

## GENERAL GERALD C. THOMAS, USMC (RETIRED)

General Gerald C. Thomas retired from the Marine Corps 1 January 1956, after completing more than 38 years of distinguished service which included duty on four continents and action in nine major battles spanning two World Wars, Haiti and the Korean conflict. Following retirement, on 1 May 1956 he became Director of the Staff, Net Evaluation Sub-Committee, National Security Council.

In 1951 the general earned the Army Distinguished Service Cross and Army Distinguished Service Medal while commanding the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division in Korea. During World War II he was awarded the Navy Distinguished Service Medal as Operations Officer of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division in 1942. In that capacity he prepared operational plans for the assault and capture of Guadalcanal and Tulagi. In 1943, after serving as Chief of Staff of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division at Guadalcanal, he won the Legion of Merit with Combat "V" as Chief of Staff of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Amphibious Corps in the Treasury-Bougainville operation. He was awarded a second Legion of Merit for outstanding service from January 1944, to November 1946, as Director of the Division of Plans and Policies at Marine Corps Headquarters in Washington.

For gallantry in action during World War I, General Thomas was awarded the Silver Star Medal. He also received the Purple Heart Medal for wounds received in action, and as a former member of the 6<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment he is entitled to wear the French Fourragere.

The general was born on 29 October 1894, at Slater, Missouri, and after attending Illinois Wesleyan University, he enlisted in the Marine Corps on 28 May 1947. He was awarded a degree of Doctor of Laws by his alma mater on 10 February 1954.

Sailing for France in September 1917, General Thomas saw action with the 6<sup>th</sup> Marines at Verdun, Belleau Wood, Soissons and in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive (Champagne). He was commissioned a second lieutenant in September 1918, and after participating in the occupation of Germany, he returned to the United States in July 1919. That November, he joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Provisional Marine Brigade in Haiti, taking part in action against Haitian bandit forces until May 1921. In August 1921, he was assigned to the Marine Barracks at Quantico, where he remained for the next two years. During that time he was detached for several months of duty with the guard company at the Disarmament Conference in Washington. He also completed the Company Officers Course at the Marine Corps Schools.

From November 1923, to October 1925, the general commanded the Marine Detachment aboard the USS Tulsa. He was then stationed for two years at the Marine Barracks, Navy Yard, Charleston, South Carolina, and for a year at Camp Holabird, Maryland, where he completed a course in the Army Motor Transport School. In December 1928, after serving as Officer-in-Charge of Landing Transportation at the Marine Barracks, Parris Island, South Carolina, he joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade Marines in

Haiti, and became side to the Commanding General. He returned to the United States in June 1931, entering the Army Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia, the following September.

Graduating in June 1932, General Thomas was made an instructor in the Basic School at Philadelphia Navy Yard. He remained there until August 1934, when he was ordered back to Quantico, as a student in the Senior Course. After completing that course he was ordered to China in July 1935, for duty with the Marine Detachment at the American Embassy in Peiping. He returned to the United States two years later to attend the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and after graduating in June 1938, he joined the staff of the Marine Corps Schools at Quantico.

In May 1941, the general was transferred to Cairo, Egypt, as a naval observer, but he was recalled to Quantico two months later to become assistant operations officer of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division. Names Operations Officer of the division in March 1942, he sailed for the South Pacific in that capacity two months later. He was appoint53ed Chief of Staff of the division in September 1942, at Guadalcanal, and in July 1943, he became Chief of Staff of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Amphibious Corps. After participating in the Empress Augusta Bay operation at Bougainville, he returned to Marine Corps Headquarters, where he was made Director of Plans and Policies in January 1944.

In July 1947, General Thomas was named Commanding General of Fleet Marine Force, Western Pacific. After that unit was disbanded in March 1949, he became Chief of Staff of the Marine Corps Equipment Board at Quantico, later serving there as Commanding General of the Landing Force Development Center. He took command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division in Korea in April 1951, serving in that capacity until January 1952, when he returned to the United States. The following month he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant general and designated by the President as Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps. He served in that billet until June 1954, and the following month became Commandant of the Marine Corps Schools, Quantico. He retired from the Marine Corps and was promoted to his present rank on 1 January 1956.

General Thomas' medals and decorations include the Distinguished Service Cross; Distinguished Service Medal (Army); Distinguished Service Medal (Navy); Silver Star Medal; Purple Heart Medal; Presidential Unit Citation with one Bronze Star; American Campaign Medal; Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with two Bronze Stars; World War II Victory Medal; National Defense Service Medal; Korean Service Medal with one Bronze Star; United Nations Service Medal; Commander in the Order of the Orange Nassau with Crossed Swords, the French Fourragere and the Korean Presidential Unit Citation.

Interview with: General Gerald C. Thomas, USMC (Retired)  
Interviewed by: Mr. Benis M. Frank  
Place: Washington, D.C.  
Date: 6 September 1966

Session 1, Tape 1, Side 1

GENERAL THOMAS: Fine. Am I close enough to that thing?

MR. FRANK: Yes, I think it picks up fine.

GENERAL THOMAS: I'll start at the beginning and go through World (War) I.

MR. FRANK: Why not. I have the outline here.

Tell me, you were born and raised in Illinois, am I right?

General Tomas: No, I was born in Missouri, Saline County, Missouri, in 1894.

MR. FRANK: What was your father? A professional man?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, he worked for the railroad. He became a contractor afterwards. He was superintendent of water and coal service on the Alton Railroad, but before that he was a farmer. My people were all farmers from out here in Albermarle County, Virginia. All of my four grandparents came from that area.

MR. FRANK: Then did they go out to Missouri?

GENERAL THOMAS: My mother's mother was born in Albermarle County in 1851. Her mother, Sidna Brown Carthrae, took slaves and a wagon train, cattle and horses and went out in 1855. She took to 5,000 acres of land on the high plains of the Missouri River fifty miles below Kansas City. So my grandmother was born in Albermarle, and her mother took her to Missouri.

My mother's father, Harrison Young, was born in Jefferson County, West Virginia, in 1838. I don't know where all he had been before his family went to Missouri in 1866, after the Civil War.

He and my Grandmother Young met at Boston Conservatory of Music and were married. She only lived a couple of years and died when my mother was born. My mother was raised by her father's sister, Mrs. James Robert Marshall, in Missouri.

My father was born in 1872. He was about fourteen in 1886 when his mother sold her farm in Albemarle County just outside of Charlottesville and went to Missouri where her two older children had gone. He grew up there, and he married my mother. He farmed for a good many years. He operated the first experiment in fattening longhorn cattle in central Missouri. Afterwards he went to town and worked for the railroad.

MR. FRANK: What was the attraction of Missouri to this group of people?

GENERAL THOMAS: Black land. Oh, they loved land. They wanted the land.

MR. FRANK: It was better than what they found around Charlottesville?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, much, much, much. The northern part of the Middle West was settled by people mostly from here and New England. The whole of Missouri and Arkansas was settled by people from Virginia and Kentucky. They wanted land. George Washington bought land, beggared himself, and when into debt. Jefferson did the same thing. Love of land was part of their English heritage.

MR. FRANK: But there was no opportunity for them to get land in the South?

GENERAL THOMAS: It was too restricted, too settled, and a lot of it had been burned out. All of this land through here by Quantico and so on was tobacco land, which burned it all out.

People pulled up from there, and went out where for three or four dollars an acre they could buy wonderful black land.

MR. FRANK: They both it from the earlier settlers?

GENERAL THOMAS: I don't even know who owned it then, but they did. They bought it. That old girl, Sidna Brown Carthrae, too up 5,000 acres in Missouri.

MR. FRANK: Carthrae is your middle name by the way.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. My Grandmother Young's maiden name was Carthrae.

MR. FRANK: Do you remember her well?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no. She died when my mother was born.

MR. FRANK: That's right, you told me that.

GENERAL THOMAS: I knew none of my grandparents except my father's mother, whom I saw once.

MR. FRANK: What was your childhood like down there?

GENERAL THOMAS: We went back and forth to the farm of my uncle. He was not really my uncle. His wife, my Aunt Margaret, and he had no children; and they raised my mother. They were our true grandparents. We had no other. My father's mother had lived for awhile out there. As I say, I remember seeing her once. She died in 1910. My mother's father, Harrison Young, died in 1910; but I never saw him. He went to the West Coast. He had four families and had fourteen children.

MR. FRANK: Fourteen! Four different ones?

GENERAL THOMAS: Four different ones. Fourteen children. Of course my Grandmother Thomas had ten children, too. My father was the youngest. My grandmother was fifty and my grandfather was sixty-five when he was born.

My father was very mechanically minded, and on the railroad he went into the water and coal service. Then he was made superintendent of that Service on the Eastern Division of the Alton Railroad; and we moved to Bloomington, Illinois in 1906. I was twelve years old.

MR. FRANK: Was that position in a supervisory class?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, he was a minor executive.

MR. FRANK: He was a minor executive.

GENERAL THOMAS: There was a lot of work in bad weather in the water and coal service. Due to the exposure, my father developed sciatic rheumatism. He gave up the railroad and went to contracting and became a builder. He operated several places and at one time was in Texas. He and my mother separated and I never saw anything of my father to speak of for years.

My mother stayed on in Bloomington. I worked my way through high school and college.

Prior to World War I my father was in the west. During that war, he went east; and he was a construction superintendent at the Aberdeen Proving Grounds. From there he went to Norfolk where at Craddock was built the big annex to the Navy Yard.

MR. FRANK: Was this his own business or just a supervisory concern?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, he was just a construction superintendent, a civil service employee.

After World War I, he went out on his own in a contracting way. The last job that he ever had was putting the forms for the dam at Manassas. He had now gone back to Virginia to live. He died at 92 in 1954.

MR. FRANK: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

GENERAL THOMAS: There were six of us, but two girls died in infancy, both at about one year of age. But of those that lived, my older brother, Shelton, who was a Marine in World War I and is dead now. He also worked for the railroad. He was superintendent of motive power on the Western Division of the Alton Railroad. During World War II he had a heart attack. He then went to San Diego and lived and died there. He's buried in Fort Rosecrans Cemetery. I'm the next one. Another girl died, and then there were twins. The girl died and my brother Louis is Rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in Natchez, Mississippi. He's sixty-three years old.

MR. FRANK: He was a minister in the early twenties, was he not?

GENERAL THOMAS: Now, let's see. No, about thirty, thirty-four. Then there is a sister who is a teacher. She's a specialist in primary education, and she got her Doctors' degree at Northwestern. She worked too hard, and had a breakdown. She is pensioned and is living in Chicago. That's all of us, though we've got many, many relatives that I don't know.

MR. FRANK: You went to grade school and high school in Bloomington?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes. Then I attended Illinois Wesleyan University also in Bloomington.

MR. FRANK: What did you do as a high school boy?

GENERAL THOMAS: I played football and basketball, I worked on a newspaper delivery, and then I worked in the mailroom for years. The paper was the Bloomington Pantograph.

MR. FRANK: That was Adlai Stevenson's newspaper.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. I knew Adlai as a small boy about so high.

MR. FRANK: Did you see him after?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, occasionally, but not often. I knew about him, but we didn't stay in touch with him.

MR. FRANK: He did a lot of traveling.

GENERAL THOMAS: He was away most of the time. You see, when Adlai was twelve years old, he shot a girl. As a matter of fact, she was my close friend named Ruth Merwin. After the tragedy his family took him to Europe. He never really came back to Bloomington to live after that. He attended prep school at Princeton and later settled in Chicago.

MR. FRANK: That tragedy is not commonly known.

GENERAL THOMAS: It's been published.

MR. FRANK: What did you start studying when you went to Illinois Wesleyan?

GENERAL THOMAS: I was a chemistry major. I was going to start out with that. Put her on.

MR. FRANK: She's on.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, it's on. Are we talking on it?

In May, 1917, I was a chemistry major at Illinois Wesleyan University; and I was headed for Mellon Institute at the University of Pittsburg in the fall of 1917 to take a degree in chemical engineering. But on the fifteenth of May, two of my college mates, Jim Elliot and Len Prather and I decided that we wanted to be Marines.

MR. FRANK: Why?

GENERAL THOMAS: It happened that in our town, one of the leading citizens, who was head of a publishing company, had served a hitch in the Marine Corps during his younger years. He used to say to us, "Why don't you go ahead and enlist in the Marine Corps?" We went to Chicago on the fifteenth of May and enlisted at the old recruiting station on South State Street.

MR. FRANK: Did you sit around and listen to . . .

GENERAL THOMAS: I talked to him many times. His name was Alfred Brown. He's dead now.

MR. FRANK: In other words, you were pretty well aware of the Marine Corps.

GENERAL THOMAS: No. We didn't know a great deal about it, but we knew enough.

The night that we enlisted we went out and had dinner with Jim Elliot's brother who was a medical student at Northwestern. We ate at his fraternity house, The Nu Sigma Nu house. We went back to the recruiting station where we formed up, and two coach loads of us left for Parris Island. We were twenty-four hours in the coaches and then arrived in Atlanta where they put us up in the Kimball Hotel, a place of deserved ill-fame. The next day we went on to Parris Island. The train went into Port Royal, and we took motor sailers over to the reception center at the recruit depot.

There was a delay in the papers because of the large number of recruits that enlisted in Chicago so we were not actually sworn in until the twenty-eighth of May. We were sworn in that day and joined a recruit company of about sixty men. We drew a tough platoon sergeant by the name of James Borden, a gunnery sergeant; and started to drill. And that we never ceased until the twelfth day of August. During the first part of the recruitment phase, we went to what was called the maneuvering grounds; and stayed there about three weeks. We drilled on the sand flats, which are on the east side of Parris Island out toward Nivey Beach. Then we moved into some newly constructed barracks, and we worked from there for a matter of a month or so. This included firing the rifle range. During the last week on the Island, they moved us into the main station where it was as a part of our training that we did guard duty.

My college mate Jim Elliot stayed right with me, but Len Prather was unfortunate. He did too well on the rifle range, and they kept him there as a coach.

On the twelfth day of August a trainload of us left for Quantico,

MR. FRANK: How did you shoot on the rifle range?

GENERAL THOMAS: I did very poorly. I did well long years afterwards, but I didn't do well then.

We arrived in Quantico on the thirteenth day of August and moved into the then also newly constructed barracks on the side of the hill. As a matter of fact, our barracks were about in the location of the present Barracks E.

We joined the newly formed Seventy-Fifth Company, Sixth Marines. That was the number two company of the first Battalion. The Seventy-fourth, - fifth, and - sixth, and the Ninety-fifth were the companies of that Battalion. We drew a battalion commander who was a very famous character, John A. Hughes.

MR. FRANK: "Johnny the Hard?"

GENERAL THOMAS: "Johnny the Hard."

We started immediately to our drills. We had to make a considerable change because the drill in the Landing Force Manual, which we learned at Parris Island, was a drill at shorter intervals with a snappier manual and a number of things of the sort more fitted to shipboard exercise than to land drills. Because we were going to France, we had to learn Army drills, and that was what we spent most of our four weeks in Quantico doing. We did have some grenade practice, and took some hikes. The grenade practice was held on a range located almost exactly where Lejeune Hall, the post headquarters in Quantico, is now.

The fifteenth of September 1917 we boarded a train and went to Philadelphia; and there in the Navy Yard, we went aboard the USS Henderson. Henderson left Philadelphia Navy Yard the next morning. The following morning, she was anchored off Staten Island, New York.

MR. FRANK: Was the USS Henderson new at that time?

GENERAL THOMAS: This was only her third trip. She was a new ship. She did not carry many people; just our battalion and a few casuals. There were maybe 1,500 officers and men. Battalions in those days were four rifle companies of 250 men each so a battalion was something over a thousand men.

But battalion headquarters was not large. As a matter of fact, it was very small. All the officers in the battalion headquarters were the battalion commander and his adjutant. I think of those days when I think of these enormous staffs that people have to work with today.

MR. FRANK: General Shepherd was mentioning that about the size of the staff. He was talking about Earl Ellis. He was the adjutant.

GENERAL THOMAS: Brigade adjutant.

MR. FRANK: Brigade adjutant. He carried out all our functions of the four.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right, with the help of the aides. Brigade was only a tactical headquarters with no administrative functions.

MR. FRANK: It's fantastic to think of that.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, they did very well too.

After arriving in New York on the sixteenth of September, we stayed there about a week, waiting for our convoy to form. I think that it was on the twenty-third that we pulled out and headed for France. We had an eleven-day passage. We were about five or six transports. The Antilles was one of them, I remember. We had a convoy of the cruisers – the old cruise San Diego and five destroyers.

We arrived in St. Nazaire, France on the fourth day of October and moved ashore the next day.

MR. FRANK: What were the conditions aboard the ship like?

GENERAL THOMAS: We lived very well, sleeping in hammocks. There were few bunks. This was my first experience with a hammock. Our food was not bad. We had a terrific passage. I didn't realize it at the time because I was unfamiliar with the ocean, but I was able to estimate afterwards that was a real rough passage, with a great deal of seasickness. I didn't get sick that time, and I never to this day have been seasick although I've cruised many thousands of miles at sea. We had drills. We stood watches watching for submarine sightings, the voyage was without incident.

MR. FRANK: Life of the Marines aboard ship hasn't changed much from World War I to World War II.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no, not at all.

MR. FRANK: Same duty, standing watches.

GENERAL THOMAS: But we were glad to see Belle Ile off the coast of St Nazaire. We got into St. Nazaire, and a figure was standing on the dock that I later knew and loved – Holland M. Smith. He welcome us to France. He had gone over with on of the battalions of the Fifth Marines.

The next day, we disembarked and moved to a camp outside of St. Nazaire. It was a very crude, rude affair, but we made ourselves comfortable. We drew straw and made mattress covers and had bunks made out of two-by-fours and planks and what not. From the fourth of October until the eighth of January we remained in St. Nazaire.

We did guard duty about one day a week in the camp. It was an enormous camp. We worked on a reservoir that was a being dug outside of our camp. But mostly we went down to the piers in St. Nazaire and unloaded ships because there was a great shortage of stevedores. During the next four months we spent many, many days on the pier. We would be up at five o'clock in the morning, and would be at work by seven. We would work until five o'clock and we would go back and get a little chow and we were really ready to hit the sack.

MR. FRANK: When you were down at Quantico during the grenade training or some of the tactical training you had, were there any either British or French liaison officers?

GENERAL THOMAS: There were several foreign officers around, but I never saw much of them. I remember Earl Ellis there. He had been to France as an observer and had come back. I remember that he was a great friend of my battalion commander, old Johnny Hughes.

We stayed in St. Nazaire until January the fourth, 1918. Then we were loaded into boxcars and started for a training area up in the Vosges Mountains. We were four days on that train; and as I said afterwards, I don't know how they possibly could spend four days making about 400 mile, but they did. We had a really cold, rough tri. All we had was cold corned willy and hardtack. One morning we pulled into a station and got out; and the French gave us coffee royale, which really hit the spot.

We arrived at our training area on January eighth, 1918. Two companies of our battalion were billeted in a small French village called Champignuelles. The other two companies were several miles away at another village. We started out training there in Champignuelles. The only place you could drill and train was on areas that were not tillable, which meant that they were really marsh meadows. We were wet every day, had a miserable life in the training area. The place was icy cold. We didn't bathe very often because the only way you could bathe was to go out and get a bucket of water, stand in the snow, and take a bath. We worked on bayonet, fired grenades, and we hiked. We went on hikes from this camp out to a trench area. We'd be gone about twenty-four hours and go out and spend the night in the trenches until two o'clock in the morning, and then we'd march back to our camp. We remained in those little wooden barracks in Champignuelles from the eighth of January until the fifteenth of March. I couldn't imagine anything more calculated to toughen people. The outfit was so damn mean that they would have fought their own grandmothers.

MR. FRANK: What were the other men like? Where did they come from?



GENERAL THOMAS: My regiment was sixty per cent college men.

MR. FRANK: That's what Catlin said also.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. That was his regiment. We were in Catlin's regiment.

There was a little bit of everything. We had artisans. We had college boys. We had kiddoes. We had just everything in that regiment.

MR. FRANK: Did you have any old-time . . .

GENERAL THOMAS: There were a few, but not many. Each company had about five or six, maybe ten, pre-War, non-commissioned officers; but they peeled off early.

MR. FRANK: What about the professional Pfc's, the brig rats, and so on?

GENERAL THOMAS: We didn't have any of them.

Hughes of course left us because they appointed him in command of Army school up in Gondreourt and my company commander, Robert Emmet Adams, moved up to be the battalion commander. I had several different people in command. Louis Jones, who is retired and living in Alexandria, was the senior first lieutenant; and he commanded the company from time to time. Finally they sent in Ted Fuller, who was the Class of 1916 from the Naval Academy, to be our company commander. He was the son of the later Commandant, Ben Fuller. He stayed with us until he was killed.

We left the training area after a really rough existence but we lived through it and we didn't really mind. Our feet were wet every night. We dried our socks by sleeping on them. That was the only way that we ever had dry socks. Our boots were cold and wet in the morning, but we put them on again.

MR. FRANK: Were those Marine Corps boots?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, they were the Pershing boots. Very much like our boondockers.

MR. FRANK: How were they?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, they were very comfortable.

MR. FRANK: And the uniforms that you had were the . . . ?

GENERAL THOMAS: We didn't have and like you have fatigues and special drill uniforms. We just lived in our greens; and when we started to wear our greens out, then we started to wear Army uniforms, regular ODs. That's all we had. We paraded and practiced and drilled in the same uniform.

MR. FRANK: You had Khaki in the summertime?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, we wore the same uniform because the summer in France is cool and we lived in the woods. We rarely lived in towns. We even wore long underwear throughout the summer of 1918. We were cold tenting out in those woods. When we got on the road and the sun was shining, we'd just sweat.

On the fifteenth of March, we went to the trenches, which was part of our training. It was supposed to be a quiet sector; and our sector was Cote des Heures, a big high mountain. I need to go back a little bit because I had changed my job. I had been sergeant in the line with the company, one of the guides in my platoon.

MR. FRANK: How long did it take you to make sergeant from the time you entered?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I had my corporal's warrant on the transport going to France, and I became a sergeant around the first of the year.

After about a month in the training area, my platoon commander, a little hard-bitten guy named Dave Redford from Rhode Island, called me and he said, "You have

been elected to the suicide squad. You go over and report to Carleton Burr,” who was the battalion intelligence officer. Burr was an able, fine fellow. He had graduated from Harvard in 1915, and had gone to France for a tour. He was from a wealthy Boston family. The War had caught him over there, and he had gone into an ambulance outfit – the First American Ambulance Outfit. But in 1916, after the Battle of Verdun, he was invalided back to the United States. In 1917, he came to the Marine Corps. He spoke French, and was our intelligence officer. I joined his intelligence outfit, which was just forming; and I was the sergeant in charge of scouts and observers. There were about fifteen of each. From then on I didn’t train with my platoon; I trained with Burr. He had a trainee program.

When we went to duty in the trenches, we took our observers to the front and billeted our fifteen scouts into a dugout in the rear. Burr took me with the fifteen observers, and we moved up in the line and took over from the French a string of observatories. There were about four observatories, which we manned on a twenty-four hour basis. These observatories looked out over the plain of the Woerve toward Metz. There we stayed. The battalion moved in down in front of us. Except for one interlude, I stayed in those observatories then for, I guess, a month.

They wanted some training for our scouts so we laid on a patrol to move out from a little destroyed village named Tresavaux, which was down in the front of our battalion. This patrol was laid on principally because the Germans, realizing that there was a new outfit in front of them – wanted to get some prisoners and identify. So they had been pushing patrols over against our wire, getting ready to make a raid. The French and our own people decided that we would counter this raid. A French officer came up and brought a patrol of about twenty-five soldiers. They were experienced in this kind of business, and this was part of our training. We brought up our fifteen scouts. I accompanied Burr, and we joined the French officer and laid out the patrol. We knew that the Germans were sending men over against our wire to listen there at night, and we were going to sweep out in front of the wire and trap some of them. It was a complicated maneuver, but we all understood what we were supposed to do.

About midnight we started out from our lines passing through a gap in our wire. We were just starting to fan out when – zingo!—we crashed into a big German patrol. Both of us backed off, started shooting, and called for the defensive barrages that we had planned before. Well, we had a real rough night.

MR. FRANK: Did you send a messenger to call it or how was it called and did you carry out a . . .

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, by pyrotechnics, Very pistols, Barrage fires were all called for by Very pistols of various types. There were two star, two white star, two red star, three star. The different Very pistol flares were fired as signals.

It’s a long story; but Burr got cut off, and I went back and got him and brought him back into our line. We had several men wounded and one of our men killed. We were very, very lucky. This was the high point of that spell in the trenches.

Later we moved over into another area and manned other observatories. There was another battalion area down there about five or six miles. We remained in the trenches until the middle of May. It was all good training for us.

We were pulled out and made our way to a camp just in the rear of the lines for a few days. Then we started to move. We would move for a day or so on foot and remain

a couple of days. Then we'd get on a train and take a short ride, and then we'd move again. We continued this until the thirtieth of May.

Finally we wound up in northern France; rather northwestern France; and my company was billeted on a farm. French farms were quite large. As a matter of fact, the barns were big enough to billet 250 men.

MR. FRANK: You were detached for duty from your company?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, not at that point. When we left the trenches, they broke up the intelligence outfit; and I went back and became platoon sergeant.

MR. FRANK: To get back to this intelligence section, you said that it was composed of scouts and observers, right?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes.

MR. FRANK: Did they have a cartographer of some type with them?

GENERAL THOMAS: I had sketchers, but that was just their natural talent. They trained them in sketching, that's all.

MR. FRANK: Carleton Burr was a reserve type?

GENERAL THOMAS: He was not a regular officer.

MR. FRANK: This question, if you recall, I dealt with in Part Six of Volume V, our WWII history of Marine operations in the Pacific, while talking about a recap on intelligence. I quoted General Bradley who said that intelligence for the regular services during the inter-War period was a neglected thing. They put some eight ball or foul-up in intelligence, and commanders were not paying too much attention to it anyway until the advent of World War II when the reservists were brought in and they had some experts like Ed Buckley in the First Division who really did a job and showed what intelligence would do. Is this your experience? Is this a valid comment?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, generally speaking, yes, but I don't think that anybody in our Army nor certainly anybody in the Marine Corps knew much about intelligence in World War I. I had some illuminating experiences because one day the division intelligence officer – I've forgotten his name now but he was a major – came up and explained to me and several of my lads what we had actually accomplished. We, by our observation from these posts, had detected the movement of a German division. All we knew was that we saw certain movements on the road, we saw the smoke of certain trains and this, that, and other things. But actually, headquarters had established the fact that this division had gone up into the big offensive that was going on in northern France.

Burr's value of course was that he was trained in France, and he knew what he was looking at. He was experienced in the War. He was the best of all of our intelligence officers in the regiment.

When we left the trenches, they broke up this outfit, stupidly, and sent us back to our companies. I was then the platoon sergeant of the Third Platoon, Seventy-Fifth Company, working for Dave Redford.

On the morning of the thirtieth, just for something to do, I knew that they were down the road. Taking a couple of the boys in the platoon that I was fond of, original members, we walked over there. We found some chow at noon and went to the memorial service and then started back down the road. On the road a messenger caught up with us. He said, "We're getting ready to move, and they want everybody to come back immediately." I beat it on back, and I went to see Redford. He said, "We're moving out tonight, and I want you to be sure that everybody has a hundred rounds of ammunition

and that they have their reserve rations and that they draw enough food to last them a day for travel.” That was easy. That was routing. We had been doing those kinds of things.

MR. FRANK: Did you all have gas training?

GENERAL THOMAS: We all had gas masks. That had all been cared for. We were never without our gas masks.

We took the road very soon after dark that night, and moved over a hill for about four or five miles. There we lay for a long time, until way after midnight. Then the camions arrived. They were driven by little Annamites, Indo-Chinese. We mounted up and started out at perhaps one o’clock in the morning. About daybreak I realized that we were going through a city of some sort. The Annamite couldn’t talk to me; I couldn’t talk to him. But I did get out of him that we were going through St. Denis, which is on the edge of Paris. I said to myself, “We’re going back to Paris.” Well, we kept on going.

What we actually had been doing before May thirtieth was marching up to relieve the First U.S. Army Division at Cantigny when they had put on an attack. We were going to follow-up their attack. It was more as a training exercise than anything else.

MR. FRANK: This was the American First Army Division or the French?

GENERAL THOMAS: This was the American First Army.

I got out of the Annamite, “St. Denis.” I said, “We’re in Paris now. Now I know what direction we’re headed in.” Pretty soon we came to Meaux, later in the day. Then we began to pass refugees. The roads were full of them. We had known that there had been a breakthrough on the French front at Chemin des Dames. We just generally knew that something had happened up there. It was obvious that we were involved in that.

MR. FRANK: They had broken through the French lines?

GENERAL THOMAS: They had broken through the French lines.

MR. FRANK: What was your attitude and that of the rest of your Marines regarding the French?

GENERAL THOMAS: The French were all right. We were all right. We were just in a war, and we were going to fight it.

MR. FRANK: You had no idea that they were going to bug out?

GENERAL THOMAS: No. They didn’t really bug out. They fought pretty well before they finally left, and I’ll get to that in a minute.

We went very slowly. Our supporting arms couldn’t travel very rapidly. Our truck would go awhile and stop, and then go a little while. There was one interesting incident during one late afternoon. We stopped where there was a little rise near the road. I looked over there, and it was like Napoleon at the Battle of Austerlitz. Marshal Foch surrounded by a group of staff officers was watching us riding by. I recognized him because I had seen his pictures. I knew damn well who he was.

We continued on, bumping along in our transports. We probably didn’t make fifteen miles that night. We stayed in our trucks until right after daybreak the next morning.

MR. FRANK: Two June, was it?

GENERAL THOMAS: One June. The thirty-first was the day that we went through Meaux and saw Foch.

On June first we pulled off of the road. The officers got off and said, “This is it,” and we detrucked. Somebody put out some cold chow. We stayed there for the better part of the morning. That’s one place where I saw Holcomb. His battalion had detrucked

on the other side of the road from ours. About noon we formed up, without any real explanation except that we were going to move forward. My platoon commander told me as much as he knew, that we were moving toward the front. We were near the village of Montreuil Aux-Lions. We moved several miles from there, and we got up onto a sort of plateau, an open area. We moved on either side in squad columns. We kept on moving forward, and in all we moved about five miles. We came to a village, and were moved over into an assembly area. My platoon was kept together. I don't know where the rest of the company was. There was shooting. There was action. We saw the French falling back.

For the next three days we shuffled around in that area. We went out and dug a line of trenches. This town we were in was Lucy-le-Bocage, which is directly in back of Belleau Wood.

MR. FRANK: The other company was attached to Holcomb's battalion, wasn't it?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, Holcomb was over on our right.

MR. FRANK: I was thinking of Cates' company.

GENERAL THOMAS: Cates belonged to Holcomb which was Holcomb's battalion on our right.

MR. FRANK: What was the name of that little town?

GENERAL THOMAS: Bouresches. Now you're ahead of me. Bouresches came a week later and was taken by Holcomb's 2/6.

We moved different places near Lucy-le-Bocage. We dug a line of trenches across a wheat field west of the village. There, on the fourth of June, the Germans made the first serious attack against us.

MR. FRANK: Were you on the right of the highway?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, we were on the left of the Paris-Metz Highway.

MR. FRANK: To the left of you was the Fifth Marines.

GENERAL THOMAS: To the left was the Fifth Marines, that's right. We were to the left unit of the Sixth Marines. The Third Battalion and the Second Battalion were over to our right.

MR. FRANK: On the right side of the highway?

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right, to the right side of the Paris-Metz Highway.

On June fourth the Germans made a determined attack against us, but they didn't really have a chance. We killed a hell of a lot of them. They never got really close to our lines.

My old battalion commander, Johnny Hughes, as I said, had gone back to be in command of school in Gondrecourt. That afternoon of that attack, the fourth of June, he came back; and took command of our battalion.

MR. FRANK: What was he like? He was a fabulous character.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, he was a rough hombre.

MR. FRANK: Was he commissioned all of his career?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes. He enlisted, and he was from a wealthy New York family. He was one of the rough sons of the family; and they put him in the Marine Corps, like Earl Ellis and the rest. He was commissioned in 1901.

MR. FRANK: Ellis had been a former enlisted man.

GENERAL THOMAS: I think so too, yes.

MR. FRANK: Had he come from a good family also?

GENERAL THOMAS: Probably so, yes. They were smart boys. Particularly Ellis. Of course, he was smart too.

I got a call. I was a platoon sergeant with this platoon. They said, "Major Hughes is back, and he wants to see you." So Redford said, "Go on back," and I went back. Hughes said to me, "This front line is in a hell of a mess. I can't make heads or tails out of it. Colonel Catlin (CO, 6<sup>th</sup> Marines) is coming up, and I am going with him over to the Fifth Marines on the left. I want you to go to the right of our battalion and plot in every one of our units, and then someplace in our battalion front we'll meet."

There were two brothers by the name of Krause, who were in the Seventy-Sixth Company. Both were very artistic and excellent sketchers. I had a so-called map. They sent our unit people in on these lousy, fifty-year-old maps, you know. That was all we had to go on, and the front was truly in a mess. It didn't take me long to get the Krause brothers, and we shoved off and went over to what we thought was the right of our battalion. Just to be sure, we moved over a little further; and bumped into the company commander, now dead, by the name of Bobby Vogt. He was commanding the Ninety-Seventh Company of the Sixth Marines. He said, "I'm the left flank company of Sibley's battalion, the Third Battalion. There's a gap of a thousand yards between me and Burns on your right." Burns was in command of our Seventy-Fourth Company. (He was killed a week or so later.)

We went then and found Burns' right, and sketched his company in. By that time we were walking up along the line and sketching things on the map. We came near the edge of a woods, and I heard this voice say, "You people get down. You'll just draw artillery fire." I looked over there. Standing there at the edge of the woods, there was Catlin. Hughes then stepped up beside him and said, "Thomas, go on back to battalion headquarters; and I'll be there shortly." We turned around and made our way back to battalion headquarters. He came in. We turned in our work. He then told me, "Nothing can be done to rectify our present position. We're going to drop back two miles tonight." He put a line in on the map. "We're going to form a unified line. As I said before, this thing is in a hell of a mess. We'll move at midnight."

MR. FRANK: Had you dug yourselves the trenches that you occupied?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes. There had been nothing there. We were working from foxholes of which we dug a number, moving from position to position. There was no real line of trenches. We just had foxholes out in the field. We made quite small foxholes too.

MR. FRANK: Were they called foxholes in those days?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, yes, I'm pretty sure they were; but I don't remember now. I called them foxholes.

About 8:30 at night – and of course the summer nights are long in France because it's so far north, I heard a commotion; and I went outside. There was Johnny Hughes talking to Major Ben Berry, the commander of the Third Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines. He said, "Deadoe, I'm going to relieve you tonight; and we're going to attack tomorrow morning." Hughes said, "Berry, you're a goddamn fool. I don't believe a word that you said, "Well, we are." It ended, and that's what happened. Ben Berry's outfit came in and relieved us about midnight and we pulled out. We moved back into Corps reserve about four or five miles to the rear. We stayed there from the morning of the sixth until the night of the eighth. It was really advantageous because for the first time we got

something to eat. We hadn't eaten much for the three or four days that we were up in the line. They didn't get chow to us.

Then on the afternoon of the eighth late, Hughes called for me. He had kept me at the headquarters, saying "I want you to stay here with me. Don't you go back to your company." We're moving back to the line tonight. I'm going back to brigade headquarters where we're all going to meet and get orders for an attack that we're going to put on tomorrow. The battalion has got to move to an assembly position, and I want you to reconnoiter a route from here to a sunken trail, which is right along side the La Ferme Paris." He gave me an idea of how to get there. I got one of my scouts, and I just loped for about two and a half or three miles; and I found this place. Then we turned around and went back.

Hughes didn't come back so the march devolved on the commander of the Seventy-sixth commander, Captain George Stowell. Hughes said to me. . . . By this time Waggy Burr was gone. He had been hit lightly. Etheridge, a Norfolk boy, and a classmate of General Shepherd's is at V.M.I., was acting as intelligence officer. Hughes said, "You lead the battalion to the sunken trail, and Etheridge will know the route from there on."

We came back and got ready to move. I was out in the lead. We had some trouble because the connecting file was broken where we crossed a road. The rear units turned instead of going straight across. It was well after midnight before we closed up again, and we got down to this sunken trail and had turned into the trail. We went for awhile. The trail was not very distinct, and it was dark. The adjutant said to me, "Do you know where you are going?" I said, "No, sir, but Lieutenant Etheridge does. Major Hughes told me that Lieutenant Etheridge would know the way from here." And Etheridge said, "I don't know a damned thing about it."

Well, we kept going. Daylight caught us, and we moved off to the left to a woods. There we were under German observation. We couldn't move during the daylight. There was a hell of a mess about it. George Stowell got relieved and sent to the rear. But anyway, we were supposed to make an attack that afternoon; we were in no position to do it. We were supposed to have continued on down, past Lucy, on this sunken trail.

That night they moved us. We moved back to the sunken trail, went on down it, went to the proper assembly position, and they delayed the attack until the morning of the tenth, when we jumped off it.

MR. FRANK: In the meanwhile, of course, a big fight was going on.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes, a big fight.

Bob Asprey has written a fine book on Belleau Woods. It was a hell of a mess, and that is what he portrayed.

Ben Berry had attacked, and he had been seriously wounded. They had a rough time. At the time that Berry attacked, Sibley's Third Battalion of the Sixth Marines went into the center of Belleau Woods; where they suffered severe casualties. They couldn't go ahead. Holcomb went in on his right and took Bouresches, at least Cates did.

MR. FRANK: The Ninety-Sixth Company.

GENERAL THOMAS: Ninety-sixth Company.

It was decided because of the very, very strong defenses that Sibley had run into that his battalion would pull out, and then they could throw a lot of artillery into that area and blast it out and then we would go in.

Well, we did, in the morning of the tenth. Although we passed a lot of dead men from Sibley's battalion, we didn't see any Germans until we got up in the Woods and we hit strong machine gun nests. There we had one hell of a fight. We held our own; but after we hit the nests, we didn't make much progress.

MR. FRANK: You talk about artillery preparation, this was Army artillery?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes

MR. FRANK: There was no Marine artillery?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no. Pershing would never permit it. General Lejeune later tried to get Pershing to let him bring two regiments of artillery over that were all trained in Quantico, and Pershing would have no part of it. You see, Pershing was never friendly to us. Now we are still on June tenth. We hit these machine gun nests, and there we lodged. The next morning, at daybreak—it was just barely light but of course light came early there, 4:30, in that northern latitude, Hughes sent for me. He said, "The Second Battalion, Fifth Marines is supposed to come up on our left and make an attack this morning. I don't hear anything. I don't trust that damned fellow Wise, and I want you to go up there and find out what's going on." I took a runner; I didn't want to go straight west because I knew that might not be healthy, so I swung back south towards the edge of the Woods. We were climbing up a hill, maybe twenty minutes after we left Hughes; and we could hear a lot of shooting. Before long I saw a group. It was obviously a command group. They were walking along. I went up, and found it was Wise. I reported to him; and I said "I'm Sgt. Thomas. I'm from Major Hughes, who sent me up here to get in touch with you and find out what was going on."

In the meantime, his people were fighting like hell. We could see the shooting and the fighting going on down at the edge of the Woods. He had moved along sort of at the side of his battalion. While we were talking, a runner came up; and he said, "Colonel Wise, they say that our men are being overcome in the Woods. They would like some reinforcements." Wise turned to the runner; and said, "Go back to that Eighteenth Company and tell them to move forward into the Woods." They were in his reserve. Then Wise turned toward the first lad and he said, "Where did you get that word?" The boy said, "From the wounded." He said, "God damn you, don't you know that the wounded are very poor witnesses." Then he turned to another runner; and he said, "Tell the Eighteenth Company to go back to Lucy." Then he said to me, "What you can do, one of your companies is supposed to attack alongside of me, and I haven't seen them. I want you to find that company, and tell them to move forward."

I went. I knew who he was talking about. He was talking about a lieutenant in command of the Seventy-Sixth Company by the name of Overton. I had a good idea of where I could find him. I went off through the Woods, and I came up to Overton. He was moving and had just hit some machine gun nests and was having a hell of a fight. It was over before long because they killed all of the Germans. I told him what Wise had said. He said, "Well, they expected me to go out and deploy in that wheat field, and I would have lost half of my men. If he had come into the Woods along with me, he wouldn't have lost all of those men."



That's about it. It was a long siege in Belleau Woods. I continued intelligence work and my job was to go out along the line every day and check with each company commander in the morning. I was to find out what transpired during the night and come back and report to Hughes.

One morning the intelligence officer, Etheridge, went with me. We got involved with a bunch of Germans that had broken through Wise's lines. There was a real fight. I got a Silver Star out of it. We took a prisoner. He was a Prussian Guard. When I took him back, Hughes said, "There have been no Prussian Guards identified on this front. Take him back to regimental headquarters."

MR. FRANK: Pardon me. Let's hold it here just for a minute to turn this.

### **End Side I, Tape 1, Side 1**

### **Session I, Tape 1, Side 2**

GENERAL THOMAS: I took this Prussian Guard back to regimental headquarters. They said, "Take him on back to brigade, which was General Harbord's headquarters. When I got back there the sentry said, "That's headquarters." I opened the door, and there was General Harbord with his officers sitting at lunch. An aide got up and came out; and it was Norris Williams, the famous tennis player. He was a Davis Cup player. I turned the prisoner over to him, and he spoke German and French of course. Williams did. He talked to this prisoner.

He said, "All right Sergeant, when did you eat last?" I said, "About five days ago." He said, "Go back to the galley." I went back there; and the old mess sergeant said, "I know from looking at you." He got a mess kit full of molasses and bread and bacon, and I had a real meal. We were not getting any food at Belleau Woods. There was very little water and we suffered for it.

The group that Etheridge and I fought that morning and took the prisoner from, were the last Germans in that part of the Woods. That evening they turned a barrage on us, and for about thirty-six hours they just laced us. They just tore that Woods down about our ears. Earlier we didn't have much artillery fire from them because they didn't get up. They ran away from their ammunition. The great barrage ended up with about three hours of gas. It was pretty awful.

MR. FRANK: What is it like to be under gas attack?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, you've got to get on your gas mask. You just live in them. You slobber and it's really messy.

MR. FRANK: Were they good protection?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes for your lungs but they didn't protect your body. You get gas burns on your body.

MR. FRANK: Were they using mustard gas?

GENERAL THOMAS: It was all mustard gas.

MR. FRANK: There was no lewisite?

GENERAL THOMAS: No. They had another gas but it wouldn't work at night. It would dissipate.

They threw a lot of gas in on us, and we lost a company. We lost the Seventy-Fourth Company in the trenches, and we lost them again at Belleau Woods. This chap,

Bob Burns, who was the company commander, was killed there, or at least he died. A shell hit him and took off both of his legs. He died before they got him out. We lost nearly all of that company there. They were in the reserve ravine where the gas drifted down. Because they were a brand new replacement company, and Hughes didn't put them in the front line. He kept them back, and they go gassed. Oh God, I guess that sixty per cent of them were out as casualties.

We just held on in Belleau Woods seven days until the seventeenth. It was real rough. Then the U.S. Seventh Infantry came in and relieved us. My battalion moved out, and back to the Marne. We were in a lovely little village of Montreuil sur-Marne. We plunged in the river and bathed. We had lots of good chow and what not; but twenty-four hours later they pulled us out and we started back to the line again, back to Belleau Woods.

As it turned out, they held us up for a couple of days; but then we went back in. We manned a sector in the Woods. By that time, the Woods was all ours; and it was a stationary front. I was still the intelligence sergeant of the battalion. We were finally relieved by the Twenty-Sixth Division on the Fourth of July.

We moved out, and we went back again to the Marne. We were supposed to be going to a rest sector. Again, after twenty-four hours, they headed us back to the front. We moved into a woods first in back of Belleau Woods on about the sixth of July. There we stayed for the next ten days. The answer to the movement was that the allies found out that the Germans were massing for another attack off to the east of Belleau Woods. Probably the middle of July. That attack did take place, but our people were warned of it and that attack didn't go very far. That was when Foch decided to pinch this German pocket, first over Chemin des Dames, and then between Soissons and Rheims. The allies captured Soissons, but they did not capture Rheims. Rheims was a great fortified city. The German pocket ballooned out below it. That was the Chateau Thierry pocket, and Belleau Wood was right down on the point of it on the Paris-Metz road. That is where we went in. We went in right head on to where they were going the fastest.

Foch decided that he would stop the attack on July fifteenth, which he did, and then he would pinch in the German pocket and threaten their line of withdrawal if he had the troops to do it by that time. They took us from this Belleau Wood front, picked us up on the afternoon of the sixteenth, and we rode all night. I knew that we were riding around the pocket because I could always see those flashes of artillery off to the right. I knew damn well what we were doing. I couldn't talk to the Annamites any more that time than I could when going to Belleau Wood, but I didn't need to because I knew that we were going up the other side of that pocket.

In the morning of the seventeenth, my truck got lost. We were in an air attack, and a bomb landed at a crossroad right in front of us. Our driver turned right instead of left. After about two miles though, we had an artillery battery right along side of us. He knew damn well that he was going in the wrong direction so we turned around and went back and that got us straightened out.

We joined the battalion about eight o'clock the next morning. Then we started to march. Moving forward was a mass of men, transport, munitions, and artillery. There were no tanks that day, but there were troops and artillery marching along this one great highway, the Maubeuge Route through the Villers-Cotterets Woods – a big place. Hughes decided to stop and take his ten-minute break. Then those behind us started

running over the top of us. He said, "Well, we're just going to keep on marching." We marched from about nine o'clock in the morning to about seven o'clock at night.

MR. FRANK: What was the composition? Was this Marines, Army, French, everything?

GENERAL THOMAS: There was everything – French, U.S. Army, Marines, everything.

MR. FRANK: Was there no organization in the composition of the march serials at all?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, now everybody was just told to move forward. I don't know whether there was any staff work done other than to say, "Go (so-and-so)." Hughes knew where he was going, and I think that every battalion commander did. They were just told to make the way the best they could. It would have been impossible to regulate traffic on that road. We were pushed off of the road and we marched out on the edge of the woods. Here and there would be five solid lines of artillery going forward.

Finally, at seven o'clock at night, we pulled up. Hughes walked off the road and said, "This is it." I was right behind him. I don't think that we had 50 men with us.

MR. FRANK: They had all straggled?

GENERAL THOMAS: Straggled, cut off. They were coming in all that night and by morning we had most of our men.

I rained that night and I didn't know where we were. I knew we were close to the front because, at the end of our march, I could see this artillery along side the road all pointed out to the northeast.

The next morning, old "Johnny the Hard" sent for me at daybreak. He said, "There's a ration dump up back down the road about half a mile or a mile." He described where it was. "You take a detail, and get all the chow you can carry." I called for half a dozen men from each company, and we went back down. All the dump had was corned willy, which was very bad because there was no water; but we picked up what we could. Going back and forth, by that time, the artillery was firing in support of the attack that was going on. The Fifth Marines had jumped off and the Ninth Infantry. We got back though, and we had our chow. Along about eight o'clock in the morning we were in pretty good shape. I mean the troops were all in, so Hughes moved out. We followed him right up the road.

Soon we crossed the old front line. Actually, our attack in that area had been a complete surprise. It had just gone through like cutting through a horn.

MR. FRANK: Was this the Fourth Brigade at the time, or was this the Second Division by now?

GENERAL THOMAS: The Second Division was in the attack, and the Fourth Brigade was the Fifth and Sixth Marines. In the assault on the morning of the eighteenth of July was the Ninth Infantry and the Fifth Marines with the Twenty-Third Infantry in support followed by the Sixth in reserve. No, the Twenty-Third was in assault too; but they got pinched out during the day. It was planned. They fell in behind us as we marched up the road behind the attack.

We had a very scenic day. I'll never forget it. We were horribly short of water. The horses and men had drunk up all the wells for miles around, and there was no water. We sent off details with canteens, and they were gone eight and ten hours before they could come back with their canteens full. That day lancers and Cuirassiers and the

beautiful French Cavalry would go loping by. The artillery was displacing forward, at the gallop. On the side of the road the walking wounded were coming back.

We went on. Our division made a right turn that day. In doing so, the Twenty-Third Infantry was pinched out and fell in behind us. About three o'clock in the afternoon, our regiment moved forward and deployed on the side of a hill. Down in front of us and off to the left was a line of artillery pieces as far as you could see standing hub to hub. I never saw anything like it before or since. The word was, "We're going to attack." We deployed. I'll never forget because as I sat with my platoon there, here came Burr, whom I hadn't seen for six weeks. He had come back from the hospital. He had been wounded and had come back so he came to see me. He wanted to know why I hadn't gotten my commission. I had been slated to get one when he left.

MR. FRANK: Had he put you up for one?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh yes. I was recommended in the trenches for a commission, but the battalion adjutant didn't like me. If Burr had been there, I would have gotten my commission then. It turned out all right in the end.

Anyway, he said, "Tell me how you're going and what not." I was devoted to the fellow. I had saved his life, and I was really very fond of him. He was a real gentleman. He said, "When they come out of this, we'll talk this all over. I want to know everything that's gone on since I left."

Then the word came, "Stand fast." They told us that we were deployed too far to the rear, and that the Twenty-Third Infantry was on the road to column right behind us. They passed through us. As they went by you can imagine what they said to us. They loped on and went on toward the village of Vierzy.

MR. FRANK: Was that the objective of the attack?

GENERAL THOMAS: No. Our troops were in Vierzy. They were going on beyond Vierzy to carry the attack on to a new line for the night because everything was so damned confused. The division commander, who was by then Harbord – he had been moved up, wanted a set line for the night. He wanted to know where he stood. By sending the Twenty-Third forward, he could find out.

As we sat there on the side of that hill, after the Twenty-Third went by, I saw the greatest spectacle of the War. The French formed for a mass cavalry attack.

MR. FRANK: French?

GENERAL THOMAS: All French. As I say, there were lancers and Cuirassiers and dragoons and everything. There were about 6,000 of them, and they formed them up on a plateau above us. I could see the most spectacular sight. For some reason they didn't get the word to move forward. Finally the Germans threw some shells in among them, and they began to mill around. They all just drifted away.

MR. FRANK: Were they in dress uniforms?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, boy, they were all dressed up. They were beautiful. There wasn't any doubt about it.

We remained where we were. They said, "Lay on your arms tonight. Stay where you are." The next morning, the nineteenth of July, we formed up right soon after daybreak. Again there was no move toward chow, but we had gotten some water during the night. We moved down in the Vierzy Ravine, and then we went on forward, past Vierzy. My battalion came up out of the Vierzy Ravine and deployed on the edge of a wheat field. The Germans, who were over on the right on a hill, spotted us. They were

about 1,800 yards away, but they started throwing machine gun bullets at us. We had a few casualties. It didn't worry anybody much.

I could see Holcomb's battalion come out of the orchard way off to our left and deploy and move out. Then I would see another outfit on their left, that was Sibley. We lay there, and after awhile we heard rumbling. It was the tanks. We were waiting for the tanks to come. When the tanks passed through, the command came, "Forward." We got up and started going with them.

The Germans had massed their artillery on a hill about three or four miles off in front of us. It was all direct fire. And, boy, they let us have it. Everybody, I don't think that anyone of those tanks went more than 1,500 yards. We just caught hell from the machine guns on the left, the artillery.

MR. FRANK: Was this the first time that you had seen a tank-infantry attack?

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right, the first time for real.

Our attack collapsed. We just simply collapsed. A little fellow near me, J.P. White, who had been one of my original platoon boys with me . . . I was (inaudible). I was platoon sergeant. At that time I was still a sergeant. I couldn't see anybody. I saw people lying down. The attack was over. We saw a twelve-inch iron field roller that some Frenchman had left in the wheat field. J.P. and I got down behind that roller, and the goddamn machine gun bullets are clicking off of that roller. We started to dig, and we dug ourselves a little hole. It took a good time because the ground was like rock. We had to work on our bellies with a shovel. He had a pick and I had a shovel. We got ourselves a little hole so we could get a little depression behind the roller.

About an hour and a half later, I looked up and there we still a lot going on. They were dropping hand grenades out of airplanes on us. We couldn't tell what was happening because some of them would explode in the air. The German planes were cruising around overhead and they were dropping grenades on us.

What had caused us to be slaughtered was the fact that the Moroccan division which was supposed to have come up on our right, was delayed. The machine guns that were giving us hell were the one that the Moroccans should have taken.

MR. FRANK: The Moroccans were going to hit from the flank?

GENERAL THOMAS: On the right of our flank. There was nobody on our right except German machine guns.

The Moroccans made an attack when they came up. Then they sent through an outfit trying to pass through their left and go down and take a little village in front of us. They lost all of their men. They lost the whole outfit. There must have been seventy-five of the. It wounded or killed every one of them.

Maybe at noon or a little after, I was able to get up and peek around. That's after the Moroccans came forward. I saw the same Overton that I have talked about at Belleau Wood. He was sitting in a ditch, alongside of a sunken road. He was commander of the Seventy-Sixth Company. He said, "Come on over here." I went over him. He said, "I've got to go back and see Major Hughes. I'd like to take him the best information that I have of the line. I know that the situation is here directly in front of me, where what's left of my company is, but I don't know what's over in that other area so I want you to go and find out."

I moved up through the wheat and went along from one foxhole to another. There I found about one hundred men. I got to what I thought was the left of my battalion. I

went back and told Overton that I had found about one hundred men, and that my company had about thirty-three men left in it as far as I could determine.

MR. FRANK: Out of a 250-man company?

GENERAL THOMAS: Out of a 250-man company. There were perhaps 200 of them who started this attack.

Overton went back during the afternoon to see Hughes. Hughes had had a tragic day too because the company commanders who had survived the attack went back to report to him. They were sitting with two members of his staff—Burr and Turner, the adjutant – in a sunken road when a German shell dropped right in the midst of them and killed or wounded every damn one of them and had killed Burr. It had blown off his head. My platoon commander, who by then was my company commander, Dave Redford, was wounded.

Overton came back and told me all thin; and then he said, “We’re going to be relieved at midnight by the French. When you are relieved, get your men together and go directly with them to Major Hughes because there are many wounded that have not been evacuated. We want to try to get them out.” At midnight the French came in. I got my thirty-three men; I went back to battalion headquarters. We made stretchers out of blankets wrapped around the rifles, and we carried the wounded out.

Later we may have found another thirty-five or forty men at different places, but my company lost over fifty per cent. There were a lot of them killed. Our battalion suffered very heavily because we were on the right flank where those Germans were before the Moroccans came. We really took a shellacking.

From there, after a few days rest out of the line, we moved down into around Nanteuil le Haudouin.

MR. FRANK: About August?

GENERAL THOMAS: About August. They sent me to school as we were moving in the line at St. Mihiel there, and I went back to Fort de Plenois. I was still a sergeant, but I was on a gunnery sergeant list. My warrant came there. As a matter of fact, I never got it as I was commissioned. We got back to Fort de Plenois about the first week in September, and then we got word that there was an attack on, which did take place the twelfth of September. Everybody said, “Oh, my god, let’s get the hell out of here. The outfit’s in a fight.”

They lined us up. There were a lot of us – hundreds; and the school commander got up and said, “Now I want to tell you fellows, this isn’t the last battle of the War. They are in a battle, but they’ll still be in it when you’re through here. You only have to be here another four days so just go ahead with our course.” We all listened to him, went back and packed our gear, and just as soon as it was dark we shoved off.

I was in a group of five Marines. We hadn’t had any idea of what we were doing; but we knew where there was a railroad station. We went down and got a train to stop, and we got on. We found a railroad transport officer; and he told us how to get to Nancy, which was the last place that we knew of. We got to Nancy, and then we started talking to railway transport people. As a matter of fact, I saw a train of wounded with some boys from my company. We finally got back to the company as they were coming out of the lines. They were still shooting.

Then after St. Mihiel, I was commissioned. I went up to regimental headquarters with y friend, Jim Elliot, who had been with me all along. We were commissioned the

same day. They transferred me over to the Seventy-Fourth Company. They said, "You can't stay in the same company when you become an officer."

We moved to Champagne after much shuffling around, and moved up to the front. I had been in so much fighting that they said, "No, you're going to stay behind in the ten percent this time." So at Champagne I stayed behind in the ten percent, but was put in the M.P.s. We went back and forth to the front all of the time. We were in almost as much danger as though we had been with the front-line outfit. That's what I did for the Champagne fight. I saw General Lejeune many times during the battle.

MR. FRANK: When your unit had lost fifty percent casualties, down to thirty-three, out at the Vierzy area, did you have a replacement command or something set up?

GENERAL THOMAS: Just as soon as we had lost men, there would come a surge of replacements. When we moved back out of Belleau Wood the first time on the seventeenth of June, we were brought right up to strength. After we went back in again, we were brought right up to strength. When we came out of Soissons, men just appeared.

MR. FRANK: How do you compare the World War I and the World II casualty replacement systems?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, it was a lot different. In World War I we had lots of replacements backing us up, and we did get replacements in the Solomon's. When I got back to Washington where I had charge of providing replacements, we had them going in behind the outfits. We sent a replacement battalion of about 2,500 men in with each division.

MR. FRANK: A replacement battalion in place of drafts?

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. They used them on the beaches, but they had them available there for the port when needed.

I saw a lot of Champagne, a lot of shooting, much artillery fire, really got into the operations, but my company was elsewhere. My old company was in it, and we lost another company commander up there. Ted Fuller incidentally had been killed at Belleau Wood, (General Fuller's son)." Then Freddie Wheeler, a Philadelphia banker who is now retired, Vice-President of the Philadelphia Trust Company, was wounded at Soissons. I found after we got people together and got back in the rear after Soissons, that there was a lieutenant on the line in our company named Tom Wicks. He's long dead now. But Tom was up there with a handful of men. As far as Overton knew, I was senior man in my company. He never saw Wicks. Wicks was off in another field of wheat.

After Champagne there was a good deal of shuffling around back and forth. Then we moved down into the last operation of the War (Meuse-Argonne) and, again, one in which I didn't get into a great deal of fighting. They put us into a great big trench getting ready for the jump off. The day before the jump off, the Germans just showered this thing full of gas. I was evacuated. I went back to the field hospital, and they gave us soda baths and things for our eyes and things like that. The next morning, the first ambulances started to arrive, and I saw some wounded from my company. Among others was my own battalion commander, Major Freddie Barker, who was being evacuated. So Bill McNulty, who is dead now. . .

MR. FRANK: Will K. McNulty, captured on Guam?

GENERAL THOMAS: William K. McNulty, that's right. Bill and I were there in this hospital, gassed. We said, "To hell with this." We went out and crawled in an ambulance and went back to the front. For the first time my pal Jim in the ten percent. He was with

the M.P.s. We crossed the old front and came to a ruined village, and there were the M.P.s. So for the rest of the operation I rode the roads with the M.P.s.

We joined our company the morning of the Armistice. It was cold, bitter, rain, ice, snow. God, it was a rough time. This of course was November 11. The company commander said to me, "I want you to go back and get the baggage." You see, we left our bedding rolls, which we never carried into action, and the officers left their sleeping rolls and baggage. So I rode back. It took us a day to go back and a day to return though the distance was not over 20 miles. The roads were in horrible shape.

Then we lay there in the woods until the seventeenth.

MR. FRANK: Doing what?

GENERAL THOMAS: Just doing nothing, waiting to move into Germany. We were assigned to the Army of Occupation.

MR. FRANK: Going back to the ten percent; I take it that this is the ten percent who had seen a certain. . .

GENERAL THOMAS: It was the nucleus for forming a new company. Our losses were so heavy that they said, "We've got to have a nucleus for a new outfit." So they left ten percent of the men behind and one officer behind in every operation after Belleau Wood to be a nucleus of a new company, somebody who would be ready to go and receive the replacements. And they needed them every time because, except at St. Mihiel, we got shellacked every goddamn time we were in action.

When I got back from the baggage the word was out that we were going to be in the Army of Occupation. We did not move until the seventeenth of November. Our first day's march took us to a village in Belgium. Two days later we were in Luxembourg. We just cut through a corner of Belgium, and we were in at least two places (Arlons) where we stopped en route in Luxembourg. Then we reached a river that is the boundary between Luxembourg and Germany. I believe it is the Sauer River. There was an agreement between the German Army and the allies that we would allow them withdrawal time. We were not to cross this river into Germany until the first day of December. We stayed and were very nicely housed in this little place in Luxembourg on the Sauer until the morning of the first of December. Then we started off.

I would say that we were one hundred and fifty or sixty miles from the Rhine River where we were to be in occupation. The Army of Occupation went into Germany in two columns. The Marine brigade was the advance guard for the left column of the Army.

MR. FRANK: Was this an honor?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, I guess so, yes. Anyway, we were.

MR. FRANK: Was it preplanned do you suppose?

GENERAL THOMAS: It was a lot of work because when that column halted every night, it had to be out posted in true rule-book fashion. If our regiment happened to be in advance guard that day, we would catch on outpost zone. After the column had marched for the day, we might go five or six mile way up in the woods and put out an outpost. The next morning we had to march back and join the column. On many nights, the rolling kitchens didn't get up. We really had a rough time. They didn't even make any pretense of feeding us a noon meal. Sometimes we would eat at night and in the morning, but sometimes we wouldn't. I remember that one night the kitchens didn't get up until the next day. When they didn't get up, we just didn't have anything to eat.



However, we continued the march for about eleven days; and my company was on outpost the last night, which was probably the eighth or ninth of December.

We had a shortcut into the Rhine. Instead of going up and going down to Nauheim and then coming down, we shortcutted and got into Brohl ahead of the rest of the Army. It was the only day that we got a decent break. We stayed in this town just a few hours, and they then moved us down to a village on the Rhine River. This was about the ninth, and we were not to cross the river, according to agreement, until the thirteenth.

On the thirteenth we moved to Andernach on the Rhine, the west left bank of the river. I was appointed by my regiment to be the embarkation officer. I saw the whole Army and the whole Sixth Marines embark and go across the river on the ferry from Andernach to Leutesdorf.

We were supposed to stay, at first, in Leutesdorf, and then they moved us. We went down river about fifteen miles and wound up at a village by the name of Honningen. Two of our companies, the Seventy-Fourth and the Seventy-Fifth stayed in the village of Honningen. Dutch Hermle, General Hermle, was in command of the Seventy-Fourth; and my company commander was Freddie Horn, no dead.

By that time Freddie Wheeler was back, and Freddie had gone over in the Ninety-Fifth Company, he had his original outfit; came over to the Seventy-Fifth temporarily. His company formed the outpost zone along with the Seventy-Sixth. They lived up in the woods on the outpost line.

We were back in Honningen. There they worked our tail off. We drilled and trained and hiked from the fifteenth of December. The only thing approaching excitement was in early June of the next year when the Germans were showing some reluctance in agreeing to the terms of the treaty of peace, they didn't want to sign it. They refused to sign it so we moved up to the edge of the neutral zone, ready to move on into and occupy the rest of Germany. We stayed there a couple of days when they saw the light and they signed. We came back to our village in Honningen.

About six weeks later, the last week in July, I believe it was, they called it a day; and we took trains and went to Brest, where we stayed several days, went aboard a transport, and came home. We got into New York about the first of August. The Second Division paraded in New York on the fourth of August.

Then it broke up. As the parade ended, everybody went to trains. All the Army units and we took our own ferries to Hoboken. The Army units got on trains and went to Fort Sam Houston and we went to Quantico.

There my company commander was detached, and I was given the job of paying off the company. So, I was discharged from the company as a first lieutenant that I went over in as a private because after Champagne I moved back to my old unit.

MR. FRANK: Well, I think that we've covered. . .

GENERAL THOMAS: World War I.

MR. FRANK: Yes sir, I want to thank you for this first session; and I look forward to number two, which follows.

**End Session 1, Tape 1, Side 1.**

Session 2, Tape 1, Side 1

MR. FRANK: All right, General, as we left off last time, we talked about your occupation duty in Germany, which didn't last very long. Is that correct?

GENERAL THOMAS: Nine months.

MR. FRANK: Nine months. Actually you had no particular orders regarding occupation duties, non-fraternization. . .

GENERAL THOMAS: We had non-fraternization orders. We drilled and trained hard up there because the theory was, as I remember, that they compared the German occupation with the occupation of Moscow by Napoleon's army. They said that the troops had gone in there and taken over and there was a great deal of licentiousness and what not and that they were not going to have that. There were some very strict orders about fraternization and contacts, which in a large measure were observed. We lived among the people, but there was no very close association. We were billeted with the people, but even then there was very little fraternization. We worked hard during the period on the Rhine.

When the time came to come home, we were glad to come. As I mentioned in our last session, we arrived in New York early in August, 1919. We paraded in New York. The Marine Brigade paraded in Washington. Then we returned the troops to Quantico and discharged them.

My company commander, who was a very talented fellow, went on some detached duty. So I got the job of paying off the company. That incidentally was the same company in which I went to France. I went over as a private and paid them off as a first lieutenant.

The demobilization of the Marine Corps after World War I was not a particularly difficult task. They gradually paid off the men who had enrolled for the duration of the War and sent them on home. A great many officers were separated on the same basis.

After we had finished paying off the troops on the ninth or tenth of August, I went up to Washington to find out what my future was because there had been a board to determine who would stay in the Marine Corps of the temporary officers; this included practically the whole of the bottom half of the officer list – most of the captains and all of the lieutenants. The board had to decide on who would stay and what their lineal position would be. It was headed by Colonel John H. Russell. We, who had been field commissioned in France, didn't fare very well. They crossed us off. The people who went through the Quantico school all held their commissions as first lieutenants. Fortunately my name was on the list, but it was on a supplementary list that was to be drawn upon if men on the regular list did not accept the appointment to continue to serve as temporary officers. When I went into headquarters to find out where I stood, the officer that I talked to said, "You're on this supplementary list to fill the possible vacancies. There are many more vacancies than there are names on the supplementary list so they will all be retained."

I went off on leave then for a month; but before I went on leave, I checked in with the detail office and asked for duty with the First Brigade in Haiti, which was granted and I was issued orders. When I returned from leave, I went to Washington just to check through there and then on the Charleston where I went aboard the Kittery on the fifteenth

of October, 1919, and sailed for Haiti along with seven other appointments. There were eight lieutenants aboard the Kittery, and we were all field appointments from France.

MR. FRANK: Can we go back just for a minute please?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes.

MR. FRANK: When we talk about Headquarters Marine Corps today, we can't think of anything else but the Navy Annex over at Arlington, but where was Headquarters Marine Corps?

GENERAL THOMAS: It was in what is known as Main Navy now. Headquarters Marine Corps was on the third floor of Main Navy on Constitution Avenue.

MR. FRANK: Occupying about how many offices in Main Navy?

GENERAL THOMAS: Not one-fifth of what they occupy today.

They moved in there when Main Navy was completed; I suppose in 1917, or 1918, 1917 probably. I wasn't around Washington. I was in France so I don't know when all of those buildings went up, but all of the nearby area was filled with temporary buildings in those days, wooden buildings, frame buildings. They have been gradually cleared out. But Headquarters Marine Corps was in Main Navy, and they stayed in Main Navy until, about early 1942 when they moved over to the present Navy Annex.

MR. FRANK: Going back again to even before that, talking about occupation duty when you went home, I remember that Bob Asprey's book mentions a time that Cates and other Marines were called upon to march in a parade in Paris.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes.

MR. FRANK: Did you get to Paris at all? Did the Marines get a chance to get to Paris on leave or were they pretty well kept under?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no. There was very little of it, and of course Paris wasn't looked upon favorably as a leave sector. A lot of people got to Paris. I went to Paris. The first time that I saw it was when we scooted through the suburbs going to Belleau Wood. The next time I had a couple of week's leave was when I was up in Germany. If February, 1919, I just wanted to see the country and have a change. We asked for, as a leave port, Le Havre because that was the end of the railroad and we could stop off. This friend of mine, Peggie Sayers, another lieutenant, and I went to Brussels and spent a few day. Then we went to Paris, but we only spent one day there. Then we went on to Le Havre because we found out that Brussels was a good sector and so we headed on back there. I only spent a night each way in Paris, and I didn't really do anything.

MR. FRANK: According to Asprey and other accounts, the Marine Corps really reached its fame with Floyd Gibbons' . . .

GENERAL THOMAS: That's the way that we got the publicity. I remember one of the censors telling me, and I don't remember who he was – and of course I knew Gibbons real well after the War though I didn't know him before – that we had this story of the fight of Berry's battalion at Belleau Wood on the sixth of June, and we heard that Gibbons had been killed. Later Gibbons said, "Here came this story so we all said, 'this is Gib's last story and we aren't going to cut it up' so we sent it through. And that's the way the name "Marines" got started. After they broke the dam, they refused to take it out of the papers; and everybody knew that the Marines were in Belleau Wood. That's where, incidentally, the fighting was going on; and it went on for the next month.

Now, as for the parade in Paris, along towards the end of the time of the period of our Army of Occupation, I would say late June or July, 1919, as the American

Expeditionary Force was drifting down and got smaller and smaller all the time, it was decided that General Pershing would be coming home. He wanted a triumphal departure so they made up a composite regiment, consisting of personnel from various outfits. I believe that there was a company of Marines in that regiment, and one of the battalions was commanded by our battalion commander, First Battalion, Sixth Marines, Frederick Barker. Then there was a company of Marines in his battalion. The regiment paraded in Paris and then in London. I believe that we actually beat them home. We got home in early August, and I think that they got home a week or two after we did. They probably paraded in Washington also. That was a ceremonial outfit that was an escort bringing John J. Pershing home, really.

MR. FRANK: I don't want to take anything away from the bravery and the outstanding valor of the men that fought there and were awarded awards by the Army and Navy, but I was noticing. . . I'm not going to say "but." I noticed in Jane Blakeney's book that a lot of Navy Crosses given during World War I were given not on the same basis or for the same reason that they are given today. I mean someone – I forget who it was right now, but maybe Eli Kelly Cole – as a paymaster or an adjutant received a Navy Cross.

GENERAL THOMAS: I never heard of that.

MR. FRANK: Well, going through the list and seeing who received it, they did not necessarily receive the award for combat.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, they did though. I never heard of anybody who got a Navy Cross that didn't really earn it. This is what actually happened. The Navy Dross was not awarded to members of the Marine Brigade or the Navy personnel during the fighting in France, but the Distinguished Service Cross of the Army was. Shepherd and Cates and many others got Distinguished Service Crosses. When they came home a year or so later, the Navy matched that and paralleled each one of those awards with a Navy Cross award; however, they were all earned.

MR. FRANK: I'm not thinking about those, but there were several there who it seemed to me, knowing what their services were, received them in a staff capacity.

GENERAL THOMAS: No, and I'm sure that I would have known about it. You find those for me, and I'll be glad to . . . As a matter of fact, they didn't give out enough Navy Crosses really.

MR. FRANK: What about the situation of Louis Cukela and several others getting two Medals of Honor?

GENERAL THOMAS: In those days, there was a Navy Medal of Honor and a Congressional Medal of Hone. Louie should have only had one really, but the Navy came along and paralleled the Congressional Medal of Honor with the Navy Medal of Honor. That's the way he got them. He didn't get them like Smedley Butler who got two for different acts.

MR. FRANK: Or Dan Daly?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, he got them both in the same act. Oh, no.

The awarding of medals was not overdone in World War I; and the people that got them, as far as I know, never got one that weren't entitled to it.

MR. FRANK: Do you think that it's gone overboard now in World War II and Korea and today?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, I don't think so. I wasn't in Korea because I sat one it out there for nearly a year. I don't know what they are doing in Vietnam. I don't think that it's ever been overdone.

MR. FRANK: Before I interrupted you, you were on board the Kittery, heading for Haiti.

GENERAL THOMAS: We got to Haiti about the twenty-first or second of October, 1919.

MR. FRANK: Who else was with you by the way?

GENERAL THOMAS: Of the eight people that were with me, I can name three or four. Grover Darnall was with me, Charles Connett, Edgar G. Kirkpatrick, Louis Cukela. I don't remember the names of the others.

MR. FRANK: I'm trying to connect them with someone who may have had a period of service paralleling yours.

GENERAL THOMAS: The people that I've mentioned all had a good deal more enlisted service that I had had. Dick Shubert was another one of the officers that was in the group that went down with us so I've named about six of us. Connett and Kirkpatrick and the others had a good deal of enlisted service. I was the only college boy in the crowd. I was the only younger fellow in the crowd.

We got into Port-au-Prince at night, and the officer of the day came aboard from the barracks. He was Sy Perkins, who has been a long-time Marine Officer. We went ashore that night and found places to stay because we were going to debark the next morning. That morning we went up and reported in at the barracks in Port-au-Prince. I had married while I was on leave, and I was the only married officer among the eight, so I was detailed to stay in Port-au-Prince.

In the garrison of Haiti in those days, the First Brigade was made up of the Second and Eighth Marines. The Second Marines occupied the northern part of Haiti with their headquarters in Cap Haitien on the north coast. The Eighth Marines had its headquarters in Mirebalais, about fifty miles out of Port-au-Prince; and the barrack was actually a part of the Eights Marines and came under the Eight Marines commander, who was then Lieutenant Colonel L. McCarty Little.

MR. FRANK: Brigade headquarters was in Port-au-Prince?

GENERAL THOMAS: Brigade headquarters, commanded by Colonel John H. Russell, was in Port-au-Prince.

I stayed on for six months in Port-au-Prince. It was a very difficult duty. The Marine Corps was in a period of transition. It was almost, you might say, a period of unrest. We had a great many officers who were waiting to leave the service and who were being held over. A number of them had been in Haiti for two years and had had the frustration of seeing their friends go to France. They didn't get to go, and a lot of them just gave up their commissions. Some of them had regular commissions or had provisional commissions, and they gave them up for that reason.

MR. FRANK: They got out of the Marine Corps entirely?

GENERAL THOMAS: They got out entirely.

MR. FRANK: What was the peak strength of the Marine Corps during World War I? Do you recall off hand?

GENERAL THOMAS: Seventy-five thousand enlisted and probably four percent officers. That worked out to be . . . 10,000? No, no. Four times. . . there were five thousand officers.

Also, the bulk of the enlisted personnel in Haiti at the time were men who got the bug because of the War in Europe and though that we were going to get in it all the way from the start; and they enrolled in the Marine Corps in 1916 or the early part of 1917 when the Marine Corps was only taking four-year enlistments so they were in for four years. They also, many of them, had seen their friends go to France, and they didn't get to go. They had been stuck off down in Haiti or Santo Domingo. I am certain that today's Marine Corps would have rotated those fellows.

So, we had a situation that was difficult. They all wanted to come home and be discharged, but we were short-handed. We were also short-handed of officers. There were only two of us in the barracks most of the time, and we had 500 enlisted strength. There were two of us for duty, and we did heel and toe watches as officers of the day. We had to take drills, and there were many courts martial. We were the recorders of summary courts martial, and judge advocates of general courts martial. I had a hard six months in there.

MR. FRANK: What was the mission of the brigade?

GENERAL THOMAS: The Brigade was in the field. There was bandit warfare going on. Several years before, there was a lot of dissidence back in the mountains, as there has been in Haiti for years and is today as a matter of fact fifty years later; but it was aggravated by the application of the law of corvee, which provided that a man had to give so much service working on the roads for the state in lieu of taxes. There was a great deal of corruption and a great deal of misapplication of the law of corvee. In other words, they got a man on the roads, and just kept him there until he got a chance to run away. When he got a chance to run away, he joined his comrades in the mountains and became a bandit. They raided the town and native gardens. Starting in 1919 there was a full-fledged period of bandit warfare back in the mountains of Haiti.

The mission of the brigade when I got there in 1919 was to suppress or wipe out this bandit warfare.

MR. FRANK: Under what justification?

GENERAL THOMAS: Pacification of the country. We were there to pacify the country.

MR. FRANK: At the request of . . . ?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes sir, at the request of the Haitian government and in accordance with treaty.

The brigade, along with the gendarmerie of Haiti – the gendarmerie of Haiti was not up to a great deal of fighting, and we did the fighting against the bandits in patrol actions.

In addition to it being difficult duty, and it kept us very, very busy in Port-au-Prince, we had one serious incident when I was there. Not only did we do officer-of-the-day duty but frequently, when there was a period of tension, we would be required to sleep in. One night you would be officer of the day and the next night you would sleep there. The next night you would be officer of the day so it was sort of rough for us. On the night of the fifteenth of January, I was the sleeping-in officer. In other words, I was available to go someplace and take patrols and take men. On this particular night, the reason that we were alert was that there had been movements of bandits towards the city

of Port-au-Prince. The bandit leader at that time was a man named Benoit Batrville. I was the sleeping-in officer on the night of the fifteenth of January.

MR. FRANK: 1920?

GENERAL THOMAS: 1920, that's right. The officer of the day awakened me about two o'clock in the morning. He said "There are reports." My mission was to take a patrol of ten men and go to the Haitian-American Sugar Company about two miles north of Port-au-Prince and guard their village out there, which was quite an assemblage of American citizens. When the officer of the day awakened me; and he said, "The Hasco people say that there are people moving around their place and they are worried."

I got up and went up and wakened the first ten men that I could find in the bunk room. We issued arms and ammunition to them and a couple of Browning automatic rifles. We went down and got on a truck and started for the Haitian-American Sugar Company.

We got down to about the middle of Port-au-Prince, and saw some rifle flashes. I had the truck stop and got off the truck. I got my patrol off. Along that particular street in Port-au-Prince, the two and three story brick buildings jut out over the sidewalk. There was a sort of arcade with beg brick pillars right along side of the roadway. The shooting we saw was on the left-hand side of the road.

We moved along slowly for about a hundred yards, and then saw a mass of bandits come around the corner about a block away. I moved my patrol over to the right, and we got along the arcade buildings and waited for these Cacos to get close enough to us so that we couldn't miss them. Thus they did. They got almost across the street. We opened up on them with eight rifles and two Browning automatic rifles. We had a ding-dong fight there for about five minutes.

When we were through, there were about a hundred of the Cacos piled up right on the sidewalk, but I had lost six men. I had one killed and five wounded. However the Cacos pulled off and they left. We followed. We then moved out into the country and to the Hasco compound. The five or ten minute battle was really exciting.

MR. FRANK: You talk about getting aboard the truck, what was your transport like?

GENERAL THOMAS: They were two and a half ton four-wheel drive trucks.

MR. FRANK: Were there a lot of them?

GENERAL THOMAS: Not man, no.

MR. FRANK: Another question; you talked about going down to the sugar company and the American civilians there. Something came into the office the other day from some old Marine who had been a corporal or sergeant down there. I think that it spoke about one of the attacks on Port-au-Prince, that you were spread out pretty thinly. Some of these civilians were to have participated and were given arms, and they bugged out. It spoke of them derisively, even at this point, as "bamboo Americans."

GENERAL THOMAS: They didn't amount to a hell of a lot. They had rifles out there, but they didn't get into the fighting.

MR. FRANK: When you had that Senatorial investigation down there. . .

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes. That was later.

MR. FRANK: Did they precipitate it? Were they the ones? Did they back the Marines that were down there, or did they accuse the Marines?

GENERAL THOMAS: Now you're talking about 1931.

MR. FRANK: Wasn't there one in the 1920s?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes, but that was not a Senatorial. That was when General Neville and the others came down to investigate Cukela and the others. We had tried Dadeus Bellegarde, who used to be the chief of police by military commission in Port-au-Prince; charged with cannibalism, and he was tried before a military commission. The commission sentenced him to death. This was in 1920. I was on duty there. General Vandegrift was a member of that military commission. I don't remember the other members. McCarty Little, I think, was the president of it. They tried Bellegarde and sentenced him to death on any number of charges, on of which was cannibalism.

GENERAL THOMAS: He was the voodoo chief; but that had been years before, and about that there's a long story after having been the chief of police in Port-au-Prince, he had taken to the hills and the mountains because of certain things that had been done to him in Port-au-Prince in the early day.

Josephus Daniels disapproved the action of the military commission. He said, "Such things are unthinkable." He was just a goddamn boob. They were thinkable. He disapproved the findings.

Shortly after that, there was an investigation, not too long after that, maybe six or eight months afterwards. There was an investigation of shooting prisoners, par of which involved Louis Cukela. He was guilty of sin. He killed a man right outside of my tent. Henry Mayo, the admiral who came down at the head of that court of inquiry. There was a three-member court of inquiry. The Marine member was General Wendell C. Neville, who was later Commandant of the Marine Corps.

Well, let's get on with Haiti. I stayed on at Port-au-Prince until April, 1920. I was ordered to the hills, and there I stayed for the next six months. I made one brief trip back into town. My life was like the others'. It was just a life of drudgery, chasing Cacos over the mountains, the bandits. Sometimes we would be gone two weeks. We'd corner the Cacos and have a fight with them. Sometimes we would be out two weeks and we wouldn't see anybody. They hid out in the daytime and traveled at night so we did the same thing. We would hide out in the jungle all day long; and then we would get on the trail at night, watching for fires where they might be gathered around. We'd try to find them. Sometimes we would and we'd have a fight and it would be all over and passing. But we gradually whittled them down and killed enough of them off.

In the meantime, along with our patrolling and fighting against the bandits, there was a pacification program going on; trying to induce them to come in and pick up what they called "bon habitant" passes, good inhabitants passes, and go back to their gardens where they lived. And that's what they were. They re natives who had lived in these areas; and, because of corvee, a lot of them had taken to the mountains and joined the bandits.

We were successful. We gradually whittled them down and killed their leaders. I had the last contact with a patrol in that whole campaign in November, 1920. I hit a bandit, but we didn't get at very close quarters. We were several hundred yards apart, but we killed a number of them.

In the meantime that same day, I was coming down with an illness; and we didn't pursue chiefly because I was just as sick as I could be. We got under a shack, hoping I would shake off whatever I had; but after about two days, I got so weak that I told my lads that they better get me to camp. They got me on my feet. I don't remember much for the next twelve hours, but I got back to camp. The next day, they put me into an



ambulance and sent me to the field hospital in Port-au-Prince. I had something very close to black water fever, heat prostration, and malaria. This was near the end of November, 1920.

MR. FRANK: What did they do? Give you quinine?

GENERAL THOMAS: Quinine and quinine, sure, nothing but quinine, intravenous injections of quinine.

MR. FRANK: Was Puller in there at the time that you were there?

GENERAL THOMAS: All of the time. He was in the gendarmerie though.

MR. FRANK: He came down with pretty much the same thing I guess.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, maybe so. He probably did. I never saw much of Lewie. We collaborated on a patrol once, that's all, because he was on an outpost. He was a corporal in the Marine Corps and an officer in the gendarmerie but a non-com in the Marine Corps.

I was in this field hospital; and about three weeks after I had got there, my first wife took ill and died. I came back to the States then on two-months' sick leave. After my leave, I took a Panama steamer and went back to Haiti.

MR. FRANK: You went home to Missouri, did you not?

GENERAL THOMAS: I went home to Missouri, to my mother's place. My wife's mother lived right across the street from my mother.

MR. FRANK: Was that about the time that you thought that you might get out?

GENERAL THOMAS: The Marine Corps, realizing that the result of the Russell board was not something that they could settle on permanently, formed another board probably in the fall of 1920. This was headed by General Neville.

MR. FRANK: Regarding the retention of officers?

GENERAL THOMAS: Regarding the officer strength of the Marine Corps, asking people who had already gone out, if they would come back and take back their commissions again and on those that were in to stay in and so forth.

I went back to Port-au-Prince, and the Neville board report came out about late March or the first of April, 1921. I was dissatisfied with my place on the list so I submitted my resignation, and I was ordered back to Washington.

MR. FRANK: They reshuffled the lineal standings?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes they did.

MR. FRANK: And you lost numbers on it?

GENERAL THOMAS: I lost numbers on it.

I was ordered back to the States. I came back, and I went to Norfolk in June, 1921. There were no orders there, nothing. I said, "What the hell is going to happen?" So I got on a boat and went to Washington. I went up to the A&I in those days – Adjutant and Inspector. I found out where the action office was so I said "I have never heard anything." He said, "Well, I've got your resignation in my basket along with a lot of others, and there have been a lot of others there. They come in to see me, and I talk them out of it. How about letting me just tear this thing up?"

MR. FRANK: Who was that? Do you recall?

GENERAL THOMAS: Franklin Steele. He died long ago. He was then a captain.

He said, "If you'll tear that up, I'll take you to sea with me. I'm going to sea in about three months." So I tore it up; or, we tore it up. I went back to Norfolk; and, after about two weeks, I was ordered to Quantico.

I came up to Quantico, and I joined the engineer battalion in August, 1921. We stayed there for about a month and conducted a big maneuver, the troops of Quantico. That was the day of Smedley Butler and his big marches and maneuvers.

MR. FRANK: The Wilderness?

GENERAL THOMAS: We went to the Wilderness maneuver, and I was the engineer officer with the 155 millimeter battery. The roads, what is now Route One and Route Three, going down to Wilderness, and their bridges were not equal to taking 155 millimeter guns and the streams were unfordable. They were the "long toms" of that day. So a move was arranged through the back country where there were not large bridges. We headed out from Triangle due west and for Ford. We forded the Rappahannock and the Rapidan because the bridges wouldn't take us. We cut fords down over those rivers; and that's the way that we got to Wilderness, and that's the way we came back. We broke in a few culverts so late in September I had the job of going out with the engineer detachment, carpenters mostly, and building back some culverts and some small bridges that we did break down.

MR. FRANK: That's the closest that you came to sea duty then?

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right.

When I came back, one of the shipmates in the engineer battalion had been detailed for the Limitation of Armaments Conference guard. He was married, and I wasn't so he said, "Would you mind swapping with me?" I said, "No, I'd be happy to go to Washington." So I was detailed that day. I went up and reported to Major Bevan, who was in command of the Marine Guard at the Conference.

MR. FRANK: At 8<sup>th</sup> and Eye?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, that guard came from Quantico. Bevan was in command, and Captain Francis J. Kelly, who was kicked out of the Marine Corps years ago, was the company commander, and Frenchie Cherbounier, who has been out for years and years, and I were the lieutenants in the company.

The enlisted men were housed in one of the temporary buildings, which is on the ground now occupied by the annex of the Pan American Building. It was a plain building in those days. We had 125 or 130 men. There were two guards for the conference. One was the Army Guard and the other Marine Guard. The Army Guard protected the Pan American building and the Constitutional Memorial Hall, (the D.A.R. building). Those two buildings sat right alongside of each other.

MR. FRANK: That was where the conference was being held?

GENERAL THOMAS: The plenary sessions of the conference were held in Consitution Memorial Hall, and committee meetings took place in the Pan American Building. But the real business was transacted in the offices, or the lower floor of the two eastern wings of Main Navy. These wings were given over to the offices of all the delegations from all of the various nations participating in the conference. The Marine guarded that, and that was where the tight guard duty went on. Nobody was allowed near that place.

MR. FRANK: Why?

General Tomas: They didn't want people going in and out of those delegation offices. They were working in there, and that is where the real business was transacted. There was an enormous pressroom and a large press delegation at the conference. We pulled out partitions to make the pressroom. Our officer of the day's desk was just outside of the pressroom and at the entrance.

*(Tape interruption.)*

MR. FRANK: Now we can start again.

GENERAL THOMAS: The officer of the day's desk used to be the hang-out for the newspaper people. They were the leading newspapermen and writers from all over the world.

*(Tape interruption.)*

MR. FRANK: Disarmament conference.

GENERAL THOMAS: Is this going?

MR. FRANK: Yes, sir.

GENERAL THOMAS: We had maximum security on the delegations in Main Navy.

MR. FRANK: Much like the U.N. when it started out?

GENERAL THOMAS: Much like it, oh yes, it was real tight.

MR. FRANK: Did they have nuts, cranks, kooks?

GENERAL THOMAS: There was a great deal of that.

I remember one particular situation was that there were two Chinese governments. There was a North China and a South China. I believe that Wellington Koo, who was the chief of the Chinese delegation, represented North China, but the South Chinese were always trying to get in. They never succeeded because we kept them out.

That conference met throughout the whole winter of 1921 and 1922. The fact is, it continued until February, 1922. One tragic incident that occurred during that period was the Knickerbocker Theater disaster.

MR. FRANK: Yes. I was going to ask you about it.

GENERAL THOMAS: I've forgotten the exact date. It was about the twentieth of January.

MR. FRANK: Twenty-eight January.

GENERAL THOMAS: We had a terrific snowfall in Washington. I had had difficulty getting around before that. I was staying at a place up on Rhode Island Avenue. The first night of the snow I had been at a dance at Eighth and "I". I had to take a girl home after that, and I had a hard time getting here there. She lived at Fifteenth Street, which in those days was a good residential district. The next day was a Saturday. We had a group called the Army-Navy Juniors who had tea dances every Saturday afternoon at 2400 Sixteenth Street. We were there for a tea dance on Saturday afternoon. It was still snowing. It had kept snowing all the night before and all that day. I had a date with the daughter of a naval officer. As a matter of fact, I was to meet her at 2400, which I did. When we came out of the dance, we couldn't get a taxi to get her home; but one couple had a taxi and they were going to the Army-Navy Club so we went there and had dinner. After dinner, I managed to get a taxi and I took my date home.

She lived only a block from the Knickerbocker Theater on Biltmore Road. As we got to her house, her father told me that there had been a bad accident. He said, "I don't want Atla to know about it," because the week before they had brought her brother's body home from France where he had been killed in World War I. They had had a funeral, and the family was all upset. The brother was an Army officer. So I told her good bye, and I went on back to see the excitement.

When I got there, I saw the men from our detachment at the Armament Conference working in the Knickerbocker Theater. The roof had caved in on 200 or 300

people. The cave-in had been caused by the heavy fall of snow. It was a defective building, incidentally, too. I don't think there was any doubt about that.

MR. FRANK: How old was the building?

GENERAL THOMAS: I don't think it was very old, but it was very poorly built. There was quite a scandal about the construction of the building afterwards. District building inspectors were roundly condemned.

When I got to the theater, I found the officer of the day, who was Frenchie Cherbouier, who was there with men from our guard. Men had also arrived from the Gun Factory. All were Marines. There were Marines from Eighth and "T" Street, all that could work in the place. I told Frenchie to carry on, and I made my way down to Rhode Island Avenue and got out of my blues and into my service uniform and came back. We worked all that night and through most of the next day getting injured and dead people out. There were 105 people killed in the disaster.

MR. FRANK: A lot of children?

GENERAL THOMAS: I don't remember too much about who it was, but there were 105 killed and there were many people injured. We set up a temporary morgue across the street in a church. All in all, it was quite a hectic day.

I stayed with that conference guard until February and then shifted over to the Mail Guard, Headquarters, which was also in Washington. I stayed on there for several months. Then (I) returned to Quantico. That was the summer of 1922. That was the summer of the big maneuver to Gettysburg, when Smedley Butler marched all of the Marines from Quantico to Gettysburg.

MR. FRANK: Going back to the Wilderness, I was talking to General "Tex" Rogers sometime before and he remembered that he did some flying. Was it for the Wilderness? Were there any planes during this Wilderness maneuver?

GENERAL THOMAS: There probably were. Planes operated in Quantico. I don't know what they did.

MR. FRANK: (Roy) Geiger, I think, was flying at that time.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh yes, "Tex" was. "Tex" Rogers was one of the fliers during World War I.

MR. FRANK: I remember that he talked about night flying. Butler wanted to find out. . .

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right, and they did. They had a least one man killed. Scotty Minnis was killed.

MR. FRANK: That's right. Minnis.

GENERAL THOMAS: They put search lights on the planes, and Scotty Minnis got in the beam and lost his way and was killed. He was a very fine officer. He had a DSC from France. He was the class of 1915 from the Naval Academy. He dived in that search light beam and lost his eyesight apparently, and he came right down to the ground. His family and I were living in adjacent suites in what's now Waller Hall. He had a wife and child.

In the fall of 1922, I entered the first of the company officer schools that were held. The schools had been reorganized during the summer of 1922. I stayed on in Quantico for that course in 1922 and 1923.

MR. FRANK: Were you a first lieutenant then?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, I stayed a first lieutenant until 1932.

I went on through that school. It was not a particularly good school, but you always learn something. They were trying to train some of these old ex-non-coms. We had people in that class that had twenty years of service, and they were way beyond the educational time and the mental capacity that could pick up company officer training. They had them there. They were captains, and they were training them for that rank.

We finished in June, 1923. I stayed on in Quantico for a couple of months because I was to go to sea. In September 1923, I went to New York and joined the USS Galveston, an obsolete light cruiser which was due for decommissioning. After a week in New York, we went off to Charleston, South Carolina where the crew of the Galveston was to be shifted to the gunboat Tulsa, which was being built in Charleston. That fall we put the Galveston out of commission and the Tulsa in commission.

The Tulsa was ready for a shake-down cruise in January, 1924, so we started off south. We were destined for duty in a Special Service Squadron and based on Panama, but the shake-down cruise was not supposed to go that far. We went from Charleston to Galveston, Texas. We were to go back than from Galveston to Charleston; but the Tacoma, a sister ship of the Galveston, a cruiser, was in a "norther" and went on the Blanquillia Reef outside of Vera Cruz. It became a total wreck. We were ordered down there to survey the wreck and take her station at Vera Cruz. Incidentally, the crew, most of whom were saved – they only lost a few men, of the Tacoma. The Tacoma was brought up to Charleston and they put our old ship Galveston back into commission, and returned her to the Special Service Squadron.

At this time there was a revolution on in Mexico, the de la Huerta Revolution, so we shuffled from one port to another, carrying refugees, Americans, from the oil fields. We'd pick them up at Tuxpan and take them to Vera Cruz, where they would get a ship and come home. Or, we'd pick them up a Puerto or Progreso and somewhere else. We remained down there until May, when we were relieved.

We went back to Charleston then for our final checkout with the ship. During that period of about three weeks in Charleston, my wife and I were married. She is a Charleston native. I met her there that winter while we were putting Tulsa into commission.

MR. FRANK: Was this a coal burner?

GENERAL THOMAS: She was an oil burner. She was built to be a coal burner, but they converted her to oil before she was commissioned.

MR. FRANK: It must have been the envy of the other coal burners.

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, but by that time the fleet was mostly on oil. They had mostly changed over.

MR. FRANK: What was your duty aboard ship like?

GENERAL THOMAS: I had a detachment of thirty-five men. I didn't have many extra duties. We drilled and trained and did the gun drill on our four-inch guns. It was a very relaxed sort of an atmosphere. We played a lot of bridge at night and did things like that.

Our ship went back to Panama, . . . My wife took a boat a couple of weeks later. We went from Charleston to Guantanamo Bay in June, 1924, to fire the crew over the rifle range. I was the range officer, and with my Marines moved ashore to Deer Point at Guantanamo Bay where the rifle ranges were. They gradually fed the 185-man Navy crew to us and we put them all over the rifle range.

MR. FRANK: That's very much like the Thomason stories of this period of the ship's detachment.

GENERAL THOMAS: Those are the kinds of things that every ship's detachment did.

MR. FRANK: Marine landing force, Naval landing force.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. We practiced and we drilled on our landing force techniques.

MR. FRANK: You had the composite landing force, Marines and Navy?

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right, and I commanded it.

From Guantanamo, we went to Panama. Life in Panama was routine. The ships in the special service squadrons, when they happened to be based in Balboa, would only stay in port, moored in Balboa Basin, from Friday night until Monday morning. Then, on Monday morning, they would go out and anchor off of Taboga or one of the islands west of the Canal and carry out daily drills. It was a real dull routine, but fortunately we didn't have to do much of it because there were a number of revolutions going on.

My wife came down in July, 1924. No long after that we were ordered up to the north coast of Honduras where a revolution was taking place. We remained there a couple of months.

MR. FRANK: It was a British territory, so you were protecting British interests?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no. Honduras was an independent country; not British Honduras. We were actually protecting United Fruit Company plantations, which in my view were a real good thing. They did a lot for those people down there. I don't have any use for these people that talk about dollar diplomacy. We took health and food and life into a country that previously had been only a miserable fever ridden swamp and jungle. The United Fruit Company went in and opened up great tracts of land and gave employment to people, gave housing to them, and gave medical care. One of the best little hospitals of tropical medicine in the world was the United Fruit Hospital at Tela, Honduras. They truly cared for those people. There's a lot of condemnation of the United Fruit and the dollar diplomacy. Sure, they made dollars out of it; but they took the better things of life to those people.

We stayed in Honduras until about the middle of October, 1924, when we were ordered to go to Galveston to be there for Navy Day.

MR. FRANK: Galveston was still your home port?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, Boston was the home port. We hadn't been there, but Boston was our home port. Boston was the home port of the Special Services Squadron. They happened to build this ship in Charleston, and we went back there for the check-out after our travels.

The day after we left Tela, Honduras, headed for Galveston, a hurricane hit us. For five days our ship just stood on end. We had a most miserable time. Finally, it subsided and we ran out of it. We had been damaged, so instead of going to Galveston, we diverted to Key West. We stayed only a couple of days getting things rearranged and checking on Tulsa's sea worthiness. We went on to Galveston, and we got there in time for Navy Day, to do the things that we were supposed to do.

From Galveston we returned to Honduras and stayed until December 20<sup>th</sup>. Then we went off to Panama. We hung out near Panama for a couple of months. We took a trip up the west coast of Central America, taking Dr. Leo S. Rowe, the director general of the Pan American Union. When we were through that, about the first of March, 1925, the

ship was due for a trip to the Navy Yard so we went to Boston. I had some leave, went to Charleston, came back; and my wife came to Boston.

Finally, in May, 1925, we sailed again for Panama. We went down by way of Guantanamo to fire the range again. By this time there was a lot of trouble in Mexico, so when we left Guantanamo, we went to Tampico. We stayed there and observed a lot of trouble. There had exchanges of very vitriolic notes between Mexico and the United States in those days.

MR. FRANK: Was that when they nationalized the oil fields?

GENERAL THOMAS: That had been done before. Mr. Kellogg from Minnesota – they called him “Nervous Nelly” – was our Secretary of State. He had written some very pompous notes to Mexico.

We stayed a week or ten days in Tampico and then went from there to Vera Cruz and later went on down to Panama. My wife didn’t come down that time. We stayed in Panama until about August, 1925. I was getting near the time to be relieved from the Tulsa. From 1912 to 1924 we had either a Marine occupation or a Marine guard – at the American legation at Managua, Nicaragua. In 1924, they were pulled out. It was just a small guard of about 125 men and four or five officers. As everybody had forecast, when the guard left there, a revolution started. The president was thrown out. Those were the kinds of things the guard had been sitting on. Are we finished?

MR. FRANK: No, we still have a little bit more.

GENERAL THOMAS: The revolution started, and we were ordered up the coast of Nicaragua. It was the east coast, Puerto Cabezas and Bluefields on the Tulsa. We stayed up there a month or six weeks. We were relieved on station and came back to Panama. By that time my relief was there. I was ordered to Charleston Navy Yard for duty.

I spent nearly two years in Charleston Navy Yard. I was just doing routine Navy Yard duty. I was Post Exchange officer and post quartermaster part of the time. It was no unusually interesting. Charleston was pleasant for us because it was my wire’s home.

In August, 1927, I was ordered to the Army Motor Transport School. I went to Fort Holabird, and there I spent the next nine months. I have no mechanical ability. But I got a great deal out of the motor transport school because it was a service school and they gave us lots of training in addition to just working in the shops. What actually happened was that the various service schools like communication and transport had gone overboard on the technical side of their own business. They were all under the cognizance of the Army General Staff. They jerked them up and said, “You’re not really a school. You’re just a trade school so you have to put in more general training.”

MR. FRANK: More professional training?

GENERAL THOMAS: More general training, more military training. So this year at Holabird they gave over four hours every morning to military instruction, and we had some of the best de-training and in-training problems in that school that I ever had.

MR. FRANK: In other words, a professional military training.

GENERAL THOMAS: A real professional school. Then, in addition, they gave us a lot of theoretical training in things like electricity. I figured afterwards, when I was working on something, that they gave us the equal of a year of college physics. We went to school every morning from eight to twelve o’clock, but at one o’clock we’d go to the shops where we met all afternoon.

MR. FRANK: All officers?

GENERAL THOMAS: All officers. There were twenty-seven of us.

We rebuilt motors and batteries. We did everything for the next nine months. My first working partner was Johnny Bemis. I worked with him some, but my real working partner was a chap names Larry Slade, an Army officer. I got a great deal out of that school.

I left there in the summer of 1928, and went to Parris Island where they hadn't had a motor transport officer for six months. They had a lot of motor transport. I only stayed there for five months.

Then they sent me off to Haiti. That was in the fall of 1928.

MR. FRANK: December, 1928.

GENERAL THOMAS: I got to Haiti in December, 1928; and I was the aid to the brigade commander down there. First it was Mason Gulick, and then about six months later he was relieved by R.M. Cutts, that's the older Cutts. The son, Dick Cutts, lives out by Warrenton and he's spending the old man's money. Old R.M. Cutts was quite an inventor. He invented the Cutts compensator, and they've made a great deal of money out of it. Of course, young Dick was also a real smart fellow and a great rifle shot.

MR. FRANK: Going back to the school, this was an inter-service school. The Army ran this motor transport school.

GENERAL THOMAS: Army Quartermaster Corps operated it.

MR. FRANK: All right. Did other services attend schools that the Marine Corps ran?

GENERAL THOMAS: Some, in equal numbers. There were three of us, Ike Bennett, Johnny Bemis, and I, in the motor transport school; but that's all of the Marines. The rest of them were Army transport officers.

MR. FRANK: Well now, then there were army people maybe and Navy people at any of the schools that the Marine Corps ran?

GENERAL THOMAS: Usually there were.

MR. FRANK: You said that the Army revamped its education system and raised its professional quality.

GENERAL THOMAS: They happened to do it this particular year at its Service Schools.

MR. FRANK: Did the other services do this too, or was it just the Army?

GENERAL THOMAS: It was just the Army working on its own service schools. I think that the other service schools were going all right, but the General Staff was just dissatisfied with the way that their service schools were going.

MR. FRANK: I think that this might be a good point to end here, and we'll turn over to the other side.

### **Session II, Tape 1, Side 2**

MR. FRANK: You're back in Haiti now.

GENERAL THOMAS: I'm back in Haiti as aide to Colonel Cutts. Although the brigade commander was a colonel, they rated an aide. You can aide a colonel and his wife just as much as you can aide a general, I found out.

I had two and a half years of real good duty. The brigade staff was small and of indifferent quality. All of the brigade commanders – I finally wound up with McCarty Little – threw a great deal of work on me. So I had a very active and instructive two and a half years and learned a great deal while I was down there.



MR. FRANK: Mason Gulick, what was he like?

GENERAL THOMAS: He was a stuffed shirt. He was a big fellow. He finally wound up in Peiping, and died out there. He was a typical old-time officer. He had to particular ability. He just lived. His father was a diplomat. He had been born in Italy and educated abroad and entered the Marine Corps in 1899. He was very kind to me, but he was not a Cutts by any means. Cutts was a very brilliant fellow, a brilliant man.

MR. FRANK: I recall, I think, a picture. He was very proper with a trimmed mustache. He wore a mustache, did he not?

GENERAL THOMAS: Cutts didn't. His brother-in-law, John T. Myers, did. John T. Myers was married to Cutts' sister. Cutts' father had been a Navy officer. He was a Navy boy, and he been raised on Mare Island. A lot of Navy families used to live on Mare Island. John Russell's father was the commodore in command of Mare Island in those days when Cutts was a young boy. Cutts' father had died. There are still families that own property on Mare Island within the Navy Regulations until this day. Cutts' mother owned the store on Mare Island due to the fact that they had no post exchange, but she owned that store and operated it and made a good deal of money. Cutts came into a good deal of money, and they are from wealthy New England families. Dick Cutts, young Dick, old R.M.'s son, is quite wealthy now, I believe.

We had routing daily work in Port-au-Prince in those days. It was interesting and I enjoyed it very much.

On two occasions unusual situations came up. In 1924 or approaching 1924, 1922 and 1923, Colonel Cutts was in command of the Guardia in Santo Domingo. They knew that the Marines were coming out in 1924. He was told to groom one of Guardia officers to take command of the Guardia when the Marines withdrew. He selected Rafael Trujillo. Trujillo stayed in command of the guard from 1924 until 1930, at which time he said that he was going to run for president. Our State Department was very much opposed to that; and they did everything that they could do to induce Trujillo to withdraw from the picture, which he refused to do. So they finally asked Cutts to intercede.

Within a matter of a couple of months, we made two trips to Santo Domingo to see Trujillo to attempt to get him to get out of the picture. He would not and organized what grew into a military dictatorship. They were the most interesting items in these two and a half years that I put in at Haiti. I stayed there from December, 1928, until June 1931.

MR. FRANK: You had your family down there?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh yes. They didn't come down at first because Jerry, Jr. was being born and my wife stayed on in Charleston until July, 1929.

MR. FRANK: Is Gerald, Jr. the elder?

GENERAL THOMAS: No. Tina Bruder, Joe Bruder's wife, was the oldest child. Do you know Joe? He works for Bill Buse over in Plans now.

MR. FRANK: Yes.

GENERAL THOMAS: Young Jerry is our second child.

I had been anxious to go to the Army Infantry School at Fort Benning for a long time and get the course there. There was some finagling going on. When I was approaching the end of my duty with Colonel Cutts, he asked me what I wanted to do. I said, "I want to go to Benning." He said, "All right. My brother-in-law, Jack Myers, is the assistant commandant." He said, "You put in a request for Benning, and then I'll

write to Jack and tell him to line it up.” So I put in a request, and he waited some time before he wrote the letter. He wrote a letter. Then two other people on station in Haiti, Gilder Jackson and O.P. Smith, got orders to Benning for the senior class. O.P. was in the Gendarmerie, and Gilder Jackson was down at the barracks.

I went to the old man, and I said, “There’s something wrong because these other two have their orders and I haven’t heard a word.” So he wrote to Jack Myers again. Myers said, “I have your first letter, but we don’t send anybody anyplace unless they request it and Thomas has never asked for duty there.” Old R.M. Cutts said to me, “You didn’t put in for it?” I said, “Oh, yes, I did. Just you wait.” I went back to my file; and I brought him back a letter signed “J.T. Myers” saying, “Your request for duty at Fort Benning as been received and will be considered when the selections are made.”

He said, “Give that to me.” By that time we had air mail. He fired it right back at Myers. Very shortly, Myers came back and said, “The selections have already been made, but we’ve asked the Army for an extra billet. We think that they will give it to us and that Thomas will go there.”

What sort of set this all off was that there used to be a tailor’s agent by the name of Mr. Dehl who worked for Carr, Mears, and Dawson’s in Norfolk. He knew everybody. He knew me, and he used to write me. He wrote to me and he told me that he had seen the detail officer. The detail officer had said, “Thomas thinks that he is going to Benning, but he isn’t going.” My request disappeared from my file, and I’ve always been certain that that fellow took it out and tore it up because it was not in the file. J.T. Myers couldn’t find it. Anyway, I went to Benning.

MR. FRANK: Why did you want to go to Benning?

GENERAL THOMAS: It was the greatest school of weapons in the world. Everybody in the world knew of Benning. Benning was number one, and I wanted to go there. I wanted the company officers course; I didn’t want the senior course. I got my choice. There were three Marines in the class. Dudley Brown, Lewie Puller, and myself.

MR. FRANK: Lewie Puller?

GENERAL THOMAS: In my class, yes.

MR. FRANK: Is that story that Puller says correct? As I understand it, he was called up to recite by Omar Bradley. Bradley asked Puller: “Tell me Lieutenant Puller, why do you Marines bother coming to the Army school in the first place?” Puller replied, “I’ll be damned if I know.”

General Tomas: I don’t know if it’s true or not. I never heard it. I’ve heard the story before.

Well, I had a wonderful year at Benning. It was a wonderful school. We did all of our work in the daytime.

I’m going to go back a little now. When the Marine Corps started the company officers’ school in 1922, Commander Mayo came down from the Office of Naval Intelligence to talk to us about intelligence. He talked to both classes – the senior school and the junior school. He used as the main theme of his story, Stonewall Jackson’s fabulous success in the Valley and his failure in the Peninsula Campaign below Richmond two months or so later. He connected that with the fact that, in the Valley, Jackson had first-class intelligence and he was in an area also that he understood and knew, but that in the Peninsula, down there in the swamps and the forests, he had no

intelligence. In starting off, Commander Mayo said, "Of course, you've read that marvelous work of Henderson's, The Life of Stonewall Jackson."

I not only hadn't read it; I had never heard of it before. I was a bachelor and had a lot of time on my hands so I decided that I would start reading it. Henderson's Life of Stonewall Jackson was out of print, but I came up here to Loudermilk's and they told me that there was an edition on the press at the time. It finally came off, and I read it first. Then I got copies of Steele's American Campaigns. Those two books started me, and for the next fifteen years, I gave at least two hours a day to the study and reading of military history.

MR. FRANK: Up until that time, you were not particularly a reader or a scholar?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, I studied in college, but I had not studied military history. I realized that I should study, if I was going to be a professional military man, something about the profession.

MR. FRANK: What about the other officers?

GENERAL THOMAS: There weren't a great deal of us, though there were some. We've had very few scholars in the Marine Corps. Some, but we've never had a great many. We've been a field outfit mostly.

MR. FRANK: Yet, did those that were the real gung-ho professional type look down?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, everything was all right. We just didn't have a great many, that's all.

I kept up reading. I bought books, and I still have a library of military history – that I haven't given to my son. When I got to Benning, we did all of our work in the daytime; and there was very little study to be done. It was a school of demonstration and performance. But Benning did have a military history library that was really marvelous so I did a lot of reading that year and got a great deal out of it. I read a great many lives of officers of the British Indian Army, the Younghusbands and Maude. Maude wasn't an Indian officer. I read a lot of those

When I left Benning, I was detailed as an instructor in the Basic School at Philadelphia. I went up there and for two years taught BAR, machine guns, mechanical training, marksmanship of machine guns, and tactics and combat principles. I was there a little over two years.

GENERAL THOMAS: Classes of 1932, 1933, and 1934 from the Naval Academy; Krulak, Cooley, Bowser, Jimmy Masters, Lazarus, who was still in the Marine Corps, Sam Shaw, Tharin.

MR. FRANK: Did you see any flash of genius or flash of brilliance?

GENERAL THOMAS: Not at the time. They were steady, good boys, all of them. They were all about the same.

I didn't stay with the Class of '34 long because for the year 1934-35, I was due to teach a new and enlarged course in amphibious operations. I was going to shift over from what I was doing in the Basic School. They were going to increase the instruction in amphibious operations, urged on by the Schools at Quantico. The Basic School was in Philadelphia in those days. It moved up there in 1923. I knew that the faculties in the Marine Corps Schools in Quantico had been drawing up a new manual of amphibious operations and landing operations. They had given that whole year because there was no school class at Quantico in the school year 1932, 1933-34 because there was the revolution on in Cuba and we had two or three floating battalions on battleships all

around Cuba. There were three or four of them as a matter of fact. They had to take students out of the schools to send them down for those battalions.

MR. FRANK: Didn't they take students out of the schools and send some of them over to China too?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes, that was 1927-28. You see, we didn't have many officers, on a thousand officers, and they just had to do things like that.

MR. FRANK: You're a captain at this time. You made captain in 1932.

GENERAL THOMAS: I made captain right after I reported to the Basic School. That's right. I was a captain all of my time at the Basic School. I was about fifteen years a lieutenant.

MR. FRANK: Did you get disgusted by the way?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no. I was happy. I thought that it was pretty slow, but I didn't worry about it. I went ahead and did my duty everyday.

I went to Quantico and picked up one of the new amphibious books. They had an old S.O.B. down there who was assistant commandant of the schools. He was a very brilliant officer named Ellis B. Miller, a lieutenant colonel. I wanted to get one of these books. I went to see Miller. He didn't know me, and I don't know that I had ever seen him before. But I told him what I was going to do. I said "I'd like one of your new tentative landing manuals." They only had a few. He cussed me out, and then he gave me one.

I'll go back a little. This was in 1934. The greatest event, possibly, in the history of the Marine Corps took place in 1934 with the passage of the law which put us under the Navy selection system. That's when they really cleaned the Marine Corps out. They really did. Selection did it. We had been a good outfit and a good fighting outfit but we had a lot of characters before that.

MR. FRANK: What was promotion based on before that?

GENERAL THOMAS: Seniority entirely. All you had to do was live and not get a general court.

MR. FRANK: Did you have to pass tests?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes. We took examinations for promotion every year, but they were not unduly difficult and you studied for your examination all of the time. I used to leaf through the Navy Regulations and the Marine Corps Manual once a year.

MR. FRANK: And get that Post Exchange accounting course?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, all those kinds of things, and ordnance and gunnery. I read them, along with military history, continuously. I took the examinations in topography and military law. But I was always ready for them, and most people that were interested in getting ahead studied and kept current with these things.

But selection was something different. It proceeded to steady things down, and people got more serious. Drunkenness dropped off. There had been a great deal of it before that. We had had a lot of drunkenness before that. Some of it resulted in court martials.

MR. FRANK: About what was going on in the country, the Depression and Roosevelt's regime and the whole ferment, how did that affect the services?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, we had one period of serious threat to the Marine Corps under Hoover. Hoover disliked the Marines for reasons peculiar to him. They had locked him up once upon a time or threatened to.

MR. FRANK: Out in China?

GENERAL THOMAS: In China. That's right. He didn't like the Marine Corps, and he had, as his Army chief of staff, and also not liking the Marine Corps, one Douglas MacArthur. They went out after the Marine Corps. They were trying to do away with us. Of course, I'm not going to go into this because this is not part of my story, but some of the things that I'm going to write about. . . . I finished writing my forty-one years up there this morning.

MR. FRANK: Congratulations.

GENERAL THOMAS: I'm all through. Thirty-eight and a half years. . . I'm not going to write about the evaluation subcommittee.

The Marine Corps all through its history has had these fights. Henderson had a fight. The next came about sixty years later when the Navy, aided by Captain Fullam started to move in on the Marine Corps.

MR. FRANK: Teddy Roosevelt's regime.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. They took the guards off of the ships.

In the nineties, we had a great man, that someday I'm going to write about, names Heywood as our Commandant. Heywood was one of the finest Commandants the Marine Corps ever had. He had the big fight. He changed the Marine Corps, he took them down out of the rigging and put them on the guns and put them on the advance bases.

Heywood did that, aided by Waller and Lejeune and some of the younger officers.

MR. FRANK: Dion Williams?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, Dion didn't do a hell of a lot about it, see. Dion was a pretty good thinker. He did a lot of writing, but . . .

MR. FRANK: Was he involved very closely in that?

GENERAL THOMAS: Dion was too much of a Navy man. Every time that an admiral said something, he went through the hoop.

Anyway, you brought up Hoover. Hoover really had the Marine Corps on the skids. My wife's first cousin – that's who she talked to this morning – was married to Stover Keyser, who was one of the bravest and ablest officers the Marine Corps ever had. He was director of operations for the Marine Corps in the early Thirties. When I came up from Benning on the way to Philadelphia, he told me that Hoover and MacArthur were out after the Marine Corps. He said, "We're going to have to fight for our lives." Soon after that, he called me up and told me to come down to Washington. So I came down. He said, "I want you to go talk to your Congressman; and if you know anybody else, tell them to go talk to their Congressman." So I went over to talk to my Congressman, Judge Horner Hall and I fell in with Mel Maas. Mel was a member of Congress then.

As I was on my way back to Philadelphia – this was in 1932, Stover said, "The man that we've got to get at is Byrnes of Tennessee. He's the key character in the piece, but we don't know anybody that knows him." I said, "I'm going to ask a man in Philadelphia." The commander of the Marine Guard at the receiving barracks in Philadelphia was Amor Sims; and he was from Tennessee. I said, "Amor, I've been in Washington . . ." And I related to him the whole story. I said "You're from Tennessee and the key man in this whole thing is Congressman Byrnes of Tennessee. They don't know anybody that knows him." Amor laughed; and said, "Well, he's my wife's uncle."

MR. FRANK: How do you spell Burns, B-u-r-n-s?

GENERAL THOMAS: B-y-r-n-e-s.

MR. FRANK: Same as James Byrnes of South Carolina?

GENERAL THOMAS: Same as Jimmy Byrnes, that's right.

I said, "Well, the boys in Washington would like to see you." He said, "When we go to Washington, we stay at the Byrnes house." The next morning Amor got in his car and drove down. I called Stover Keyser that night and said, "Amor Sims whose wife Martha is Congressman Byrnes' niece, will be down in the morning." He said, "We'll be glad to see him."

So, that helped out. We had that battle, and we won out on it. But, oh, boy. Hoover was really looking down our throats.

MR. FRANK: The Marine Corps was pretty small at this time.

GENERAL THOMAS: About 15,000. Well, we had 15,000 or 16,000 men; but

Hoover's proposal was to cut the Marine Corps to 12,000.

MR. FRANK: I remember of my early days in the Marine Corps, which by comparison is not so long ago – well, it's twenty-four year ago – meeting and knowing some of the old timers who came on in 1931-32 at the time of the Depression. One in particular was a college graduate who was a gunny sergeant or a tech sergeant in World War II. The Marine Corps must have really had its pick.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes. We had good men.

MR. FRANK: Of men that came on in that time?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes. We had good men. There's no doubt about it.

I'm going to jump back to this trip to get to this Landing Force Manual in Quantico. I realized that I should be applying for another school. I had been to Benning, and I knew that schools were a good idea. They were good for me, and they were good for your record. I found out in Quantico that the senior officer's school would resume that fall . . . the renewal of the school because it had not been in session the year before. The faculty of the school had been working on this tentative landing force operations manual.

I went back to Headquarters. I saw Stover Keyser. I told him what I had been doing. We were on a very friendly basis. I said, "I don't want to stay three years in the Basic School. I would like to go to the senior school at Quantico next year. They do not have a full class, and here it is in June." He said, "Well, you know how interested I am in marksmanship." Keyser was an old rifle team man. "If you'll stay with the class of 1934, which is now reporting in at Philadelphia, through their marksmanship training, which this summer will be a Cape May instead of Mount Gretna, we'll put you on the list to go to school next year; but you've got to say up there until August." I said, "All right. I'll be glad to."

So I did. I went back; and I went through with the class of 1934, Krulak and Shaw and Tharin and Seeds and all of that crowd. I took them through marksmanship training and machine gun and BAR, which that summer was concentrated at Cape May, at the Coast Guard range.

I got orders to Quantico. I went down and I took the senior course at Quantico. I was the junior member. Cates and Hart and Woods and all of those people were classmates of mine. Near the end of the course, I got a hint that Vandegrift, who was there on the post, wanted me to go to Peiping. I had not known him before. I received my orders to the Marine detachment at Peiping; and after the senior school, I went there in 1935.

MR. FRANK: He was going to have to take over the detachment?

GENERAL THOMAS: He was going out to be. . . He was on the list for colonel then, and he was to be promoted in about seven or eight months. P.M. Rixey was in command in Peiping, but he was due to leave there after about six or seven months and Vandegrift was to take command.

He took me out there. I went to Peiping in the summer of 1935, and I had two years of really marvelous duty, professionally and in every other way.

MR. FRANK: This is a theory of mine. I have tested it out by asking several of the general officers that I have interviewed about this. That the golden age of the Marine Corps was in the late Twenties and the Thirties and the milieu of the Marine Corps was the Far East, particularly China. Is this true, or am I being unduly influenced by Thomason?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, we had duty out there. It was very active, a lot went on and what no. Yes, it was a great era of the Marine Corps. We've got a great era going on right now.

MR. FRANK: Well, each era is different.

GENERAL THOMAS: A lot went on, and it was a really good outfit. We had a great, great outfit in Peiping. There were five officers and 500 men. We trained hard and drilled all over that countryside. In the winter when they can't plant crops out there-it's as cold as hell in North China in the wintertime. We had Erskine as our operations officer and then as our exec and Vandegrift in command. We had a really marvelous two years. It was a lot society and lot of life and balls and all that and international life. There were big foreign embassies there. Living conditions were good. Money was plentiful. We got an exchange relief. We got additional money, in addition to our pay, on account of the rate of exchange. So we had a really prosperous two years.

Of course, in a way, it was a tense two years because the Japs were moving in. We had lots of contacts with the Japs. Rather than contacts, I should say that there was a Japanese presence that spread over everything. They were really occupying North China. We occupied our own little compound.

MR. FRANK: Did you become a polo player?

GENERAL THOMAS: No. I was going to the last year that I was there. I decided to play polo. I didn't know that I was coming home, and the summer of 1937 I bought a polo pony from a lieutenant by the name of Graves Morris, the adjutant of the British Guard. This little pony was names Black Peter. He was a beautiful little horse. All through the winter of 1936 and 1937, I practiced polo. I'd take this little black horse and ride out to the field. We were getting ready to have our fourth child so we were inactive although we did go socially all of the time at night, but I did ride every day. I rode little Black Peter, and I'd ride up to the polo field and bat the ball around. I used to go to all of the polo matches and the teas in the afternoon.

MR. FRANK: Had you been a horseback rider before?

GENERAL THOMAS: No. I had been schooled at Benning.

MR. FRANK: Was equitation part of the curriculum?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, you bet. Oh, boy. I hope to tell you; and a great many of our exercises were mounted at Benning. Oh, yes sir. Benning was a different as night and day. It was divided like this. We were very fortunate when the hunters were available, the horses that hunted. But if the senior class was going out on an exercise,

they got the hunters; and we had to take the polo ponies. Polo ponies are just crazy. You get them out and they want to play polo all of the time. They jump into other horses. You just had the wildest damn time with those polo ponies; so when we had to take polo ponies we had a really rough afternoon.

MR. FRANK: Even though it was an infantry school, the influence of the cavalry was pervasive?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, the Army then lived on their horses. It was a shame that Eisenhower did away with the horses in the Army because he didn't like them. He wanted to play golf. He didn't like horses. They just ruined it; and I didn't have the same thing, as I will relate, when I went to Leavenworth.

We rode a lot, and I had a real good course of instruction in horsemanship. Of course, I'm a farm boy. I know one end of a horse from another. But we rode a lot at Benning, and, as I say, I rode that last year in Peiping. It was something that I needed to do because we had a certain set life in Peiping. The year around, we went to the barracks at seven thirty, and we had routine hours until one thirty. If we happened to have a field exercise that day, we might be out in the field until dark, but if that came, it was all right. For my first period of about five months in Peiping, I commanded a company. Each of the companies in Peiping had a dual mission. We were all rifle companies. There were three companies, "A," "B," and "C." I had Baker Company, "B" Company. Then we had a secondary mission. "A" Company was a machine gun company because we had a defense plan to defend the legation quarters, and we were one of the guards in the defense of the legations. There were about a half dozen other guards, the French and the Italians and the British and the rest of them and ourselves.

MR. FRANK: And the Japanese?

GENERAL THOMAS: You bet. There was a large Japanese Guard, yes.

MR. FRANK: Is this the shades of the Boxer Rebellion?

GENERAL THOMAS: Same, like the Boxer Rebellion, the Tartar Wall and all the rest of it. But we were to defend the legation quarter.

MR. FRANK: Against whom?

GENERAL THOMAS: The Chinese. Oh, yes, if they were revolting or if there were any disturbances. And of course China was right on edge all of the time. There was always a possibility of a flare-up.

Each of the guards had their sectors, and we were to man them. Vandegrift was in charge over all commanding officers. The American Commandant was to be the senior one. One day he said to the Commandant of the Japanese Guard, "Of course you know that I am senior." The Commandant of the Japanese Guard said, "Yes, but, Colonel, in my safe I have a commission as a brigadier general." And if there were trouble, he would have pulled it out and flashed it.

Now what was I on?

MR. FRANK: You were still on China.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, a dual mission. My company's secondary mission was as an artillery battery, and we had four old 3-inch naval landing guns. Their battery position was on the Tartar Wall. We went off the Tientsin to the French Arsenal and fired on the range down there. It was a very restrictive sort of an exercise, but it was worth while.

We had a most wonderful two years. There was good rifle firing. They had a good range, The Peking International Rifle Range, and good training. My last sixteen



months there I was the adjutant of the American Guard, which meant that I had all of the contact with outside agencies, military and others. Everything I had in my. . . .

As I was approaching the end of my tour out there, Vandegrift said to me one day, "What do you want to do when you leave here?" Erskine and I were intimate personal friends, as well as we had a lot of duty together. We were both instructors in the Basic School together. I said, "Well, Bobby Erskine says that I should go to Leavenworth." He said, "Well, I'm writing to the Detail Officer, John Marston, who is going to relieve me here in the spring; and I'll tell him that you want to go to Leavenworth." Within a month he had a letter back saying that I was on the list to go to Leavenworth.

I came home in the summer of 1937, and attended Leavenworth in 1937-38. I had an equal or better year than I had had at Benning. Leavenworth was a marvelous school. It was terrific. The pressure was just terrific because the Army officers there realized that it was a life and death matter, the Command and General Staff School. They just had to do well or they were done. It would drive them crazy. We had more than one that went crazy. One of them committed suicide.

MR. FRANK: Pressure?

GENERAL THOMAS: Just pressure.

MR. FRANK: On the Marines too?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no. Litzenberg and I didn't worry too much about it. We scooted on through. We both did well.

MR. FRANK: Did Erskine go to it?

GENERAL THOMAS: No. Erskine had been there before.

Erskine had said to me, "If you go to Leavenworth and pass that course, as I know you will, you will never be confronted with a military problem again that you can't solve."

MR. FRANK: Has that been true?

GENERAL THOMAS: That has been true. There isn't any doubt about it. Leavenworth did it.

I had a wonderful year there. There again I fell in with the horses. When we got to Leavenworth, they took us out and said, "Everybody is going to go draw a horse." We went over to the stables. The Tenth Cavalry manned the stables then, and had 256 horses in the stables. We were 240 students. They said, "All those who are graduates of a service school may ride at will during the year, but those that are not will have to stay in the bull ring for two months and take training." I can remember riding out, and one of my old, old friends – I had known him for years – was a doctor and had been one of the best polo players in North China, was in the bull ring. His name was Page. He cursed me. I could hear him for a block. Here I was riding at will, and Page, who was not a service school graduate, though a fine polo player, and he was in the bull ring. Well, they put me on a big bay mare. She was an enormous creature who had been on the jumping string. Actually, they played a trick on me because they put me on a real rough horse; but I rode that mare for a year. We really had some wild rides. I'd go over there in the afternoon after some these woolly sessions in school, and sometimes I'd ride for a couple of hours. Then I'd come back, and I was all cleared up.

We studied every night. We put four ours n every night. Each set of quarters had a study all fitted out, and that school ran for the student. They did not allow children on

the street, radios after seven o'clock at night. Everything was for the students. I truly had a wonderful year there. I left with genuine confidence in my ability.

MR. FRANK: I'd like to ask you a question. The Marine Corps at this time was still small. The officer corps was very small, and every officer, unless you were a brand spanking new officer, from senior on down to junior knew of or knew each other.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes, we generally knew everybody.

MR. FRANK: So there was a lot of personal contact. Would you say that careers or assignments or so on were very much arranged by this type of personal contact?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, not necessarily so. As a matter of fact, you could get a duty if you wanted it. There was some of that, but people got pretty much what they wanted.

MR. FRANK: What about uniforms?

GENERAL THOMAS: We were well dressed. In those days uniforms were hand tailored.

MR. FRANK: And especially in China.

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, but they didn't make as good uniforms as they did in the States. You know a Marine officer's coat was hand tailored.

MR. FRANK: Of beaver.

GENERAL THOMAS: And serge. I always wore serge.

MR. FRANK: That's too bad that they did away with . . .

GENERAL THOMAS: You can't do as of old. When World War II came along, I asked my friend Dehl then at Shulman's. He said, "Let me tell you. There are only ten coat makers on the whole East Coast of the United States. Each can only make one coat every two days. Here you've got a class of 300 boys going through. We don't have a prayer. We've got to go to the factories to get uniforms for them." That was the First Candidates Class, which I'll get on to pretty soon.

MR. FRANK: Talking about the uniforms and the tailoring and so on, again remembering the old officer's overcoat with that cut, . . . Of course you had to have a boat cloak.

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, and there was that mess dress and everything else.

MR. FRANK: Did you wear the boat cloak often?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, I wore it a great many times, always with blues. I gave it to my boy. My boy has my boat cloak, then Wethered Woodworth gave me his boat cloak. My son-in-law has that one.

MR. FRANK: The leather that you wore was English, the shoes and . . .?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, not necessarily so. I never went in much for boots and things like that. I had them but I also had puttees.

MR. FRANK: You know, there's a recommendation today to do away with the belted Marine blouse.

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, I know. They're going to do it too. I was up there and saw the vote with the general officers.

MR. FRANK: How did you like it?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I prefer the belt. If they've got too much belly, tell them to take it off.

MR. FRANK: How much of a purist are you regarding the Sam Browne belt for instance?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, I liked the Sam Browne belts. I thought they were very military. We came back to it after World War I, and I liked it. I never would have done away with it. I'd wear it today because it's a part of a very handsome uniform. Some of these officers would go around in their pajamas, if you'd let them.

Okay.

MR. FRANK: You're back from China, and . . .

GENERAL THOMAS: And I've been to Leavenworth. I finished Leavenworth in June, 1938; and I was ordered to Quantico to the schools.

MR. FRANK: To teach?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, to teach.

When I reported in, they sent me up to Bobby Erskine, my old pal.

MR. FRANK: You were now a major?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes. I was made a major in the summer as I entered Leavenworth.

Erskine said, "Dave Nimmer has gone to the Naval War College, and you're going to take over the military history billet," which I did.

MR. FRANK: They taught at Quantico at this time?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, I hope to tell you that they did. I had fifty-five hours before the class.

MR. FRANK: This is for what, the senior school?

GENERAL THOMAS: For both of them, they all attended my lectures.

I taught the presentation and the preparation of lectures. I had maybe four or five hours on things like that, preparation of visual aids but then I had fifty hours of lectures on military history. It's obviously impossible for a man to prepare and deliver fifty hours of lecture. For every hour before the class you put in one hundred hours of preparation. You just can't. There's a limit to what you can do.

So, there was a system, and a very good one, at the schools. They had a series of lectures that had been going on for several years. When I got there I found numerous lectures, I found all of the hours filled with lectures. But all of the hours were not filled. There was a little that needed doing. In 1935, Arthur Mason, who is one of the finest brains we ever owned – he's a mean bastard – Class of 1923, a very talented man, had written a five-hour presentation of the Gallipoli Campaign, which was our Bible. Then there were other lectures there. I looked them all over; and I made up my mind, with Erskine's approval, as to what I'd like to do. And he gave me free rein. He didn't tell me what I had to do.

I thought that I would make the key point of my year of lectures the Gallipoli Campaign. There was a new book out by an Australian. The Australians had a lot to do with Gallipoli. The Anzacs did. So I read that book and re-researched Art Mason's five-hour presentation and built it into a seven-hour presentation, which I delivered to hours one day, three hours the next and two the next.

Dave Shoup was the shifter of my visual aids. He was in our intelligence section. Of course we had a great map and wall charts; Dave would go around and stick in the things.

I wrote a new three-hour lecture on the Battle of Bull Run. There were two Battles of Manassas. I wrote a three-hour lecture on the Battle of Chancellorsville. Then

there was a lot of other mish-mash, early American landings and this, that, and the other thing. I just took them and rehearsed them and delivered them.

I had fifty hours before the class, and about a half of it was real good military history. Maybe twelve or fifteen of my hours were historical rides. I delivered one afternoon a three-hour lecture on the two Battles of Manassas, and the next day we spent the whole day on the battlefield. That was part of my fifty hours. I wasn't on the platform, but I was before the class. I conducted a historical ride of the two battlefields and went through the two battles with the class. Then I delivered a three-hour lecture on the Battle of Chancellorsville, which was one of the greatest battles in the history of the world. Then the next day we went down and we spent the day. I started a Fredericksburg because the Battle of Chancellorsville starts at Fredericksburg where the armies were before. As long as I was there, I spent a couple of hours going through the Battle of Fredericksburg. I gave them nothing more than a sketchy description of the Battle of Fredericksburg, but I gave them a ride over the field. Then we followed the troops. Both armies fed from their two positions at Fredericksburg up to Chancellorsville where they collided again. We went on tours and spent the day on a historical ride. As a matter of fact, sixteen of my fifty hours I spent out on these historical rides.

I go well along and did a lot of work. I reported in early in June, and I didn't have a class until September. I turned to on this Gallipoli lecture. I ground out the three-hour lecture on Manassas. So, along in the fall, I had a slack time. Erskine had said to me, "I'm as busy as hell. If you get any time, I wish that you would bring up to date the study of the theater of operations of the Island of Trinidad." The schools had a landing problem on Trinidad. In fact the main school problem was Trinidad. I worked on the study of the theater and brought it up to date. Then Erskine said; "Now we don't have a real study of the theater of operations on Guam, and I wish that you'd write one." This was late in 1938. I turned to. I had Pete Hill's report. You know, W.P.T. Hill the Quartermaster made a reconnaissance of the Mariana Islands from a submarine about 1935. Do you know about that?

MR. FRANK: I've heard of it, yes. Why don't you go ahead and tell it to the tape.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, there isn't much I can tell about it because I don't really know a great deal; but I do know that this submarine took Hill to all of these Japanese islands. Among other things of course we held Guam, and he made quite a survey of the island of Guam.

MR. FRANK: By foot?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes, in every way, boat, foot, and everything else.

So I started on the study of Guam, as I read Hill's report of his reconnaissance and his study of the islands.

MR. FRANK: Was this at all highly classified?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes. As I remember it was.

So I prepared the study of the theater of Guam, and I finished it. And one of the things that Pete Hill said, "Guam is barriered by coral. The coral grown out from the island, and they've got only little tiny stretches of beach. They've got lots of beach areas, but they are barriered by these coral reefs." Hill would say, "This is an impossible landing beach unless a vehicle can be developed that can surmount coral reefs." I repeated that in this study of the theater. They had a Guam problem in which they assumed that all of these barrier reefs were impassable and that nobody could come over

them. But I wrote in that if a vehicle could be developed that could go over coral then these beaches were all open.

Well, Noble was the executive officer of the school, and the bugger came down and bawled me out because he said, "You've ruined our Guam problem with your study." Erskine told him to get out. He wasn't going to put up with anything like that. That I had only told the truth.

A few weeks after I had finished the German study, the Army was instructed to study Guam with the idea of preparing the island for defense. Two Army officers, one of whom was a chap by the name of Pope who had been one of my instructors at Benning, came down. They said, "We understand that you have a study." I said, "Here it is." They said, "Thank God. We don't know a damned thing about the place." Erskine told them, "Those are the real facts concerning Guam." They left taking a copy.

It's a good thing that I put that all in because I was then called up to Congress to testify about the defense of Guam. I went before the naval committee and talked to them about the defense of Guam and expressed the opinion that Guam should be fortified and defended and that it could be fortified and defended very easily. And it could have been, but the crux of the matter was this thing of a vehicle to get over coral. Then came the LVT. Later, when we attacked Guam, we just went with the LVT's and they took us everywhere.

MR. FRANK: Had Ellis in any of these studies earlier, in the Twenties, done anything on Guam?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, he went to the Japanese-held islands. He didn't have to go to Guam because we knew all about it and we held Guam. The Japs finally got him in the Palaus.

MR. FRANK: Did I tell you this story that Kaluf told me? About two year ago we were going to an association board meeting and he said, "You know, when we were fighting on Peleliu, some of my men in the heat of battle came up and said, 'Colonel, look what I found here, a sign rusted with a man's name on it, Ellis' name on it.'" Before he had a chance to turn around or get the sign, the battle was going on and didn't have a chance. That was very interesting.

I think another point, you know the Commandant's Advisory Committee on Marine Corps History met in July. Heintz is on it and Tiny Frazer and General Fontana and there were several others, Don Dickson. One of their recommendations was that a seat in military history be reinstalled in the Marine Corps School and that they teach it down there.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I tried to revive it when I was Commandant, and I'll come to that later when I get to my time down there. When I was commanding general of Quantico and I was truly the commandant of the Marine Corps Schools, I delivered a five-hour lecture on Gallipoli to the class each year.

MR. FRANK: That's right. I've heard about that.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, we went on in the schools. The Marine Corps Schools was a fine institution in those days. We taught well, and the students were earnest. Of course, we could see a war coming and as a psychological effect it was very important.

I made a trip to Culebra on an umpiring team in January, 1940. This broke my time up in the schools a little bit. It was very, very interesting too, and very instructive.

MR. FRANK: What kind of exercise was it down there?

GENERAL THOMAS: It was a landing exercise.

MR. FRANK: Marines?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes, a brigade from Quantico went down for landing exercises. Pedro del Valle took an umpiring team down there. Bob Bare and Emmett Skinner and three or four others were on that team with Pedro. We umpired the exercise. There was a defense on the island set up as a skeleton defense and we umpired as to whether the attackers would get ahead. It worked out all right.

Then, late September in 1940, the schools were getting ready to start the first candidates' class. Lem Shepherd, who was the head of the correspondence school in those days, was designated as the commander of the first candidates' class, and I was designated as his executive officer. They started to bring college boys in around the first of October. The first of November the class started.

We ran this class, but Shepherd and a horse couldn't get together on a jump and the horse rolled on him and broke his shoulder very badly. He went to the hospital about three weeks after the class started so I took command of the first candidates' class and carried them through.

MR. FRANK: Were you a lieutenant colonel yet?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, I was still a major.

We put that crowd through. When we started at the first of November, we had three one hundred-man companies, or a little short of one hundred men. Then the next month they gathered another group, and we had about an eighty-man company. We wound up with about 360 officers, prospective officers, in this group. We only had three months with the first group, and two months with the second to see whether these lads should get commissions. The successful ones were to be commissioned the first of February, 1941.

MR. FRANK: Basic School was still up in Philadelphia?

GENERAL THOMAS: No. Basic School had been closed and brought down here to Quantico and became a Base Defense Weapons School. The Class of 1940 from the Naval Academy went to that school. They did not go to a Basic School I don't believe. I can't remember exactly how it happened.

So we put the first candidates' class through. I was the first commanding officer. Then for the second candidates' class, which was to start at the end of February, Jack Dubel moved over and took command of it. I was still in the schools, but I was not connected with them. I was connected with them but we had a school exec that didn't like me, and vice versa. Arch Howard was the assistant commandant of the schools; and he wanted Dubel to take the class, which he did.

About ten days after that class started, I was ordered to Headquarters for temporary duty. Walter Rogers was the G-3 of Headquarters in Plans and Policies. I found later what he was doing was getting me in there to make me take over his job. I had been there about ten days – this was the end of March, 1941, and Charlie Barrett, who was the director of plans and policies called me in his office. He said, "You're going around the world. Jim Roosevelt and you are going to go to London as military observers, but you're going first to the Middle East as an observer." I never found out what happened. I thought that Vandegrift did it, but he told me that he didn't. He said that General Holcomb called him in one afternoon and he said, "I want a major by the

name of Thomas that I know. I've got a job for him." So Vandegrift said, "Well, he's right down the corridor. He's down here on temporary duty." He said, "All right, I want him to take Jim Roosevelt around the world."

MR. FRANK: What was Vandegrift doing up there at this time?

GENERAL THOMAS: He was assistant commandant at the time. He was a brigadier and assistant commandant.

So I started on a trip with Jim Roosevelt, which was one of the most interesting things. That's another tour. That's what I finished writing today. We had a very interesting time, and I think that I should make a record of it.

MR. FRANK: I think that we'll end this session right here, and start out the next one because I'd like to talk about it. I think that this is very interesting. This will start in the phase of leading to World War II and your assignment to the 1<sup>st</sup> Division.

So, it's been a good day.

GENERAL THOMAS: Tomorrow?

MR. FRANK: Sure.

GENERAL THOMAS: One thirty.

MR. FRANK: Yes sir.

GENERAL THOMAS: Okay.

**End Interview Session 2, Tape 1, Side 2**

**Interview Session 3, Tape 1, Side 1**

MR. FRANK: As we ended yesterday, you were telling us how you were selected to accompany Jimmy Roosevelt on a fact-finding trip.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. In the month of April, 1941, as long as James Roosevelt stayed within the United States he was simply a captain in the Marine Corps Reserve – an able one, incidentally – but when he left the United States for travel abroad, he became the eldest son of the President, and was a confidante of his father, a man who in foreign eyes had limitless power and bottomless money bags.

The first leg of our trip took us to Honolulu.

MR. FRANK: What was your mission? What were you supposed to do, by the way?

GENERAL THOMAS: I was never given a mission, except that I was supposed to be an observer. We were to be observers going to visit the British and watch what they're doing.

The first night we spent together in Honolulu, I asked Jimmie what he knew about this trip, that I had been told nothing. And he said, "Well, the only thing I can figure out is that the Old Man thought that it would be well for the people of to see his son in uniform, to show that the United States was really serious about its preparations for war," which were real preparations by that time. This was of course before the war started. But that's all. However, it developed, as we'll find, as the story of the trip unwinds, that everybody, the foreign people we saw thought that he was an official representative of the United States and of his father. They wanted to talk business. We did talk business, not once but on many occasions.

The first leg of our trip took us to Honolulu, where we just had a pleasant 24-hour layover. We were flying in the China Clipper, and landed in Pearl Harbor at 8 o'clock in the morning, at Pearl City, where Pan American used to land. The one thing that I particularly remember about our approach was, when we circled for a landing, we circled Pearl Harbor, and I was struck at the time with the concentrated target, where all the United States activities there were just simply terrific. There was the whole fleet lying down there in little slips of water – Ford Island, Hickam Field, the Navy Yard and everything, all within just a few acres of ground. The most concentrated military and naval target I imagine in the world. And I was really struck by what a target that would make! I had no idea what was going to happen to it later, but I thought . . .

We were met at the plane by Colonel Harry Pickett, who was the – in command of the 14<sup>th</sup> Naval District Marine activities. We stayed with them for a day. We called on Admiral and Mrs. Block – Admiral Block was the commandant of the 14<sup>th</sup> Naval District. We had a good time at Honolulu for 24 hours, then we took off the next morning at 8 o'clock and went to Midway.

At Midway I saw my old friend Bob Pepper, whose Third Defense Battalion was then digging in on Midway Island. There was a lot on construction going on. We got in there, oh, maybe in the middle of the afternoon. They took us on a tour of the island. That night we had dinner with Pepper and his officers, and there I saw an old Haitian friend who was the officer in charge of construction, Civil Engineers commander by the name of Ventrees.

The next morning we took off for Wake. We were very much impressed by the fortifications on Midway, the progress of the fortifications, and a little disappointed about



what we found at Wake. There was very little – though much work had been done and there were a lot of workmen on the island. There were, however, no Marines there yet, no military personnel at all, all civilians, and the work was going ahead but going ahead very slowly. We stayed there from mid-afternoon until the following morning.

MR. FRANK: Wake could have been taken very easily at that time.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, it could have been. It could have been fortified, too, if we'd gotten the things in there. Of course you know the story about the fleet that was almost in there to relieve Wake, and then turned around.

Mr. Jeter who was in charge of construction (and who was later captured by the Japs on the island, incidentally) took us around, showed us things on Wake, but there was not a great deal. We took off the next morning for Guam. I was very much interested in Guam. I'd never been there, but I knew a lot about it, because when I was in the Marine Corps Schools, I prepared a study on Guam and I appeared before the Naval Affairs Committee of the House to testify about it. Before we took off, I told Captain Davis of the China Clipper, that during the writing up of this Guam study, I'd been very much interested in the island of Rota, which was about 30 or 40 miles north of Guam, and that I'd like to have a look at it. We had no information on it because it was in Japanese hands.

MR. FRANK: Were you the only people on the plane?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no. We had a plane – in those days there were about six of us who went from San Francisco to Honolulu on the plane, but the rest of the legs across the Pacific, the plane could take another 12 passengers, and a person who couldn't get passage on the airplane from San Francisco would take a boat to Honolulu, and then pick up the plane and go on to Guam or Hong Kong or Manila or wherever they wanted to go.

So, there were six of us going from San Francisco to Honolulu, but I suppose there may have been as many as 18 or 20 people on the plane leaving Honolulu. Captain Davis didn't reply when I spoke to him about Rota, but early the next afternoon, one of the ship's officers came back and said, "Captain Davis asks you to come up to the control room."

So I went up and he said, "We're just about at Rota. I'll give you a look at it." So I slipped into the copilot's seat, and we came in – we were high, and there was a cloud bank, as there is over the Pacific around 10,000 feet all the way across – and so he turned back and dropped down, and we could see Rota very, very plainly and also could see a runway. There was an airfield on it. And that's what we wanted to know, was there an airfield on Rota that they could operate fighters from.

MR. FRANK: Had you been asked to look at it and discover this?

GENERAL THOMAS: No. I had not, but in writing my study, I tried to take Rota into consideration but didn't know the capabilities of Rota. But we did after that. As a matter of fact, I saw a plane take off from that airfield that afternoon, a small plane, as we went by it.

Well, we got to Guam. Willy Harrison who was in command of the Marine Barracks, old friend of mine, colonel, met me. I think he was a colonel, or lieutenant colonel, then. He took me in, took us into see the governor of Guam, and I was very shocked to find that they hadn't even dug one foxhole on the island. Nothing had been done. As I had explained to the Naval Affairs Committee, it could have been made into the Gibraltar of the Pacific – that it was really the arch, the keystone of the arch, Guam

was, in that arc of islands that was the defense of the Japanese homeland, and we should have fortified that place, with mountains and sheer cliffs, reefs, bastions at the beaches and all that. No one could ever have taken Guam if we'd really defended the place. It certainly could not have been taken. We took it from the Japs, sure, but we took a terrific amount of power in there, and we had a hard fight there for two weeks taking the place, and lost a lot of men in the process.

We stayed overnight in Guam and left the next day for Manila. Arriving at Manila, where we landed in the Cavite Navy Yard, which Pan American was using at the time, and we went over then to the commandant's house, Admiral Harold Bemis. Bemis and I had been friends here in Washington 20 years before. I knew him very pleasantly. The doctor came in and gave us a shot for Cholera, and we went over then to Manila, where a reservation had been made for us in a Manila hotel.

MR. FRANK: On Guam was there any feeling, or any place else that you visited in the Pacific, that there was going to be a war?

GENERAL THOMAS: Not particularly, no. No, I don't believe so – I think they were just living from day to day. I think maybe some people felt like I did. I felt pretty certain there was going to be a war. But nothing – there was no obvious awareness of it. Of course, Manila was hot as all get out. We had a very nice suite in the Manila hotel, air-conditioned, one of the few air-conditioned places on the island. We were met by people at Cavite, Judge Bell of the court represented the governor, and others at Cavite who were in the government. That night the governor gave us a stag reception on the lawn of the Manila hotel. It was a large affair and very interesting. That was the first time I ever saw Douglas MacArthur. He came to that reception.

We stayed overnight at Manila, and then we went to Hong Kong. We had expected that we would go from Manila to Singapore. That's what we had been told, the way we would be routed, but when we got to Manila we were told that the Singapore flights had been secured and there would not be any more, and instead we were going on to Hong Kong in the China Clipper, and there we would pick up the China National Airways for the rest of the trip proceeding by Chungking.

This was a toughie, for a couple of reasons. Jimmie had letters from his father to all of the heads of state, crowned heads and others, in the countries through which we were to pass, and a message from the father, a verbal message and a letter. He didn't have one for Chiang Kai-shek in China. And here we were going to the capital.

Another matter of a little concern was that Nelson Johnson, who had been for many years the Ambassador to China, was being relieved under not very favorable circumstances. I was a little touchy about it all, one reason was that I knew Nelson Johnson very well from my Peiping days. He'd been up there and we'd lived there side by side for two years. However, there wasn't anything we could do about it so we went on. En route to Hong Kong we visited Macao. We stopped off at Macao for a couple of hours, went ashore and went around to visit the Portuguese settlement there.

When we got to Hong Kong we were met by the acting American consul-general, and a representative of Chiang Kai-shek and also a representative of Madame Chiang Kai-shek. The latter made quite a point that he was her representative. She was a power in her own name.

They took us to the Peninsula Hotel in Kowloon, where we went into this very luxurious suite. We told the acting Consul General, "We don't need anything like this."

As a matter of fact, we were wondering whether we could pay for it or not. We were told that we were guests of the Chinese government, and we couldn't turn it down. So, we just relaxed.

That afternoon we went over to Government House, and signed the guest book, which is good British protocol wherever you go. We came back over to –to Kowloon, dressed and went over to a fabulous Chinese dinner that was given for us at the Hong Kong Hotel. The people that entertained us, I imagine the Chiang Kai-shek representative, was O.K. Yui, head of the Central Bank of China, and he was apparently the host at this dinner, but most of the people there – 25 or 30 – were Chinese who had been educated abroad, mostly in the United States. They used to refer to them as “returned students.” If they lived to be 100 years old they were still a “returned student” from the United States or from Germany or from London or Great Britain.

It was quite a dinner. Then the next day we took a trip out through the Kowloon leased territory. We spent a couple of very pleasant days in Kowloon and Hong Kong. Then in the meantime we had gone over and made a call on the governor, just a very brief call. One night he had us for dinner, and he had half a dozen representative people from Hong Kong there, and we talked to them quite extensively, a long time, before and after dinner. Their attitude was that this war that the mother country had gotten into back in Europe was just a nuisance, and they should have found some way to buy Hitler off, and it was just interfering with their business in Hong Kong.

We had gotten a little of that in Manila, too, that the war was sort of upsetting the equilibrium of the Orient and what not.

MR. FRANK: Had you met Quezon at the party in Manila?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, I don't remember who the Filipinos were, never did remember who they were. As I say, I remember MacArthur and General Wainwright, but not the Filipinos.

The last day we were in Kowloon, we went over to Hong Kong and the governor took us on a personally conducted tour of Victoria Island, which is Hong Kong, and told us all about his problems – showed us what his defenses were to be, and they were all pitifully small. There were only four infantry battalions on Hong Kong.

MR. FRANK: Was he a military man?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, sir. No, no, he was not, no – he was a civil servant. Incidentally, the governor of Hong Kong today is Sir David Trench who was one of the coast watchers with us on Guadalcanal. He's the governor general of Hong Kong today. This chap was also a civil servant.

MR. FRANK: Did you know Sir Jeffrey Northcote?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes.

MR. FRANK: He was in the same prison camp with Luther Brown in Shanghai.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, that's the same man.

MR. FRANK: And the Japanese guard went to strike him with a sword, was going to knock him – Luther Brown just jumped all over this man and took his sword away and nothing was ever done about it.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's the man who was governor of – the same one.

Well, the anomaly that struck me about all this pitifully small force, was that Life Magazine had come out with a featured article, some five or six months before, in which they had pictured all these British soldiers over in Hong Kong bristling with arms, the

British strongpoint of the East and all, it could never be taken. Well, it was just a mess. Nothing to it.

We left Hong Kong soon after midnight, because we had to fly over Japanese occupied territory. Before daybreak we had passed over Japanese occupied territory. We were headed for Chungking, which was eight hours away, 1,500 mile away. We got into Chungking at 8 o'clock in the morning. We were met there by representatives of the Chinese government, and Jimmie McHugh, a Marine major who was the naval attaché in Peking. The airfield at Chungking was down in the Yangtze River Valley. Chungking is on a very high cliff. There were a thousand steps climbing up to it.

In Chungking we were taken to a very nice bungalow which was the property of T.V. Soong, Madame Chiang Kai-shek's brother. He was away and we stayed there while we were there. Jimmie McHugh stayed with us most of the time. Nearly all the time, he stayed right with us. We had an official host that was there and he stayed in the bungalow with us. Although it was a political appointment, he was a major general in the Chinese Army. His name was J.L. Huang. J.L. Huang was the head of the youth movement in China, which was a moral rearmament affair. He was a very pleasant fellow, spoke perfect English.

We had a very busy time. We had to see many people – I mean, for purposes of protocol we had to call on them. Our first call was on the prime minister, who was also the head of the state, because after all China at that time was a sort of a monarchy with Chiang Kai-shek sitting on the top of it.

We went to see Dr. H.H. Kung. Dr. Kung had been – had been reputed to have been China's wealthiest man. He was married to a sister of Madame Chiang Kai-shek. MR. FRANK: Yes, three Soong sisters – GENERAL THOMAS: Three Soongs – one married Sun Yat-Sen, one Kung, and one Chiang Kai-shek.

Dr. Kung was very pleasant. He was finance minister as well as prime minister, and he said, "You know, the cabinet's meeting, and I want you to go meet the members." So we went down the hall and into the cabinet room, and there were about 14 people there, and we met them and shook hands all around, and when we came out he said, "I want to tell you gentlemen, you've made history. I'm certain that never before did an Occidental see the Chinese Cabinet in session."

We went to pay other calls from there. We went to see General Ho Yin Chin, the chief of staff of the Chinese armies and commander of the field armies. I saw him again years afterwards.

In the afternoon, we went to see Ho's chief of operations, who was a political appointee. We wound up the afternoon having tea with the Generalissimo and Madame Chiang Kai-shek. They got right down to business. They wanted to talk business, and we did. We talked about a lot of things, and we had a very pleasant visit with them.

MR. FRANK: Would you care to discuss what they ---?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, they wanted to know about the American war effort, and what we were doing, things of this sort, what we could do to be of more help to China, in her war with Japan. We were already helping them a lot. We discussed other details. That night Dr. Kung was giving a dinner for Johnson, and we attended, had a very nice time, good dinner, but everything was very austere around Chungking. These people

who were no accustomed to living under reduced circumstances were, during that war with Japan.

There was a good crowd. The Chinese at dinner sit at a round table. They have nothing like a long table with everybody sitting – they all sit at a round table, and by preference, they seat eight, but they never seat above ten, because that's as small a group as can be entertained by each other.

There were eight at our table. Dr. Kung pointed out that four of the eight at our table were graduates of Yale. So he said, "We've got a pretty good American crowd here tonight."

MR. FRANK: Yale had a university at Peiping, Yenching?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, there was a Yale in China, but Yenching was the college, maintained by Boxer Rebellion funds. Dr. Leighton Stuart was the president of Yenching at our time in Peking, '35, '37. I later fell in with him when he was Ambassador to China and I was in Tsingtao.

Madame Chiang had said, as we were leaving from having tea that afternoon, before the dinner with Kung, she said, "We've given up entertaining ever since this war with Japan, but on Friday night we'd like you to have potluck with us." We accepted of course. The following day we made a trip up to the Chinese Air Base at Chengtu, about 200 miles north of Chungking. We had an extremely interesting day. We saw the Chinese air training program. They were pitifully short of planes, and most of what they had were Russian. We went to the main air base and several satellite fields. Then we went over to the west to an enormous field that was being built. The Chinese were expecting to receive some B-17s, Flying Fortresses, and they were building a 10,000 foot runway to the west of Chengtu, and it was a fantastic sight, because there were 85,000 people working on that runway, and they were literally carrying rocks by hand and putting them down, in their hands.

There was a part of the runway that was finished and we landed our DC-8. Our guide that day was P.T. Mao, a major general, the head of the Chinese Air Force, who later was quite a sensational character because he ran away with some money and went to Mexico. He ran away with a girl and some money from the United Nations – P.T. Mao.

We went into the city at lunchtime, and we had lunch with the governor of Chengtu, a Chinese general whose name I don't remember. Later we went over to their officer training school, watched some of the cadets work out, and then wound up at Chengtu University, the University of Western China, a very, very old university, had always been located in Chengtu. Chengtu is way out in western China, several thousand miles from the coast. In addition to the University of Western China they had four other universities on their campus parts of whose faculties and students had refugee from Peking and Shanghai, when the Japanese had come in. They had gone to Chengtu and joined the University of Western China, very interesting.

Well, we went back that night, had dinner at Dr. C.T. Wang's. After calling on Kung that first day we went to see Wang. Dr. Wang was quite an international character. He was foreign minister of China. I had known him because he had lived in Peking when I had been there in '35-37, and his daughter Maizie had gone to school with our children at the Peiping American School. So our second night in Chungking, he gave a dinner for Nelson Johnson and we attended – again, very nice – this was after we came back from the air base.

The next day, we had one of the most unusual trips. The Chinese are blessed with a terrific amount of ingenuity. They made a vast amount of their arms and ammunition with which they fought the Japanese. They had to work out of Japanese occupied territory and had to get the plants under protection, particularly protection from Japanese air because Japan dominated the air. Dr. Yu Ta Wei, a graduate of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and later a very famous Chinese – he spent some years here in Washington – was the Master of Ordnance of the Chinese government. He took us down. What they had done was to go down in the gorges of the Yangtze River, about a hundred miles below Chungking, and gouged out the walls of those cliffs and put in underground arsenals. It was really fantastic what they accomplished.

We spent a whole day visiting these arsenals. We dropped down – we were on boats, we came back the same way – we saw them making shells, making everything, and they themselves had manufactured an extensive family of mortars. The Chinese are great mortar people, always have been. They made mortar ammunition. We saw a cartridge factory. They made cartridges for their rifles. It was really, it was a very, very interesting day, and something really to look at.

Also I saw that strange sight, that day – when we got to the Gorges of the Yangtze River, its 1,500 miles from Shanghai up to Chungking – the Yangtze is the great artery of commerce in China. Much of the material that comes in and goes into the inland from the outside countries goes up the Yangtze River and then fans off.

They would hire crews of what were called couriers, down river, when they got – that worked their way up the river as far as they could to the gorges, and then couriers, about 25 or 30 of them, with lines, would draw a boat up through the gorges. Sometimes they'd be two or three weeks. What they would do is tie up every night, and all the crews, the couriers, would go aboard, and they'd feed them and sleep on board, and the next morning they'd get out and man the lines, and pull the boat on a tow path up the river. It was really quite a sight.

That night after we left the gorges we had dinner with Madame Chiang Kai-shek, and the Generalissimo.

One of the things we discovered was that their deputy chief of staff, the great old warlord Pai Chung Psi, had no real idea of what anything outside China was like, and we made up our minds that we were going to recommend that Pai Chung Psi come to the United States.

Also, in looking at this Chinese training program, Jimmie got the idea that we should train some American "overseas" Chinese, those living in the United States, and send them over – put them in our training school. So when we arrived at the Chiangs that night, they had a country place out about ten miles from Chungking and that's where we went for dinner –

MR. FRANK: Had Chungking suffered any bombing raids?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes. They got in one bombing raid while we were there.

MR. FRANK: Most of the people lived underground?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, but they had great dugouts.

MR. FRANK: How about the AVC, the Flying Tigers? Did you visit any of those?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, we didn't see any of them. No, they got back into the picture back over in far western China -- We never got anywhere near them.

When we got out to the Chiangs that night she said, "I'm sure that you boys have had enough of Chinese chow so I have an American meal for you tonight." It was delightful, and we were glad to get off of Chinese chow because we'd been on it for about ten days.

After dinner she asked me to come over and sit down by her, so I went over and sat down and that gave me a chance to take up these two points, about Pai Chung Psi – we thought it would be a good idea if he'd visit the United States – and also we had the idea about training young American-born Chinese to fly, then go on out there and take part in their training. Their pilot training program was two and a half years, which is entirely too long.

From Chungking we went to Rangoon.

MR. FRANK: Did she buy the idea?

GENERAL THOMAS: She bought it. She thought it was a good idea. And I know she later took it up with Chiang Kai-shek, but nothing ever came of it.

The day after the dinner with Chiangs, we jumped to Rangoon, stopping over at Kunming (Old Yunnanfu) Lashio, then flew down over the lair of the man-eating tiger, Mandalay, and down into Rangoon. Arriving in Rangoon we went to dinner that night with the governor of Burma, a chap named Cochrane, and he was being relieved. His relief was Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, who had just come out, and after the ladies withdrew, over brandy we talked for a long, long time. Cochrane said (Sir Archibald Cochrane was his name, he'd been there about five years) – he said, "I'm briefing my relief, so you guys can just listen in. I'm going over the land problem with him."

Well, the land problem was that the Indians – and we have some very mistaken ideas in the country about Indians, they are a mean bunch of bastards, they're grabbing – the Indians had come over into Burma, over many, many years, and they were thrifty and industrious, and the result was that they had achieved the ownership of a large portion of the arable land in Burma. And then they had gone back to India, and Burma had a terrific absentee landlord problem.

The British were not much of a hand to do anything about it because they didn't want to ruffle the feelings of the Indians. So nothing was done, but it was a real problem.

We stayed in Burma three days waiting for transportation. We'd gone there by China National Air Force plane of course it was just terrifically hot there, but we had a good time. We saw a good deal of the country, of the towns, the cities of Burma, which is a very exotic place. At Rangoon we shifted from the China National to the British Overseas Airways, BOAC.

MR. FRANK: Had there been any or sense of contact with the Japanese? Did the Japanese know Jimmie was out there?

GENERAL THOMAS: Roosevelt? Oh, nothing, no, the Japanese – this was before they were really turned loose. They probably kept track of us.

MR. FRANK: You were followed?

GENERAL THOMAS: I don't think so.

As we were about to leave Rangoon, the captain of the BOAC told us about the Iraqi rebellion that had taken place near Baghdad, which might interfere with our flight. We were supposed to go in this same plane to Cairo. We went to Calcutta, and there we were met by the American consul general to the Indian government, and there also we had a message from the Viceroy who said, "You can't get through Iraq on account of the

rebellion, and so I'd like you to come on up to Simla where I have my residency now" – the Viceroy – "and stay with me until this Iraqi rebellion is settled and you can get on through."

Well, we didn't want to do that, and we didn't do it. We stayed in Calcutta that night and the plane went on the next day and we went on with it. We got some clothes made that night, incidentally. It was too hot and we didn't have any really hot weather clothes, so in the British hotel the tailor, we mentioned this thing and they said, "Well, call up the tailor," and this man came up. We were only going to be there till 6 o'clock the next morning, you know, and this was 4 o'clock in the afternoon. So this Chinese tailor said, "I can make them in six hours," bush jackets and shorts.

We didn't believe him, but he took our measurements, and we went off to the consul-general's for a cocktail party and dinner that night, and when we came back at midnight there were the shorts and the bush jackets.

MR. FRANK: Were you traveling in civvies or uniform?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, we traveled in uniform. No – no, we were traveling in uniform. We had our black tie with us because we were told to take it because the British expected it. As a matter of fact, we wore black tie on that terrifically hot night in Rangoon when we went to the governor's house – just like a sweatbox, but the British were in their black tie every damn minute.

MR. FRANK: They didn't have light-weight suits?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, not like you have now.

We left Calcutta the next morning, flew across India, made a couple of stops. At Allahabad a lieutenant general of the Indian Army came aboard by the name of Quinan. He was on his way to Iraq, because by that time the Indians had sent a great many forces to Iraq to combat the rebellion, had as his chief of staff a brigadier by the name of Slim, Indian Army, and Slim later became Sir William Slim, the chief of the British Imperial General Staff. We had a very pleasant trip with them that day – for the next couple of days, as a matter of fact.

We got into Karachi that night, and the secretary of the governor met us, Sir Hugh Dow, and he said, "You're going to stay at Government House and I'll take you up there to meet Sir Hugh and Lady Dow."

Well, when we got there Dow had another message from the Viceroy in which he again urged that we come to Simla, and he said, "In a few days Peter Fraser, the prime minister of New Zealand will be here. I'll be sending him to Cairo in a plane, and you all can go with him."

We still held out. First Quinan, Slim and military secretaries, a brigadier, who met the plane, went to the airways. They were trying to find out whether we could go on. There was fighting around Basra, and that was the next stop. It was in Shatt al Arab, the short stream where the Euphrates and Tigris join and run down into the Gulf of Persia.

After a while the military secretary came in and said, "Are you going ahead?" and we said, "We're going." So we spent that night at the governor's house at Karachi, and the next morning we took off for Basra – all of us did, the same planeload of people. There was a plane full – about half a dozen or more. We stopped at a couple of places, Jawina and Bahrein, and then got into Basra in the afternoon.



I was standing looking out of a porthole right alongside of Slim, he was looking out of another one, as we were circling Basra to come in and land in the river, on the Shatt al Arab there. He said "You see that plane on the water? That's from Cairo."

He said, "Maybe we can get a ride on it."

We landed and went over to the hotel and there was fighting going on outside the town. In fact there was a line up of stretchers in the lobby of the hotel with wounded men. We check into the hotel. The sort of the Lord Mayor of Basra, the man who had built up that whole area was Sir John Ward, who had become fascinated by the area when he served with Maude's Army in 1918, Sir Francis Maude in the final campaign, and he went back to Basra after the war and stayed and lived and built that place up.

We went up and had a bath and came downstairs to get a drink before dinner. And when we came down to the library, we found Lady Ward waiting for us, and she said, "I'd like you all to come on over to our house, because some of your countrymen and women are over there and I'd like you to see them. We'll have tea."

We went over there, and found there Mrs. Knabenshue, whose husband was the American administrative man at Baghdad, the consul's wife, Lady Cornwallis, who was the wife of the British Ambassador to Iraq. We had a pleasant time and tea with them. Slim came in, Brigadier Slim, and he said, "It's all arranged. That plane brought Colonel Roger Peake over from Wavell's staff to meet General Quinan, and you've got a seat on the plane tomorrow morning." We had to leave Basra early, at daybreak.

We had a rather bad night because there was a lot of shooting going on around the place. Many were afraid of an air raid so mats had been hung all over the windows and doors. We got off the next morning. Colonel Roger Peake, who was a real fine fellow, had been over to meet Quinan when he came in and talked to him about measures that were going to be taken. We flew right straight across Arabia. It made you think, to go across those deserts and mountains in a flying boat. Aboard we had eight pilots of the Royal Air Force that had been wounded in the fighting against the Iraqis. One of them was a wing commander by the name of Golden, and we flew these people to Ismailia, a big British air base on Suez. There we had lunch, and Golden insisted on presiding at lunch though he had a bullet through his left arm. We had a very pleasant conversation with him and with the officers there at the air base at Ismailia.

Then they put us in a car along with Roger Peake, and we all went to Cairo. When we got to Cairo they dropped us at the American legation. The American minister who was there at that time was Alexander Kirk, a very, very fine personable fellow and a very wealthy man. His family was great stockholders in Proctor and Gamble, and he had an awful lot of money. He was a bachelor and lived like a king. We checked in and they took us down to Shepherd's Hotel. We were attached to the Royal Air Force while we were in Cairo, and they had a big suite reserved for us.

MR. FRANK: Were you provided with batmen?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, we had everything. You don't need anything at Shepherd's Hotel. It was the last word in a hotel.

We did a lot of calling, contacting. The American military attaché was Bonner Fellers, who is here in Washington now, an Army retired brigadier. He was a very active and a very able military attaché. Also in Cairo at the time was Major Greatsinger Farrell, one of our fliers. Another of our fliers, Major Parmalee, was with him. They contacted us immediately when we got in. They had a lot of things they wanted us to do and made

it very helpful for us. Farrell could get things done for us that we couldn't do for ourselves.

The next day we reported to the chief of the Middle Eastern Royal Air Force, Air Marshal Arthur Tedder. Tedder was Eisenhower's number one deputy in Europe. He was a real nice fellow, and he was our father confessor all the time we were in Cairo. We borrowed his office.

Tedder told us to confer with his staff. He had his staff give us a thorough briefing. Of course we had our contacts with the British Army, too, Roger Peake particularly. As we left, Tedder said, "You fellows sit down and decide what you want to do and then come in and task to me and we'll arrange, see what we can do."

We already knew that we wanted to go to Crete, because Jimmie had a letter for King George; Alexander Kirk had told us that King George was on Crete. So we told Tedder, and he said, "Well I don't know whether that can be arranged or not. But we'll see."

We left Tedder, had a big briefing by his staff for a couple of hours, and then we went in to see General Wavell, Sir Archibald Wavell, commander of the Middle East, and had a nice talk with him, and then we went off – they had peculiar office hours because of the heat. They went to the office at 9 o'clock in the morning and had office hours from 9 o'clock until 1. Everybody went home and had lunch and a siesta. Then they came back to the office at 6 o'clock at night and they stayed there until 10, and then you went to dinner. Well, if you had an invitation to dinner it was never before 10:30. That's when people gathered for dinner. And they'd sit up until 1 o'clock and then they'd go home and sleep late and have breakfast and go to the office at 9. Very convenient. But it had another real advantage. By 6 o'clock at night – you see, this was the center of all these theaters. They had groups in Palestine and Iraq and Ethiopia, Crete, the western desert, all round. By 6 o'clock at night the activities in the various theaters had terminated and they received reports, and could study what had happened and give their orders for the next day. It was a really worthwhile arrangement.

MR. FRANK: Why did Tedder think he could get you to Crete?

GENERAL THOMAS: What? Oh, I'll show you that in a minute.

So, we kept working and studying. They put lots of things at our disposal. After a day or two, and word was passed to us that Air Vice Marshal Drummond wanted to see us. He was Tedder's deputy. So we went to see Marshal Drummond, and he said, "I want to make our apologies, but we don't think it's advisable that you go to Crete, but we would like you to go up and see the Turks at Ankara. We think that would do a lot of good."

Well, we had no plans to go to Ankara, and we didn't want to go particularly. Everybody admired the Turks, they were good fighters. We left and we told Drummond we still wanted to go to Crete. But he just indicated that it was too dangerous.

So on the way back for our lunch, at Shepherd's, we stopped at the legation and Jimmie sent his father a dispatch in which he said, "It begins to look like we're not going to be allowed to go to Crete and I will not be able to convey your message to King George. The British consider that it's too dangerous."

He filed the message, and we went on back to Shepherd's and had lunch and went to bed. Half an hour later the phone rang – the legation, message from Washington, from the President to Jimmie, in which he said, "When I sent you on this trip, I was conscious

of the fact that there was quite a bit of danger involved. Despite that, I want you to carry out the missions that I have given you and see everybody that I told you to see.”

Siesta again, and the phone rang again in about half an hour, and this voice said to me, “If you two gentlemen will go from Cairo to Alexandria on the 9:20 train tomorrow morning, you’ll be met and you’ll be taken to Crete.”

Well, the reason they gave us, and the real reason was, that Crete was a real hot place. The Germans had an air base on Scarpanto, an island 70 miles east of Crete, and they just lambasted the hell out of Crete, and sent fighters over it – many times during the day.

We took the 9:20 train the next morning and got to Alexandria, and a sergeant of the RAF met us, took us to a car, and we went out to the fleet air arm base in Alexandria Harbor, and checked in there. They told us, “Be ready to take off at 4 o’clock.”

We had a very interesting trip down on the train because we saw the Nile Valley. We’d been flying all the time and had seen very little landscape, so we enjoyed this trip.

When we checked in with operations at the fleet air arm base in Alexandria Harbor, there was something about the whole thing, this makeup, that was real tense. We got the idea that we were in for an adventure, no doubt about it.

MR. FRANK: The reason I asked you earlier, I neglected to remember that the British were at war. They were fighting a war.

GENERAL THOMAS: This is a war going on! Oh, yes! Greece had been invaded and the King had been driven out and had gone to Crete.

We had lunch at the air base, and just as we finished lunch they said, “The fleet’s coming in.” And we were right where we could observe the breakwater, the entrance to the breakwater. We went up on the roof of the headquarters, and saw the British Fleet come in with a convoy of seven freighters loaded with tanks and weapons that the British needed so badly.

MR. FRANK: They were US?

GENERAL THOMAS: Sure, a lot of it came from the US, sure, but it came by way of Britain. It was transferred or trans-shipped in Britain. These were British ships, but there were seven great big freighters and the British carrier Formidable and the battleship HMS Warspite and several other men-of-war. They had brought this convoy through the Mediterranean, which was a real rough spot. I’ll get on that later.

About 3:30 we got a call, report to the landing for the airplane. We went down there and there was a British Short flying boat, and a pert little Scot by the name of Woodward, Flight Lieutenant Woodward. He gave us a briefing and it was a lulu. Woodward had flown King George out of Greece, and he was almost a nervous wreck, the poor guy, but he was still flying that airplane. And when he got through briefing us about this trip, what we were in for, why, we knew why he was nervous.

We departed and flew along for about two hours. Then we got word that Suda Bay, where we were supposed to land, was being bombed. So we slowed up for about a half an hour. Then Woodward came back and said, “They’re being bombed, but I’m going on in. The hell with them.”

Crete is actually a hogback. It’s about 80 miles long, I guess. It’s a mountain range, drops right down the middle – it’s a little bit like Guadalcanal, a hogback with the mountains five or seven thousand feet. Crete is a beautiful spot. The mountain ridge

drops down to the sea on both sides. Villages nestled on the mountainside, all with red roofs. We were coming in there in the afternoon. It was a very beautiful sight.

We had to go through a pass to get to the north side because Suda Bay is on the north side of the island. Also, all of the large cities and towns are on the north side of the island. This pass was 4,000 feet high and we were a thousand feet above it, so we came in at 5,000 feet. The Short, being a flying boat, had no protection on its underbelly, and when it was attacked it would drop right down 50 feet above the water because it had four turrets on top, and it could really put up a fight, when it got in position. But if anything got under it, it was just a gone bird, because they had no protection down there.

Emerging from the pass we could see off to the left about 15 miles Suda Bay. The pilot fired his Very signal, and they immediately came back and said, "There are German fighters in the air and they are lower than you are."

Well, he put that boat into a dive. Now, we were 5,000 feet, and he just nosed her over. I remember, I was standing looking out a porthole, and there was a bulkhead right alongside of me, and I just laid on that bulkhead like I might lay on this floor, see. That plane was diving, and you could just hear the God damned thing sing; the struts and the beams were just screaming. He pulled her out at about 300 feet, and we scooted in to Suda Bay and landed on the water. That was a real experience.

When we docked the plane, we were met by the military attaché to the British legation to Greece, Colonel Jasper Blunt. He told us, Jimmie and me, "We have everything arranged for you, but we have instructions from Cairo, you must come back on this plane tonight."

Well, we were disappointed, but we also knew we must do what we were told to do. So Woodward, the pilot, said, "I've got to get out of here before the moon's up. Those fighters will be on this place when the moon's up. The moon comes up at 10:35 and we gotta be off the water at 10:30."

He said, "Be back here at 10 o'clock, and don't be late."

Blunt took us. We got in the car and we drove about five miles to Cannae, a town in western Crete. We went to the City Hall, went upstairs and went into a suite at City Hall and there was King George and his prime minister waiting for us. Jimmie gave him his father's letter, and gave his regards, and the King made a little speech. We had a very pleasant conversation. He wanted to know about our trip. Of course he spoke perfect English.

Then Blunt said to me, after the interview was over, "Let's you and I slip outside. Maybe His Majesty wants to tell Captain Roosevelt something and he doesn't want anybody to hear it." I said, "All right," so we stepped out the door, and the King said, "Oh, no, where are you going?" But we went on and in a minute he came on out with Jimmie and the prime minister. We met his young nephew, Prince Peter, coming up the stairs, and he was a nice looking lad about 25. The interview was over, so Blunt took us in the car and we went a few miles further and down on the beach, where a big house had been taken over by Sir Michael Palleret, the British minister to Greece, and this was the British legation. The naval attaché was there, Admiral Raymond Turrell. It was getting sort of cool, so we went upstairs and changed into gabardine, out of our short, and in the meantime Lady Palleret had gone out in the kitchen – they didn't have any servants, and they were all in nondescript clothing because they'd lost all their baggage – the ship on which they were escaping from Greece had been sunk by the German dive bombers, and

they'd lost all their gear. So they were dressed in all sorts of costumes. She and the Admiral went out and got a little dinner together, out of a ten-in-one can, while we were changing our uniforms. But we sat and had a number of drinks and a very, very pleasant time. Then General Freyberg came in. He was the commander of the garrison. He found out we were there and came over. I had a long talk with him. The poor guy was really in a bind. Oh, he was quite a man. He told us about a lot of things he needed, which was a lot of things, because he had men on that island – they just took people from Greece and dropped them off at Crete because it was too far to take them to Alexandria, and the boats had to turn around. They were trying to get out as many as they could, and he had 8,000 Grecian soldiers on the island that didn't even have rifles. Oh, it was terrific.

Well, one of the things that disappointed me was that they showed no signs of blocking the airfields, and I knew if the Germans were coming in – and they already had word that the Germans were coming, they knew about the Germans moving all of their transport planes down across Europe, down into fields in Greece and Yugoslavia, and gliders, bringing gliders with them and it was obvious that they were headed in that direction. Now, there were some British who believed the Germans were going to land on Suez and capture the Suez Canal, but most of them thought that Crete was the objective of this force. The German airborne Army was moving to Greece for an operation, and everybody thought it was going to be Crete – well, not everybody, but most of them did.

As for those gliders – Crete's terrain is very rough, and the gliders had to have landing strips, of which there were only three. These strips could have been blocked with trees as there were olive groves all around the place. You could have taken those olive trees down and pulled them out on the runways and blocked them.

But finally Freyberg gave us a message for General Wavell, and he said, "I wish you'd write these things down. Go to him and tell him, I need these things, and I need them by air."

Well, we stayed as long as we could, until Blunt said we'd better get back to the plane. When we got back, Woodward was pacing the pier. But we had a little trouble getting under way because one of our engines wasn't quite – but finally as the moon was coming up, off we went.

When we got close to Alexandria, word came that Alexandria was under bombing attack. So they took us to Aboukir Bay and we landed there. Then they sent us by car to Alexandria. The bombing attack was on when we got to Alexandria, so we just went into the shelters. We stayed there until the next morning. We knew that Geiger was with the fleet, as he had joined the convoy at Gibraltar. Greatsinger Farrell had come down to meet him. So we got hold of Great, by that time -- he laid out some calls for us during the day, and we went over to the American consul to check in. Mr. Gaudin and Roy Geiger were there. Next we went off to the Fleet. Admiral Cunningham had gone to Cairo to see General Wavell, but we talked with his chief of staff, on the flagship Warspite, and then from there we over to the Formidable, the aircraft carrier. Their officer commanding took us all over the carrier, and I noticed there were no planes on board. I didn't say anything to him; I just presumed they'd flown ashore.

We then returned to the American consulate where we were to have lunch with Gaudin and his wife. So Geiger spent the lunch hour telling us about the convoy, and I asked him about these planes, and he said, "No, they haven't been flown ashore – there

aren't any of them left!" He said, "Those poor kids flew those planes till the last one of them was gone. The carrier was full of fighters, and coming by the Boot of Italy there, from those fields, the German airplanes were just at us all day long, and those kids fought them off. I remember the last one going off to fight a German, and he never came back. There aren't any planes – they were all shot down. But the Fleet got through."

They got that convoy through; they lost one ship out of eight on that convoy, and as I say, they were loaded with tanks, and God knows the British needed those tanks on the western desert!

### **End Session III, Tape 1, Side 1**

### **Session III, Tape 1, Side 2**

MR. FRANK: You were talking I think when we ended the other side of the tape about the battering the carrier planes had taken but the convoy got through.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, that was about all of that. We had our lunch with the consul and Geiger and the rest of them, and then we got on the train. Of course, I was glad to see Geiger because we'd been friends for many years. He was much senior to me, but we'd been in Haiti ears before, and we didn't know it then but we were going to be together a year later.

MR. FRANK: There were quite a few Marine aviators, Lewie Merritt and Dyer went out there, and so on, as observers, I imagine. Why were they sent out to the Middle East?

GENERAL THOMAS: That's where the fighting was going on. The British weren't fighting any place else. There wasn't any other war going on. They were fighting in the desert, in North Africa.

MR. FRANK: Actually, they were more concerned with the conduct of German operations rather than Japanese.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. Of course, the Japanese weren't in it yet. This was early in '41; it was the Allied Powers against the Axis Powers, Italy and Germany against France and Britain, and by that time it was Britain alone – France had gone under.

MR. FRANK: Of course a lot of senior Marine aviators went to England to see the conduct of the night flying.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, yes, they did. That was a part of it. But apparently the aviators got an edge on that, and everybody that went were aviators, at first, but later there were occasional ground people who went, but not very many. I was one of the very few. The rest of them were mostly fliers.

We finished our luncheon with the American consul at Alexandria and took the train and went on back to Cairo. In the meantime Jimmie had called the minister, Mr. Kirk, and had given him a message from King George to his father and to report to Washington that we were safely back from Crete.

We had other plans about things we wanted to do, in response to what Air Marshal Tedder had told us to do, off the schedule, and what we'd like to do. One of the things we wanted to do was to go to Palestine and join General "Jumbo" Wilson's column then enroute to recapture Baghdad. We put our main effort at unblocking the trip to Crete and getting over there. That evening after we got back from Crete, we went down to Middle East headquarters and got the word that Air Marshal Tedder would like

to see us the next morning. When we went in at 9 o'clock to his office, he told us then, he said, "We've made arrangements for you to go to Palestine."

We said we'd be on a plane leaving tomorrow morning. We caught up a few loose ends around Cairo, had a visit with Geiger that afternoon, and then the next day we left for Palestine. We flew from Heliopolis, the airport of Cairo, to Lydda, which is the airport for Jerusalem – at Jerusalem you can't have an airport, it's up in the hills. At Lydda we were met by Group Captain Brown, the chief of staff of the officer commanding in Palestine, Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac. We went up to the King David Hotel in Jerusalem and met the CG, and we had a very pleasant session with him. He said he was very much at ease with me because "in my younger life I was an officer in the Royal Marines," he continued, "In World War I I transferred to the Fleet Air Arm and became a flier, and then I transferred into the Royal Air Force." He had been in command of the air in Greece. He was very nice and he said, "You're going to be my guest. You're going to stay at our house."

"You're going to stay with me two days, and then the High Commissioner of Palestine wants you to come up to the Government House and spend two days with him. You'll be over here for four days."

That noon we went out to have lunch with him. He had an Irish wife, who was a very lovely person. After lunch they took us for a tour up to the Old City of Jerusalem. It was a real guided tour because they knew what they were doing. We saw the Holy Sepulchre and the Fourteen Stations of the Cross, and wound up at the Wailing Wall. When we got back to the house there was a message for D'Albiac.

After the tour we went up to the Government House to sign the guest book, and to tea. Sir John McMichael was the High Commissioner to Jerusalem, and had arranged that we would meet young King Peter of Yugoslavia up there that afternoon. King Peter had something he wanted to propose. So up there we met him. He was just a boy. He was an immature kid of 19, but he looked like he was about 15. The poor lad had had a real rough life, you know. He wanted Jimmie to use his influence to get some Yugoslav fliers – there were about 250 marooned in Palestine – over to the United States, to retrain them and get them American planes and send them back over to Europe, get them fighting in the war. It was not a bad idea but it wasn't workable.

So we had a nice session up there with McMichael and seeing this young crowned head of Yugoslavia, who was without a throne at the time. When we got back, we found that Air Marshal D'Albiac had been ordered to Habanniyah. That is a lake west of Baghdad where the BOAC planes land, and there was a large air base, a joint Iraqi-British ground air force at Habanniyah, and that's where actually the revolt had started. We had gathered from D'Albiac that he had some pretty strict instructions about how much he would let us do. When we found out he was leaving, we went to him and said, "Well, we want to go with you."

He replied, "No, that's beyond my instructions, I can't let you go."

We stayed with him and wouldn't take "no" for an answer. Finally he said, "Well, you've got four days laid out here, three more days, you folks go on with your program here, and four days from now my chief of staff, Bingo Brown, is coming over to Habanniyah, and you can come with him."

That was all we wanted. We had things to do around Jerusalem. We had a session with the Regent of Iraq. With the rebellion in Baghdad he had gotten out and had

come over to Jerusalem. Abdul, the one who was killed – his nephew Feisal, he was the regent for Feisal, and Feisal was a little six year old boy then. They were all killed in the revolution of 1960, murdered.

MR. FRANK: The rebellion of '41 was Axis-fomented, do you thing—that it was German undercover agents that started that?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh yes, probably so. Now, to go back a little bit, when we got back from Crete, we found the British quite excited about the fact that the Germans had gone into Syria and into Mosul airfields in northern Iraq, to help out the Iraqi rebellion. The British were very much upset about it, and they had respected the French position in there and had not touched them, but the Germans forestalled them and moved in.

MR. FRANK: The British were waiting for the Germans to make that move, to allow them to move in turn?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, they did. They had been forestalled on that, however.

Now, we were in Jerusalem, and we had things to do there for a couple of days, but one day we were to go with the Jews, and Moshe Shertok, later Moshe Sherrat, the first foreign minister of Israel, picked us up on our third morning in Jerusalem – took us down to Lydda, where we joined a couple of others, and then we spent the day visiting the Jewish colonies. We went out to the Sea of Galilee and landed there. These were communal affairs. They really were. They took away the children. The parent didn't have their children. They had a communal nursery.

MR. FRANK: The kibbutz – the kibbutzim?

GENERAL THOMAS: The parent could visit the children for an hour in the evening, and the men and women all worked in the field together. They were very comfortable, I guess. We visited three of those camps. Then we went to Haifa. Our second day there, we had gone to the British air base at Akia, where the British sent a hell of a lot of fighter pilots but very few planes.

And there were a bunch of French there who had put up a fight, some wounded French that we saw who had put up a fight against the Germans coming into Syria. They'd gotten out afterwards. Well, we took this little airplane and we went all over northern Palestine (it isn't very large) and as we went over it, of course Shertok would say, "That's the Vale of Sharon on the ground there's Nazareth, this is the Valley of Jezreel," and all the things that we knew from the Bible and what not. It was a very, very interesting day.

That afternoon we got back and we packed our gear and moved to the Government House. And I got a case of Gypsy Stomach and I was as sick as a horse. I wouldn't go to dinner that night, but I drank some brandy and the next morning I felt better, and Lady McMichael found out what was wrong with me and gave me some bismuth. I quickly snapped out of it.

We stayed with the McMichael's two days. The last night they gave a dinner. They knew that we had been exposed to the Jews in Palestine, so they had it arranged that we would get the Arab side. They sat me alongside the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Palestine who was a Britisher, Sir Somebody, see. So he told me all about the Arabs. By then, my education was complete. I had both sides of the picture.

We stayed four days in Jerusalem. We made a trip down to Bethlehem, all very, very interesting. As I say, we saw the Regent of Iraq and we saw young King Peter. We also saw the American consul, a dope by the name of Engert from Beirut, who said he



couldn't see and significance to the Germans moving into Syria, it didn't amount to anything. We just thought he was a plain fool.

The fourth day we went down to Lydda with Bingo Brown; boarded a plane and went to Habanniyah. Habanniyah had been bombed by the planes from Mosul just before we got in. D'Albiac turned us over to one of his staff officers, who took us out and showed us where the Iraqis had first put their defenses on a nearby bluff, before they demanded the surrender. The move went up under the guise of a maneuver, but when the Iraqi army reached the bluff, they built a position looking over the air base, and then they demanded its surrender. However, the British didn't surrender, they fought back, and called for planes and planes came in from Palestine. They lambasted the hell out of the Iraqis.

In the afternoon we went out with D'Albiac to see the flood waters. As the Iraqis had withdrawn, they had cut the dikes. The Euphrates was in medium flood and the dikes had held back the water. When they cut the dikes this river flooded all the desert land; there were hundreds of square miles of flooded land. By now the British had pushed an outpost up in the direction of Baghdad; what they were trying to do was to get at the Iraqis but the water blocked them.

We rode out the D'Albiac, and the general commanding the ground troops, a chap named Major General Clark, and after we had looked at the flooded river we turned around and started back, when we were about ready to get in the car to return, D'Albiac looked back and said, "Heinkels, there are three Heinkel bombers up there coming in."

We took off fast. We were about three miles from the air base, and we heard the bombs and saw the Heinkels turn and leave. At the same time British fighters took off from the airdrome to try to catch them. They had no direction finder, radar, nothing like that – had no air warning devices at all. All they knew was when they saw them coming in.

As we got close to the airport, we came on a British Army car. One of the bombs had fallen alongside of it and killed everybody in it, and hanging out the door, dead, was a Major Freet-Evans of the Queen's Own. He was commander of a battalion which was on duty there, and he was dead, and General Clark said, "Well, now, this is the strangest coincidence. This lad's oldest brother was killed here in the 1918 campaign within just a few miles of here, another Freet-Evans."

After stopping where the car had been bombed, we got back in our car, but we didn't go more than 200 yards when four Messerschmidt-110s came in over the sand dune with their machine guns spitting, and we jumped out and laid flat on the sand, and they just raked the place all around us, but fortunately none of the four of us were hurt.

MR. FRANK: Hit the car at all?

GENERAL THOMAS: They didn't hit the car. The car went off to take a wounded machine gunner to the hospital, and we walked on in, but it was quite an experience. Those Messerschmidts were looking right down our throats.

MR. FRANK: That's the first time you were under fire since World War I.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right, first time – oh, no, since Haiti. I was under fire at Haiti.

The air base at Habanniyah was a very interesting place. There were a great many people staying there and eating at that mess. There were a lot of liaison officers from the various fighting units, because they worked through liaison officers. They had no

communications. Their radio apparently didn't work very well, and distances were too great to use telephone wires, so they relied on the liaison officers to get out orders. There were a number of young officers around the place that were all very interesting and we talked to them at length.

MR. FRANK: Marines, you say?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh no, no Marines. They were all kinds of units, Queen's Own, King's Own, Life Guards and what not; one lad who was particularly helpful to us was Captain Peter Herbert of the Life Guards. The Household Cavalry had been converted into mechanized infantry that were over around Habanniyah.

We were to go out the next day, but they wouldn't let Jimmie go. It was sort of a touchy point. But D'Albiac said, "I want Jimmie to go with me over to another place, and you can go with General Clark on a reconnaissance that he's conducting of the Iraqi positions." We could see what was afoot, but we didn't complain about it, because we knew that Air Marshal D'Albiac had stretched his instructions in letting us join them. We knew that he was worried about us, because they bombed the hell out of us all the time. They'd come in every few hours and drop – there was no place to go, they had no dugouts, because you'd go two feet below the sand and you'd hit water. They just had a few sandbags, and we would go out and stand behind them. The Germans really bombed the place, and machine gunned it too. The Messerschmidts would come in and spray the whole place with machine guns and go off away.

After the second night there, we were to go out on a reconnaissance. It was laid out. And after dinner that night D'Albiac took us aside and he said, "Now, there'll be a plane in here early in the morning. The Regent is coming over here."

They were getting the Regent so they'd have some show of authority for their push toward Baghdad. He said, "I'm wondering if you two boys wouldn't like to go back in that airplane?"

Well, we sensed immediately that we were an embarrassment to him, so we said, "All right. It's been very kind of you to let us come and see as much as we've seen." We'd had a good deal of excitement, because several times we'd been driven out of the Air House by bombs. We left the next morning and went back to Cairo.

As I said, while we were in Habanniyah, the German airborne invasion of Crete was kicked off. We decided when we went back we would follow that. To go back, there was one item that took place the night before we went to Palestine. The aircraft, the fighters, the Tomahawks, the P-40s that were furnished to the British by the American government, were most of them destined for the Middle East – there were two or three types of planes, but the Tomahawks were the principal ones. These were shipped crated, disassembled, to Takaradi on the West Coast of Africa. There was a British air base there. And there the P-40s were to be assembled and flown across central Africa to Cairo.

There were all kinds of problems involved. The British didn't have much of a knack for mechanical things. They didn't have the people there to assemble the planes. The whole thing was just a mess. The planes simply weren't getting through. In the meantime, there were nearly 300 planes sitting in their crates at Takaradi rotting in that wet tropical air.

When we first got to Cairo, Farrell and Parmalee said, "The poorest show in this whole setup is Takaradi. Here these fields are barren for fighter aircraft, and there are

fighters sitting on the ground rotting in their crates at Takaradi because the British just can't put them together!" "We talked about it," they said, "but we haven't been able to get to first base." Now, Bonner Fellers, the military attaché, told us the same thing. They said, ""If you can get on the inside with somebody, maybe you can get something started."

One of the officers that we called on, and had very pleasant contacts was the chief engineer from the RAF, Air Vice Marshal Maund; we had a little affinity with him because he had spent three years at Kelly Air Force Base in Texas, years before, and so he felt that he had a pretty good American slant. He really did have.

The night before we went to Palestine, he invited us to come to dinner, so we went to his apartment. Some of the officers in the Middle East had their families out there. Maund's wife was there. Mrs. Tedder had been there but she had gone home. As a matter of fact, she was killed in a plane accident just about the time we left, going back there to England. When we got to Maund's place there were several ladies there; wives of officers, RAF officers who were out in the western desert, and Maund's wife was there, and his daughter. But there were only four men, Air Commodore Cook, the G-4 of the RAF, his chief engineer Maund, Jimmie Roosevelt and myself.

As usual, coming at 10:30 and having had a few drinks, we probably sat down at 10:15 or something like that, and had a good dinner. In accordance with British custom, when the dinner was over the ladies withdrew, and we had port and then Maund poured around the brandy. And he said, "Now, I'm told that you lads are interested in Takaradi."

We said, "Well, we are. We've heard a lot about it."

He said, "Well, I'm the responsible party. Things are going badly and I'm very glad to talk about it." So all the cards went down on the table. We told him everything we'd heard. He agreed to the whole thing and said, "I have just, after many months, got permission to do certain things. I need certain things done technologically which heretofore, I've been refused. I need factory representatives from America at Takaradi. From each factory that's furnishing airplanes I need a rigger and I need an engine man and I need this, that, and the other thing."

So he said, "Of course, one of our problems is getting the pilots from Cairo back to Takaradi to fly the planes in. I can't get seats on the airplane to get them down there. We don't have the planes to get them to Takaradi."

Well, we had an answer to that, because we knew that they were loath to use the airplanes of the South African Air Force, and we told him, we knew they had planes, and said, "Why don't you use those?" And he didn't answer. They just didn't want to use them.

So we talked and talked endlessly there, and everything he said convinced me that the things he wanted to do were only partial measures. They would not cure the disease at all. So I finally said to him, "I believe that I've got a solution to propose, and that is that you contract with American organizations to take over Takaradi, and receive, assemble and fly into Cairo all the planes that America is shipping there."

He said, "I'd love to do that. I'd love to do that." Whereupon we broke up. The ladies had been sitting by themselves for about three hours while we were battling, kicking this ball around.

The next day we told Farrell and Parmalee about our conversation, all about it, and said, "If you find out anything more, tell us."

We went off to Palestine, and when we got back the battle for Crete was on. We told Roger Peake that we'd like to follow the Crete operation. He at one placed all dispatches at our disposal. We had some jumps to get over, but we followed it very closely. It was a very, very sad thing. Those poor guys didn't have a chance. I stayed in close touch with Roger Peake. I felt very sorry for him, because at first he was hopeful, and then he didn't have any hope at all.

So we spent the next three days – In the meantime, we had decided that we had used up so much time that we would not try to go to the western desert, and so we went down and managed to get a place on a plane leaving on the 31<sup>st</sup> of May, going to Lagos in Nigeria, from where we were going to Lisbon and London. We spent our last days in Cairo keeping in touch with the German invasion of Crete. The British placed everything at our disposal. They gave us all their data, thousands of messages, everything they had.

In the meantime, I got around and talked to various British Army officers about things that we've discussed, organizations and weapons and training. It was a real good education for me.

Bonner Feller had said to me, "One of the outfits that I admire most over here are the South Africans. They're a good sturdy people and they've got the best division in the western desert, the South African Division. If you get any chance to contact those people, I wish you'd do it."

Well, it happened there was a brigadier as liaison at the Middle East Headquarters by the name of Theron, and we sort of buttered him on the right side, and one day he said, "There are about a dozen of our officers from the division coming in, and they'll be in Cairo tomorrow, and I'm going to have a lunch for them and I wish you and Jimmie Roosevelt would come along."

So we went, and we had a very interesting session with these people, a very pleasant lunch. They were a fine crowd. We went to the Turf Club in Cairo, one of the finest. One of the things that surprised us was the number of French names amongst them. Well, they were of Huguenot descent. The Huguenots had gone to South Africa at the same time that they came to the Carolinas and Virginia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

So we enjoyed seeing those fellows. Then, almost the last day that we were in Cairo, I was in Roger Peake's office, and I said to him, "One thing I'd like to do, but apparently I'm not going to get a chance to do, I'd like to see somebody who was in the defense of Crete." Sitting over on the other side of the office was Lieutenant Colonel, Scottish fellow, by the name of MacLean, and he said, he spoke up and he said, "Well, I only came here a few months ago, and I turned over my battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders to a chap named Anderson, and they've been in Crete. Anderson had gotten out. They'd been gotten out of Crete, and Anderson is going to have lunch with me today at the Turf Club; why don't you come along with us?"

So I said, "Thank you very much." So I went over at noon to the Turf Club. I've forgotten what Jimmie was doing. He wasn't there. There I met MacLean, and there we found Anderson, in the clothes just like he had been brought out of Crete. It was a real sad occasion, because the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders had taken a terrific beating, and this poor guy was telling MacLean what had happened to his whole battalion, -- who was gone, who'd been killed, this, that, and the other thing.

However, he talked a lot about the whole battle, and I got a little better insight into the defense of Crete. But that was the termination, the last real event of our stay.

We had dinner the last night of our stay in Cairo with Mr. Kirk, the minister. We took off from the Nile River the next morning in a flying boat.

**(End Session 3, Tape 1, Side 2)**

*Interview Session #4, Tape 1, Side 1*

Interview with General Gerald C. Thomas by Mr. Benis M. Frank, Washington, D.C., September 19, 1968.

GENERAL THOMAS: I want to turn back a little, because before we left Cairo, we had two very interesting experiences. Not long after our arrival there we were invited to lunch with General Wavell, the British Commander-in-Chief of the Middle East. The Wavell's were living in Cairo, and their official entertaining was largely at luncheons. We were invited to lunch with them, but General Wavell went away and the engagement was cancelled.

When we returned from Iraq, we were invited again to have lunch with the Wavell's, which we did. It was a very pleasant party. There were about 20 people present, mostly all high level visitors to the Middle East, and among others was General Charles De Gaulle, whose Free French headquarters was then in Cairo.

My French wasn't good enough to talk to him and he doesn't talk any English apparently, but Jimmie Roosevelt's French was, so he approached him on the matter of the seizing of the island of Martinique, asked him what his reaction would be to the American seizure of the island of Martinique, and he spoke up very pompously and said, "I would approve of that, but with the understanding that after you seize it, you turn it over to me" – which didn't seem to be a very sound proposition.

We had an interesting lunch, very pleasant time, and we were making our goodbyes, and General Wavell drew the two of us aside and said, "I'm leaving tomorrow afternoon for India."

MR. FRANK: Just before he'd been sacked.

GENERAL THOMAS: Right, before he was sacked – that was that preliminary trip, when he was sent off to India to look the situation over before they gave him the heave-ho. But we didn't know that of course at that time. No one else did. He said, "I'm leaving tomorrow afternoon for India, but before I leave I'm very anxious to have a talk with you two boys. So will you see my ADC and make a date for tomorrow morning? I don't leave until afternoon."

That night when we went for the regular night office hours, 6 to 10 office hours at Middle East Headquarter, we went into the General's office and the ADC gave us an appointment for the next morning at 10. We were on time, and were ushered in to General Wavell's office promptly at 10. Without preliminary at all, he plunged right into his story.

He said, "You two have been here for over a month. You have enough military experience to be able to judge what you've seen and what you've heard and what you've studied here. You're both men of intelligence, and I'm sure that you understand the position that we're in here and the position of this theatre." He said, "We're fighting in Iraq and on the Western Desert and in Ethiopia and all around, but those enemy in those areas are the lesser of my concerns. My greatest worry is the attitude of the Egyptian government. There are no particular points of conflict at the moment, but there don't have to be, because I am entirely dependent upon them for the things necessary to run our campaigns – their railroads, their roads, their telephones, their water, their electricity, telegraph, everything. It's not necessary," he said, "that they make some overt act. All

they've got to do is just quit functioning or strike and we would be completely paralyzed."

MR. FRANK: Were there any acts of subversion going on?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, there were none. Everything was smooth, but he had the problem hanging over his head.

MR. FRANK: He was afraid that it might happen.

GENERAL THOMAS: That it might happen, yes. No, as I said, he said, "Now, there are no immediate areas of conflict between us, but it isn't necessary that there be anything of the sort. All they have to do is to simply quit working and go on strike, and we're completely paralyzed. We could not function in any theatre if that happened."

Then he went on to say, "We're badly in need of help. We're badly in need of any help that we can get."

Of course, I knew that he was talking to Jimmie, and he was really saying, "Tell your father this," and that's what eventually happened.

That was the last important meeting that we had in Cairo. I think in our last session I talked about going down and gutting into a Sunderland flying boat on the Nile, and we took off on the morning of June the 1<sup>st</sup>.

MR. FRANK: You'd been gone altogether about two months from Washington.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, six weeks.

MR. FRANK: Six weeks. So actually your stay in the Pacific and Far East was of short duration. The major part of your trip was in Cairo.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. We spent two weeks on the way to Cairo, and we spent a month in Cairo, and then we left, presumably headed for London. We took off from the Nile, where the Sunderland flying boat was. As we departed, the pilot purposely flew by the Sphinx and the Pyramids and gave us a good view of them.

Very soon after our takeoff, a very handsome stocky fellow came up and spoke to us and introduced himself. He was Captain Lord Louis Mountbatten, who had lost his destroyer division of four boats in the Battle of Crete. They'd all been sunk by German dive bombers, including his two famous K-boats, the Kelly and the Kashmir. The Kelly particularly had been in the evacuation of whatever the name of that port up in Norway was.

MR. FRANK: Narvik.

GENERAL THOMAS: Narvik, yes. So we talked. We formed a very pleasant acquaintance with Mountbatten, and he talked about his nephew, Prince Philip. He said that Philip had been in one of his destroyers, all of which were sunk, and he said, "I was terribly worried about him, but just last night before I left Cairo I got word that he was safe and that he was back in Alexandria, so I don't have that worry. My sister would never forgive me if I had lost that boy."

So of course that's the "boy" that's Queen Elizabeth's consort.

MR. FRANK: Have you seen Mountbatten since that time?

GENERAL THOMAS: Of yes, several times. Had dinner with him once. Several times I've been in England and I've seen him. I've known about him and what he's done and what not. Just now he's given up the position of their Joint Chiefs of Staff. He's been a very influential character.

We struck a headwind very soon after leaving Cairo, which was really a bonus for us because it forced us to put down for fuel at Luxor. We were flying up the Nile.

Mountbatten had gone to Luxor on his honeymoon and he knew the place well, so he gave us a conducted tour. The pilot didn't want us to leave the boat, he told him, "You stay here till we come back." We went up to the temple of Luxor and around various ruins, and had about three quarters of an hour ashore.

As he left Luxor, the pilot said, "I'll give you a good look at the Valley of Kings." That's where Tut-ankh-Amen's tomb is. So we flew in, flew very close to those hills, and we got a very good look at them.

MR. FRANK: Karnak and the Valley of Kings.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right.

MR. FRANK: Abu Simbel was there –

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right, Karnak and the Valley of Kings.

We stopped at Wadi Halfa for fuel, and then went on and arrived in Khartoum about the middle of the afternoon or early in the afternoon. The temperature was 125 degrees in the shade! Fortunately the humidity is at zero, so you are not terribly uncomfortable. It's not pleasant. It was a very high heat.

We went on to a hotel and then Mountbatten said – he was traveling under a pseudonym, his name was Louis Mountain – (on his passport) – so he said, "Drop your baggage and we'll go for a tour." He had been to Khartoum before. So we got a car and went over to Omdurman. Mountbatten was well up to date on the whole campaign. We went to the Mahdi's tomb and to the various places of interest in Omdurman.

MR. FRANK: Was Gordon buried there?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, I believe Gordon was buried there. Oh, yes.

So then we went down to the native market, which reminded me of Port-au-Prince. It just smelled like it and all that. And I bought an arm knife for my boy, the knife that they carry under their arm. We had a good tour. We went back, and when we got there we found the secretary of the governor waiting for us, who said that the governor said, would we come over and stay at Government House that night? We didn't want to go there but we told him we'd come over and have a drink. We went over and we had a nice drink, and it was fairly cool in his garden, pleasant, so we stayed for dinner. Then went on back to the hotel.

We took off the next morning, and that's where (Khartoum) on that route you transferred from a flying boat to a land plane. We took a land plane and headed south. And as we went up in the air, we could see the confluence of the Blue and the White Niles, so we flew across this scrub country. Later that afternoon at El Fasher, the capital of Darfur, we landed, spent the night at the governor's guest house, and had a very pleasant stay. He took us over to a native village, a very unique looking affair, mud walls and conical huts. We saw the chief and his wives and other natives. We watched some polo afterward that evening, and had dinner with the governor. We left El Fasher the next morning, flew over Fort Lamy in Chad, and down over the Rain Forest of Africa. At noon we landed at Kano, a great north Nigerian city, reputed to be the largest native city in the world. The resident commissioner met us and took us down to the market places and on tour of the city. Kano is a great dye center, dye woods grow back in the forest there, and all over the place there were enormous hundred-yard bolts of cloth, dyed cloth drying in the sun. Really a spectacular appearing place.

We arrived that afternoon at Lagos in Nigeria. There we were to transfer to another flying boat.



MR. FRANK: Was Mountbatten with you all the time?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh yes, we traveled with Mountbatten for the whole trip. At Lagos we caught up with my old friends Farrell and Parmelee, the two Marines, and they had gotten down there the week before but they couldn't get a flight out.

MR. FRANK: That's where the RAF base was, where they got the planes from the US?

GENERAL THOMAS: Takaradi was north of there. Not very far. No, Takaradi was up the African coast, but Lagos was the capital of Nigeria. Well, we had a very interesting stay there, three or four days. I stayed at the consulate, because the Government House is very small there was just loaded with people, and the American Consul said, "You come on over with me" – a chap named Jeter. We had a very pleasant time.

The governor was away when we got there, but he came home the next day, and he said, "Now I want Lord Mountbatten to have a real understanding of conditions in Nigeria when he goes home." So he sent us on some very interesting trips, one in particular. We went up to a meeting of the chiefs, the Obas, they call them, up the lagoon from Lagos. We went into the assembly hall where they were going to have the meeting on this day. It was not staged, it was a scheduled meeting and we were just going to attend.

As we entered to the meeting hall, there was a sort of a foyer or entrance to the place, and over at the side was a great long table, 15 feet long, I guess, even 20 feet long, covered with a black cloth, and all over the table were bones and skulls of animals and humans. This was a sort of an altar for those people.

We went in and we listened to the meeting. A funny incident happened. I haven't written about this, but it did. When the resident commissioner, through an interpreter, said to these chiefs, who were all very spectacularly dressed, you know, in their flowing costumes and what not, he said, "Of course, everyone here knows these gentlemen," and he pointed over to the three of us sitting at the side, and they all sort of craned their necks and looked down at us, and then settled back in their chairs, and after a moment, one of the chiefs spoke up. The interpreter said, "Sorry, he says he never heard of them before."

Then the resident commissioner told him who the three of us were. But that sort of put us in our place anyway.

The day after that we made another trip in the opposite direction, up the lagoon, had a very interesting visit at a native village. They took us ashore at the place and visited the club. That morning I had gone over and used what little authority I had to muscle the BOAC into getting Farrell and Parmelee out of Lagos. They were marooned there. In fact there were a lot of people marooned there.

MR. FRANK: What were they doing there?

GENERAL THOMAS: Farrell and Parmelee had been in Cairo with us.

MR. FRANK: Yes, I know, but –

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, they were trying to get to London, the same as we were. That was the way people went. Most of our observers went over to China first and then through the Orient to Cairo and then on to London. Geiger was the only one that came the other way. He came to London, then to Gibraltar, then he came through with the convoy. No, it's not particularly safer, but it's just the way they happened to go, and that's the way they all went.

MR. FRANK: Up to Dakar?

GENERAL THOMAS: I'll tell you in a minute. We were in Lagos four days. Then we got a plane. We took off in a Sort, and landed at Freetown for fuel. At Freetown we had a rather interesting experience. Freetown is in what is now Sierra Leone. That's where allied commercial shipping from all over the world concentrated. They came to Freetown on their own, but from Freetown to United Kingdom they were convoyed by British men-of-war. So the harbor was full of vessels, and the people there were on edge because the planes from Dakar had been over them every day. Dakar was about 300 miles north of there.

MR. FRANK: Was Dakar in Axis hands at that time?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, it was in Vichy French hands, which was about the same. That's where the big French battleship was, you know.

As we came out of Freetown, we flew out over the channel, and lying down alongside the channel about five or six miles outside that port were three German submarines. They were lying on the bottom.

MR. FRANK: You could see them?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, we could see them as plain as day! Water was clear, crystal clear. The pilot circled to get an exact fix on their position and then radioed back to Freetown, telling where they were. That afternoon we went into Gambia, Bathurst in Gambia, and we were to spend the night there. Gambia was worried because that day – and we just learned it when we arrived at Bathurst – the British had gone into Syria to seize these airfields that the Germans had been operating from, and they were worried that the French at Dakar might retaliate by bombing Bathurst. Bathurst – Gambia, of course, is a very small country, and Bathurst is not a large town, and we stayed there one night. We took off the next night for Lisbon.

We got past Dakar, about an hour away, and the plane turned around and started back. Farrell and Parmelee were with us on the plane. Mountbatten and two Australians, representatives of the Australian government going to London. Our number three engine had sprung an oil leak and the captain said he had to return to Bathurst. After a while, he sent word back and he said that he'd have to stay in the air about four hours to burn up his gasoline. He was too heavily laden to land.

About this time the steward came back with a quart of Scotch, put it in front of us, and old Parmelee looked sort of funny and he said, "Somebody's worried."

Anyway we stayed up. I was certainly glad to hear that water bouncing on that hull about midnight when we landed.

MR. FRANK: Of course Parmelee being an aviator, that was an aviator's observation.

GENERAL THOMAS: By the next day, we got a message not to proceed that night but to come on the next night. Then the winds changed and became adverse. The long hop to Lisbon became impossible, because the wind was from the northwest. So there we stayed for eight days. Finally after about the third day there, we got a message from Averill Harriman, saying, "You can't get to London but I can get to Bathurst and I want to talk to you." He was then American representative in London on Lend-Lease, the aid program.

He got in the next morning on a PBY, flown in from London, from Poole, rather.

MR. FRANK: Nonstop from Poole?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes. Oh, yes, PBYs have good legs on them. It wouldn't gain him anything to stop at Lisbon, I don't suppose he stopped at Lisbon, but he came over

there from the UK anyway. When he got there, we sat down and he said, “Now, I want to talk about Takaradi.”

Well, our friend Maund, chief engineer in the Middle East Air Force, after we had that conversation at his house about somebody taking over Takaradi, had sent the proposal to London and said we had suggested it. So Averill Harriman said, “Now, I want to talk about Takaradi.” Well, we talked all day, about Takaradi. He also inquired about everything else that we had seen and done. I suppose we talked for four or five hours.

Ralph Royce, and Army Air Corps brigadier, was with him. Royce was one of the Air Corps big boys in those days. They took off for Takaradi late that afternoon. We stayed on for a couple more days and then the pilot said “I’m going to lighten the plane, and I’m going tonight to Lisbon. If I can lighten the plane, I can take on a full load of fuel and I can make it.”

So they put Parmelee and Farrell off again, and some mail and we went on to Lisbon. There was a plane coming through the next day and I made the agent at Bathurst promise that he’d put Parmelee and Farrell on that plane, and they did, they came to Lisbon.

In Lisbon, we had a very pleasant time. Mr. Fish was the American minister. He met us and he insisted that we take all of our papers and lock them up in his office safe, because Lisbon was a den of spies, they were every place. We went to the Avis Hotel which was the swankiest place in town and the biggest den of spies of all.

From Bathurst, when we’d been delayed so much, we radioed London to ask permission to go on to the United States. Jimmie had been married just before he left and he wanted to come home, and I was ready to come home, because I’d done all the fiddling around I thought I ought to do. I thought I ought to come home and go to work.

So when we got to Lisbon the minister, Mr. Fish, said that he had reservations for us on the Clipper which was leaving in three days.

MR. FRANK: The Lisbon Clipper.

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, but that wasn’t the name of it – what did they call that Clipper? The Yankee Clipper. That’s the one that blazed the trail across the Atlantic, and as a matter of fact we traveled with that same captain who blazed that trail.

Well, we had some nice days because Mr. Fish’s chauffeur had once been a Boston policeman – many people don’t know that cranberries in New England are picked by Portuguese, and many of those come from the Azores Islands. This chap had been there and then he’d gone to Boston. He’d lived in New England and been on the police force, and then he’d gone back to Portugal to live. He was a good guide. He took us on some really wonderful tours, out beyond Lisbon and up the coast were these famous and enormous, gigantic palaces – the ancient kings of Portugal had a religious bent, and they’d built a combination monastery and palace, and we went to, oh, three or four of those.

The second day we were there, Juan Trippe arrived. As soon as he got there he got in touch with us, and he’s an old friend of Jimmie Roosevelt. Of course, I knew him because he’d come to China in blazing the trail to China, and he’d come up to Peking, and I met him up there then.

MR. FRANK: He’d always been close to the Marine Corps hadn’t he?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I think probably friendly, yes – he was one of the naval aviators that went from Yale University in World War I. Well, we talked. He didn't say anything much but we had a pleasant day together. We were leaving the next morning. He had just come down from London. He was at that time president of Pan American Airways. Still is Chairman of the Board.

After we were in the air, leaving Lisbon, he said to me, "Do you know a Marine officer names Ennis?" and I said, "Yes, I know two of them."

"Well," he said, "this fellow's an aviator."

I said, "You mean Thomas Ennis."

MR. FRANK: Thomas G. Ennis.

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes. So he said, "When we get into the Azores, if you see him, don't recognize him."

I said, "All right." I knew there was something mysterious about it. When we got into the Azores, we went to the Pan American Hotel. I was sitting in the lounge of the hotel and a bellboy came along and said, "Sir, would you come with me?"

We went up to the third floor of the hotel, and he let me to a suite and I went in the door, and there was Trippe and Tom Ennis, and a young reserve ensign of the Navy by the name of Long who happened to be a Portuguese speaking boy. I've forgotten the circumstances now.

We were thinking – the Germans, if the Germans went into Spain, as they threatened to do, and Portugal, the United States was going to seize the Azores, and we wanted more information (it looked like we might have a fight to get it) about the beaches. And Tom Ennis and this lad Long were over there on a scouting trip. The International Police had picked them up and were on their trail. They did finally arrest them and take them to Lisbon, where they were put on trial, but were released. Ennis and Long were in the Azores under guise of being employees of the Pan American Airways looking for additional facilities. They got out of it all right. But they did take them to Lisbon, a couple of days after we –

Well, we got home. My wife met me in New York and Jimmie and I parted there. I went down to Washington to check in with the people at Headquarters. While I was, as a matter of fact, sitting in General Vandegrift's office, a call came, and said "Mr. Phillips of ONI would like to talk to you."

Mr. Phillips was a senior civilian in Naval Intelligence. So I went on down there, and when I went in, he said, "I am sure you won't be surprised to learn that the Pan American Airways has contracted with the British government to take over the operation of the base at Takaradi, and they're going to assemble planes there and fly them into Cairo." I said, "I sure am not surprised at all." I'd been threatened with duty at headquarters, and I'd had a lot of office duty and school duty and I didn't want that when I got to Headquarters. I said to General Vandegrift, "I'd like to go to duty with troops." So the day after I got there I was handed orders to the First Marine Division.

MR. FRANK: Before we go on to that, I'd like to recap your trip with Jimmie Roosevelt. I recall auditing the tape of the last interview, and it wasn't until you got to Pearl Harbor and asked what the mission was that you found out that he had to deliver certain messages.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right.

MR. FRANK: Actually, your final destination was Cairo.

GENERAL THOMAS: London. It was London.

MR. FRANK: It was London, but you spent this long period of time in Cairo.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's the way everybody did. You had to be accredited to the embassy – that was in London – but before you could go to the British and before they got to London, that's the reason the Marine Corps sent their people by way of the Pacific. Also flying was a lot better across the Pacific. It was a more certain way of getting there.

MR. FRANK: But you were not a Marine Corps officer per se, you were there to go with Jimmie Roosevelt.

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, but we were both Marine officers. That's what we were. Officially we were just another pair of Marine observers.

MR. FRANK: He was not a Presidential --?

GENERAL THOMAS: He had these other jobs.

MR. FRANK: Now, was there anything more to it than delivering messages?

GENERAL THOMAS: No. No, the President wanted these foreigners to see that his boy was in uniform.

MR. FRANK: Actually you and Jimmie came up with a lot of good dope.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, boy, I should say we did! Oh, yes.

MR. FRANK: Were you debriefed?

GENERAL THOMAS: He transacted business every place he went, see. We did – I mean, between the two of us.

MR. FRANK: Now, I assume that he went and reported to his father.

GENERAL THOMAS: He spent hours and hours talking to Harry Hopkins, who was the chief of staff to the President in those days.

MR. FRANK: And you were debriefed by ONI.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, at headquarters – that was a small matter. I just went on my way.

MR. FRANK: Did you talk to the commandant? General Holcomb?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes, quite extensively. We became very, very good friends.

MR. FRANK: What do you think of value came out of the trip pertaining to the Marine Corps? Was there anything that accrued to the Marine Corps, do you think?

GENERAL THOMAS: I don't know. Nothing that I know of particularly, except that I was more experienced. There were a lot of things that pertained to the country – working on the Burma Road – as a matter of fact, we suggested that a single transportation company be set up to handle the whole of the Burma Road, and it was done not long after. Now, what our influence was, I don't know, but we did definitely plant the seed on the Takaradi matter. That was the biggest thing we did.

MR. FRANK: Of course, that was a big thing as it got more aircraft for Britain.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh yes, and it turned out to be a bang-up success. The whole thing worked out beautifully. Pan American walked in there and put these planes back together and just shot them on out to the British, and it really worked out well. But I don't think – it wasn't particularly a Marine Corps mission, it was sort of a national affair.

MR. FRANK: It must have been fantastic – you were a young major.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I wasn't so young, but I was a major. Oh, yes it was a fantastic experience.

MR. FRANK: Now, when you reported back to headquarters and received your orders to First Marine Division, General Vandegrift had not been assigned as commanding general?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no, he was still Assistant Commandant.

MR. FRANK: This was in June of '41. The division had returned from the Caribbean?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes.

MR. FRANK: -- and the commanding general this time --

GENERAL THOMAS: -- ready to go on in.

MR. FRANK: Do you think General Vandegrift knew he was destined for it?

GENERAL THOMAS: No. No, I don't think so, at that time, no -- because -- I'll relate that later. I went off to Charleston where my family was staying. That's my wife's home, and I went down to see them for a couple of days. When I arrived in Charleston my wife said, "You are to call Operator # in New York." I did and she put on a Vice-President of Pan American. For nearly an hour he questioned me about the route that planes fly from Cairo to Lagos -- he wanted to know in detail what the terrain was like. I left him in no doubt that it was indeed a very rugged trail. The flagship of the amphibious force was in Charleston Harbor; aboard it also was First Marine Division headquarters. As a matter of fact they weren't there when I got there, but they came in in about two days. They'd been out off the coast, doing maneuvers. And I joined the division. I got to Charleston very soon after the Sixth Marines went through, and that was quite a shift.

MR. FRANK: Up to Iceland.

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes. The 6<sup>th</sup> Marines had embarked on the West Coast as an assault force really against Martinique.

MR. FRANK: Oh, really?

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. And then after they got into the Atlantic, the Iceland venture arose, they put them into Charleston and outfitted them for cold weather climate, and then sent them off to Iceland. When they came through the Canal, they hadn't the slightest idea they were going into anything like Iceland, nor did anybody else, but the Iceland thing broke, and the British wanted somebody to take it over and keep the Germans from moving in, so off went the Sixth Marines. My wife saw some of our old friends in the streets in Charleston, see, like Arthur Worton and G.P. Smith, people like that.

MR. FRANK: But I'd never heard that it was destined for Martinique.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's true, however. They weren't aimed at Martinique, maybe, but they came through with an open mission, but Martinique was the Number 1 target at that time. The First Marine Division would have taken Martinique, but the Sixth Marines would have been reinforcements for them, because all of the planning on the Martinique seizure had been done by the First Marine Division.

I joined the division staff, reported aboard the USS Barnett, didn't know what I was to do until I got aboard. General Torrey, who was in command of the division -- an old friend of mine, I'd known him many years, our wives are cousins, distant cousins, not close -- Torrey told me, he said, "Dave Nimmer, the G-3, is due to be relieved, and I want you to go into his section with him, and then when he leaves why you take over the G-3 job."

I reported in as I say to the staff there and joined them. Of course Nimmer and I were old friends.

MR. FRANK: Nimmer was an artillery man all the time, wasn't he?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, he wasn't, he was mostly a sea-going man. He became base defense type later. Then he commanded the artillery brigade, the Corps artillery at Okinawa, because we sent him out there for that job. He relieved Rupertus in command of the Fourth Defense Battalion.

MR. FRANK: According to Nimmer – no, Bemis went to Motor Transport School with you.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right.

MR. FRANK: But Nimmer had also been an assistant naval attaché, first Marine officer, at Moscow.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. He had studied Russian at Harbin, and he was a Russian language officer. He went to Moscow with Bullitt.

MR. FRANK: And Bohlen? No, Bohlen's cousin, Charles Thayer.

GENERAL THOMAS: Tommy White also went to Moscow, the Air Force fellow, the former Chief of the Air Force, no dead.

We were afloat, and very shortly, a day or so after I joined the division staff. My assistant in the section was Wally Greene.

MR. FRANK: He was a captain, then, I believe.

GENERAL THOMAS: Probably. Yes.

MR. FRANK: Was that before he went to England?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes. It was June. He went over there in October, something like that, perhaps November.

We went out to sea. We really went out to assemble with the rest of the transports for the First Division, and we were going off to Puerto Rico to put on a landing down there and we were going to join the First Army Division and form the First Amphibious Corps.

About the time we were supposed to start, the doctors came up with the report that the place we were supposed to land at was a malarial pest hole and they urged that we would not go there. We were going to Ponce.

So we cancelled out on the Puerto Rico landing, but we wanted to carry out a maneuver, and the decision was to land on the New River Reservation, as it was available, we'd just take in over. So we found that we could alter the division landing order by changing names and places for the landing in Ponce, and just convert it to a landing in New River. We made a mail brief, and I flew the mail brief to all the division units as they were very scattered. They were in Norfolk and Quantico and Miami, Florida, and Charleston – and I flew to each one of them and took a copy of the mail brief and explained the changes to the unit commander. Then we went ahead and made the landing at New River.

At New River, it was obvious that relations between Torrey and Holland Smith were very poor. Corps razzed the hell out of us, in the division, but of course, Erskine was Chief of Staff, and – I'm supposed to call him up.

MR. FRANK: They had this conflict?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes. Well, their relations were bad, and stayed that way, all the time.

The landing went off at New River all right. Of course, landings have got to be – an oddity about it was the inland waterway that you have to cross at New River.

MR. FRANK: Yes, the inland waterway.

GENERAL THOMAS: Back of Onslow Beach. But we got over that and then plunged inland.

MR. FRANK: How was the landing there? Was it well organized? You had all regulars.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, we had very, very bad weather, and we lost a lot of boats and landing gear, and there was a great deal of trouble in that landing. We were trying out these new boats. We couldn't convince--Higgins could not convince the sailors that you shouldn't throw out a stern anchor from his boats. You just brought the boat in and drove it ashore and then backed it off after you debarked your people. Of course, we didn't have the ramp bow boats then. We had the first of the Higgins boats. We had a rough time, and oh Lord, I went down there once when the tide was out and there must have been half a dozen tank lighters and 15 or 20 boats beached.

MR. FRANK: The control was bad overall?

GENERAL THOMAS: Nearly bad overall. It was a very miserable effort and showing. But people were learning. The coxswains did not know how to handle Higgins boats. They thought they were handling a motor sailer. And they weren't, they were handling a Higgins boat, a new landing variety.

MR. FRANK: Now, would you lay the blame for the foul-up more to the Navy than the Marines?

GENERAL THOMAS: Only a few – oh yes, we were all right, the things that we did, you know. They didn't handle those boats right. Holland Smith blames a lot of that on Torrey. Torrey didn't have a damned thing to do with it, not a thing.

We got ashore, and proceeded with the operation, which went along. There was some razzing of the First Marine Division, from old Holland, the First Corps, they razed Torrey. They didn't razz me because I knew what I was doing. But we carried out the maneuver. It lasted about four or five days. And it was pretty miserable, because of New River obstacles – in our zone of action we had the treat swamp west and north of the barracks. Also at that time it was just a snake house – I never saw so many snakes, as there were in that damned place.

MR. FRANK: Did any men get bitten?

GENERAL THOMAS: There was only a couple, as it turned out. But there were snakes all over the place.

However, we got through the operation. And I'll make a record of this, it's nothing against Dave, but we were supposed to – we had been held up, and the decision of the commander was to withdraw, and we embarked in these transports. It was just a convenient thing to do, to get people back, but it had a military significance.

Well, the Corps as I said was working on our headquarters. It didn't touch me, because I wasn't the G-3 or chief of staff.

MR. FRANK: Who was the Corps 3?

GENERAL THOMAS: I can't remember who it was. (Later it was Linscott.) But Nimmer said to me, "I'm sick. I'm going to bed. I don't understand land warfare anyway, I'm a Navy man myself, so you take over." And from then on I acted as G-3 of that division, for the next six months.



So we withdrew, and carried it properly out. As I was Army-trained, I knew how to do those things. We went back on the ships, and we had no place to go, because there was no place large enough to take our growing division.

MR. FRANK: The division had not gone to Lejeune yet?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, it hadn't gone to Lejeune because the camp wasn't ready. The facilities weren't in. The barracks were being built, but we were to have temporary facilities. So the division scattered again. One battalion housed up in the Norfolk barracks, and some went to Quantico and some went to Parris Island, various different places.

But after about three weeks, they had the facilities in, the tents, the mess halls, the water and lights and things like that. In the meantime, we were in Quantico, and I made a trip that turned out to be real interesting. Apparently Roosevelt had an idea that when the Marines came up out of the topics, instead of stopping at Parris Island, Quantico and other places, they should go to a cooler island. So he had an eye on Martha's Vineyard, and he had talked to Admiral Stark about it. And –

MR. FRANK: --that was Admiral Harold R. Stark?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, Chief of Naval Operations. Coming back from the Atlantic Conference at the end of June 1941, as they were passing Martha's Vineyard, Roosevelt said, "Dolly, whatever became of the idea the Marines had of a training area on Martha's Vineyard?"

And Stark said, "Well, Mr. President, we've had a study made of the place and it's not suitable."

He said, "Well, I don't believe you. I want another reconnaissance made." So I went up on that reconnaissance and I confirmed the previous studies, because it's no place at all, there's just nothing to the place. All of the land that isn't built up is covered with about a three-foot growth of dwarf oak, which is a horrible thing. There's just hundreds and hundreds of acres of it. Later I took the first detachment to New River. I went down from division headquarters with the first detachment that was to occupy it. Mercade Cramer brought his battalion down from Norfolk, so they were the working detail. We put up the tent camp. Frank Goettge went down with me. Frank and I spent hours and hours every day riding all over that reservation and familiarizing ourselves because we had to lay out the training facilities.

MR. FRANK: Had the air facilities at Brownsfield Point been built yet?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no. No. Peterfield Point was a forest then. There wasn't anything, just the first camp and the main camp over a Paradise Point, being built, and the officers' quarters.

We had a hard job when we first got there because of the difficulties of the training. First, the Fifth Marines were about at strength. So was the Seventh. But we were short of men. We weren't up to strength. We were, however, a fairly good outfit.

MR. FRANK: The Fifth was at Quantico?

GENERAL THOMAS: They had been at Quantico. The Seventh had been formed practically on the move. The First Marines were just a cadre, and they were at Parris Island. We brought them up after a while, but they were slow to build-up because we didn't have many men.

MR. FRANK: You had you lieutenant colonelcy?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh yes, I was promoted just before I joined the division. I was promoted when I came back from this trip with Jim Roosevelt. As a matter of fact, the first day I was with the division, I guess, I was promoted.

We started up training. It was very difficult, because everything on the reservation, the New River Reservation, was given over to building new roads. All else was in abeyance, priority was all given to construction. The construction quartermaster wasn't very helpful. He interfered with us in every way that he could.

MR. FRANK: Civilian or Navy?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, his name was W.P.T. Hill. But anyway we didn't get much help. But we continued our training. It was artificial, but we did work, and got some things done. We lacked ranges, so you couldn't fire, but we put up little short ranges and things of this sort.

MR. FRANK: Who had the Seventh Marines, Amor Sims?

GENERAL THOMAS: Webb. Colonel Jim Webb had the Seventh Marines.

MR. FRANK: Did he land with a division at the Canal?

GENERAL THOMAS: They were not in the original landing, but Webb brought the Seventh Marines, and I'll get to that, in September. But Jim Webb left then right after he came aboard. He brought them to Guadalcanal from Samoa, and Sims relieved him when they got to Guadalcanal. That had all been arranged.

MR. FRANK: I'm thinking particularly of Puller's book, when he tells about this man who landed on Guadalcanal in his dress shoes and regular uniform, and was chided by General Vandegrift for this, and he'd given the Seventh Marines a hard time or given the Corps a hard time during training. I wonder whether this was --?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, the Seventh Marines wasn't a very happy outfit. It wasn't in those days. You had some very strong characters in there, you know, Hanneken and Puller and Sims.

MR. FRANK: The man who had Special Weapons Seventh – he's buried here in Arlington, a man from up around Massachusetts, Boston, a warrant officer—

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, Joe Buckley. Oh, yes, Joe still had the Seventh Weapons Company. Oh yes, they had a lot of strong characters in that outfit. However, we didn't have any trouble at New River. They had trouble in the Seventh because Red Williams was the G-3, and he later was bumped back to major and finally retired, because he was a mean devil, and he tried to take a curry comb to Hanneken and Puller. Well, that was all right when he was up there as G-3, S-3 of the regiment, but when he became battalion commander under them, they really worked him over. And he earned everything that happened to him.

So we were training reserves, and the pace continued along like that for three months. The one big change that was made was that we had not had an assistant division commander, and about the first week, in November, General Vandegrift joined. He was a brigadier then, and he became the assistant division commander.

Well, they had a routine in the division that, they had a scheme, a system—the assistant division commander was the inspector of training, and we needed one, really. So General Vandegrift came down and he brought Merrill B. Twining with him as his operations officer, and they moved in. They were a great help, but the really big help came on December the 7<sup>th</sup>. And when Pearl Harbor hit, all bets were off, and they said,

“Get that division ready for war,” and we got first priority, building and fixing roads was Number 2.

MR. FRANK: What was the nature of division training before Pearl Harbor? What were you stressing?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, we stressed battalion exercises, and combat principles, firing, weapons, maneuvers over the countryside and what not. That pretty well covers it. We had several command post exercises which gave training to the division and the units and the staff, and about the 1<sup>st</sup> of November we had one really fine field exercise, in which we moved the whole division back inland about 50 miles from the coast and then marched them into the reservation and deployed them and set up a real defense of the beach line along there. In training, the artillery couldn’t do much firing. They were handicapped. We did send some units to Fort Bragg for firing.

Well, when Pearl Harbor came along, as I said, all bets were off. We started to train that division. And we also started getting men, because when Pearl Harbor hit they reduced the recruit training I think from about 13 weeks to eight weeks, so we had thousands of recruits available, and we brought the Fifth and Seventh Marines to full strength right away and started putting men into the First Marines. By then we had a good training system. There were some things that affected what we did. For one thing, we had all these men in the one camp with one road, and getting units out to train and getting them back in at night over one road, a whole division, is a difficult job. But another thing that influenced our thinking was that we had no liberty. No means for liberty. There was nothing near there. So we developed a scheme of training. We wanted to get into the boondocks and train out there. So a battalion would go into the boondocks for two weeks, and live in pup tents and train, and we had very effective exercises and field maneuvers after staying out for two weeks. They would come back in the camp, have a period to clean up, and then everybody got five days’ leave, and that gave them a chance to get up north or any place they wanted to go.

MR. FRANK: What about the transportation?

GENERAL THOMAS: We got busses in there. Enough busses. The bus companies were able to handle them. So they’d take one unit out and bring another back in. Of course, people didn’t have cars in those days like they do now, but there were still some cars, but there were enough busses to take these boys and some of them would go as far as New York on their five-day leave.

Then they’d come back and the battalion would assemble again. They’d have one week in the post, for close order drill, police duty, guard duty and what not, and then for two weeks they’re back in the boondocks again. And we continued that, and units lived largely in pup tents the winter of 1941-42, and—well, by the 1<sup>st</sup> of March we had a pretty darned good outfit. We were very short of weapons and material, but we were ready to go into action.

MR. FRANK: I was going to ask you, was the Fifth Marines down at Lejeune with you at this time?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes, Fifth and Seventh and First.

MR. FRANK: They were all together. Now, didn’t they take the First Battalion Fifth Marines away from you?

GENERAL THOMAS: That had already been done. That had been done the summer of 1941. Division re-formed the First Battalion, Fifth Marines, and they—there was a First

Battalion, Fifth Marines, when I joined, and Edson's outfit was then called the Rubber Boat Battalion.

MR. FRANK: The First Special Battalion.

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, that's right, and then they continued on. Later they drew on us for other officers and men, in about February, 1942. They never came to Lejeune at all. They stayed in Quantico. They were the playthings of Corps Headquarters.

MR. FRANK: I want to ask you about that now. I wrote about that in the conclusion to Part—to Volume V of the World War II history.

#### **End of Interview Session #4, Tape 1, Side 1**

#### **Interview Session #4, Tape 1, Side 2**

MR. FRANK: Now, we get to this matter of Edson's Raiders. The question is who provided the impetus to form this type of unit? Someone suggested it was President Roosevelt, because he knew Carlson and Carlson had been on duty at the Little White House in Warm Springs, Georgia, and he'd gone to China and then had had some correspondence and was close to the President on this, and it came on down from the top. The President was very impressed with the British Commandos and thought it might apply to the Marine Corps, that the Marines could form this unit.

GENERAL THOMAS: I don't know. I don't have any background on that. I doubt that very much. There may have been some influence. I don't think Carlson got into the picture, at least not until later. He joined when they formed the second Raider battalion on the West Coast.

But it may be that Roosevelt influenced it a little bit, but Jimmie never talked about it at all, though he went with Carlson afterwards, you know. The Marine Corps was off on some tangents in those days. If you remember, we had not only base defense battalions but we had some barrage balloons, we had Raiders, we had parachutists. We just started tapping almost every bell, it seems. I think probably the Commando or Raider business took their eye a little bit and they decided to form them out there.

It also suited the Corps. That suited Erskine and Holland Smith, you know. They liked that sort of thing. Oh yes, Raiders were the Corps outfits. They didn't leave them with the division. It was a Corps outfit, in those early days, and we had nothing to do with it then.

MR. FRANK: To carry it on further, one point more, Carlson's Second Raiders went in for this unorthodox training, went in for this special gimmickry—

GENERAL THOMAS: --Gung Ho—

MR. FRANK: Gung ho, and they had to have a special type knife and special this and that, while Edson's Raiders just went along with orthodox Marine type training, didn't go in for these special things, and again someone advanced a theory, told me that, again on the higher echelons, they felt that the Marine Corps had been pushed into this Raider business, in spite of itself, and that Carlson had been the influencing factor, and so, while Carlson did such and such with all the special gimmicks, Edson did it strictly along

orthodox lines, and they would try to show that this was the way it could be done, the Marine Corps didn't need to go in for all these –

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I don't think anybody, it was anything premeditated. I know very little about that. Maybe there was some influence from above or something of the sort. One of the chief differences was that the Raiders were organized differently from standard units, they experimented. Their squads were organized differently. They were a much more mobile and more flexible outfit. I'll come to that later, because we adopted that squad and it's the Marine Corps squad today. That was tried out by the Raiders and the Parachutists.

MR. FRANK: That fire team—

GENERAL THOMAS: --the fire team idea, that's right.

MR. FRANK: Sammy Griffith you recall wrote about his board, coming out much later, '43, I believe.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, we all go together at headquarters and took that whole thing up there. I'll get to that.

MR. FRANK: That's right, you were right there in the middle of it.

GENERAL THOMAS: Right there in Plans and Policies. No, I don't know who was really behind it, and I don't know as I ever knew a good deal about it. But we had the 1<sup>st</sup> Special Battalion with us on the landing at New River, in 1941, but they operated as Corps troops. They landed up in Brown's Cove. We never saw them.

MR. FRANK: Do you believe in that stuff?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no. No, sir. I think that any good Marine detachment—that's what Lew Puller used to say. He used to say, "I've got as good a Raider battalion as anybody." He was right.

MR. FRANK: And his was more strongly armed and equipped, more than the Raiders. The Raiders didn't carry anything heavier than a '60.'

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, maybe so. Maybe so. No, it was a – it was a good outfit. It was a sharp outfit; there wasn't any doubt about it. But they robbed the division; they grabbed the Fifth Marines to make that outfit up. They did it initially and they did it later. They sent down and selected more men from the division and took them into that Raider outfit. And I don't believe that an outfit as good as the Marine Corps needs to build special organizations. Shock troops and special organizations are the device of declining power. When they can't build real formations, they start in and grab all the good men and put them in one outfit so they got somebody they know can fight. It's a losing game. You don't go in for that in the early day. And the Army had the same experience with their Rangers. The infantry battalion ought to be able to do the same things.

MR. FRANK: How about the Amphibious Engineers of the Army?

GENERAL THOMAS: You mean the Boat Brigade? Oh, no. They were just trying to duplicate the Navy, that's all. And I knew the first outfit. As a matter of fact, I see the guy right here; Bill Heavy commanded it for a while. We were classmates at Leavenworth and I see him in the Army-Navy Club today. But no, they were just trying to take over the Navy's business, that's all. There was no cause for that.

We continued on with our training, and very effectively. Lots of men came in. At Division they were very carefully screened. For instance, our Jim Murray, Kilmartin and Lindi, sat up there and crammed through all of the—the recruits from Parris Island.

For instance, our motor transport company—we had two companies, A and B, on motor transport battalion, and every truck driver was a man who had driven one of these big vans some place. As they came in they were screened, and Murray would say, “What company did you work for?” If it was some little bit of a company he’d say “Go ahead,” but if it was some big outfit like Allied Vans or what not he’d say, “Well, the transport battalion for you.”

We got a wonderful band the same way, because Leon Brusiloff would stand outside the door and say. “Anybody here play a musical instrument?” He auditioned 300 men to get his band, but he a wonder when he got it.

MR. FRANK: How about the officers that came down? Were you getting any new officers?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, we had a good many officers. The first candidate’s class that graduated, and about the time we organized the division the second candidate’s class was ground out. We were well officered, junior officers and otherwise. We got them during the winter. They came in February and stayed three months and they went to three months ROC and they joined up about the time we went to New River. That was a big outfit, and that was the first candidate’s batch. We had lots of people. We had lots of lieutenants.

MR. FRANK: Did you have much of a turnover in officer strength, say the old timers who were found wanting?

GENERAL THOMAS: No. No, very little. I can only remember one or two, see. No, we sent some people out, like Charlie Nichols, who was a drunk, and there were some people like that, Roger Beedle, but we didn’t have much trouble.

MR. FRANK: Charlie had his problems even then – poor Charlie.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes. He was a good man. Charlie was a real smart man.

MR. FRANK: Smart military historian.

GENERAL THOMAS: Right. He was an awful drunk. We had a couple of people like that, we had a few people, but we had very, very little trouble like that. Some of our senior officers weren’t as well qualified as they should have been.

MR. FRANK: Physically?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, oh no. I mean professionally. Some of them hadn’t gone to school, you know. But it sort of went along like that.

Our first blow came when we were ordered to build the Seventh Marines to go to Samoa. Charley Barrett came down there with a free hand, to select and pick anyone he wanted, and so in order to really build up that outfit into a brigade, on material as well as men, for we were still short of material, we didn’t have the weapons that we needed – we had enough to train with, and we didn’t fuss anything about it, but we were sort of flat when Charley left, when he formed the Seventh Marines.

MR. FRANK: He was a pretty smart man, wasn’t he?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh yes, he was very smart. But he formed the brigade, his brigade. I took a couple of weeks, and then they took off to embark for Samoa. And I don’t think he’d been gone more than a day when General Vandegrift had a call from the Assistant Commandant, who was then Stover Keyser, my wife’s cousin, and he said, “Five days after my birthday something’s going to happen to you people.”

So the Old Man yelled for me and I went in, and he said, “Get the book out, when is Stover’s birthday?”

We found it was the 10<sup>th</sup> of May. So the 15<sup>th</sup> of May, something was to happen, and he told General Vandegrift, he said, “You sent Jerry Thomas to Washington next Monday and we’ll give him the dope on what’s going to happen.”

So I went to Washington, and I was told we were going to the South Pacific, and that I should go over to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, on the committee over there, for a session. I went over and tasked to them, and I also talked to a New Zealand brigadier who was there. Well, I didn’t get much positive information, but I got an estimation. I got some very useful negative information. Among other things we found out that there were no cantonments in New Zealand suitable to take a Marine division. So we sent Twining out as advance agent of the division. The New Zealand government said they’d build them by the time we got there. So Twining went out to supervise that.

MR. FRANK: Who went with him?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, nobody except a warrant officer who was from the Quartermaster Department who was a specialist in leasing, because we had to lease a lot of property, lease a lot of buildings and what not. And Seth Williams – I’ve forgotten the name of the warrant officer, but he came down to Quantico, came down to New River – he was then Quartermaster General, came down and among other things he said, “I don’t know how much money to give Twining.” So Twining got a blank check. Well, that was something new from a quartermaster, and Twining wouldn’t believe it, so I took him in and said, “General, tell Bill what you told me.” So he did. He said, “You’ve got a blank check. I’ll give so and so \$10,000 for spending, for pocket money, but whatever you have to spend down there, you’ve got to spend it. If it’s five million dollars, you’ll have to spend it.” Well, that was something new in the Marine Corps.

MR. FRANK: How did you get back and forth from Lejeune to Washington, drive?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, the trip I made, I made by railroad. We went up and back by railroad. Yes, I could have driven, but I didn’t do that. I’d go up on the railroad, and returning, we’d come into Warsaw, you know.

MR. FRANK: Yes I remember. Petersfield Point was not there yet?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, no, no, a long time I saw but Petersfield Point was the first LVT. That’s what Petersfield Point was, it was the LVT base – oh, long before they put an airstrip in there.

MR. FRANK: Then they went out to Courthouse Bay.

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes. After the telephone call from Keyser and the Seventh Marines were gone, they starting pouring men into us. This went on for over a month, and we filled up the Fifth Marines again and loaded up the First, and we had two full regiments, as far as bodies were concerned. One of the important things was, we started getting a lot of gear. Trucks and vans came in night and day loaded with brand new arms and equipment.

MR. FRANK: You were right by a railroad anyway.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, we had a railroad spur in there, sure, right in our camp. But a lot of material came in by van and truck from the north. Soon we were filled up. We were busy at division making our plans for the future, making plans for the embarkation and for the transportation of units to ports. This wasn’t difficult, because the First Marine Division had been moving for over 20 years, and they were professional movers. They knew how to move.

MR. FRANK: You knew you were going to the South Pacific. Had Guadalcanal been mentioned yet?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh no, no, never, oh no. I'll get to that pretty shortly.

The division was to go to New Zealand and we were told we'd be down there six months, that we'd have a period of training for six months. That was rather comforting, because after all, the First Marines, although they had splendid leadership – Cates as commanding – but they were just brand new. God know, they'd just barely had some drills and little unit training.

Vandegrift decided to go out with the first echelon, which was the Fifth Marines, reinforced, leaving from Norfolk on May 20<sup>th</sup>. We motored up and went aboard the Wakefield. But before I get to that; ships were loading everywhere. Navy AKAs, civilian ships, like Crescent City and the Del Brazil – they were loading gear and material of all sort. On each ship we could put a few men. The AKA would probably take 150 men aboard. Ran Pate, who was then the G-4, having relieved Monson, he and I went off to New Orleans because things weren't going very well and we had three or four ships loading down there. We went down and spent two days and got the thing on the right track. At the same time, Alchiba, Libra, and Alcyone, all AKAs were loading in Norfolk, and there were several loading in Gulfport. All these ships were loading for our move and then heading for Wellington where they would disembark.

MR. FRANK: This was not combat loading, though?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no, everything was commercially loaded. I'll get to it – commercial packaging too. That was bad, but that's what it was. The quartermaster had to buy material in the open market, you know, and he couldn't specify anything special. He had to buy – he would pick up a thousand cases of corned willy, if he could get them, anywhere.

It was decided that the First Marine Division would go out in two echelons, one from the East Coast and one from the West. In the meantime, I've skipped this over. I ought to go back to it – while Charley Barrett's brigade was getting ready to leave, Torrey was relieved as division commander, and Vandegrift was promoted to major general and assigned command. At the same time, Rupertus, who was a brigadier, came up from Cuba and joined the division as the ADC. Rupertus was to take the second echelon and Vandegrift the first. Rupertus had to go to the West Coast. The second echelon largely, the First Marines were transported across country by rail, and they took three or four ships out of there – the Ericson, the Heywood, and several others went from the West Coast, from Wilmington.

We sailed on the Wakefield, and we had about maybe 6,000 men aboard that ship. She's the old Manhattan.

MR. FRANK: Yes, I sailed on her from China, I know her. She hadn't burned yet. She burned, you remember?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes. We had an uneventful trip. We were convoyed in the Atlantic and down to the South Pacific. The "Philly" (Philadelphia) with the "flat fanny" led the destroyers and convoyed us to the Canal Zone. From there, other destroyers took us out about two days from the Canal Zone. Then put on full steam and ran for it without any convoy.

We had no incident on the trip. One even, we'd had lots of warning that they didn't have any liquor in New Zealand. Every morning Twining sent a message back, he



ended with “Be sure to bring whiskey.” Vandegrift said, “Oh, I think Bill Twining’s a fool. I’ve always been able to get liquor wherever I went.”

Off all people that came down to see us off was O.P. Smith, who’s a teetotaler, and O.P. said “Are you taking any liquor?” And the Old Man said, “No, Bill Twining keeps sending messages back, but I’m not going to take any, I’ll be able to get liquor down there.” O.P. said, “Well, let me tell you – of course, you know I’m not a drinking man, but I was in Iceland, and the British Empire is very short of liquor, and I suspect Bill knows what he’s talking about.”

So we passed the hat on the Wakefield and got about six or seven thousand dollars and we sent Scozylas ashore, Joe Scozylas, in Panama. He came back out with 400 cases that he bought out of bond in Panama, of Scotch and Bourbon. That was the biggest incident of the trip.

We got to Wellington about the middle of June. Twining met us, and he had enough camps ready to take the Fifth Marines Reinforced, with every prospect that the camps for the remainder of the division would be ready by the time they arrived, which was to be around the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

The camps were to be north of Wellington. Twining had taken over the old Hotel Cecil for division headquarters in Wellington, and it wasn’t quite ready so we had to stay aboard. They didn’t have the people all out of it so we had to stay aboard ship for about three days. The Fifth Marines Reinforced and the artillery battalion with them moved out to their camps at Camp Paikakariki and settled down there.

We started immediately surveying the training areas. I was still the G-3. Twining was my assistant, and I had pulled in Willie Enright. Enright however was with Rupertus. We set up a staff with Rupertus.

MR. FRANK: The ADC group?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes. Kilmartin was the acting chief of staff and Willie Enright his G-3. But I had Bull Buse and Ray Schwenke in my division, my G-3 section. There were four of us – Twining, Schwenke, Buse, and myself. We started immediately surveying the training areas. We also were given the job of setting up a defense of that part of New Zealand, because an attack, a Japanese attack on New Zealand, was not the most far-fetched thing at that time. The Battle of the Coral Sea was over, but we were not clear on the overall situation. We didn’t know what the Japs were going to do next, because they were creeping down the Solomons at that time.

We had an airplane by that time, because Vandegrift asked for one. So we didn’t find any training areas, beach areas, on the southern part of North Island that looked good to us, so they said we should go over to Queen Charlotte Sound on South Island. We went over there, without particularly good results, but we were to go back again. When we first landed, Admiral Ghormley had just arrived out there with his COMSOPAC staff, and he was in Auckland, but he told Vandegrift, who called him on the phone, that he wasn’t really shaken down and to give him a few days to get settled, and then he would like him to come on up and pay his call.

We’d been in Wellington about four days, and when we got back from the reconnaissance of South Island, we found that a call had come from Ghormley, that he wanted Vandegrift to come to Auckland to see him. We flew up the next day, and there was Goettge and Twining, no Goettge, Eddie Snedeker and I went – and Snedeker was then communications officer of the division.

Vandegrift went off to Ghormley's house to stay with him, and the rest of us were taken to the Star Hotel, where we were billeted while we were there. We hadn't any more than gotten in the rooms when I was called to the phone, and Vandegrift said, "I want you to meet me at Ghormley's headquarters right away, with the people in your party."

Well, COMSOPAC headquarters had been set up in an office building in the downtown area, and it was only a block or two from the hotel. We went right over. When we got there, they called me in Ghormley's office. Present were Ghormley, Admiral Dan Callaghan, his chief of staff, and DeWitt Peck, chief of his planning section. DeWitt was a brigadier then. They had a message that they'd gotten from Washington. There had been some garbles in the message and it had taken them nearly a day to straighten them out. They had sent for us anyway before they got the garbles straightened. The message said that the South Pacific force was to capture the island of Tulagi. The First Marine Division (7<sup>th</sup> MAR Reinforced) would be the landing force, and that it would be reinforced by the Second Marines (Reinforced), who would join from San Diego. D-Day should be 1 August.

Well, it was now late in June. I've forgotten exactly – 23<sup>rd</sup> or 24<sup>th</sup>, I guess, of June.

MR. FRANK: Seventh Marines were at Samoa?

GENERAL THOMAS: Seventh Marines were at Samoa, and they didn't belong to us.

MR. FRANK: They were the Third Brigade?

GENERAL THOMAS: They were the Third Brigade on Samoa; and of course the Eighth Marines were over there too. The 8<sup>th</sup> were in American Samoa.

When the meeting broke up, I went off with Peck and we talked extensively. They had practically nothing to tell us. No maps, all they had were sea charts and very poor ones at that of the Solomon Islands. They had nothing they could tell us. The Solomons had been a sphere of influence of the Australians. So Vandegrift decided to send Frank Goettge to Sidney and Brisbane in an effort to see what he could get from MacArthur's headquarters, and also to talk to the Australians, because Sidney was the headquarters of the Coast Watcher's system. So Frank set off for Australia; we learned all we could in Auckland, and then we went back to Wellington.

The transports for the division, except those enroute down, with Rupertus' echelon, were already in Wellington. When the transports had unloaded the Seventh Marines, the Third Brigade, at eastern Samoa, they went on down to Wellington to be available to us for our training, our amphibious training down there.

MR. FRANK: Now, even though the First departed from the West Coast, Vandegrift's contingent arrived ahead of them, right?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh yes, much. They didn't leave for a couple of weeks after we did. I've forgotten when they left, but they were due to leave about a week after we did and then cross country and embark in Ericson and come down that way.

MR. FRANK: That Ericson is ill-famed.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, that's right. It was a lousy ship.

There were a couple of divisions of transports in Wellington. The commander was Captain Lawrence Reifsnider. We got back to Wellington; General Vandegrift and I went to Reifsnider's flagship, allowed him to bring in only his chief of staff, nobody else, and we told him only what was necessary for him to know, and also such plans as we had. Of course Reifsnider would get his orders directly from Ghormley, and later from

the commander of the task force. Well, we had a problem. We had just a little over a month; we had less than a month before we were to leave New Zealand. We had all these ships and these AKAs were coming in there, loaded; the passenger docks at Wellington are very inferior for handling even light gear. We couldn't use them at all. Fortunately there was a quay there, Aotea Quay, which was a beautiful facility. Aotea would take five big AKAs and it had a paved area which extended the full length of the pier and back inland for about 150 or 200 yards. It was ideal for our purposes. So we – as a matter of fact, the AKAs were already alongside, started unloading.

We pulled a couple of them out away from the quay because we wanted to return the Fifth Marines to Wellington and embark them. We had to have a cover plan. We had to keep things quiet from the New Zealanders, too. Our cover plan was that we had been ordered to do some immediate training, and that the Fifth Marines, who had just arrived in camp, would come back and embark in the amphibious ships.

Our cover plan was a little too good. The Fifth didn't move very fast, and we had quite a session with them. We needed the Fifth Marines aboard the ships particularly because we required working parties, to work the AKAs around the clock. So the Fifth Marines embarked in transports and pulled out in the harbor, then we had room, and we had the five AKAs lined up alongside, unloading, all unloading 24 hours a day, on Aotea Quay. To make matters worse, it started to rain, and it rained for ten days.

MR. FRANK: No cover, no warehousing?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, there was nothing, no, and as a matter of fact, we really wouldn't have needed it if it hadn't rained, because the lack of warehouses and buildings there, were a great help to us, but a lot of the supplies that came in were in commercial packaging, just cardboard. Here a Marine would pick up a carton of canned tomatoes and it would disintegrate in his hands, and the rain would wash the labels off. In an hour or so you didn't know whether you had a can of corn, peas, or tomatoes. It was a real problem.

MR. FRANK: Did Pate supervise it?

GENERAL THOMAS: He supervised it. He stayed there; he almost went crazy on that thing.

MR. FRANK: Don Dickson was there?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, Don was down there, sure.

MR. FRANK: Let's go back just for the record – Frank Goettge was a G-2?

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right.

MR. FRANK: Secondly, to maintain the cover story, did you have the cooperation of the New Zealand authorities, for censorship, for close security control?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, no, we didn't. We just didn't have anything to do with them. We stayed away from them. Fortunately in their railway transportation office there they had a very fine man, and we didn't tell him what we were doing, but he had a good brain and he guessed what was up. He sensed what we were doing and he protected us; but we had to hide from the New Zealanders, of course, what we were doing.

MR. FRANK: You also had a problem here about the longshoremen going on strike.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, it wasn't a question of them going on strike – they didn't work hard. Just like the British Empire today. They knocked off at 10 o'clock in the morning for tea. They didn't come back for three quarters of an hour. Then they'd knock off in the middle of the afternoon for tea, and they'd work about a six hour day.

And we just brushed them aside. We stole some of their equipment, because there was only what they called a “hicatea” floating crane there that could handle about 20 tons, and we took it away from them, took it up to Aotea Quay and used it. Of course, these AKAs had some very heavy booms on the, heavy lift booms, and it worked out all right.

Although the Aotea Quay had no unloading equipment as such on board, but we did use this hicatea. As for the longshoremen – we just brushed them aside, and there was a lot of hard feeling about it.

MR. FRANK: The story I also heard was that they were very suspect, very strongly Communist-influenced.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, they were a socialist – New Zealand was and still is a socialist country. But it was mainly because of their work habits that we brushed them aside, not for security reasons. We kept real tight security.

However, matters moved along. We had a real problem in the 3 section, to plan an operation on an objective that we didn’t know anything about. We knew where the 100-fathom curve was but that’s all we knew about Guadalcanal. However, we set up a Black Room down in the Hotel Cecil. I don’t think there was more than five people in the division that had any idea what we were doing. And we went in there and we planned the landing, and when we had reached a decision on what we thought we ought to do, our amphibious force commander, who was to be our immediate boss, had not yet arrived in the South Pacific. That was Rear Admiral Kelly Turner.

I went to Auckland, and told DeWitt Peck and Admiral Ghormley’s people the position we were in. I said, “We’ve got a plan, and Turner isn’t here, but if you approve of what we’ve done, we’ll go ahead and work it out this way.”

We had to load ships. We had to load ships according to the tactical plan. So they passed it, said, “Ok, you go ahead.” They said it was all right. We made the decision to land – it was an uncertain situation and in uncertain situations you operate in columns, so we decided to land the Fifth Marines, and we thought most of the Japs would be on the Guadalcanal side. But we knew that we’d have a fight on Tulagi, so we sent good outfits over there. Rupertus was to command the task force at Tulagi, then he had the Raiders and the Second Battalion, Fifth Marines and the Parachutists. On Guadalcanal we had only five infantry battalions, and we had been warned that there might be as many as 5,000 Japs on Guadalcanal. And there were quite a lot, but they were laborers, they weren’t effective fighting units.

Goettge came back from Australia, and he brought with him some plantation managers and some coast watchers, so we had a guide to go with each battalion that was landing there. He brought about ten men all told with him.

In the meantime, after we had tasked with Reifsnider, we decided to send Bill Twining and Reifsnider’s Marine officer, Bill McKean, a major, to fly over Guadalcanal, which they did, and I’ll joint up with them later.

MR. FRANK: May I ask you a question about Ghormley? Was Ghormley very forceful?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, no, he was not.

MR. FRANK: His staff?

GENERAL THOMAS: You got the impression they were sort of a detached organization.

MR. FRANK: What were they doing in Auckland – did they move to Noumea later?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes, but they stayed aboard ship. They had a big command ship, I've forgotten what it was – they lived on that. Ghormley never did go ashore in Noumea. He lived on this ship, whatever the name of it was. It was a command ship, very appropriate thing. He had all his communications aboard and everything. Yes, I believe it was an aircraft tender.

The people Goettge brought back gave us some information that was useful and they gave us a little bit of misinformation. But it didn't muss us up too much.

We had to get a message off to Rupertus, warning him that they would re-embark immediately on arrival, and we just said, "Be prepared for re-embarkation immediately upon arrival, and in re-embarking troops will take only those item necessary to live and fight." That's all we told him.

Well, Rupertus' echelon was delayed a week. Instead of getting there the 4<sup>th</sup> of July they didn't get there till the 11<sup>th</sup>. We went aboard and told Rupertus what it was all about. Cates, CO of the First Marines, and del Valle, CO of the 11<sup>th</sup> Marines, were present. Some of the units were already in assault ships, like the parachutists in the Heywood. The others had people aboard, but people on the Ericson, shifted quickly into assault transports which were all ready in Wellington.

MR. FRANK: Well, for the record, the Ericson was a miserable ship and the men were poorly fed and everything. Did anything ever come out of it?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, I think they made an official report of it, but I don't think anything came of it. It was a commercial vessel, you know. They knew nothing about it. Nothing ever happened about it. But the troops were, I understand, miserably fed on board. I never heard of anything ever coming out of it afterwards.

At Aotea we finished unloading. Then, I've forgotten what the exact day was, we got a call, a message from Ghormley, saying that Kelly Turner would be there the next day and we should come up because he wanted a conference.

Vandegrift and I went up, me Turner; Turner had his staff with him. His chief of staff was Tom Peyton. His operations officer was Navy captain by the name of Jimmy Doyle, James Doyle, and his Marine officer was Linscott, Colonel H.D. Linscott, a good Marine, and then his flag lieutenant was Lieutenant Commander John Lewis, and his flag secretary was Commander Hamilton Hains.

Well, Turner didn't have much to add to what we already knew. But I'd never seen him before. I knew him by reputation. He was a tough hombre, a brilliant fellow, brilliant brain, but ruthless.

Turner's staff besieged me for copies of my order when they got there. I said, "My God, you're our commander, I came up here to get my orders from you!" They didn't have any. I told them what we planned to do, for I had a rough draft of our order. I hadn't smoothed it, purposely. I said, "If you approve this rough draft, I'll give you copies of our order when you arrive down in Wellington, but you're supposed to give me a mission."

They said, "Of course, you know what you're supposed to do," and so forth. Anyway, it wasn't according to Hoyle at all. But they approved the rough draft. They could not do anything else.

To go back a little, on my trip up to get our plans approved by COMSOPAC, (before Turner came down I made the trip up there by myself), I took the opportunity to have a long talk with DeWitt Peck, to try to iron out in my own mind some of the details.

We talked about the approach to Guadalcanal, and the task force, which we knew by that time, was to be commanded by Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, and what they would do. I was turning over in my mind the configuration of the whole thing, I knew a great deal about the Central Pacific because I'd once war-planned Truk; and that was the great base. So I said, "I presume that Admiral Fletcher's task force will be to the north of us. That's where the enemy is." Peck said, "Oh, sure, he's got to be there." So I took that and didn't say anything more. Well, to get back on Turner and his crowd, he stayed on at Auckland for a couple of days, and then he came down to Wellington, and went aboard his new flagship, the McCawley. By the time they got there, I had copies of our order, smooth, and I gave them copies.

We continued our unloading, finished our work, and then – oh, to go back to the original attack date in the message, D-Day was to be August 1<sup>st</sup>. Ghormley felt that was a little too soon and he asked Washington for a delay, and they gave us a delay until August 7<sup>th</sup>. Now, a sidelight that I know about but I was not in on – Ghormley was instructed to confer with MacArthur about this operation. So after we had our first meeting, after the message was deciphered, he flew to Brisbane for a conference with MacArthur. They both disagreed with the operation entirely, and sent a message off to Washington urging that it not be carried out, which was, of course, disapproved. Well, that's not a very happy omen for the future!

MR. FRANK: Why did they - ?

GENERAL THOMAS: Hmm? They disagreed with Washington then, agreed between the two of them, see, that the operation should not be carried out. MacArthur and Ghormley both were opposed to the operation; and thought it was too risky, that it would not be successful. They recommended to Washington that the operation be cancelled. Washington said, "No, it's going to go through."

Now, at the same time, in order to make command lines clear so that the operation would be under COMSOPAC, they shifted COMSOPAC zone to the west by several degrees and this way Guadalcanal fell entirely within COMSOPAC zone. As a matter of fact, I think the dividing zone between COMSOPAC and Command Southwest Pacific cut through Guadalcanal, maybe through the northern part of it. But anyway, they disagreed with the operation. They did not think it ought to go off, and they told Washington so, and Washington told them to go ahead and put it on anyway. I don't know whether that's in the history or not, but that's true.

Turner came down. We then also moved aboard the flagship, making a big headquarters. We sortied from Wellington, with the *Chicago* leading.

One small item – in the Fiji Islands, we wanted a rehearsal and we were ordered to have one. We sent off Don Fuller from the Fifth Marines, a major, Ray Schwenke from my section, and Lou Ennis, an artilleryman, to the Fiji Islands to reconnoiter a rehearsal area. We sent them to the island of Koro, which looked good to us on the charts. When we went up to meet Turner, General Vandegrift and I, and almost as we arrived, Don Fullers, Schwenke and Lou Ennis arrived back from Koro, and said that they had flown over the island and they had tasked to people about it. They reported that it was a most unpromising area. They urged that we not put the rehearsal there. But Turner said, "It doesn't make any difference, we don't have any time, we're going to rehearse at Koro." So that's all there was.

We then made our plans and issued an order for the rehearsal, the landing on Koro, with the beaches all laid out as in our Guadalcanal landing plan. Three days after we left Wellington, we rendezvoused with Fletcher's fleet, and he wanted to have a conference aboard his flagship, the Saratoga. So Turner and Vandegrift, James Geottge, and I went aboard the Dewey. They picked us up off the McCawley. When we went over, we found also aboard the Dewey. Twining and McKean coming back from Guadalcanal. They had a very exciting flight over the place, having been jumped by Zeroes; also aboard the Dewey were Dan Callaghan, Ghormley's chief of staff, and DeWitt Peck. Ghormley was not there. He didn't go to the conference.

We went aboard the Saratoga. I did not go in the conference room. Nobody from the division went in except Vandegrift, and Turner was the only one who went in from the amphibious force. Peck and Callaghan also were there.

It was a most unsatisfactory conference. Frank Jack Fletcher flatly accused Turner of backing up this operation for his own benefit. He was opposed to it. He asked Turner and Vandegrift, "How long is it going to take you to make this landing and get you supplies ashore?" They said, "Probably five days." He said, "Well, I'm not going to stay there that long. I'll give you two days. Then I'm going to pull the carriers out."

Well, they argued with him a little bit, but it didn't do any good. Then he took off on Brigadier General La Verne Saunders who was the B-17 commander. John McCain was there from COMAIRSOPAC. He had brought Blondy Saunders with him. The conference ended, they'd done all they could, and we went back aboard the Dewey and then back to McCawley.

We proceeded to Koro, got there the next day, and went through with the landing. Well, the reconnaissance party had reported it a most unsuitable area. The island was completely barriered by coral reefs, and we lost two landing boats. Fortunately, Vandegrift had gotten into one of the early boats, and when he saw what was happening he called the whole rehearsal off. The troops came on back. However, it had a lot of advantages. There were a lot of men that had never gotten into a boat before, never went down a cargo net, and many of the boats hadn't been in the water for months because the ships had been tied up in the harbor, and they had not worked hard. They did not do well, and Turner really raked them about the condition of their boats on the transports.

They spent the next four or five days, while we were cruising, working on their boats, trying to get them in shape. But it warned Turner and he made up a boat pool plan which was real effective. After all, Turner was a real smart fellow.

We gained various advantages from the rehearsal. Among other things, we were able to get all unit commanders, down to and including battalions, on board – including Pepper from Third Defense Battalion, and the new Second Marines outfit (Reinforced), on the flagship, where I went through the order with them and Vandegrift gave them a task.

Then leaving Koro, we started the approach to Guadalcanal.

MR. FRANK: What did Vandegrift say to them?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, he told the unit commanders that we were going into a difficult operation, that we didn't train or work together or we hadn't been together much, but he was sure things would work out; that we were going into a practically unknown situation, we didn't know the size of the enemy, the terrain we were going into or anything of the sort. It was to be a very difficult thing, but he was counting on them to all

produce. And, of course, they were all pros, and – we were reassured about the whole thing. They had a few questions to ask, but very few.

I went through the division order with them, the order of the landing and special provisions.

Now, there was one aspect of troops available to us that was not satisfactory. Turner had a string on the 2ns Marines Reinforced. He was hoping to bounce them off of Guadalcanal and go down to the island of Ndeni to the southeast, and make a landing there. He planned to use the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marines for that. We'd had a little warning of this, but he told us definitely when he joined that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marines were not to be used at Guadalcanal; that he another use for them.

He had no right to do that, because the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marines had been given to Vandegrift, but he had the authority to do it. He had no military right really to do it. However, in our landing plan where we used a couple of companies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marines to guard a flank on Florida Island to protect the Raiders going into Tulagi, he agreed to that, with the understanding that as quickly as the main landing was made those two companies would be withdrawn.

But the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marines didn't really belong to us, and we had had enough warning that we did not use them in our landing assault.

Now, the approach to Guadalcanal was made very cleverly. From the Fijis we headed for Australia, in order to convey the impression to the Jap subs that we were an Australian bound convoy. We actually set a course for Sidney. That carried us somewhat to the south, but parallel to the Solomon Islands. Then one evening after dark we turned hard right and headed for Guadalcanal.

We were very fortunate in the weather. There was cloud cover all the time. There were Jap snoopers over that area a lot of the time, but they couldn't see us, and we got to Guadalcanal, and we surprised them when we pulled in there. I went up on deck the morning of the landing. We had a 3:30 breakfast, and we went up on deck to look for the PT boats, because we thought there were a lot of Jap PT boats in Tulagi harbor.

MR. FRANK: Did you smell the rot, the Frangiangi, the Bougainvillea, offshore? Could you smell the island offshore?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, I don't remember.

MR. FRANK: I remember when I went there, we had a – opposed to the operation, Ghormley's opposed, Fletcher's opposed – how did Turner feel about it?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, Turner had laid it on. Oh, yes. And he was a brave guy. Oh, yes. He and Ernie King had laid that operation on –oh, yes sir, and he was going to go through with it.

MR. FRANK: Really? Then Fletcher was right when he accused Turner –

GENERAL THOMAS: - oh, to a certain extent, yes.

MR. FRANK: Do you think Turner would have made a good Marine general? Ground commander?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, I don't know – no, he didn't know anything about ground. He had the character for a commander, sure. He was a steady character. The fact that he was an old polecat a lot of time was just beside the point. That was just Turner.

**End Session 4, Tape 1, Side 2**



*Interview Session 5, Tape 1, Side 1*

GENERAL THOMAS: There are two or three items that are worth mentioning, I believe, prior to our approach to Guadalcanal. There was a real advantage in the Koror landing, which I may have mentioned before but perhaps I didn't. The condition of the boats and the transports was horrible, and Kelly Turner laid on the various transport commanders to get them repaired. Thus they did. That was a real advantage. In our approach to Guadalcanal, I had the job of making up a table of substitution for units in the landing force, either at Tulagi or at Guadalcanal, in case we lost a transport on the way out.

MR. FRANK: That was a real threat all the time.

GENERAL THOMAS: It was always a real threat, because we were moving into what was practically Japanese territory, and we might lose a transport any time. If we lost the Second Battalion of the Fifth Marines, we'd have to put somebody else in the Tulagi landing. We also reached the conclusion, about which I satisfied Turner, that if we lost more than three or four transports, then we had to call it off.

In addition to that, I had the problem of drawing up a plan for the defense of the island, and it was not easy because I didn't know really what the island looked like. However, I had a fair idea of what we'd have to do. In working on this plan, I had been warned by Vandegrift, who ate in Turner's mess on the way out, that Turner had some very unusual ideas about defense of land areas. He wanted to put a hundred Marines here and a hundred Marines there, and that would be able to take care of everything. I had no such idea and I didn't plan to draw up any plan like that. However, I did draw up a rough defensive plan of the Guadalcanal area and left it to Rupertus to draw up his plan on the Tulagi side. I didn't want to have difficulty with Turner, so I waited until the day before we got to Guadalcanal, to go in with my plan for the defense of the area.

It was too late for him to say very much so he said, "All right."

To go on with the landing, we had two objectives; Tulagi and Guadalcanal. As a matter of fact, from the inception of the operation, the prime objective was Tulagi. That, as I've said before, was the only island that was mentioned in the original dispatch. But we had deduced that the real important area was Guadalcanal. We decided to carry out simultaneous landings.

MR. FRANK: Well, wasn't the reason for the landing on Guadalcanal the intelligence that the plane brought back about the airfield construction?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, we had it from every source that that was the important island. Everything pointed to that. Goettge brought back the word, and we had it from COMSOPAC that the Japs were building an airfield on Guadalcanal.

MR. FRANK: Actually, that was the motivating factor for the landing in the Solomons in the first place, was it not?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I don't know what they had in mind. They said, "Seize the island of Tulagi." Well, Tulagi; there wasn't anything on Tulagi or Florida Island, which were very mountainous and rugged -- all of that area over there. You couldn't build an airfield. So I've often wondered, and I've never known whether Admiral King had the idea of moving his naval power there without air and cover it with carriers, or just what idea he had. But we deduced what we ought to do, and it worked out very well.

MR. FRANK: Just to get back to what Twining found out on his reconnaissance, and also, what intelligence came out of this? I recall that there was some problem which later turned out to be very real about the maps that were made up.

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes. Twining, in his trip up there, flew down well over, low down over Guadalcanal, and he was able to estimate that there was about a 2000-foot runway there, already completed. That's almost enough to take carrier planes. Other information came along that confirmed that since the B-17s made several flights over from Espiritu Santo, over Guadalcanal.

MR. FRANK: For reconnaissance?

GENERAL THOMAS: Photo reconnaissance.

MR. FRANK: Were maps prepared from that?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, they were not. All we got – for one thing, we got from them a mosaic, but it was too high an altitude, and there were too many clouds over the island. Now, I can't remember when we got that mosaic. Maybe we did during the approach, but I can't be certain about it. But they did make a much better mosaic, we understand it was, and they attempted to drop it on the McCawley, but it went in the water and it was lost.

MR. FRANK: What about the one that was made and lost in Australia, that never –

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, now, maybe that's the one I'm talking about. In any case, we never got it. All we had was the one mosaic. We made a great deal of use of it, since it's all we had. And I remember Puller saying, "I'm here under the cloud at so and so's."

Well, later we made some real use of that mosaic. When it's the only thing you've got, you've got to make a lot of use of it.

MR. FRANK: What about the information derived from those people that Goettge brought down from Brisbane?

GENERAL THOMAS: From Sidney. Well, much of the information was good. But they didn't – it wasn't entirely clear. For instance, as I'll talk about these streams that came down off of the mountain and then during the dry season they formed bayous, we went there in the dry season, and at the mouth of these little streams would set up a bar – the ocean would throw up a bar. But those bayous were real carriers. They didn't talk about those. They didn't think much about them, although later one of them said to me, "Well, I know if I lost a cow in that bayou, I wouldn't even worry about getting her back, because I wouldn't get her out."

But then, in the landing, I think I ought to leave that till later . . .

I think probably it's not unusual that military people operating on foreign territory don't have too intimate a knowledge of what they're getting into. I remember, as I've related here, in our move into France, and our use of defective old maps which were way out of date, that we didn't know where we were going. So going into Guadalcanal, there was nothing unique about it. Those people that Goettge brought back were very useful to us because they were familiar with the territory, but it's surprising how little they really knew about it.

MR. FRANK: Did they give you any information about beach conditions, "trafficability"?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, yes – but we had no problem about that, because just aback of the beach area was this long strip of open land, about 1000 yards. It was a false

beach, as I'll explain here in a second, and that's where they had the coconut groves. That was the fertile area.

MR. FRANK: Near Kolombangara?

GENERAL THOMAS: Kolombangara is one of the islands way up to the north. But at Kukum, and all down through there, we had a broad area. It might be worthwhile to talk about Guadalcanal. Guadalcanal was an island 80 miles long and 25 miles wide. The predominant feature on Guadalcanal was a rugged hogback which extended from one end of the island to the other. On the south side the hogback dropped off, I've always been told, abruptly to the sea, very sharply. As a matter of fact, the peaks were only two or three miles from the sea. The descent from the hogback to the sea on the south of Guadalcanal, I've always been told was very precipitous.

Now, over on that side, which doesn't interest us, there were some small villages, fishing villages and what not and there were people who lived over there, but they were as remote from us as though they were at the North Pole. On our side of the island, the north side, it dropped off, also very sharply, and then, leading back to that mountain range, were these coral spurs, which were dead coral spurs and they were grass-covered, but no other vegetation. The configuration was an indication that Guadalcanal Island had risen out of the sea in stages, because the coral had grown, and coral won't grow in air, it has to grow under salt water. Apparently over a thousand, two thousand, whatever many years there were, the island came up, was raised up, and these coral spurs came down toward the sea, dead coral.

Then, over the hundreds of years, apparently, rains washed material down, and in front of these coral spurs and in between them, they formed a band of black soil, and on that grew a most impressive tropical rainforest – gigantic trees, really giant teakwood and trees of that sort, and vines and ferns. It was a real rainforest.

That ended about – well, 1500 yards from the northern beach of Guadalcanal, but apparently the sea over the years, and hundreds of years, had thrown up sand against this rainforest, and we had a strip, practically the whole length of the island, varying between 500 and 1500 yards.

MR. FRANK: Pretty nice beaches.

GENERAL THOMAS: But in front of that, on the north side, were all these beautiful beaches. There were beaches all along, along the whole length of the island. We could have landed almost any place along that north edge of the island. We, of course, didn't know that until we got the aerial photograph, but from the chart we used all that we got was where the 100 fathom curve was, but that's all. But this area which interested us and which we used was this relatively flat sandy area. That's where the Lever Brothers planted their coconut plantations. The whole of the coast of Guadalcanal was one great coconut plantation.

But we had no – from what we were able to gather from the Australians who came over, and as I say, each one of them joined the battalion in the area to which they went. The manager of the plantation took one battalion. We had no problem about that. But we were going into an uncertain situation. Our information was that there were about 5000 Japs on Guadalcanal. We didn't get any true report, and reasonable report on what there was on the Tulagi side, but we were worried about that, so we decided on strong landings. We sent at Tulagi, a small force of Raiders, Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, and the parachutists. The parachutist's objective was some islands in the bay in Tulagi

Harbor, Gavutu and Tanambogo. These were good outfits, and we had no feeling that they wouldn't match up to what they had to do.

MR. FRANK: What was the overall strength of the division, reinforced, do you recall?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, the First Division, less one RCT, the Seventh Marines, probably was about 16,000. That's a fair guess, 15 to 16 thousand. And I believe I've mentioned this before – one of the handicaps under which we suffered was that though we had been given the Second Marines, Reinforced, for our landing force, Turner, the amphibious commander, had a string on them, and they were not available to us, though we did employ a couple of companies from the Second Marines to protect the flank of the Raiders going into – there was a point on Florida Island that jutted out, and we thought it might be defended, and we arranged for these two companies of the Second Marines to take that area before the Raiders went into Tulagi.

So we went into an uncertain situation. We laid out the scheme of maneuver for Tulagi, which was that the Raiders would land, followed by the Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, in column, and then after they had gotten ashore, the parachutists would enter the harbor and take first Gavutu and then Tanambogo. On the Guadalcanal side, we also had an uncertain situation, which, in accordance with good military principles, you approach in column in an uncertain situation. So our scheme of maneuver was to land the Fifth Marines, less one battalion – the Second was in the Tulagi attack – followed by the First Marines, and then they were to be followed by a conglomerate task force made up of the artillery and the engineers and under the command of the artillery commander, Pedro del Valle. The scheme was that the Fifth would land and seize a beachhead with their two battalions. The First would land behind them, pass through the Fifth, and then go off oblique to the right and seize what we called "the Grassy Knoll." That was one of the problems, it was so far away.

MR. FRANK: To the right from the landing would be to the northwest?

GENERAL THOMAS: Northwest, that's right, goes off to the northwest.

MR. FRANK: The main height, as I recall, On Guadalcanal was Mt. Austen, is that correct?

GENERAL THOMAS: Mt. Austen. That was the main objective. Now, it was a very poor objective, because Mt. Austen – these Australians had not really made clear to us that Mt. Austen was a gigantic – miles and miles across – grass covered mountain.

MR. FRANK: That was one of the problems, it was so far away.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, we just didn't understand from them what this was, but we had to have an objective; we thought we were lucky in having a geographical objective, which was the Grassy Knoll. But it wasn't a good one at all because it was just too enormous and entirely too far away, and there was intervening and almost impenetrable rainforest.

Well, the Fifth Marines were to land. Then they were to turn to the right and go up the beach. We elected to land about five miles north of where we were certain the Japanese strength was, around where they were building this airfield, because we didn't have enough people. If they had 5000 men ashore there, as we had some reports, we just didn't have the strength to rupture beach defenses and fight it out and win, even though we had maybe eight, nine thousand men. So we decided to land away from the Japanese strength, develop ashore, and then go after them.

Well, the Fifth Marines landed first. They seized their beachhead. Of course, there was no opposition, not even a shot fired. Then they faced to the right. The First Marines landed, started to carry out their scheme of maneuver, which was that they would, in column, one, two, three battalions, would go off to the right front.

The First Marines hit their first problem when they hit one of these bayous, one of these streams with a bar at the beach, and they had to bring up some LVTs and make foot bridges to get across the obstacle. It had very precipitous banks, high and low, a mud affair.

MR. FRANK: Your LVTs were originally scheduled to be used only as supply carriers?

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. Well they only used a couple of them, though, to make foot bridges. This place was not very wide, but it was very deep and full of water. It was like walking across a big bath tub, really.

Well, the First Marines got across. Now, they were a relatively untrained, newly formed outfit. We put people in the First Marines almost up to the day of sailing. That was a drawback, but they had real good leadership. Clifton Cates was one of the finest officers the Marine Corps ever had. He was the regimental commander, and he had in his battalions Cresswell, Pollock, and Spike McKelvy, all real good driving people. So the First Marines were well commanded, and it's a good thing, because they were a brand new outfit.

We did fairly well the first day though the Fifth Marines were sluggish in moving and carrying out their missions. Frankly, they were not well commanded – very poorly, as a matter of fact. The officer commanding them had a great reputation from World War I, and had borne it all the time.

MR. FRANK: Now, you had actually most of our commanders – Cates was a World War I –

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, and the one commanding the Fifth Marines was also. They were both great heroes of World War I.

MR. FRANK: And how about you battalion commanders? What was the average age of your battalion commanders?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, they ran all the way around 22, 23, 24, 25 –

MR. FRANK: They were that young?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no, I mean their classes! Oh no, classes.

MR. FRANK: So they'd already had –

GENERAL THOMAS: Seventeen years of service, oh yes, they'd all had from – well, one was the class of '20 at the Naval Academy with 21 years of service. One was a contemporary of mine. He had World War I service, and – in the Fifth Marines. Then in the First Marines, Pollock was the class of '21. McKelvy was in the class of '21. Cresswell was the class of '24. So they'd had a lot of service, 17, 18 years. We had plenty of experience.

MR. FRANK: They were in good physical shape?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes, they were all up to that. As a matter of fact, later I thought we were a little over in age, but those people were all in good shape – for that limited movement that we had to make, they were in plenty good shape.

MR. FRANK: They were in their late 30s or early 40s for the most part.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, the regimental commanders weren't. The late 40s – Cates was born in '93 and this was '41, so he was 48 or 49 years old and so was Hunt. But they were all right for what we had to do.

As I say, we didn't do badly the first day, but – on the Guadalcanal side. We weren't satisfied, but it was all right. But we got a message, oh, I might go back to say that when the Fifth Marines had landed, according to plan, and we sent a forward echelon of a division command post ashore under Caspers James, who was the chief of staff, and he took most of the division staff ashore and set up a command post.

General Vandegrift, because he wanted to stay in touch with the Tulagi attack force, stayed aboard ship. We had quite some excitement that day because there were two big Japanese bombing attacks against our task force. During the first one, we saw some of the planes and we saw a lot of shooting. It came about 11 o'clock in the morning; the Japs really reacted quickly to our landing. They got planes off after us real fast, because Rabaul was about three hours away.

We had taken them by surprise; there wasn't any doubt about it. As a matter of fact, we caught 14 float planes on the water at Tulagi, and we got every one of them. Never a one of them got off.

MR. FRANK: How was our naval gunfire?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, we had lots of gunfire.

MR. FRANK: Shot it all up?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, they shot it all up, and they were the ones that got those planes on the water at Tulagi. The Japs had no idea we were coming. They say one plane got in the air, but they said he crashed within 100 yards. They burned all the rest of them.

MR. FRANK: When the air raid came down at 1100, you'd been ashore how long?

GENERAL THOMAS: We got the word to land the landing force about 6 o'clock in the morning.

MR. FRANK: So five hours –

GENERAL THOMAS: Or maybe 7 o'clock. You see, in those latitudes, daybreak and sunset are almost constant the year around. Six o'clock in the morning is sunrise and 6 o'clock at night is sunset. You have no variations. You have no twilight and you have no dawn. From the time it starts, when first light starts, it's only 15 minutes and you have sunrise. That's the way it is in those latitudes, near the equator. So we had the Tulagi landing I believe at about 5:30 and we had the Guadalcanal landing about 7:30. Now, we did that because we didn't want to strain our air support. They gave first their air support to the landing on Tulagi, and then threw most of their weight over on the Guadalcanal side. They came in there and they really plastered that place. But as I say, Zero-hour on Tulagi was at 4:30 and H-Hour on Guadalcanal was, I'd say, 7:30. So we were moving in, but it was well after daylight before we landed on Guadalcanal.

I have finished with that first day; that's about how things went. The First Marines, as I say, had trouble with a bayou, and very soon after they got over that and plunged forward, they hit into this terrific rainforest, which was almost impenetrable. It just stopped them all along the line. Cates pushed his people up as near as he could, but you just don't make – you can get through a rainforest, but you don't carry military formations through a rainforest. It's just not in the cards to do that.

MR. FRANK: Control would have been lost completely.

GENERAL THOMAS: You'd have no control. They'd have to hack their way through, and that's no good. You don't go forward like that.

Well, we settled down on Guadalcanal with the First Marines facing the rainforest. The Fifth Marines had moved out, not satisfactorily, but they had gone. They'd gone a reasonable distance. We told the First Marines that on the following morning – there also had developed the fact that this Mt. Austen, the Grassy Knoll, was not a good objective. It was not a practical objective at all. We told them not to fight the rainforest but to skirt along the edge of it because they were in no danger from anybody from a rainforest. We made plans for the Fifth Marines to push on west and actually we had a zone of action not more than 100 or 200 yards wide, till the next morning. This was quite satisfactory.

However, after dark of the first day, we got a message from Rupertus on Tulagi, saying that they had had severe fighting; although in the initial landing things had gone very smoothly, very soon after that they struck serious resistance, and that there had been hard fighting all day, and that he had not only committed the Raiders, but he had committed the Second Battalion, Fifth Marines; that the Parachutists had landed on Gavutu and had been badly shot up there; and that he needed assistance.

I got hold of Jim Murray, who was Acting G-1, because the G-1, Kilmartin, was acting as Rupertus' Chief of Staff, over on Tulagi. We told Murray to go out to the flagship, because Turner had a string on the Second Marines. We could not touch them. Murray is a very able and intelligent fellow. He came back after two or three hours and reported that he had talked to Turner, and that Turner had been very much impressed with Rupertus' message, and he said to Murray, "Well, how much of the Second Marines do you want?" And Murray, being a Scotsman, said, "WE want it all." So orders went out to land the Second Marines, minus their regimental headquarter, incidentally, on Tulagi.

MR. FRANK: The next day?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, that night.

MR. FRANK: Immediately?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes, they went ashore that night. So Rupertus had more than enough men. He took Bob Hunt's battalion and sent it to Gavutu and Tanambogo the next morning, because you see, the Parachutists started with only about 275 men in their battalion. They were a great outfit but they were just too small, and there were a hell of a lot of Japs on those two tiny islands. That was their naval base out there. But the next day the Second Marines mopped them up.

On Guadalcanal the next morning, at daybreak, everybody moved out. In the meantime, we had a very severe logistics problem. We had dealt off what we felt were a reasonable number of men to work supplies on the beach, but the naval echelons were so energized by this touching situation and the bombings that they really worked those ships fast! The result was, our people couldn't unload the boats, we didn't have the men there, and we couldn't divert the men. We had an unknown situation ashore, and we just had to act accordingly. So boats lay off, things piled up on the beach, there was no dispersal, and we just had an enormous line of supply on the beach.

MR. FRANK: Let's go back. I want to ask you about this logistics thing, because this was the first time that your amphibious doctrine, especially the logistics angle, had been tried out in battle. You'd had exercises which were minimal before. And was it FTP –

GENERAL THOMAS: - 167!

MR. FRANK: - 167, they made provisions – let's see, in 1 August 1942, changed two to FTP-167. You adopted that change earlier that year. As I said; besides the Marine division had been increased by adding a Pioneer Shore Party Battalion –

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right.

MR. FRANK: - of 34 officers and 669 enlisted Marines. This was made on 10 January but it was too late for your personnel changes to be made within the division.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, we had a Pioneer Battalion, a very good one, yes.

MR. FRANK: Now, the Tentative Landing Operations Manual did not stipulate the strength and composition of the shore party, but stated that it would contain detachments from some or all of the following landing force units: medical supply, engineer, military police, working details, communications, and chemical warfare. Interesting that although they say working details, they don't say where they're going to come from.

GENERAL THOMAS: They didn't say where they were coming from or how they'd –

MR. FRANK: What you were going to have to do actually was take them –

GENERAL THOMAS: We had some. We set up some for Guadalcanal. Now, I don't remember offhand just what we set up, but they were entirely too small, because, as I said, the Navy, activated by the bombing and all and the desire to get out of there, started to really put things ashore.

MR. FRANK: They had piles of supplies –

GENERAL THOMAS: - piles of supplies, ammunition, equipment, and boats that were still unloaded. They didn't disperse anything. The beach was very narrow and shallow. There was just a little strip of sand, and then there would be a berm, and two or three feet of dirt and that had to be gotten over. There were no broad swales like Onslow Beach at New River or features like that. The beaches were all shallow, just little places. Good sand. We got on the sand without any trouble. But there'd be a little hangover of black dirt there, and you had to get through that to get up on top of the ground. Sometimes it would be two feet and sometimes it would be six or eight feet. But this little area between the water's edge and this black berm just got totally filled with a lot of supplies – all kinds of things, food and ammunition and oil and gasoline and everything else – although they sent very little of those latter things. The first was food and ammunition that came ashore. But we really had a problem about getting things ashore, and the boats – they didn't work continually, because they had to lie off, waiting for somebody to signal them in.

MR. FRANK: Was that shore party control, or naval beach party?

GENERAL THOMAS: We had – the naval beach party, I can't remember that it amounted to much, and I don't remember a great deal about the shore party, but we just simply didn't have enough because we didn't have men to go into an unknown fighting situation until – during that first day. So they were pretty well clogged up. The logistics situation was poor.

MR. FRANK: That was a good time for the air raids.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, they were after the ships. They didn't touch anybody ashore. No, they went after ships. The two air raids, I would say, about 35 bombers, came in on each of them. I believe that the fighters from the carriers got on the first one and shot them up pretty well, and they probably got some of the second ones. The carriers, instead of – and I might touch on that now – whereas I had been assured by DeWitt Peck, and DeWitt Peck and I had agreed, at least, that Frank Jack Fletcher would



throw the carriers to the north of Guadalcanal, between us and the enemy, he did not. He stayed about 75 or 80 miles south of Guadalcanal, behind us, with his carriers, with his whole naval task force.

MR. FRANK: So he could withdraw in a hurry?

GENERAL THOMAS: Exactly!

Now, we had naval combat vessels with us. They were our screen. We had cruisers and destroyers. We had the Astoria and Quincy and Vincennes and Chicago and San Juan, Australian cruiser Canberra and the Australian cruiser Australia on which our screen commander, Admiral Crutchley, had his flag. They served with us – just had five-inch guns – wonderful fire support ships – but they were present with us, but the big task force was the carriers 80 miles south of us.

MR. FRANK: Now, in fairness to Fletcher, which maybe he deserves, perhaps some little fairness, these were the only carriers that were in the South Pacific, weren't they?

GENERAL THOMAS: That hasn't got anything to do with it. He went into a battle, he should have fought it. He showed the same reticence there as I'll go on to say here in about a minute, he did when he was sent into relieve Wake. He could have landed, he could have saved Wake. It's in Bob Heinl's book. Heinl was in the task force going out there. He could have landed. Fletcher could have landed.

MR. FRANK: Before he was recalled by Admiral Pye?

GENERAL THOMAS: You're damned right. He held off. He was within a day of the place when he stopped and pulled back to fuel his destroyers. He did the same thing again at Guadalcanal, as I'll tell you later. At Wake there were four Japanese cruisers 200 miles ahead of him. God know, if his carriers had been allowed to go in there, they would have made a mess of the place. And there were transports standing off the beach, Japanese transports standing off the beach with not one damned combatant ship at Wake. And Fletcher pulled off to oil, and took a whole day to refuel his destroyers.

On the second morning, Rupertus had a large task force, five battalions at Tulagi, plus the paratroops. On Guadalcanal we started to move out, and as far as I could see the movement of the First Marines was satisfactory. They were moving along as well as we could expect.

About 8 o'clock in the morning, I began to have a feeling that the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines weren't functioning. So I spoke to General Vandegrift about it, and well, he said, "You go out there and tell them I said get going." Well, I went up to the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, joined them, and they weren't moving. The commander and I went on up to his forward echelon. Now, in the meantime, there wasn't a shot. Not a shot was fired. But there was the battalion commander, with his company commanders surrounding him, and he was issuing a formal order for his forward movement, and there they were sitting.

So the regimental commander and I said, "For Christ's sake, let's get going," and he and I walked down the trail, along with a whole bunch of Marines, and we went clear over to the Lunga River. And when we got there we could see the 1st Marines off on the left and they were moving over the airfield, and they got to the Lunga too but they couldn't cross, because it was pretty broad and deep up there. There was a bridge there where the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines were, but when we got to the Lunga, the Japs started shooting at us from Machine guns across the river. But by that time the forward echelons of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines were ready to go, and they went across and mopped them up pretty quickly. Then we moved into – the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines didn't need to cross. They had captured the

airfield. We moved across the bridge, and there were some places below the bridge that could be forded, and the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines moved across the Lunga River and into the Japanese camp, where all of the workmen and the Japanese defense force were.

MR. FRANK: Completely abandoned, wasn't it?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes. They were all gone. Their camp had been under heavy fire from the ships and also from the planes, we learned afterwards that the sturdy Japanese defense force, had been a "landing force," a part of the Japanese navy landing force. About 700 men had been there as the defense force. But the rest of these three or four-thousand people were Ryukyuan laborers. They were down there working on the airfield and the facilities on Guadalcanal.

Well, these Ryukyuan, whom we later called "Termites," took to the woods and went back in the jungle, and I think 90 percent of them starved out there. They ran around our place trying to steal gear, to steal things around our messes and caused a lot of shooting on the first few nights ashore, but I think they all got it back in there. I doubt if a damned one of them surrendered. However, the Japanese naval landing force withdrew up the coast.

We finished that without other fighting. We reported to Turner that the beachhead had been secured the early part of the afternoon. We moved our Division CP down on behind the advancing troops, and we were a little off to the east of the airstrip. That afternoon I took Bill Buse and went forward to select our command post for the division. We found a very good place, a little coral finger that extended for about 300 yards up along the river that had trees on it and therefore some cover, so we figured we could dig some dugouts in there and we'd be secure. The day passed like that, and during it, we broke through before noon into Kukum, across the Lunga and into that area. We immediately sent word to the amphibious commander that we wanted all supplies landed down where we were, and not back up at Red Beach. He complied and it worked out very well. They sent all the boats to the new beachhead and we moved our working parties there. Everything up at Red Beach just sat tight. By that time we could turn a lot of men to, and we got quite a few boats unloaded that day.

MR. FRANK: That's the second day?

GENERAL THOMAS: That's the second day.

MR. FRANK: Had you received air raid warnings from the coast watchers yet?

GENERAL THOMAS: If they came in, they came to the flagship, they didn't come to us. We didn't have the communications to receive them. However, there was one fantastic sight that afternoon. As a matter of fact, I was on my way back from having selected an area which I was going to recommend for General Vandegrift to be the division command post area, when I looked out on the sea, and there all the transports were under way. Then there happened the most fantastic thing. I could see Japanese planes diving in and around the transports, and the transports all firing with every damned thing they had – machine guns, anti-aircraft and everything.

Well, it was a torpedo attack by 40 Japanese planes on the transports. They had gotten in without being discovered because they had come down back of Florida Island, wave hopping, you might say. They'd come over Florida Island and come right down and caught the transports in a solid mess.

I'll tell in a moment about the result, but it really was a sight, all that shooting out there, and these planes – you could see the planes zoom around.

I got back to the CP. We finished our day's work. Then about 5 o'clock, it wasn't dark, it was still light, a message came in for General Vandegrift to report aboard Turner's flagship. So he said to me, "Jerry, com on, let's go," and we went down to the beach.

MR. FRANK: When did he come ashore?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, we'd been ashore since 2 o'clock the previous afternoon.

MR. FRANK: Vandegrift did come ashore the previous afternoon?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, after the second air attack, on the first day of the landing we went ashore and he took over the command ashore where Capers James had set up originally. We were ashore and that night we sent Murray out to the flagship. Maybe I didn't make that clear. Oh, he'd been ashore. He just stayed on the flagship to get more information from Rupertus. We went ashore about 2 o'clock in the afternoon of D-day.

MR. FRANK: Did he make a trip to Florida Island at all?

GENERAL THOMAS: Wait, I'll get to that. I'm about to get to that now. Vandegrift got the message, as I just said, and he said, "Jerry, come on, let's go."

We moved over to the beach and we found an empty boat, and the old man said, "Do you know where the McCawley is?" The boy said, "Yes, I do," so we started out.

In the meantime, no twilight, and the darkness came down, and we spent the next two hours wandering around over that black sea trying to find the McCawley. Finally we fetched up alongside American Legion, which was a vessel manned by the Coast Guard, and Captain Perkins of the American Legion said, "I know where the McCawley is. We've been moving, we've all moved since dark," he said, they were all under way. So he said, "I'll give you a boat and he'll lead you, and I'll tell the coxswain where to go and he'll lead you to the McCawley." Well, he did, he led us to the McCawley, but we had spent three hours. It was after 10, 10:30. So we went aboard the McCawley and we went up to Turner's cabin, and in the cabin with Turner was Admiral Crutchley, the British admiral, commander of the screen, Turner's chief of staff, Tom Peyton, Jimmy Doyle of operations and Linscott, the Marine planner of Marine operations. They had been there for some time, and the first thing we did was say, "We want a cup of coffee." We hadn't been eating for a couple of days, and I asked Turner for a pack of cigarettes, which he gave me, and he said, "Now, Vandegrift, this afternoon our fliers picked up a task force of four large Japanese vessels, and they're headed in this direction. I am certain that there are three cruisers and an airplane tender, and that they're going to Racata Bay on the island of St. Isabel, north of here. Tomorrow they're going to launch another torpedo attack. We will probably not be as lucky as we were today because today we shot down all of their planes and they didn't get a single ship, except that one of their boats went into a hold, the forward hold of the Elliott, and set her on fire." He said, "Fletcher has informed me that he's withdrawing the carriers tomorrow." If you'll remember in the conference on the Saratoga, Fletcher had said, "I'll give you two days and then I'm getting out," Turner went on, "I must withdraw the transports tomorrow morning." Vandegrift considered for a moment and he said, "Well, I haven't had a real check on what's ashore at Guadalcanal, but I believe probably we're all right. But I have no idea what fix Rupertus is in."

Turner, who had previously said, "Of course we'll come back and unload the transports later, we haven't finished unloading, we will come back and bring your gear" – when Vandegrift was through, Turner said, "Well, I thought you'd be uncertain about

Rupertus, and I have the Southard standing by.” She was an old four-stacker, the flagship of the mine-laying squadron that was with us. He said, “Southard will take you over to Tulagi to see Rupertus.”

We had another cup of coffee and as I say, I scrounged a pack of cigarettes off the old boy, and we started to go, and Crutchley went with us, and Tom Peyton and Linscott. We got down in the boat and made one thrust to find the Southard, but we couldn’t find her and we had to come back, and Peyton went back up on deck to get another bearing and came down, and that time we found the Southard. Oh, when we first left the McCawley, Crutchley said, “Vandegrift, you have a mission and I don’t. I’ll put you aboard the Southard first and then I’ll go to the Australia.”

The second time we found Southard, and getting down to the boats, the old man had a fall and caught his knee around the kingpost, you know those things? Hurt himself very badly. He was in quite a lot of pain. He started to get up out of the boat, and Crutchley reached out and took him by the hand. He said, “You know, Vandegrift, I don’t know whether I can blame Turner for what he’s doing or not.”

Well, from a Britisher, that meant a lot. He didn’t approve of what Turner was doing. He did not believe it was his business.

MR. FRANK: What did Turner think about Fletcher? Of course Fletcher was his senior.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, he wasn’t about to do anything, no sir! He’d already told him he was leaving in two days. Ghormley was the guy to step in and Ghormley never was there. No sir! He didn’t do anything, he just said, “Fletcher said he was going to take the carriers out.” The admirals, you know, one number on the Lineal List was everything to them.

MR. FRANK: So Turner wasn’t about to – but I imagine he had his own private reservations.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I don’t know – he undoubtedly did, see, but the College of Cardinals, they were operating, and they didn’t one take off on the other.

MR. FRANK: Now, you say Vandegrift was getting no reports, didn’t know what was going on with Rupertus. To whom was Rupertus responsible? To whom did he report?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, he would report to Vandegrift. But the communications weren’t too good. The best communications channel was through the flagship. But that night ashore – oh, when we got ashore and set up, at the end of the first day, oh yes, we were in communication. As I have said, Vandegrift was on the flagship until 2 P.M. where communication with Rupertus was good this first day after his landing. Vandegrift wasn’t certain how they would be ashore, and he wanted to know how it was going over there. He knew things were going well on Guadalcanal, but he wasn’t certain about Rupertus. And Vandegrift knew they were having a fight over there. He stayed on the flagship where we had a radio, play-by-play. But by 2 ‘clock in the afternoon, things were not going badly and Vandegrift went ashore, and by that time, our communications had been set up and we were in touch with Rupertus and he didn’t do much reporting because they were still fighting. A man fighting doesn’t do much telling guys in the back what’s going on. To continue, after our conference with Turner we went aboard the Southard and we went down to the wardroom. They had battle lights on. Everything was blacked out in the fleet. I remember sitting down on the transom by the wardroom table, and the commodore said, “How about a cup of coffee?” So we said, “Fine,” and we sat there drinking the cup of coffee. I was right by the voice tube coming down from the

bridge. Then the officer of the deck said, "Commodore, you'd better come up here, all hell's broke loose!"

The commodore of the squadron headed for the ladder and he went up. We sat there for a couple of minutes and Vandegrift said, "Let's go up and see what's going on." As we came out from the – on the topside, it was raining, in fact, it was pouring down, and Jesus, it looked like the 4<sup>th</sup> of July at Washington Monument. There were shells and star shells going all over the place. They were even going over the top of us. We were under way, of course, and we just – I remember holding on to a lifeline, there on the side of this old destroyer, just watching this fantastic sight. We saw a couple of ships blow up – just great flashes of fire. But as we watched it, whereas at first we had been sort of in the middle of it, we started to pull away. The rain kept up but flashes were back of us. That was real comforting.

In about a half an hour, we came alongside the Neville, the flagship of the Tulagi attack force, and we went aboard the Neville and to the cabin of the Commodore, George Ashe, and there was Rupertus. So we sat there and talked, had another cup of coffee, and Rupertus told us the things that had gone on ashore. By that time he had things in good hands, because he had had all that day, those three battalions of the Second Marines. One of them he had landed on Gavutu and they killed every Jap on the place. The Raiders and 2/5 had wiped out all the Japs on Tulagi. The Raiders had been hit hard, but that night, the night before, he had moved the Second Marine, 2/5 Second Marines under Rosecrans, he'd moved them in to reinforce Edson, so he had cleaned up where he was. They killed every Jap in the place.

MR. FRANK: Including Tanambogo?

GENERAL THOMAS: Including Tanambogo, oh yes – the Second Marines, Bob Hunt's battalion went ashore there.

Rupertus reported, "We've been fighting for the last two days and we've done very little unloading." George Ashe was not only the Tulagi task force commander, but he was also skipper of the Neville. Ashe had a little hard-bitten guy, a lieutenant commander, as an exec. He spoke up and said, "Well, every boat from all these ships," and there were a lot of them, the Second Marines, everybody, I guess there were ten transports over there. He said, "Every boat from these ships is in the water and every one of them is rolling in supplies." He said, "General Rupertus, we have our landing points, and if you can get ashore and have working parties at those landing points at once, by noon tomorrow, I can have you completely supplied. I can empty these ships."

So Bill said, "Well, I can do that," and we broke up. He went off, and this little exec made good. He landed everything out of these ships. The fact is that there were almost as many supplies (less Avgas) ashore on Tulagi as on Guadalcanal. In addition to the vessel carrying Raiders, 2/5, parachutists, and 2d Marines at Tulagi were the vessels carrying the 3d Defense Battalion. We had sent this latter in the Tulagi force to keep them out of the melee on Guadalcanal. The 3d Defense was scheduled to be the last unit ashore.

**End Session V, Tape 1, Side 1**

**Session V, Tape 1, Side 2**

MR. FRANK: The man made good on his promise?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh yes. We went back to the Southard. She headed back toward the Guadalcanal side and of course we were getting on towards daybreak.

MR. FRANK: Why would they have wanted to unload the supplies if Florida, Tulagi, Gavutu, and Tanambogo had been secured? I suppose your plans were to bring these troops over onto Guadalcanal?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh no, they were to stay there and defend the place.

MR. FRANK: Garrison the place?

GENERAL THOMAS: Garrison the place, sure. We had no other ideas. Because we didn't know what was going to happen. We'll show how we moved them later.

When the naval battle started the night before, Turner left with all the transports, of which there were over a dozen, and the AKAs. He went south, but he returned after the battle was over. He was not yet off the beaches when we arrived. We waited for him for maybe a half hour, and he came up with his transports and layed to. He and Vandegrift talked from bridge to bridge as the two ships came closer together.

Vandegrift said, "Rupertus is all right," and so forth. So a boat put off and too Peyton and Linscott back to the flagship, and another boat put off and took us back to the beach.

MR. FRANK: You stayed all night on the Southard?

GENERAL THOMAS: We were all night, well, most of the night on the Southard. We were all night on the water, let's put it that way, on one ship or another.

MR. FRANK: What was that naval battle? Was it the first battle of Savo Island?

GENERAL THOMAS: First battle of Savo Island. That's where we lost four cruisers. But we had no idea. We didn't know what had happened. We were completely in the dark. It was a funny thing that happened, and I've made a record of it, it's never been cleared up. I'm standing on the bridge of the Southard, about 7 o'clock in the morning, daybreak, and we can hear off to the north, northwest, this 'harum,' 'harum,' and on the intercom came this voice, and it said, "X-ray to Zebra, X-ray to Zebra, whose ships are those firing?" There was no reply, that's all. But it's never been established, and I've never been able to find out, who were those ships firing at 7:30 in the morning of the 9<sup>th</sup> of August and they certainly were firing, because I heard them and somebody else heard them too, because "X-ray to Zebra," and that was one ship to another.

MR. FRANK: Talk between ships?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes. "Whose ships are those firing?" It was a very distinct 'harum,' like a battleship salvo.

We went back ashore, found out they'd had some excitement during the night. There's been a report that there was a counter landing up at Red Beach by the Japs. We packed up our command post, moved to our permanent position, sent out word to all unit commanders, including battalions that they were to assemble at division headquarters behind our finger of coral where we were going to have our regular command post. They came in, and that's where that picture was taken of all the commanders on Guadalcanal. Vandegrift got up, told the commanders as much as he knew. They knew practically nothing of the battle of the night before. He told them, gave them a talk about, we're here, we've got a large part of an airfield, and we're going to stay here. "The ships are gone. I have assurance of the admiral he'll come back and (un)load them. But we have three big problems."

Then I got up and gave the defensive orders, which I had not put in writing at this time. I didn't want to give it to Turner because I went in to him, as I said, before we planned it. By then it was too late for him to pick my defensive orders to pieces.

Now, there's one element that I passed over and I should mention it. About three or four days out of Guadalcanal, Turner told Vandegrift, "You know, I'm going ashore with you." Well, Vandegrift naturally received that announcement with a good deal of misgivings, but Turner went on to say to him, "I'm not going to interfere with your defense of the island. I'm going ashore and build the naval base."

But we knew enough about Turner already to know that things probably wouldn't go that way, and we issued a Marine kit to Turner and the five or six members of his staff that were going ashore with him; gave them boondocking shoes and uniforms and everything to go ashore. However, the battle of the night of the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> of August apparently changed Turner's mind, and he went away and he didn't go ashore with us. To get back to our defensive situation, we had all the commanders there and as I said, Vandegrift gave them a talk, a good talk, and then I got up and laid out the defensive order, and it was very simple. (The) boundary between our two infantry regiments was the Lunga River, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines (-) to the left and the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines to the right, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Marines in division reserve. The artillery back on the edge of the rainforest and I said, "Well, all dig in." We gave – well, I'll get to this in a second.

The first priority for troops was to dig in, at the same time, to provide the maximum working parties to move supplies from along the beach and disperse them within the beachhead. But first priority for the whole division was completion of the airfield.

The Japs had finished something over 2000 feet of airfield. They had built the landing strip out of dead coral, and they had borrow pits open near there from which they were getting this coral. They had left about a 200 foot place yet to be filled because there was a swale and it had to be built up to about four or five feet. They had a little narrow gauge railroad running from their borrow pits over there. There were a couple of rollers left for rolling down the dead coral and packing it, and we had every prospect of being able to do the job, but the big thing was to get that airfield finished and have a 2200 or 2300 foot runway.

MR. FRANK: What you were doing in your defense order in effect was to set up a perimeter of defense within which was the airfield?

GENERAL THOMAS: We set up a perimeter of defense around the airfield. We went to Guadalcanal for the sole purpose of capturing and defending an airfield. That was our simple mission and we continued on it for four months.

MR. FRANK: Who named it 'Henderson Field'?

GENERAL THOMAS: We did. I don't know. I think Kenny Weir came up with the idea. We talked about Joe Henderson being lost at the Battle of Midway, which he was. The first report was that he died in a flaming dive bomber down the stack of a Japanese carrier. He's 'Toots' brother, you know.

MR. FRANK: Is that 'Toots' Henderson's brother? Lofton R. Henderson?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes. Lofton R. is 'Toots' brother.

MR. FRANK: Kenneth Weir, I take it, was the division air officer?

GENERAL THOMAS: Kenny Weir, a major, was the division air officer, that's right. He came up with the idea of naming Henderson Field after Joe Henderson, so we named it Henderson Field, just like that, never any change.

Well, everybody turned to. We decided, in order to expedite the movement of supplies, that we would use up whatever was necessary of the remaining one-hundred hour life of our LVTs in bringing supplies into the garrison. It developed that they were the most useful of all vehicles there. We had enough to do the job there, and LVTs of that day had only an average of 100 hours of operational life before they had to go in for overhaul. We were pleased to find that after this supply dispersed, that a number of our LVTs still had useful life. I all worked smoothly. The work got done. Things were moved in. Gasoline was dispersed, whatever rations we had were dispersed. People dug in. They didn't have much digging in to do because they had no tools and we had no barbed wire. We salvaged some barbed wire from a corral. There were cattle being raised on Guadalcanal, and there were some corrals for cattle, and we used the barbed wire from them. But Bellatrix, the AKA, had all of our barbed wire in her belly and she went away without being unloaded.

MR. FRANK: Did any of your Marine commanders look good yet? Had they been tested really?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, not really. Cates always looked good. One of our handicaps was that though we could communicate with Tulagi, we couldn't communicate with the outside. We did not have yet, nor did we have with us, a radio setup that could transmit a thousand miles away. However, the Japs had a powerful station which they had almost completed, and one of our master sergeants went into that station. Everything was all there, ready for him to work with – charts, diagrams and what not – and that man put that station in operation in about three days.

Well, our first effort of course, was to try to talk to Ghormley, so we sent out a message to COMSOPAC, and a reply came back from him which sounded like he was doubtful about who it came from. So he said, "Report us your position, situation, etc., and use as the indicator on your dispatch the names of the last two vessels upon which you saw my chief of staff." Of course we'd seen Dan Callaghan on the Dewey and Saratoga, so our first indicator was 'Dewey' and the second was 'Saratoga.' We told Ghormley the fix we were in.

In the meantime, the most important thing we had to report was this: we checked material and were able to make a pretty good estimate of what we had. The commanders helped in that report. But about the third day on the island, the Old Man called for Ray Coffman, the division quartermaster, and said, "I feel pretty sure about gasoline and ammunition and things like that, but I'm not certain about food. I want a thorough check of the food on this island."

Coffman went away. He was a very able fellow. I guess it was the next morning he came back and said, "There's less than five days food on this island for the number of men on it."

MR. FRANK: Including Japanese supplies?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes. There were some very nice Japanese supplies like rice and crab and things like that, but they didn't quickly enter into this picture. So we included in the message to Ghormley, that we had less than five days of food. Well, almost immediately a message came back from Turner saying, "I have canvassed by ships"



captains and am assured that over 30 days of supplies of food was put ashore for the entire garrison.”

Well, Vandegrift came right back at him and said, “Your captains regardless, there is less than five days supply of food on this island.”

About a week later or ten days, Vandegrift got a letter from Turner in which he said, “I am sorry that I made a mistake, but I know now that you were right,” see, but the son-of-a-bitch didn’t put it on the air like he did the other things. He wrote it in a letter.

MR. FRANK: You with you high-power station communicated directly Ghormley?

GENERAL THOMAS: Ghormley, that’s right.

MR. FRANK: With Turner monitoring it?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, hell, he got a copy of everything. He had a hand – he still thought he was in command at Guadalcanal, despite the fact that he was a thousand miles away. I’ll take that up later – that’s a part of the relationship between Vandegrift and Turner.

We felt pretty secure on Guadalcanal. We had each flank refused. The flank of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines was refused up the Tenaru River which ended in a bayou. This was the dry season. The flank of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines was left at Kukum, was extended down along the beach. We didn’t think we had any problems in our rear because of the rainforest, but there were two avenues entering our position from the rear. One was the Lunga River, and it could be, though it wasn’t a very broad river, there was a lot of water in it, but it could be forded at that time of the year throughout its whole upper length. Then there was a coral finger that came down through the rainforest, the only one in our position really, it was probably two and one-half miles long, but it was a re-entry. It came right on down clear to the airfield. We were concerned about those two conditions. So in order to take care of them, we bivouacked the Engineers at the foot of that coral finger alongside of the artillery area, and we bivouacked the Pioneers alongside the upper Lunga River. The Pioneers, of course, went to work immediately on the only thing we had in the way of an administrative group. They had left a sizable boat group, many boats and lighters, for our use. They were under a command of a lieutenant commander of the Coast Guard by the name of Dexter. They set up at this place known as Kukum, which was a little village over in the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines’ area. Kukum had also been the administration beach of the Japanese. That is where they had landed their things. They had built a couple of piers out of coconut logs, and they had some sheerlegs that they’d built out of coconut logs on the piers. The Pioneers immediately took over that area and that was the administrative beach for Guadalcanal, then, and throughout the whole operation.

Each day after the Pioneers got through work they went back up the Lunga and outposted that area and defended it. The Engineers, of course, worked all day on the airfield or roads or other works, and at night they went back to that coral finger and that was their bivouac. They were to defend the coral ridge in case anybody came through there.

MR. FRANK: Was it the Aviation Engineer Battalion?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no, that unit didn’t come there for four months. Probably three months. They brought the First Aviation Engineer Battalion up there about the middle November, 1942. We’d been on the island over three months when they got there. But we had our divisional Engineer Battalion and they completed that airfield and maintained it all the time they were there.

I may not have made it too clear, but we felt initially that the greatest threat to us from the Japanese, who obviously controlled the sea, was a landing from the sea, and so our main defense faced the sea, faced Sealark Channel to the north, with the First and Fifth Marines, the First Marines with two battalions plus one, we had one battalion division in reserve, and the Fifth Marines was two battalions because the other one was on the Tulagi side.

MR. FRANK: Any special weapons down there?

GENERAL THOMAS: Special weapons, we spread them all over the place. We had a terrific amount of weapons. We had weapons all over the place. We took them from the tanks and everything and we put them up on the beaches, and we really had a beach defense, there wasn't any doubt about it, throughout the whole length of our perimeter on the sea side.

We didn't have any immediate enemy, although we made clear our interest in those Japs withdrawn to the left, and told the Fifth Marines to try to gain contact with them and keep them under observation.

Just a few days after we went ashore, a squad of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines went up there. It was three and one-half miles from Kukum to the mouth of the Matanikau. The bar at the mouth of the Matanikau was a bone we gnawed on for four months. It was always a point of contention between us. This squad got up there, got fired on, took a couple of casualties and came back. The next day a platoon went up there, fought with these Japs a little bit, but every day the Fifth Marines patrolled out that three and a half-miles, but they had the strictest orders to come back at night, to be back at night, because we always thought we might be attacked from the sea.

As soon as the First Marines were dug in and free of their labor job of getting supplies in, they also started to patrol. We kept up a very active patrol program. First, you've got to keep the boys moving. You can't let them sit down behind a strand of barbed wire and sit there in a foxhole. They'll go to pot if you do. So we didn't worry much about the flank to the east because we'd landed at Red Beach about four miles away, and we knew there were no Japs out there, but still the First Marines fanned out in that direction all the time.

The Fifth Marines kept plugging away at the Japs on their left flank. Five days after we landed, and that's when that platoon went up there and I think their commander was killed that day, but they brought back a prisoner. He was one of the few prisoners we ever got. We got some 'termites,' but he was one of the few real naval people we got. He was a surly bugger. One of the things that he told Goettge, who was our G-2, was that his people wanted to surrender, and said he would lead a patrol back to where they were. Well, I was busy, I was the G-3, and Frank was the G-2. He was senior to me. He told me (we were very close) that he was going to take a patrol and go up there with this prisoner. I was busy and I never got any really clear idea about the whole matter. He took several of his own men from his -2 Section and went over and borrowed men from the Fifth Marines, and took about a 25-man patrol on the night of the 12<sup>th</sup>. We'd been ashore 5-1/2 days, see, -the night of the 12<sup>th</sup> of August.

Along into the night we got a call saying there were tracer bullets being fired to the west, about four mile away in the direction that Goettge had gone; just before daybreak we got a report that a Marine had gotten back from patrol, and that they wanted help. At daybreak the Fifth Marines sent people over there and they were fired on and

couldn't get ashore, and they came on back. Only one other of the men came back from that patrol, out of about 25 or 26 people. But we've never had any story, we don't know what happened.

MR. FRANK: The man's name was Frank Few, I believe, an Indian.

GENERAL THOMAS: I can't remember. Well, anyway, there two people that came back from that patrol and one of them was almost nuts. He wasn't worth a damn afterwards - a little blonde fellow in the -2 Section. He was just - like that! Of course, the Fifth Marines sent people to Matanikau that day. As a matter of fact, Bill Whaling took the patrol. Whaling was exec of the Fifth Marines. He took a patrol and went out there and he got over across the mouth of the river, and on the bar. The river - when the rains came, these rivers rushed down from the mountains, like the Matanikau and the Lunga and the Tenaru, and when the rains came they'd gouge out great big areas which, when the dry season came, became bayous. During the dry season the flow of the river was so small that the sea threw up a bar. The bar at the mouth of the Matanikau was a bit like the bar at the mouth of the Tenaru, and then there would be a small stream which you could step across where the water trickled out. The bar at the mouth of the Matanikau was about 200 yards long.

MR. FRANK: A very large sandspit?

GENERAL THOMAS: A sandspit. Some fresh water did flow all the time. Usually it went up to the east, but at the Matanikau it went to the west.

Well, Bill Whaling said, in the brief time before he got driven back in, that he saw graves that had been dug, so this was the bar undoubtedly where Goettge landed. As a matter of fact, Whaling told me, "I saw an arm sticking out of one of those graves that just had to be Goettge's. There was nobody else in that patrol that big."

Storms came, and as always, the rushing water washed part of that bar away.

MR. FRANK: The bodies with it?

GENERAL THOMAS: The bodies with it. And of course, you bury a body in salt water sand, it's worse than lime, it's gone, in no time. Although we found occasional pieces of equipment up there, we never found a bone. They washed away during the first rain that came, part of the bar washed away. We never got any sign of any of those graves or any of those people. Not a dog tag or a damn thing.

MR. FRANK: Who interpreted this prisoner?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, we had - Edson had with him "Tiger" Erskine, who is now a CIA character. Our main interpreter was Pappy Moran, who had been commissioned a captain. Pappy had been a YMCA secretary in Yokohama, and had been there for years and read, rote and spoke perfect Japanese. Now, offhand, I can't remember who our other interpreter was with the main division. Erskine was with Edson or with Rupertus over on Tulagi - Erskine actually was attached to the Raiders. But Moran did all the interpreting, really, and as I say, he was very adept, so throughout the whole are . . . He was an old man, way older than any of the rest of us.

MR. FRANK: Buckley was the assistant -2 and took over?

GENERAL THOMAS: When Frank Goettge was killed, we sent for Buckley. He as then S-2 of the Eleventh Marines and was a very able fellow, and we reached out and pulled him into division headquarters to take Goettge's place.

The Fifth Marines kept pecking away at the Japs on the Matanikau. They sent a good art of a battalion up one day. The battalion, started to cross the bar and they got

shot up a little bit. It as not well handled, but a couple of company commanders, Spurlock and one or two other fellows, pulled the thing out. But one thing that made it a pretty good victory from our viewpoint was that after our troops had been driven back they formed a line which the Japs decided to "Banzai." We killed about a hundred of them. So it was really a victory for our side.

Not long after that Matanikau fight, the Japs made an airdrop, on these people up beyond the Matanikau, and several of the baskets of food and what not fell in our lines, and in each one of them was a message, "Banzai! Help is on the way."

Well, we had a suspicion almost from the first day that we arrived that their destroyers came down there at night and maybe landed men and arms, but we knew now that they id. We dubbed the destroyers, "The Tokyo Express," and it was a rare night when, for the ext four months, that they did not visit our island.

MR. FRANK: At the northwest end of the island?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, up in that direction. Actually, they landed on both sides of us, but at first they only landed up there. This was about four days after our landing that this air drop came in which it said, "Banzai." The message was written in the top of the basket, "Banzai! Help is on the way."

MR. FRANK: Just to orient ourselves – facing the beaches the Matanikau is to the left?

GENERAL THOMAS: It's to the northwest of Kukum. Yes.

MR. FRANK: You're facing the beach and the island is running from northwest to southeast?

GENERAL THOMAS: And we were facing the northeast beaches. Though the inward side of Guadalcanal faces northeast, if you go up the island you travel northwest. That's 90 degrees. The Matanikau was northwest of Kukum. Well, you actually swung almost south along the edge of the water and then there was a bend, and she ended right there at the mouth of the Matanikau, and then you took off for the northwest again, up toward Cape Esperance.

MR. FRANK: . . . or to the west of the beaches as you face it.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right, as we faced the sea. In facing the sea we faced northeast, but it came n around where we were to the left, and after you got to the mouth of the Matanikau the island then trended off to the northwest. And our own beach front where the First and Fifth Marines were, it ran northwest to southeast.

During the first couple of weeks on the island, the thing that gave us the greatest lift – actually, to go back, on about the 15<sup>th</sup> the PBY5AA that belonged to Admiral McCain, COMAIRSOPAC, landed on the Guadalcanal airfield. The pilot got out and looked the airfield over and reported that it was ready to take carrier planes and so reported when he went back. And he took out the first evacuee we had, a lad names Sutherland, who had been on the Saratoga and had been shot down, a fighter pilot, and the natives brought him in to us after we'd been there about five days. He was seriously wounded, and the PBY took him out. As I have said, the pilot pronounced the field ready to receive airplanes.

MR. FRANK: Had Martin Clemens come in yet?

GENERAL THOMAS: Martin Clemens came on the 14<sup>th</sup>. I'm glad you brought it up because I forgot it and I want to get it in. I've forgotten, maybe it was the middle of the day when I was told that he was over at the -2 Section. He was a big sturdy-looking fellow with a blonde beard and he had a number of police boys with him. Almost

immediately they became of enormous help to us. Clemens worked with the -2 Section all the time we were on the island. He, of course, had been a coast watcher and before that had been one of the district officers on Guadalcanal. Martin had been a famous footballer in his Cambridge days. He was a great athlete, there's no doubt about it, and these colored native police boys he brought in with him were really devoted fellows. He came in on the 14<sup>th</sup> and he stayed with us throughout the whole campaign. Every one of the patrols that went out from the First Marines after that had one of Martin Clemens' police boys with them. They knew the terrain like they knew the back of their hand.

On the 20<sup>th</sup>, late in the afternoon, I remember, we head the Butterflies coming in, and here were our planes. And there was nothing that happened on Guadalcanal that really gave the lift in all the time like those airplanes did coming in that day.

There were two squadrons, one Grumman fighter squadron, under John L. Smith, and a Dauntless dive bomber squadron under Dick Mangrum. The group commander was Charlie Fike. We just felt like we were in business, because the Japs had been there several times before that and we had been bombed several times. Jap bombing started about the third day we were ashore. That day a flight of 35 planes came in. They were way up high, and they cruised around, turned over the island and went back, and they didn't drop a bomb. It was our conclusion that they thought there would be ships there, and they were looking for ships, and they weren't looking for anybody on the ground.

MR. FRANK: Did you have any anti-aircraft defenses set up by this time?

GENERAL THOMAS: No. No, they were there, but not in position.

MR. FRANK: That was Pepper's Third –

GENERAL THOMAS: Pepper's Third Defense Battalion was in the Tulagi attack force. We did have one ship with to 90mm batteries aboard. Pepper was in Zeilin with about half of his battalion, and the other half was in our Guadalcanal attack force, Kenny Benner and Sam Taxis came ashore with two 90mm batteries at Guadalcanal. But it took them several days to get set up. They couldn't come ashore early – they got ashore almost the last thing, from the ships. Perhaps on the afternoon of the 8<sup>th</sup> is when they came ashore.

MR. FRANK: A bit of conjecture here – you mentioned, this is interesting, Sam Taxis was d Defense Battalion man and he later turned out to be a pretty smart individual.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, he's smart. He and Kenny Benner were both smart.

MR. FRANK: I've also heard, I think you may have mentioned it, that getting assigned to Defense Battalions for some of these real sharp officers was a kiss of death. Is it possible that this had a marked effect on Taxis, the fact that . . .?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I don't think so. I don't think so, because I later rescued Taxis and sent him up to be G-3 of the Second Division, because he was a smart guy. Frankly, I want to tell you, it was a handicap to a lot of people. Now, some of them have overcome it, like Van Ryzin and others, but it was just – to me, I never could understand why the let Duncan Waller and Wade Legette reach out and comb the Marine Corps for the brilliant boys and stick them in the Defense Battalions. But they did, and Headquarters let them get away with it. For a lot of them, the war passed them by, and a lot of them are gone for that reason. They didn't get in the war, and when selection came, and they would have been – but the ablest officers in the Marine Corps, they put in those battalions.

MR. FRANK: Why?

GENERAL THOMAS: It was stupid but the artilleryman got away with it.

MR. FRANK: Built an empire.

GENERAL THOMAS: Built an empire. Wade Leggette sat up there at Headquarters Marine Corps and just combed through the sharpest officers that came into the Marine Corps and took them into Base Defense work. Of course, that was the big deal at one time, but later it turned out to be a dead game. I'm talking about that later.

MR. FRANK: General Shepherd mentioned when we were talking to him that he'd been offered the glamour and glitter of the Defense Battalion, but fortunately he sidestepped it. Now, another thing you brought up, about the artilleryman. We talked off the record about the schism between aviation and ground. Did the artillery people think they were a breed apart?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes, they did.

MR. FRANK: Thought they were smartest?

GENERAL THOMAS: They thought they were the smartest yes. Still do, many of them. You have it every place you go. But they're not a breed apart. They're not the smartest. They're smart boys, but they're inclined like a bunch of quail to go off in a nest, see, and get their own people around them, and we've had sad experiences like that, of an artilleryman who wouldn't have anything but artillerymen around him, see. And it doesn't work out.

MR. FRANK: And again, like aviation, artillery is nothing but a supporting arm.

GENERAL THOMAS: They're a supporting arm, essentially.

About the 20<sup>th</sup> of August – we'll have to check some of the dates along here because as I go along I may miss some of it.

MR. FRANK: When we get the manuscript, we'll check this.

GENERAL THOMAS: We had an observation post down on the beach. They had built a platform up in the coconut trees to see out over the ocean, but they also had men down on the beach. They could always tell when a ship went through, because a ship would throw a wave up on the beach, and they could tell if it was two ships, because when there's more than one ship they could tell. So on the night of the 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> of August, we got a report from this observation post in Cates' regiment that some ships had gone through. Well, we were sure they weren't ours, so they had to be Japs. And we hadn't had anybody down that way before, so Cates, being the alert guy he was, although he'd had a good patrol program, the next morning he sent out a good patrol, water patrol, headed by Charlie Brush, and Charlie went on down the coast about, I guess maybe he got eight or ten miles down there.

MR. FRANK: Charlie Brush must have been a company commander.

GENERAL THOMAS: He was a company commander. It wasn't a company, but it was a good-size patrol, see. He came back late in the afternoon, and they sent him right on down to Division Headquarters, and he sat down with me and Buckley, and he had had a couple of Martin Clemens' police boys with him, and they had gotten out maybe ten miles down the beach, eight or ten miles, when the police boys said, "There's somebody coming." And they got off the trail. He deployed his patrol. And here came a party of about 35 Japs, considerable number of whom were officers. The patrol waited until they got real close and then they let them have it, and they killed every one except three.

Those three got away. So Charlie, being the alert guy he is, he piled right on them, and these officers had maps and orders and what not. He picked up a lot of papers from them

and he brought them in, and Pappy Moran turned to immediately. Among other things they had a real expert, a real precise map of our position and everything. They knew all about us.

MR. FRANK: Had they identified the division as Marines?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, I can't remember that, I don't remember. But they knew where we were located and about the airfield and where our positions were, and of course as we found out later, they had an observer on Mt. Austin, see, from this naval landing force, and he was in communication with them.

So we had problems. We did not know how large this outfit was that had landed, maybe 15 miles up the coast, and of course there was a temptation to go out and find out, but something told us to sit tight. Well, nothing happened that night after Charlie came back, but the next night, about 1 o'clock in the morning, Cates called me. We had a suspicion something was going to happen, and L.B. Cresswell was in command of the reserves, and I had him come over and sleep under my piece of canvas, with his orderly, because I thought that they might want to use him, and having him there under my hands so I could tell him what to do was the way to do things. So L.B. was sleeping right there alongside of my cot. And about 1 o'clock Cates called in and said, "There are signs of the enemy across the bayou from us," Tenaru there. From there on things rolled along – I didn't get up until 3 o'clock. I woke up, talked to the people, talked to Cates. About 3 o'clock I heard so much shooting, I got up and went outside my little piece of tent canvas that I was sleeping under, and walked up and down, and from then to daybreak I was talking to Cates most of the time.

MR. FRANK: What did you have, sound-powered equipment?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no, we had a telephone line out there. We had very little sound power in those days. But we had telephone lines all over the place.

MR. FRANK: No radio?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, we had radio too, but you didn't need it for that, with the telephones. So Cates told me that he had this fight on, and I kept in touch with him, and he wanted Cresswell, but I said, "Cliff, we don't know what things may happen to this outfit and we just cannot commit our reserve until we know, so you just go ahead fighting." In the meantime, they were fighting and fighting like hell, I watched the flares over the –

The day before we had alerted the Fifth Marines to have a battalion ready to move by trucks, and also the Engineers and the Pioneers, because we were pretty sure something was going to hit. We just sort of had it figured that that was going to be the night, see. So the battle continued on, and it was some time after daybreak, where nothing had happened anywhere else, everybody else reported they couldn't see a thing, no activity, so I proposed to Cates that I let Cresswell go and that he loose him to go and – the Japs hadn't pulled out, and our people were pot-shooting at them down there through the coconuts, that he would cross Cresswell over with two or three tanks on the upper Tenaru, where you could get across with tanks, and pin in these Japs.

So he said, "All right," and I spoke to General Vandegrift about it and he approved, so I released Cresswell to him and Cresswell moved out. Before noon, he had all those Japs, the rest of them, pinned in against the beach, and they took the tanks in there to chew them up and closed in and they killed almost every damn one of them. There's a little overhang of ground on the beach, and maybe 50 or 60 Japs sheltered

underneath there. So we got the planes to take off. The fighters took off and went up and polished them off. But before the day was over they had killed 700 Japs.

MR. FRANK: On that Tenaru sandspit?

GENERAL THOMAS: That Tenaru sandspit, just loaded with them, their pictures. I went up that afternoon and it was just really a fantastic sight, and we had a hell of a time burying all those buggers. That's the first time we started burying with bulldozers. We dug a ditch and threw them in and covered them up. They're probably still there.

It was about this time, or maybe a little later, that we were conscious of the build-up, up beyond the Matanikau – these destroyers coming in, which we were pretty certain they were coming in there during the night. So before they got too strong we decided to give them a good try, and we set up a plan whereby – you see, we still didn't have 2-5, we had 1-5 and 3-5. 3-5 was to go out and man the line of the Matanikau. 1-5 was to move by boat up the coast to a point about five miles from the Matanikau, be ashore there before daybreak, and these two outfits would drive together and catch these Japs in there and chew them up. And all of them – I told them, “You've got to be back by night, because we still expect trouble from the sea.”

Well, 3-5 did well. They got out there and they were to start their attack at a certain hour, but 1-5 instead of being in their boats and landing before daybreak were still loading at Kukum at daybreak. Well, they went on over. We didn't hold them up, they went on over, and of course the Japs saw them coming; gathered down there to oppose the landing, but they got ashore. They didn't have an awful lot of Japs. But there this damned battalion sat. Finally after they didn't make any progress, General Vandegrift himself went to Kukum and told the regimental commander, he said, “Goddamn it, you get over and do something.”

So he did. He went over and relieved the commander, sent him in, and he took charge. He made a little progress, but –

Oh, about 4 o'clock in the afternoon the battalion commander asked for boats to come over, and that's when the regimental commander went over. It was a fiasco. But they killed quite a few Japs, and we had very little losses ourselves, but it wasn't good, and that's when the Old Man realized that he had some commander trouble.

So we kept pecking away at the Japs. At the same time, at about this time, we realized we needed more strength, and Rupertus had lots of it and no enemy. We told him to send up the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Fifth Marines and the Raiders and the Parachutists, and he'd have the Second Marines. By that time the Regimental Headquarters had come back up there and was commanding the Second Marines. So 2-5 came over and the Raiders came over, but before the Raiders came over, Edson came one day and proposed that on the way over, he send Sam Griffith with two companies to investigate Savo Island and see what was over there. So we approved that and he did go over there, on the way over. But when the – it had a sort of a sad ending.

This was about the last day of August, and these two old APDs, one was the Gregory and one was the Little, they got in late in the evening with Griffith and his outfit from Savo, and we told them to go over to Tulagi harbor. For some reason or other, they disregarded the orders. We had a scheme on about that time. We knew the Japanese had been down – as a matter of fact, they'd been shooting at us at night. A submarine had come up and fired at us one night, one morning. So we had a seaplane over in Tulagi harbor, and they concocted a scheme, the Defense Battalion did – by this time Custis



Burton was ashore with one battery of his five-inch guns on Guadalcanal. So this one plane, seaplane with flares, was to take off, and when he saw some Japanese destroyers, he was to illuminate them, and then Custis Burton would take them under fire.

Well, the Gregory and the Little, after dropping Sam Griffith and these two companies, apparently hung on just off Guadalcanal, and this lad with the flares went up. He saw these two vessels down there, and he dropped his flares right over the both of them. Well, as hell would have it, the Tokyo Express was going by at that time, and they blew the Gregory and the Little out of the water. We didn't even save one soul from those two ships, because that skipper, whoever was in command, Senior Officer Present Afloat, decided he'd do what he wanted to do, see, and he never lived to tell the tale, because if they'd gone into Tulagi they'd been perfectly safe, but they didn't.

MR. FRANK: Sam landed with no opposition on Savo?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, there was nobody there. The natives had killed some Japs that had floated ashore and things like that, but they found nothing. They didn't find any Americans or any Japs. As I say, the Japs had been killed. Some bodies floated ashore there from the First Battle of Savo Island, Americans and Japs. Probably not Japs, no, Americans, because there were no Japs hit out there. On the first battle of Savo, the Japs all go away without a scratch. They sank four of our cruisers. We found that out later, and we were a long time finding out what happened out there. We didn't know. We had no idea what happened in that battle.

Now, here's the tragedy of the thing, and it shows how the Navy operates. Turner guessed what the enemy was going to do. He was in command of that whole force, the screen and all that. Instead of somebody on his staff taking a pair of calipers and saying, "At 3 o'clock this afternoon these four Japanese vessels were here. Everybody within this arc, which is the distance they can go between now and daybreak tomorrow morning, guard your chin tonight." But they didn't even tell these people. Turner guessed, and Turner said to us, "There are three Japanese cruisers, and a seaplane tender, and they're going to Racata Bay and launch a torpedo attack." He's responsible. They never even condemned him, much less relieve him. He stayed right on, see. He guessed what they were going to do. And that's the tragedy. He guessed wrong - didn't work on the capability of the enemy, worked on the intentions of the enemy. That grows out of the old Navy War College estimate of the situation, in which they stressed intentions and not capabilities, see. But he did that that night. Here was the commander of the screen, Crutchley, who said to Vandegrift, "Vandegrift, you have a mission and I don't, " yet Crutchley knew that the enemy was not more than three hours from him, see, and he was in command of this fleet. These were his cruisers, four of which were sunk that night: Quincy, Vincennes, Canberra, and Astoria. The Japs blew them out of the water. The skipper of the Vincennes was in his bunk when the battle happened. They just simply didn't - I just cannot conceive of a military man being that lax.

Well, anyway, as I say, it was a week after that. We got hold of Sam Griffith and

—

MR. FRANK: - that's right, you learned a long time afterwards - didn't Ed Buckley learn that there were some intelligence documents or a report that he was not getting at all, that COMSOPAC was putting out some dope and you were even -

GENERAL THOMAS: Maybe so, I don't remember.

MR. FRANK: His intelligence picture of capabilities, enemy capabilities, which could have affected your situation, was in this report, as I recall.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, maybe so. Maybe so, but Ben, COMSOPAC was pretty good, when Ghormley was there and after Halsey came, about writing us, giving us information that would have influenced us. I'll relate it as I go along, several instances. Turn it off a minute; let me think what I'm saying.

### **END TAPE 1, SIDE 2**

### **Session V, Tape 2, Side 1**

GENERAL THOMAS: One of the most unsung units on Guadalcanal was the 3<sup>rd</sup> Defense Battalion under Colonel Pepper. Their gear was rather heavy, but without delay they snaked it ashore. At first the major part of it was on the Tulagi side, and one five-inch battery went ashore over there, and I believe stayed there throughout the operation, and one 90mm battery went over there, because we didn't know what would happen as far as requirements for air defense on Tulagi were concerned. But two 90mm batteries, as I said, under Benner, who was Pepper's exec, came ashore and very shortly they set up on Guadalcanal. When it became obvious that the air attacks were going to be against, and they were made against the Guadalcanal area, we brought the other. At least Pepper came over and brought the other 90mm battery, and we then had his full anti-aircraft defense, including light weapons. These were all distributed around our airstrip on Guadalcanal, and they were, of course, right in the heart of it. As a matter of fact, our area was so small; our division headquarters wasn't more than a hundred yards from a 90mm battery.

There was some little time before Custis Burton was able to get one of his five-inch batteries over, but we finally got transportation and brought it over to Guadalcanal, as they too had landed on the Tulagi side.

Before the 90s got in operation, the Japs came in at 10,000 feet, the first few days, and blasted us, but they learned pretty quickly when the 90s started to fire and they went up to 23,000 feet and there the bombers stayed for the rest of the time we were on the island.

MR. FRANK: They weren't effective up there?

GENERAL THOMAS: They were handicapped but safer for that was the top of the 90s reach.

There was one aspect of that that was very helpful. The weather in the South Pacific is bad all the time. It just is miserable weather. There's nearly always a cloud bank over the Solomon Islands, and it's not low. Sometimes it's up to 12 or 15 thousand feet, but it is nearly always there. When the Japs could come in at 10,000 (feet) they were under that, and they rode right in and let their bombs go and went away, but when the 90mm (batteries) forced them up to 23,000 feet, they had to go above the cloud bank, which meant they had to jockey around to find a hole through the clouds to bomb, to see

their target, because they only had one bomb sight in the whole Japanese flight of 25 planes. It meant that while they were jockeying, our slow climbing fighters, the f4Us, or the F4Fs, could gain altitude. The Grummans, were very slow climbers. It took them 40 minutes to get to 30,000 feet. When the Jap had to jockey for the holes in the clouds to bomb through, and the coast watchers or radar picked him up, the fighters had a chance to get on them, and they did, frequently. Many, many times they got on them.

The 90mm really did valiant work. They shot down maybe as many as 70 planes over Guadalcanal, during the time they were there, and many, many days they did not get a shot at a plane, because the rule was that if our fighters were in amongst the Japs, our 90s didn't fire. So a lot of times they didn't get a shot in, but I believe they shot down as many as 70 Jap planes while we were on that island.

MR. FRANK: Of course, you say it took 40 minutes for the F4Fs to get within range –

GENERAL THOMAS: - 30,000 feet, yes –

MR. FRANK: - 30,000 feet, and they got up there, and were waiting for the Japanese, because the coast watchers watching the flights coming down from above –

GENERAL THOMAS: If they saw them, if the coast watchers spotted them, but sometimes they didn't see them. Sometimes our radar would pick them up. If the coast watcher on Bougainville picked up a flight coming down, he'd say, "23 Bettys coming yours." Well, if he spotted them he spotted them on Bougainville, that meant that our fighters would be up there waiting for them, they'd really know the hour – for the Jap came in almost on the hour, 12 o'clock every day. He was a creature of habit; there wasn't any doubt about it. But if the Bougainville man didn't hear him or see him, the next man was on New Georgia.

MR. FRANK: The New Georgia? Where was John Mather, Bougainville or New Georgia?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, John Mather was with us.

MR. FRANK: Was he with you and Clemens?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, he was at Guadalcanal, Johnnie Mather was, yes. I've forgotten the names of the people up at those other places. They got and killed the fellow on Bougainville. But they changed a lot. There was a man named French. David French is the Governor General of Hong Kong now. But if the man on New Georgia got them, and there was a cloud break over and they had to jockey, we'd get on them. The fighters would get on them. But the time was short. But always, if the man in Bougainville picked them up, the fighters would be up there waiting for them and they really gave it to them, and they shot them down every time. The Japanese losses were simply terrific.

I want to give the fliers all of the credit, and I've written in the writing that I've done – I may miss a lot of it – they went off from Henderson Field, and they sent out their searchers every day. They picked up a Japanese task force on the 21<sup>st</sup>. They didn't want to go out after it because the weather was bad, but General Vandegrift told them to go and they did. They went through the weather. They didn't get the ships but they found out that dive bombers could travel in bad weather. That was really a good result. I'm very much inclined in this recital to stick to the ground thing, but the fliers were operating from the airfield all the time, every day. I'll look through my notes here and see if I can - ?

MR. FRANK: When did Geiger come in?

GENERAL THOMAS: I've got it down here. You asked the question, when did Geiger come in. He came in about the first week in September.

Now, about the last week in August, Bill Wallace came in. He was the group commander, one half of which had come in on the 20<sup>th</sup>, about 10 days later, I'd say one of the last days in August, he came in. Bill Wallace, who was a real good man, arrived bringing the other fighter squadron and the other dive bomber squadron. The way they got those planes up there was to bring them up – the first ones came in, they brought them in on the carrier Long Island and flew them off into Henderson Field. I can't remember how Wallace came in. He may have come in the same way. Later they flew planes up from Espiritu Santo, which they could do with belly tanks. They could get them in. Geiger arrived about the first week in September, and he brought with him Louis Woods, his chief of staff, and Toby Munn as his intelligence officer. By then the field was going full blast. They'd had a number of flights and a number of strikes and had sunk some ships. By that time, we had a mixed group, because along around the end of August, the Japs and Fletcher's force tangled, and they had quite a fight.

During this time, a Japanese submarine put a torpedo into Enterprise, and Enterprise couldn't recover her planes. So Turner Caldwell, with a mixed group of about 15 planes, came into Guadalcanal. We were very glad to see him. The next day, the Enterprise went away and they just told Caldwell to continue to operate from Guadalcanal.

MR. FRANK: This was known as the Cactus Air Force.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right.

MR. FRANK: What was Geiger's command relationship to Vandegrift?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, that was easy. Vandegrift was the commander, and there wasn't any doubt about it, but he gave 90 percent of his time to running the ground show, and I did the same as his operations officer, in my work, although we kept in close touch with aviation. We were in constant touch with them. Vandegrift was in command, and therefore – like telling Mangrum and Fike to go after those Japanese destroyers the first day when they didn't want to go through the weather, Vandegrift ordered them to go. Vandegrift was in command and there was never any question about it.

Now, he did not run the daily air details. He just couldn't do it. He didn't have the staff to do it. That had to be run by aviation. After Geiger came in, before and afterwards, they ran their own show. We were there together. We were working together. We were very close together. But Geiger and Vandegrift were close personal friends. They were classmates, and there was never any conflict in any way about anything. Geiger ran his show. We ran the ground side of the game. When they wanted something, we did what we could. We were always on the alert to help them, because again I say, we were there to run an airfield, and that's the only reason we were there. The ground fighting that we did was for the purpose of protecting that airfield and keeping those planes in the air. They hammered at the Japanese fighters and they hammered at the Japanese fleet, and that's what we were there for. We couldn't reach them from the ground. And we fought the buggers they put ashore there, but the fight was an air fight, and that's the way it was. It went very smoothly all the time and our relations were the very best.

MR. FRANK: I want to ask you also, at this time it's safe to say that the Americans owned the area by day and the Japanese by night.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's generally true, yes.

MR. FRANK: How about Turner? What's he doing all this time?

GENERAL THOMAS: He's back down there in Noumea. He would come up with transports and then go back. The first ships that came up after the transports took off were old destroyers and they brought (the) aviation-ground detachment up under command of Fog Hayes, former Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps. Hayes brought a lot of gear, aviation gas, things necessary to operate aircraft. He arrived there about three or four days before the airplanes flew in. Then he joined up with Kenny Weir, the division air officer, in getting things ready, waiting for our planes to come in. However, these destroyers coming in showed the transport people that somebody could come in. Now, we needed avgas very badly, early in the game, and though we had plenty of cooking gas, and motor gas, motor fuel, we had not taken any avgas in with us. We had none to load. It wasn't part of the game. So they sent other APDs in. There were two APDs that Fog Hayes came in with and his detachment and they gradually came in, and then they got up their nerve to send the transports back in or send AKAs back in. We had to unload them. They'd come in after daybreak and we would unload them, and they'd be away by the middle of the afternoon. We'd take off what we could by the middle of the afternoon and then they'd take off, because the Japanese owned the sea at night, and they wanted to get as far away as they could. Of course, the Japs couldn't get on them very easily in daylight because we controlled the air. We covered the air around there, and it enemy planes were within a couple of hours of our ships; we would have picked them up and let them have it. We did do that on occasion, when they tried to sneak down and get our people.

Other ships came and went. One very interesting – and I think there's going to be too much to this Guadalcanal thing – but after Edson came over to the island, he didn't want to go and just be an ordinary infantry battalion. He wanted to carry out operations like his raiders were equipped and trained to do. We knew very soon after he arrived there, or about the time he arrived there, that the Japs were building up down to the east of us. As a matter of fact, there was a small handful left over from the outfit that hit Cates on the 21<sup>st</sup>. About the first week in September, we found out that we could get a couple of APDs and a couple of "Yippie" boats. The "Yippie" boats were the tuna boats, and they sent them up there because of the cold storage on them, and they could have meat and frozen supplies. So we laid on an operation that Edson would go down about 18 miles below us to a place called Taivu, where we knew these Japanese had gone. We knew, they'd come in there at night because the boys down at the beach OP could see the waves coming in and going out. They could tell when they went in and when they went out from the way the waves came up on the beach.

So Edson landed at Taiva (sic) and – right after daybreak, from those two destroyers, which gave him some fire support. We were in very close communication. I stayed alongside of the radio all day long, because there were a lot of misgivings in division headquarters about this operation, which I had laid on, and they thought I was wrong. I was taking too many chances with these –

MR. FRANK: - didn't whaling go down?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, whaling did not go with them. He didn't get into the picture at this time very much, but he did later, a great deal. Edson went down and landed with his Raiders, and the Parachutists. They amalgamated the Raiders and the Parachutists,

and they landed, and very shortly, he told me on the radio, he said, "I'm certain that I've landed in the rear echelon of a sizable Jap force." The Raiders drove off the Japs that were guarding the supply dumps and installations, and they just came upon mammoth supplies of gear and food and radios and all manner of things, including a 3-inch gun battery. So they fought these Japs and drove them off. In the meantime, a week before that, we had gotten a dozen P400s which belonged to the Army Air Corps, and we had decided to use them. They had no superchargers and no oxygen for their pilots, so 13,000 feet was their limit of their elevation, but we decided to use them for ground, for close air support. Well, Edson called for them, because he had a pretty good fight there that day, and he realized that he was only fighting a part of this force. The major part of it was gone, but he said, "There's undoubtedly a force there and if they turn around and come after me, I'm in a bad fix."

We sent the P400s down, but they were not up on our air control system so they didn't render the kind of support that we'd have liked, that we had hoped for, but they did get a few Japs and shoot them up. Edson worked there until afternoon, and they destroyed food and cut sacks of rice and poured it on the ground. Then took canvas and put it on a lot of things that they couldn't destroy, threw gasoline over and burned it. They just played hell all the way around. Then we told them to come on home. So they took the four 3-inch guns, put a line on them and dropped them off. Then they got back on their ships and came on back to the perimeter. It was a very successful raid, and among other things, he brought back a terrific amount of paper, written material and maps, and the maps showed that he had landed in the rear echelon of a force of about 4,000 Japs, and the map revealed their plan of attack for our perimeter.

The time now was near the middle of September, and General Vandegrift had gotten the idea that our DP was not in a good place. For one thing, we were in the bomb pattern every day. They were after the airfield and those 90mm batteries and we were right alongside of both. So we decided to move out on the end of the coral ridge that came down through the rain forest. We did move, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September.

In the meantime, despite these charts and maps and things, we thought maybe that would be a fairly quiet place for the Raiders, so we sent them out there on the coral ridge for their bivouac area.

MR. FRANK: I'm laughing because I know what's coming.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, we moved our CP and started to dig in, and the first night that Edson was back there, the Japs hit him. He withdrew down the ridge a ways and that night, - I'm going to leave Edson, who made a Christian of Kelly Turner.

That afternoon, Kelly Turner arrived. Vandegrift met him, brought him up to the Command Post, and when he got there, we went into this little shack that had just been constructed, where Vandegrift and I slept, in the new CP, Turner pulled a piece of paper out of his pocket, and it was a Navy message, an abbreviated estimate of the situation from Ghormley, COMSOPAC, to CINCPAC, in which he discussed the enemy situation and the 25,000 men in transports at Truk which he estimated would be sent against Guadalcanal. He talked about the enemy strength and his weakness, and wound up with the conclusion that it was sort of too bad about the boys on Guadalcanal. That's really the essence of what the whole estimate was about.

Well, Vandegrift read the message and handed it to me, and I read it, and when I was through Turner reached for it. I said I'd like to keep it, and I stuck it in my pocket. I don't know what ever happened to it. I wish I had it now, but I don't.

Turner said, "Vandegrift, I'm not inclined to be as blue about the situation here as Ghormley is." Turner was actually up there to discuss with us the bringing of the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, from Samoa, to Guadalcanal. Now, I'll go back a little and build up a little background, which I should have done before.

Turner was a dispersal-minded fellow, and he had tried to talk COMSOPAC into letting him put the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines ashore 40 miles below us at Aola Bay, where he would build another airfield. At his instruction, we had sent a recruiting – reconnaissance outfit to Aola Bay, because we had some small boats there that we could get back and forth with, and Martin Clemens, whose headquarters had formerly been at Aola Bay, told us beforehand, "There is just no place in that area. It's a mixture of hills and swamps; no place you can build an airfield."

But we sent down there and this reconnaissance party, made up of engineers, came back and reported unfavorably, no chance to build an airfield. But Turner would not be convinced. He said, "I'm still going to put the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines in there. I'm sure we can build an airfield."

Well, he came to Guadalcanal to talk about that. So after I read this dispatch, he said, "Now, Vandegrift, I'm inclined to be as blue about this situation as Ghormley is. Ghormley does not believe that I can get the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines into Guadalcanal. But I have a scheme by which I think I can do it, get them in here. Now, I've got a bottle of whiskey. Let's have a drink, and we won't mention this problem again until tomorrow morning."

So he pulled out a bottle Black Label and we had a drink. Well, I made mine a fast one, because I wanted to talk to Bill Twining, and I went outside and I got Bill, and I handed him the message, and he read it, handed it back to me, and I said, "Bill, this is not going to be another Bataan. If we lose this airfield, every man that can walk is going to take a rifle and all the ammunition and food he can carry, and we're going up the Lunga to the mountain, and we're going to continue to fight."

Well, Bill went off and sat in a corner and worked on a plan to do just that.

Darkness came, and there was something about the whole of the evening that we realized (we) were in for an active night. The Jap seaplanes were over us, and they flew back and forth over us many times. Our people called them various names.

MR. FRANK: "Washing Machine Charlie."

GENERAL THOMAS: Yeah, that's right. So – oh, I suppose it was 9 o'clock, the planes came in and dropped flares over the coral ridge.

By that time, Japanese destroyers were off the island, and they opened fire, and they fired at us for three or four hours, and mostly they fired at the ridge. We were at the end of the ridge and their shells were going over us. But we could see that they were trying to help our attack out and were not shooting at the airfield.

In the meantime, there was some fighting on down by the Matanikau. We had plugged the bar there with a battalion of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines.

The only thing that had been completed at the CP was the communication dugout. They're always first anyway, and they had a pretty good dugout and had great big pile of sandbags all over the place, really well-protected, so Turner and Vandegrift and I went

out and sat down on some steps beside those sandbags, to be sheltered from this 5-inch fire, and there we stayed most of the night.

In the meantime, Kawaguchi – we found out Kawaguchi was in command of the outfit that had landed and was coming up towards the ridge – his outfit was attacking Edson, and they did break through at one place in the line, and Edson withdrew to another knoll about 2,000 yards back down the ridge.

The next morning came. Everything was quiet. No sign of Japs. I sent for - . The previous day, we had a heavy bombing attack. At the time being certain that something was going to happen on the ridge, I wanted to bring the division reserve which was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines at that time up a little closer behind Edson, so I went for Rosecrans, who was in command, and he was bringing George Skinner, his exec. Thus they were right in the middle of the bombing raids so I told them to wait till the raid was over. We had a Condition Red on when I talked to them. But they started out, and a bomb hit alongside of their jeep, and they both got out and lay down on the ground, and a bomb hit nearby and blew them both up. Rosie got over his injuries, but George Skinner never did. He was retired after the war. But they both were badly bunged up, though none of their bones were broken. It threw them up in the air. They had to be evacuated.

Whaling had had command of 2/5, so we sent him down to command it again. He brought it up that night to the position where we wanted it.

Well, the next morning, after this, Vandegrift said to Turner, "I'd like you to see your defenses." So Turner took a jeep. Somebody took him, and aide or somebody. He went over to the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines and then the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines and he came on back. He got back amid a great deal of excitement, because there was a Condition Red on, and the coast watchers had reported a whole slew of dive bombers on the way in.

Well, this was close to noon, and about that time Roy Geiger came up, and Roy was a very phlegmatic fellow, unexcitable, unemotional. But this time he was really concerned and he said, "Vandy, I'm sure the Japs have spotted your CP. Now, you and Turner are going to have a conference, and these dive bombers are on the way, and I want you to go someplace else for your conference."

Well, Vandegrift said, "I'm not going to do it." And old Roy was just vehement about it. So finally he said, "Oh, all right, if it'll make you feel any better, we'll go down to Cliff Cates' place."

So we got in the jeeps, the three of us – I don't know where Geiger went, but Turner, Vandegrift, and I went down to the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines headquarters about a mile away, and the old man said, "Cliff, I want to use your tent a minute."

Cates said, "You're welcome" and he walked on out.

Well, this was a period of height excitement and tenseness, and the three of us, Vandegrift, Turner, and I sat down, and I can just see Vandegrift, and I had the same idea – we were waiting for Turner to start about putting the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines at Aola Bay. When, to our surprise, he looked right at me and he said, "Now, where do you want the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines to land?"

And I said, "Admiral, you see that beach 300 yards away over there? That's where we want them landed, right in this perimeter." And he said, "Well, that's settled. I'll be here in the morning of the 17<sup>th</sup> of September."

Well, it was fantastic, but we made a Christian out of him, right before that, or at least the Japs had.



Turner left that afternoon, and that night the Battle of the Ridge occurred. It was really a night. Edson started the fighting about halfway up the ridge, and we were worried about the security of our CP, so – because the engineers were a little to the left of where we were. So we brought one of their companies up and threw them in on the edge of the rain forest, around to the south of our CP. Not long after dark, the Japs hit Edson out on the ridge. They gave him about three banzais there. Edson's people fought them off, but he in the meantime discovered that the Japs were getting around his flanks by going down in the rain forest. So old Eddie carried out a withdrawal that was a masterpiece, and he fell back about 1,000 yards to another knoll, organized there. By doing that, he managed to tie in with the engineers. I could hear him from where we were, and the bullets were skipping through the trees in our CP, and our engineers killed more than one Jap who tried to slip through the rain forest and get in that way.

MR. FRANK: Didn't Sherman Banta kill a Jap?

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. That was the next morning. So all night long, till after midnight, I could hear – we could hear the screams and the yells – all night long. We were only a few hundred yards from the front lines. And I could hear Edson up there, barking. All night long I could hear him, and then he and I'd be on the telephone, and he'd say, "I need some more of this, I need some more of that; I need some hand grenades," and what not, and we fed things into him all night long. And the Japs gave him three banzais on the last position.

About 4:30 Edson told me, "I've been hit hard, I need some men." I had a company about 100 yards from there with Whaling, and we started to feed them in. We fed them into the line and strengthened Edson's line, and they fought there till daybreak.

At daybreak, Whaling went in with the rest of the men, and took over from Edson, and we pulled the Raider's outfit, the Raiders and the Parachutists, what was left of them, and let them go back down into Whaling's bivouac where they could get some breakfast, and Whaling had the job of burying all the Japs. There were 1,200 dead Japs out on the ridge. In this, the Ridge and the Tenaru were previews of the future. That was between the two nights' battles. Oh, they were slaughtered.

One little angle – when daybreak came on this last position the Raiders held, there was one little lip about 100 yards that just dropped off for 100 feet or so, and the Japs had gotten down underneath there, and when daybreak came they couldn't get away, nor could the Raiders get at them. So this guy Brannon, who was in command of these p400s, and Ken Bailey, who was Edson's -3 came back, and I put the two of them together and said, "Now, you figure out how to get those Japs."

They worked it out on a mosaic, and I went out to watch it, and the P400s came in firing right down against that bank, right down in front of Edson's line, and they killed those damned Japs down there with their .50 caliber guns. They wiped them out.

That was the Battle of the Ridge. We remained there that day, but Vandegrift said, "I think we'd better move back to the old CP." So we moved back and that evening Warwick Brown, the division surgeon came and they put a stretcher down alongside me 0 under my piece of tent, and he said, "It's time you got some sleep." I'd been on my feet for three days.

MR. FRANK: Three days straight?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes. So I went to sleep and I slept that whole night. When I woke up the next morning the sun was shining. (It's almost 4:30, you want to finish this tape?)

MR. FRANK: Well, just a couple of questions. Number one, had the 164<sup>th</sup> Infantry come in yet?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, not yet. Let me get in the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines.

We continued on. This was about the 13<sup>th</sup>, I'm talking about. The morning of the 17<sup>th</sup>, our OP looked out on the water and there wasn't a sight of anything. We felt very low. But the morning of the 18<sup>th</sup>, there they were. They came ashore that day, and that was the turning point of Guadalcanal. I didn't know whether we were going to win before then, but from that day on I did. Because that night of the 18<sup>th</sup>, we had 5,000 more men defending Henderson Field, good fresh ones, too.

MR. FRANK: How about malaria? Had you been hit by malaria yet?

GENERAL THOMAS: A little bit, but that didn't pile up for maybe another month after that. It was very gradual. Oh, we were on Atabrine. Oh yes. Yes, sir, we went on Atabrine within a week after we got there. They discovered the mosquitoes and told us we'd better. They had a very bad malaria situation there, a very bad type of mosquito, you know. So we went on Atabrine, and although malaria whittled us down little by little, and we had men sick with malaria on Guadalcanal, but it wasn't until after we got to Australia that it really hit. Then we had as many as 6,000 in the hospital at one time.

MR. FRANK: When they went off of Atabrine?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, when you went off, because Atabrine is only a suppressive. It is not a cure or a preventive, it is a suppressive. You do not come down with malaria while you stay on Atabrine. Everybody was taking Atabrine every day, the men there, I couldn't take Atabrine because it made me deathly ill, but I took ten grains of quinine every day with a glass of whiskey.

MR. FRANK: It must have been the whiskey.

GENERAL THOMAS: It must have been the whiskey, but I didn't get malaria, not did Vandegrift and Geiger. The old West Indies soldiers never got malaria on Guadalcanal. In Panama, Vandegrift had Blackwater fever. Geiger had had lots of malaria and so had I in Haiti. But we never got it again. And I know, here and there was another old West Indian veteran that had had lots of malaria – they did not get that Guadalcanal malaria.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Marines came in. We discovered that where as we'd thought our back door was closed, it wasn't, it wasn't, and immediately after the Battle of the Ridge, Edson's battle, we started to cut a jungle line through about 2,000 yards out beyond where our CP had been, and 3,000 yards from the airfield. And it was a difficult job, because that rain forest was really something to cut through, but we made it. We cut a jungle line through there. We could not put in fields of fire because it was just too much, but we had lots of weapons. Whaling started the jungle line and when the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines arrived we set the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, under Farrell at the time 0 he stayed out there a couple of days and then Williams relieved him. They built the jungle line, a line that ran from McKelvy's right over to the Lunga, well, I'm guessing now, 2,500 yards. Our back door – but we found out later, we really beat them. But Williams' 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines – in the meantime we started working again on the Battle of Matanikau.

MR. FRANK: I think this is probably a good place to end, but before we end, how were the medical facilities, the medical support? Hade you any great requirement? Had there been many wounded to take care of before the battle of the Ridge action?

GENERAL THOMAS: We had a few wounded all the time. As a matter of fact, the performance of our medical organization was simply marvelous. Of course, we had wounded from the bombing attacks. They didn't do us a lot of damage but there were always some wounded and killed in those bombing attacks, and sometimes they'd bring people in to the hospital and then there would be more than one bombing attack. The doctors, who were just working in shacks that were their operating rooms, they'd just keep right on operating. We had helped them, the Engineers had helped them build some big dugouts right near the ward shacks that they put up. Some of the shacks had thatched roofs, you know, coconut leaves and what not. When a bombing attack was coming in, they had to move under shelter. And they did. It was a terrific job, but they always did it, and their performance was simply remarkable, then and all throughout the whole campaign. I don't remember what our wounded – our killed was about 1,100 on Guadalcanal, but I don't remember what the wounded was. We had a lot of them.

MR. FRANK: How about supply support? Logistics support overall?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, it wasn't bad. We had a lot of things going in during the landing. We were short of food, but after a while the food supply caught up with us, and these ships – we had pretty continuously, day after day, during the last two or three months on the island, there'd be a ship up there every day and unload something, or maybe a couple of ships. When the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines convoy came in of course the whole convoy of ships came in, and Turner not only brought them, he brought a couple of AKAs in. Now, we ran short of aviation gas, very critically short, because the planes really burned it up.

MR. FRANK: Didn't it hamstring you?

GENERAL THOMAS: At first it did, as a matter of fact, at first they had to hoist drums up a coconut tree and drain them out like thank, you know. They worked under the most primitive conditions, and they did a remarkable job. Later we got some trcks and fueling equipment and it eased their life a little bit. Of course they needed more and better food which we didn't hat at first. Later we began to fly food in, so the fliers would have fresh beef all the time.

MR. FRANK: The aviators had to have special rations?

GENERAL THOMAS: A fighter pilot has got to be fed, and he's got to be fed red meat. He can't do it on corned-willy. You've got to have – and Geiger told us, "I'm going to have planes come in here and they're going to bring in things for these boys, they've got to have it."

And always they lived under primitive conditions. But they improved as time went on, and so did everything else. We started a feeding scheme. When we found out the shortage of food, the first thing General Vandegrift said, "Well, we'll go on two meals a day. We'll have a breakfast and we'll have a dinner." So we started a regimen of having breakfast 0 at division headquarters, we'd get up and have a cup of coffee and get a couple of hours' work done, and we'd have breakfast at 8 o'clock, and then we just had dinner at 4:30, and we managed to stay pretty well in stocked liquor so we always had a drink before dinner. But that was such a good arrangement that we kept it up all the time we were on the island. We were fed two meals a day all the time we were on the

island. The boys would go to the beach and work all day long, or go on patrol. They'd have a good breakfast and when they'd get back to their bivouacs at night they'd have a good chow about 5 o'clock. We served two meals a day all the time we were on the island, even after we began to have all the food we could use. And those 'Yippie' boats, with their - cold storage. They were tuna fishing boats and they had a lot of cold storage aboard, so when a transport would come up or AKA, a Yippie boat would go alongside of them and say, "Give me all your meat, everything except what's necessary to get you back to Noumea." And they'd load it into the Yippie boats and they'd carry on there for a week or ten days and wisely issue it out.

MR. FRANK: What about your chaplains? How did they work out?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I had very little contact with them, but I think they did as they usually do, very well. They worked with the outfits and they were there all the time. There all the time. And, of course, the present Bishop Coadjutor of Washington was always there but he was a lieutenant – Paul Taylor.

MR. FRANK: Well, General, thank you – Paul Taylor?

GENERAL THOMAS: Paul Moore.

MR. FRANK: Paul Moore, I was thinking of Paul Taylor. That's very interesting.

**End Session 5.**

GENERAL THOMAS: Going along in my narrative and my talk about Guadalcanal, there were some personnel matters that plagued Vandegrift, but they didn't come to a head until about the middle of September, after the Battle of the Ridge. One thing that moved this towards a solution was the fact that we had had a lot of promotion in field grades, particularly the grade of colonel, who were greatly in excess, and we'd had an order from headquarters – not an urgent order, they didn't press it on us – to send our excess in rank home. Also we should do it because we were not – we didn't need these people, and it's not a good idea to employ people in jobs below their rank.

Vandegrift had a bit of command problem. He had settled some of the business in the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines by sending the commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion home, after he had messed things up over beyond the Matanikau late in August. My position was a little touchy; I was very close to Vandegrift. I was actually, and had been, his closest advisor. Yet I was the junior of the whole crowd, all the regimental commanders and much of the staff. The staff didn't work well. I didn't press on Vandegrift, I never talked about it. I let him arrive at his own conclusions and his own decisions about this matter. I remember one morning, after I think maybe he'd had a fairly sleepless night, because we'd had some difficulties the day before, he called me in. He walked me down the road by the CP, and he said, "I've got to relieve the commander of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines. He's not producing."

Turner had told him, on his visit up there, when Vandegrift revealed to him what he was going to do, he said, "If you hadn't told me you were going to relieve him, I would have told you to do it, because the situation in that regiment is not good, and I earned it in 30 minutes," he said. So he said, I'll have to have a commander of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines."

Well, I had no hesitation. I said, "Take Merritt Edson of the Raiders and put him in command." He said "We'll do that." Then he told me that he was going to relieve the chief of staff and send him home, which he did, and that I would be chief of staff from there on.

That was particularly sensitive. The commander of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines had been a very close personal friend of Vandegrift, and I had handled my relations with the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines with kid gloves. There were things I had to do and I did do them, because they had to be done and the chief of staff wouldn't do them so I had to do them, like when I went into Wellington, I went to the commander of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines and told him that he had to get aboard those ships and quit dilly dallying around. But the matter of the chief of staff, we were married to first cousins.

MR. FRANK: Capers James?

GENERAL THOMAS: Capers James, and we had been close friends, very, very intimate personal friends for years. But it was one of those things, and Vandegrift decided to do it, and I never had any feeling other than that he was justified in doing it.

So, whereas I would have appreciated a little promotion, seeing my friend Capers go on didn't make it any easier. But Vandegrift sent him and recommended me for a spot promotion to colonel, which came back immediately and I took over as chief of staff. My position didn't alter really a great deal, because I'd been going along working in this position intimately connected with Vandegrift, but it wasn't a bad idea to have a junior chief of staff. I'm a pure general staffer, and I believe that the general staff is a part of

the body of the commander. We'll find prevalent, particularly in the Marine Corps, a lot of different ideas. We'll find a great many division commanders who will say, "Well, I want the senior colonel as my chief of staff, and I want senior colonels on my staff." Well, when he does that, he sets up a group of people who feel that they should command in their own name, and when the senior colonel calls a regimental commander to give him an order or tell him something, he says to him, "I'm telling you to do so and so," and that destroy their general staff system, because these people are supposed to be working for the commander, and the best jobs in the division are the command jobs, the regimental commanders. And they should be honored in those jobs because they're the ones that the division commander and his staff lean on really when the fighting starts. But in these setups, and you'll find more than one, where the division commander says, "I want the five senior colonels right up here with me," when the fighting starts – and this had happened more than once – you'll find the five colonels slipping out and the division commander looking down the neck of three regimental commanders who are junior and many times have been denied an opportunity to talk to him. And they're the people who are fighting his war. They've permitted the general staff system to destroy the command chain.

Well, we didn't have that, fortunately, at Guadalcanal. I was the junior. I was junior to all of them, and it worked out very well.

MR. FRANK: Who took over from you?

GENERAL THOMAS: Bill Twining. Twining became the G-3, and had the same old section with Buse and Schwenke there working for him, and by that time we had a couple of youngsters, one of them who is today a colonel, who was a corporal then – Bob Brant – and the other was Dick Kuhn who retired a lieutenant colonel about a year ago. But those two boys had worked their way up in the -3 section to where they were very, very capable, and we gave them, very shortly after – the period I'm talking about – we gave them field commissions.

MR. FRANK: Of course, in a general staff situation the -3 is the kingpin. While the chief of staff 0

GENERAL THOMAS: - well, he has a lot to do with operations, but if the two get out and do it – they've all got their jobs they've all got their spheres, and they're all terribly important and they're almost co-equal. The kingpin's the chief of staff on that thing. He coordinates these gents and their work. But I'm a purist on the general staff idea, and I think it's prostituted now and will be by a great many people. But it worked out well at Guadalcanal.

One small item, small but fairly important in our business. I believe that I have mentioned that the day before the Battle of the Ridge, I had sent for the commander of the division reserve, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, Rosecrans, and he came with his exec to get instructions for that night as to what they were to do. There was a bombing raid on, and I told them not to come till the raid was over. It was one of those days when we had a Condition Yellow for a long time, and we had a Condition Red, and then it went off and then it came back on again. Well, after it went off Rosecrans thought it was safe so he started for division headquarters, and he and his exec, George Skinner, Major George Skinner, got caught. A bomb hit near them, blew them both up. As a matter of fact George Skinner was disabled and still is. He has been all these years.

But Bill Whaling, who had been promoted out of the executive job in the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, was still with the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, and 2-5 was his old battalion, so we sent for Bill and told him to take command of the battalion, and he brought it up, and he was the one who brought the battalion in that night to relieve Edson.

We pulled Bill into division headquarters because I felt the need of a troubleshooter, and he was an ideal man for that. Rugged, fearless, physically like a rock. He didn't want to sit around division headquarters and not do anything and just wait for an opportunity to do a job, so one day he made a proposition that he form a company of scouts. He said, "We don't know what's back in that rain forest, but I can train men to go back there and find out."

I knew enough about Bill to know that he could do it. So we sent out the word, "Bill Whaling is going to form a scout troop and he wants volunteers."

Well, we had the weirdest looking characters that drifted down to division headquarters, and Bill interviewed them. And I remember one day, this red-bearded giant who had come from a 90mm battery, as a matter of fact, and I said, "Why did you come down here?" And he said "Well, we're laying up here behind this barbed wire, and we've been there for two months, and if I don't get beyond that barbed wire and find out what's out here, I'm just going to go nuts."

So those there were the kind of people. Well, Bill took this outfit and he started training them, and they didn't need a lot of training because it was a matter of spirit. He took them out. He'd take them into the woods and take them first on shallow patrols and then on deep patrols. And a little unusual thing about this – these people – most of them turned out didn't want to go on patrols, they wanted to go in pairs, and some of them even didn't want to go with anybody else, they wanted to go as individuals. Day after day or nights, these one and two men would cross through our wire and then fade out into the jungle. Daniel Boones, Davy Crocketts, that's what they were. Probably a good many of them didn't come back, but many of them did, and they brought us a lot of information. Sometimes a confirmation of the presence of Japs, at others confirmation of the absence of Japs in certain areas. "There was nobody there." It was really a grand outfit. I suppose Bill had 100, 125 men, and I remember, when he came in after he'd taken his first group on patrol, and Bill just laughed. He said, "You know, the first Jap we found was asleep, and we were on patrol, and we didn't want to shoot him and make a noise, so two or three of us just aimed at him and hit him in the head with the butts of our rifles." That's the kind of outfit they were. Later we made great use of them, as I'll explain.

I have very little to say about aviation. They came in with the first two squadrons, one fighter and one SBD, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August. They immediately turned to, and started to work. We knew they were there. We kept contact with them daily. We also knew that they were a part of the island garrison and that they came under Vandegrift. We were occupied with our land battle, which then was pretty slim. The fliers did a magnificent job, then and later. Each day they would fly out, send out their searchers, and on one or two occasions, up until early September, they picked up Japanese task forces. The first time I think I've related, they went out after them and they couldn't get them on account of the weather. But another time they went out, and they picked up a task force with several transports. They went after them and they hit them, and sunk one transport.

I believe that that was about the same time, and I believe I've related this, that the carriers were hanging around down south of Guadalcanal, part of Frank Jack Fletcher's fleet. They had a fight with the Japanese task force, and they had been jockeying for position. The Japanese north of the Solomons and the U.S. force south of the Solomons. The planes from Fletcher's fleet found some Japs and hit them. You could never tell for certain whether they got a near miss or a hit, but they didn't do the Japs any good. The Japs' main threat against Fletcher then and later was submarines, was down in that bight between New Britain and Guadalcanal, between the Solomons and those islands to the north, they put a lot of submarines. And they got the Enterprise one day, and I think maybe I've already related this, that Turner Caldwell, not being able – nobody being able to take him aboard, he came back into Guadalcanal.

The fliers kept on working, and they went out day after day. They went up, the Grummans, the F4Fs, day after day we had bombing raids, and every day – sometimes they'd have a warning from the coast watchers, and if we got the warning from the coast watcher on Bougainville, they'd be up and over the bombers before they came in, and when they did they let them have it because they were up high enough to do it. If we didn't get the warning until the coast watchers from New Georgia, then it was touch and go. If the weather was fairly clear, the bombers got in. If it was bad, and they had to jockey for a hole through the clouds, the fighters would get on them beforehand. But every day they shot down bombers.

MR. FRANK: What was the mean time between the warning, say, at Bougainville, and the time the Japanese airplanes would arrive at Guadalcanal?

GENERAL THOMAS: From Bougainville we had about an hour and a quarter.

MR. FRANK: And from New Georgia?

GENERAL THOMAS: About 45 minutes.

MR. FRANK: And that's about the amount of time that it would take –

GENERAL THOMAS: - well, it took an F4F 40 minutes to climb to 30,000 feet, so if we got a report from Bougainville, the Grummans were up there, the Wildcats were up there waiting for them. But if we didn't get the warning until from New Georgia, that's 45 minutes, and the result depended upon the weather. If the weather was bad they'd get on them, because the Jap planes would have to jockey for the hole through the overcast. I've already related that Bob Pepper's 90mm had driven them up to 23,000 feet, and 23, 24 thousand feet. They were up there above the overcast and they had to look for a hole through the clouds to find the island, and to find a target, and in those cases our fighters would usually get on them. There were occasions, and I've related a couple of them, in which we did not get any warning, due to the fact that the coast watchers and radar didn't pick them up in time. However, we were rarely surprised. We usually had our planes on the ground. Nearly all the time we had fighters, torpedo planes, and dive bombers. The torpedo planes and dive bombers and other types of aircraft, maybe the transport planes, were no good against the bombing raids, only the fighters. So when the Condition Red came, the non-fighters would take off and rendezvous over the southern end of Guadalcanal and just fly around and wait till the battle was over. But the Grummans would take off and go after the enemy. But they did this day after day and during our period on the island, between the 15th of August and the 15th of November. In 90 days, we had 75 major bombing raids.



Now, at other times we had other airplanes over. We had Zeros and we had float planes, and they flew Float planes over at night, but I believe I've related that our aviation was never able to – we tried all kinds of schemes to get on those Float planes and shoot them down, but Washing Machine Charlie and people like that – but it just never did work out. They were just a terrific harassing element, and they were over us almost every night.

MR. FRANK: The Zero, being a fighting plane with relatively short range, must have come down from Munda?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no, they came down with belly tanks from Rabaul. Or from Faisi which is south of Rabaul, and a little closer to us. But most of them came from Rabaul. You know, the Zero – and that's another thing. There were all kinds of psychological factors in this South Pacific campaign. The word Zero, as of September 1942, seemed to strike terror into everybody. The Zero, the Zero was a master plane, you know. Well, God Almighty, when our F4Us got up there and started fighting them, they found out that they were a flimsy airplane and they caught fire very easily. The great thing about the F4F was that it was a sturdy well-built airplane, and it would get into a fight and get shot up and very often lose its engine, yet the pilot would glide it on in to Guadalcanal. The air battles were nearly all over Guadalcanal, so that was not as difficult as it might seem. But the Zeros were just flying coffins. Our planes set them on fire just like that. They had no trouble with them. Time after time, we had Grummans come in, just glide in with their engine dead, dead stick landing, but they brought the pilot down. He was alive. We saved the pilot. And the next day they had the old Grumman fixed up and he went back again. They did a magnificent job, and all through September they went up. The searches out of Guadalcanal were by SBDs; that was the best thing we had in the way of a search plane. They'd go out and look for these task forces. They'd pick them up. They'd see Japs. If there was a possibility of getting at them, with dive bombers and covered by Grummans, they'd go out after them. Now, the dive bombers had longer legs than the fighters, but they'd go together. There was one occasion when they had to turn back because the fighters ran out of gasoline, or should have, but the dive bombers kept on, and they got through the clouds and they were in a storm front. They came on a Japanese task force and sank a transport. So, as I say, it was a magnificent performance.

This continued on. I'm going all through now up to the middle of October. It was the daily life – a bombing raid at 12 o'clock almost every day, the fighters took off after them.

MR. FRANK: When did the P38s come in?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, a long time afterwards. I'll mention that now, and then forget about it, because they didn't come in until a short time before we left Guadalcanal.

The P40s came up, and they had rather a sad experience. They went up one day and tangled with the Zeros, and they really came off with the little end of the stick. But they were good boys, those Army Air Corps fliers, and when they got down to about three or four planes, General Harmon (Millard) called them back, down some place in the South Pacific, and there they phased in the P38s, and Dale Brannon, who was a major in command of the P40s, came into Guadalcanal – he brought the P38s back in November. But, of course, by then we'd taken the sting out of the Japs. Most of those 75 raids were

over. But the P38s really gave them the business, because they'd go to 30,000 feet in 15 minutes. All we had to do was have a little radar warning of an incoming attack.

But, as I say, from here on, I'm not going to talk about aviation. It's somebody else's story. But, as I said, and I'll repeat, they were magnificent, and they went up day after day. I remember the day that I stood on the ground and watched. We had four Grummans on the field, and that's all the airplanes that could fly and there were 25 Japanese bombers coming in, and these four boys, led by John Smith went up. They shot down four Jap bombers and all four of them came back again. It was really a wonderful performance, and they did similar things throughout.

There were some very hectic days later on, where they gave us support of another nature, and I'll touch on that later, but I'm going to drop the aviation situation for the moment.

I think I've mentioned that the words "Mouth of the Matanikau" were practically a byword with us. I've mentioned the fact that when the rains started, the water came down off of the side of the mountain range, scoured its way down to the sea, and then when the rainy season was over, the sea would throw up a bar at the mouth of these various rivers, and the gouged out part immediately back of the beach for, oh, sometimes 1,500 yards would be a slough, very deep, maybe not very broad, not more than maybe 150 feet, but almost a barrier. Well, that's what the Matanikau – it was, not almost a barrier, it was one. Dominating that whole area was this so-called Grassy Knoll, Mt. Austen, and Mt. Austen, this big round-topped grassy-covered knoll, descended to the sea through the east of the Matanikau, and a little bit influenced to the west, but particularly the east of the Matanikau, it came down in some very high and precipitous ridges. They were all covered with grass. From the mountains the Matanikau came down abruptly. There were a few places you could cross it, even in the upper stream, but beyond the Matanikau towards Cape Esperance the mountains also came down in ridges, that ended when they were within 150 or 200 yards of the sea.

Well, it meant that as we moved west from the Matanikau, we came against one barrier after another. These the Japanese could and did defend. So we developed a field that was used many, many times. We started to go up to the upper Matanikau, and get across, move along some of the upper ridges, and come down on the Japs toward the sea. MR. FRANK: From their rear?

GENERAL THOMAS: To their rear – well, to their right, and to their rear. We'd drive toward the sea and get them down into the low part where we could get them all with artillery and mortars.

Now I come to the first real battle of the Matanikau. We thought if any person could get a battalion up the river and get it across and get above the Japanese, it would be Lewie Puller. When the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines had arrived on Guadalcanal, we sent the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines out to relieve 2-5, which was then digging the jungle line. Ed Farrell, Farrell was the CO, was relieved there too by Williams, and they took over the job of digging in the jungle line. We had the rest of the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines in hand and moved them out toward the Matanikau, and sent Puller – we first sent the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines to the bar of the Matanikau, and then we sent Lewie Puller – to try to get over these ridges on the lower part of Mt. Austen. We had hoped to deceive the Japs and get up across the river and beyond them. But Lewie had a hard job. It rained. We found out, he found out and

we found out that the slopes of these ridges were almost precipitous, and the rain and the heavy grass made them almost impassable.

Lewie sent back two of his companies and said he'd try to make it with the other two, because his column was strung out so far trying to move. He got over to the Matanikau, but by the time he got there, the Japs had picked him up, and they defended all the possible crossings. They also brought him under some pretty accurate mortar fire. We had some casualties and we had a job getting them down from up there. But Lewie, in an effort to get across, just eased on down the river and finally came down to the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines and he still never was able to get across, understandably.

In the meantime, it had been decided that when he crossed the river, we would send the other two companies of his battalion by boat and land them behind the Japs, and it was not known where Lewie was exactly, but we felt possibly he was across the river. But he had not gotten across. He came down behind Edson's 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, and was there. Lewie had a feeling for combat, naturally so instead of staying there, he beat it for Kukum, and found out that his two companies were under way, and he got a boat and he went over, and that's where the man got up and wigwagged and got himself a medal, and Lewie went ashore behind these two companies, and it was very well that he did because the Japs had ganged up on him, and Otho Rogers, his exec, had been killed. Lewie, by his own force of will, pulled his two companies and brought them out of there, and brought his dead and wounded out with him. There was more than one or two of them.

But it was not a well arranged affair. It's one that we should have stopped, but we didn't. We were just trying to do something, and it just didn't work out.

We had very little news of the outside world during our first couple of months on Guadalcanal, except that we listened to Tokyo Rose every night. We did have occasional visitors. General Marshall sent two officers out from his general staff, two majors, and they stayed with us for some time on Guadalcanal, and when they went back they prepared a booklet about what we were doing there and how things worked out. One of these was a major by the name of Red Reeder, the famous West Point football player, and old Red lost a leg at Omaha Beach later on. They did very well. There were two high ranking travelers who came our way but who didn't come up to see us, and one of them was General Hap Arnold and the other was Lt. General Delos Emmons. While on their way back across the Pacific, after coming as far as Noumea, they expressed a great deal of concern about Guadalcanal and grave doubts as to whether the Marines would be able to hold out. They didn't think we would. They said, "There's another Bataan coming and so you'd better get ready for it." But if they'd just come up to see us, maybe we would have been able to convince them that we were going to hold out.

We had one great supporter, the commander of the U.S. Army forces in the South Pacific, who was General Millard Harmon of Air Corps, Army Air Corps chap, and he was Ghormley's deputy for Army matters. He came up to see us and he sent his people up to see us, and of course his chief of staff was Nate Twining, Bill's brother. He came up and he sent his G-3 up on occasion, and so Harmon became one of our real backers and one of our real supporters, and he came up one day and spent a day with us, and he was there during a raid and he watched the Grummans go up and shoot these Japs down.

Well, it had a little influence about two weeks later. One day, in the late morning Ghormley was having a conference, and these officers were in there, when he was handed

a message saying that a Jap force of 25 planes had attacked Guadalcanal and that the Cactus Air Force planes had gone up and shot down 23 of the 25.

Well, I understand that when they read this message, there was a great deal of skepticism on their part, particularly of naval officers, and Harmon spoke up and said, "Gentlemen, I believe there are a good many here who don't believe this. But I was on Guadalcanal the other day, and I saw almost an equal performance to this, and I believe every word of what those people told us. They actually shot down 23 planes today."

He helped us in more than one way. Near the end of September, we had a very useful visitor. He had a touchy sort of approach because it was raining and we realized that this plane was having trouble getting in. It was a B-17 and it landed, and in it was Admiral Nimitz, and with him were three members of his staff, important members of his staff – Bill Callaghan, his logistics officer, Ralph Oftsie, his air officer, and Omar Pfeiffer, a Marine colonel who was his chief planner.

MR. FRANK: The field was able to take B-17s by now?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yeah, we took 'em all the time. Oh, they came in. They didn't have any trouble. B-17s can come in on 3000 feet without any trouble at all. We had trouble getting the Nimitz plane in because it got lost, and to that there was quite a story. It was written up later in the National Geographic. This navigator didn't have any navigating charts on the B-17. And Ralph Oftsie, who's dead now, long dead – he later became an admiral and was CINCSOUTH in Naples, and came home and died of cancer – he said, "I didn't mind passing an island twice, but when we passed it the third time, I thought I would go up and talk to the navigator." Of course Ralph was an old Navy flier, so he said "I said, lad, can I help you out? I think we've passed the same island three times."

And he said this young Air Corps navigator said, "Yes, we have."

He said, "Well, let me see your chart."

And he said, "He handed me a page out of the National Geographic on which was depicted the Solomon Islands, and that's what he was navigating by."

So Ralph took over, and with the navigator, they brought the B-17 on in to Guadalcanal, but that's how close we came to losing our fleet commander.

MR. FRANK: How the heck can a major B-17, any plane carrying a VIP party, including Nimitz, take off without any navigation orders?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, that was the life in those days. We had many of those kinds of affairs. The war was very loose, and you would have thought somebody would have put something in this plane, but they didn't. As a matter of fact, they didn't have any charts. If they'd had any – now, B-17s conducted searches to the north and west of us, and I remember Admiral McClain saying, "I send those boys out, but I never know whether they're coming home or not," and a lot of them didn't get back. And a lot of them used to drop into Guadalcanal when they were out of gasoline, on the way home from a search, and we didn't want to see 'em because we were short of gasoline. A B-17 took a lot of gas. Well, after a while we decided, "We won't give 'em much gas, just give 'em enough gasoline to get home on and tell 'em to go on home." That was our program from then on.

Well, Nimitz visit did us a lot of good, and we talked things over. We talked to him about relations between commanders – Turner was always dipping into affairs relating to Guadalcanal. We talked to Nimitz about all of these things, and he was a very

able, a very friendly, a very wonderful man, and that night that he was on the island, Vandegrift and I talked to him for a long, long time, sitting there in the dark. He asked us a lot of questions and we answered them. The next morning we lined up about a dozen of our heroes, and he pinned medals, Navy Crosses, on them. We brought Rupertus over and gave him one. They had quite a bit of trouble getting off. As a matter of fact, their plane almost ground-looped in getting off, because we'd had a lot of rain the night before. We had another B-17 there so we didn't send him off in the first one. He got in another one, and he finally got away.

During this visit, I concentrated on Pfeiffer. Pfeiffer had worked for Turner in Navy Plans. Pfeiffer was a great planner. He had worked for Turner, and he knew him very, very well. Thus he understood all the things that I'd said to him about Turner and about the difficulties that we'd had with him and what a hair shirt he was proving to be for Vandegrift. And I knew that Pfeiffer would have a way to see that this information got through. It was a great lift to us, this visit of – from Admiral Nimitz.

MR. FRANK: When was this; in September?

GENERAL THOMAS: September 30<sup>th</sup>. He got there September 30<sup>th</sup>.

MR. FRANK: This is getting close to the time when Ghormley was relieved.

GENERAL THOMAS: That came not long after that, and I hope to be able to catch that as I go along.

MR. FRANK: Was there any hint of it?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, no, no. It's just something way beyond our thinking.

Along about this time, or even before this visit of Nimitz, we realized that Rupertus was sitting over at Tulagi with a pretty sizeable outfit, and that we were doing all the operating and fighting on the Guadalcanal side. So we told him to send us a battalion of the Second Marines. Late in September Bob Hunt's 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Marines, came over to Guadalcanal and we started to use them, but it came close enough to the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines arrival so that actually we had four fresh battalions on the island.

MR. FRANK: Did you anticipate the Army coming in? Had you and advance. . .

GENERAL THOMAS: No, no. One of the – it's just as well to bring it up now. It was the theory at that time that the Marines would go in and seize a beachhead and that the Army would come in and relieve them, and it was our feeling, though we had very little to go on, that we would go in and secure Guadalcanal, and that the Army would ten relieve us. There was no murmur of that during the early weeks. But when we saw we were in for a long and enervating operation, we started to think about that. We started to talk about the Army coming in to relieve the Marines.

MR. FRANK: That was basic amphibious doctrine.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. But Turner's outfit, who were determined to go on up to the Solomons, had a different idea, and I'm sorry to say that our Marine officer on his staff, Linscott, subscribed to it. I remember one time when Linscott came up with Turner on a transport, maybe when the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines came in. He came ashore and he said, "You're never going to be relieved up here. We're going to secure this island, we'll send enough men," and all that kind of stuff, and "you will have movies and recreation here, you're never going to leave here."

Well, that wasn't our idea at all. Our idea was that we'd do all the fighting we could and then our division should come out and go some place where we could have a rest. However, it was a moot question, whether the Army would relieve the Marines.

What we referred to as the Third Matanikau – by this time, 3/7 was out on the jungle line. Out near the Matanikau were the rest of the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines and the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines. We determined again to try to get over the upper reaches of the Matanikau. Our scheme of maneuver was that the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines would close in at the lower part of the river, around the bar, and that we would – instead of trying to get over the bar, over which we'd already lost a lot of men, trying to get over this little thing, that we would bridge the lagoon.

MR. FRANK: How far inland was that from the beach?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, four or five hundred yards in from the beach.

MR. FRANK: In other words, this spit that in the dry season would form a lagoon back of it . . .

GENERAL THOMAS: It formed a lagoon back of it. So the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, two battalions of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, leaving one in beach defenses, started to close in to the mouth of the river, and they found a pocket of the Japs had been established east of the river. So Edson asked for a company of the raiders, which were still on the island, and we sent them out to him, and he used them to reduce the Jap pocket. Edson was in command of this whole operation, the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, two battalions of the 7<sup>th</sup>, Hunt's battalion, 3-2, and also Whaling's Scouts. Well, our scheme was that the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, less a battalion, and Whaling's Scouts would go upstream, and then come down. Well, our scheme was that the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, less a battalion, and Whaling's Scouts would go upstream, cross and then come down. Well, that took a day or two, and the Raiders harassed these Japs in the pocket on the east bank, and finally the Japs decided to attack, with the result that they killed a bunch of Raiders but the Raiders killed the 200 Japs, and then moved on down to the edge of the river.

The maneuver force, then 2-5 and 3-5 moved down to the river, ready to cross; upriver, at a crossing which was always later known as Whaling's bridge, where he with his Scouts let Hunt's battalion, and behind him was Sims with Hanneken and Fuller's battalion of the 7<sup>th</sup>. Whaling got across; Hunt followed him and then Hanneken and then Puller. As these outfits went across, they were in column, and one would peel off to the right, first Whaling's Scouts and then Hunt's battalion, peeled off to the right and headed towards the beach, and then Hanneken peeled off and Puller went on behind Hanneken and he peeled off, and our line then extended well out across the ridges.

As they moved, Puller's Scouts observed a very unusual situation. As I've said all along, the Japanese wanted to fight at night and sleep in the daytime. Puller's Scouts came up over a ridge and looked down in a valley between there and the next ridge, and there was a large number of Japs in bivouac. Well, Lewie brought up his mortars, got everything that he had ready, and then told the artillery, "I've got a big target, give me everything you've got," and all at once mortars and artillery descended. They destroyed a Jap regiment. Over 600 Japs were killed in that valley, and we didn't lose a man.

About as that was happening, there was an occurrence that was repeated more than once. While this operation was going on, we were being warned that another Jap task force was headed our way. We were still, as always when we were on the island, alert to the possibility that they should come if they wanted to get the airfield, really get the airfield. Of course they were in command of the sea. So we had to tell Edson to have everybody move to the beach, wipe out what Japs they could between, and that the whole force would conduct a security operation and move back across the Matanikau. I got in a

jeep that afternoon, I remember, and went out, because I wanted Edson and Sims to know why we were giving up this very promising operation. But we had to do it, because we were warned that the Japs were just about to come on us.

Much of our information – these warning came from COMSOPAC. At the same time we also had a great deal of information that we had taken from captured Japanese during the current battle on the Matanikau.

MR. FRANK: Buckley and his people collected it?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, by this time everybody knew that they ought to get all the papers and maps, and if they found a dead officer with a map case, they should send it on in, and they did, and we had a lot of information that we had gotten like that.

MR. FRANK: Iseley and Crowl, in their amphibious history of the Marine Corps, mentioned that some combat correspondents scooped up a poncho filled with papers.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, you mean one of our people?

MR. FRANK: No, he didn't say who it was. They said it was a correspondent. It might have been Dick Tregaskis. How about Tregaskis? He was there with you all the time, wasn't he?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yeah. He stayed all through that early Guadalcanal campaign. He was with Edson most of the time.

MR. FRANK: You say his book made the First Division a household name?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes, sure did. The Guadalcanal Diary? Oh, Dick was a real guy.

We had a warning as I was saying and also by this time the aviation had reported that there'd been landings up above us toward Cape Esperance and that they'd seen tanks.

MR. FRANK: The northwest part of the island?

GENERAL THOMAS: The northwest part of the island, and they'd seen tanks and they'd also seen several heavy artillery pieces. So we thought we could see something coming, and so we started to pull in our horns. For one thing, Puller's battalion had had two pretty rough shows, so we pulled him in and sent him to the jungle line, south of the airfield, and sent Williams' 3-7 back to Sims. We brought all these people back into the perimeter. We had the – one battalion of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines was to hold the mouth of the Matanikau, and we gave them two halftracks because there had been a report of tanks. One battalion of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines guarded the bar across the Matanikau. They didn't have to worry about the Japs crossing as we'd pulled in our foot bridges. Out people had no worry about the bayou because they had it under observation.

During the time that I – about this time, we had had the welcome information that, probably, due to the good will of General Harmon, the Army commander, we were going to get more reinforcements, and that in about ten days or two weeks we would have the 164<sup>th</sup> Infantry with us on Guadalcanal. There was also at the time a small operation, but a very good one and it worked out quite successfully. The Japs had gotten ashore – how, whether they came off destroyers or submarines, we don't know, but down to the south of us on Guadalcanal, Clemens' Scouts had reported that there were two Japanese groups, one about 45 men one about 50 men, that had radio stations set up. They were obviously reporting the passage of U.S. ships and airplanes, as they were down below us on the island. So we told Bill Rupertus to send outfits of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marines over there and wipe these places out. We coordinated a very good operation.

Martin Clemens went down. One of the Japs set-ups was right near Aola Bay, and Clemens went down with some of his Scouts, got ashore, set up a rendezvous point close to the nearest of these Jap posts. Then he met a company of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marines led by Jack Stafford. They got ashore, moved down on this Jap outfit and killed every one of them, destroyed their radio.

The other company, which was to go down on the same morning, got lost, and the Japs saw them coming and they took off for the boondocks. They killed some of the Japs, but it was not as successful an operation as the first.

Near this time, we made our first contacts with the resident commissioner of the Solomon Islands. His name was Marchand. He'd been a great many years out in that area, and when the Japs had come in to Tulagi where his headquarters were, he and the Bishop of Melanesia had taken some loyal natives and some of the boys from the school that the Bishop ran ashore at Purvis Bay near Tulagi, and they had gone over to the island of Malaita down below us. There t natives were friendly and protected them. We sent for Marchand as he wanted to come over. He actually was the civil head of all the area. We brought him over in an old Grumman amphibian called a DUCK. He told us about another group of Japanese who were on the end of Malaita, about 50 of them. So we concocted another raid there. We sent a group of about a company from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marines to Malaita, and it was arranged that guides would meet them on Malaita, which they did, and then at night they led this company of Marines down to where these Japs were.

**End of Tape 1, side 1, Session VI.**



*Tape 1, side 2, Session VI, 23 September 1965*

GENERAL THOMAS: As I said, reminiscent of Samar, the Marines waited until the Japs all went into the mess hall. The natives had told them they all went in to breakfast every morning. When they did this, the Marines opened up and killed the last one of them. Just before midnight, the night of October 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, we saw some gun flashes. We climbed up on our hill near the CP and watched it, and we knew that something was going on. It's like the Northern Lights, a naval battle 40 or 50 miles away. You can see the lights but it's sort of like the Aurora Borealis, low on the horizon. We didn't hear any sound but we knew that something was going on up there.

At daybreak the following morning our planes were off to go over to the battle area, which was in the vicinity of Savo Island. They reported seeing men in the water. In the meantime our boats had started in that direction. What had happened – we got this later and I won't go over this, because we got it later as I say – our boats came back bringing quite a sizeable number of American sailors, including the captain of the destroyer Duncan, Whitey Taylor, and Lou Bryan, his exec, who were both old Navy football players. Taylor is now in submarines. I don't know what Whitey's job is, but he's a vice admiral, down in Norfolk.

Taylor and Bryan told us the story of what had happened the night before. Admiral Normal Scott had come up with a task force, the Boise and the St. Louis, I remember, and the Salt Lake City were in the task force, and the destroyer Duncan was in the van. They sent the Duncan up to Savo Island to sweep the Slot coming down between the islands, and when they did, they immediately reported a Japanese task force coming down.

Well, these outfits started firing at each other, and they all suffered damage, but both sides shot at the Duncan – Japanese and Americans shot at the Duncan and sunk her. It was the Duncan's crew that we picked up. An accident had marred the whole affair, from the American viewpoint. Apparently our naval people had not realized the hazard of keeping a Scout plane, an SOC on the catapult on a cruiser during the battle. The – so, or before that – the Salt Lake City, in flying off their airplane, the SOC, had trouble. And he had flares aboard, and they went off, and they had a hell of a time. We rescued the pilot that flew the airplane. We found him on a raft about five days later. Later on, the fleet realized what they were up against, and when they came up – when task forces came up to Guadalcanal – they'd fly their Scout planes off well to the south. These would shelter in Tulagi harbor.

Well, that flying in of the Scouts had the advantage also of permitting them to send us a message, because as they approached the Solomons, the upper Solomons, the ships maintained radio silence on, and there was no communication between us. We could send them messages but they could not reply. They could send us messages by their Scout planes, and they always did, except on one occasion. They would tell us what to do with our airplanes and with our PT boats.

Scott's battle was an inconclusive fight, but it stimulated us, because that was the first naval effort. We'd been there two months and three days, four days, but that was the first naval effort in our defense, when Norman Scott brought those people up that night.

I've recorded the members of the 164<sup>th</sup> Infantry must have gotten the idea that it was a mistake that should ever have come to Guadalcanal. They came in early in the

morning in a task force brought up by Turner. At noon, a flight of bombers came in which had not been picked up by coast watchers or radar. We don't know how they got in but they did and dropped their bombs all over the place, including on the beach where the 164<sup>th</sup> was unloading. The Army lost several men as a result of this bombing raid.

They hadn't any more than gotten over that when a group of dive bombers came in, covered by Zeroes, and they also plastered the island and the beach. So it was a real rough day.

MR. FRANK: The Marines were armed with 03 rifles, and they still had – I'd heard that when the first air raids came in, the Marines were so used to that that when the Army dispersed, the Marines went down to the beach, took the M-1s that the 164<sup>th</sup> brought in, left the 03s. . .

GENERAL THOMAS: No, no, they didn't do that. They stole a lot of gear from them. They stole a lot of food and what not. But no, the Marines were devoted to the 03, and later – I'll come on – no, I'll take this up on the visit of General Holcomb.

We were still equipped with the 03, and the 164<sup>th</sup> had the M-1. I'll touch on that later.

MR. FRANK: That's another sea story.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, we stole the 36<sup>th</sup> Division's Browning automatic rifles in World War I, but no, they didn't lose and M-1s at Guadalcanal.

The same evening that the 164<sup>th</sup> came in, we had a new visitor. He's called Pistol Pete, and he was apparently (a) 150mm gun, the large gun that the fliers had reported they saw out to the west of the Matanikau. He opened up, and started dropping shells around the airfield. He occasionally hit the strip, but he didn't fire many rounds, but he was a damned nuisance, because the fliers didn't want to get on that airstrip with Pistol Pete out there. However, he was not a terribly big handicap, and that night after he opened up, Vandegrift sent off a message asking for a 155mm battery to take him on, because we didn't have anything that could reach him. The fliers searched for him day after day, but they never could find him. We found out later, the Japs would bring the gun down towards the beach, fire a few rounds, and then take it back up the draw, and camouflage it and cover it over so the fliers never could pick it up.

MR. FRANK: What was the heaviest artillery you had at that time?

GENERAL THOMAS: The 11<sup>th</sup> Marines – we did not bring up our 155 howitzer battalion, which was the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion. We had 105s, that's all we had, 105s.

Despite the bombing raids, the 164<sup>th</sup> got ashore, and – but it was a long day's work, and their loading had been broken into twice. We were thus able only to move them over into the perimeter, and tell them to bivouac in areas near the beach defenses where a lot of foxholes were available. But the next morning, about 2 o'clock, the Japs really opened up on us. We had the biggest night on Guadalcanal. There were two battleships, several cruisers, and a bunch of destroyers lying off there, and for two hours and twenty minutes they threw everything they had right in the middle of us. It was a terrific bombardment – 17-inch shells – division headquarters was lying behind the little coral ridge, and every one in a while a shell would impact on the ridge, and occasionally one would hit a tree and we'd hear the damn thing come crashing down over the place.

I don't remember being awfully worried that night for myself, although we were just in a bit of a narrow trench. We did worry about bombs because they could come right in your hole with you, but we didn't feel that gunfire could. From 2 o'clock in the

morning until 4:20, they let us have it with everything they had. The next morning the airfield was just a shambles – the planes shot up, ruined, and damaged, everything. More than that, the aviation personnel which had been bedded down in and around the airfields was scattered, because they had tried to get out of there. The airfield was the impact area. That's what they were shooting at, although there were lots of overs and lots of shorts. They were shooting at the airfield and these lads tried to get out and get over where there was more shelter, and some of them were killed trying to. The result was our heaviest losses were in aviation. However, we had a surprisingly small number killed and wounded that night, only 40 men killed.

MR. FRANK: I understand from someone I've spoken to who had undergone the naval bombardment that was about the worst of anything.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I don't think there's any doubt about that. Oh, yes. That was the worst night on Guadalcanal. There was no doubt about it. But there was the 164<sup>th</sup> Infantry lying out on the ground. They did get into holes with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines. They took them in. And they only had two men killed out of the whole 164<sup>th</sup> regiment.

Well, I was worried that the 164<sup>th</sup> would go to pieces as a result of it, and they couldn't have been blamed if they had, but it did not affect them. They seemed to be all right. For that I give credit to the regimental commander, who was a real sturdy guy. His name was Bryant Moore. He was a West Pointer, a very austere man. His friends were worried about him, because they said, "Here's Bryant bucked off here with a National Guard regiment, and he's never going to get any place, and he's a really good man."

Well, later we were able to give Moore a recommendation, and he went on to be ADC of a division landing in Europe, commander of the Trieste garrison, superintendent of West Point, and died commanding a corps in Korea. So he got his rights. But we helped him. We talked to General Marshall about him later on. He was a good man and he had a good regiment, and he handled them like a czar. You know he could bust a company commander and make him a first sergeant and make the first sergeant company commander, and he did on one occasion.

Of course, the big job for aviation after the bombardment was to get those planes back in the air, because the Japs didn't come in just to bomb us for fun. They had something on their minds. So the airfield worked all day long trying to get planes in the air. Finally at 4 o'clock they got one plane in the air. That one plane went up the Slot beyond Guadalcanal, and there he spied a force of cruisers and destroyers bringing in six transports. And all of them were headed for Guadalcanal, and about 100 mile away.

By late afternoon they had five dive bombers in the air, and also some Wildcats, and they went after the Jap transports, and although they bombed them some, they didn't hit any of them but they had some near misses from them. That night, Pistol Pete opened up again with the 150mm gun and he threw a few more shells in on the airfield. Also that night two cruisers and several destroyers came in and shelled us again.

The next morning, our OP on the west reported six transports all lying off the beaches between the Matanikau and Cape Esperance, unloading troops. We had a good many planes despite events. There was something that Geiger did as a result of this gun firing, this 150mm gun. He got as many of his planes as he could away from the airfield. The airfield was the first 3000 feet east of the Lunga River, but then it ended and there was a grassy area of probably, oh, 1500 yards, level grassy area between the end of the runway and the Tenaru, where the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines held their line. Well, Geiger moved his

planes over onto this grassy strip to get them away from this 150mm gun that was firing at the airstrip, with the result that both of these bombardments, he saved a lot of airplanes with only damages that normally would have been destroyed alongside the airstrip by the fact that they were up there, and that was out of the main impact area. After we spotted the six Japanese ships, he got some planes in the air right away and they went after them right at daybreak, and they just lambasted those ships all morning long, and set three of them on fire. They worked over the ships and also worked over the area right at the bow of this vessel where the enemy had been landed with gear and what not. They set three of the transports on fire and the Japs, apparently feeling they couldn't get them out, beached them, and just shoved them ashore. The other three stayed till about 10:30 in the morning and then they took off. Now, how much they got ashore or whether they got everything ashore, we never knew, but we could guess that all of them got something ashore and that we had some thousands more men up there.

One of the mystifying things that happened that day was that the Japanese cruisers and destroyers, about two cruisers and four destroyers, all day long – and I went out and watched them because I went out to the OP where I could see. They were some 30 miles away but I could still see with my glasses – those combat ships just went around in an enormous circle between Florida Island and Savo, all day long. Well, if those monkeys had come down off the island and thrown an occasional shell into our airfield, we never could have operated. As it was the aviators just lambasted those people all day long, set three of their ships on fire, and caused them terrific casualties. But those Jap cruisers, apparently it never occurred to them they could do that, but they could have, and it would have been a real handicap to us.

MR. FRANK: Where was our fleet at the time? Where was the American fleet?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, well, our fleet didn't come up there. We didn't – now, Norman Scott came there the night of the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup>, but that encouraged us, that our fleet was now going to try to help us, and they had not appeared there before. As I said before, that's two months and three days since we landed on that island. Now, some combatant vessels did come up. No – the Navy – we were out on a limb. And they didn't have very many vessels, because after all they lost those four cruisers in the First Battle of Savo, and then Frank Jack Fletcher played around down off the islands, and they lost two carriers. He lost both the Sara(toga) and the Enterprise.

MR. FRANK: No carrier aviation then.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, there was practically none. So – there wasn't at the moment, there was some later, when the Wasp and the others came out. But no, no, there just wasn't much help. We were up there by ourselves. But we felt greatly encouraged. They were going to reinforce us on land, and they did. We had a full division, with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marines over in Tulagi, with one battalion on Guadalcanal, and we had the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, which were a great outfit, because before the 7<sup>th</sup> went out, you know, we just loaded them with talent. They were a talented outfit, and of course they were a physically sound outfit, that was one thing. They were the only outfit that went into the Samoan Islands that came out healthy, because Charlie Barrett, when he got out there, had had the wisdom to insist on an area for his camps out away from the native populations, and what natives that were near, he made them move them out, and he reduced – he had very little contact between his people and – and he set out, in areas adjacent to this camps, and cleaned out all the areas that might have mosquito breeding

places. They really cleaned it out, with the result that the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines came in without any malaria and without any mu-mu. The others didn't, but the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines were a clean outfit. It was due to the fact that Charlie Barrett had been so meticulous and about taking care of his people on western Samoa.

All right, but, as I say, we had a full division, using our own 7<sup>th</sup>, that was back. We had in addition the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marines, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, and now we had the 164<sup>th</sup> Infantry. And we felt we could whip the whole Japanese Army. The turning point was the day, the 18<sup>th</sup> of September, when we saw the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines land, that we said, "We're going to win this war." We never said we weren't, but from that day on we said we were going to win it. But by the middle, despite all this bombing – and when these six transports came in and took the terrific beating from our air, during the time they were trying to land, and three of them beached and burned up, we didn't feel that what men they got off of those ships were going to help them a great deal. But they did get a lot of men and they did get a lot of material, and we were very sure about that.

The next night, that was the night of the 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup>, we took a bombardment from the sea. 1500 eight-inch shells were thrown in on us from cruisers, and they wrecked a few more airplanes but we still had a lot left.

In the meantime, Vandegrift radioed for more airplanes. He said, "We're being punished, we've just got to have aircraft." So the afternoon of the 16<sup>th</sup>, coming up was the VMG-221, Joe Bauer, Lt. Colonel Joe Bauer, or maybe Joe was a major. As the squadron came in from Efate down to the south, they were told that there was a bunch of Vals, Japanese dive bombers, over Tulagi, apparently trying to get at the ships that we had in the harbor at that time. So Bauer's squadron dropped its belly tanks and went after them. Joe Bauer shot down four of them before he ever landed on Guadalcanal.

MR. FRANK: He was an Indian, "Indian Joe" Bauer, wasn't he?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I don't know whether he was an Indian or not, but Joe Bauer was an old Naval Academy football player. So they came in. It was a real successful afternoon. But we did have one had break that day. We were always short of aviation gas, and the McFarland came up, an old four-stacker, with gas, and by that time we had a Pontoon barge which was a nice long thing, as long as from here to the corner, and it was loaded with gas. There was a Condition Red, and those same Vals that Joe Bauer went after, and so the youngster who was coxswain of the Pontoon barge said, "I'm going to cast off."

The captain called him and said, "You cast off and I'll shoot you. I'm going to unload this ship, and you stay where you are."

Well, he finished unloading, and they separated, and at that instant the dive bomber came in and put a bomb right on the McFarland's fantail, amongst his depth charges, killed 25 men and wounded 50 or 60, and the McFarland limped into Tulagi and there it stayed for months, just due to this man's stubbornness. The coxswain tried to tell him that he was in dire danger but he wouldn't believe him.

This is not a big war matter, but it was a very heartening day. Of course, all through the war our Navy was reading the Japanese codes, and we got a lot of information. As a matter of fact, most of the intelligence COMSOPAC furnished us came from code breaking. We had some vessels, destroyers and what not, over in Tulagi harbor. I don't know why they happened to be there but they were. And apparently the Japs decided to lay on a raid. This was about three or four days after the big

bombardment. The Japs decided to put on a raid, and the way they were going to do it – and they had specified in their order, which had been picked up and was furnished to Geiger. On Guadalcanal, they were to send eight dive bombers in to hit our air strip and prevent our fighters taking off. Then they would follow with 15 dive bombers, 30 minutes later. The 15 dive bombers would hit the Tulagi harbor and get after these vessels that we had in there.

Well, we read the mail, Geiger had the dope, so the next morning half an hour before daybreak, he put all of his airplanes in the air, and he denuded Henderson Field. He didn't even have anybody near it. Our dive bombers and others had gone down south to rendezvous down there, but he sent all of his fighter craft, of which he had 18 or 20, over Tulagi to try to protect those ships.

Of course this information went to the 90mm batteries, and we had one right down on Kukum Point, where these people were to come in, right over Kukum Point, and we had that dope on them. So the next morning about 6:30 here came these eight dive bombers. They were the first echelon to come in. And they came in a 10,000 feet. And the 90s waited till they got the prime range, and the first volley of four shells took six of them right out of the middle of the formation, and sent one of them away smoking.

Over Tulagi, the fighters were waiting for the 15 dive bombers, and when they came in they got them all. We got that on code breaking, and it was a real heartening victory.

Geiger, who had gone to the 90mm battery to watch the planes coming in over Kukum 0 well, the fliers never liked anti-aircraft. It's a hostile outfit to them, even though they're friends, I remember old Roy coming by the CP afterwards and he said, "My God, those anti-aircraft people are just fantastic!"

It was certainly an unusual day. Something else happened that day that put a different aspect on everything. We got the word that Halsey had relieved Ghormley as COMSOPAC. Now, this I learned later was what Nimitz really came out about, to go over the situation and decide what he was going to do about it. Bill Halsey had a reputation as a down-to-earth fighting man, and when we heard that he was in command down at – it gave everybody a lift.

When we got the 164<sup>th</sup> Infantry, we already had had three tries at the Matanikau, so we started thinking about what we were going to do next. We always wanted to keep punching at the enemy. In the first place, a little offensive didn't cost you too much in personnel, always kept your men alive, and that's something we had to think about on Guadalcanal. So we did some rearranging of our outfits. But this time the 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Marines had seen quite a bit of fighting, and also their malaria rate had started to climb, despite the Atabrine that everybody was taking. They were having malaria. So – and also the Raiders had departed on the transports that brought the 164<sup>th</sup> in. They were a battered outfit. We sent them back to New Caledonia.

MR. FRANK: Paratroopers also?

GENERAL THOMAS: The paratroopers had left when the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines came in – they went out on that convoy, because they were sadly decimated and they'd had some command difficulty. Bob Williams had been wounded, and we had sacked the exec – Williams had been wounded at Gavutu and had gone – and the exec turned out to be a horrible dud and we had to sack him, and we had a captain in command of the paratroopers.

MR. FRANK: Was this the exec that something was a little weird about him?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yeah, yeah, he was no good.

MR. FRANK: He'd been written up. Tregaskis wrote about him. This was the guy who had thrown dynamite in the caves, and had his clothes blown off and everything.

GENERAL THOMAS: I dunno. The first week after the big bombardment and the beaching of the six transports, we did some more reorganizing. As I said, we pulled the 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Marines. They'd had their crack at things, so we pulled 3-5 in from the bar at the mouth of the Matanikau and sent 3-7 out there to guard it, and bedded down the 164<sup>th</sup> Infantry within the perimeter not far from Division Headquarters, waiting to decide what we were going to do. Puller was out on the jungle line. We thought we should add more strength in the vicinity of the Matanikau, so we had Sims put Hanneken's battalion on the nearest ridge that came down from Mt. Austen back of the mouth of the Matanikau, and there he was. And we sat to catch our breath again.

Then on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October we had a very wonderful visit from the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Holcomb. Holcomb came out really to find out what was going on. He brought with him Ralph Mitchell, who was director of aviation, a major general. He brought his G-3, Colonel Walter Rogers, Bill Riley, who was his JCS planner and his aide, "Bunnie" Brunelli, and Phil Berkeley, who was the communications officer from division headquarters. Well, it was a great thing to have General Holcomb come and spend a day or two with us. He's always been an inspiring figure. We talked a lot. We talked about his problems and his problems with Turner, the amphibious doctrine which Turner was violating, the relief of the Marines and what not by the Army and all, and we sat with Holcomb a long time at night talking to him.

Another thing that came up during this visit, and it had been revealed before, I suppose near the end of September – General Vandegrift then had had a letter from General Holcomb saying, "As you know, August next year I'll be 64 years old, and I have no plan to stay on. I don't want to stay on because I've refused to let other over-64 officers come to active duty and I think I should retire, and it's my intention to recommend you as my successor as Commandant." As with everything Vandegrift got, he showed the letter to me, and he told me at the time he said, "I want to know if you'll go back with me when I go?"

He continued, "I want you to be the director of plans and policies."

Well, he wasn't to go back until pretty nearly a year, and I said, "I'll have a good tour in the combat zone – yes, I'll go back." Of course, I would be made a brigadier. I'd just been made a colonel about two weeks before.

So when Holcomb came out this time, he told Vandegrift, "I talked to the President and he's agreeable. You will come back to be my successor as Commandant." And this was late in October 1942 – well, after the 21<sup>st</sup>.

In talking these things over, the matter of Turner, the matter of relief by the Army, and the matter of reinforcements for Guadalcanal, planes and ground troops, Holcomb said to Vandegrift, "You're the only man that can really plead your own case, and I want you to go down to Noumea with me."

"Well," Vandegrift said, "things are working up here, it looks like a fight, and I don't want to go."

Holcomb said, “You’ve got to go. There may be a fight, I’ll wait’ll you come back. In any case, you come with me. Let’s o down and fight this thing out with Halsey.”

So they left on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

MR. FRANK: Who was acting CG?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, Bill Rupertus had come over to see Holcomb, and when it was determined that Vandegrift would go back, he said “Well, Bill, you’re here. Now you stay and command the ground action.” Of course, Roy was in command of the whole garrison, Roy Geiger. So that was arranged.

MR. FRANK: Geiger was senior to Rupertus?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes, much. Geiger was a classmate of Vandegrift’s.

Rupertus was the vintage of 1913, and they were the vintage of 1909.

As it turned out, before Vandegrift got in the airplane to leave, Rupertus came down with dengue, and he was just completely out for about a week. He had a horrible case of dengue. He couldn’t get out of his bed. We had to help him out of the bed to go places. He was a terribly sick man. Roy Geiger came over, after Vandegrift left. We saw them off on the airplane and Roy said to me. “Jerry, you know what you’re supposed to do. You go ahead and do it. I’ll be at the wing, and if you need me I’ll come, but if you don’t need me, I’ll come to see you every morning at 8 o’clock, so let’s go ahead.

MR. FRANK: Were you on a first-name basis with him at that time?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

MR. FRANK: It was “Roy” and “Jerry?”

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no, I never called him “Roy,” not until years afterwards, but he called me “Jerry.” So did Holcomb. I was one of the few people Holcomb ever called by his first name. Holcomb said, “I don’t call people by first names,” but he did me because we were very friendly. I never call General Geiger “Roy,” until along just the latter years of his life.

That night after the CMC party got away; in fact, about 11 o’clock we heard some firing. Well, the jungle line went through the jungle, and it was real dense just in front of our foxholes, but Puller had found a spot out in front of the jungle line, about 700 or 800 yards, and he put a platoon out there.

MR. FRANK: A listening post?

GENERAL THOMAS: A listening post of a platoon. After we heard the firing he called in, and said, “My outpost reports enemy all around them.”

A few minutes later he said, “The outpost has called in and said, ‘we are being overrun, hundreds of Japs around us,’ and then silence.”

About a half hour after that Puller reported that his line had gotten a shower of hand grenades.

MR. FRANK: You heard the firing all the time?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, we didn’t from the outpost. We didn’t hear the hand grenades. But very shortly after Puller called in, we started hearing the firing, because they followed up the hand grenades – the Japs always, like at the Tenaru and like at the Matanikau, they always tip their hand. Now, instead of rushing the line, as they should have done, they gave them a shower of hand grenades. In other words, “We’re going to Banzai you.”



We didn't hesitate a minute after we heard that that outpost had been overrun or had reported enemy all around them. These units all happened in just a few minutes in quick measure. I got hold of Bryant Moore and said, "Get one battalion away at once, and send it across the airfield towards the jungle line." They did. I remember going out in the rain, because they had to pass right by division headquarters. I saw the 164<sup>th</sup> going in that night. We told Puller to send men back down the ridge to guide these people in to places on his line that he wanted them to go. So he had quite a fight, and – but these 164<sup>th</sup> were just enough strength, they bolstered Puller's line that night. However, in one spot maybe 15 or 20 Japs got through, but we got them the next morning, including one colonel. We killed them all. But we had a real lurid night that night. Old Lewie, he was the same Lewie. He was fighting and the 164<sup>th</sup> was just the strength he needed, and he just fed them in the line all along his foxholes, a few doughboys and a few Marines, and they fought there, and the next morning our in front of his line he had 60 or 700 Japs out there dead.

At daybreak I went out to the jungle line. We decided that the way to arrange things was to send the whole 164<sup>th</sup> out. We had captured things we got off of the dead Japs, and we got off of this colonel copies of orders, and we realized that this was only the first crack, that less than half of the Japs had hit Lewie. There was another column of two or three thousand men some place else that hadn't hit him. So we moved Bryant Moore out and during the day e took over the whole of the jungle line with his regiment, and of course the jungle line was only about two thousand yards long, so he had a good strong line, and his boys were armed with M-1 rifles. The Japs hit them again that night, and they hit near the Lunga the first night, but the next night they hit off towards the Tenaru, and there were 800 Japs piled out out in the next morning, in addition to those that Lewie had killed the night before. They must have killed 1500 or 1400 Japs in front of that jungle line.

I went out the next morning to see Bryant Moore and we went up through the lines and I saw those dead buggers lying over there, and we had a hell of a burial job. They didn't go at it that day because they still were waiting, and that night they got hit a couple of time more, but the big part of the fight was over, and the next day Vandegrift came back and he was very chagrined that he had missed the fight, though he was pleased the way the thing had gone.

Now, we always had an eye on the Matanikau, and I didn't touch on them when we were talking about Lewie's fight, but the first night they hit Lewie, they pushed two of their tanks across the bar at the mouth of the Matanikau. Our boys got one of them but the other one pulled back. The second night when the Japs hit the 164<sup>th</sup> on the jungle line, the night after they fought against Lewie – the previous night, as I've said, they sent two tanks across the bar. The next night they sent nine tanks across the bar. In the meantime during that day Williams had told us that he would like some more anti-tank defense, so we sent him what we had, and he was pretty well strengthened. When those nine tanks started to cross that bar at night, they opened up on them and got eight of them. They were light tanks. I saw them sitting out there in the water later. I went out there the next day and there they were, sitting out there.

MR. FRANK: "Tankettes" actually?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I don't know, but they were light tanks and our 75mm just blew them out. One tank got through and got into our position, and that's the tank that

ran over the foxhole of a man and stopped, and the guy reached up with a hand grenade and pulled the pin and stuck it in between the sprocket and the tank. Now, this is a true story. The hand grenade went off, and when the tank started out it threw its track, and the crew jumped out, and the Marines killed them. Now, there was a terrific bonus to this action. The Japs had expected their tanks to make a breakthrough, and they had massed about 600 infantry just on the opposite bank of the Matanikau lagoon, which were to file across the bar and follow those tanks through and work these Marines over.

During the time when flares were being sent up and lighted, our lads down along the lagoon saw the Jap infantry over there. This was at a time when the 11<sup>th</sup> Marines were up firing in defense of the jungle line, as they had done the night before and the evening. Our people called the whole 11<sup>th</sup> Marines down on this concentration of infantry. They said they were just standing on the other side of the lagoon. Our lads said they could just hear the Japs scream, over the sound of these shells. The next morning they went across the bar, and said there were at least 600 Jap dead, that the artillery concentration had polished off.

MR. FRANK: In other words, in three nights the Japs lost nearly 2000 men?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, that's right, over 2,000 dead.

The day between Puller's fight on the jungle line and the next night, that day intervening between was a weird one. In Robert Sherrod's book on the history of Marine aviation it's referred to as "Dugout Sunday." I guess it was maybe the 25 of October. Geiger as was his practice had moved his aircraft up behind the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines on this grassy strip, and the heavy rain that had taken place the night before had made a morass of the dirt runway. We couldn't use the regular runway because it was punctured. As planes tried to take off from the grassy strip, they couldn't get any foothold, but the sun came out, and the Japs had planes down over us that morning, and looking, and when nobody came up to defend the island, they apparently got more curious. And they sent two Betty bombers down. These went in front of Guadalcanal and they came in down low, about 300 feet, right over the airfield. These antiaircraft rifles near the airfield, antiaircraft 30s and 50s, hadn't had anything to shoot at, but they laid into those, and they piled one of them right across the Lunga River. He just came down in the coconut trees, and the next one went away smoking. But then others came in, and all day long there were airplanes over us, Zeros, float planes, everything, and there were dogfights going on – as I say, dugouts – but we didn't go in dugouts. All day long we were standing out watching the fighting, air fights, and there were vapor streaks all over the sky. The whole thing, it just lasted all day. As I say, we were too interested to go into dugouts and we weren't afraid.

There were two old destroyers, Trevor and Zane which had come up bringing gasoline and they spent the night in the Tulagi harbor, and then they went out to head back south the next day. Well apparently there were three Japanese destroyers near there, and they came and went after these two old ships. We didn't have anything to combat them with. And the Trevor and the Zane were two old four-stackers. They couldn't stand up to the enemy. When they got within range, the Japs had fired at them. At the time, three or four of our fighters which were airborne, not knowing anything else to do bored in on the Japs' destroyers with their machine guns and fired on the bridges and the decks and darned if they didn't turn those Japs around. They made them go back. It was a fantastic thing. It just added to a weird day.

Well, I think I've missed – I've misplaced my timing. One night, the night that the eight tanks came across the bar of the Matanikau was the night of Puller's battle. The two had come over the night before. The third night, the night the 164<sup>th</sup> were in their fight, and that was the night after this Dugout Sunday, we discovered that among other things in the Jap plan of attack, besides the movement of these 600 men behind the tanks across the Matanikau, they had put a battalion across up river. It apparently went inland in an effort to get at the airfield, but came down the ridge on which we had placed Hanneken's battalion. So they hit Hanneken and there was a terrific fight, and the Japs got into Hanneken's line. This ridge was a razorback, and Hanneken just had a single line on the crest of the ridge, but the Japs got into the line, wiped out several foxholes and captured two machine guns. There wasn't much, very little to be done. Hanneken had no reserves, Tex Conoley was his exec, and Tex gathered all the cooks and messmen and bandsmen and everybody around the battalion CP, runners and everybody, made up a party, went up there and attacked this Jap penetration and wiped it out and restored the line. Tex got a Navy Cross for that night's work. It all made for a real exciting night.

As I said, Vandegrift came back the next morning, and he was chagrined at having missed the fighting, but he'd had a very successful trip, back to Noumea. Halsey had reiterated his intention of winning this Solomons Battle, and told Vandegrift that he expected to give him everything that he could do his job with, and he'd give him every reinforcement he could get his hands on. He said, "To show you that I mean what I say, the 8<sup>th</sup> Marines are now getting aboard transports over in American Samoa, and I'm sending them to Guadalcanal."

So Vandegrift came back feeling pretty good about the whole campaign.

Also there came up at this conference the matter of the relative position of our commanders of amphibious forces and commanders of landing forces, and at this conference, Halsey made a decision. He said, "Commander amphibious force will command at sea, but the exclusive command ashore is that of commander landing force, and commander amphibious force has no authority on shore." Holcomb said, "Let's put it in writing," so they did, and Holcomb took this back with him, and as he went through Pearl Harbor, he got Nimitz' initials on it. Then he took it back and King initialed it, and they told Kelly Turner to stay in his own province – which he didn't do. We'll get to that later. But we bucked him back considerably.

Vandegrift also reminded me again about the fact that he was to return next year to become the Commandant, and that I'd go home with him. He also brought back word that there were two large task forces, one American and one Jap, around the Santa Cruz Islands. Nobody knew what was going to happen. Kinkaid was commanding the American force. Vandegrift said, "Probably there's going to be a battle."

Well, there was a battle, but we had to pick up information from our people that came up from below, and they brought us the report that there had been a task force, a fight between a Japanese task force of two carriers and other ships on one side, and Americans with two carriers, the Wasp and another one, the Hornet on our side. Kinkaid had swapped one carrier for two. He lost the Wasp, but he got both Japanese carriers. This was a war of carriers. That's really what it was.

However, Kinkaid had one great advantage. When his planes returned from their strikes on the Japanese task force, the remaining carrier – I believe it was the Hornet, I can't remember now – was able to take aboard the short-legged aircraft, and they waved

the long-legged boys back to Espiritu Santo, so fliers who survived the fight got home and landed. But the Japs had no carriers, the planes had no place to go, and they all went in the water, and they lost not only the planes but they lost all those experienced pilots, every one. So the Battle of Santa Cruz was a real victory for the American forces.

**End of Session VI, Tape 1, side 2.**

Session VI, Tape 2, side 1.

GENERAL THOMAS: We weren't much more than through with the battle on the jungle line, first with Puller and then the 164<sup>th</sup> Infantry, and the battle at the mouth of the Matanikau, when we realized that the Japs had suffered some severe losses. We made up our minds that we would make his recovery as difficult as possible. We sent Bob Hunt back to Tulagi, and had "Doggie" Arthur come over with the rest of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marines, the other two battalions. And we started another attack on the Matanikau.

Again we put in foot bridges – to cross the lagoon – and again we sent Whaling, but this time with 3-7 following him, and had him cross at Whaling's Bridge. Again we used the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, and they crossed across the foot bridges over the lagoon. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Marines took over at the mouth of the Matanikau and relieved the 7<sup>th</sup>. We laid on this operation. We used everything we had against the Japs, planes and what not, put artillery in front of it, and we started the move. It worked very successfully. Edson's 5<sup>th</sup> Marines crossed the bayou, moved out with 3-7 on his left flank and we told Edson to pin in what he could, so he pinned in a bunch of Japs down against the beach.

Then we moved the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marines minus a battalion through the back of Edson and had them move on. Edson in the meantime had pinned in 300 Japs against the beach, and they proceeded to kill 'em all.

This was going on real well, and what we were after was to push our line far enough west of the Matanikau that Pistol Pete couldn't fire on the airfield. As I say, the operation went very successfully, and we had a prospect of having a good show out there, when again we got a message. As a matter of fact, we had been warned by COMSOPAC for a couple of previous days that Japanese messages continually turned up the words 'Koli Point.' Koli Point was 15 miles east of us, and again as I say, we were always worried about that flank. There were still a few Japs down there left over from the ones that Edson had gotten. Also, after the battle against the jungle line, instead of going back the way they came from Matanikau, there were about a thousand Japs that continued on around and went down beyond Koli Point. Now, we knew they were down there, but they weren't a great threat and we just didn't bother 'em.

To show that the Japs didn't know what the hell was going on, they came in a bombed that Koli Point outfit one time, Japanese bombers did, and not only the bombers laid the bombs all over the place but the fighters came in, the Zeros came in and strafed the ground, apparently thinking that Edson was still down there. They apparently were out of communication with their people.

Well, anyway, we were going ahead west of the Matanikau and had been very successful, Edson pinned in 300 men. Then we got a message from COMSOPAC saying that another Jap message had mentioned Koli Point and the Maliumba, which was a river near Koli Point. We just had a feeling we had to do something about it.

We ordered a halt to the attack across the Matanikau and told Arthur's 2<sup>nd</sup> Marines to dig in, Edson to go ahead and finish ff the pocket he had there, and we detached Hanneken from the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines and sent him towards Koli Point. Well, old Herman was a mover, and when we told him to go to Koli Point he went to Koli Point. MR. FRANK: He was an experienced jungle fighter.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. Darkness overtook him before he got there, but he kept on moving, and he was almost at Koli Point when it started to rain. It was a

thundershower and there were flashes of lightning, and he was right near the beach on this jungle track, a beach track, and out on the water he saw one transport and four destroyers unloading men.

He hauled in; pulled back a little bit, and deployed his battalion. The next morning, he moved out and hit the Japanese. At first he got ahead a little bit, and then it was revealed that he was up against something a lot stronger than he was. When he came under artillery fire, he started a withdrawal.

Hanneken and Puller, unlike Edson, were never much of a hand to work up their communications. Edson was always meticulous about the way he worked up his communications. He was always in touch with us. But Puller never told us anything. He wouldn't even use his radios, and Hanneken was almost as bad. But to make matters worse, the rain the night before had ground out his radios, and it was late in the afternoon or the middle of the afternoon before Herman got word to us that he was in a hell of a fight and that he thought he had at least three or four-thousand Japs out in front of him.

Well, we had Puller's battalion, which had come out of the jungle line, so we sent it right down to the beach and put it in boats with Sims and his headquarters, and sent them up the beach and joined Hanneken. In the meantime, they got Williams down from the Matanikau the next morning and sent him to join his regiment. Sims deployed the next morning and started to fight the Japs, and then he called in and said, "I'm in the face of a strong force."

We got the 164<sup>th</sup> Infantry, less a battalion, out of the jungle line, and told them to go south across country, and pin the Japs in. Sims kept on fighting. The 164<sup>th</sup> Infantry came around to the south, and they had a pretty good battle going – two regiments. They whipped the Japs and they drove them in toward the beach.

Then there was a misunderstanding of orders, and a gap opened up in the 164<sup>th</sup>'s line, and about 12 or 14 hundred Japs got through and headed out towards the rain forest, the jungle.

In the meantime, the 8<sup>th</sup> Marines were on their way. They landed on Guadalcanal on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November. However, and I've mentioned the fact that Turner didn't believe that his superiors meant that he shouldn't play soldier. He had told us before that he wanted to build an airfield at Aola Bay and that's where he wanted to put the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, and as I've mentioned I'm sure before, we sent a reconnaissance party down there. We also had the testimony of Martin Clemens, whose headquarters had been there, that the area was totally unsuited for the building of airfields. There was a series of knolls and swamps all over the place. But Turner brought up a battalion of the 137<sup>th</sup> Infantry, the Second Raider Battalion, and a bunch of odds and ends including Seabees, put them ashore as he went by Aola Bay enroute to bring the 8<sup>th</sup> Marines in. Of this, he said not a word to Vandegrift. He told the Aola detachment to build an airfield down there.

Well, Turner wasn't much more than gone when the Aola outfit communicated with him, with COMSOPAC, and with us, and said, "You can't build an airfield at Aola Bay. The place is impossible."

Well, that made Halsey mad. This all happened at the moment that these 1200 or 1400 Japs got through the 164<sup>th</sup> Infantry and headed for the rain forest. So we messaged Halsey at Noumea and asked, now that Aola Bay was out, if we could have the 2<sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalion, and he said yes, passed the control to Vandegrift.

We told Carlson (2<sup>nd</sup> Raiders) to head towards Koli Point. It was 25 miles away but there was a track, a pretty good track up the beach, and it was only a short time before he got there. As a matter of fact, he was on the way before these people broke through, but he was so close then, we told him to attack.

Oh, in the meantime, we had brought Rupertus over from Tulagi to take command of the Koli Point operation, with Bill Whaling as his chief of staff. Bill had been acting as a liaison between Sims and Division up to this time. But again, the dengue hit Bill Rupertus, so he went down. As it happened, a few days before that a brigadier of the Army, Ed Sebree, the ADC of the Americal Division, had come up, so we gave him command of this Koli Point operation, and he carried it out. At first we told Carlson to report to Sebree, but then when we found out this breakthrough had come, we told Carlson to take after these people, which he did.

Well, to make a long story short, Sebree, with the 164<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, finally closed in against these Japs, pinned them in to the beach, 1200 or 1500 of them and killed them. Killed every one of them.

Then Carlson got on the other Japs, a force that was actually larger than his own battalion, but the Raiders were able to operate and do well. They were against a defeated enemy. They gradually pinched off small pieces of them and killed them, and finally after about four days were able to report that they had practically destroyed this group.

Since Carlson was over there and practically in the rain forest, we brought him in to division headquarters, talked to him about going clear on around the perimeter. Well, he undertook that we could use trails out by the Japs. We worked out a good communications scheme, an airdrop scheme so we could give him supplies and he had a very successful move. They had one fight, and they came through it all right, killed the Japs, drove them off. They got to the Lunga River, and that's where they played a dirty trick. The Scouts came up to the Lunga River, and there unsuspecting was a company of Japs bathing in the river. Carlson brought his men up, got them all lined up, and they killed the last one of the Japs. Then they went on around and came in on the north side of the perimeter. They confirmed the fact that there were no Japs back there.

Now, in the meantime, we decided to have at the Japs again beyond the Matanikau. We moved the 8<sup>th</sup> Marines up, brought Sebree over and gave him command of the Matanikau, and made some progress. The 8<sup>th</sup> Marines got mixed up, but we finally called that attack off, or gave some ground, and I'm skipping over a lot here, because it's not really of any great consequence. But we were warned to wait until we had more strength. In a few days we were to get the 184<sup>th</sup> Infantry of the Americal Division. They did arrive, and we moved them out o the Matanikau front.

MR. FRANK: The purpose of their arrival on the Island was to reinforce or to relieve?

GENERAL THOMAS: Both reinforce initially, but eventually the whole Americal Division was to come in there and did come in there. Actually, they were larger than a division. They were a powerfully reinforced outfit. They had all kinds of extra artillery and supporting units.

MR. FRANK: Had the division yet received word as to when it going to leave Guadalcanal?

GENERAL THOMAS: No. We didn't know then, but it wasn't long after that that we found out. That's in the next paper after this, really.

As the 184<sup>th</sup> arrived, quite properly the commander of the Americal Division arrived, and –

MR. FRANK: Eichelberger, was it?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, Patch; Alexander Patch. I passed over something and I'm going to have to go back.

Before the middle of November, Roy Geiger left. He was relieved. He had to go back to command the wing base at Espiritu. Admiral Fitch kept wanting him to come back there, and Louis Woods came up and assumed command of the wing. Before old Roy left, the fliers from Henderson Field got on a task force and scored hits on a cruiser and a destroyer. It was a good going-away present for him.

Then on November 8, Admiral Halsey came up and visited us. That was when we had this battle going on out at Koli Point, and very soon after Edson had polished off those 300 Japs, that he had pinned in up there. Of course it was a great thing to have Halsey come up and see us.

Then –

MR. FRANK: Did you see that movie, “The Story of Halsey?”

GENERAL THOMAS: No. Another visitor we had about this time was Sir Philip Mitchell, the British High Commissioner of the South Seas, a very fine man. We saw him later on several occasions in Suva, Fijis. He came up and we brought Marchand over from Malaita and they had a conference.

I believe I called the new infantry regiment the 184<sup>th</sup>. It was the 182<sup>nd</sup>. They were a Boston outfit. The 164<sup>th</sup> were a bunch of country boys from Minnesota and North and South Dakota. We found out they were different outfits entirely. But the 182<sup>nd</sup> landed on the 12<sup>th</sup>, and we had a lot of bombers over that day and got hit real hard, but our fighters went back after them and they hit them very hard. As a matter of fact, that day they shot down 16 torpedo planes and a number of Zeros.

Then about an hour before midnight, and this would have been the night of the 12<sup>th</sup> of November, our wave watchers down on the beach reported that something had gone west. I've already talked about the coast watchers being able to tell from the waves on the beach when ships went through a high speed. It wasn't long after that, we knew something was under way because scout planes had come into Tulagi and we had received word from a commander that we didn't know to use our PT boats to sweep the south shore of Florida Island and then for them to haul off and for us to keep all planes on the ground.

Soon after midnight, things started to happen. We not only could see flashes but we could hear gunfire. We went up on a CP and there we watched the Third Battle of Savo Island. We didn't know what happened.

The next morning, again at daybreak, it was reported from the observation post that there were vessels floating out toward Savo. Our airplanes reported that the water was full of men, Japs and Americans. The Portland was just able to move, about two or three knots. Atlanta was just barely afloat. As I say, the water was full of men, and off beyond there towards Savo Island was a Japanese battleship, they said the superstructure was sheared off as though he had cut it off with a big knife. She was floating around making about a knot or two, and there were four Japanese destroyers hovered around her.

Well, we started a rescue operation. We got our boats in the water. In the meantime Jap destroyers tried to get Portland but she sank two of them. She was able to



get off a salvo, and so got away, but Atlanta sank that night. We brought in that day 700 American sailors from the water. Many of them were burned and oil covered. They were a miserable mess.

I went to the naval base that afternoon; saw my old friend Murray Stokes, who had been commanding the destroyer that was in the van. Murray said, “We didn’t see a thing until we took a right turn at Savo Island, and then the Japanese ships came on my radar screen like raindrops driven in a storm. I said ‘Open fire,’ and before I could get the words out of my mouth I was in the water. I had opened on a battleship a thousand yards away.”

Then he told us what the make up of the task force had been. Norman Scott was in the Atlanta. We had the rescued skipper of the Atlanta by the name of Jenkins. Dan Callaghan had been in overall command in the San Francisco. San Francisco and several other ships had survived, but Callaghan and his whole staff and Norman Scott and his entire staff had been killed. As a matter of fact, the skipper of San Francisco was also killed, and the navigator, a chap named McCandless, a lieutenant commander, took the ship out that night.

Well, we rescued these people. We dragged them in, and we finally got them out. Ships came in and took them out. There wasn’t any doubt that some eggs had been broken.

The reason we survived was that these Japanese ships’ handling rooms were full of bombardment ammunition instead of armor piercing – that is the reason our ships survived. If they’d used armor piercing, they said they would probably have sunk every damn ship we had up there. There were two Jap battleships in the battle; we learned that later, along with several cruisers and destroyers.

The morning after this battle, while we were rescuing these sailors, the fliers that went off on searches found out what it was all about. Up the Slot was a cruiser, a half a dozen destroyers convoying eleven transports. They reported twelve at first. Our fliers started after them, and all day long, just fast as the planes could get in the air, get back and get armed and off they went again. By now we had a pretty good number of planes, fighters, torpedo planes and dive bombers, and they batted at those enemy transports all day long.

As I said, the first report was twelve, the next report was eleven, and we didn’t know for a long time what had happened to the twelfth, but there was a B-17 search and strike out from Port Moresby in the South Pacific that had picked these people up, just south of Bougainville, and had bombed them and sunk one transport.

Well, all day long or people battered at them, and – now, I’m off a day. It was really the second day after the night battle that we picked up the transports. The day following the battle they were busy battering at that battleship and those destroyers. The second day, the transport – the planes picked up these 11 transports, 12 at first, then 11. Then all day long as I’ve said as fast as they could come back and arm and fuel, off they went again.

Finally about four o’clock in the afternoon – I’d guess this was the 14<sup>th</sup> of November – about three o’clock in the afternoon, we had had a warning that there was another US task force in the area. I told Louis Woods, “We have got to be able to tell Admiral Halsey before the night comes exactly what the situation is up the Slot.”

By this time this whole melee had come down to within about 70 miles of Cape Esperance, the north end of the island. So I said, "You send somebody up there for the sole purpose of looking at this scene." We had been debriefing the fliers as they came in, but one would bomb from one side and one from the other, and this was burning and this was sinking. So I said, "This person is to go and come back and bring us information, and that's all he's going for. Tell them not to fight."

So Woods sent off Joe Bauer with his wing man, Joe Foss, and Bauer got up there, he couldn't resist the temptation to dive in on a transport, and as he dived a Zero got on his tail and shot him down. But Foss stuck to his task, and came back and told us what the situation was, and he said, "There are four transports that are burned out and abandoned and dead in the water. There are another three burned out. But there are four that apparently have been hit badly but they are going ahead a little bit." So out of the eleven we had four still to be concerned about, and he said, "The water for miles is covered with bobbing heads of Japs, who have jumped off these burning ships."

During the day the fliers got a cruiser too. The next morning we woke up, and there were three Jap transports, though beat up, way up above the Matanikau. The planes started to work on them and worked them over all day long. They had beached the transports. All three of them were afire and burning.

General Vandegrift and I went out to the OP to watch the show. After a while we saw a transport coming around Cape Esperance, a Jap transport, just barely making way, maybe two knots. Well, I called Bill Greenman, (Commodore Greenman who was in command of the Naval base,) told him about this transport, and I asked, "Have you got a PT boat you can get over here to get on this fellow?" He said "Better than that, Meade, a modern destroyer, has just left Tulagi, and I'll send her."

Well, it wasn't more than a half hour when here came Meade, and she went up there and laid into this transport, and the transport, when they saw Meade, headed just for the beach right there to beach, and Meade ran alongside her and just pumped shells in for it seemed like a half hour, and the ship was burning, and then Meade shoved off, and as she went along, she came by each of the other three beached transports and gave them a salvo.

As I said, I'm going to finish this, and I think I will. The 182<sup>nd</sup> had landed, and we started another attack, moved them out beyond the Matanikau, and as I've mentioned, their division commander, General Patch, arrived with his staff at this time. He was to be Vandegrift's relief. We put him in command of the Matanikau operation.

After about a day, I discovered that the operation was going very poorly. I got in a jeep and went out there, beyond the Matanikau, went up with the 182<sup>nd</sup> Infantry which was supposed to be attacking. I didn't like what I saw at all, but I didn't say anything to anyone. There weren't any officers around. But I went on back to Patch's headquarters, and I told him that – I told General Patch what I thought about the situation. And he was very downcast, and he said "I realize that that regiment that I have up there's not doing well."

And I said "General, I suggest you pull back from the attack. There's got to be a complete reorganization."

Now, he had the better part of three regiments up there, the 182<sup>nd</sup>, the 8<sup>th</sup> Marines and most of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marines. So I said, "I'm going back to division headquarters and task

to General Vandegrift about it. I suggest that you come in and talk to him, and give him the suggestion that I'm giving you, that you pull back and reorganize."

Well, when I got back General Vandegrift was furious, but I told him that I thought the best thing he could do was to take it in stride. Shortly Patch came in, and he said to General Vandegrift, "I would like to wait for any more offensive moves until my whole division is in, and the 132<sup>nd</sup> Infantry will be in here in about a week, and then I'll take up the offensive again."

So Vandegrift agreed and the thing was called off.

That pretty much settles what I know about Guadalcanal.

We had one more Battle of Savo Island. Admiral Carlton Wright came in there on the night of the 30<sup>th</sup> of November. He sent his scout planes in to Tulagi, but we sent him word that we needed instructions as to what we'd do, but he didn't send any in, and that night he walked in there, and lost four cruisers from six Jap destroyers that were lying in the shadow of the island. The Northhampton we lost, and the Pensacola, Minneapolis and New Orleans got their bows blown off by Jap torpedoes. Jap torpedoes were of terrific strength. American torpedoes of those days were made with long fuel runs. You could fire them from 12,000 yards. But when you put fuel in a torpedo you cut down on your charge, your explosive charge. Well, the Japs were set to run about 3000 yards, but the rest of the weapon was explosive. Their torpedoes were powerful, with the result that they had terrific effect on our ships.

The end of Guadalcanal, I'll talk about on the next tape. There isn't much more to it.

**End of Session 6.**

*Interview with General Gerald C. Thomas, USMC, Ret., Washington DC by Mr. Benis M. Frank; 26 September 1966*

*Session 7: Dec 1942 – July 1944*

GENERAL THOMAS: We were sitting in our tent in Guadalcanal one morning early in December, General Vandegrift had in his hands a message which he had just read, and with a wry sort of a look he said, "I must rank with an admiral, they won't give me an order." The message that he held had reiterated what they had told him before, that the command of Guadalcanal would be turned over at a time considered appropriate by the two commanders. General Vandegrift wanted it turned over on a definite date. The result was that he called General Patch and asked him to come in for a talk.

Patch came in. They discussed the situation and made this decision - that the command of Guadalcanal, the change of command, would be on December 9<sup>th</sup>. On that date the 137<sup>th</sup> Infantry, the final regiment of the Americal Division, would arrive, and on the same transport from which they came ashore, the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines would go aboard. The basis of the decision was that when the number of Army group troops ashore at Guadalcanal exceeded the number of Marines, the command would pass, and as we could see, the 9<sup>th</sup> of December was the date that that would take place.

MR. FRANK: Where were the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines to go? Had that been determined already?

GENERAL THOMAS: I'll get to that in a minute. Late on the afternoon of the 9<sup>th</sup>, Patch's staff came in from the Matanikau, slid into the various positions, and Vandegrift and his staff moved out. We went up and spent the night with Bill Rupertus, who had now recovered from his Dengue and had his headquarters just to the east of the Tenaru. When it was decided that the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division would be removed on Guadalcanal, troops to actually relieve them had to be provided from some source. The 25<sup>th</sup> US Division, which had been based and trained in the Hawaiian Islands, had been slated to go to MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Command. Instead of them going there, they were diverted to Guadalcanal, and to compensate MacArthur, the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division went from Guadalcanal to Australia.

After the command turnover, as I say, we went to spend the night with Rupertus. The following morning we went to the airfield and took a DC-3 to Noumea. In our party that day was Vandegrift, myself, Warwick Brown, the doctor, the division surgeon, Bill Twining, Jim Murray, Eddie Snedeker and an aide. Eddie was the division communications officer, and the aide (was) Guy Tarrant.

We stayed with the commander of IMAC (1<sup>st</sup> Marine Amphibious Corps), General Barney Vogel, at Noumea. We were entertained by Halsey and had a very pleasant time there for a couple of days. Then about the third day there he sent us over to Brisbane in North Australia on his Coronado. At Brisbane we went to the Hotel Lennon, which is the largest hotel in town and the place where incidentally General MacArthur lived. He had his family with him, of course, and he and his aides and his family occupied one full floor of that hotel.

MR. FRANK: May I ask you a question here? When was it determined that the division was to go to Australia, and why Australia?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, the decision that the division would go to Australia was made back here in Washington. You see, in order to have somebody else on

Guadalcanal, the Joint Chiefs of Staff gave Halsey the 25<sup>th</sup> US Division, incidentally commanded by “Lightning Joe” Collins – gave the 25<sup>th</sup> Division to Halsey to use in Guadalcanal. In the meantime, they ordered the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division to go from Guadalcanal over to MacArthur’s command, of course his command was in Australia, and that’s where we would go. We weren’t fit to go up forward because we were a worn-out division.

MR. FRANK: One other question, please, General. How long had IMAC headquarters been in Noumea?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, it had been established back in Noumea, I would say, about October 1<sup>st</sup>, about two months before we left Guadalcanal.

MR. FRANK: That was the senior Marine command.

GENERAL THOMAS: That was the senior Marine command and the senior amphibious command in SOPAC.

MR. FRANK: That’s right. What did Vogel have?

GENERAL THOMAS: Initially, he had the First Marine Division, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division, most of the latter being either in New Zealand or Guadalcanal. You see the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Marines of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division were in Guadalcanal with us. As we came out of Guadalcanal, oh, about maybe the middle of December, the 6<sup>th</sup> Marines came up from New Zealand and they also went into Guadalcanal, so the whole of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division was in Guadalcanal at one time or another, although the division commander never went up there. There was a very bad mix-up over that.

MR. FRANK: Did Vogel ever make a visit to Guadalcanal at all?

GENERAL THOMAS: Vogel came up once. He came up about – oh, in November, Vogel disliked to fly, but in order to get to Guadalcanal he had to fly and he did fly up there, but he did not want to fly. He didn’t like to fly and he never did fly unless he had to.

MR. FRANK: 2<sup>nd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Marines slated to go to Australia too?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no, on leaving Guadalcanal they went to New Zealand. It isn’t part of my story, but when they were relieved on Guadalcanal in January and February, 1943, they went to New Zealand, as did the 6<sup>th</sup>, but of course the 2<sup>nd</sup> had been in Guadalcanal from the first day that we got there – although, as I’ve already related, except for one battalion, the first two months that we were in the Guadalcanal area, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division except for the Tulagi fight did not participate in any operations. But they did come over, and they were a well-used outfit before they got through there. They were the first unit of 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division to go out. I imagine they went out at the end of January, 1943, and the 8<sup>th</sup> followed them a week or two later, and the 6<sup>th</sup> Marines a week or two after that. Other Army troops came up to replace them.

We went from – as I say, we went from Noumea to Brisbane, and we went to the Lennon Hotel and bedded ourselves down. General MacArthur at the time was at his forward headquarters in Port Moresby in New Guinea, because he had the New Guinea campaign going on up there with two divisions, the 37<sup>th</sup> and 41<sup>st</sup>. The larger part of his headquarters, however – and it was an enormous outfit, there were 1500 officers in his headquarters – was in Brisbane. We checked in, I checked in with the head of his headquarters who was a brigadier general by the name of Steve Chamberlain. He was the G-3 for MacArthur. The g-4 was also in Brisbane, and he was an old Leavenworth classmate of mine by the name of Whitlock.

When the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines came on over to Brisbane, MacArthur ordered us into Camp Cable 25 miles south of Brisbane. We went out there when we first got in with this advance party which Vandegrift took over, and we didn't care for the situation. We didn't like the camp at all. The liberty for our men would be difficult because there was only a very small railroad and there was no towns anywhere near the camp except at Brisbane, and that was 25 miles away. However, we'd whipped the liberty problem in Camp Lejeune and we didn't worry much about this.

Our doctors reported to the Southwest Pacific doctors that they might count on our division being a reservoir for malaria. Just wanted them to know about it. This got to MacArthur's medical officer, a Colonel named Rice, whereupon he somehow or other reported to MacArthur that this was a matter of no moment because there were no anopheles mosquitoes in northern Australia.

Well, right after the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines got in, we had a heavy rainstorm. They don't have much rain in that part of Australia, but we did have a record rainstorm and the camp was half flooded, and it was revealed that the camp was full of mosquitoes, anopheles. Also at about this time, all this came to the attention of the health officer, Dr. Sir Kirt Cilento, the health officer of Queensland, and he immediately put up opposition to the Marines being in that area. You have to sympathize with MacArthur for wanting them there, because he still didn't know he was going to win in New Guinea. And the Japs were still strong in New Britain, and they were still threatening a landing in Australia, and he wanted a division and the cupboard was bare when we got there. We were a division and they wanted to keep us handy. You really can't blame him. But anyway, while all this was going on everyone in the Navy chain of command was concerned about the Marines going to a warm area from Guadalcanal. Northern Australia is – well, it's semi-tropic, northeast Australia is. So Nimitz sent a message, Halsey sent a message and King sent a message, each urging that the Marines go to a more salubrious climate. The result of this and Sir Kirt Cilento's complaint was that MacArthur, with a little bitterness in his messages, said the Marines should go to another camping area.

So we set off. He said in his message, "The inhibitions of Halsey, Nimitz and King to the contrary, I need this division in north Australia. But since the matter has arisen and since the health officer has complained, I want the Marines to find another place to stay."

We sent off Twining and Murray. They went to Sidney where they talked to MacArthur's logistical command, which was still there. Then from there they went to Melbourne in South Australia, and of course that was obviously the place for us, because they had everything there that we needed.

MR. FRANK: And no Army around.

GENERAL THOMAS: The only Army around was the 4<sup>th</sup> Base Section which was loaded with gear and supplies and clothing, just everything that we needed, and commanded by a wonderful colonel of Cavalry, Geoffrey Galway, and he had wanted to have somebody to help him. He wanted somebody to serve. Geoff had been an officer in the 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry when I was at Fort Leavenworth, and I had known him before. He had everything we needed and he just really turned things inside out for us.

Another thing that Melbourne had, that later proved to be a godsend, was an enormous hospital. Just before World War II broke out, Melbourne had built this, oh, I guess 12 or 13 story hospital, maybe 1800 or 2000 beds, and the US Government had

completed it for them and equipped it and sent out a complete medical unit from Cleveland, nurses, doctors, everything, and they'd been sitting there in Melbourne for several months without any patients. So they were glad to see us.

MR. FRANK: You provided the patients?

GENERAL THOMAS: I'll tell you, we provided more than enough patients.

Melbourne was ideally fitted. Of course it has a climate about like San Diego, and although we got there in their midsummer, which is December, it was still mild and pleasant. The camps for the division were ideal. There were two cricket clubs in the city, and in Australia or the colonies when you go to a cricket club you can spend the night there if you want to. They have restaurants and all manner of things. You just go and spend the day. So in the Melbourne and the city cricket clubs in Melbourne – enormous places – and we had a third of the division housed in those two cricket clubs. The 1<sup>st</sup> Marines were in the Melbourne Cricket Club and Division Headquarters troops were in the City Cricket Club.

There were camps, and they had lots of camps in the area, out about 20 miles down the bay from Melbourne, at Mount Martha. There were camps out there and there the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Marines holed up, and Rupertus moved out there to command, set up a command echelon out there to command that area. The artillery went to Ballarat, about 25 or 30 miles west of Melbourne. The situation was ideal.

We got shaken down – we had a wonderful place for our division staff mess. I personally made out a list of the people to be in the division commander's mess, because we knew we'd go from there to another operation, and I wanted to confine the group in the division commander's mess, to those that would absolutely have to know about an operation. Well, that easily resolved itself into 1, 2, 3 and 4 – division surgeon, division communications officer. We took over the home of the Australian representative of the International Harvester Company, a Mr. Kessenger, who was at the time staying in the United States, and his house was available. It was a big place with nice grounds and appurtenances, and we were very comfortably located. But everybody was comfortably located in that place. It was really some place to recuperate.

We'd been about a week in Melbourne when a message came through from Washington that they wanted Vandegrift to get back to Washington, and told him to bring me with him. So we came home. We hopped in our Beechcraft, which had come over to Australia. It had been all the time down in New Zealand, because it didn't have the legs to get around the Solomon Islands. We'd gone from Brisbane to Melbourne in the Beechcraft. When this message came for us to come home, we hopped right in and went up to Brisbane.

Vandegrift went in to see MacArthur because he was a little concerned. He didn't know what this message was all about, and he knew that MacArthur had been mad about our having – having to transfer us down to Melbourne. But when he saw him, MacArthur said, "What are you going to Washington for?"

Vandegrift said, "Well, I thought maybe you'd tell me."

He said, "No, I don't know anything about it."

Well, anyway, we got back to Washington. We had a record trip – a little over 80 hours. We went from Amberly Airport, outside of Brisbane, to Nandi in the Fijis. We flew all night and rested all day, and we were in a stripped-down B-24, and oh God was it cold up in that thing. They flew at about 12,000, 15,000 feet. We spent a day in Nandi.

Flew that night and spent a day in Canton, then we spent a day in Pearl Harbor, and then after a very hectic letdown in San Francisco through the fog we got in there.

The reason for Vandegrift's trip was that President Roosevelt had said he thought that Vandegrift should come home, he being the first successful commander in the US service, and talk to people about what had happened down in the Solomon Islands. So he did come home, and Vandegrift talked to many groups and went around various places. I was called on to make a talk or two, but most of my talks were over in the Navy Department to various people, to packaging committees and all that sort of thing, and also to Headquarters Marine Corps.

After we'd been home four or five days, I satisfied everybody about what I knew except the communicators, and I've never pleased them, so we sent and got Snedeker and had him come on home. We stayed in the States six weeks. I recall one particular talk. I went up with Secretary Forrestal to New York and made a talk up there.

After six weeks, about the middle of March, we started back to Australia. In fact, it was more than that, more than six weeks. We were home nearly two months. We went by rail to the West Coast because Vandegrift had a speech he had to make in Chicago, and then we took the China Clipper to Pearl. There we got into a plane going out to the South Pacific, and we went on back by stages.

One of our companions on the trip back was Walter Nash of New Zealand, Foreign Minister. We had a very nice trip with him. We got back to Noumea, and Halsey then sent us on over to Brisbane, where the Beechcraft was waiting.

MR. FRANK: Who was the General's pilot, Petras?

GENERAL THOMAS: Petras, yes, the Greek boy. Oh, but he was a great flier, that guy. He flew in all kinds of weather. Pete was really fabulous.

When we passed through Noumea – and I'll get this in now – Halsey let Vandegrift know that he was not satisfied with the IMAC situation, and would like to have him back over there, but there wasn't anything he could do about it at that time so that all passed off. We got back to Melbourne at a most propitious time. When our division, 20,000 strong, had arrived in Australia, they took them off of Atabrine, the malaria suppressive, and then men started to come down with malaria, and they just had a two-month cycle that was simply horrible. Some men had malaria two and three times. The 2000-bed hospital expanded by going outside – fortunately it was an open area, and they put up tents, and there were as many as 6000 men in the hospital at one time with malaria.

MR. FRANK: Any fatalities?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, only – yes, there were occasional ones, but malaria like that leads to enlargement of the spleen. So we had certain people, a few men that were surveyed home because of enlargement of the spleen. One of the advantages of this situation was that this was a completely equipped hospital, had all of its specialist sections, surgery and eye, ear, nose and throat and all the internal parts, and they had ample doctors, and our people were available. They put every body through their hospital, and examined them. Anybody who needed corrective surgery, they were glad to take care of them. So it was really a rehabilitation area in many ways that was really worthwhile.

When we got back, however, we found the atmosphere bad, because there was a feeling throughout the division, because of the fact that these men had gone down and



down time and again, that the division never was going to be well, and that the only thing to do with it was bring them back to the States. That wasn't possible. Fortunately Vandegrift and I had both been home. We hadn't had malaria, neither one of us after our Haitian days had had malaria, and we had a good viewpoint on this thing. We went out to see the commanding officer of the hospital, called in our own division surgeon, the chief of medicine from the hospital, and the chief of medicine was a real down to earth guy. This was the Cleveland outfit. It was a reserve outfit, a complete unit from Cleveland, Ohio – oh, yes, everybody from Cleveland, Ohio. Dr. McCowan who was the head of it was one of Cleveland's leading surgeons. This chief of medicine said, "Well, I've heard all this and I've watched all this. As a matter of fact, I've supervised it. These men have been through my hospital. And this division is well today. All it needs to do is get up and walk."

Well, that just dispelled all doubts. We instituted a vigorous training program. There was a large training camp, Camp Kearney, 65 miles north of Melbourne, and we worked out a program for our troops to train in that area. The artillery went up in various units and fired at Camp Kearney. Oh, it's a great big place, couple of hundred thousand acres. The infantry regiments moved up for periods of three weeks' training in which they went through regular training and they wound up, each of them, the last part of their training was a forced march to their camps at Melbourne or Mount Martha, 65-mile march with only hourly halts, and they all made it. Bill Whaling was up there in charge of training of Scouts, and he brought the first outfit in, led them in 65 miles, and what did they make it in? Well, 25 hours – 24 – 24, 25 hours. It was really tough, but they all made it, and had no trouble because they were tough as they could be.

MR. FRANK: You were talking about Noumea and Halsey's talking about the situation at IMAC. Would you care to discuss that at this time?

GENERAL THOMAS: I will later. This continued on. We got the training done. Admiral Dan Barbey had come out to Australia with an amphibious force of ships and what not. He came down to Melbourne, and we had some landings, some practice landings, and refurbished all of the amphibious doctrines. The ships that Barbey commanded needed this training more than we did, really, but it all worked out for both. It worked well. In the meantime, the command situation was enlarging in the South Pacific, and during our training we were passed to the control of the newly arrived 6<sup>th</sup> Army, Old General Kreuger, Walter Kreuger, great old fellow – good soldier, too – was in command of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army and his chief of staff, his 1, 2, 3 and 4, had all been classmates of mine at either Benning or Leavenworth, and it made for a very pleasant arrangement for us, because I knew all these people and knew them very, very well.

MR. FRANK: You were in a really key position as far as liaison goes.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes. Of course, I was chief of staff of the division. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of July General Vandegrift received orders to proceed to IMAC, and take command. When we arrived General Vogel was away. He'd been away for six weeks. As a matter of fact, that's what brought things to a head. He'd gone to New Zealand on an inspection trip, and since he wouldn't fly, he was waiting for a ship to come up.

I never knew exactly why all this came about. No one ever told me. I made my own deductions. There had been some dispute between COMSOPAC and IMAC, or some disagreement about the seizure of New Georgia. I believe that IMAC submitted a

plan for the seizure of those islands, with which COMSOPAC disagreed. As a result it was turned over to the Army, and the Army's XIV Corps carried it out.

I don't have to tell anybody, that wasn't good for us, to weasel on an operation. I won't say weasel, but –

MR. FRANK: Well, he had some Marines in there, didn't he? You had Liversedge's outfit, didn't you?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes, but my God, there were three or four Army divisions. Our Marines were just a drop in the bucket. But the thing should have taken place under command of IMAC, because they were the amphibious corps of the South Pacific, but they didn't carry it out.

Well, when we got to Noumea, I found a terrific pile-up of things, because the Chief of Staff did not want to pass on matters while General Vogel was away and he'd been gone for six weeks, so there was a terrific pile of paper there.

MR. FRANK: You were the Chief of Staff?

GENERAL THOMAS: Vandegrift had me Chief of Staff, and I relieved General Vogel's Chief of Staff, who was Brigadier General Arch Howard. Howard would not pass on things while Vogel was away, so as I say, there was a terrific pile-up of paper work six weeks or two months old, and also I found when I got there that they'd set up a service command under Brigadier General Earl Long, and that was a fine move, but it sort of blanked the -4 section. I had all this paperwork. Now, we had brought over with us from the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, Twining to be the G-3 and Snedeker to be the communications officer, but when we got to Noumea and I looked at the pileup of things and the situation, we sent immediately for Murray to be G-1 and Wieseman to be G-4. So we got our headquarters organized in a few days. Most of Vogel's staff moved out. He took his G-3, Dudley Brown, whom we'd have like to have had, home with him, because he was authorized to bring back a Chief of Staff. Arch Howard asked General Vandegrift to let him have a command in the Solomons, so he went up to Guadalcanal to take command of Marine troops on Guadalcanal, of which there were a great many. Johnny Selden wanted to go to the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division so we sent him on over there and he later commanded the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines and then became Chief of Staff, and Joe Burger stayed with us. I said Murray became G-1 – no, Joe Burger was G-1; Murray became staff secretary of the headquarters.

Of course, we received a wonderful reception from Halsey and all of his staff, all of whom did the honors. About two days after Vandegrift got there he was promoted to lieutenant general.

MR. FRANK: When did he receive his Medal of Honor, back in the States?

GENERAL THOMAS: He got his Medal of Honor while we were back there in January. He went over to the White House one day and got that Medal of Honor.

MR. FRANK: I take it from what you say, from the number of people you kept on from IMAC headquarters that the staff all in all was in pretty good shape or a pretty good group.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, no, they all left, except Burger. Burger stayed, but George Munson went home. Vandegrift sent him home, just like he'd sent him out of the division when he took command. I became Chief of Staff, Murray staff secretary, Burger stayed – I've forgotten what the G-2 situation was. It had been shifted around. But then Wieseman became the G-4.

MR. FRANK: Was Sidney Wade G-2?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, Sidney wasn't down there in those days.

MR. FRANK: He was I Corps' G-2 later.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, maybe so. I don't remember. I know Sidney real well but I can't remember that. He wasn't there then, I'm sure of that.

About the second or third day that we were in Noumea, Halsey brought up in his morning conference a situation. In fact it was first morning we were there; I went over and was sitting talking to Admiral Halsey. General Vandegrift said, "Admiral, my little Beechcraft is no good over here, so I left it with Rupertus in the division, but I need to get around and I have no way to get there." Whereupon Halsey, with a little profanity, said, "Well, Barney wouldn't fly, so he doesn't have an airplane, but I'll get you one right away – there's a PBY5A in Pearl Harbor that's just finished an overhaul, that belongs to me, and I'll send a message right now to tell them to put a Marine crew in it and get it on down here."

Well, in about three days the plane arrived. That day or the day before, a rather crucial situation arose. The planning for the Tarawa operation was under way. For some reason, I've never been able to fathom, Kelly Turner wanted to – he had left now, left the South Pacific, and Cousin Theodore Wilkinson had relieved him, but Turner was going to be the amphibious commander for the Tarawa operation.

MR. FRANK: Central Pacific task forces?

GENERAL THOMAS: Central Pacific, that's right. He was working out of Pearl Harbor then. He had left Noumea and gone to Pearl Harbor. Turner was an able, brilliant fellow – that's the reason they used him. He could really get things done. He was an old polecat lots of times, but he was – and he and I were very friendly. We were on a very friendly basis. But, as I say, we had fought things out many months before.

Well, Turner wanted to bring the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division up from New Zealand, oh, just 500 miles away, to the Fiji Islands, and there transship them in small boats and landing draft for the trip to Tarawa. The naval commander, the naval task force commander for Tarawa, was Admiral Spruance, Raymond Spruance. Spruance didn't approve of this idea of Turner's, but he couldn't turn him down, but he decided to investigate - he came to Noumea on a trip and he took the matter up with Halsey. Halsey had to agree to the plan since all this transshipment would be in his area. They had a conference. We'd only been there a couple of days, and he brought this up, but I spoke up and said, "Well, Admiral Halsey, that's not a good idea. The Fiji Islands are no place to transship an outfit, you don't have any facilities. We've been to Nandi and to Suva which Admiral Turner wants to use, and they're not at all suited. Nandi is just a bare beach and they'll load a hell of a lot of stuff up there, and Suva has only got two or three little passenger piers and that's all – nothing fit for that kind of operations."

MR. FRANK: How long a trip was it from the Fijis to Tarawa?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, the Fijis were about halfway between. I'm just guessing now. It's a thousand miles from New Zealand to Tarawa, and the Fijis are about halfway between. But Turner wanted to use LCIs and this that and – LSTs, and all those kinds of craft. Later of course for Guam they did, they fooled around for weeks with those kinds of ships.

So Halsey said, "Well, I think undoubtedly you're right, but I can't say no to this thing without having something done. So you go over to the Fijis and make a reconnaissance and then come back and report to me."

Well, our new plane was there, so I took Jim Murray. We got in our plane, started out. Oh, I'd say, Fijis – the western rock of the Fijis, which extends way out from the western islands, is about two hours by PBY, 250 or so miles from Noumea. We were to make a landfall of the big rock pillar about an hour west of Suva – we should have made landfall in about two hours. But here we'd been going about three hours and we hadn't seen anything. By that time Murray and I had a chart out and we were sort of navigating back in the airplane ourselves, and I decided not to say anything to the pilot. We were about four hours out of Noumea when below us we saw a little string of atolls, and the plane continued. Of course, I knew if that was a landfall that should be on the chart, and I still didn't see anything. The pilot went in to the end, the last one of those atolls, and then he turned back, and an hour and a half later, we got into Suva with five minutes of gasoline.

What had happened was that the navigator had added the drift instead of subtracting it, and we were 175 miles out of our way, going there.

Well, I didn't say anything much. When I got back the next day -

For my reconnaissance in the Fijis I used some Hudsons that were manned by New Zealanders, there; the Hudson was an American plane. I've forgotten who manufactured it.

MR. FRANK: Lockheed, I think.

GENERAL THOMAS: We went all over the island, and I conferred with the Army there, and there was a nice little story that happened there. During this trip back to the United States in January of that year, General Vandegrift was going to have lunch with General Marshall. He did have lunch with him. The day before he was to go over, I got a call from Bob Young, a Leavenworth classmate, who was secretary to the War Department General Staff, and he said, "Your boss is having lunch with my boss tomorrow. You come on over with him."

We went over, had lunch with General Marshall. It was a small one, very pleasant. He was very penetrating in his questions and what not, and General Handy, his Deputy Chief of Staff, was there – what was that ambassador to the Air Force, I've forgotten. McInerney was there – and Bob Young, General Vandegrift and myself.

Marshall encouraged Vandegrift to talk, which he did a great deal, and on the way over, I said, "General, if you get any chance today to put in a plug for this fellow Bryant Moore of the 164th Infantry, do it."

He said, "I certainly will." So after Vandegrift was through talking, Marshall turned to me – he asked me some questions. Among other things, I had expressed the opinion that the 164<sup>th</sup> Infantry, a country-raised and woodsy outfit, had done better in the Solomons than this Boston outfit had – and they had the 184<sup>th</sup> or 182<sup>nd</sup>, whatever the number was. So Marshall said, "Well, what about the commanders? What were they like?"

I said, "Well, that's something we ought to tell you about. The commander of the 164<sup>th</sup> Infantry was a sterling fellow, and I think General Vandegrift ought to tell you." Vandegrift proceeded to give Bryant Moore a real plus. Marshall listened, but said nothing.

In Suva I found out from General Frederick Thompson, who was the island commander that the Americal Division was on the island. They had come out of the Solomons and come back there to recuperate. I went up there, and the acting division commander was a brigadier by the name of Quaney who I had known before, a fraternity brother of mine. I visited with him a few minutes and I said, "Where is your 164<sup>th</sup>?" He told me and I said, "Well, I'd like to see Bryant Moore."

"Oh," he said, "Moore's been gone from here for months."

I said, "Well, that's interesting. When did he go?"

He said, "I can't tell you the date, but you just wait, I'll get you the date." So he called the regimental sergeant major of the 164<sup>th</sup>. Bryant Moore had been detached from the 164<sup>th</sup> the day after we had lunched with General Marshall. He came home, was made a brigadier and put in a division that landed on Omaha Beach. Then, as I said, Moore went on later to big things. But he had been sidetracked, just like his friends had said, but this little word from Vandegrift about the work that he had done put him back on the track, and the guy really went to town after that. It was a very, very interesting thing.

On the matter of the Hudsons, my mind goes back to Guadalcanal. The Lockheed Hudsons were manned by New Zealand fliers, and they had a real good squadron (they were light bombs) of 12 or 15 planes. When I got up to – as we really dug in on Guadalcanal, I used to talk to General Geiger about the Hudsons, because he had to use dive bombers for his search operations. The dive bombers conducted the search operations from the start. The first day they came there, they started their searches. Well, they weren't well fitted for it. They didn't have long legs and had poor observations. So I talked to Roy Geiger about getting these Hudsons up and he said, "My God, I've got all I can attend to now. I've got the Army, Navy and Marine Corps fliers, a half a dozen different kinds of airplanes – I just don't need somebody else."

I told him, "But these guys can save you SBD time."

But he was adamant about it. But one day, I don't know just when, early in October or the middle of October,, he got shorthanded on SBDs, and about that time there had been a New Zealand general staff officer, and he brought up the matter of the Hudsons, and he said, "We've got 12 of them down there and they'd really like to get in the war."

So I went after Geiger again and talked to him about it, and finally he said, "Well, OK; send them."

Well, they brought the Hudsons in, and they're ideal reconnaissance planes because an observer can sit down in the bomb bay and look all over the place, like I did in the Fiji Islands. So we got those dozen Hudsons in there and they conducted all the searches from Guadalcanal from then on, all the reconnaissance, and did a splendid job. I don't blame Geiger because he did have a mess to monkey with there, in all this heterogeneous group of airplanes and fliers that he had there.

MR. FRANK: The Hudsons and New Zealanders became an integral part of COMAIRSOLS from then on.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. Oh, yes, sure. Oh yes, they reported in and they were part of the operation.

We didn't tarry long after General Vandegrift came over to IMAC, in Noumea. It's lovely back there, best climate in the world, but he went on up to Guadalcanal and started to go around and visit all the various units.

MR. FRANK: What was the result of your Fiji reconnaissance?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, I came back and told them, “absolutely not,” and Halsey turned thumbs down on the operation. They didn’t do it. It was a most unwise proposal.

MR. FRANK: How about your navigator? Did you get a new navigator?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh yes, though Vandegrift protested. Ralph Mitchell said, “No, I can’t leave them there.” He continued, “Vandy, if you’d been going north in that airplane, why, you’d have wound up in Jap territory.” So he put a new navigator in the next day.

We went up to Guadalcanal and the General started to go around to various outfits. By this time the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division, which had gone out in October and November, 1943, ’42, or a little later, the fall of ’42, they had moved to New Zealand, and too over – well, they set up their own camp. They went to north New Zealand. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had been down in south New Zealand, but the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division was based around Auckland in the northern part of North Island, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> was in Wellington, the southern part of North Island. But at the time our 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division was moving to Guadalcanal. Some units were already there, but what interested Vandegrift most was the defense battalions. They just piled the defense battalions out there, and there must have been five or six of them – four or five anyway, in the Guadalcanal area. They had never fired a shot. The war had gone on beyond them. We found Guadalcanal was a new scene to us. Not only was old Henderson Field now a great big place, but there were bombers too, a great big strip down near the river and with planes all over the place, B-27, B-25, B-17s, just everything, loaded with airplanes. The island was really a bastion.

We visited the defense battalions. One thing that impressed me was the number of young fliers – you see, for the defense battalions, the Marine Corps had permitted the artillery training section to take the cream off of every class and put them in artillery and particularly defense battalion work. Some of our finest officers got into that work and never got a chance to look at an enemy.

MR. FRANK: Do you think this defense battalion concept was because of the requirement for Marines to man an advanced base?

GENERAL THOMAS: That’s right. Now, I know this, General Holcomb has told me this – in 1941, if you said, “I want an offensive outfit,” the politicians would say, “No sir, you want to fight a war,” but if you said, “I want a defensive outfit, I want to defend this country,” you could get men. And we got men for defense battalions, and we got them just that way, because they were a defensive outfit saying – “We’re going to defend this area.” It’s a psychological thing, and it’s silly as all get out, but that’s the way it was. They got men for the defense battalions, and eventually, as I’ll relate a little later on, we formed 15 of those units although I don’t think more than four actually really got into the war. I doubt if more than five ever fired a shot.

MR. FRANK: Except later when they were disbanded and went to aircraft artillery.

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, but what I am saying is – when we got up to Guadalcanal, there were about five, at least five defense battalions, all around Purvis Bay, on the Tulagi side, and on Guadalcanal, up in the Russell Islands, and Bill Scheyer had gone into Rendova with the 4<sup>th</sup> Defense Battalion, incidentally had heavy action and did a very fine job. Well, as I went around and saw all these outfits, I saw all these young majors, who went out as captains, the many captains in those outfits had all been promoted to majors, and they were all very bright boys, and they must have been – each battalion

must have been in excess of five or six majors, and here these kids were just pleading to get in the war.

So when we went back to headquarters, I wrote a letter to Colonel Ben Galley, who was then the detail officer, Headquarters Marine Corps. I told him, "These young officers are all out here, and we have under our command seven defense battalions. I'm going to send 35 of those boys home, and I would like you to put them in the command and staff course at Quantico and put them back, because our crying need at the Division and Corps level is for junior staff officers."

So I sent the word out to each Defense Battalion to nominate five majors to be returned to the United States to go to staff school. Well, a couple of commanders came to see me and said, "You're taking all my good officers," this, that and the other, but my God, they didn't have any jobs. But we went through with it. They did come back, and most of them – later somebody tried to block them – most of them did get back to the Pacific as young graduates of the staff school and went off to divisions, staffs, regimental staffs, things like that. It really turned out all right.

When we got to Noumea, the New Georgia campaign was being conducted by the XIV US Army Corps, and was well along, in fact almost completed. The next jump up the Solomons was to be Bougainville. General Barrett, commanding the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division, was to be General Vandegrift's relief at IMAC, because it was known that General Vandegrift would stay at IMAC only a brief period of time and then come home to be Commandant. So Barrett moved over from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division to our corps headquarters and joined us for the planning of the Bougainville operation. As a matter of fact, we actually turned it over to him. He led the staff, and General Vandegrift and I stepped aside, because we were both going to leave.

MR. FRANK: Was it well known that Vandegrift was to become next Commandant by then?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, I told you that Holcomb had been out the year before – first he wrote him a letter and then he told him that, when Holcomb was out there, and when Vandegrift got his Medal of Honor and was over in the White House, it was all settled.

MR. FRANK: Was it a matter of common knowledge?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, no – not while we were in Washington. No, that's one of the things that I had to be very careful about during this visit back to Washington in January, because I was coming back to be Director of Plans of Policies and nobody knew it, so it gave me a good chance to go through that section, really have a look at it during that six weeks. I did though have to be very careful to conceal what was in the wind. But by the time we came back to IMAC, I think it was probably pretty well known that Charlie Barrett would relieve Vandegrift, and Vandegrift would come on home in a month or six weeks.

MR. FRANK: As Commandant.

GENERAL THOMAS: He would be the Commandant and relieve Holcomb. You see, Vandegrift was supposed to come home in the spring and relieve Holcomb in August, because Holcomb was 64 in August, but the matter of relieving Barney Vogel came up, and there was a delay in it. Holcomb was then to be held on through December, and go out at the end of December, while Vandegrift came over and took command of IMAC and got that train back on the track. I will tell you that it was almost off the track. The Marine Corps was really in jeopardy as to our command situation in the South Pacific.

But, as I said, Barrett joined us, and at this time we moved our headquarters forward, the echelon headquarters, to Guadalcanal and set it up there. We just had the rear echelon down in Noumea. By this time, even long before this time, Admiral Wilkinson had relieved Turner in command of the amphibious forces, and the next move after New Georgia was a landing on Vella Lavella. This was to be a shore-to-shore operation, with the use of landing craft, infantry and other small craft. Vella Lavella was not supposed to be defended strongly by the Japs, and it was not supposed to be a serious operation. As it turned out, the landing was not, although later there was some fighting.

Session VII, Tape 1, Side 2.

GENERAL THOMAS: We boarded the Coney, which was Admiral Wilkinson's flagship, going on the Vella Lavella operation, and during the night – it was a one night run up to Vella Lavella – from Guadalcanal, for the flagship – the other craft had started out earlier. We had snoopers over us all night. So they knew we were under way, but they didn't know where we were going. They found out where we were about eight o'clock the next morning, though. But the operation went off very smoothly. The troops landed. We watched them go ashore from the LCIs.

About eight o'clock, the Japs got on us from the air, and the dive bombers came down, and the destroyers which were escorting the landing force all went into Figure 8s at 40 knots, and it was really a wild time. Coney took two near misses, one off the port bow, which put about a 15-foot dent in the bow, and the other one right off the starboard quarter. A couple of men got hurt back aft, but we were very fortunate. As a matter of fact, no ship was hit that day, although we had bombers over us which dived at us repeatedly. And standing on an iron deck and looking at dive bombers isn't fun! We had quite a day. Of course, Vandegrift and Charlie Barrett and I went on this trip, and on the way back, when we got abeam of Munda, they put us ashore. We went over to visit with the air outfit, because the air support for the XIV Corps on the landing was a Marine group commanded by Pat Mulcahy, a brigadier. We visited the XIV Corps and then went to see Pat. He had us flown back to Guadalcanal.

About two days later, we were back in Noumea, and Halsey gave Vandegrift hell for going on the Vella Lavella landing. He said, "You're not supposed to go off on these operations, a man like you, and besides that you took your relief with you." He was really put out about it.

MR. FRANK: At this point, you didn't look many dive bombers in the eye in World War I, and you'd been through the Guadalcanal campaign, and the trench warfare of World War I. How'd you compare them? Which would you say was the roughest?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, of course, in World War I, we carried out repeat attacks. As I have said, we demonstrated that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. It was real rough and rugged. But there was little Air to worry us. I was in a bombing attack in Nancy once and got scared, but I didn't otherwise, and at Soissons, the German planes flew over the top of us and dropped hand grenades down on us. But we didn't suffer any casualties from them. We'd already been shot up so badly nothing could hurt us. There was very little Air. As I say, I had my first experience with air attack with the British west of Baghdad. Of course, we had all those air attacks at Guadalcanal. There were 75 major air attacks during the time I was on Guadalcanal, and



many, many small ones, and people dropping bombs, and this 'Washing Machine Charlie,' you know, he'd fly around all night long, or one thing or another would. They'd have two or three bombs aboard, and he'd fly maybe 15, 20 minutes and all of a sudden he'd drop a bomb. So he'd keep everybody awake. You had to watch out for that bugger because he'd drop that bomb right in the middle of your foxhole.

MR. FRANK: How about the trench warfare versus the jungle warfare?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, they're not alike, matter of fact; they're not at all alike, although when you've got an enemy over there, you've got to fight him. No, there weren't many similarities, except that they were both rough. Both were very rough.

MR. FRANK: Which was roughest?

GENERAL THOMAS: I'd say the jungle warfare was the roughest, rougher than trench warfare – unless you had to get up and go across from those trenches, as we had to do on occasion. You can't beat that. At Guadalcanal we didn't have anything like that. WWI was more like the beach assaults, Saipan and Tarawa, things like that. Our march across Soissons and Tarawa were very similar. We got the hell shot out of us both places.

As I say, General Barrett took over the planning for the Bougainville operation. He took over the staff, and they went forward with it. Because Vandegrift wasn't to be in on it, no I, we didn't get in on it very much, although Barrett and I had many long talks about the whole operation and what he was planning to do. He was bringing over with him his chief of staff, Noble, from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division, and Hal Turnage of course was moving up to division commander, and in the meantime Speed Cauldwell was made a brigadier. He had been commanding the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines, and he moved up to assistant division commander; Speed and I had been in the same battalion in World War I; we'd gone to France on the same transport. He was the commander, 95<sup>th</sup> Company, and I was a private in the 75<sup>th</sup> Company, and afterwards we had lots in common, and were very friendly.

Vandegrift effectively turned over to Barrett late in August. He said, "Now, Charlie's here and he's working on this thing, so why not travel." On the way home he had asked Headquarters Marine Corps to allow him to go by and see every Marine between Noumea and Washington, and not only did Holcomb approve it by President Roosevelt did also. We were going to go back to Australia, see the people back over there, so we went over to Australia, landed at Brisbane. We were using the PBY5A. We checked in with MacArthur's headquarters and then left because MacArthur was in Port Moresby. We went to Port Moresby the following day and check in there, and MacArthur asked us to stay to lunch so we stayed and had a very pleasant time.

MR. FRANK: How were your relations with him?

GENERAL THOMAS: Very good. Very pleasant. He was very affable. He told Vandegrift a lot of things he didn't mean and all that kind of stuff. We had a very pleasant lunch, and I had a long talk with the staff there, Steve chamberlain particularly, and they wanted to give me a job, but I told them that I didn't want to stay there; I wanted to go home with Vandegrift. They wanted me to be chief of staff of a corps they had over there but I wasn't interested.

MR. FRANK: - a Marine Corps?

GENERAL THOMAS: Chief of staff – oh, yes, they wanted me to be Eichelberger's chief of staff. Oh, yes, but I said no, though they held out prospects for higher jobs.

MR. FRANK: That's a compliment.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, anyway, I wasn't interested. At this time the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division was staging towards the New Britain campaign, Cape Gloucester campaign. In fact, the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines had already come up, Johnny Selden was in command of them, and they were at Milne Bay, as was also the 6<sup>th</sup> Army headquarters, General Krueger, so we went from MacArthur's headquarters at Moresby over to Milne Bay where we spent a couple of days seeing the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines. It was a miserable situation for Milne Bay is a rainforest; it's just horrible. They have, I don't know how much, they may have a hundred inches of rain a year there. It's just a horrible place. Anyway, they put our lads in there and there they were. We saw Selden and his regiment, hopped off from there and went over to Woodlark Island, where there was an Army commander, Cunningham, of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry, and Willie Harrison – or maybe Willie was in command, I can't remember who was in command, but Woodlark Island, it was one of the preliminary operations. Harrison had a defense battalion at that time. He transferred from there over to the 11<sup>th</sup> Marines later.

So we visited with Willie Harrison, and then we doubled back to Australia and went to Melbourne, where the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division was finishing loading out, and spent a couple of days with them.

MR. FRANK: Rupertus had the division?

GENERAL THOMAS: He had had the division since the 10<sup>th</sup> of July. Yes, that's right. So then after we finished in Australia we went back to Noumea, where Vandegrift went through the ceremony of turning over to Barrett, I'd say about the 15<sup>th</sup> of September, and we took off for New Zealand to visit the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division which was around Wellington. Oh, I'd say it's about six hours from Noumea to Uhennupai, the airport at Auckland. When we were about half way there and the pilot came back and told General Vandegrift, "They say that Uhennupai is badly socked in. We can't get in there. It's too far to turn back to Noumea, and I suggest that you let me go into Norfolk Island, which is only about half an hour from here. We can spend the night there and see if Uhennupai won't open up tomorrow.

Well, it was one of the most delightful experiences I've ever had. Norfolk Island is a gem. It rises sheer out of the sea. It's probably, oh, five by six miles each way. On all but in one tiny spot white limestone cliffs rise out of the sea from 300 to 600 feet. Then in this one little place it swales down where there is a small beach and a small bay, where shipping could come in. The place, as I said, was a gem. It has towering Norfolk pines. Since it gets lots of rain everything was emerald green.

We landed there and went over to headquarters. The airfield was operated by the New Zealanders. They put us up at their mess, and then we went in to call on Sir Charles Samuels who was the governor of the island. He was an Australian and had commanded a division at Gallipoli so he and I could talk a lot about Gallipoli. He took us for a tour of the island, and then we had tea. Of course Norfolk Island has a vile reputation because it was a prison island, where they sent the prisoners. They sent prisoners there before they were being sent to Australia. General Samuels took us to the dungeons where they kept the prisoners. We had a lovely stay and a most wonderful experience, dropping down onto Norfolk Island.

The next morning we went on to New Zealand, found everything open, and got in there. We spent two days in Auckland, visiting various Marine units. Muggs Riley was

there with the 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Battalion, just come out of Guadalcanal. We had a large base depot there, a very large one, and we visited that.

Then we flew on down to Wellington where we spent about four days with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. They were then planning the Tarawa operation. We visited all the outfits; had a very good visit. General Julian Smith was in command. After our visit we headed north. As we left so did Julian Smith. He left with about three of four members of his staff, enroute to Pearl Harbor to coordinate the planning for Tarawa. We both landed, as a matter of fact, at Suva at almost the same time. I remember meeting Jim Riseley who'd been over a Tonga on a reconnaissance. I saw Jim yesterday. He's here in Washington. He's over here visiting for a couple of days.

General Vandegrift and I spent that night with Sir Philip Mitchell. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division went on to Pearl – they flew that night. We stayed over and were flying the next morning, and well, we had a wonderful trip. We went first to Western Samoa where General Charles F. B. Price met us, and we visited Tommy Watson's brigade. That was Barrett's old brigade that had originally contained the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines. The 7<sup>th</sup> Marines were replaced by the 22<sup>nd</sup> Marines.

MR. FRANK: I think it was the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade.

GENERAL THOMAS: I don't remember what the brigade number was, but they were in Western Samoa. We spent a night with them. Then we flew over to American Samoa, where the 8<sup>th</sup> Marines had been before going to Guadalcanal. However, there were other Marine outfits around there, and we went to see them, and inspected the Fita-Fita Guard. After a day there, we doubled back to the Horn Islands, where the 8<sup>th</sup> Defense Battalion was, others I don't remember – the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines had once been on Horn Island, and the remainder of the regiment around Apia.

From Horn Island we went to Funafuti, where Frank Good had command of an advanced base, quite an active airfield, and included a defense battalion. We went up to Nanomea, where they were planning a move forward. Then we doubled back to Apia. The following day we flew to Canton where we spent the night. From there we went to Palmyra and visited the defense battalion there. Then on to Johnston (island), and visited another defense battalion there. After Johnston we went to Pearl Harbor and then to Midway where we spent a couple of days. Then we came on back to Pearl Harbor.

Now, we were on the way to Washington, but the first morning after returning from Midway we were at breakfast with Admiral Nimitz, when somebody handed him a message from Halsey saying that Barrett was dead. Halsey recommended that Roy Geiger assume command of IMAC and that Vandegrift, because of his familiarity with the Bougainville operation, return and command that operation.

Now, have I talked about my talk with Riley about Geiger taking command of the Corps?

MR. FRANK: No.

GENERAL THOMAS: I haven't said anything about that? Well, it was one of the last days before we left to go to New Zealand and then home. Bill Riley, who was the head of Halsey's planning section, without any preliminaries, said to me, "If anything happens to Barrett, who do you think out to command this Corps?"

I said, "Well, Roy Geiger, by all means."

He said, "I couldn't agree with you more." So it didn't come as any surprise to me that Halsey had asked for Geiger, and of course they had been old fliers together, and

had a close friendship as well, but I'm sure that the thing really happened as a result of my conversation with Riley.

MR. FRANK: Why should Riley have prognosticated – was this an emergency contingency plan or something he was –

GENERAL THOMAS: We won't go into that. He didn't feel certain of himself in the situation.

We took another plan. As a matter of fact, Nimitz put us in an airplane, and with delay we went back to Noumea.

MR. FRANK: Same day?

GENERAL THOMAS: We started back that same day, oh yes, within a few hours after breakfast we were back in the air.

MR. FRANK: PBY was too slow?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I don't know – yeah – oh, we left the PBY in Pearl. No, no, no, we went back in the PBY. We went back in the PBY, I'm sure. But anyway, we didn't dally around, we got back down there.

We attended Barrett's funeral, after we got back. General Vandegrift went then right off the Guadalcanal, where the Corps was all set up. At the time that we left IMAC, the place they were looking at to land on Bougainville was down near the southern end, not far from the Buin-Faisi area. This was a big fleet anchorage, two big airfields, and a lot of ground troops. Our landing was to be to the westward of Buin. When they really got into the thing, though, and studied it, they reached the conclusion that our force was not large enough, just like we felt like at Guadalcanal, to land, fight, the Japs, overcome, and take the thing over. And they (like we did at Red Beach) reached the conclusion that the best thing they could do would be to land further away, develop all their strength ashore, and then find some way to fight the Japs. For one thing, however, we didn't particularly want the Buin-Faisi airfield. We could build another airfield. All we were trying to do was to move our short legged aircraft a little closer to Rabaul.

So the IMAC decision was to seize a perimeter at Empress Augusta Bay, and build an airfield there, from which we could hammer Rabaul, thus they could bypass Buin-Faisi and all of their strength down there.

So that was what the decision was, and the plan was well along. When I got there I relieved Noble, who was acting chief of staff – had been Barrett's chief of staff. When I got there, General Vandegrift told me to relieve Noble, which I did, and we took over the planning. As I have said it was far along and I didn't have any real influence on that part of the planning. It was too far along.

MR. FRANK: To what extent, do you think and in what areas was the planning for Bougainville influenced by what happened at Guadalcanal; logistics and tactics?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, the tactics were similar, and of course they had a terrific amount of logistical support down there by that time. Things had been pushed up. There was a base depot in the Russell Islands. They were in excellent shape.

MR. FRANK: I was thinking of logistics in the amphibious assault.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no, they were so much better.

MR. FRANK: It was better?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes. They had plenty of ships and landing craft – although they pleaded they didn't have enough ships to do the job with, because almost immediately, when I got there, I found out that Snedeker, the G-3, was worried about

ships. Twining had been invalided home, came home for his second cancer operation, and he had malaria too, and Snedeker was the G-3, Bill Coleman was the G-2, Burger was the G-1, and Wiesman was G-4. There was one feature of this operation that had the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division and the Corps worried, and I gave attention to it immediately when we got there. The division was to move up and make the landing with two-thirds of its strength or two reinforced regiments, two RCTs, and then the transports were to depart from the area and go back to the Central Pacific. The 21<sup>st</sup> Marines, the remaining RCT, was then to be shuttled up on destroyers, over a period of something like 10 or 12 days, and after that on that same shipping, an Army regiment was to go in. In other words, Turnage and Geiger, who was to command the operation, were not to have more than half their strength for ten or fifteen day. Well, they were afraid the Japs would be on them before then, because after all they had great strength on this very same island.

MR. FRANK: The FMF intelligence estimates had downgraded enemy strength?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, they didn't give it much thought. I think that's the answer. They just didn't think in terms of ground warfare.

Well, anyway, when they last took this up with me, I didn't say anything. I went over to their headquarters, called Alligator, Wilkinson's headquarters. I saw Linscott who was there, and a couple of Navy people, and I talked about the dangers of this thing. I didn't get very far with them. They said, "These ships have got to go back. We're ordered to send them back. This is the only thing we can do."

I thought it over when I went back to my own bailiwick. I went in to Vandegrift and explained the whole thing to him. He said, "Well, come on, let's go see Wilkinson."

We went over to Alligator and fortunately Admiral Halsey was there, and Vandegrift put the question to them. He said, "You're doing something that's very, very dangerous, putting only two regiments ashore there in the midst of all those Japs, and then over a period of two or three weeks, bringing in the other two regiments."

MR. FRANK: With no air superiority in the area?

GENERAL THOMAS: We didn't have any air. All we had was from Munda. But no, we had nothing there. They had to build the airfield.

As Wilkinson was mulling the thing over in his mind, Halsey said, Theodore, do it." Wilkinson said, "All right. When the transports come back from landing the first echelon of two regiments, immediately, it's only 24 hours each way, we'll pick up the 21<sup>st</sup> Marines reinforced and take them up. And then we'll shuttle this Army regiment up by destroyers, but we'll start immediately with them."

Well, as it turned out later – I won't get into that because I was not there. But as it turned out later ours was a good idea, because the Japs were on top of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division immediately. It was just a matter of a day or two, but as the 21<sup>st</sup> Marines went ashore and the Army later, they had to move right into battle. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division would have been in a bad fix if we hadn't gotten that change made.

MR. FRANK: Of course, also, one of the ships of the 21<sup>st</sup> was bombed, with the loss of some life, if you recall.

GENERAL THOMAS: They were?

MR. FRANK: Yes, one of the ships carrying one of the battalions. Butler, I think had the 21<sup>st</sup> Marines, didn't he?

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right, yes. We had one other argument while we were on Guadalcanal, during that period of time. It was planned that the Bougainville operation

would be under IMAC, and Geiger was coming out, and as a matter of fact, he arrived about that time. He didn't delay long about getting out there.

MR. FRANK: Where was he? Guadalcanal all the time?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no, he was in Washington, commanding aviation. Oh, he came right on back out there, as soon as – he didn't tarry in Washington at all – just as soon as he found he was going to be Corps commander. Woods had relieved him on Guadalcanal, and he had come home some months before that, oh, a good many months, six months before that. He had come back and was Director of Aviation in Washington. When he was designated to command IMAC, he didn't tarry, he got right out there. He was to command – IMAC was to command the Bougainville operation. The next operation out there was to be a landing on New Ireland, up about Rabaul, Kavieng, and it was under active planning. The Army, led by General Harmon, Miff Harmon, said, "That thing has to be handled by the Army," because now we're leapfrogging. The Marines didn't go to New Georgia; the XIV Corps went in there.

Well, our contention was, the Marine contention was, that the XIV Corps should come to Bougainville and relieve IMAC. Then the IMAC would come back and plan the Kavieng operation, and they would go on there – oh well, the first of the year, early spring, something like that.

By that time Halsey had an advance headquarters on Guadalcanal, and he was there, with his chief of staff, Carney. He called this conference and Harmon with his chief of staff came up from Noumea. Harmon was still in command of US Army troops in the South Pacific.

Well, we had a dingdong session, arguing about who should command the Kavieng operation, and we presented our story, that it should be a Marine outfit, and that the XIV Corps should go into Bougainville, relieve IMAC, let IMAC come back to Guadalcanal and plan the Kavieng operation. Well, it was hammer and tongs. Harmon and his chief of staff were very insistent about the XIV Corps leapfrogging. Halsey had not made up his mind, we didn't feel. The Wilkinson spoke up, and said, "I've gone more deeply into the Kavieng operation than I believe anyone else here, because I'm going to be the amphibious commander." He continued, "There's one thing that strikes me, and that's its extraordinary difficulties. In that operation I must have the very best amphibious corps command that can be obtained for me."

And Halsey said, "Well, that's IMAC." And the conference was over. Well, Harmon was very crestfallen. They'd lost the battle, but we had gotten the Marine Corps back into its rightful place. We had been on shaky grounds with Vogel, the death of Barrett, New Georgia and all this, but we were back on the track.

MR. FRANK: But when they put on New Georgia, the Army really goofed that up, didn't they, I mea, the way it was run – the Army commander, I think the 43rd Division, infantry division, was in there –

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, it wasn't very good. Oh, no. Some of our people helped to lead them.

MR. FRANK: The Raiders that Sam Griffith –

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh yes, I know all about that, yes, we had three, Radio Smith and George McHenry and somebody else helped lead Army regiments up on New Georgia.

MR. FRANK: So they didn't look too good on that.

GENERAL THOMAS: I understand they didn't. However, that's not my story.

The last day of October came. The amphibious task force embarked. Geiger had arrived. As a matter of fact, he was present at the conference with Harmon about Kavieng. He didn't say anything and I said very little. So he was there, and when we were planning what we were going to do, General Vandegrift said, "This is Hal Turnage's show, but I'm going up as an observer. I'm going up with Wilkinson, and I'm not going to have anything to do with it, but I'm going to look at it," and he said, "You stay here with Roy."

So I stayed back on Guadalcanal when they left, and Noble went with Vandegrift. He was to go ashore and be present. General Geiger wanted Silverthorn as his chief of staff, but Silverthorn could not be relieved for several months, so he took Noble. They took off, and as I said, I stayed with Geiger. The operation went off, and we stayed on then for about two more days at the corps headquarters, and when the operation was an obvious success, General Vandegrift turned over to General Geiger and we took off for home. We went back to Noumea, and went from there on. Halsey sent us up to Pearl Harbor in his Coronado, and we had a nice flight, stayed overnight so Vandegrift could talk to Nimitz, because Nimitz was going to be in the chain of command of a hell of a lot of our troops, between Washington and the Pacific. Then we went to San Francisco where we inspected the depot and stayed for a couple of days. Mrs. Vandegrift met the General in San Francisco. We visited Mare Island. Then we went down to San Diego because the 4<sup>th</sup> Division was preparing to mount out then for Roy in the north, from Camp Pendleton, and General Vandegrift's son, young Archie, was on duty with the 4<sup>th</sup> Division at the time.

We stayed about a week in San Diego and visited all the outfits. It just happened that was my first visit to the area. I'd never been there before. I'd had 24 years in the Marine Corps before I saw San Diego.

MR. FRANK: How about when you were at Pearl? Didn't you see Holland Smith out there?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes. We stayed with him, as a matter of fact.

MR. FRANK: Because I want to talk to you, when we get into this, after General Vandegrift takes over the commandancy, about the relationship of Vandegrift and Smith.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, it was very cordial. It think – I don't think there's any doubt that Smith was a little hurt that Vandegrift, his junior, had been selected to be Commandant, but Holland Smith and Tommy Holcomb were not friendly at all, and I don't think Holcomb ever had any idea of making Holland Commandant of the Marine Corps.

MR. FRANK: It seemed to me it was a very striking, very close relationship.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, they were very friendly. Now, Holland, just between us, cusses Vandegrift out a little bit these days, but they were on the friendliest of terms then, very close terms.

MR. FRANK: Actually even though Smith was Vandegrift's senior, the letters show that he like Vandegrift almost as a son.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, he's the junior, and Holland took a very, very becoming stance in that whole thing, and of course Holland was commanding three-fourths of Vandegrift's Marine Corps, and Vandegrift's too smart a man to do anything but keep the relationship between the two good.

There's one thing that arose at San Diego, as I went over that place. We had a little session with Harry Pickett, who was commanding the amphibious training command out there then, and that's where Vandegrift told Pickett that he wasn't to monkey with the divisions. The Naval commanders were getting ideas, you know, particularly after Tarawa, about commanding the Marines aboard their ships, and as a matter of fact one skipper got relieved as a result of writing a letter saying that the Marines on his ship should be under his command. He put them ashore. He didn't care whether they belonged to the division or not. Well, it was a very screwy idea.

MR. FRANK: Was Vogel in command on the West Coast at this time?

GENERAL THOMAS: Vogel was in command in the San Diego area, with his headquarters up at Camp Elliott.

As we went over all the area inspecting the Marine Corps base, Elliott, Camp Kearney, Camp Pendleton and all, I said to General Vandegrift, "There's one conclusion I have – the Marine Corps owns too much real estate in Southern California, and if anybody got after us, we just couldn't defend ourselves."

Well, we'd been down at the Marine Corps base, San Diego, where the commander had told us of Navy efforts to get a part of the base, and now he was fighting them off.

We went back to Washington, where we checked in. We went across country by rail. Mrs. Vandegrift was with the General, and we went back on the Super Chief. I was promoted to brigadier on the 7<sup>th</sup> of December. The General of course wasn't to take over until the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, which he did. He took over from Holcomb on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of January, 1944.

I don't know who in the long line of Marine Officers could have done a better job than Holcomb had done. He had really built the Marine Corps, the wartime Marine Corps. When you think that in 1940, or '39, late '39 when the war started in Europe, we were only a little over 16,000 men, and the first increment was a buildup to 25,000 men. That went very slowly because the recruiting service didn't get out and get to work. Roosevelt kicked our Commandant right in the tail about it. He said, "Tommie, I told you to get those men, and I want you to build the Marine Corps to 25,000 men."

From that day, in 1940, until almost four years later when he left office, Holcomb built the Marine Corps to 34,000 officers and 450,000 enlisted. He did a splendid job, and much of it he carried on his own shoulders.

As I say, Vandegrift took over on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of January, 1944. DeWitt Peck, who had been the Director of The Division of Plans and Policies, moved up to be Assistant Commandant, and I slid in to the office of Director of Plans and Policies. There had been a system under way in Headquarters Marine Corps for a good many years, and a very good one for peacetime work of making a study of every project that came up. The study would be written, bucked to the pertinent office, and then it would be circulated around Headquarters Marine Corps. Well, such thoroughness in peacetime is justified, but as a wartime device it was completely lacking. When General Vandegrift told me that he was going to take me back to Washington with him, I said, "There's one thing I'd like to ask you, and that is that we do away with this study idea," and then I told him when I came up to Headquarters on temporary duty in 1941, before I made my trip with Jim Roosevelt, they handed me a job, and my first job was a study to determine whether the Marine



Barracks, Brooklyn, should have 13 or 12 baseball uniforms and that's the study I was doing, and that's what a lot of the studies were like.

So over the next year we reduced them considerably. I – as I've probably commented, and will again – I'm a purist on the general staff idea, I believe that the general staff is a good system, and when you've got it in, it should work, and Headquarters Marine Corps was organized on the operational side as a – on a general staff basis. As a result, the Director of Plans and Policies was the chief of staff, and we had a 1, 2, 3 and 4.

MR. FRANK: And later a -5.

GENERAL THOMAS: Later a -5, yes. Well, long after a -5. I wouldn't have a -5 right now but they do have.

However, in getting ready for the war, and I presume also, lacking leadership from people who really believed in the general staff system, the development, back in that area, was towards the old Corps and branches idea of the Army's. When I got to Headquarters Marine Corps, I found the -4 section completely flat on its back. It had been de-energized by the Engineers, the Artillery section, the Special Weapons section, the Communications Section and others. We had formed these specialists' corps.

MR. FRANK: They were specialized.

GENERAL THOMAS: They were. They were the specialized corps. Now, they took over all these duties, they impinged, they practically ruined G-4 and they impinged on G-3. They also had their tentacles extending out all over the Marine Corps from these various branches.

Now, I had forgotten something that I want to cover, and I'm going to go back to it. It was at Bougainville – actually it was at Guadalcanal – about a week before we were to make the landing on Bougainville. Jim Murray came to me one day with a proposal that we use one of our parachute battalions, of which we had two or three at Vella Lavella, that we use it for a raid on the island of Choiseul, just below Buin-Faisi. It appealed to me and to General Vandegrift. So I sent a message to Bob Williams, who was commanding this parachute regiment, to come down to Guadalcanal and bring Krulak with him, because we'd determined that Krulak was the one we wanted to do the job.

MR. FRANK: Was it to be a raid or a diversion?

GENERAL THOMAS: A raid, really both; a raid mainly. Now, as the Japanese withdrew from New Georgia, and they had a lot of people down in the Central Solomons, they didn't have the shipping and we had too much air in there for them to get out in the daytime. Well, what they did was to walk their people back up that chain of islands, and to water jump by small boat between islands. They'd shuttle them over at night and then they'd walk along these islands. Well, the longest of the islands was that of Choiseul, just below Bougainville. So we cooked up, with Alligator, the amphibious command, a raid, and it appealed to them as much as to anybody else. We told Krulak exactly what we wanted him to do, and he returned to his unit. The small craft went up to Vella Lavella, which was not far, just across the strait from Choiseul. They picked up the 2<sup>nd</sup> Parachute Battalion, and landed them at night on Choiseul – across the line of retreat of the Japs.

Well, for about four days Krulak just raised hell with them – destroyed their supplies, sank their boats, did all kinds of things, killed Japs, a whole bunch of them (he

had a few of his own men killed) but he carried out a real raid. We were in close communication with him. I kept in touch with him just like I used to do with Edson, and about the fourth day, he said, "There's just too many Japs around here." The Japs were ganging up on him. They found out he was a small outfit, not a big landing, and so they started out after him, and we sneaked him out later that night. And John F. Kennedy was in command of one of the boats that brought him out of there.

So we got Brute back. One of the things he did was to capture a chart showing the layout of the mine fields at the entrance of the Buin-Faisi Harbor. Now, I don't know but I'm pretty sure that the next day after we got that chart back, and we had it back the day after we captured it, because he gave it to the coast watcher, and it was a Dumbo (PBY) that went that night. A PBY landed back of Choiseul every night taking people in and out of there, across the island from Krulak, and the Dumbo brought the chart down, and one of our submarines went in there and laid mines in the Buin-Faisi channels.

We got Krulak out of there. When he had come down with Williams I noticed he limped. He'd had a pinched nerve in his leg as a result of a parachute jump. So I told Williams, "I want Krulak to come back down here. We will take him home with us, he needs hospitalization."

So he came back. Halsey gave him a Navy Cross. This operation had real results. The morning of the landing at Bougainville, the Japs knew we were coming. The snoopers had been over the task force the night before and had seen them coming up the Slot. They got their planes off the next morning at an early hour, and they came down looking for our transport force. However, as a result of Krulak's raid, they apparently had reached the conclusion that our landing was to be on Choiseul. So their planes swung south to Choiseul, before they found out they were wrong and got the word the landing was on Bougainville, and this delay gave our fighters a chance to get on them. Though they did get in and bomb a couple of the transports, they didn't hurt anybody. So Krulak's raid had that much effect.

MR. FRANK: Had you known the Brute before China?

GENERAL THOMAS: No. I knew him when he was in the 1<sup>st</sup> Division. He was Holland Smith's aide when we landed at New River, after that. I knew him. I knew him off and on. I was an instructor in the Basic School when he came in from the Naval Academy. Oh yes, sure, I've known him ever since he came in the Marine Corps. He was just the boy we wanted for this raid. Also I wanted him back in Washington, too.

MR. FRANK: He took over your -4 Section?

GENERAL THOMAS: He took over the -4 Section, that's right. One of the things that I did, when I came back to Headquarters Marine Corps, was to make arrangements for the relief of a large number of the officers in Plans and Policies. They had a splendid bunch of people there and they'd done a fine job, but they'd been sitting there in Plans and Policies for two years while the war went on out in the Pacific, and they wanted to get in the war. Over the next three or four months I brought in combat experienced people who were due for relief in the Pacific, and relieved almost every one of them. I had a fine group, and all these boys happily went on their way to the Pacific. It was a really a heart-warming experience, to be able to do it for them. It also helped me to break up the specialists' situation.

At the time that I came to Headquarters, regardless of the changes in Plans and Policies, we picked up right where the other crowd left off and went ahead with the war.

There had been a great many changes and even more recommendations for changes in the organization. As a matter of fact, I should say there was a stack of them. We went to work on those. Some were just fine, many were not. We had passed on a great many of them and sent many of them back to where they started from down in IMAC. We turned to on these changes, and there were a few changes that should be made and we made them. But most of them were not justifiable and were rejected.

We had already shifted over from the -03 rifle to the M-1. But we were still dissatisfied with the performance of our infantry, small infantry units. We had adopted the Army squad when they changed from 8 to 15 or 14 men, or rather 13 men led by a sergeant. I don't claim any originality and I don't know who the originator was, but in order to inject a higher degree of flexibility into their very small units, the raiders and the parachutists had developed a kind of squad different from that of the standard infantry organization. I was impressed with the value of that squad for any unit, but before I made the move I wanted high-grade testimony. We convened a very loose board. We called Edson, who had just finished at Tarawa, back home. Sam Griffith was available from Quantico. There were other people around, and Krulak was there with us, and Twining was available, and we all sat down, and in a matter of a few hours we decided to adopt the unit which is the standard Marine Corps squad (of) today.

MR. FRANK: Can I ask you about this thing, the 24<sup>th</sup> Marines, the Litzenberg squad, Litzenberg report. They practiced with a squad which had this Fire Team concept, according to documentation. If you recall I wrote about them here, which of course this is only mere paper. What happened on the East Coast at Headquarters may have been going on independently and isolated. According to the documentation, the report came in. They were sent to the Division of Plans and Policies. I saw your chop on it. Krulak made some notes which I quoted, about the use of it, and it was sent on down for the Griffith Board, Quantico, to study. They took one of the special training battalions, school battalions down there to look around and research it and brief it. Now, I've also heard from Bill Russell at the Naval Academy who talked to Krulak about this, and your board, and evidently you came to some conclusions independently of what Sam Griffith had, and according to Russell the reason the 4<sup>th</sup> man was added to each fire team supposedly was to give it the flexibility for your casualties, to give you this.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's the change we made, and that's the argument I made about it. The original squad was a leader and three-man fire teams. Well, it's very well, a three-man fire team is workable, although I liked the other, but if you have only three men, you can't have an effective two-man fire team. They aren't any good. So if you've lost a man due to sickness or a man was killed, your fire team immediately got out of action, so I said, "Let's make it four men, and they can lose a man and they can still operate."

Now, one thing I wanted, and I've always argued for, and I think I've won out in most cases, was that there should be a fire-team leader who is the leader. Now, I went to Quantico in 1954, and I looked out there at their demonstration, and there they had the fire-team leader up in the firing line firing, and I immediately jumped the Basic School, and Kenny Houghton, who was in command of the infantry training section out there, and I said, "You're wrong as you can be."

He said, "Well, you can't afford to do away with the rifle fire." And then I pointed out to him how many bullets these guys could throw out and I said, "Now,

you've got a sergeant commanding 12 men, and we found out long ago a corporal couldn't command eight, it's too many men. We've blown it up like this, and this is the fire team, the fire-team leader stays back and directs the three men, one of whom is equipped with a BAR, and M-1 rifles."

So I always fought for the four-man fire team, and that's what we adopted. We put in the four-man fire team, and the three men in that fire team, under this corporal, you've got two M-1 rifles, only they've got this other rifle now, but we had the two M-1 rifles and the BAR, and look at the terrific fire power. And the fire-team leader, his job is to direct that fire power.

### *End of Tape 1.*

### *Tape 2, Side 1.*

GENERAL THOMAS: There were two rather important changes in organization that took place. They were actually spread over the latter days of General Holcomb's administration and the early day of General Vandegrift's administration. General Vandegrift – they really came about as a result of conversations of letters between General Vandegrift and General Holcomb. I refer to the role of the Parachutists and the Raiders.

When the war broke out, the Marine Corps went into a lot of activities. I think probably I've mentioned this before. We had barrage balloons, and we had this, that, and the other thing. We went into a parachute program and we went into a Ranger or Raider program. I think maybe I've already commented that the Raiders or Rangers, the shock troops, are the resort of the declining power. They have to get their good men into an outfit that can really fight. I never felt that, although I take nothing from the Raiders, they were a wonderful outfit, but I would back more than one infantry battalion with a splendid, far-seeing commander to train them to do almost anything that a Raider outfit can do. The Marine Corps wasn't an outfit that needed these specialties. Of course, the Parachutists were something particularly special.

I've mentioned already that we took the Parachute Battalion. They were sent out to us. They belonged to the division as a matter of fact, a part of the division organization. They were a small outfit, and we sent them as a rough – an objective in the Guadalcanal operation. Their battalion commander wanted to go and I don't blame him. He's a good kind of guy to do this kind of thing. They fought a good fight. We got some wonderful fighting out of them.

But after we got IMAC, where General Vandegrift took command of the Corps, we had a parachute regiment in the South Pacific. Well, I turned the whole thing over in my mind many, many times, and I finally sent for Bob Williams, and I said, "Bob, you're here for training. You're ready to go. You've got three battalions out there. Now, if you will show me some place in the Pacific war where you can carry out your parachute functions, with parachutists, and convince me, I will say 'Carry on.' But I don't believe you can. For one thing, the winds are too high. The areas are too small. They're too rough, very little land, too much water."

MR. FRANK: How about the aircraft?

GENERAL THOMAS: Not to speak of aircraft, but actually the aircraft weren't available. There were just all sorts of things in the Central Pacific. "Now, there's no place for you in the Central Pacific. Parachutists just don't work, that's all. It isn't feasible game. So I give you a choice. We can suggest to Headquarters Marine Corps that you'll be offered to the Army in Europe, or we can suggest to Headquarters Marine Corps that you'll be offered to the Southwest Pacific, to MacArthur's outfit." I said, "The alternative to those two things is that you be converted into regular Marine infantry outfits."

Williams went away, but he came back before long, with the idea of no Europe, no Southwest Pacific, but they wanted to stay in the Marine Corps and he believed they should be converted. We recommended that to General Holcomb, and he ordered the Parachutists home. We sent them home and they went into the 5<sup>th</sup> Division. They furnished the most marvelous bone and sinew for the infantry of that division.

Despite the wonderful work that the Raiders had done, we had the same feeling about the Raiders – that they should be converted into a regular infantry outfit. We had at that time four Raider battalions, three of them in the South Pacific, and we had a Raider training headquarters and we had a Parachutists training headquarters. So it was decided – as a matter of fact, I believe this was done by General Vandegrift – the Parachutists were abolished by General Holcomb, and they were brought home. In abolishing the Raiders, we had the opportunity of doing something that warmed everybody's heart, in other words reviving the old 4<sup>th</sup> Marines name, in honor of the Shanghai crowd, so we redesignated the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> battalions of Raiders as the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines. But the left-over of Raiders, the whole Parachute regiment, the training centers – all went into the 5<sup>th</sup> Division and did a great deal to bring them up to an Iwo Jima show.

The forming of the 4<sup>th</sup> MarDiv as I've mentioned – we visited the 4<sup>th</sup> MarDiv, and practically as we left the West Coast they were embarking to go off to Roi Namur. The next item on the agenda was to form the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Division. Well, there were a great many men at Pendleton all ready to be in the division, but there were to be very large drafts, I'd say over 4000 men to go from Camp Lejeune to the West Coast to join the 5<sup>th</sup> Division, and there were maybe 6000 men to come from Pendleton. The rest of them were either on the way in or at Camp Pendleton or to Elliott at the time.

MR. FRANK: I think the Engineers and Pioneers of the 5<sup>th</sup> Division were formed at Lejeune, weren't they?

GENERAL THOMAS: I think so, yes. These numbers of men, now, I'm thinking about going into the – they were casualties to go into artillery and infantry. I think maybe so. I don't remember those details now.

But I hadn't been at headquarters long when word came from Camp Lejeune that they did not have the men. They could not furnish the men, these 5000 men they were supposed to send to the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Division.

Well, I had their strength reports. We didn't have a single solitary noncombat outfit, except the women Marines, yet they had 32,000 men on the post. So I told General Vandegrift, "I think somebody had better go down there," and he said, "Well, go ahead."

I went down. I knew where these people were, and I asked the commanding general about it, and he said, "Well, these people are all tied here by Headquarters. I'm not allowed to touch them."

I told him, "You can't show me anything in writing that says you can't touch them."

He said, "No, but they get these telephone calls." It was the result of our specialist sections. They had people sealed down there, wouldn't let anybody touch them – Communications, Defense, all that.

Well, I said, "I'm going to call their COs in," and the first guy that came in was Sammy Taxis from down on the beach, where he had base defense weapons, and he had about 3000 men. I said, "What are they?" He said, "Well, these are all trained men, and they're home for a spell, and then they are to go back and fill up these replacement battalions, I mean these defense battalions."

I said, "Sammy, the base defense battalions have done well, and you guys at Guadalcanal were wonderful, but it's a dead game. There is no use for them any more. Defense battalions are all sitting in the Solomon Islands doing nothing. So send a thousand men to the post out of your outfit to go join the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Division."

I did the same thing to the Communicators, and before I was through that day I found 5000 men, and I told Henry Larsen to take them over and send them to Camp Pendleton, which he did.

We got a message from Camp Elliott. They were to furnish about 6000 men. They said they could not furnish their quota, yet they had 18,000 men on their rolls, and they didn't have a single military formation. We just told them, "Take the men out of your post and send them."

But General Vandegrift said, "You'd better go out there." We were having a terrific blizzard. This was late February, 1944, and commercial airlines were grounded. So I said, "I'm going on the train. So I went on the train, and as I walked in the door of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Division, or Camp Elliott, the adjutant said, "We sent the last man of our quota yesterday to the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Division."

And I said, "Well, that's a damn good thing, because I'm out here to get some of your 18,000 men."

Well, anyway, the 5<sup>th</sup> Division got formed, and they were a good division. They would have been a good division anyway, but they were a much better division because they had, oh, I suppose 5000 Raiders and Parachutists, the cream of the crop in their outfit, and as I said they produced at Iwo Jima.

Another situation came to a head while I was on that trip. As a matter of fact, I was visiting with General Vogel, and I had a call from General Vandegrift. The Navy had been hell-bent to take the Marine Corps Base at San Diego away from us. They had done everything they could to undermine us. They wanted that base. They wanted those quarters and barracks. Of course, the base at San Diego and the Naval Training Station at San Diego lay side by side. But they were just determined to get that away from the Marines, and they put up all kinds of arguments about the Marines can train their troops in Kansas just as well. Well, that was a fact. We trained them just as well in Kansas as we did in San Diego. But we were not about to give up that base.

The pressure got heavy, and I knew a little bit about it. That's why I said to General Vandegrift when we were in San Diego, "We own too much real estate out here. We've got to give somebody something, back to the public or something."

As I went to the West Coast, Secretary Knox called a conference, and the Navy had prevailed upon him to make a decision in this matter. Well, as I'll relate in a second,

a little later, General Vandegrift had set up very friendly relations with Admiral Horn. Admiral Horn was the Vice Chief of Naval Operations, and was the housekeeper of the naval establishment. Ernie King ran the war, but Horn ran the naval establishment. General Vandegrift told Admiral Horn, "Admiral, the Marine Corps Base at San Diego was a tidelands and a sand flat, and Marines with their own hands over years and years built that place by hand." He said, "Myself, I've bought plant after plant and I've planted them in that Marine Corps base. We made it the beautiful place it is. And if anything is done to take that away from the Marine Corps, the resentment is going to be terrific." Well, Horn didn't reply. Anyway, I knew this was going to come. As I have stated, Vandegrift called me and said, "We had the meeting today. Secretary Knox had a meeting about the Marine Corps Base at San Diego, to make a decision. The Navy got up and made their plea, all the reasons why they should have the base and what not, and I waited till everybody had tears in their eyes, and then I said, 'Well, we understand that the Navy needs a lot more room, and I am willing to turn over Camp Elliott to the Navy.'"

Well, he said the naval witnesses were flabbergasted. But Mr. Knox said, "Gentlemen, why, that's a very fair decision. You take Camp Elliott. Now, that's all," and Knox got up and walked out.

Vandegrift said to me, "I want you to go see COMELEVEN about turning over Elliott. We want to turn it over right away. We're going to get out of there, and you talk to Barney about getting out of there and getting over to Pendleton."

So I went down to see COMELEVEN, and the poor guy was almost in tears. He said, "We don't want Camp Elliott. We can't use Camp Elliott. We want the Marine Corps Base."

I said, "I know you do, but you've got Camp Elliott and we're going to move out immediately, and it's yours."

Well, I went on back to Washington. But that's what happened to that fracas. We turned over Camp Elliott to the Navy.

MR. FRANK: What could they use it for? It was inland.

GENERAL THOMAS: Hell, they could use it. They had schools all over the place. They could use it for their schools. They loaded up their West Coast. They just moved everything, really. They moved it to the West Coast. Well, we did more or less the same thing, and neither one of us was very sensible, and I'll get along to it later on where the West Coast broke down during the war.

MR. FRANK: When I went out to the Pacific I went out through Camp Elliott. It was a staging base for replacement battalions.

GENERAL THOMAS: What date was that?

MR. FRANK: In '44, March '44.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, we didn't have it long after that.

MR. FRANK: Linda Vista.

GENERAL THOMAS: We didn't have it long after that. Now, of course, I mentioned the major posts. When we went through on that inspection trip I just talked about La Jolla and the base and what not, but we also had a Raider training camp. We had a Parachutists' training camp. We had a tank training camp, back in the hills there, and we had Camp Dunlap out at Niland in California where the artillery fired. We just had a terrific setup out there.

Now, I'm going to go on here for about a minute, and then – no. . .

General Vandegrift did not require much instruction or a guide to find his way around Washington, because two years before he came back he had just completed a five-year tour here and he knew his way around quite well. He also knew a lot about relations with the Navy, and General Holcomb had set him a good example, a quiet, calm, dignified yet when required forceful relationship. We didn't have a situation parallel to today's, in those days. In the first place, we didn't have the laws that the Marine Corps rests on today. But President Roosevelt looked to two people to run the war, George C. Marshall and Ernest King, and there wasn't any doubt that they ran it. Now, Roosevelt knew the position of the Service Secretaries, and they fulfilled their position, and nobody ever impinged on their authority, but they didn't run the war. They ran the administration of their establishment. They did very well and everything went smoothly. But in the Army, George C. Marshall ran things and in the Navy, Ernie King was a czar.

Vandegrift quite appropriately decided that his best bet was to set up pleasant relations, workable relations with King's staff, and that when he had to deal with King he would deal with him. He had to on many occasions. King was very pronounced in his views and very rough in his attitudes, but King was devoted to winning the war, and Vandegrift never let him forget that a hell of a lot of the war was being won by Marines. And I'll say for Admiral King, he never gave any indication that he didn't realize this. There was never any difficulty. Everything went very smoothly. King had a chief of staff, Dick Edwards, a full admiral, a very able, very, very able, very good personality, and he and Vandegrift were on good terms. King had a man a little bit of his own color as his operations officer, Vice Admiral Charles M. Cooke, Jr.

MR. FRANK: Still around.

GENERAL THOMAS: Still around, yes, 'Savvy' Cooke. I had associations with him later, you know. I had a connection with him, in Tsingtao. Cooke, very able, a little on Ernie King's side in that he was a brilliant thinker and sometimes impractical 0 not really Ernie King but Kelly Turner's side. Kelly Turner and Savvy Cooke had a lot in common, but Cooke worked very closely with Vandegrift.

Admiral Horn, who was the housekeeper for the naval establishment, was very fine. He and General Vandegrift had the friendliest relationship. And Vandegrift kept it smooth. He spent a good deal of time over in the Navy Department. As I say, he didn't see King very often but he didn't need to see King, he got his business tended to and he didn't worry King, because King was a busy man. But every time he went to King he got what he went for. Vandegrift had very close relations with Secretary Knox, and particularly so with Jim Forrestal, the Under Secretary of the Navy. They all worked very, very smoothly together. But, of course, as I said, Forrestal and Knox were out of the fighting part of the Navy. As a matter of fact, they neither one were informed about operations except as they were taking place. They did not – they never touched the operational planning. As a matter of fact, they didn't know what the planning was, and I know that to be a fact. That was off in another sphere. I suspect the same thing held in the War Department, where Marshall and Arnold – he had Arnold at his right elbow all the time, the Air Force general. But General Vandegrift's relations were pleasant, not familiar, dignified, but always on a real good sound basis. Never in my three and a half years with him there did I see him lose a battle. He won every one of them.



And of course, as I said, Tommy Holcomb had left him a wonderful foundation, because Holcomb was the same kind of man. He hated King and King hated Holcomb, but they respected each other and they got along. Holcomb would write to General Vandegrift in one of his letters – as a matter of fact, these letters are probably in the files – “that son-of-a-bitch King.” Oh, yeah, he hated the hell out of Ernie King, and when they put the Negroes in the Marine Corps he said, “King, the first thing I would do would be to form a nigger guard and put it on you battleship.”

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also were a unit, not quite parallel to what they are today. They’ve now a formal setup, amplified, vigorous, big empire today. They were a loose-knit organization in 1944-45. They met regularly. I believe three times a week, usually over lunch, and they didn’t meet for any great period of time. They did transact their business, because they had teams that would prepare plans. There were many fights and there was a lot of bitterness in the Joint Chiefs. I know that to be a fact. Marshall never wanted to fight the Pacific War, and Ernie King was determined to fight in that theater, and he won out and we did fight the Pacific War. Marshall resented every man that went to the Pacific and was thus drawn away from Europe. He was determined to fight the European War, and he wanted to turn his back on the Pacific and take care of them later. Well, whether he was right or wrong, it’s not for us to say now, I don’t know, but King wanted to fight the Pacific War and he did, but he had to battle for every man and every dollar and every bit of power that he got, he had to fight Marshall for it.

There were several teams. The Red, White and Blue Teams in the Joint Chiefs of Staff which were the planners. We had a Marine all the time on one of those teams, usually the White Team. Frank Whitehead was prominent, and Silverthorn was over there I believe at one time. But when we came back it was Nimmer. Nimmer had been evacuated from Guadalcanal (with an ulcer) where he had a defense battalion – those ulcers were horrible. When Nimmer got home, they put him over in the White Team. He was there during the first of Vandegrift’s administration. He considered as part of his job was to keep the Marine Corps informed of the things that might interest them, of real interest to them. He used to come by my office on his way to work. He lived over in Arlington. He came frequently. And we really kept track of things. We knew what was going on. He kept us informed. The White Team was handling Pacific matters. As a matter of fact, I’ve written down in my notes – we were the ones that really picked out Okinawa as an objective. When the Formosa operation collapsed, and Nimmer came by, Formosa was cancelled, and it was very fortunate that it was because it would have been a bloody operation and it would likely have been a failure, because we could never have conquered Formosa. It is ten times as large as Okinawa.

Anyway, we knew what was going on, at least all we needed to know. We had a big job to do, and we didn’t have to run the operation in the Pacific, but it was helpful to us to know a little bit about it and what they were planning and what they were thinking about, and we always knew. I got into it from a JCS level. Vandegrift got many details of it over at CNO, and COMINCH – that was the title that King took on. King was King; there wasn’t any doubt about that.

Thing went very smoothly. I was very close to General Vandegrift. I was in and out of his office all day long. I believe I can honestly say that there never was an item of any kind that came up that he didn’t talk over with me directly.

I was dissatisfied with the position of his Assistant Commandant. No one in that office ever functioned. I didn't feel that the Assistant Commandant was given responsibility to equal his authority, and I once said to the General, "Your Assistant Commandant can bring you a goat for everything that fails in this Headquarters, and he'll never be the goat."

He said, "Well, why not?"

"Because you've given him authority without any responsibility. There isn't a damn thing that he has to do." Now, I don't have any objection to the man nor did it worry me a great deal, but I felt that the Assistant Commandant should be named the chief of staff and should reach out and I should work for him. We would go in to the Commandant sometimes in the attitude of rivals; however, we got on all right.

Now, another element of really great strength to us was that we had a Marine in Admiral King's planning section, and that Marine during a good deal of our time there was Omar Pfeiffer. He was one of the finest planners that anybody ever saw, and he was a good Marine, and when something came up down in COMINCH planning that he thought we ought to know, he'd tell us about it. He guarded the interests of the Marine Corps every day. He was a very, very smart individual – very able, very smart. Omar was a real good man, real good, and very influential. You will recall that when we were in the Pacific, as I mentioned, Omar came down, and he was with Nimitz out in the Pacific in the early days and then he came to Washington. He came back to Washington. Ralph Robinson relieved him at CINCPAC, and Omar came to Washington and became the chief Marine planner on COMINCH's planning section.

MR. FRANK: Ralph Robinson or Ray Robinson?

GENERAL THOMAS: Ralph was Ray's first cousin, different fellow entirely. Ralph went out there and relieved Omar Pfeiffer.

I've covered the first days there in Plans and Policies. Just a few items that came up. Many, many of the men who went out to the Samoan Islands, except in Charlie Barrett's battalion, and Charlie had protected his battalion by moving the natives out, many of the men in the Horn Islands, American Samoa and others caught Filiriasis, Mu-mu. The psychological effect of the disease was much greater actually than the physical side of it, although neither was good. The doctors, I believe, probably still think there is no cure for the disease. There is an improvement in it, and they can gradually eliminate it, as distinguished from curing it. But we had – I'd say, 12 or 14 thousand men who had the Mu-mu.

MR. FRANK: Oh, really?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, large numbers. I guess there were 12,000 men. Oh, everybody that went to the Horn Islands got it. Also American Samoa. I'd say we had 12,000 men. The doctors wanted a cold weather place, a rugged place and cold climate, so we set up a camp at Klamath Falls, Oregon, and they went horseback riding. We got a bunch of horses and sent them up there, and they rehabilitated those men. One of the worst was Sid McMath, who was Governor of Arkansas, you know. They brought those men back, put them back in physical condition. I must say that very few of them ever got back to duty, except in barracks duty. But they just took a lump of about 10 or 12 thousand people out of us, right at a time when we needed them the most. We needed men, and I had to start scraping, even though the Marine Corps had 450,000 men, when we put the 5<sup>th</sup> Division in the field. One of the places that I turned my eyes to when I

first came back, and Ray Robinson – you were talking about Ray – Ray was the G-3 in Plans and Policies. He warned me, he said, “Don’t you touch these defense battalions.” But he went his way because Hall Turnage wanted him out in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division. We were on the list for 29 defense battalions. And we had already organized the 15<sup>th</sup>, and we didn’t have jobs for even two! I had no intention of seeing those men go into an outfit that just wasn’t going any place.

Admiral King could approve changes in organization, as the agent of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, not as CNO but as the agent of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. That’s quite a fine point, but it’s an important one. So we took up with King the matter of canceling these last 14 defense battalions, and he approved it. As I say, that was one of the things that Vandegrift went to him about, and he didn’t hesitate. He said, “All right.” Vandegrift told him he needed these men. So we came into about 20,000 men. What we were scraping the barrel for was replacements. We thought we wanted to send in about 2500 replacements behind each division that went into action, so they’d have some men immediately to fill up the losses at the beach line. And we generally made it, but we didn’t have to use all that 20,000, because we had – after the – for Saipan, of course, we had an Army division, and we sent the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and 4<sup>th</sup> Division to Saipan. In getting ready for Guam, we had the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines, formed out of the Raiders, and we had the 22<sup>nd</sup>, which had gone to Western Samoa to replace the 7<sup>th</sup>. The 22<sup>nd</sup> had come up and carried out the Eniwetok operation. We decided to form these two outfits into a good brigade. So general Shepherd was ordered to command, and he had a brigade, and we reinforced him pretty well. He really had two-thirds of a division, and they landed at Guam.

Well, we had in the back of our minds all the time that we would like to form a 6<sup>th</sup> Division. We were blocked partly on it because when we formed the 5<sup>th</sup> – General Marshall fought every Marine division from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division on. He tried to block every one. Now, what was in his mind? I won’t impute anything to him. He was anti-Marine, always was, but he tried in every way he could to block personnel from coming into the Marine Corps.

In order to organize the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Division, King had quite a fight with him about it in the Joint Chiefs, and finally Marshall said to King, “All right, I’ll agree to the Marines building another division, the 5<sup>th</sup> Division, if you will promise me that they will never form another one.”

Well, King promised him that he would not go along with the formation of another Marine division. I imagine – General Vandegrift must have been in his most persuasive mood when he took up with King the matter of a 6<sup>th</sup> Marine Division. King told him (and we knew it) that he’d promised Marshall that he never would do it, but Vandegrift stayed with him, and finally King said, “Well, I’m not going to take it to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but you’re going to the Pacific soon and if Nimitz will agree and says he needs a 6<sup>th</sup> Division, we’ll just go ahead and form it.

So the old man came back and told me and we were delighted, because we were leaving to go to Saipan and Guam to see a little of those operations. We didn’t talk details, and then one day he called me, a day or so later, and he said, “Now, look here, we got permission to form a 6<sup>th</sup> Marine Division, and we’re strapped for personnel. You’d better damn quick get busy and find the men for that division.”

I said, "General, I know where they are. They're down at Camp Lejeune, and there's that 20,000 men, some of the 20,000 men we got out of the defense battalions, and we've got them buried down there."

So he said, "All right." We told Camp Lejeune, and we had to do a little politicking there, to form the 29<sup>th</sup> Marines, which they did start to do, and though Henry Larsen bleated a little bit, he got over it, because we gave a friend of his command of the regiment. We went to Pearl Harbor, and the first thing we did when we got there was to talk to Admiral Nimitz about the forming of the 6<sup>th</sup> Division. Well, Nimitz, of course, said, "I'd be delighted to have a 6<sup>th</sup> Division," and he promptly notified King. We sent a message right back to Headquarters, "Embark 29<sup>th</sup> Marines," and sent them to the Solomon Islands, and so Shepherd got his division.

MR. FRANK: And a round-the-end play against Marshall.

General Thomas. Yes. Well, I don't know whether Marshall even realized it. But nobody said anything to him about it. But by that time King was so full of Marshall, he didn't give a damn what happened, and, of course, we were well along with the war and Marshall had plenty to worry about in Europe.

Well, we formed the 6<sup>th</sup> Division and we sent the 29<sup>th</sup> out and there we were. (I'll stop this in about five minutes, two minutes). General Vandegrift wanted to go and see some of the operations in the Pacific. June '44, July '44, when the landing at Saipan was made. He didn't want to go in the middle of the operation.

MR. FRANK: I think you left the end of July or the beginning of August.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, Saipan was finishing. It was after the Smith-versus-Smith fight.

MR. FRANK: I'll tell you why, because I have some questions to ask you, because it was the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> conference at CINCPAC when this matter of carrier air came up.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, it did when we came back. Before I finish, let's get at the date. All right. You want to do that?

MR. FRANK: All right. I wanted to ask you earlier, what exactly would you consider the role of General Vandegrift at Headquarters Marine Corps during the war? What was his function, and your function?

GENERAL THOMAS: We provided forces. That's about it.

MR. FRANK: You had no tactical command, no administrative command?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, we did not. No. We provided the sinews of war.

MR. FRANK: You weren't even a type command?

GENERAL THOMAS: We were not a type command, no sir. Well, I mean, yes, probably we were a type command. But Vandegrift had no authority, and that's the basis of the Marine Corps, you know. It goes right on back to the original FMF order of 1933 or whenever it was that it came out, that we put these troops under a fleet commander, and they were in command and we didn't touch them. Now, Vandegrift said, "They're my men," and we'll come to this when he wanted to go to Okinawa later. "They're my men and I'm interested in them and we're supposed to support them."

And we supplied them, and we sent the supplies and we sent the men. But he could not order a single unit, nor did he try. He didn't expect to, as Commandant of the Marine Corps. All was cleared through COMINCH and CINCPAC.

MR. FRANK: How responsive was Headquarters Marine Corps to the needs in the field?

GENERAL THOMAS: 100 percent, I'd say. That's all we existed for, in our opinion. We got them men, we got them replacements, we got them supplies.

MR. FRANK: And were there problems out there which had to be settled in Washington?

GENERAL THOMAS: Very few, no problems, no. There was very, very little. We kept them loaded with men and we kept them loaded with supplies.

MR. FRANK: Now, let's get to the point about getting the Marines on carriers. Is the background...?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, that was done after this trip. Now, let me go through this, take me about a second, here, and then I'll say what we did when we came back. We went to Saipan. The battle was over. As we went through Pearl Harbor, of course, at that time Vandegrift had an R5C, and old, a Lodestar, and we flew to San Francisco, and then took an Army plane and went on to Pearl Harbor, and when we got there Nimitz said, "I'm leaving tomorrow evening for Guam. Why don't you wait and ride with me?"

Well, we wanted to do that anyway. Then, of course, in the meantime Holland Smith came in on the Smith-versus-Smith battle.

MR. FRANK: Would you like to talk about that?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I will later. So we went on to Saipan, visited the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, went over to Tinian where the 4<sup>th</sup> Division was just mopping up. We got to see a little fighting on Saipan because there were still some Japs down under a cliff there and Edson was out there with somebody. They were digging them out, and killing the last one of them. We spent a couple of days on Saipan, visited the aviation outfit, and then we went down to Guam. Well, the Guam operation wasn't quite over. They were still fighting up on the north end of the island so we got up there to see the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines wipe out the last Japs up on the north end of the island. We saw Geiger. Holland Smith had come back. He had been out there, but he had gotten back to Pearl Harbor by that time, but Geiger was still finishing off his Guam operation. We had a good visit with him. When the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division finished in Cape Gloucester, they made a filthy decision to send that division back to the Solomon Islands. I've always believed that should have been something that we should have gotten into, or maybe the Corps should have gotten into it, but the division was helpless and they dumped them at Pavuvu. You're familiar with that?

MR. FRANK: I landed there before the division returned from Cape Gloucester and it was a mess.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, anyway, the whole thing was a mess, and that should have been avoided. As I look back on it, I think that division should have gone to the Wellington area, where the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had evacuated those camps. Well, there would have been two or three days difference by sea, but what the hell difference would that make in those days? None whatsoever. But it didn't go, and Vandegrift wanted to visit the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division after the Guam operation.

Well, Geiger had a couple of old DC-3s that they'd put extra gasoline drums in, and gave them a lot longer legs, so we headed off to the South Pacific and we went up to visit Pavuvu and I stayed there about three days visiting the staff. Vandegrift went one day up to Bougainville to see Ralph Mitchell because the 1<sup>st</sup> Wing Headquarters was still up there. But we had a good visit, and that's where he found Rupertus on crutches, and that's where Vandegrift should have relieved Rupertus and brought him home.

MR. FRANK: Do you remember when the Piper Cubs took off from the strip there?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, right on the road.

MR. FRANK: They played "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny?"

GENERAL THOMAS: Anyway, then we had a base depot, where Ken Imman was in command at Banika, and then while we were back there – stayed with him (crosstalk)

MR. FRANK: Banika, that's right, saw him before . . .

GENERAL THOMAS: That's where I met General Vandegrift, and we flew on back and by that time, Geiger had reached his own headquarters, back in Guadalcanal. We spent a night with him and then we came back to Majuro and then to Pearl Harbor. When we got to Pearl Harbor, Nimitz said, "I certainly disapprove of you flying around the Pacific in a two-engine airplane. I'm going to tell King to get you a good plane." So when we got home we got a nice modified B-17, for the command plane. The General had it for the rest of the war. Oh, it was a beauty, wonderful plane. Had great big long legs, sleeping and cooking arrangements, everything so we were really fixed.

When we got back to Pearl Harbor, and things had slackened down a little, we were ready to talk business. Harris was with us, of course. He was then director of Marine Corps aviation. Yes, this was the trip, I'm sure.

MR. FRANK: You said that Field Harris was there, Forrest Sherman was there.

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, that's right, all right. The CG, FMF Marine Air Pacific was Ross E. Rowell, an old-timer. He did not lie very closely alongside of CG, FMFPAC although he was his subordinate. He stayed out of Ewa. But he did keep very close relations with COMAIRPAC, at that time John H. Towers. One thing that Harris was worried about, all of us were a little bit worried about, was the way Marine Corps Aviation was being bucked out of the forward moving operations. They had set up some Marine Air to go into Saipan and Guam, and that was satisfactory.

MR. FRANK: That was only after the landings had been made and the fields had been taken?

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right.

MR. FRANK: In other words, they were not there initially.

GENERAL THOMAS: We sat down, Field and I did, with Jack Towers, and Rusty Rowell and Sherman, and it didn't take long to get to the point, because Towers said, "Marine Corps aviation has just priced themselves out of the war. They have gotten so heavy. Your Marine Air groups have gotten so heavy we just can't take them. They've got entirely too much gear. They want to live like they're living in a hotel, and we just can't do that, and they're just out of the war."

Well, Field undertook to strip his groups down, and take a lot of this gear and reefers and all that away from them. Towers was engaged to provide carriers for Marine Corps aviation. That's my recollection of the discussion. Marine Corps aviation got back into the war, and they were bucked off, on the sidelines before that.

MR. FRANK: Well, Sherrod made the comment that Towers or someone said to Field Harris, "You don't want your people on carriers," whereupon Harris said, "Yes, we do." The argument was made that the senior Marine aviators were Marine aviation's worst enemies.

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, that's right.

MR. FRANK: All right, we'll talk about Smith-versus-Smith.

GENERAL THOMAS: I'm only going to give you what I've understood. Now, I've never seen one written word or anything of the sort, and I don't know really a great deal about it. However, somebody, some Army officer brought the matter up to me not long ago, about the whole matter. Ralph Smith was in command of the 27<sup>th</sup> US Army Division. They had been the outfit that had gone to Makin after Tarawa, and it's my understanding that they hadn't done particularly well there.

MR. FRANK: New York State National Guard, was it not?

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. I'd forgotten that, but that's a fact. Holland Smith was dissatisfied with their performance at Makin. Then they were a part of the attack force of Schmidt's Corps – no, Schmidt didn't have a Corps until after that at Saipan. Schmidt commanded the 4<sup>th</sup> Division at Saipan. Watson commanded the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, Schmidt (Harry Schmidt) the 4<sup>th</sup>, and the Corps command was Holland Smith.

I don't remember the details of what happened. I understand that on Saipan the Corps gave the 27<sup>th</sup> Division an objective, and they did, apparently, very, very poorly. I've had that testimony from many, many people, and not always from Marines. There are a lot of Army people who know all about it. They don't like to admit – and I believe that Holland checked his proposed actions out with everybody, Kelly Turner and all the rest of them – that he said, "If the 27<sup>th</sup> Division does not do better, I am going to relieve Ralph Smith." And he did. I don't know a great deal about it, but all the testimony that I've had since that time has been that Holland was more than justified in relieving Ralph Smith of his division.

MR. FRANK: Well, Richardson really. . .

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, now, Richardson went out there and he conducted himself in a most unbecoming manner. He was a small man. He made himself very, very repulsive, very repugnant to Nimitz. I remember one time we were sitting with Nimitz, maybe it's when we came back from the South Pacific and we were about to tell him good-bye, and Nimitz said, "Well, I'm glad to see you. I'm in for a hard hour. Richardson's coming in, and it's always unpleasant when he comes."

Well, Nimitz was just too much of a gentleman. He should have taken the bald-headed guy and thrown him out of there. That's what should have happened. But he didn't do it, he put up with him in the interests of letting the war go along, but he didn't take up for Holland. I know when we got there that time, ready to go out to Saipan, he said, "Vandegrift, I don't know exactly what that's all about. . ."

No, he didn't say it to Vandegrift; he said it to Julian Smith. When this thing happened, Julian Smith was then getting ready to go to Peleliu, and he said "Julian, I hope your man is right. This is a bad situation."

Well, of course, Holland was right. But Nimitz didn't back him up.

MR. FRANK: He never did. It seems to me in the correspondence that Nimitz never really backed Holland Smith.

GENERAL THOMAS: No, he never did. Never did. He backed Holland in his fight with Kelly Turner, but they weren't very bad, not as bad as the Vandegrift-Turner fight.

**End of Session 7, Tape 2.**

Session 8.

Interview with General Gerald C. Thomas, USMC (Ret.), by Mr. Benis Frank,  
Washington, DC, 28 September 1966

MR. FRANK: This is Interview Session 8 with General Gerald C. Thomas, United States Marine Corps, Retired. The date of this interview is 28 September 1966. The interview is being held in General Thomas' quarters in Washington, D.C. This is Tape 1, Side 1.

GENERAL THOMAS: Showing how conflicting matters will come up even in the middle of a war, was that of the Woodrum Select Committee of Congress, of the lower House of Congress. It convened in 1944. The task of the committee was to examine into recommendations that the War Department desired to make on the postwar armed forces establishment of the United States.

We were not long in discovering that these presentations of the War Department boded no good for the Marine Corps. They really had the knife out for us. What they proposed at that time, and what was to follow on for many years afterwards, and is still in play, I would say, was a merger of the armed forces of the United States.

Various personnel of the armed forces appeared before this committee, and it was not a great while before it was evident that there'd be a great difference of opinion, and there'd be a lot of bitterness and fight about the whole proposal.

General Vandegrift appeared, gave his testimony in which he opposed the merger, and then thereafter I became the liaison with that committee and I attended all the hearings. They were terminated very suddenly because, my understanding is that President Roosevelt said, "We're in the middle of a war, this is no time for a great big fight between the armed forces of the United States, so call it off."

So the Woodrum Select Committee of the House, which was the way the division was in those days – it just shows that the Army was always ready to take something on and make a little profit when they thought they could.

MR. FRANK: Talking about General Vandegrift and yourself going up to Congress, of course you always had to go up there to justify budgets and so on.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right.

MR. FRANK: Was the Marine Corps always able to get what it wanted?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, we always did. The successive Commandants inherited from General Lejeune a terrific stand with Congress, and they all carried it on. They all did well, and because the Marine Corps could prove that it could do as good a job or a better job at less money than any other member of the armed services, and they never had any trouble. But the real foundation for the Commandant of the Marine Corps was laid. It wasn't bad before that, but a better foundation was laid by General Lejeune in the ten years that he was Commandant of the Marine Corps. They really took him seriously in everything he said.

MR. FRANK: Did it require a lot of lobbying and politicking?

GENERAL THOMAS: No. The Marine Corps took care of its close contacts up on the Hill. General Vandegrift – and that's one of the first things he did after he came to Washington – he would go up, as a matter of fact he'd go up every year, make an appointment and go into see Carl Vinson, who at that time was chairman of the Naval Committee, and he talked to Mr. Vinson about the problems of the Marine Corps, talked



things over very calmly and frankly and we never had any trouble about getting the backing that we needed. Vandegrift of course was very adept about his operations on the Hill because as I have mentioned before, he had a long history of contacts like that. He'd been here four years, for instance, with the – oh, what did they call that thing? Chief Coordinator's Office, the one that eliminated all the surplus of World War I, and also attempted to get coordination in the government. That was an office that passed out of existence after a while, but for a period of seven or eight years it was very, very powerful, and General Vandegrift was in that office for a matter of four years, say from 1927 to 1931. He used to live right across the street from where we are sitting – 1607, that was his home then.

But we never had any – the Marine Corps had no difficulty, and still doesn't. We've always kept our word – we feel that civilian control of the armed forces means control by Congress. Now, the thought has been prostituted. Over in the Pentagon today, they think that civilian control means that some clerk shall take some uniformed man and push him in the nose, and all these minor Under Secretaries and everything, that's what they think is civilian control. That's not civilian control of the armed forces of the United States. Civilian control of the armed forces of the United States comes through the representatives of the people in Congress. That's what we mean by civilian control, and this, a few civilian Secretaries trying tell a group of uniformed people what to do, and that doesn't mean civilian control. But I must admit that seems to be what they're thinking about over there now.

MR. FRANK: Did you find in your years at Headquarters Marine Corps with General Vandegrift as Commandant that we had too many over-zealous friends in Congress that they would try to –

GENERAL THOMAS: No. Well, we had some vigorous friends, and of course, some of them – but we had no trouble like that, no.

MR. FRANK: In other words, sometimes your best friends are your worst enemies.

GENERAL THOMAS: No, we had no trouble like that. When we came back to Washington, as then and for later, our biggest problem was personnel – where to get personnel, where to get replacements. We needed a lot of replacements in the fall of 1944. Operations were set up. I might say that the replacements for the summer of 1944, for Saipan, Guam, the rest of them, were pretty well under way by the time we took over. I mentioned before, we liked to send in with the division making the assault 2500 or even 3000 men as a replacement outfit, to take care of their initial casualties.

MR. FRANK: And to act as stevedores, too.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, they did do that. They were available and they were used. They were used greatly. There were 14,000 of them on Okinawa, as a matter of fact, and they were used there as stevedores. You must have a beach party, and as we found out at Guadalcanal, you need a shore party.

Not long after we came to Washington, we learned of a plan for an operation known as CAUSEWAY. That entailed the seizure of the island of Formosa, and it was to follow along after Saipan and Guam. In other words, instead of going right or left or what not, the forces of the Central Pacific would cut across the line of movement, the line of approach of MacArthur's Southwest Pacific forces, which were coming up through the Philippine Islands, from New Guinea and the lower islands, Morotai. CAUSEWAY was a very optimistically planned operation. It envisaged – that a corps of three Army

divisions would land on the south end of the island, and up near the north end of the island, in the area of Taipei, the 3rd PhibCorps would land. These two divisions would subjugate the island, join up, and then after they had destroyed the garrison, the three Army divisions would take over the island, and then the 3<sup>rd</sup> PhibCorps would go over and seize a beachhead at Amoy on the China coast.

This was so optimistic as to be almost silly. You just can't imagine people planning anything like that. In the first place, Formosa is a very large island. There were a lot of Japs on it and they probably could procure the natives to do a lot of fighting. The first time we heard of CAUSEWAY we shied from it. There was nothing Headquarters Marine Corps had to say about it. We just let it go, but we always had our fingers crossed about it.

Well, one day Dave Nimmer came over from the White Team and said, "CAUSEWAY has been called off." Of course we were delighted. And as I've related before, that's when the Okinawa operation was laid on. The outfits, the troops that were to go to CAUSEWAY were shunted over to Okinawa.

MR. FRANK: Do you recall this is a matter of fact; Buckner of the 10<sup>th</sup> Army had been assigned to CAUSEWAY, Formosa?

GENERAL THOMAS: He possibly had. I don't remember that now.

MR. FRANK: And one of the problems that he raised, one of the questions he raised to Nimitz, was that he did not have enough support on garrison troops, and also added the comment that since he was going to the Army commander and III AC was coming under his command, his survey of the situation was that the Marine Corps did not have enough support troops, and I saw a memo to the effect, Vandegrift to King, that this is ridiculous, the Marine Corps has its own organic support and needs nothing else. It was within bounds. Do you recall this discussion?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, I don't. It probably had to do with support troops. You see, the Army, as we found out in our dealings with them in Australia and what not, the Army organizes on different lines than the Marine Corps. The Army comes in with a lot of backup troops.

MR. FRANK: That's right.

GENERAL THOMAS: I remember when I was in Brisbane, I was sitting with Steve Chamberlain, the G-3, and our relations were very pleasant, and he said, "Look at this troop buildup. Three months from now we'll have 196,000 men in the Southwest Pacific, but we'll only have two divisions, and the rest of them are supply troops." He said, "The figures out to be reversed. But that's the Army's way of doing business." Probably what you're talking about, Buckner was trying to think of the Marine Corps coming in with a lot of backup, and if they had three divisions they should have 90,000 supply troops behind them. Well, the Marine Corps had always figured on going and living and being able to exist, and that's Marine Corps planning. That's what they do.

MR. FRANK: That's the reason I think CAUSEWAY was called off, because the Army troops were not available and Buckner made this –

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, it may be, it may be, but they also may have gotten their eyes open, when they found out what it would take to capture the island.

MR. FRANK: Yes, the other commanders also.

GENERAL THOMAS: Of course, when Saipan and Guam were taken, they immediately set up large airfields from which B-25s operated in their bombing of the Japanese home islands.

MR. FRANK: B-29s, sir?

GENERAL THOMAS: B-29s. What did I say?

MR. FRANK: B-25s, sir.

GENERAL THOMAS: B-29s. Oh, no, B-29s. B-25 is a little bit of a two-engine plane. B-29s bombed the Jap home islands. I don't know the figures, and I've never checked them and I don't have any idea of doing it, but there were a lot of B-29s that got over Tokyo and didn't get back home. They were shot down over there. They were shot up and sometimes went into the water on the way back. They just didn't make it home. Sometimes they ran short of fuel, dropped in the water and were lost.

Also, about halfway between Saipan and Tokyo were the Volcano and the Bonin Islands, which were manned by the Japanese, and they had fighters on those islands. I don't believe actually the B-29s ever suffered much from the Japs on those islands, but they suffered by not getting home. And the result was that an operation to help was laid on. They didn't know whether first they'd go to the Volcano or the Bonin Islands, but it was decided to take the Volcanos on the island of Iwo Jima. We took Iwo Jima just to succor the B-29s coming home from Japan. That's the reason.

Okinawa and Iwo Jima went off not far from the same time – February 20<sup>th</sup> Iwo Jima, 1<sup>st</sup> of April for Okinawa. We had a Corps at each place, 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps, the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Marine Divisions, and the 5<sup>th</sup> PhibCorps at Iwo Jima, the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Divisions.

I wasn't an active participant in those operations. They're all history. They were real tough. They cost us a lot of men. But they went off, and Iwo Jima was successful.

MR. FRANK: We talked in earlier sessions about the defense battalions and about how many Marines that could have been used elsewhere were absorbed in doing nothing. One of the problems that General Nimmer had in getting his 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps Artillery ready was the fact that he'd absorbed a great number of defense battalion personnel who were not field artillery trained, and he had to retrain them on Guadalcanal during the staging and rehearsal time, and I'm sure that the divisions' artillery, the 11<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Marines, had problems. Now, did you have a hand in the final bust-up of the defense battalions, the formation of the Triple A units, when you were head of Pots and Pans?

GENERAL THOMAS: I don't remember anything to do with that.

MR. FRANK: Because you had said that –

GENERAL THOMAS: We called off the last 14 of the base defense battalions, and we used the others, perhaps, but a lot of them stayed in existence.

MR. FRANK: . . .and island commands and so on.

GENERAL THOMAS: Island commands and what not.

MR. FRANK: Here's what I don't understand. You said that the two men who were most influential in the formation of the defense battalions were artillery men.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right.

MR. FRANK: What were their names again?

GENERAL THOMAS: Duncan Waller and Wade Legette.

MR. FRANK: OK. Now, in forming these defense battalions, they shortchanged the regular field artillery, it would appear.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, they had enough men for both. They really wrote their own ticket.

MR. FRANK: But there was a shortage of trained field artillery men by the time of Okinawa.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, maybe so. (It) Could be the result of losses and having to rotate men home.

MR. FRANK: And those defense battalions which had been disbanded; the personnel went over to Triple A battalions and to the artillery regiments, and they had to be retrained in (field) artillery techniques.

GENERAL THOMAS: I don't remember anything about that. I don't remember about that. I don't have any recollection.

MR. FRANK: OK. You're going to address yourself in today's session to your trip to Okinawa?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes; that's right.

One thing that came up about this time, or it came up very soon after my arrival back at headquarters, was a matter of Chinese language officers, interpreters. Because of my duty in Peking, I was very familiar with the old program of Chinese language. Also I realized that those people who had been trained, like Griffith and Worton and all those, and – had gone way beyond the time that they could be interpreters, and we needed interpreters, because I was sure that eventually we'd wind up on the Chinese coast. I was positive of it.

MR. FRANK: Regardless of whether there was an invasion –

GENERAL THOMAS: - of China or not. We'd have to have them, and of course we had before us at that time CAUSEWAY, from which all of our people were going to Amoy.

MR. FRANK: Foochow Amoy?

GENERAL THOMAS: Foochow Amoy. We had a very difficult problem because at Amoy and Foochow, they talk in eight tones and that's extraordinarily difficult, and interpreters for that conversation are hard to come by.

MR. FRANK: That's not Cantonese?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, it's like this. When they say tones – one place in China they say, "Ha-ha," another place in China they say, "Ha-ha, hah'ha," that's four tones. Another place they say, "Ha haha ha ha ha," that's six tones, but in Foochow and Amoy they say "ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha," and that's another word. And if they say it in two tones, that's different, but they talk in eight tones down there. I'm not up on it but (crosstalk)...

Well, anyway, we had to conceal our efforts. We couldn't go out looking for Amoy interpreters; we had to conceal what we were doing, so we took interpreters from all up and down the coast. We got a good many missionaries that we enrolled in the Marine Corps. Some of them we gave commissions. But we only got one interpreter for Amoy. The Foochow Club in New York dug up a student. In New York the Chinese have their own clubs. There's a Foochow Club, there's an Amoy Club, there's a Canton Club, in New York. Well, the Foochow Club in New York dug up one man for us, and that's all we got. But I don't know whether I've talked about training people in Chinese language or not?

MR. FRANK: No, you haven't.

GENERAL THOMAS: As I said, I realized that we didn't have a program for training Chinese. I was in contact with Dr. Pettus, who had formerly been the president of the College of Chinese Studies in Peking. The College of Chinese Studies is an old institution. That's where the missionaries and the oil people and the tobacco people and the military, the Army, Navy and Marine Corps, sent their student to start training in the Chinese language. Of course, it was largely a missionary institution, because there were worlds of missionaries to be trained in the Chinese language. Well, the Japs chased Dr. Pettus out of Peking. He got out ahead of them, and he came back to the United States and went to the University of California, and there set up or re-energized their Department of Oriental Languages.

So we took a hold of a real smart bunch of boys and we put them in training in Chinese language in the University of California, and they ground out 25 or 30 of them for us; and, we sent some to Yale, also.

MR. FRANK: Read, write and speak?

GENERAL THOMAS: Read, write and speak. Now, the Army had a school, then and later, down at Monterey, and they were just trying to teach conversational Chinese, but we were interested in making real Chinese students that could read, write and speak Chinese, despite the fact that our chief requirement was for interpreters.

So much for the Chinese.

MR. FRANK: How about Japanese?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, they had a Japanese program, but we put our Japanese interpreters in the Army school which was at Boulder at that time – at Boulder, Colorado.

MR. FRANK: The Navy had a different one?

GENERAL THOMAS: Maybe so. I think probably a joint service school, but I'm not sure about that, but we did have Japanese students at Boulder and the University of California.

MR. FRANK: Well, we evidently did not have enough Japanese interpreters, because I recall at Okinawa we had so of the people in the G-2 section and also we had Army Nisei.

GENERAL THOMAS: We availed ourselves of the Nisei, that's right.

MR. FRANK: But they weren't Marines.

GENERAL THOMAS: No. Now, we had a few native Chinese that were commissioned in the Marine Corps. We had several boys commissioned in the Marine Corps – one named Lee, I remember.

I'll get on with the setup in Washington. By the middle of 1944, General Vandegrift had been in the front office for six months. I'd been back in Plans and Policies for the same period of time. I've related that I brought Brute Krulak back with me when we came back in December. I shoved him into the de-energized -4 Section and he started that shop going at a good clip. Very soon after the first of the year when the Bougainville operation was well under way, I brought Eddie Snedeker back and made him my G-2. But when I brought both of those boys home I promised them they could go back to the Pacific, so when the summer of 1944 came, Krulak went to the 6<sup>th</sup> Division to be General Shepherd's G-3, and Eddie Snedeker went on back to the 1<sup>st</sup> Division and became the commander of the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines. I had reliefs for them. I had worked it all out when I was out there, watching the Guam operation. I wanted Shoup for my G-4, and he was chief of staff of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, and he'd been away from home

then for nearly three years. He'd also gone to Iceland with the brigade and was home a few months and then he went on out to New Zealand. And I wanted Wally Greene to be my G-3. So both of those lads came back, and turned to.

I believe we injected in the – well, we had a background, let's say, in logistics that few people had, and it largely arose from the matter of horrible examples. The story will never be written, probably, but what happened in Noumea with supplies was just unbelievable. First off, they loaded ships and sent them out there, not one but dozens of them. There were ships that laid in Noumea for six weeks and two months, waiting to be unloaded. As a matter of fact, you hear a little bit of that same story out of Vietnam now. The Marine Corps bought, embarked and sent to the South Pacific, millions and millions of dollars worth of all kinds of precious equipment, anti-aircraft and computers and this and that and the other thing, and they didn't send one solitary man out there to receive them, store them, and take care of them. They finally unloaded those ships and threw that gear out in the mud, and there it was, and there much of it was lost. It was just a tragic thing.

MR. FRANK: Whose responsibility was it?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I think that it was not thinking the problems through. Now, as I've said, I was a great admirer of Holcomb and Seth Williams, the Quartermaster, but that's where the weakness was. I mean, the Headquarters Marine Corps just didn't think their problem through. They didn't say, "What's going to happen to this stuff when we get it out there?" They just said, "Let's get it out to the boys."

Well, Turner really helped the situation most by insisting that we move part of a depot that we had in Wellington up there, and we did. It was with our concurrence, we knew what was going, and they got started out and they did a lot of good, but they were just way late. If instead of setting up this depot in Wellington we'd set it up in Noumea – but there wasn't anybody ashore in Noumea then. Ghormley lived aboard his flagship most of the time.

Now, by the time Vandegrift came over to IMAC and relieved Barney Vogel, they'd gotten the thing pretty well straightened out. They'd set up a logistics command and the first commander was Earl Long, a very able fellow, but a lot had been lost. Not any more. We took care of the rest of the stuff that came.

Along about this time we had a breakdown. The Navy began to find out, not only the Navy but everybody, that there weren't enough ports on the West Coast to fight a great big war in the Pacific Ocean. Space just wasn't there, that's all. And the Navy burdened it, as we did also, with personnel and schools and all that kind of outfit. We had a tremor of this, you might say, not long after General Vandegrift went to Washington. As it turned out, however, it was not the ports, not San Francisco and Seattle and Wilmington and all the other places that broke down, but what broke down was the railroad passes through the Rocky Mountain. They just couldn't handle the freight trains through those passes in the Rocky Mountains, and east of the mountains the gear piled up.

They gradually reduced it, but it caused us to look around, and we decided to get ourselves off the West Coast. We had been shipping out of several ports but largely out of San Francisco through our depot there. We had Islais Creek and the depot in San Francisco. We started to survey the Gulf Coast. Well, actually, once you get the gear aboard a ship, you've only got two or three or four days more travel time between New

Orleans and Guam than you have San Francisco to Guam, you pass through the Panama Canal. So we looked things over down on the Gulf. We made our plans and we set up a preliminary organization at Gulfport, Mississippi. We decided that was the best place for it. There was a big naval reservation near there that they didn't need, and we took it over, and of course that's what led to the formation of the depot at Albany today. Gulfport's where that depot ought to be, but the Congressman wasn't from Gulfport, he was from Albany. That was Mr. Vinson. But anyway, we were all fixed. We were well fixed. But we had to go down to the Gulf – that is today, it didn't handicap us a bit. It was two or three days steaming time on a ship, practically nothing, and we had free run of Gulfport, Mississippi, which is a great port.

Again I come back to personnel – need of personnel for replacements. We never knew how the Army operated. They just took personnel, threw them under their hat, and took them off without any overall assorting to other services. They got the major cut out of everything. We found out quite by accident, as a matter of fact, that the Army did not carry in their overall troop strength their sick and wounded in hospital. They excluded them from their troop strength and filled up from draftees and others.

Our agent at that time in the Joint Chiefs of Staff was Admiral King. We had nobody else to handle our business. So Vandegrift asked King to get the JCS to lift the restriction on us, and let us do as the Army did and set aside our wounded and sick in hospital, which had gotten to be quite a figure, to exclude them from our troop strength. Of course we had a troop level that had been set by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and we could always fill up to that troop level, put in draft calls.

King brought it up in the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Marshall and the others turned it down. So King went right to the White House, and Franklin Roosevelt gave us permission to exclude our sick and wounded in hospital. The Army did everything they could to plow us under. We increased our draft calls to make up for the sick and wounded. I don't know, maybe it was 30,000 or 35,000 men in all. But we got the men in and we had that many more replacement detachments.

MR. FRANK: You've had, as you've related in these interview sessions, you've had personally good relations with Army people, both at the command and staff school, and otherwise. However, there's always been an undercurrent of Army resentment, jealousy, what have you, of the Marine Corps, and there's always been this conflict, less so with the Navy. Would you attribute this fact to World War I?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, the Army – they made up their minds that we weren't going to get away with another Belleau Woods in World War II. A lot of advertisement for the Marine Corps, a lot of publicity for the Marine Corps. They'd done everything they could. The Army had a knife out for us ever since we started being – they never fought us when we were the Marines shooting people on the deck of the other ship from the top of a sailing vessel. But immediately we started ashore, defending advanced bases, they got the knife out for us. The Army, as I'll say later, has collaborated in every effort to plow the Marine Corps under, and they're still doing it. As a matter of fact, this stuff is all, as I talked to you about this man Frykland the other day; it's still coming out of Vietnam. There's still that feeling that they want to cut the Marine Corps back and cut it down to size, and it's all a part of the merger business. I'll get to Eisenhower and his memo about what the Marine Corps ought to do later. Oh yes, there had always been that fight.

There were mixed feelings concerning the formation of the Women Marines. It was sort of an odd arrangement. But those girls really earned their position. Almost every, not every one but I'd say 75 percent of the Women Marines, individuals, relieved a man on a job. They did a lot of things, and they did them well, and we probably had enough men for a division out of the Women Marines, although they never got to any great size. Their greatest value for me was their work in Headquarters Marine Corps. You can get so much out of civilians, but you've got to pay them overtime and this that and the other thing. But with the gal Marines, there were those that worked for me in Plans and Policies that would work 24 hours a day. They'd work at night. They'd be over there at night, and there was never any question about it. They really paid their way. They were a great outfit. Still are.

MR. FRANK: How do you feel about giving a woman flag or general rank?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I don't think it's necessary. The other services haven't done it and I don't think we ought to be the first.

MR. FRANK: Well, you know, there's something up before Congress now.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's all right. When the time comes it's all right, but I don't think – oh, they tried their best to make Mrs. Streeter a brigadier, you know during the war. Oh yes, sure, I think Lit Waller got behind that. But no, no – in time, maybe – but I don't have any particular feeling about it.

One of the jobs I had to do as somebody in Headquarters Marine Corps was to write and make speeches. General Vandegrift had to go and talk a great deal, and he did. As I'll relate later, I was my own speech writer. I just can't use a speech writer. I've got to write what I want to say. And I did a lot of talking, going here and there. That was all extra duty. I'd sit at my desk and scribble out a few words at a time on what I wanted to say.

I made two speeches, two trips that particularly stick in my mind. In the fall of 1944 they had a big Navy Day celebration in Los Angeles, which is quite a naval area anyway, and Ralph Bard, who was the Under Secretary of the Navy, was to go out as guest of honor. He called Vandegrift and told him, "I'm going out there, but I want a Marine general to make the speech."

I was detailed, and I went to Los Angeles, and I was the main speaker at the Navy Day luncheon at the Biltmore Bowl in Los Angeles. The Navy people looked at me sort of cockeyed, but we really – we got away with it; I made a good speech.

On that trip also we did a lot of things. We went up to China Lake, which was being built then, Inyokern, and was just being built and I had not even known it was there. Then we went other places, and every time we'd go by a Marine I'd point him out to Mr. Bard. Then in the fall of 1944, I had – probably as a result of General Vandegrift saying he couldn't go – the American Ordnance Association was giving a dinner for Levin Campbell. Well, Campbell was the Chief of Ordnance in the Army. He's a graduate of the Naval Academy, though, class of 1910. They called me and asked me – then they wrote me and asked me if I'd come to this dinner, and of course I checked with the Old Man and he said, "Go ahead, represent the Marine Corps."

Well, a few days later I got a call from Army public relations. "Could you make a few comments, couple of minutes?" I said, "All right," and I wrote some down. A week later I had another call; "Could you talk ten minutes?" So I said, "All right, I'll talk ten minutes." Then a few days after that I got a call from this same officer, and we said



“We’re very, very sorry but we want you to be the principal speaker and talk for 20 minutes.”

Well, this was a very unusual – the atmosphere of this whole thing – because this was the 4<sup>th</sup> of January, 1945, and Levin Campbell was on his way to Europe to find out what he had lost in the way of ordnance, ammunition and what not, at the Battle of the Bulge. So the feeling was unusual for this thing. But at any rate I made my 20-minute talk.

MR. FRANK: Talking about ordnance –

GENERAL THOMAS: By the time we got to Headquarters Marine Corps, equipment for our organization was pretty well standardized. We knew more or less what we wanted. Arms and equipment were in production. They weren’t about to make any changes. For, as of today, the Marine Corps is a shopper at the Army counter. We took what the Army developed. Now, very often we contributed some to the development, because we have officers that worked with them and we made various tests and what not, and as you’ll find out later, we tested everything for its amphibious characteristics. But the matter of equipment was generally solved.

However, there was one gadget for the existence of which the Marine Corps is largely due credit, and that is the landing vehicle, track. The LVT was started by Roebbling down in the marshes of Florida, as a rescue vehicle. He was a wealthy fellow, of course, and he could afford to do that. But we bought the first, and I can remember just as well, the first LVT that was tested in Quantico by our then very small Equipment Board. It was a monstrosity, and people just went out to look at the development. I remember also at about that time, I’ve already related that I wrote a study of the theater of Guam. Well, when Pete Hill, later Quartermaster General, made his reconnaissance of Guam, and from a submarine the other side of the Mariana Islands, he expressed the opinion that if a vehicle could be developed that would go over coral reefs, then the attack on Guam was a simple matter. Guam was largely barriered by coral reefs, and you simply couldn’t get at the place via conventional landing craft.

Well, I wrote that in the Guam study, and I got roundly cussed out by the school authorities, because they had a Guam problem, and the solution of the problem was they could only land on one place because they couldn’t go to these others because they had coral reefs. Then they passed out this study of the theater which said that if somebody could get over the reefs, it would be all right. I remember Noble came up to tell me one time that I had ruined the school problem. Well, Erskine chased him out because he said, “He’s just told you the truth.”

I’ve already talked about the fact that we used the remaining life of our LVTs at Guadalcanal to get the supplies down into our perimeter. We needed them and we used them, didn’t use all their life, because a few had a little more in them and we used them later on. The LVTs made Tarawa possible. They made Guam possible. Thus they were a very important item of our equipment. But they were a very particular item, because the Navy considered they were landing craft, and in a way they were, and they came out of BuShips’ money.

To carry on this LVT matter, they set up a Secretary of the Navy’s Board for LVT matters. Our G-4 was a member of that board, and I was always an interested observer, and our good “Marine” whom we last saw as Kelly Turner’s naval operations officer,

Jimmy Doyle was the head of the LVT Continuing Board. I used to work directly with him.

We had an unusual detail come up. We needed a permanent member on the LVT Board. There was a lad who had been a professor of romance languages at Harvard by the name of Francis Rogers. He's now the Dean of the Graduate School at Harvard. He had been out in the Atlantic because he talked Portuguese. As a matter of fact, he'd gone in on that same submarine when Mark Clark went into North Africa. Well, Francis came home and had a minor operation, and he was available for some months – the doctor didn't want him to go back to combat – so we put him on the LVT Continuing Board, and he turned out to be a whiz. He had a terrific grasp of the situation. For a professor of romance languages, he turned out very, very well.

We had one touch and go case, the Army again coming up and trying to cross our path. They had members of the LVT Continuing Board. They came in once and laid on a requirement for a thousand LVTs for the China-Burma-India Theater. We had quite a fight about it, but we finally fought them off and gave them a hundred and that's all there was to it. To have given them one thousand would have undermined the requirement for Iwo Jima. I've always thought that they actually set up the requirement just to trip us up.

MR. FRANK: Had Rogers by the way been a member of the OSS?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, I don't believe so. No, I think he was taken on for his Portuguese language really, and he was over in the Med there, and I'm sure he's one of the people that went in with Mark Clark when he landed on the north coast of Africa to talk to Darlan – was it Darlan?

MR. FRANK: Operation TORCH. What about DUKWs? Did the Marine Corps get into the development of the DUWS?

GENERAL THOMAS: No. We had nothing to do with the DUKWs as far as I know. We only used them, because that's an Army vehicle, but we used a lot of them, and they were very, very successful.

MR. FRANK: Heinl had made some comment to the effect that Sam Shaw was involved with the development of that.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, he may something about it I don't know. But I just recall that the DUKW came along. I have no recollection that we ever got into it much. It's quite possible Sam had something to do with it.

Training of course was one of our most important activities during the war. I was a graduate of the class of 1917 at Parris Island, and I have always admired our recruit depots. While I was director of Plans and Policies I kept in close touch with them. I visited them frequently, every time I got a chance. My main interest was that nobody monkeyed with them, that they continued to go, and when you think back, you realize that recruit depots have been going now for 50 years more or less without fundamental change whatsoever. There's been no change in recruit training. It's still the same thing; so it must be real good.

MR. FRANK: I don't know, I guess you feel the same way I do. I'd never trade my boot training for anything in the world. It was an experience –

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. Nothing compares with it.

MR. FRANK: Nothing cares with –

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. So, recruit training; when the Woodrum Committee was meeting, one of the aspects of Armed Forces organization that was

discussed was the matter of universal military training. In the presentation that we got together for General Vandegrift, and which he gave before the Committee, he gave support to universal military training. Universal military training has always been a hobby of the American Legion. And they were studying it during the war, and they asked for a representative from each of the services to sit with their Armed Forces Council. It's one of the big committees of the American Legion, and I was detailed to do that. I met a number of times with the American Legion Armed Forces Council.

It developed a little bit in relation to that and what not that the Army was going to get – was going to make an effort to get the American Legion on record in favor of the merger of the armed forces as they had recommended it to the Woodrum Committee. The Navy was opposed to this. The Legion held abbreviated conventions during the war. They were smaller, but they were very important, and they transacted as much business. They were to have a meeting in Chicago in the late fall. I remember it was cold weather, bad weather; it was late fall of 1944. I'd had all these contacts with the Legion Armed Forces Council. The Navy wanted to combat this effort of the Army to get the Legion on record as favoring merger of the armed forces.

Mr. Forrestal, then Secretary of the Navy – Frank Knox had died in the spring of 1944, died of a heart attack – set up a group made up of two vice admirals and myself, and we were to go to Chicago to combat this effort of getting the Legion on record for a merger.

Actually the dirty work was to be done in the Armed Forces Council, not in the full meeting. The resolution that had been prepared to go before the Legion convention was to be given by Louis Johnson, who was in between his time of being Assistant Secretary of War and Secretary of Defense. I went out, and the Navy – we had a pretty fair arrangement as to how we'd handle the matter. Our contacts with the Legion were real good. There was a chap who's dead now by the name of Dudley White who was a radio and newspaper man from Ohio that was actually – and a big Legion man himself – was the go-between on the dealings.

Well, I didn't trust the weather, so I got on the train and went to Chicago, got in the morning. Their big meeting was that noon at the Ambassador East, the big fancy place in Chicago.

MR. FRANK: They have the Pump Room there.

GENERAL THOMAS: The Pump Room – as a matter of fact, we had this lunch in the Pump Room, and Dudley White was among the – Dudley was a very wealthy man. I think he was financing this whole thing.

So the two vice admirals were going to fly out, and they couldn't get off the ground, so they didn't get to Chicago until two days later. But anyway I stayed in there, and working with a former American Legion commander, a real good Marine friend, and he had a boy in the Marine Corps at the time, a flier, by the name of Harry Colmery. He's from Kansas. We got this thing spiked. The defense council of the American Legion turned it down. That's what they called themselves, the National Defense Council. They turned it down and then they prevailed upon Louis Johnson not to bring the proposal up at the Legion Convention. That's one of the things I did, one of my extra-curricular duties.

Along about January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1945, also we had some very serious personnel problems involving FMFPAC. Wally Greene and I hopped in the plane and we made a quick trip

out to Pearl. By that time Bobby Erskine had left the job as chief of staff and Merritt Edson had come back and had become chief of staff. Edson and I always worked closely together.

MR. FRANK: Would you care to discuss those problems?

GENERAL THOMAS: I don't remember much of the details, except that it had to do with defense battalions and the cutting off of the 14 defense battalions, and we had some of these – and replacements and what not. It didn't take us long to settle it, as I remember. But I couldn't recall exactly all the things that we went out there about.

MR. FRANK: Of course FMFPAC had just recently been formed as an entity, right, summer of '44, and wasn't the service command or administrative command also –

GENERAL THOMAS: As a matter of fact, the forming of the service command was one of the things I went out there about at that time.

MR. FRANK: You had Julian Smith or Harry Schmidt?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, Evans Ames. He was the first commander of the Service Command. There was one thing that I wanted to stop. I had gotten all those young officers out of defense battalions that had been promoted out of jobs, and we had at that time 15 defense battalions in the Pacific Ocean area, and as these lads would go back from the staff school, and we meant them to go on to divisions and be staff officers, those buggers in Pearl, in the artillery sections, sent many of them right on back to their old outfits – which was a very poor thing to do.

MR. FRANK: You got it stopped?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh boy, we stopped that quick, yes. Oh, yes. We got them out to divisions and Corps. We had no trouble because Edson was perfectly willing to do all these kinds of things.

There was an administrative alteration in Headquarters Marine Corps that did not affect us much, except that I was the advisor of the Commandant, General Vandegrift. I was his very close advisor. The proposal to consolidate the Quartermaster and the Paymaster had been considered off and on for years to make it look like the Supply Corps of the Navy. The Paymaster and Quartermaster people each had some standing within statutes, had some authority. Of course the Pay Department was for years in the hands of General George Richards, and Richards was a powerful man in Washington. He was a well-to-do man. He was a great social figure here, and – things don't exist like they did in those days. Our Quartermaster McCawley and George Richards, and Denny before McCawley, were powerful people. They had entrée into the White House. They had a lot of backing. Richards was able to stave off this move to consolidate the two departments.

As I say, each of the departments had duties as laid down by law. I think I've talked about the Marine Corps being run by a triumvirate, the Commandant, the Adjutant and Inspector, and the Quartermaster. They were a triumvirate. They ran it. In my early days those three people were almost co-equal in the operation of the Marine Corps. Now, maybe the Commandant was the boss, but these others, the Paymaster and the A and I and the Quartermaster had statutory functions. They were laid down in law.

MR. FRANK: Weren't their appointments to be approved by Congress?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes sir. Oh, yes, sir. Well, anyway, General Vandegrift, despite the fact that he was devoted to – who was the last Paymaster? Wright, Raymond Wright – devoted to Wright, he decided to go through with the matter. So he got the law

changed and consolidated the two departments, as they are today. It didn't make a great deal of difference. All it did was to move the Paymaster Department into the Quartermaster Department, and they became the Disbursing Division, that's all. That's the only change it made. And they were independent in lots of ways, because Merritt Curtis, an old paymaster, became head of the Disbursing Division when he was general officer.

MR. FRANK: Vandegrift having been made Commandant over the heads of so many other officers senior to him, particularly Holland Smith, did he have his problems with any of these generals? Problems with the over-age officers, senior officers who didn't produce? What steps did he take to get rid of them?

GENERAL THOMAS: He had problems with Holland Smith, but they were settled amicably during the war.

MR. FRANK: But some of the others were just not producing out in the Pacific?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, he had – there were one or two here and there –

MR. FRANK: Vogel, for instance?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, he was just sent back. He went back to San Diego from the South Pacific, and Torrey had gone to Quantico. Those people that were senior, they never caused Vandegrift one moment of worry. They got good jobs afterwards and they just relaxed and carried on. Holland was the only one that might have had some bitterness, because he had been so active, and he was not friendly with Holcomb. I think probably Holcomb might have thought that he wasn't temperamentally as well fitted as Vandegrift. A great guy, a wonderful officer and all, but General Holcomb just thought that Vandegrift was the man to relieve him. General Vandegrift had a great deal in common with Lejeune. There's a lot in it. And Shepherd had a little bit (of) the same, touched with a little bit (of) the same brush and what not.

MR. FRANK: I was thinking of the difficulty – for instance, Vogel; Vandegrift may have wanted to retire him and yet Vogel was so politically powerful and had so many connections with the Navy that –

GENERAL THOMAS: No, no, no! He didn't want to retire him. He didn't mind him carrying on. They filled the job. Barney stayed on the West Coast for a long time, then he went to Parris Island and commanded – Moses retired from there, but they never caused Vandegrift one moment of concern. And Vandegrift and Holland got along very well together. They worked very closely, and he was very careful, and I'm sure you'll find in his correspondence that he wrote and talked over matters with Holland continually. Oh, yes, and they were good friends. In his later years Holland will shy a rock at Vandegrift. He does right now. But I won't pay any attention to it, because he knows I'm devoted to Vandegrift and to him too.

MR. FRANK: What about certain senior officers out in the Pacific who may have wanted to build empires or build their own commands, may have wanted, by the back door, to relieve regimental commanders and bring in their own men or something. Would Vandegrift stand for this at all?

GENERAL THOMAS: It never came up as far as I know. We had no trouble like that. We had very little relieving done in the Pacific. There were one or two occasions, but let's not – now, another very powerful fellow was Charlie Price. But Price didn't cause Vandegrift any trouble. None at all. If he was jealous of him, and he probably was, because he was of a jealous nature – but it never came up. These guys just took it,

because, remember, Vandegrift was the hero of Guadalcanal. You just couldn't get away from it.

MR. FRANK: He was capable, he had all the –

GENERAL THOMAS: - yes, he had what it took, and he had the background of being a successful commander. And don't forget, Guadalcanal was the first offensive of World War II, and it looked like we were going to lose, and we pulled it out, and Vandegrift quite properly got the credit for it. Oh, yes.

MR. FRANK: The reason I asked, I've seen some correspondence where someone wanted to relieve so and so, and was told – he told Smith that if they want to do this, it has to be through channels.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, now, wait a minute; we're talking about the 6<sup>th</sup> Division now. Yes, there was a case, and as a matter of fact Smith took this attitude too. They wanted somebody relieved down in the 6<sup>th</sup> Division, so Johnny Clement made a trip out to Pearl to get it all handled under the rug, and they said "Nothing doing."

MR. FRANK: This was before Okinawa.

GENERAL THOMAS: "Put it on record." Before Okinawa. Well, the change was made. The change was made but it didn't save the situation.

MR. FRANK: The change was made during the course of Okinawa.

GENERAL THOMAS: No, it was made before that, and then there was another change made later. They didn't like the whole thing, but they went ahead with it. It had to do with the 29<sup>th</sup> Marines. But that's not something I – No-

MR. FRANK: This was the only major one in your memory that you know of? That was of any –

Thomas: Oh, that was a trivial matter. That was a small matter. But you'll have to watch. Now, I had an instance when I was Assistant Commandant. The division commander wrote a personal letter about two lieutenant colonels in his division, and he said, "They're worthless" and so forth and so on, and "I want to get rid of them. I haven't any place for them and they're a demoralizing influence."

I wrote him back and I said, "I have your letter and I've issued instructions for those two officers" and I named them "to be transferred, with this understanding; that you will be certain that they will receive fitness reports that say exactly what you told me, so that a board may consider them to be retired from the Marine Corps," as boards were allowed to do. And by God, those two guys, the detachment fitness reports were excellent, from that division! And I never got over it. And the division commander didn't put a word on them. He just got rid of them and that's all. But we had very little of that difficulty during the war.

### *Session VIII, Tape 1, side 2:*

One of the long-time dissatisfactions that I had was with the fiscal function in the Marine Corps. I always felt that there should be more knowledge about where the money was and where it came from and what it went for. Too many times, even when I was Director of Plans and Policies and had a lot of authority, I was told I couldn't do something because there wasn't any money to do it with, and I said, "Why the hell didn't you get it? You ought to know these things are going to come up."

And I used to talk – lots of times I'd go sit in the General's office and we'd talk by the hour, and many, many times I told him that I thought the fiscal function was badly handled in the Marine Corps.

MR. FRANK: You needed a comptroller of some sort.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right, and he said, "Well, I handle it myself." That was a fact, and this really was an outgrowth of the years in which he was first military secretary and then as Assistant Commandant he was actually a fiscal director for the Marine Corps. He and the Commandant, General Holcomb, handled the matter themselves.

When Vandegrift left as Assistant Commandant, however, his successor wasn't interested in fiscal matters and he let it slip, and of course General Holcomb was terribly busy, and also he had quite properly great confidence in Seth Williams. The fiscal function drifted into the hands of the Quartermaster, and there it stayed for years. Now, it was a long time, but as I'll relate later, I was a party to getting it out of there. And the guy went to his grave cursing me for it, but I got it out of there, and the Marine Corps got straightened out. I'll touch on that a little later on.

I've already touched on the matter of the Assistant Commandant and how I explained to General Vandegrift my impression, I gave him my impression, namely that his assistant commandant had great authority but no responsibility.

MR. FRANK: A little like the Vice President?

GENERAL THOMAS: A little, but Vice Presidents often have a lot of responsibility.

Well, Iwo Jima went off, and as I say, everybody was saddened by the casualties. It was a real rough show and we lost a lot of men there.

MR. FRANK: Have you any knowledge of this naval gunfire controversy over Iwo Jima?

GENERAL THOMAS: A little bit. It was a little the same – well, of course, Spike Blandy commanded the battleships off of there, and they all had the same attitude. They had it at Peleliu. As a matter of fact, the naval commander said, "They're all dead; go on ashore and take over the island." That was the attitude of the Navy; "We fired all these guns and they're all dead, not you just go over and occupy the area."

I don't know anything about the controversy at Iwo Jima, except that the attitude was "We've killed them all." And when our boys got ashore, they found out that wasn't quite correct.

Okinawa got started. It had been under way a couple of weeks. General Vandegrift made up his mind he wanted to go out there, so we shoved off. By this time he had the B-17 that I've mentioned, and we went to Pearl Harbor, where we saw Holland Smith, and Holland said, "I want to go to Okinawa too but Nimitz won't let me."

So we went on to Guam. By that time Admiral Nimitz had displaced CINCPAC headquarters from Pearl Harbor to Guam. We got to Guam, and Nimitz said, "I can't let you go to Okinawa."

Vandegrift told him, "Well, that's what I came out here for, and I must go."

So he said, "Well, you go on over to Saipan and see Watson." The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had come back to Saipan from Okinawa. We went up and spent a day with them, and they were living under exceedingly austere circumstances of which Vandegrift did not approve. They had not taken any of their gear off the ships because they hoped to get back to Okinawa.

MR. FRANK: They were standing by for the second –

GENERAL THOMAS: They were standing by. We went up and spent a day with Watson at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. Incidentally, he hated my guts, as he did anybody that had any connection with Vandegrift. He and Vandegrift were great friends, and he –

MR. FRANK: Didn't Vandegrift do him a favor by giving him a division?

GENERAL THOMAS: He sure as hell did! Yes!

MR. FRANK: When Vandegrift wanted to go, when the Commandant wanted to go out to the Pacific, did he have to request permission from King or - ?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, I think he just told King and the Secretary of the Navy he was going. It was recognized that he could go and what not, but he kept them informed. I think he probably told the Secretary, "I'd like to go to the Pacific" and the Secretary said, "Fine," and he told King the same way. He was not working for King, and we've always insisted the Marine Corps does not work for the Navy, but King was the executive agent for the law within the Department of the Navy. Now, this is the thing that Vandegrift recognized and was always very, very careful about. But as I said, and I repeat, when he had something he had to do and the Marine Corps interests were involved, he won every time. However, he didn't really have to go (and) say, "I'd like to go to the Pacific and can I have your permission?" like the officer of the deck, - "Permission to go ashore, sir." They didn't operate that way. But he told them he was going, and there never was any question as to his right to go.

MR. FRANK: No necessity to get permission from the theater commander to enter the area? In other words –

General Tomas: Well, I would say, probably, no, I don't remember that there were every any requests for authority to go, of the theater commander, no, sir. No, sir. They had no right to turn him down. This is a higher headquarters.

MR. FRANK: Then why did Nimitz –

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no, Nimitz said, "You can't go to Okinawa." He didn't say he couldn't come out to the Pacific, but he said, "I can't give you permission to go to Okinawa."

So we went off to see Watson, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, in Saipan, where they were ashore. Their personnel were ashore but the gear was nearly all aboard ship. And we came back, and Nimitz said, "Tomorrow I think you'd better go up to Iwo Jima," and of course we wanted to go up to Iwo Jima, wanted to see the island.

We got up there very early in the morning and we had a very exciting day, because they were building a road around the island, and in building the road they bulldozed away a lot of the old defenses there, and they opened up the caves where the Marines had sealed these Japs in, and those monkeys came out firing, and there was shooting going on all over the place.

MR. FRANK: Oh, really?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes. And the Army of course knocked them off, killed them all. The Army then was occupying the island. But we visited Iwo Jima and saw the island. We didn't climb Suribachi but we didn't have to.

MR. FRANK: This was about the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> of April?

GENERAL THOMAS: Later than that. Yes, it was – the Army made an attack south on Okinawa on the 20<sup>th</sup> of April –

MR. FRANK: -19<sup>th</sup> of April it began.



GENERAL THOMAS: Well, anyway, the 19<sup>th</sup> of April, and that was about the day we arrived in Guam, because that attack was a fizzle. And that's one thing that put Nimitz on his mettle.

MR. FRANK: I'm trying to put this in – because you're getting to a point that I want to find out about – there's nothing on the exact dates, the documentation. I think General O.P. Smith in his diary mentioned about the 21<sup>st</sup>?

GENERAL THOMAS: That's about right. That's about right, sure. Well, we went to Iwo Jima – oh, before we went to Iwo Jima, General Vandegrift, without – and Nimitz was a gentleman, you didn't treat Nimitz rough – but General Vandegrift, before we left for Iwo Jima, the day before, didn't tell him directly, I believe, but he gave him to understand that he was going to appeal to King, for permission to go to Okinawa.

MR. FRANK: Was Nimitz worried about Vandegrift's safety, or the Smith –

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, the Smith-versus-Smith thing – oh, no, no, no. The Army had not done well, and he did not want Vandegrift going up there and saying anything. Nimitz was just worried about relations, inter-service relations.

MR. FRANK: This was it.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right.

MR. FRANK: I can quote you on this?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, you can, up to a point. That's my judgment. He had no regard for Vandegrift's safety. That didn't enter into the situation at all, see.

MR. FRANK: Vandegrift did not say this outright in his book. When I called him, as I mentioned to you, about the conference, and he didn't want to be critical about Nimitz, and you said you'd talk about this thing. I'd like to get this down on the record in black and white.

GENERAL THOMAS: Get what down?

MR. FRANK: As to your judgment of the probable reason that –

GENERAL THOMAS: - oh, no sir, he did not want General Vandegrift to go to Okinawa where he might be in a position to criticize the Army. And he would have another Smith-versus-Smith difficulty.

MR. FRANK: But do you think Vandegrift would do such a thing?

GENERAL THOMAS: Why, I don't think he would, no. But Nimitz was just going to foreclose it. He wasn't going to let him go. He wasn't going to take any chance on it.

Well, we came back from Iwo Jima. As I said, before we went to Iwo Jima Vandegrift had impressed, either by word or something of the sort, that he would appeal to a common superior. He said, "I came out here to see my people and I'm not going home until I see them. Those are my Marines in Okinawa and I want to see 'em."

So we went to Iwo Jima, and we came back in the afternoon. It's not very far from Guam to Iwo Jima. And when we got back, Vandegrift went in to see Nimitz, and Nimitz said, "Tomorrow morning I leave for Okinawa. We have to make a decision and I'm going up to make that decision, and you may go with me. And you may take one staff officer and no more."

MR. FRANK: Who was going out with you on this trip anyway?

GENERAL THOMAS: Field Harris and Aides. There were four or five of us, a couple of aides – Field Harris and I were the principal subordinates. Well, that suited Field all right. He would have liked to have gone to Okinawa, but he also wanted to go over to the

Philippines and see the group over there that was working with MacArthur, so he went along to the Philippines.

I want to be sure I get these things right now. Nimitz said, "I'm going and you can take one staff officer, and I'm going for the purpose of making a decision as to what will happen to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Phib Corps."

Now, you see, Okinawa, first, a preliminary operation to Okinawa was an Army division landed in Ie Shima to the west of Okinawa, maybe the 88<sup>th</sup>, I've forgotten what division it was.

MR. FRANK: 77<sup>th</sup>.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, anyway, they landed over there and they took Ie Shima as a preliminary operation.

MR. FRANK: Kerama Retto?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, anyway, whatever it was. Now, a part of the Okinawa plan was a little bit like CAUSEWAY. They would seize Okinawa, then after three or four days or a week, 3<sup>rd</sup> Phib Corps would bounce off and go down towards the south.

MR. FRANK: Sakishima Gunto.

GENERAL THOMAS: And seize a Shima down there. Now, that was a part of the plan. But after the Army had this sterile offensive on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April, it was obvious that they had more there than they could chew. So the question was what shall happen to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Phib Corps? And either in some way Nimitz had the impression, I suspect, that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Phib Corps should just forget about this Shima down towards Formosa and stay right there and help fight the battle of Okinawa. So he said, "I'm going up to sit in on the conference and we're going to make the decision about the future employment of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Phib Corps. And you may go with me and you may take one staff officer," and General Vandegrift took me.

We started out the next morning, and I got Sherman in the corner.

MR. FRANK: Who was not a friend of the Marine Corps.

GENERAL THOMAS: Not a friend of the Marine Corps, never was. He had a brother in the Marine Corps, of course, Paul Sherman, but he was not a friend of the Marine Corps.

MR. FRANK: Was Forrest Sherman at that carrier conference earlier in August of '44?

GENERAL THOMAS: If he wasn't, he was around there, and he might have been, but Forrest Sherman was not about to tell Jack Towers what to do.

MR. FRANK: Towers was Deputy CINCPAC.

GENERAL THOMAS: Deputy CINCPAC, that's right. I think maybe Forrest Sherman was not present actually in the conference room, because Towers would not have tolerated anything out of him.

MR. FRANK: Oh really?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh no, not for a minute. Sure. Oh, no.

MR. FRANK: Forrest Sherman was now head of, the Deputy Chief of Staff and Head of the War Plans Division of CINCPAC?

GENERAL THOMAS: Something of the sort. I don't know what they called the job, but he was the operations officer for CINCPAC.

I wanted to talk to Sherman, I talked to him. I didn't take anything off of him one way or the other. I told him, "I can see that the Army's stymied. They made the attack on the 19<sup>th</sup>. I can also see that the Army has a perfect problem. Three divisions, three

roads, drive straight ahead.” I said, “That’s going to be a costly thing. Now, I’d like to propose this; that you bring the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division back over to Okinawa, bring it into Buckner Bay, and land them there behind the Japanese lines, and then shuffle the 1<sup>st</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Divisions around and land behind the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division.”

He said, “Well, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division is ashore in Saipan.”

I said, “Their personnel are ashore, but General Watson has assured us that he can be aboard and can sail in 12 hours. And they can be back at Okinawa in less than three days.”

We continued our voyage. We got a little experience of the war thing because as we got about 50 miles out of Okinawa, a Marine F4U squadron just closed in around us like that, 18 planes, and took us right on in to Kadena. We landed there, and were met by a concourse, and we went to Geiger’s headquarters, which was not far away. Of course Kelly Turner had come ashore. Spruance didn’t come ashore but Kelly Turner did. There was Geiger and Buckner. We had lunch and then we started to confer. It was the most dolorous performance I have ever seen. I sat in the back row and these guys sat around the table and talked. Roy Geiger said very little. Vandegrift said nothing. I ached to talk about this proposed plan of landing in Buckner Bay but I didn’t have a cue and I kept my mouth shut. The decision was made to cancel that substantive operation of 3<sup>rd</sup> Phib Corps and let them turn to on the war down south.

MR. FRANK: That would also release the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, it didn’t affect the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. Nothing – I repeat, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division never was released. They finally brought the 8<sup>th</sup> Marines to Okinawa, you know.

MR. FRANK: That’s right, but there were messages.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I’m not sure. I don’t remember. I didn’t know anything about that. Anyway, Turner’s attitude at this conference was, “You guys are ashore, for God’s sake. Get on with this battle. I’m losing ships every day.” And they were, the Kamikazes were hitting them and the Navy was catching hell, and he wanted them to get busy and start fighting on the beach. They weren’t fighting. Two days had gone by and they still were sitting on their Ditty bags.

I guess maybe we used up most of the afternoon. I can’t remember. But we stayed that night. It was probably late in the afternoon, by the time this conference was over and these people went to their various headquarters, and that night we got a good briefing from Geiger’s staff. He had his regular 8 o’clock briefing that night. We got up to date on the operation. I don’t remember talking to Geiger. I talked to some of his staff. But Geiger and I were very friendly, and I would have said anything to him I wanted to, but he and Vandegrift were off together.

The next morning we got up and I went over to see the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, del Valle. Well, the 1<sup>st</sup> Division had just walked across the island and they hadn’t lost a man. Nobody shot at them. They were all full of beans and ready to go. Then we went up to the 6<sup>th</sup> Division. Well, they’d had a pretty hard fight. That fight up the Motobu Peninsula was a right rough fight, and we went to the division headquarters and had a briefing, and there I found out that I’d lost a first cousin, my young first cousin, Archie Norford, was a captain in the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines and he’d been killed on Motobu Peninsula. I’d helped the boy get his commission.

Then they took us around Motobu Peninsula. We used up the whole day visiting the troops, finally wound up in the afternoon at Kadena where we went through the air outfits and visited with all the people down there. I think Woods was there by that time.

MR. FRANK: No, Mulcahy was still –

GENERAL THOMAS: Mulcahy. Woods was over on the other side of the island. He did go up there. Maybe it was Mulcahy, I don't remember.

MR. FRANK: Mulcahy. Woods didn't relieve him until May.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, maybe so. I guess Nimitz went out to Turner's. I don't know what he did that second day. I know among other things he went down to the 10<sup>th</sup> Army headquarters and talked to – Buckner.

Well, the next morning we took off to go back to Guam.

MR. FRANK: Did Vandegrift know, I'm sure he must have, you talked over with him the idea of using the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marines?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh yes, sure. We'd talked it over.

MR. FRANK: Did you have much of a chance to talk to O.P. Smith?

GENERAL THOMAS: A little bit. Very little.

MR. FRANK: Any view as to his attitude, what he saw of the Army?

GENERAL THOMAS: We didn't get a good deal out of it. O.P. Smith, nobody talked with him much alone, and we are very good friends, and still are, but O.P. was – he didn't have a very easy job there, you know.

MR. FRANK: No, he was Marine Deputy Chief of Staff.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. We left the next morning, went on back to Guam. From Guam we went to Pearl. At Pearl, we saw Holland Smith. Vandegrift talked to Holland about some changes that he thought ought to be made. By that time Holland had been out in the war a long time, and he wasn't a young man, so Vandegrift said, "I think you'd better come home for a little rest."

Well, Holland was out of the war then. He wasn't commanding an active corps.

MR. FRANK: Why, when CINCPAC moved to Guam, didn't FMFPAC headquarters move?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, they did later.

MR. FRANK: But here they moved forward to be right behind the war, and after all Smith was supposedly Nimitz's amphibious force –

GENERAL THOMAS: I may have known at some time or other what the circumstances were about that, but you see, Smith was just back from Iwo Jima, where he'd been in a very anomalous position, and –

MR. FRANK: He was over Schmidt and he had nothing to do.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. FMF Headquarters, this was just interim. It was to move out there. And of course Guam was pretty crowded. There wasn't an awful lot of room. And there wasn't any reason why Holland should be hell-bent to go out there. Geiger did go out there later. He kept the headquarters, matter of fact.

MR. FRANK: Also, hadn't Holland Smith hoped or been told or expected the possibility that he might have had the overall command for the Okinawa operation, and he had not gotten it and was a little disappointed about that?

GENERAL THOMAS: Maybe so. I don't know. I don't remember. I don't remember. He should have had it, as a matter of fact. But Nimitz was not about to put any more Army troops under Holland Smith's command, that is my guess. And you can't blame

him, and I don't think he should. As I said to you, any Marine commander that commands army troops is going to be in trouble. They standard of performance isn't up to it, that's all. Now, Nimitz would never consider, after the Smith-versus-Smith fight, and quite properly he shouldn't because Holland would never be satisfied. He would have raised hell with those three divisions that didn't gain any ground on April 19<sup>th</sup>.

MR. FRANK: There would have been a 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division back of those men.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. General Vandegrift talked to General Smith about the changes, and he felt that he should come home, and he thought a nice thing for him to do would be to go down to San Diego and command the barracks down at the base down there. That suited Holland all right. Geiger would come on back and be FMFPAC.

Keller Rockey would go out and take 3<sup>rd</sup> Phib Corps, and Gene Bourke, a very able fellow who was still a brigadier commanding the artillery of the VAC would take the 5<sup>th</sup> Division. Those things were all set up.

We went from Pearl Harbor over to Maui, where Harry Schmidt had his corps headquarters and spent a day with him, and then we went over to see Cates' 4<sup>th</sup> Division, up in the hills in the south end of Maui, and there we learned of the death of Franklin Roosevelt. That put a little damper on everything. Cates was to have a big party that night, have a lot of Maui people come around and what not, and the whole thing was called off. We went from Maui over to Kamuela on Hawaii and had a visit with Keller Rockey, spent a night there with him and the 5<sup>th</sup> Division, and then came on back to the States.

MR. FRANK: How did the division look after Iwo, pretty shot up?

GENERAL THOMAS: They were pretty well shot up. But they had gotten a lot of replacements, and they were getting ready then for Kyushu, which was to come on, you know.

MR. FRANK: Operation OLYMPIC.

GENERAL THOMAS: OLYMPIC. CORONET was the second one wasn't it?

MR. FRANK: That's right.

GENERAL THOMAS: OLYMPIC. So we came on back to Washington, and of course Harry Truman was in the White House. We had some contacts to polish, because Truman brought in an entirely new setup, and he brought in a commodore of the reserves by the name of Vardeman. Harry Vaughn was his military aide, and Commodore Vardeman, who was really a politician, was his naval aide.

Well, Vardeman actually contacted us, I think because he had a son in the Marine Corps, and he told General Vandegrift, "If there's ever anything I can do for you, I'll be glad to do it." The Old Man said, "If there's anything you can do we'll sure call on you."

A few days after we came home, King received a sizzling dispatch from Nimitz, in which he said a correspondent of the Herald Tribune –

MR. FRANK: - Homer Bigart –

GENERAL THOMAS: Homer Bigart, that's right, had written a story which embodied my recommendation about the landing of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division in the bay, and it was just the same thing all over, that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division should come back and land behind the Japs and so forth.

MR. FRANK: Highly critical of the Army.

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, that's right. No, Nimitz said that Vandegrift, or he inferred that Vandegrift had violated his confidence, and that he had released this story.

Well, King had an investigation made of the thing immediately and determined that Bigart had written the story from Okinawa and that it had passed through Nimitz' censor before its publication. Of course Vandegrift was just furious about this whole thing.

King, when the circumstances came out, that Nimitz's own censor had released the story; King gave Nimitz a hot shot. About that time, by that time there was a good deal of knowledge about the whole affair. Well, David Lawrence has always been very close to the Navy. His U.S. News used to print the chief of operations' report to the Secretary. He used to get it out for him. I believe that was the case. Well, Lawrence probably still does, had in those days, free run of the Navy Department. He got the Tarawa story, and King said, "Well, I want you to have the real story, so you go talk to Vandegrift."

Lawrence came over and we talked for a while. He talked to Vandegrift. And then King said, "I want Pfeiffer and Thomas to sit down with Lawrence and go through the whole operation with him." So we did. We spent a couple of hours with him one day going through the whole damn thing, and he came out with a real good article about the whole setup. But Nimitz was just off base, and they were, of course, very, very sensitive about any criticism of the Army, you know. They were trying to keep everything submerged.

MR. FRANK: Well, hadn't this sensitivity – hadn't there been two other factors involved? Number one was the Sherrod story about the Saipan controversy.

GENERAL THOMAS: Maybe so.

MR. FRANK: Do you have any knowledge of the background of that?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, I did not, no, but I know that Sherrod is a very close friend of Holland Smith's.

MR. FRANK: The other one, remember the Hearst papers in San Francisco –

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes. They came out on the Ralph Smith side.

MR. FRANK: On the Ralph Smith side and they were touting MacArthur. They were for MacArthur, and then when the high casualty rate list from Iwo came out, they started getting stinking about (the) Marine Corps and Marine Corps tactics and so forth.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right, and later Marshall too – Marshall, who had asked for the Iwo Jima thing. I've forgotten who he said it to, to Vandegrift or whoever it was, but he said, "I've had a fair study made of Iwo Jima, and I feel that though the price was high, it was worthwhile." Well Goddamn him, he'd been the guy that laid Iwo Jima on, to save his B-29s. Then he took this attitude about it later. I don't remember all the characters involved in the thing, but I recall that it happened.

MR. FRANK: In Plans and Policies also, in every operation order there's always a chemical warfare defense in it, right?

GENERAL THOMAS: Um – hm.

MR. FRANK: You always have the gas masks. You have the preventatives. What did you do or what did any of the higher commands do about counter-measures, use of poison gas or toxic –

GENERAL THOMAS: We had one gas scare on Guadalcanal, and there was a tremor of hysteria, but you couldn't imagine a more impractical theater for the use of gas than the Pacific theater. The wind blows always over those atolls and islands, and also you have a very hot sun, and gas just couldn't persist. The kinds of gasses that we've found useful in

time of war are ones that hang in low, cool, damp places. You don't have that in the Pacific Ocean. I couldn't imagine. We didn't have gas masks. We never did have them. Isn't that right?

MR. FRANK: No, I have to disagree, because on Peleliu we had a gas scare. The Japanese were using –

GENERAL THOMAS: Did you have gas masks?

MR. FRANK: Yes, sir. They had a –

GENERAL THOMAS: I don't remember that one.

MR. FRANK: -the thing exploded with a yellow thud and everybody yelled "GAS!" and everybody went dashing off in the division CP defense –

GENERAL THOMAS: Maybe so. I never was worried about gas.

MR. FRANK: And of course Lillienthal in his memoirs mentions the fact of a conversation he had with Marshall several years after the end of the war, in which Marshall said that they had seriously contemplated using gas in Iwo, and also there was some fellow, I forget his name, who was one of the chief scientific advisors to OSS – mentioned that some Britisher by the name of Lethbridge had made a report, the Lethbridge report, in which plans had been made for the employment of gas at Iwo Jima.

GENERAL THOMAS: No, I don't remember much about that. As I say, I still stick to my story that I can't imagine using gas on Iwo Jima. The winds would blow it away faster than you'd lay it down. And also that hot sun, mustard gas would just go like that –

MR. FRANK: - warfare service would have had responsibility for –

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes. We didn't have it, no. We didn't. They used to talk about it before the war, laying gas by destroyers and things like that. Well, if it was a one shot affair, if it was powerful enough, that would be all right.

By the time we got back to Washington from our trip to Okinawa, we again had a personnel pinch. We needed for the 6<sup>th</sup> Division going into Japan – the 5<sup>th</sup> Phib Corps was locked up for Kyushu, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Phib Corps was to go into CORONET, 5<sup>th</sup> Phib Corps OLYMPIC, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Phib Corps landing with the 10<sup>th</sup> Army up in CORONET.

We needed men, and we decided we needed 25,000. The way you got men was through a Joint Chiefs of Staff allotment, and Vandegrift took it up with King, and King said the Joint Chiefs of Staff never in the world would approve it. "The only way you can get those men is to get them from the White House." He didn't do or say anything more, but when Vandegrift came back and told me what King's reaction was, I said, "Well, call Commodore Vardeman."

So we made up a memo, a very brief memo (for signature of Harry Truman) authorizing the Marine Corps to increase by 25,000 men. Vandegrift took it over to Vardeman, and Vardeman took it in to Truman, and he signed it. We had 25,000 more men. We put in the draft calls. As it turned out we didn't get them because the war ended, but we had them anyway. But King wouldn't touch it. Vardeman produced. He'd said, "If you need anything come and see me." Well, we went to see him, and we got 25,000 men out of it.

Well VE Day came along, and there was the feeling about people in Europe being transferred to the Pacific Theater. As a matter of fact they started diverting troops almost immediately. But those others who had had experience in the war realized that the subjugation of the Japanese home island was going to be a damned bloody affair. They

were going to fight to the last man, man, woman and child, there wasn't any doubt about it, and I've always had the feeling that it would have cost us a million lives if we'd ever gone into the Japanese main islands. Also, we would have killed millions of them.

However, one of the things that happened, if you remember, the 5<sup>th</sup> Phib Corps was to land at Kagoshima, down in southern Kyushu. In the weeks before, after the decision was made to land there, and before VJ Day, when the decision to land there was originally made, there wasn't a corporal's guard defending that area. Then the Japs moved nine divisions down into the area. Now, this is off the cuff, but my recollection's pretty good. There was a good deal of feeling that there had been a leak on that operation.

As it turned out I believe later they determined that there was no leak, that the Japs just guessed what we were going to do. But they moved nine divisions, imagine, in Kagoshima Bay. The assault on the home islands would have been a real bloody affair, and no doubt about that.

I never knew anything about the Manhattan Project. I knew there was such a name. I knew there was a project, that there was something called Manhattan, but as I've often said, I already possessed all the secrets I could keep quiet about, and I didn't want to know anything about it. I knew it was really highly classified.

MR. FRANK: Any Marines involved in the project?

GENERAL THOMAS: Not that I know of.

MR. FRANK: Strictly an Engineers' project.

GENERAL THOMAS: Army Engineers and civilians, I believe, but I'm not sure. We may have had a man there but he didn't come around and tell me what he was doing.

I did know, however – I remember Omar Pfeiffer telling me once – Manhattan had overriding priority above everything else. Nothing in the armed services takes priority over Manhattan.

MR. FRANK: Did he know about it?

GENERAL THOMAS: Did he? I don't know how much Omar knew. But of course if he'd told me I wouldn't have understood. I don't understand very well today. I wouldn't have understood it if he'd told me what it was all about.

But then the holocaust came, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the end of the war.

Well, the war wasn't any more than over when a wave of hysteria hit this city of Washington. It largely was in Congress, demanding that we bring the boys home tomorrow, bring them all home right now, so we had to do some planning.

Now, I meant to talk about this before when I was talking about the trip. Field Harris and I used to talk at length. We'd mull over things. We still do when we get together. We're very good friends. Actually, we're distant cousins, as a matter of fact, maybe sixth cousins. But we talked about the future. General Vandegrift had us working on the postwar Marine Corps.

MR. FRANK: There was future planning?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes, as a matter of fact our plans were right up to date. He told us, "You boys get together and get your ideas on these things and let me have your figures.

MR. FRANK: Did you have a section working on that?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I think my own outfit. I never was much of a hand to set up a special section to work. We worked on it right down in the G-3 sections, and we



were working on a 100,000-man Marine Corps and 8000 officers. Field and I used to talk about that. We thought that the Navy would want to hold a lot of the Pacific islands, and in our plans we set up little outfits of 50 and 100 men on every damn one of those mandated islands. We even went on down the islands off the New Guinea coast. Field and I talked about how we would move people by air, and in the case of officers, noncommissioned officers that were married; they wouldn't be allowed to take any furniture or anything of the sort. We'd furnish the houses there for them with their families and they'd take their families and they'd just walk in with a suitcase and that's all, and they'd walk out with the same thing. Guam was to be one of our big setups, and we'd have another one in Japan, and we would change men from those islands down around the Peleliu. Peleliu and places like that, men would go from there up to Japan for a year after they'd been down there so they'd have recreation. We did a lot of planning and talking. I wanted more than 8000 officers because aviation was a big drain on officer strength, but Vandegrift said, "That's all we'll ever be able to get, so you just plan on 8000 officers."

So we talked a lot about that. When VJ Day came, we immediately started. We had had enough warning that we had done preliminary planning on demobilization, and – but you see, the people we wanted to demobilize, we didn't have in our hands, because they were all under the operational control of Nimitz. As a matter of fact, two thirds of the Marine Corps was under his control.

So Field and I, there about the last week in August, took the Commandant's plane and went to Guam. My recollection is that the surrender on the Missouri took place the 1<sup>st</sup> of September, about that date, and so we planned to be in Guam when Admiral Nimitz got back, and we were. As a matter fact, we got there practically the same hour he got back.

I remember my first contact with Sherman on that visit. We went into Sherman, told him that we just had to know who we could demobilize. How much of this advance information, we may have known a little in advance, but it was decided that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Phib Corps, in other words the 1<sup>st</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Divisions, would go up to China and receive the surrender up there as Tsingtao, Tientsin and Peking, the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines had already gone to Yokosuka. They went into Yokosuka Harbor and manned that area there, defended that area, took the surrender. Fourth Marines were from the 6<sup>th</sup> Division of course. The 4<sup>th</sup> Phib Corps, less a division – the two divisions that were left out of these calculations were the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup>, the 3<sup>re</sup>, in Guam and the 4<sup>th</sup> Division was in Maui, but the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> did go into Sasebo and Nagasaki and – as occupation forces.

We therefore had two divisions to play with, and Nimitz released them to us immediately, the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Divisions. There were a lot of people that had only been out a short time in those divisions, and we arranged for the transfer of those men up, particularly to China, to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Divisions. They were the ones that were to be there longest. It's my recollection that we never expected the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Divisions would be a great deal of time in Japan. We didn't know for sure. But the long timers who – we brought them out of those divisions, and sent these men, who'd only been out there a short time, up. There was a change of personnel. But generally speaking we had the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Division and a whole raft, considerable aviation. Now, aviation went also to North China where they manned the airfields. There was a field at Tsingtao and then the big airfields around Peking and the small airfield at Tientsin.

Now, there were two large air bases at Peking, the south field and the west field. We didn't have any difficulty. The Pacific commanders were perfectly willing for us to demobilize anybody we wanted, and we had a vast number of Force troops – could take anything we wanted.

We had grist for our mill back in the States. We drew up a plan – as a matter of fact, we followed the Army to a considerable extent on demobilization criteria, the formulae that they set up. Ours was a little different from the Army's and just at the moment I don't remember exactly where we differed from them. Our people had more combat than theirs had. The Army had such vast numbers. The formulae were based upon combat, length of service, length of service overseas, but it was a very satisfactory amount. It pleased everybody but the Congress. I went up. I was summoned up to the Senate one time, or at least a Marine was to appear and I went up, and appeared before the Senate Naval Committee, and they were just hysterical. This fellow Ed Johnston from Colorado, and a guy from West Virginia who only served one term, I don't remember his name now, but anyway, they just said, "The purpose of your formulae is to keep men overseas. You're not trying to bring men home."

God, here we were breaking our backs, the Marines, to get them home.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Phib Corps went into North China and Japan, and received the surrender of the Japs there. They remained there for the time being.

MR. FRANK: Were there any incidents like the Army had?

GENERAL THOMAS: For instance?

MR. FRANK: Men wanting to go back home.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, one. Just one. There was one in Pearl Harbor. By that time Roy Geiger had moved his headquarters back. As a matter of fact, he came back to Pearl Harbor to stay, from Guam, the same night that Fields and I came back, and I remember we went into Kwajalein together and had supper together there. Roy took off and he didn't say anything to us. We took off in our B-17 in a pouring down rain for Pearl Harbor from Kwajalein. I remember the pilot, what's his name, and he said, "My God, people must be crazy to travel on a night like tonight." But we got off, and we just barely got off. But Geiger only took a half a load of gasoline and put in a Johnston. He said, "You guys were fools to take off in a pouring rain," but he didn't tell me the night before. Fields was the flying member of our family. But we did take off and it was dangerous.

Long before the war was over, but at a time when we knew we were going to win it, that it would be over some day, we had an officer personnel problem, and that was, "What shall we do for officers?" How shall we procure the 8000 officers that Vandegrift talked about he might be able to get us? At that time there were probably 1000 or 1100 permanent regular officers in the Marine Corps.

MR. FRANK: That's all?

GENERAL THOMAS: That's all. We just had the pre-World War II officer strength and that's all we had. There had been little dribbles of PLCs (Platoon Leaders' Class) that had been commissioned regularly, but I'd say 1100 is a pretty good guess as to what we had. General Vandegrift said, "We will move this figure of regular officers up to 5500, which means we'll select 4500 from the Reserves, for transfer to regular status. Then over a period of four or five years we'll pick up the other 2500."

Well, it turned out that he made a pretty good guess on what we could do and what we ought to do. To get started on the project, he brought Jim Underhill, Major

General James L., a very, very able man, a man with a personality like an old sock, and that was the reason he was dropped. He was a lot better man than some we kept. But Jim Underhill had a fine administrative mind. He came back. He got his business lined up, and we gave him some personnel to work with. He started to study on this matter of the transfer from the reserves to the regulars, and set up the criteria and procedures for the selection.

MR. FRANK: You went through this after World War I, didn't you, without any input based on your - ?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I don't know what happened after World War I.

MR. FRANK: You were personally involved. You put in for a regular commission. They had re-enlist problems and everything.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, they never gave it the thought that we did after WWII. After WWI they had two boards, first the Russell Board and then the Neville Board, but our project I gave a lot better boost because I knew what happened after World War I.

MR. FRANK: That's what I mean.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh yes, I'm sure I did. But Jim Underhill studied this problem for a long while, and he came up with some real fine conclusions. He and I used to talk daily. He would come in and talk to me about some aspect of the problem, and we decided – he'd go away satisfied that he was on the right track.

Then after Underhill set up the whole program and got it approved by the Commandant, General Vandegrift appointed him President of the Board to make the selections, to go over all Reserves.

I've forgotten how many people put in for regular commissions, maybe 10,000. Underhill came in after they'd selected 3000 and he said, "We've got the cream off the top of the bottle." But he continued on and selected and he got the number of people that we wanted. There was only one thing. My cousin Field used to argue with me about the fliers. Of course, the objective of the fliers was to get the highest percentage of fliers in the regular establishment they could get in. The more they would get, the better they would like it. Well, they had pretty poor ideas about qualifications, because a very high percentage of their personnel, pilots, after the war were only high school graduates. We too boys right out of high school, and I told Field, I said, "You cannot build the permanent Cops on high school graduates. You just can't do it. The education isn't there."

So we squared off on that, but after I left Washington in 1947, he went in to General Vandegrift and got permission to select a thousand more of these lads. I will say for them that they're the ones, and a high percentage of those boys today have a college degree. They turned to and they really produced. But they put in for – what is it now? I think that block is probably at the grade of lieutenant colonel. They had an overload of aviators in there and they had selection problems that were terrific, and I know, I'm talking about 1960, an assistant director of personnel made a study of the problem coming up, in which practically all the lieutenant colonels in the Marine Corps would be fliers, and when he went to the then Commandant, the Assistant Commandant, who was a flier, blamed it on me.

Well, it came to my attention, and I went over and told the Assistant Commandant exactly what had happened, and we settled the matter right there. But that block was there, and it's been mended now to a certain extent.

MR. FRANK: In 1947-48, did they revert a number of aviation Lt. Colonels back to major, or was that Marine Corps?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, that would be Marine Corps wide. I'm going to get to that reverting pretty soon.

MR. FRANK: Now about the COMINCH, Admiral King's Navy Postwar Plan No. 5, for the retention and manning of islands in the Pacific and bases and so on. Do you recall that at all?

GENERAL THOMAS: No. But that sounds a little bit like what Field Harris and I talked about.

MR. FRANK: Well, actually I have it documented. It applied to the size of the forces, the bases to be maintained, and if I recall – I have it right here but no matter – it pertained to the major ones, not the small islands.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, one thing that always astounded me and this is opinion only – as we were coming away from Okinawa, flying away after our trip out there, I said, "Okinawa's a beautiful island," and I said to Admiral Nimitz, "Weren't you attracted to Okinawa?"

"Well," he said, "it's an attractive place, but what else do you mean?"

I said, "Well, Admiral, we ought to keep it."

He said, "We don't know who it belongs to."

I said, "We don't now, but in a month we're going to know. It's going to belong to us, and we ought to keep it as a future bastion in the Pacific."

Now, I didn't talk about my return from Okinawa. After we got in the plane, I got hold of Sherman, and I said, "What happened to the thought of landing the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division behind the Japs?" And he said, "Well, the 10<sup>th</sup> Army said that that is not a suitable area to land."

And I said, "My God, that's where the alternate landing was to be if the western beaches were weathered out. It's a perfect place to land."

Now, to get back to what I was talking about, about the Pacific islands. Sherman wanted to get involved in Europe. In his days of Chief of Naval Operations, he turned his back on the Pacific, which is the great ocean. So did Nimitz. They just couldn't see those places out there. They wanted to get over and get involved with the Army, particularly Sherman, in Europe. They let the Pacific go down the drain. I never was able to fathom that.

MR. FRANK: A postscript to this Okinawa thing – you know, we sent the draft manuscript on the Okinawa campaign which I wrote to Admiral Nimitz for comment, and he read it through, and he didn't make any particular comment. He sent it back just about the time, if you'll recall, last year or is it two years ago, when they were having these riots on Okinawa to return the islands to Japan. He referred to this. He said, "It has always been my opinion that we should never" – and he underlined it again, he made capital letters – "NEVER" – it was handwritten – "release Okinawa. We should keep it."

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, that's very good, because he didn't think so then. Oh, you're damned right. Of course, hindsight's pretty good.

One of our chief problems was – Marine personnel after the war – Marine personnel for the naval establishment, in other words, Marine barracks detachments. We made allotments of men in numbers, rough numbers, to various posts and stations, Marine barracks. Of course as the Navy whittled the commandants down on civilian

personnel and civilian police, they'd come in and demand more Marines. "You cut off these civilians, now I need Marines to replace them."

Well, we had already gotten our overall plan approved by Admiral Horn, who was the housekeeper for the naval establishment, and he backed us up, and each time when Com-4 of Com-8 would say, "I've got to have another 140 Marines because they've cut off my civilian police," Admiral Horn would say, "Com-4, you'll have to take them out of your allotment. Now, if you can arrange to move them –." We told them, if they wanted to move them from Brooklyn, from New York to Philadelphia or to Boston, that's all right with us, but Com-4 is going to get so many men, that's all. And Horn backed us up and we got away with it. But we didn't do so well on our own posts and stations, particularly Lejeune and Pendleton.

In our planning I had envisaged that a lot of the running of those posts would be handled by the combat forces there. Watson was really the man that upset that apple cart. After I left Washington he came in and got a lot of that thrown out. Got allotments made to run these posts and stations as hotels for combat outfits. He went down as Commanding General – well, he had two jobs, he was Commanding General, 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, and Commanding General, Marine Barracks, Camp Lejeune.

So it went that way. I was gone, I couldn't fight it, but they did, they got more men and they got more and more men, so those stations now are big outfits, and actually those stations could be manned by division personnel, like the MPs and what not.

MR. FRANK: Where did the men come from? If there was a requirement for manning of posts and bases they have to take them from some place.

GENERAL THOMAS: They took them from the divisions.

MR. FRANK: And they denuded the combat units?

GENERAL THOMAS: They took them from the combat outfits, you're damned right. That's the only place they could come from. They came from the FMF, and that's what I was opposed to. I said, "Why shouldn't the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division Military Police Company handle the Military Police job on Camp Lejeune? If he's got to go away he can go out and get himself some people from out of the commissary and go out and run his military police, but why doesn't that company run the military police in that station?" But they did away with the whole damn thing. Now the military police – what do the military police of a division do? They don't do a damn thing, but they've got a great big military police setup. The only place we made it stick was Quantico. General Vandegrift said to me, "I don't give a damn how you organize Quantico, or any other post, but the number one man on the post must be the troop commander, the combat troop commander."

Well, that didn't last long. But he had lots of trouble with Quantico in the old days. But we made the Commandant of the Marine Corps Schools, we eliminated the Marine Barracks Quantico, because I remember going down there during the war and Phil Torrey saying to me, "If it wasn't for these damned schools I'd have a very pleasant post."

And I said, "General, you haven't got anything else here, that's all you've got. That's the only reason you're here."

He said, "Oh, to hell with that."

But the Commandant Marine Corps Schools is responsible for the education of people on that post. That's what we meant it should be. It's slipped a little bit since my day down there, but we made that stick. I'd better get on here.

MR. FRANK: Let me get another reel.

GENERAL THOMAS: OK. I can just about do one more.

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GENERAL THOMAS: There was a void in the control and administration of the Marine Corps that came about as a result of the abolishment of the Adjutant and Inspector's Department, and the setting up of the Personnel Department. Prior to that time, the Adjutant and Inspector and his department had conducted rigid inspection of Marine Corps units. It was a good outfit and these inspections were really worthwhile. They hadn't been carried on for quite a while when Vandegrift got there. I was very conscious of this omission, and I used to say to the General, "You and your staff send out enough orders to run an outfit of 10-million men, but you haven't got a solitary person that goes out to see if those orders are carried out, and the only way we find out whether they are or not is when trouble comes and we find out that our orders have not been obeyed."

Finally, when the war was over or practically over, he decided to set up an office of Inspector General. Pedro Del Valle, who had worked himself through the Pacific pretty much, came home to be Inspector General and DeWitt Peck left the Assistant Commandant Job and went out to command the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division. Hal Turnage came home from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division and became Assistant Commandant. Well, Del Valle spent the first part of his time as Inspector General in drawing up regulations and setting up the office of the Inspector General, and did a good job. (General) Del Valle was a very able fellow and had lots of get up and go to him, and so we have, I presume, a good Inspector General's department today.

MR. FRANK: May I ask you one question, going back to this fiscal matter, it seems to me that we didn't finish there – one point, that Holcomb and Vandegrift had more or less kept it in their heads and you felt that there needed to be –

GENERAL THOMAS: - well – yes, that's right. I talked to him about it and I said, "You've got the same man who is your banker, your bookkeeper, and your disbursing officer."

"Well," he said, "it suits me," and it did. He understood it all and he handled it all, but the Quartermaster General had all the money, and when General Vandegrift wanted to know something, he got an answer, but when anybody else in headquarters wanted to know something about money, they got the back of their hand.

MR. FRANK: This was Seth Williams?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no, Pete Hill. Williams went out when we came in. He retired one month after Holcomb. He became 64.

MR. FRANK: Pete Hill had been there for quite a few years, hadn't he?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, he had been in the Quartermaster's Department but he became the Quartermaster, and then the title of Quartermaster General was set up by law a couple of years later, but at that time he was called the Quartermaster. Hill went in on the first day of February 1944; one month after Vandegrift took over.

I'll chop it off there because I'll come back to it later. Seven years later I was able to put this matter over and I did. But Vandegrift said, "I understand it. It works all right for me." And so we just left it there. I bitched about it, but he just listened and told me to walk by beat.

In 1946, he sent for me, and he said, I've had a most disturbing report from Hill. He tells me that these people out in China have completely wrecked his rental and lease funds, that they are spending more money than he's got for leases and rentals."

"Now," he said, "I'm going to send Hal Turnage and I want you to go with him. Go out there and tell Rockey and the rest of those people they've just got to quit this nonsense. We don't have the money to keep them in the state in which they're living. They're leasing great big houses and facilities."

So I took Shoup with me. He was my G-4 at the time.

MR. FRANK: Had he relieved Krulak?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, didn't I touch upon the fact that in the summer of 1944 –

MR. FRANK: - he went out to the 6<sup>th</sup> Division –

GENERAL THOMAS: Krulak went out to the 6<sup>th</sup> Division to be Shepherd's G-3, and I let Snedeker go, and he went back to the 1<sup>st</sup> Division to command the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, and I brought Shoup and Wally Greene home, and they had worked their way through the Pacific, and I brought them home to be G-3 and G-4. Shoup was G-4 and he had a very good understanding of the logistic situation. We headed for China at the various stations. I think we stopped at Midway on that trip. Then we went to Okinawa, spent a day there. Stan Fellers was commanding the Marine barracks on Okinawa. Then we went over to Tsingtao where Johnny Clement, brigadier, was in command of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines-reinforced. It was really a brigade combination of a Marine regiment plus an air group on the base at Tsingtao. From Tsingtao we flew up to Peking where Keller Rockey met us. We stayed in Peking for a couple of days, and I've always thought of my return. When we walked up, up to the entrance of the Wagons-Lit Hotel in Peking, the front doorman said, "Captain Thomas, we're glad to have you back." He had never forgotten me and I had been gone from there since 1937.

MR. FRANK: Nine years.

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes. So we stayed in Peking. Peking was not changed much. Our troops in Peking were living in our old barracks down there. The Japs had messed them up a little bit, but they were practically the same as they were, but there were very troops up there. They'd pretty well hollowed out our units by that time. Present was what we called the "300 sleeping colonels" – in other words, General Marshall's peace outfit was up there in those days. But we enjoyed Peking and spent a couple of days. Then we went down to Tientsin, where we spent a couple of weeks with Keller Rockey and Worton. The purpose of our visit was about these rental funds. Well, the whole thing was completely untrue. They had not spent a dollar of Marine Corps funds. When the troops started to move into China, our government realized that there was no currency. That whole area had been under the Japanese. There was no Chinese currency. So they printed hundreds and hundreds of millions of Chinese yen, perfectly good money, and distributed through the naval disbursing officer, Shanghai, so it was called "dough Shanghai," and that's where the money came from, and there was not five cents of Marine Corps funds, and somebody had just told our Commandant a lie, and I think they knew they were lying.

They said, "Dough Shanghai is paying for all these things, the Marine Corps doesn't pay a nickel."

MR. FRANK: This was all backed up by Chinese gold reserves?



GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I don't know. I don't understand the fiscal side of it, the money side of it.

MR. FRANK: Had a Marine given the Commandant the wrong information?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh yes, somebody had, yes sir, the Quartermaster General. He'd lied about it. He knew different. OH, yes. Will you turn it off, I'll tell you. . .

Well, we came back. Our trip had one real good result. Shoup made good use of his time. We talked to – we mostly spent our time with the Generals, Worton and Rockey. I made one trip. I went up to Tangshan, where Julian Frisby was commanding the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, and Julian was my oldest Marine Corps friend. We'd known each other since we were 15 years old. We played football against each other when we were high school boys.

MR. FRANK: Oh, is he from Bloomington?

GENERAL THOMAS: He's from Springfield and I'm from Bloomington, and we played football, Julian was 15 and I was 16, on the Camp football field in a pouring down rain one day about 1909 or something like that, I've forgotten. Let's see, I was 16 – it must have been 1910. So Julia and I – then he went to Illinois College and I went to Illinois Wesleyan, and we played football against each other in minor college football in Illinois, too. And when his team would come to Bloomington to play, he'd stay at my fraternity house. So we've been friends. I went up to Tangshan and spent a couple of days with him up there, and I could see the value of what the Marines were doing on the railroads. General Vandegrift never agreed to that. He was bitterly opposed to the Marines guarding those coal mines and those railroads. As a matter of fact, it was a very touchy point between us and was for a long time.

When we came back we went in and sat down and had a talk with Vandegrift. I had taken Shoup in with me. Hal Turnage and Shoup and I went in. Of course Dave had been, the three of us had been in Peking together years before. Shoup was a lieutenant in the guard when I was out there with Vandegrift, and he had known him well for years, and he said, "General, my impression is that our chief weakness is that men in the Marine Corps, officers particularly, do not relate money and equipment. They don't know where money comes from. They know where equipment comes from. They have no particular feeling of responsibility for keeping this equipment up. "Now," he said, "I know where the money comes from, you go get it, and if they destroy a tank or a truck, you've got to buy them another one, but they don't know that. There is no realization throughout the Corps as to what the maintenance of equipment really means in dollars."

A lot of that probably came from the fact that most of the things destroyed were destroyed in combat and it was just a part of the battle, and a lot of our young officers didn't relate economy to the maintenance of our gear.

MR. FRANK: War is waste.

GENERAL THOMAS: I told him, "What Dave is telling you is what I've been telling you all along. You go down and get the money and you buy these things and send them to the people, but as Dave said, they've never related this gear to money, and that's the junk that we've got to get over if we're actually going to work properly."

Well, it took me seven years to put that into effect, and I finally came back as Assistant Commandant and I then made it stick. As I will relate, when we divorced fiscal functions from the Quartermaster's Department, and also put economy – as a result of this talk with him, they put economy on the – remember that, economy conscious. But it

was seven years before we got this arrangement and Shoup then of course was the man, because he set up the first fiscal office, Office of Fiscal Director in the Marine Corps in 1952. And I was responsible for bringing him up there.

One last item before we quit. We had too many people in high ranks when the war ended. It was a problem that caused a great deal of soul-searching for one thing, we had a great many more generals than we could use or justify for a postwar Marine Corps. We had a few too many colonels and a few too many lieutenant colonels and maybe majors. I told General Vandegrift, "I personally am interested in this thing. I'm a brigadier general, and I have no intention of going back to colonel and staying there ten years. I'll be glad to retire if they don't want me as a brigadier general." I said, "I think that most of my contemporaries feel the same way."

MR. FRANK: Were you jumped ahead of your contemporaries?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes, a great deal. First I was spotted to colonel, and then I went up, oh, God knows how many numbers when I was made a – how many hundred numbers when I was made a brigadier. Well, I'll tell you where the brigadiers were – right under the class of '16. Now –

MR. FRANK: - you were two years ahead, class of '18.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right, but oh boy, there were a lot of numbers in there.

MR. FRANK: Then of course you lost numbers when –

GENERAL THOMAS: I was down near the bottom of the World War I group, and the class of '16 was the top of the World War I group. But I was made a brigadier right behind the class of '16. Now, the other people – I lost seniority as they were promoted. I didn't stay ahead of them. But there weren't a great many promoted. However, so, the Old Man said, he finally reached the decision, "Stay in the present rank or out," for general officers. Of course he had to get a law. But everybody had the same problem, and there had to be a law about what to do.

MR. FRANK: Stay in the present rank or out?

GENERAL THOMAS: For general officers. For general and flag officers. That was done in the Navy. I don't remember what the Army did.

MR. FRANK: You were either selected to remain in that rank, or else you had to resign.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. The law was passed providing that a board would recommend to the Secretary of the Navy and to the President, a board would recommend those officers to be retired. They didn't recommend those to be retained. They recommended those to be retired. So –

MR. FRANK: Did he have a hard time getting the law passed?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no, everybody had the same problem. Oh, no, there was no difficulty at all, no. It went on through. Now, they decided, and in the same law it provided that colonels would remain to complete 30 years. It also provided for some reversion in the grade of colonel. Oh, maybe the bottom 50 colonels dropped back to lieutenant colonel. We had a little drop back but not very much. So colonels stayed, could complete 30 years, but we didn't have much of a problem there because I'm talking now about 1946, and all of the colonels in the top half of the rank anyway, oh, two-thirds of them, were vintage 1917, and they only had a year to do and then out they went. So that made a lot of vacancies, would make a lot of vacancies. So those people who reverted to lieutenant colonel, I don't think they were in the grade more than a year, and then we were selecting new blood into the grade of colonel. But the board that was

convened passed only on general officers. Members were Holland, Smith, Harry Schmidt and Roy Geiger. It was the three-man board (?). And they decided what major generals and what brigadiers would retire. Nobody was to be reverted. No major general dropped back and no brigadiers dropped back to colonel. I don't remember how many, but there must have been 15 or 20 general officers who left the active list at that time.

MR. FRANK: Hard feelings?

GENERAL THOMAS: Quite a bit, yes. One of the people who went was our friend Jim Underhill, who was a very able officer. Roy Hunt and some of those people couldn't carry his hat! But they kept Hunt and let him go. Of course, they kept Hunt on his World War I reputation. But the one that almost upset the apple cart was Henry Larson, because Henry Larson was a very potent guy, but they selected him out. Henry had had a lot of trouble with other people during the war and that influenced the board.

Anyway, this thing passed off, and as I say, there was a lot of bitterness. Tex Rogers is one of them. That's one of the things Tex is better about. But it was for the good of the Marine Corps that it should be done that way.

General Vandegrift went out to China in the fall of 1946. He hadn't been able to get out before, but he went out then. I didn't go with him because I'd just been back a couple of months, and I hoped that he would change his view about having our people out there guarding those mines and railroads, because they were necessary. They were the backbone of Chiang Kai-shek's support in China; that the Marines guard those and keep those railroads, and that coal had to go to Shanghai and Hong Kong and Canton because they had to have it for power. But Vandegrift did not change his mind. He was bitterly opposed to Marines being out there.

MR. FRANK: This was a point of irritation between you and him?

GENERAL THOMAS: Not irritation, no, we'd talk about it, but we never had a serious disagreement.

MR. FRANK: But I mean, you were sensitive enough to – (cross-talk)

GENERAL THOMAS: - I thought they should stay, and also, I just could not picture 100,000 Marines sitting in Camp Lejeune and Camp Pendleton. I knew damn well Congress would never let us keep them here, and we almost – they didn't, we were cut down and cut down, and then Korea stopped that, and then other things that have happened since then. But General Vandegrift would never change his mind. Now, he was very anti- Chiang Kai-shek. I've often marveled at the job of character assassination that's been performed on old Chiang Kai-shek. He's a sturdy man. Now, we pulled the bottom out from under him, and he helped us a lot, because he has outgrown his time, but even my father who didn't know a darned thing about it used to talk about "that old crook, Chiang Kai-shek." A job of character assassination was really done on him.

MR. FRANK: How about his associates? Could it have been that he was guilty of association?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, there was a lot wrong in China. How much of it could have been corrected I do not know – but of course, a lot goes back, and this is not my story, a lot goes back to the day they said, "Oh, these are just agrarian reformers." Our own State Department and people like that, you know. "These Communists, they're not really Communists, they're just agrarian reformers." And old Chiang Kai-shek, he is the head of this corrupt Kuomintang and what not. That was about the whole picture. We pulled our chief of staff out – when Wedemeyer was Chiang Kai-shek's chief of staff for

Chiang Kai-shek's army; we pulled him out of there and just pulled the bottom out. I'll talk later – I sat there and watched China go down the drain, and I've been bitter about it ever since. I wasn't necessary, but as I say –

MR. FRANK: - of course –.

**End of Interview Session 8.**

**Interview #9 with General Gerald C. Thomas, USMC (Ret.), Washington D.C. by Mr. Benis M. Frank, 30 September 1966**

GENERAL THOMAS: I don't remember all the details about the postwar organization, except that I always tried to whittle down on non-fleet Marine Force duties and allotments, and build the FMF up, but my recollection is that we set a rough figure of about 60 percent in combat units.

MR. FRANK: How much?

GENERAL THOMAS: 60. About 60 percent of the Marine Corps should be combat organizations, and I always made the point, if we couldn't get 60,000 men in the field out of 100,000 we just couldn't justify our existence. So I believe that's roughly what we shot at, and perhaps that's what we received. The idea was two divisions, and that's about all you could support, with aviation, two wings and two divisions, and that's what we started with. We had one division at Camp Pendleton and the other division at – the 1<sup>st</sup> Division at Camp Pendleton and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division at Camp Lejeune, which was a reversal, because actually the old home of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division was Camp Lejeune. And the old home of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was Camp Elliott, which was close by, not far from Camp Pendleton. But that's my recollection of it. We got, as I remember it, more or less – initially – we got the 100,000 men we were shooting at, and 8000 officers, but when they put the pressure on Vandegrift on the Hill, he dropped the officers. They gave us 7000, which made me a little bit unhappy, because we still had this problem of aviators, and 7000 was a very small figure to work with. But that's what we settled for.

When Field Harris and I discussed the disposition of troops and our ideas of what the Navy might want to retain, in the Pacific, we included a great many islands that we had taken, and we thought perhaps the Navy would want to maintain somebody on those islands. But as I've mentioned before, I felt that Admiral Nimitz and his advisor, Admiral Sherman, turned their backs on the Pacific. They started looking towards Europe, and one by one these Pacific garrisons, like Wake and Midway and the rest of them, dropped off, and we finally would up with a very few. We had one on Okinawa in 1946, but then it was liquidated, and the commanding officer from there and the personnel were moved up to Yokosuka. We retained our garrison on Guam. The old 14<sup>th</sup> Naval District, which was Pearl Harbor, was maintained and we had a detachment at Dutch Harbor. But we did not wind up with anywhere near the number of garrisons and men that we had originally fought for, that we would need them. Fortunately we didn't, because with 100,000 Marine Corps we couldn't have provided very many.

MR. FRANK: You know, you might remember that immediately when the Marines became involved with surrender and occupation duties, like Rixey's outfit up a Chichi Jima and some of the others, and Larson's outfit at Guam, the Navy would take over an island command, or if it was like Rogers had – the Peleliu Island command, there was a Marine occupation force which later was placed in a barracks.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, that didn't persist very long. I remember staying with Admiral Nimitz once, and talking about these island commands, and expressing the

opinion that flier should command them, because after all mostly we were there protecting a flying game. He said, "Oh, well, we've taken care of that, we had it going during the war." Well, all they did – here these Marines went in and defended these places like Johnston, and there wasn't enough sailors around to wear a hat. But they sent a superannuated captain flier out there to command the place, which is a wrong as it can be because actually the fellows that were doing the fighting at Palmyra, Johnston, Midway and all the rest of them were the Marine defense battalion commanders, but they had a Navy captain sitting there over them. It was a part of the old game which we've pretty well dispelled by now. But it was very prevalent in those days.

MR. FRANK: Prior to the end of the war there had been a number of these island commands set up, and the proposed plans, Navy plans, postwar plans, were to establish a number of airfields. Then I think I mentioned last time this Navy Postwar plan Number 5, which more or less determined the proportion of Marine Corps personnel to Navy personnel and the basis of barracks and commands which were to be maintained, which may have knocked out and in fact did knock out quite a few of these. As I recall, the personnel, low point personnel who had time to do in the Pacific, were then sent out to China or to other barracks which were to be established.

GENERAL THOMAS: They gradually went on to those places.

MR. FRANK: But this did not present any personnel problem?

GENERAL THOMAS: No. No, not to my recollection. One of the most – shall I go ahead?

MR. FRANK: Yes, sir, please do.

GENERAL THOMAS: As I look back on it, I realize one of the most influential events in the postwar history of the armed services in the United States was the Bikini tests, at which time and at that place they tested atomic weapons against naval ships and installations. It was a real big thing. It was the first test really. They got certain lessons from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but they couldn't really be thorough and make a test, but they did at Bikini. I remember, when we came back I guess we landed at Kwajalein, when Generals Turnage and Shoup and I were on our way back from Tientsin in 1946. The Chief of the Naval Bureau of Ships, Ned Cochran, vice admiral, asked to have a ride with us. Ned always referred to himself and the "oldest living Marine" because he was the son of old Micke (sic) Cochran, a Marine officer, a Civil War veteran about whom many, many stories are told. He was an eccentric in the early days of the '90s and the early days of 1900 as in storied told by Smedley Butler. Mickie Cochran was in command of Philadelphia when Smedley was up there as a young officer, and Ned Cochran was his son, apparently came along when old Mickie was no longer a young man by any means. Well, Ned, who was a very, very bright fellow who went on soon after this to a very outstanding record in the world of business, and he's now dead. Returning from Bikini he was very silent. He was thinking over things and he had the kind of mind that could think about what had happened.

We got to Pearl Harbor and found Geiger in more or less the same condition. He was a little floored, like Ned had been by what had happened at Bikini. It wasn't long though before a letter arrived at headquarters from Geiger, a personal letter from Geiger to Vandegrift, in which he described in a way what had happened at Bikini, and then without any detailed analysis made a very profound observation; namely, "the military

world will never be the same again,” and “I believe that the Marine Corps should do some thinking about it.”

Well, to give credit where credit's due, his G-3, who had accompanied him to Bikini, was Bell Coleman, a member of the class of 1929 and a very, very able officer. He was instrumental in writing Geiger's letter.

MR. FRANK: Is that William C. Coleman?

GENERAL THOMAS: William L. Coleman, and he was retired a few years after that for eye trouble and what not. I think Bob Heintz had something to do with writing that letter also. I think he was in Pearl and that he had a hand in writing that letter. But the letter came back to headquarters. Vandegrift bucked it down to me. I read it and we were both nonplussed by it. We simply didn't know what to say. But we did agree that something had to be done.

Well, Twining and his Marine Corps Board were in Quantico. I've forgotten who all the other members were, but the air member was Colston Dyer, who had been a pretty good technical man, and an early man in the radar business in order to head the study up and give it a little more stature. Vandegrift appointed Shepherd who was the Assistant Commandant as the – part of a special board. He included the members of the Marine Corps Board in Quantico, but Shepherd was the president, to make a study of this letter and situation and make a report to the Commandant.

Well, some time after this, maybe four or five months, the Twining group came in with their report, and after going completely over the situation, they said that they believed that the future of military operations would be more greatly influenced than in any other way by the development of this monstrosity known as the helicopter. There was just one sentence in their conclusion.

There was a sidelight to what those lads did. They were all very keen and highly intelligent people. We were not able to give them any information. We had nothing about Manhattan (Project) or atomic bombs or anything of the sort, but in order to give them a basis on which to work, they went out and started to study.

MR. FRANK: Did anyone in the Marine Corps had Q-Clearance or anything like that or Official Data Clearance at this time?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, not that I knew of. I don't remember.

MR. FRANK: In other words, they had to start from scratch.

GENERAL THOMAS: These lads at Quantico, Twining and his group, went from scratch, and they gathered material together, and they gathered not one item except what – now, the Smythe Report was one of the big things that helped them. You remember about that?

MR. FRANK: No, sir, I know nothing about that.

GENERAL THOMAS: Smythe was one of the early atomic people, and he wrote a report that had been highly criticized for having revealed a great deal more about our development of atomic weapons than anybody thought he ought to reveal. But he was a civilian and nobody could do anything about it. He'd been a civilian engineer. So Twining had the Smythe Report. But the Board made a summary of this entire atomic project. They sent it up to headquarters as the basis of their study. It was like the study of a theater of operations, in which they're going to operate. They sent it to Headquarters and we sent it over to, oh, I guess Naval Operations or some place for clearance.

Immediately we got back an order to destroy all copies. These lads, as I say, had only got

to use items that were in the public domain, but they had also made some conclusions that were very revealing, and they destroyed every copy of it except one, and I've got it.

MR. FRANK: You've got it?

GENERAL THOMAS: I've got it.

MR. FRANK: Now, I have two questions. Number one, what was the rationale for determining that the helicopter was the item, and two, what helicopters what military development in helicopters had been achieved by this time?

GENERAL THOMAS: Very little. Up to this time we'd tried the autogiro, which was even more a monstrosity, a great failure, but the helicopter had gone far enough that this extremely prescient and intelligent group had said, "It's got the business."

Now, I'll touch on the helicopter later, but it was a question of the fact, to enter it in a sentence here, that you cannot concentrate military forces in the face of atomic bombs any more, but that you can move and disperse military forces by using the helicopter.

MR. FRANK: Now, actually, this was the genesis of the new amphibious doctrine.

GENERAL THOMAS: All right, this was the genesis and this is the thing that the entire armed forces of the United States hang up their hat on today, including Korea. This was the first time the helicopter was tried, and I'll go forward for several years and tell you a story. After I went to Quantico in command in 1954, we used to, before that and afterwards, we conducted these demonstrations for orientation groups, and among other things we'd bring these people in in helicopters and land them. It happened that I was sitting alongside of the Chief of Staff of the Army, Joe Collins, who was an old friend of mine, and we looked at this thing and we watched it and I turned to him and said, "Joe, you're looking at the battlefield transportation of the future." He didn't say a word. He just looked at me like I was a damned fool. I haven't seen him for a long time but I would like to talk to him about Vietnam some time.

I'd been three-and-a-half years at headquarters, and I was pretty well burned out. I'd been working for six years for Vandegrift. Along in the spring of 1947, maybe late winter, whoever it was that undermined China was being more successful than usual and it was decided to liquidate the armed forces of the United States in North China. It was decided to remove the Peking and Tsingtao garrisons, get the people off the railroads and off the coal mines. The decision was made to retain one force at Tsingtao, and as long as I've mentioned the ting, at the time we went out in '46, the Tsingtao garrison was the 4<sup>th</sup> Marines. Tsingtao was also the headquarters of the Seventh U.S. Fleet. Tsingtao is the greatest harbor in the East, in the entire Orient, a really great harbor. It's the old base of the Asiatic Fleet Submarines, their summer base. They used to come up from Mamla and have submarine training at Tsingtao. The reason for this was that the water outside of Tsingtao Bay shoaled very gradually. There was a shelf extending out for many, many miles beyond the Bay, and that shelf was most useful for recovering torpedoes after they had made their run. If they sank in too deep water, they lost them, but if they sank in shallow water, why, they got them. So Tsingtao was the old submarine base of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet.

When the decision was made to liquidate the situation in Peking-Tientsin, concentrate on Tsingtao, Admiral Charles M. Cook Jr., who was commander of the Seventh Fleet, sent a message saying that he recommended that his Marine Officer, Brigadier General Pfeiffer, be given command.

Well, Vandegrift and I talked about it and he decided I should go. So we went back to Cook and told him initially it was all right and he'd like Pfeiffer to go ahead and organize the garrison, but that I would come out there to take command during the summer.

MR. FRANK: This was Pfeiffer's first command in the war, wasn't it?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes. Pfeiffer was a planner. First time he'd been in any small organization. He'd been on ship detachments. No reflection on the guy. I never felt that – he was a little picayunish to command; a very brilliant fellow, though. He was just too damned valuable on planning sections, and they just used him all the time and never let him get off there. He was in the Joint Chiefs and everything else.

MR. FRANK: He retired as what?

GENERAL THOMAS: He retired as a brigadier.

MR. FRANK: So, as a matter of fact, lack of command -

GENERAL THOMAS: Probably. I went out and I arrived in Tsingtao on the 17<sup>th</sup> of July 1947. I was glad to get away because as I say I'd been six years with Vandegrift as his chief of staff or in one capacity or another, and I'd had three and a half hard years in Headquarters Marine Corps, and I welcomed the fresh air of field duty. Pfeiffer was senior, so my first few weeks there, several weeks, I was free, and I took advantage of this by making a trip up to the northern provinces, up to Tientsin and Peking. Tientsin was the location of a very large supply installation, with many, many supplies, many pieces of equipment that had gone in there with the old III Phib Corps. They had sent certain things in with Shepherd's 6<sup>th</sup> Division to Tsingtao but mostly they put it into Tientsin and Peking. So it was all there and we were gradually reducing the pile of supplies, and I went up to look over it. The combat organizations had been reduced a good deal, but we had some pretty sizable supply organizations, a lot of it in Tientsin. While I was there I went around to call on the mayor Tientsin, who was my Leavenworth classmate, and he was a Chinese Army general by the name of Tu Chih Min. Well, Tu gave me a lovely luncheon and a very fine piece of carved ivory which I still have as a present. Even as I took over in Tsingtao, I felt that I was participating in a moving situation. The Chinese Nationalists were in what I considered a fairly good position in Mukden, Wei Li Wang, having large numbers, at Chingohow below there; Fan Han Chih, had nearly all the armored forces that belonged to China. They were all well equipped, and around in the Peking-Tientsin area, was an old Mongol general with his own army that he'd brought from Mongolia by the name of Fu Tso Yi. These were three powerful outfits, and they should have been able to handle the Commies.

My analysis, and I'm backed up by a little information I've gathered from elsewhere, was that the weakness arose from the fact that Chiang Kai-shek did not trust any particular individual, and he did not put these relatively adjacent armed forces under any single command or under each other, and I've heard the comment made that somebody said to the Generalissimo, "Why don't you coordinate these people? Why don't you put one under the command of so and so?"

And he said, "Well, Fan Han Chih is under the command of Wei Li Wang," which would have been real good, see. And they said, "Well, how much?" And he said, "Oh, about 5 percent."

This person said, "How about the other 95 percent?" And he said, "Well, the other 95 percent is under me." He didn't coordinate, and he couldn't, he just simply couldn't



trust. I made the comment that we pulled the bottom out from under Chiang Kai-shek in China, but he helped us a good deal. There wasn't any doubt about that.

But the Chinese had a lot of strength. They had a good strong hold in Chefoo, which was on the north shore of the Shantung Peninsula. That was the old base of the American destroyers of the Asiatic Fleet. General Li Mei was in command there, and he was a very talented and able man. I remember one time he'd been down to Nanking and he came back to Tsingtao. He'd flown in there, and then another plane was to come in and take him over to Chefoo where he had a large Army. I met him at the airfield, brought him in and gave him lunch, and he said, "I want to ask you a favor. Let me have a Browning automatic rifle."

I said, "Well, I think I can arrange that. What are you going to do with it?"

He said, "Well, I've got a foundry, and I'm going to duplicate it. I can build them."

So I personally signed to the quartermaster for a Browning automatic rifle, and I let Li Mei have it, and I confirmed later that he did make some of them. After a good many months he returned it to me. I was beginning to think that I was going to have to pay for it, but he returned it.

Our airfield, which was occupied by a mixed group – we had one fighter squadron and one transport squadron out there – but it was also used by the civil air transport, which was what's his name, the American flier out there - ?

MR. FRANK: - Chennault –

GENERAL THOMAS: Chennault. That was Chennault's outfit. Well, they operated from our field pretty freely, and we didn't object, and they didn't ask for much, and we didn't give them much.

When the war started, and the fights started everywhere, these CAT planes operated from our field, and they were a rugged outfit. They didn't have any bombers. They were supporting the Chinese Nationalist forces. What they did was to take a DC-2 and take the doors off, and put a couple of 500-pound or 300-pound bombs in the plane, and they'd fly over the enemy and they'd push the bombs out the door. It apparently worked.

MR. FRANK: Is young Rixey, Rixey's brother?

GENERAL THOMAS: Palmer Rixey, who was retired last summer, as a colonel, incidentally.

MR. FRANK: Bird colonel? He was a lieutenant colonel?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, he was, he didn't get selected for colonel. He's old P.M. Rixey's son.

MR. FRANK: Brother, isn't he?

GENERAL THOMAS: The old one, but the other Rixey, who lives down here below Fredericksburg, is P.M. Rixey, Jr., and then old Colonel Rixey was the vintage of 1900, who was my commander in Peking, and is dead now, dead a good many years.

I sent these lads out, and we didn't keep them at home; we based them in our 2-Section, we sent them out to the main Chinese armies. We had one in Mukden, on in Chinchow, we had them in Peking, we didn't need much in Peking but they checked in there because I relied on Dave Barrett, my old Army friend, in Peking. He was the best source of information I could get and I didn't need to keep an interpreter up there, but we sent one out to Hen Shi Shan, at Shensi, his headquarters, and one was in Yena, which

was the headquarters of Shantung, and all over the place, and they fed information in all the time. And we had a good idea what was going on. Very, very interesting and very helpful.

MR. FRANK: Did you get a better idea from Marshall? Marshall wasn't out there at this time?

GENERAL THOMAS: Marshall was gone by that time. He had already done what he was going to do when he got out there.

MR. FRANK: Who was there then?

GENERAL THOMAS: The American ambassador. I'll get on him later. But Marshall had gone out on one trip, and he seemed to achieve something, and then he came home. Then he went back out again and that was the mistake. He should have never gone, because the things that they did out there in those days and what they did to the Chinese Nationalists, and what they did was to my mind disgraceful, and they've got a hell of a lot to account for, to my mind, for what they did to old Chiang Kai-shek and his forces.

Tsingtao was a fairly interesting place. It was actually a European city. Just a fishing village when the Germans seized the Shantung Peninsula in 1899 or demanded that the Chinese turn it over to them, after they murdered the German ambassador in Peking during the Boxer Rebellion. So the Germans moved, lock, stock and barrel, into Shantung, and at Tsingtao they built a European city. In 1947 it was pretty well down at the heels because there'd been nobody taking care of it. In addition, we had a very touchy problem. The population of Tsingtao was about 200,000 people, and there were also about 200,000 refugees in the city who were absolutely destitute. They were living on anything that – American relief organizations tried to give them some food. They stripped the bark off trees and cooked it and did all sorts of things. But it really made for a touchy situation.

All to the north of us was Communist territory garrisoned by reasonably strong Communist forces. The National Chinese garrison of Tsingtao was about 35,000 men. They were deployed on the outer approaches of the city, Tsingtao is a very easily defended place, because it's barriered by mountains, through most of which there are only occasional goat paths. Very easily defended. They swale off to one entrance down to the Tsingtao Harbor, about 20 miles from the city, and one real pass, but that's all. So I never had any particular fear about troubles with the Communists, or that the Nationalists couldn't defend the place. They had these 35,000 men largely out on this defense line at the low pass. Our defense plans were not hard to come by, because they only covered the withdrawal of the American forces, so our defense called for – we took up the same one General Shepherd laid out when he went there in 1945, and it was just to cover the withdrawal of the Fleet and what not from that position.

The situation as regards refugees crowding in on this city made things a little difficult on the score of troop morale. We had to protect our men very, very closely. We didn't have any trouble to speak of. We did several things. Mostly we set up clubs, one in the compound and several out in the city, where these boys could get some liquor and get good food. The club which was in our own compound had the best food in town. A Marine could go there and for about 40 cents he could get as good a meal as he could buy in New York City.

We had a morale problem, but we managed to solve it. We had a very, very heavy – and this always is my forte – we had a very heavy training program. We really

kept them busy. If you feed them and keep them busy, that keeps the trouble down. We also had a very active athletic program, football and basketball. We had a large number – we had about 7000 men in Tsingtao, air and ground, and a large number of our younger officers were not long out of college, and many were football and basketball players.

MR. FRANK: And the old Shanghai rugby players?

GENERAL THOMAS: We didn't play any rugby. We played good old American football. We had six teams in our league, and they were real good, I want to tell you. They were real good teams, and we played good basketball, but athletics, feed 'em, hard training and what not, we kept the difficulties down. We had difficulties, but we solved them without much trouble.

MR. FRANK: You had a couple of fleet landing exercises, didn't you?

GENERAL THOMAS: The amphibious force of the Seventh Fleet was out there, and we worked with them all the time. We would have about two landings a year. We'd go aboard and go out and make landings, sometimes that were more like a command post exercise, but the amphibious force got really more use out of it than we did. We'd been through the war and we were pretty well fixed up. But that was very helpful in the amphibious forces. This was the headquarters of the Seventh US Fleet. When I first went out there, Vice Admiral Cooke, Charles M. Cooke, Jr., who I related was Ernie King's operation officer, was in command.

MR. FRANK: He was also later Spruance's chief of staff.

GENERAL THOMAS: He was? Well, I'd forgotten that. I didn't know when Savvy – we called him Savvy, he got that nickname in the Naval Academy – and he was a savvy fellow, but he was eccentric too. He had some idiosyncrasies, but we got along nicely. He was inclined, whenever Marines clashed with the Chinese, to take the Chinese side of the thing, but we fought all the things out, and I got along with Admiral Cooke in pretty good fashion. I believe I've always been smart enough to keep my seniors from running over me, but have also been smart enough not to fight with them, and that's not always done. Cooke and I got along very well.

He had a better idea than some of the others. In the old days one of the most powerful international figures in the Orient was the Commander-in-Chief of the US Asiatic Fleet, which made its winter headquarters down in Manila, and always came up the China coast during the summer. The fleet included all of the Yangtze gunboats and river craft, which didn't go to Manila, but as I say the submarines from the Asiatic Fleet always came to Tsingtao, and the destroyers went to Chefoo.

The Asiatic Fleet was mostly made up of light units, which was a good way to have them. Always had a good cruiser or battleship as a flagship. But the old Commander-in-Chief of the Asiatic Fleet was a man of real power in the Orient. Cooke, who was initially commander out there, was relieved by Vice Admiral Oscar Badger. Each of them tried to maintain the old position of the Asiatic Fleet. They would probably have gotten away from it, except for the fact that this hard to define authority of MacArthur cut right across.

MR. FRANK: Even in China?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes sir. MacArthur was Commander-in-Chief Far East. CINCFE was his name, and he considered that he was in command in China. Well, I was in intimate contact with all of them, and I know this: he never did much to help out in China. But there was always a feeling that he had the authority to barge in, but also there

was always a feeling that if anything went wrong, no blame would fall on MacArthur. So it was a sort of an anomalous situation. Cooke and Badger would check things with MacArthur, but that was all.

Now, probably influencing all that was the fact that Marshall had been out there, and of course as an envoy of the President, Marshall was in a more powerful position than MacArthur, and I suspect that MacArthur never approved much of what Marshall did in China.

MR. FRANK: He probably didn't approve much of what Marshall did during World War II.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right, but now I mean, out in China – he had a sort of a standoffish position, but we always felt that he was the boss. He was actually over everything out there, but if anything went wrong, somebody else would be holding the bag.

The Chinese government at the time was in Nanking, and I used to have cause to go down there occasionally. The American ambassador was Dr. Leighton Stuart whom I got along with quite pleasantly. We were fraternity brothers, and he had been the president of Yenching University when I was in Peking in 1935, and I had known him there. Leighton Stuart was a great gentle fellow – dead now, long these years – he was a great Chinese student, but as ambassador he was never allowed to exercise any real authority. The State Department had him so completely surrounded. There was very little Leighton Stuart could do, despite his great, great understanding and influence in China.

On my trips down there I enjoyed them, because I hadn't been to Nanking before and I hadn't been down in the lower Yangtze Valley at all. Also, another of my Leavenworth classmates, Fisher Ho was the G-2 of the Chinese armies, and I saw him on each of my trips. At one time he gave me a big luncheon at which he served his native Szechuanese food, and that's the kind of stuff that just burns you up.

I've spoken about all the supplies in Tientsin, and there was a great pile of them there. When the decision was made to evacuate North China, we didn't have the shipping to send all that material and equipment to the United States. In order to get it out of the northern provinces, they sent a lot of it to Tsingtao. We had a real job caring for a pile-up of equipment. There was almost enough to equip a division at Tsingtao, at our depot. We always had a difficult guard job there. We had a particularly difficult one to guard that gear, because the town was full of refugees, and they would risk their lives to steal anything. They stole us blind, and we killed some of them, and that's when the Seventh Fleet commander would say, "The Marines are murdering the Chinese." And such nonsense. Well, a Marine on post with a rifle is told to protect his post, and when somebody busted in there and started to steal something, they'd shoot 'em.

So we had a very difficult problem. We had another small difficulty. I've written about it and I might as well mention it. There was a lot of talk about black marketeering and various other things that went on on the China Coast after the war.

MR. FRANK: Americans were involved?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, American armed forces people were involved. And I don't doubt that there was a lot of it. But the Marine Corps is the only outfit that picked up an offender and court martialed him. One of our ablest and oldest senior officers became involved in a black marketeering and graft situation. He had been in command of the

latter stages of the Tientsin evacuation. It came to my attention. It also came to the attention of the Fleet. We brought him to trial in Tsingtao. He was so senior we didn't have the officers to form a court, so Pfeiffer came back as the president of the general court, thank God, because he's a real good lawyer. We had another eight court members, for a matter of about four months in Tsingtao, while we were trying the Colonel. It was the most complicated case I have ever known of. The court met for eight days before they arraigned the accused, and there are about 15 documents on the record of that court martial written between the president of the court and the convening authority, and I was it. The most complicated case I ever heard of. But they found the man guilty and dismissed him, and so – but we were the only one that tried anybody at all. I don't think there was any doubt that there was a lot of funny stuff went on out there.

MR. FRANK: Hadn't there been early cases? I'm thinking in particular of a senior Marine aviator, smuggling gold from Shanghai north.

GENERAL THOMAS: You mean, after World War II?

MR. FRANK: After World War II, from the time the 1<sup>st</sup> Division went into China till –

GENERAL THOMAS: - no, I don't know about that. No. This man was a ground officer, that I'm talking about, and he was involved in all sorts of things, and we never did know how much money he got out of it but it was probably a considerable figure, because he was involved in a lot of deals – furs, drugs, chemicals and automobiles. He was a very able businessman.

We hadn't been in China very long, six months to a year, when the “debacle” picked up speed. The Chinese lost Mukden, but even before they lost Mukden the Commies had come in south of Mukden and polished off Fan Han Chih in Chinchow. Then they swept on down, bypassing the Peking-Tientsin area, because they apparently never had any stomach to take on old Fu Tso Yi, because he had a very fine army. He also had a good line of retreat. He was from Mongolia and he could just go back there. If they pressed him too hard, he would probably have slipped on through the mountains and gone on home.

This matter – this war – moved apace. They lost everything – the Chinese decided to evacuate Li Mei from Chefoo and move his division down south. Some of these people came through Tsingtao, and that was a real bad show. We should never have given up the Chefoo area but they did. I remember one of the saddest, saddest things I ever remember in my life, when the Communists were going to move into Chefoo, someone, I can't imagine how they figured things out, decided that they would not let the children fall into the hands of the Communists. So they told them, “When you come back to school tomorrow morning, bring something along with you, an extra change of clothes and what not, because we're going to move you out ahead of the Communists.” Well, they brought those little boys and girls, 12 and 13 years old, about 4000 of them mostly girls, to Tsingtao, where they moved them off the ships. They came in on LSTs and they moved them off the ships out on the side of the hill, back of the city. It was in midwinter, cold as all get out.

Well, the international organizations fed them, but it was just tragic. Then they moved them back out and took them south. You know where all those little girls wound up? In Shanghai and Hong Kong, no doubt about it. It was one of those tragic things. The children's parents never saw or heard of them again. I know that. It was just a tragic show. Of course, refugeeing is a game. When one runs, everybody else runs, and that

was the case in China. And of course they didn't have much to hope for. Operations moved along. The Communists moved down and took Yennan, and they moved down to the city of Hsuehchow, which is perhaps 100 miles north of Nanking, and there the Chinese Nationalists decided to make another stand. Hsuehchow is in the old valley of the Yellow River. The Yellow River afterwards cut north and entered the sea north of Shantung. Adjacent to Hsuehchow are great sloughs, miles and miles long, sort of like along the Mississippi River down in Louisiana. The Chinese deployed there and attempted to defend the gaps between the sloughs. Well, all the Communists did was to break through one oft hem and then they were behind all the rest of them.

The end was in sight. Admiral Ramsey came out from Pearl to visit the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet. We were very old and good friends so I went out to the airfield to see him off. As we were standing there waiting for his airplane, there was a very unusual happening. They had some frost on his airplane and they were waiting for the sun to melt it off the wings. A CAT (DC-3) landed, pulled up. There was a truck there to meet it. Coolies got out of the truck, went over to the plane, got in, and came out, carrying about four or five small but obviously very, very heavy boxes. Then, after the boxes came out, about four very beautifully dressed Chinese, fur collars on their coats and all.

I had gone right to the flagship from seeing Duke Ramsey off, because General Ho Yin Chin, whom I've mentioned before seeing in Chungking, was coming up to see Badger to talk about some more American assistance. With him was Bob Soule, a US Army brigadier, Robert E. Soule, dead now a long time, then the US military attaché at the embassy in Nanking. Well, I told Soule about what I had seen, and he said, "Well, that's a revelation. That's Yen Shi Shan's gold, and he's going to follow it very soon. That means he's given up. He's getting out. He had held out against the Commies back there in Shensi for years and years and years." They never did get him, because he got out of there and he left, and this was his gold going out. Just an interesting item.

Well, I can remember, and it's a revelation of a side of the Chinese mind. I had spoken to Badger about talking to Ho Yin Chan about the Hsuehchow battle. We had been a little bit in the dark about Hsuehchow, because I tried to get – as a matter of fact, I got Dick Cooley, one of my interpreters, over Hsuehchow in an airplane once, but they were shooting all around the airfield and the plane couldn't land. We were in the dark about what had happened down there, but we knew that there was a big battle going on. And we also knew that the Commies had broken through between some of the sloughs. So I primed Badger to talk to Ho Yin Chin about the operation, and Ho said, "Oh, that's a small matter. We are all regrouped now and we're going to counterattack in a day or two and destroy the Communist armies."

Well, that is a perfectly good illustration of the old Chinese failure of telling themselves the truth. They just didn't face the truth.

MR. FRANK: Japanese too. Orientals.

GENERAL THOMAS: Orientals. So, after Hsuehchow, the Commies closed in on Nanking, and things moved along as I say at a pretty damned fast pace. The decision was made by the US authorities to do two things – first, to offer evacuation to all of the non-Chinese in North China, and then to largely abandon Tsingtao.

MR. FRANK: You say non-Chinese. Does that include the European refugees?

GENERAL THOMAS: Everybody. That means exactly what it said, non-Chinese. Because – there were a number of Russians, White Russians, everybody – just a great mixture.

MR. FRANK: As you recall, there was a large colony in Peking, around Tientsin particularly, of Russians who had been there since the turn of the century.

GENERAL THOMAS: They had mostly been there since 1917-1918. We brought them all out. I'll get to that in about a second here. After the offer had been made to provide means of getting out for these people, we sent out the word that the opportunity to leave China would be given them. They didn't have to go and we sent it all the way back in the country to the missionaries and any business people. Badger, who was then in command of the Seventh Fleet, divided the job into two parts. He gave FMFPAC the job of evacuating all the non-Chinese north of the old valley of the Yellow River, and Clyde Crawford, who was read admiral in command of the amphibious forces, the job of evacuating all the non-Chinese below the old bed of the Yellow River.

When it was found out that the situation was getting touchier and touchier in China, they decided to reinforce FMFWESTPAC. The 9<sup>th</sup> Marines, reinforced, came up from Guam and joined us. They never got off their ships, as there was no cause to. Clyde Crawford turned over two amphibious ships to me, for the evacuation of North China, and I turned over the 9<sup>th</sup> Marines to him, and he sent them to Shanghai. Thus we started the evacuation.

I haven't touched on the disposition of our people in Tsingtao. We held the campus of the University of Shantung, and that was our main barracks and where most of our men lived. It was a walled compound, and we lived there very comfortably. The university was not of course keeping school and had not for several years. The evacuation of non-Chinese was a touchy thing. They were only allowed to bring what they could carry in their hands. That's all they could bring out. I put communications outfits in Tientsin, set up communication cots in Tientsin, Tsingtao, and Peking and sent Jack Lindsay to Peking. He retired about a year or two ago. He was a very brilliant Chinese language officer. He went out in charge of the whole thing in the north. We sent out the word that shipping would be available. We set up reception centers and as I said, from the Peking-Tientsin area we evacuated 8000 non-Chinese, including White Russians who had been born there.

The operation worked very smoothly. Finally in December the time came to send our own dependents, and they came out in two increments. I insisted that my family should come out in the first increment and set an example for the rest of them, so Lottie came home, and the next shipment came out I think about the 8<sup>th</sup> of January. Lottie came out early in December; gave them a very rough Christmas, because they spent Christmas at the Memorial Club in San Francisco. These people with all their children. But the Memorial Club really took care of them. It was a wonderful thing how they met all those people and took care of them. There were dozens and dozens of them.

MR. FRANK: Had you any contact with any of the Communists around there?

GENERAL THOMAS: No. The Fleet carried out those negotiations. The Commies captured a couple of our parties. They captured two plane crews that were forced down in Communist territory, and then we had a hunting party that went out into the Communist territory. It's a great hunting area, you know, a vast flyover of ducks and geese. That was the big Chinese flyway. And while we're on serious matters, that was

the big Chinese flyway for woodcock. Woodcock from Manchuria fly to the Shantung Peninsula, and put down there for a matter of three days, on their way to Indochina where they winter, and it was really a harvest. There were lots of hunting parties, and there were all kinds of things there, that – like there are all through North China. The ducks and geese just flock into North China.

One of our biggest problems was getting the gear out, evacuating gear from Tsingtao. They told us sort of like, “Well, do the best you can. Decide what is useful to get out and do it.”

They sent in 14 Liberty ships there and we loaded them. Well, 14 Liberty ships will take a lot of stuff, and we filled them full and sent them out. Our orders were to turn over to the Chinese Nationalists anything that we didn’t take out, and we didn’t turn over to them very much, because we attended to this job – or at least Ed Wheeler, who was the – he was my G-4, and he really got the stuff out of there.

While I’m in the matter of gear, one of the things that has always – oh, I don’t know, it made me doubt – I saw the statements. I’ve seen the statements made by Marshall and others that the American government gave the Chinese Nationalists billions of dollars worth of arms and equipment. Now, some of my Navy friends who were out there in the early days said that there was some good gear brought in there right after World War II. But I sat in Tsingtao for two years and watched ship after ship after ship unload, because Tsingtao was the chief port of entry into China for US military aid to China, and those ships unloaded the greatest conglomeration of junk I have ever seen. I saw one ship come in there with a lot – about 30 LVTs. Now, what the hell would a Chinese do with an LVT, if it was in good shape? But these LVTs didn’t have any tracks on the, and they just tore up the docks trying to get them off. These things were unusable for anything, any military or commercial purpose.

Well, I’m going to get on with our evacuation.

### **Tape 1, side 2.**

As the situation resolved in China, Badger felt that the American businessmen were influential in Shanghai, so we made a trip down and talked with Jack Cabot, later our ambassador to Poland – I don’t know where he is now. He was consul general and we talked to the businessmen down there and told them what we were doing. They could take a chance; get out, or stay there.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of February, after we moved the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines on board ship, we left them in the Harbor there. We left a small detachment ashore. I took the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines, went aboard the Henrico, and came home. Six weeks later I was at Quantico. I was named the commanding general of the Equipment Board. The Equipment Board had some very interesting projects on in those days. One of them was the close air support in hours of darkness or little or no visibility. I believe that the project that we were working on or they were developing in connection with the boys at Point Mugu is probably the same thing that they are using in Vietnam today.

Then another one, another thing that they’re using in Vietnam today, we were the first one to attempt to arm a helicopter. It was a difficult problem because we used bazookas and that was very dangerous because in those days the rotor of a helicopter was made out of laminated wood, and they caught fire. But they shifted over not long after



that, to aluminum rotors and that was better. However, the project never went any place, because our fliers weren't in favor of it.

MR. FRANK: In recent days, the past year, the Commandant hasn't been too much in favor of it; the past year, General Shoup or General Greene haven't been too much in favor of it.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I'm not sure about that. I don't know about that. About the time I went to the Equipment Board they were testing a new family of motor vehicles. Various companies submitted vehicles. Dodge came out with a heavy truck. At the Board we were testing them for amphibious characteristics.

As we thought things out for a first few months that I was with the Equipment Board, we sensed that we lacked the will to find an objective. What were we shooting at? What sort of capability were we developing? What was this amphibious game? We were dabbling with the helicopters, the close air support, but what was it all about?

As a result of this, our thoughts and discussion with Headquarters Marine Corps, they convened an Equipment Policy Panel. They sent in to the Equipment Board as many as 15 officers, all of whom were highly skilled in their own field – tanks, engineers, communicators and others. That Policy Panel worked for about three or four months. One of the officers that we received was Freddie Wieseman. As a matter of fact Freddie is one of the senior people that came. He and I talked things over exhaustively and reached the conclusion that we needed a concept of operations for landing operations in the atomic age. So, with my blessing, Freddie sat down and developed a concept of operations which was a really splendid thing. All that led to, after five or six months, the development of the Equipment Policy Panel Report, US Marine Corps, 1950, and it was a really good document. We knew what we were shooting at, and we took it up to Headquarters. What happened to it after that, I don't know.

MR. FRANK: That document was the equipment Policy Panel of 1950? I'll see if we have a copy.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, you probably do. I remember coming up to Al Pollock, who was G-3, and I had in my hand the Equipment Policy Panel, and I had another one, and I said, "Al, this is the Marine Corps Equipment Policy Panel, as you see from the cover, prior to 1950."

Well, he took it and he opened it, and it was all blank pages – this joke we were perpetrating – and then I handed him the other one. We had a P2V bomber assigned to the board for close air support tests. It was a very convenient way for me to get around, because Jack Cram, who was the head of the close air support project, had to go to various places that were working on some aspect of close air support. McDonnell's in St. Louis, people on the West Coast, including Douglas Aircraft. There must have been a dozen places. It gave me a good opportunity to get around and see things.

I set up a liaison there. I did it just on my own. We had groups of very bright young officers around various places working on the projects. A good many of them we had put through the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics setup, and some of them had doctor's degrees. Some of them were fuel engineers. But they were outside of the view of the Corps and I would go to see them. Cram had to go to these places, and I'd go, and I'd check in with these boys, like at Point Mugu where actually they were developing the MPQ-2, MPQ-15 for close air support. Major Dalby and his crowd were out there, and they were doing a lot of work, but they felt abandoned. They said, "We have no purpose,

we don't know anybody, nobody ever comes to see us," and I said, "Well, I'll come to see you," and I did, and I continued to do so.

One time we went to China Lake, where – what's the anti-aircraft missile from China Lake? The batteries were being set up.

MR. FRANK: The Hawk?

GENERAL THOMAS: The Hawk. First Hawk batteries were being trained there. Of course, I had been to China Lake before that. I went when it was first building.

When I was commanding the brigade in Tsingtao, China, nearly 10,000 miles away, I managed to keep reasonably well informed on events relating to national defense, particularly the National Defense Act of 1947 – at times by letters or periodicals, and at other times through visitors, I learned of the implementation of the National Defense Act of 1947, which, as I've elated, was not passed until that time. Twining was out at Pearl Harbor, and I saw him occasionally, and at those times he brought me up to date on what had happened.

The new Department of Defense had been created, with James Forrestal as the first secretary. I learned that the new Joint Staff was wrestling with the recently enacted law amid such – much disagreement between the services. In an attempt to overcome these, Forrestal had taken the heads of the Army, Navy and Air Force to Key West, Florida, for a conference, at which incidentally the Marine Corps was not adequately represented.

MR. FRANK: Who was down there? Do you recall?

GENERAL THOMAS: Silverthorn, but he was not allowed in the conference.

On return the Director of the Joint Staff held a press conference, and that was General Alfred Gruenther, at which he issued a statement which purported to include the conclusions reached at Key West. In it, he paraphrased the law, constantly, as they always do, moving away from its' exact wording and leaving no doubt as to the diminished stature of the Marine Corps in the eyes of the people at Key West. He further sought to imprison the future by saying that in wartime expansion the Marine Corps would be less than that which they had successfully reached in World War II. There was little that he said that was in real conformance with the law, either by word or intent. Actually the Director was laying the groundwork upon which to demand changes in the law. As might be expected, there was a proposal to create the post of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Coordination was lacking, they said, now that Admiral Leahy, the President's Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, was no longer in the picture. Likewise it was pleaded that the Joint Staff was too small and that its function were overly restricted. All of these changes were embodied in a bill introduced by Senator Millard Tydings of Maryland up which hearings soon started. General Vandegrift had left the office of Commandant. Clifton Cates, whom I greatly admire, had succeeded him. Cates had many qualities required to meet these problems. Foremost of these was his great courage, but in addition he was venturesome. I once said to General Vandegrift when he was talking to me about nominating Cates as his successor, I said, "Cliff is a gambler, and anyone who tries to reduce his stack of chips is in for a real battle."

Cates did battle but he had a rough time. He had perhaps the roughest time any Commandant of the Marines Corps ever had. Unfortunately, for that purpose his inheritance from Vandegrift was very small. The apparatus that saw the Corps through the trying 1944 and '47 period had been dismantled, and its members scattered. Several

were near Washington, but their combined power was lacking. Inevitably the Tydings bill became law, and General Omar Bradley became the first Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Another and genuinely unhappy change was the relief of James Forrestal as Secretary of Defense by autocratic, heavy-handed Louis Johnson. The Marine Corps soon learned that it did not stand high with the new Pentagon head. Johnson, using the butcher knife, whittled away at the Corps' vitals, its combat echelons. Misery loves company, they say, and the Corps had it, for the Navy did not fare much better. I fighting the battle of the two services John Sullivan, Secretary of the Navy, fell into disfavor and was replaced by Francis P. Matthews, a man fitted neither by temperament, background or character for the post.

Into this supercharged atmosphere Congress now elected to move. In the fall of 1979, Chairman Vinson of the House Armed Services Committee convened hearings on unification and strategy. What broader pond for fishing could be found? By this time nerves had been tightened by the careless dealing of Louis Johnson. Testimony at Vinson's hearings conformed. It was acrimonious at times. These events found our headquarters ill-prepared. The only agency faintly resembling the Edson Board was public relations, then under the leadership of Brigadier General John Taylor Selden. They, particularly Sullivan, who skillfully exploited the influence of our Marine Corps Reserve Officers, labored valiantly, but were too much in the public view to do effective under-cover work. Incidentally, they ran Sullivan out of town for that at that time. They ran Sullivan out of town. They really put the pressure on him.

MR. FRANK: But you haven't talked – the Edson Board –

GENERAL THOMAS: That's what I'm talking – we're going back on Monday, I'm going to take up unification from 1944. But I'm ahead of myself now.

However, Twining was now (1948) back in Quantico with his penetrating mind and facile hand. General Cates made a superior presentation before Congress. His performance pleased Congress but not the Pentagon. Nonetheless no action was taken by the Pentagon against him. Not so fortunate was the Chief of Naval Operations – Admiral Louis Denfeld, who likewise treated the subject forthrightly. For his pains he was relieved from his post a week later. It was not surprising that Forrest Sherman, co-architect of unification, was chosen to succeed him.

One thing that was stressed in the House hearings was the lack of Marine Corps representation at the Joint Chiefs of Staff level. As a result of their determination, Chairman Vinson brought forth a bill to make the Commandant a member of that body. With the arrival of Sherman, the difficulties of the Commandant multiplied. Leaning heavily on the provisions of Public Law 432, known as the CNO Bill, forgetting Sullivan's letter to Vandegrift, which incidentally, he may have written, the new CNO Louis Johnson, he gave particular attention to Fleet Marine Forces. This combat force was at the same time under attack by the Secretary of Defense himself, who again with a butcher knife reduced it to where it was to have only five battalion landing teams and some emasculated aviation units. There were companion reductions in other services, and one might conclude that Johnson was chosen to preside over the dissolution of the armed forces. As it turned out the Communist assault on South Korea halted this process. The new hostilities, though they did find us in poor shape for combat, with the result that our troops courted disaster for a matter of very many months.

When I left Headquarters in 1947, the National Defense Act had not been passed. If it had been – I must say I didn't know whether it was going to be passed or not. We didn't know what the provisions were going to be, and therefore any chance of planning was difficult, but anyway no plans were set up for the National Defense Act of 1947. But of course we all know, and they're still in there now, that National Defense Act – and I'll go through all of this – the National Defense Act of 1947 gave the Marine Corps certain specific roles and missions. As it said, we were supposed to do certain things.

MR. FRANK: Implied in the Functions Paper.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, the Functions Paper and some of the JCS business, and that is one of the places where, each time they write a Functions Paper, they try to get a little further away from the law. The Marine Corps should stick strictly to the law, and every time they put out a Functions Paper, we should say, "Let's just copy the law." They should copy all the words, just exactly what Congress said we should do, and not try to paraphrase it and put it in other words, because every time they paraphrase it, they take a little something away from us.

Marine Corps lassitude in handling DA1947 created a vacuum.

Not long after I came to Quantico and took command of the Equipment Board, Twining, who was still the head of the Marine Corps Board, brought me a paper in which he strove to correct this omission on the part of the Marine Corps, because of what they had not done following the National Defense Act.

Now, Lem Shepherd is my pal. He's a great guy and I'm very fond of him. He was in Quantico in those days, in command of the post, of the school, and as I began to get myself more intimately into the military picture after my return from China -

MR. FRANK: - you were a major general now, weren't you?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, no, I was a brigadier.

MR. FRANK: Then Shepherd was a lieutenant general? Marine Corps Schools has a major general?

General Tomas: He was a major general then. They were major generals.

MR. FRANK: One more interruption. Marine Corps Board, Twining was not a colonel and head of the Marine Corps Board?

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right.

MR. FRANK: Marine Corps Board was a postwar development, was it not?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes. Yes. We just put it together. It had the specific purpose to study Marine Corps problems that might be sent to them by Headquarters, study them, and come up with recommendations. We just thought we needed them. Headquarters Marine Corps is a very poor study place.

MR. FRANK: A trouble-shooting study group?

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right, long-range planning. Now, one person who got me into that attitude – and this isn't in my writing – is Jim Murray. After Murray was wounded, he took a bullet through his chest while commanding a battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines at Okinawa, he came home. Jim Murray is a very brilliant man and was a very brilliant officer, and I have always regretted that he is not in the Marine Corps any more. But he was a man of pronounced ideas. His downfall was that he just stepped on the corns of too many seniors. Murray came in to see me once, after he began to heal. The doctors would not discharge him because he had a big hole in his back so he said, "But I'm going crazy lying out there in that hospital."

So I said, "Come on in here, Jim." We were very close. We'd been together all through the South Pacific, and I said, "You take a desk over in the corner and you just sit down and start to write."

Well, some of the finest ideas that ever flowed out came out of Jim Murray's pencil while he sat there in that corner, and he stayed there for a good many months. He was not fit for duty, but he was fit to think, and he did a lot of that.

But among things he thought of was that we should set up a Marine Corps Board, and we did, the first time we got a chance, after Twining became available.

I don't remember where I left off, but I talked to Lem Shepherd and I said, "Lem, when the National Security Act passed in 1947 you were the Assistant Commandant."

MR. FRANK: Defense Act, was it not?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, National Defense Act of 1947. I said, "That Act bestowed upon the Marine Corps certain responsibilities. What did you do about it?"

He said, "Well, we didn't do anything."

Well, this was two years later, and I said, "It's high time we did something."

About this time Twining handed me a paper, as I mentioned before, treating this whole aspect of Marine Corps duties and responsibilities, and recommending that we set up at Quantico a Marine Corps Development Center for the purpose of carrying out of these functions, the development of amphibious doctrines and techniques, which is what the law required of us. We set up a Marine Corps Center at the Marine Corps Schools in Quantico to perform these statutory functions.

I read Twining's paper. It fitted with what I'd been talking to Shepherd about, and I went to Washington and talked to General Cates with whom I had very good relations and had had for years. It took some time for him to get this through his advisors, but finally in the spring of 1950 he appointed a board of general officers to study this problem. Twining very shortly came up with the recommendation that they establish the Board at the development center. We set up a Board of Tactics and Techniques and joined it with the Equipment Board in the Marine Corps Development Center, and it was set up, and I was its first commanding general.

In 1950 I tripped over my friends Watson and Hunt who, along with five admirals and a couple of other people, were members of the selection board for major general.

MR. FRANK: Admirals were on the selection board till that time?

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. I'll get to that. I'll put it right on tape. Watson and Hunt who were members of the board hated my guts, because I was with Vandegrift, and they had this planned, and I could never understand their attitude, but they didn't like me. Now, there were four Marines and five admirals on the board. One of the admirals commented that I wasn't a college graduate and I told the person that told me this, well, I wasn't, but I had three years at a very fine liberal arts college, and that guy graduated from the Naval Academy in 1910 when the Naval Academy wasn't any better than a good high school, and that's a fact, and I know that. But that's that story. That year caused a change. The law said that if there were not enough generals on active duty to form a board, they may put admirals on. One person dumped by admirals was Arthur Worton, he never got over it, the bitterness in his soul. The admirals hated Arthur Worton because of his fight with Sherman. Worton was eased out of the Marine Corps. Two successive boards, five and six members of which were admirals.

But that year, Cates saw the light, and the next year they called retired officers, and thereafter. Now they've got enough general officers, they can have them for the board, but for a good many years they had two, three, four and five retired officers on the board.

MR. FRANK: It took how many years for Smedley butler's "To Hell with the Admirals" article to –

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, but of course Worton had great drag with the Navy, he'd been a lot with the Navy, but he'd had a big fight with Sherman, and I think they knew all about it, and that's what pulled the rug out from under Arthur Worton. But the next year, they had nine Marine, retired and active, generals and I was selected for major general. I was in Charleston when the selection news came out, that I was to be promoted at once, and I remember meeting Franklin Hart in Camp Lejeune about two or three days later and he brought me the second star and flag and promoted me on the spot.

The day after I got home I went to Headquarters, and I went in to see Clifton Cates and said, "I've been promoted to major general. Now I'd like to take command of my old division when it's free."

He said, "Well, O.P. will be home in a couple of months and you can have it."

MR. FRANK: Korea had already broken out?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes, Korea had been going on since the previous July. I'm now talking about January 1951, and Korea had been going since June, 1950.

MR. FRANK: Even with having been passed over one year for promotion to major general, had the adjustment been such that you were no longer head of your class?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, there were only one or two people involved. It didn't amount to anything, and I leaped over them later just like I had done before – a year later, when I came back as Assistant Commandant. I was a major general only a year. I was 15 years as a lieutenant. Then when I started moving I went along all right.

Despite the fact that we had a landing force development center in 1950, it was in fact not a very happy year for me or for our Corps. A lot of things happened, like my Passover, various other things, and Louis Johnson was hovering over the Armed Services and he still wanted to whittle at the Marine Corps. In late '50, early '51, despite the fact that the Marine Corps was doing a great deal of fighting – as a matter of fact the major fighting, the major successes were due to the Marine Corps, in Korea, the Commandant of the Marine Corps was still bypassed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He did not go in there, was not allowed to go in there, didn't go in there, was not able to present the Marine Corps' picture or anything of the sort.

As a result, however, of the 1950 hearings, Vinson proposed that the Commandant of the Marine Corps should sit as a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He didn't push the proposal and it didn't go any place. I don't even know whether he introduced the bill, but he made such a recommendation after the hearings on unification and strategy.

MR. FRANK: I just read an article (you're undoubtedly aware of this) – he was not in favor of this Joint Staff concept and he certainly was not in favor of a Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no sir, he never was, although they undermined him later. He never was. All those changes were put in over the opposition of Chairman Vinson, and of us and the Navy and everyone else. The Navy didn't know how to fight about it.

The Navy is a bunch of kid glove boys and they just didn't fight much. But no, no, Vinson never was in favor of it, and they're not in favor of it down there now, but the administration gets away with it. That's the conflict between Mendel Rivers and McNamara. This centralization, this chairman of the Joint Chiefs, a civilian and all – no, it's not good.

However, January 1951, things looked up a little bit. Louis Johnson departed and George C. Marshall became Secretary of Defense. At least Johnson wouldn't whittle on us any more, and of course Johnson – and Bob Sherrod I know is the authority for this, had first-hand knowledge of it – Johnson had on his desk a proposal to transfer Marine Corps Aviation to the Air Force. He said he didn't but Sherrod said he did have. No doubt about it.

Also in January 1951, Paul Douglas introduced in the Senate a bill proposing that the combat forces of the Marine Corps should consist of four wings and four divisions, and that the Commandant of the Marine Corps should be a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff when matters of direct interest to the Marine Corps were being considered. Mike Mansfield, who was then a congressman, introduced a companion bill in the lower House.

MR. FRANK: How influential was 'MCROA' (Marine Corps Reserve Officers' Association) in all this? Were any of the members undercover agents?

GENERAL THOMAS: They came in later, but not now. I'll take them up in time; as a matter of fact, I probably won't get at it today, but they got into this. You see, this bill didn't pass for 18 months, but the final heave on that bill came from certain Reserve officers. And they were very influential.

MR. FRANK: They were no longer muzzled.

GENERAL THOMAS: They couldn't muzzle MCROA. They couldn't muzzle Reserve officers any time. But the regulars were muzzled.

MR. FRANK: But weren't the Reserve officers muzzled during Johnson's regime?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, they probably tried to, but –

MR. FRANK: (crosstalk) – pay for all the Navy Day celebrations?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, they cut out those things, but the Reserve Officers didn't, they didn't. Joe Chamberlain and the rest of them didn't pay any attention to Johnson.

MR. FRANK: Of course there's a hint of this in his book about the time they tried to take away Cates' limousine and remove him from the list of general officers to receive –

GENERAL THOMAS: They did all kinds of things. They did everything they could to belittle the Marine Corps. That's part of this whole Army game, and of course Johnson was a former Assistant Secretary of War, you know. Oh, yeah, this all just went forward with a terrific bang. We were really on the down grade but we were fighting.

MR. FRANK: Would you say this was just because there was a lot of infighting to get the defense dollar, or was it a bund of pettiness?

GENERAL THOMAS: Both. Both. Both. The defense dollar didn't enter – the Army objected, on the Woodrum committee, which I talked about the other day, "abolish the Marine Corps." They were going to reduce the Marine Corps to nothing, and that's a part of their objective, and it has been ever since the days of Theodore Roosevelt. They've been jealous of the Marine Corps and wanted to do away with it. It's a cut-throat game.

On the Douglas and Mansfield bill, there were hearings held in both the House and the Senate, and various people appeared. Cates appeared and testified very

vigorously for the bill. Forrest Sherman, who was a very, very smart individual – there was no doubt, had had a lot of brains – he did a very skillful job of combating the bill, to set up four divisions and four wings. However, the place they fixed him was when they accused him of not taking the interest of the Marines. He said that he protected the interests of the Marine Corps, and they proved that he didn't. Although he had said he had taken the Commandant of the Marine Corps into the Joint Chiefs, he had never taken him there.

MR. FRANK: He lied outright.

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes. That's right. It had never been done. He had never taken – there was one occasion when Cates was consulted, but it was developed that he actually did not go in and sit with the Joint Chiefs in considering the matter.

I'm starting an entirely new chapter now. The beginning is the evening of April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1951. I was at Airfield K-1 near Pusan in Korea, visiting my cousin, Field Harris, who was in command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Air Wing. He had an eerie evening, because after dinner, as was their practice, they assembled all of the pilots who had flown that day and debriefed them. Well, on the morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April, the Chinese armies had launched a general offensive all across Korea. They'd made great progress in some areas, and there had been movement along all throughout the front all day long, and these lads had flown over on the missions that they were to perform. They each came back and told a story of what they had seen. It was all very confusing, but at the same time it was a little bit threatening or frightening. Something was really going on.

After they were through, Field and I sat, as we were in the habit of doing, and we must have talked for a couple of hours. Whenever he had occasion to come here, as he did for an operation a few months ago, we'd sit and talk about things, because we have a lot of interests in common, in addition to being seventh cousins. We talked for a long time and then went to bed, and the next morning I got up early and I went to Taegu, which was the base headquarters of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, and when I got to Taegu I found General Van Fleet there. I had not expected to see him, and I was only reporting for duty.

Van Fleet called me in, and went over the whole military situation on the front. There was one really heartbreaking thing. The units to the right and left of the Gloucester Battalion in front of Seoul had gone out, and left those poor British up there all by themselves. "Well," Van Fleet said, "we left the Gloucesters yesterday, but we're going back and get 'em out of there."

Well, they didn't, and history tells us that out of that whole battalion, less than 40 men ever got back. They left them out there and didn't give them instructions – well, I'd better not say this – to withdraw. I'm just as sure of that as I'm sitting here.

MR. FRANK: That's a matter of record.

GENERAL THOMAS: Van Fleet asked me what my plans were and I said "Well, I'm going back to K-1. Then we have this big supply installation over a Masan, where we've left all the unnecessary gear of the 1<sup>st</sup> MarDiv. We have men over there also, and I'm going over there to make an inspection and then go back to K-1, and I'm going up to the front for a couple of days."

Without explanation he said to me, "I'd like you to go up at once and take command of the division."



So I said, "All right." I went back to the field, I got a plane, I went to Masan, spent about an hour or two, just checking in, and then I went to the front. I landed at Chunchon, and Louie Puller met me, and I'll tell you, I'll relate later why Van Fleet wanted to do this. It was no reflection on O.P. Smith at all. But he wanted him relieved right now – wanted me to go up. Puller met me, and he gave me a rundown on what had happened, and I went on over to the CP, which was not far away just across the river about a mile. O.P. Smith said, "I can't turn over to you. We're fighting up on our front, and we have a 15-mile gap on our left, where the 6<sup>th</sup> ROK Division has retreated."

Well, I didn't know what to say so I didn't say anything. I went with Eddie Snedeker who was the Chief of Staff. We went over to G-3's tent. I said, "Show me what's happened."

So Al Bowser went through the whole situation with me. By that time I got an idea, and I went back in to O.P., and I said, "O.P., the table of organization only calls for one major general in a division. Either you turn over to me, or I'm going to leave."

He didn't say anything. I went outside and talked to Snedeker for a while, and after a while O.P. came out and he said, "I'll turn over to you tomorrow morning at 8 o'clock."

Well, without any ceremony, the turnover was made the next morning. We had a pretty good situation on our front, despite the fact that our left flank had been withdrawn. The 6<sup>th</sup> ROK Division had just gone out like a light, and nobody ever knew where they were. There just was nobody in the gap. We didn't even know if there were and Chinese Communists over there. It was a really obscure situation. Unfortunately, the only road to the front led right up very close to the boundaries between the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division and the 6<sup>th</sup> ROK Division, and it crossed a river by a bridge at the north causeway, somewhat of a barrier. The 1<sup>st</sup> Marines had been fighting around that bridge, and they refused their flank down to the left which they held strongly. We weren't in bad shape, nor were we in good shape. There was some intermingling of units, because there'd been a good deal of fighting all along the front that day. The Korean Marines were on the right, hooked into Hwachon Reservoir. The 5<sup>th</sup> Marines were in the middle, and then came the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines. The 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, and the remainder of the regiment was across the road. We had them in reserve – 7<sup>th</sup> Marines less a battalion.

After I took over the O.P., I told my staff, "I'm going to the front, as I want to see very regiment." The only way I could get there was by jeep. I wanted to see the regimental commanders and some of the front line units, where the fighting was going on, and I wanted them to see me. I was almost ready to leave, about 10 o'clock in the morning, when I got a call from the corps commander of the 9<sup>th</sup> Corps, in which we were then serving, General William Hogue. He'd died now – Bill Hogue. I had not seen him the previous day because Van Fleet had said, "You can just report in to the Corps by dispatch," which I did, from Taegu.

Well, Hogue said, "I'll be at the Chunchon air strip." Which as I said was across the bridge and about a mile away, at such and such an hour, maybe an hour later, "and I want to talk to you."

So I went back there. Then he told me, "We have to rectify the front, and our orders are to withdraw."

One of the troublesome things, then and always to any army, was that the Soyangang River ran right back of us. I don't suppose the river was more than 600 yards

from our CP. There was only one road, and the one bridge had been damaged. It had been repaired but it was still far from first class.

Hogue said, "We're going to withdraw and form a line back of the Soyangang, and I want you to start your withdrawal immediately."

Well, that was land warfare, and I'm an old Leavenworth graduate and I knew exactly what to do. We were in a real good position, because the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines were in reserve astride our road to the rear, already occupying our first delaying position.

MR. FRANK: The holding position?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, first delaying position. We got our orders very quickly – well, by this time it was getting on towards dark. The daylight was pretty well finished. But we got our orders out, that the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines would occupy the first delaying position and that we would first withdraw the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines. The 1<sup>st</sup> were still in combat. The 5<sup>th</sup> Marines were to sideslip over, pass through the 7<sup>th</sup>, come back, then the 1<sup>st</sup> would follow. After that the 7<sup>th</sup> would withdraw. The Korean Marines, who were over I suppose seven or eight miles to the right, the best thing for them and the thing they were fitted to do was simply to come on back across country, because they were good cross-country travelers. So when the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines pulled out, the Korean Marines dropped right straight back. They found a ford across the Soyangang upstream.

One of our first acts was to displace the division CP. We had a terrific amount of gear, ammunition, supplies on the north bank of the Soyangang because the 8<sup>th</sup> Army had just started an offensive the morning when they got hit. In other words, they had been caught with both feet in the air. We had the job of getting that gear back, hopefully getting all that material out.

Well, it was just fantastic, because by that time the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division was a real pro outfit. They really knew how to do business because they'd been in that war for nearly a year. That evening, I made a calculation as to what we should do, and I said, "If we get behind that river in 48 hours we're doing a real good job."

Just after we got our withdrawal started, I received an order that we would not set up a defensive line behind the Soyangang, but that we would withdraw another six miles, to a line known as the No Name Line. All the lines had been given names, but this line that they had prepared about a month before as a resting place during Ridgeway's offensive, they'd stayed there for several days, and they'd preferred a defensive line without mines and that was back of us about seven miles, and they said we would withdraw to the No Name Line.

So, as I say, we pulled our division CP back of the river, oh, about a mile and a half, on a hill where I could see things, and I made a mental calculation. Well, if we can carry this out and get most of our supplies across the river in 48 hours, we've done a real good job, after which we'll destroy that bridge.

Before dark the next day, the whole outfit was back of that river. Oh Lord, 11 o'clock the next morning, I got word that the Korean Marines were back of the river. I jeeped over there to see them. Charlie Harrison was with them. He was their advisor. We went to see them. That was the first time I ever saw him. But all that day – and before dark, the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines – I pulled the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines back first and had them man the river line. They were the next delaying position behind the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines and 5<sup>th</sup> Marines successively and deployed to our left. I remember the 7<sup>th</sup>, they had passed through the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines by dark that night, and that was less than 24 hours.

MR. FRANK: I want to go back to when you saw Van Fleet. The answer may be obvious but I'm not aware of it, why he wanted you to take over immediately, and why O.P. Smith was reluctant to –

GENERAL THOMAS: - give me about a minute and I'll come to it. I'll come to it. Oh, yes, I plan to touch on that, but – I've got to explain, I can't leave old O.P. hanging in the air like that, you know, I'll come to it. Oh, no, I wouldn't leave it out.

MR. FRANK: You could write a good mystery story, General!

GENERAL THOMAS: OK. There was one wrinkle about this withdrawal that was unusual to me. They said, "As you withdraw from the No Name line, you will leave an RCT (Regimental Combat Team) as a patrol base on the mountain range a mile and a half south of the Soyangang. There was only one road to withdraw, and it went through a pass. It was a dirt road, and we had a rain that wasn't very good. Our engineers went up there and worked on that pass, because we had a lot of gear and trucks and tanks and what not to get back through there. But we left. The 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, they were over the river and behind the 5<sup>th</sup>, the night of the 22<sup>nd</sup>. The next morning I remember walking out on the road, walking down from the CP, and seeing those boys, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, swing along. It was really a heartening sight, to see all those vigorous youngsters, you know, all happy, going along, shouting and singing and having a hell of a time.

MR. FRANK: That No Name Line was behind the Soyangang?

GENERAL THOMAS: About seven miles.

MR. FRANK: Between that No Name Line and the river itself, there's a mountain range?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes sir, a lot of mountains, the Soyangang runs through the mountains but there's a plain around Chunchon, and around the place we were camped.

MR. FRANK: But it seems to me to get behind the road south of that range you'd have no observation.

GENERAL THOMAS: oh, no, we were over on the next mountain range. Oh, yes, six miles beyond that mountain range is another one. That's where the No Name Line was. While we were down in the valley, from that mountain range where we left the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, you go down in a valley for two or three miles, then you start climbing up again and you go to another mountain range.

MR. FRANK: So the No Name Line was on the northern face of this mountain line, and your RCT patrol base naturally –

GENERAL THOMAS: - was six miles away on top of another mountain range.

MR. FRANK: Which is a large-sized observation post.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes, I'm coming to that. I'll get to that.

MR. FRANK: Who were your regimental commanders at this time?

GENERAL THOMAS: Commanding the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines was McAlister, and he had been wounded slightly, the day before I got there, and there was the battalion commander also wounded, Virgil Banning, who is now down in Joint Chiefs, you know. Virgil got hit in the leg and McAlister got scratched but he was not evacuated. The 7<sup>th</sup> Marines' commander was Herman Nickerson, and the 5<sup>th</sup> was Dick Hayward.

MR. FRANK: And your ADC was Whaling?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no, Puller. I'll tell you when he comes in. But Puller was the ADC.

MR. FRANK: The Chief of Staff was - ?

GENERAL THOMAS: Snedeker. Al Bowser was the G-3. Gus Banks was the G-4. Ridge was the G-2, Tom Ridge. Dan Godbold was the G-1.

MR. FRANK: He was the G-1, but your G-3 was?

GENERAL THOMAS: Bowser. That's right, Nickerson, Hayward – 11<sup>th</sup> Marines was Buzz Winecoff, I guess. Some of the generals are retired.

This matter of leaving – oh, well, I'll get it in a second – this matter of leaving the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines out in front there, six miles, with nobody on the left, nobody on their right, gave me some concern. I didn't like it. This patrol base idea was a new Army idea. It wasn't in the field service regulations, and they sure as hell didn't teach it when I was at Leavenworth, and I didn't like it. I never have liked it. But at this time I didn't say anything.

We dropped back to the No Name Line, left the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines – oh, I'd say, about the 27<sup>th</sup>, and we occupied this already prepared position, with 5<sup>th</sup> Marines on the left, Korean Marines on the center, and the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines on the right, and the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines of course, out in front. Didn't keep anybody in reserve because it was too long a line as it was.

MR. FRANK: Your line, as a matter of fact, the line that the division had to hold, was so vastly greater than anything experienced in World War II.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, boy, at one time, as I will relate, we held a 27-mile front. One division. We had over 30,000 men, you know. We had those Korean Marines. But that's a lot of territory.. Oh, we had a lot – because we were holding mountains, and there were gaps here and there covered by fire.

About two day, or the day after we got back to the No Name Line, I got word that they were going to shift the boundary between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Corps, and that the 7<sup>th</sup> US Division which was on our right would pull over. Their zone would be take by the 2<sup>nd</sup> US Division. They would cross our rear and come in on our left, and that we would then revert to the 10<sup>th</sup> Corps commanded by Almond.

Well, there's the explanation of why Van Fleet wanted me to go up and take the division. Now, I don't know, but I believe I've got the correct story. It's b been my understanding that Van Fleet had promised O.P. Smith after the Reservoir that he would never put him under command of Almond again, and he wanted to revert the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division to the 10<sup>th</sup> Corps, and he couldn't do it as long as O.P. was there, and he told me to got up and take command, because he had that in mind. He didn't make the change until two or three days after that, but that's what he planned to do.

MR. FRANK: Did O.P. know that this was going to happen?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, I don't think he did. He probably doesn't know it today. And we've never talked about it, and I don't plan to.

A couple of days intervened between these events, so when we got back to the No Name Line, we started to send out our patrols. The 5<sup>th</sup> Marines in their zone sent patrols clear back down to the Soyangang, six and a half miles away. At first they didn't find anything, but after a day or two they began to hit the Chinese each time. The Chinese had crossed the river. They didn't pursue us, but the followed up slowly.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Marines sent patrols almost every day. Nickerson just had a tight little enclave up on that mountain range there, with one battalion down below him in the rear. He sent patrols a mile and a half, two miles, back down to the Soyangang – tight patrols.

At first they didn't hit anything, but then they finally started hitting Koreans and Chinese. They got in a little fight every day.

Well, I kept in touch, very close touch with Nickerson. I had my helicopters, and I went up to see him every morning, talked to him at his CP. Sometimes I climbed up to the front lines, looked down over the plain to the river. There was a great big mountain peak off to the left of Nickerson, the highest thing there. We didn't want the Chinese to get that, and we also wanted it for observation, so we sent a company of Korean Marines up there. They went up on that mountain peak and held it until we told them to withdraw. They were never attacked. They didn't have any trouble. But each day, though the Chinese were not strong, our patrols would hit them a little bit earlier. They were a little bit closer to our front every day.

Now, when we passed to the 10<sup>th</sup> Corps, I called Almond and told him that I didn't want to come back to corps headquarters unless I knew he'd be there, so he said, "I'm coming up your way. You can come back here and see my headquarters some time, but I'll be at your command post." He told me when, maybe a half-hour.

Well, he came. I'd never seen him before. I knew about him. He was a year ahead of General Shepherd at VMI, you know. He's a very pleasant fellow, very nervous, tense fellow, in a way, and he said to me, "I'm a very active corps commander. I visit the front line units all day long. I'll be in your division area every day. I'll probably see your regimental commanders, some of your battalion commanders. I just wanted to let you know."

Well, I didn't answer him. He apparently felt that there was something he hadn't said, and he went on, "But I'll never give an order to a unit of this division except through you."

So I said, "General, on that basis, you're always welcome." And from that day forward he and I were close associates and are now still close friends. I'm very fond of Ned Almond. I don't see him very often. However, I saw him not too long ago.

MR. FRANK: Is he living in the area

GENERAL THOMAS: He lives at Anniston, Alabama. He's running an insurance company or something down there. That's his wife's home. She was quite a well-to-do woman and they went back there. They went to Anniston to live. He's a Virginian. His first cousin was Governor of Virginia – Governor Almond. Did you hear about him six or seven years ago? Ned is from Culpeper.

MR. FRANK: He never said anything about Shepherd, about taking over the Inchon thing?

GENERAL THOMAS: We never got into any of that. I didn't see any reason to be borrowing trouble.

MR. FRANK: Were you aware of the situation there?

GENERAL THOMAS: I didn't know as much about it as I know now.

I've indicated that I was not happy about the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines being out on that mountain, six miles in front of our front, and beyond supporting distance of our artillery. It caused me to do some soul searching during the time they were out there. The successful withdrawal and our rapid movement there had given me a confidence in what that division could do. It revealed the division, as I said a while ago, as a real pro(fessional) outfit. I doubt if there was a better outfit ever walked than the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April, 1951. They were really skilled. They'd been through

Inchon; they'd been through the Reservoir; they'd been through Ridgeway's offensive, and they had skilled leaders – a good outfit, and I had every confidence in reaching a conclusion as to what we could do, it they wanted to continue on this patrol base. I was willing to leave a regimental combat team any place, any place. And with every feeling of confidence that they could cut their way back to the division, with what we could do to help them. But I would not leave a battalion. Under no circumstances would I leave a battalion at a patrol base, and I told them so, I just wouldn't do it.

Later on, when it looked like we might be hit hard, I suggested that they leave us alone. Let the Marine Division stay and fight, and I told Almond, I said, "We can cut our way to the coast, don't you worry about us. Just let us be a good strong force."

However, that's another story.

### **Reel 2, Side 1.**

I've mentioned that I was not over-happy with the position of the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, but I didn't do anything for a matter of days. We kept pushing patrols out every day. Every day the Chinese were a little bit closer and a little bit closer. They did all – at least most of their movement, however, at night. We realized they were because we had command of the air, and when they moved in in front of our position at night, and we had just a little bit of evidence of them during the day.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, however, one morning picked them up, picked up Chinese strength not far from our lines, and in a position where they could have gotten in behind the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, and I thought the time had come. They'd been out there a week or maybe a little longer, and I thought the time had come to do something about it, and the way to do something about it was to put it in writing.

So I sent a dispatch to the 10<sup>th</sup> Corps saying that I was concerned about the security of the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, because of the Chinese who were almost all around them, and I recommended their withdrawal. Well, my oral protestations had been waved off, but not that in writing. They responded to that and I was told to bring the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines in.

Nickerson was all cocked, and that afternoon he started one of his battalions in. I think it was 3/7, in command of now-retired Colonel B.T. Kelly. Nickerson actually was going to make his move in two moves. He dropped back his covering force, 3/7, to the valley behind him. The valley tended left off towards the Chinese lines, way down the Soyangang, and then across our front. It was the valley between these two mountain ranges, right across our front and into the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division on our right. So Nickerson wanted a holding position in that valley, so he moved B.T. Kelly back for that one afternoon, and he was down, he was about halfway back of the 7<sup>th</sup> and about three miles in front of the No Name Line.

We didn't like Kelly being out there, so we requested eleven of our artillery down in front of him. The next morning about 2 o'clock he got hit by at least a Chinese division, and they had a dingdong fight. We estimated afterwards that these Chinese didn't know he was there. Actually, they were headed up towards the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's

front, but they snagged into Kelly, and what saved him was our artillery. This whole regiment of artillery turned to the right in front of this one little battalion's position.

I hopped out there the next morning at daybreak, and the shooting was mostly over, but the whole area, the mountainside down below 3/7 was covered with dead Chinese. Within the battalion area they had 150 Chinese sitting in a little knot. They had come into the position and surrendered to get out of the artillery fire. Well, the reason I – the artillery was still working on 'em, and we'd asked for some planes the day before. We had close air support, and I'll get on that later. It was, had been unsatisfactory and continued to be. Well, we asked for some planes and they told us we couldn't have them, but about 10 o'clock in the morning, twelve F4-U's came in and said, "We want a target." So we told them where these retreating Chinese were. They picked them up quick and went down and laid on these retreating – probably a Chinese division, maybe more, but there were a hell of a lot of Chinese in that outfit. But 3/7 really wrecked 'em. You put a battalion, with a regiment of artillery behind them, on the side of a mountain, and somebody tries to take 'em over, they've got a real rugged job.

MR. FRANK: Did your request for air go into Joint Operations Center?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, the Joint Operations Center.

MR. FRANK: That's that JOC problem that Shepherd –

GENERAL THOMAS: - very, very bad. Still, that's the way they operated, and it was wrong and I'll get into that later. There was quite a battle about it.

MR. FRANK: 5<sup>th</sup> Air Force, Partridge?

GENERAL THOMAS: Partridge, yes. Pat Partridge was a classmate of mine at Leavenworth. He was with the 5<sup>th</sup> Air Force when I first got out there and then Hank Everest relieved him.

As I said, on the day that the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines filed through their 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion I was very much relieved to have them come back into the No Name Line, the whole outfit. The 1<sup>st</sup> Marines moved over a little to the right and let the 7<sup>th</sup> in. I put all four regiments in the line, and I had the 5<sup>th</sup>, the Korean Marines, the 7<sup>th</sup>, then the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines. Well, one reason I had to put them in was because I was ordered to relieve certain units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> US Division over on our right, and a good deal of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines had to move over into that sector. I didn't have much of a reserve. I had a couple of battalions here and there. But I had no worry; I didn't worry about it.

Over on the right – and one thing, it was part of the atmosphere that hovered over this whole battle area – to the right of the 2<sup>nd</sup> US Division was a ROK Corps, and they had been attacked about the 24<sup>th</sup> and they, like the 6<sup>th</sup> ROK Division, had gone out like a light, and they had gone to the rear and nobody knew where they were.

Now Almond, who had no control over the ROK Corps really, was trying to repair that front, and he had his deputy working over in that area. As a matter of fact, he worked himself to death. They found him dead in bed – an Army Brigadier General, Lawrence Ladue. But there wasn't much they could do about it. Those ROKs had gone, left their transportation and everything and just lit out right down the road.

We had a couple of quiet days on our front. They didn't hit us, and I was very much impressed with the beauty of the place. The Korean national flower is the wild azalea, and it's a light purple flower, and it was just all over the hillside. It was really very beautiful.

MR. FRANK: I must agree with you. I found Korea beautiful too – those hills, at a certain time of the year.

GENERAL THOMAS: The Chinese were massing in front of the 2<sup>nd</sup> US Division. There wasn't any doubt about it. They were going to hit them. The 29<sup>th</sup> was our flank. The Chinese were really massing. I had occasion, a few weeks later, to go over through that area in a jeep, and also in a helicopter, and the mountainsides were just pockmarked with holes that these Chinese had hid out during the daytime, also caves and what not. There were thousands of them over there.

I guess maybe the 2<sup>nd</sup> wasn't a bad outfit, but it wasn't a good division, and I know, because they were the ones that had broken the previous year, you know. I knew that Almond didn't feel too certain, too secure. I thought I could help him, so I went back to his CP. There was a road that came back through the No Name Line, then dropped down off of the mountainside to Hongchon. Chuchon was at one end, Hongchon the other. There was also a road going through the mountains, a lateral and east-west road. This road that we straddled was a north-south road. Just south on Hongchon was a defile through the mountains. Except through it, there wasn't any other way to get through those mountains for eight or ten miles of that defile.

Almond had his corps out in front. I said to him, "I am sure that you're worried about the security of Hongchon and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, because the Chinese are really out in front of 'em. And you're worried about this defile and getting your corps back through it. You leave it to me, and I'll defend Hongchon, and I'll cover that defile until you get this whole damned corps through it."

He just said, "Thank you." But that afternoon he made a change between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Corps. This allowed us to pull the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines out and move them down behind the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, and near to Hongchon. Well, there was one thing that didn't look good, over on the right – really it was back of the junction of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines and the 2<sup>nd</sup> US Division. We sent a battalion of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines up there, oh, about a mile, a mile and a half beyond the rest of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, and that night the Chinese broke through the 2<sup>nd</sup> US Division and hit this battalion.

Well, apparently they thought they were through all resistance and came on in masses. I don't know why they were so damned stupid. Our battalion of the 5<sup>th</sup> just massacred them.

MR. FRANK: 2/5, you say?

GENERAL THOMAS: I believe it was 2/5. It was in command of a little spunky Reserve officer. No, not Finch – I forget the guy's name. Anyway, they really killed the Chinese that night. We didn't know about it until the next morning, and I went out there and I got hold of this battalion commander and I said, "You didn't report this fight."

He said, "Oh, General, we didn't have much of a fight. Just a few Chinese out there and we killed them all. I didn't see any reason to worry you."

It was a funny attitude. He had really won that battle. Well, that was the last thrust of the Chinese, and they had hit against us and hit against the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and they'd lost a lot of men. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division lost a lot of people too. But that was it. That was the end of the Chinese push, and Van Fleet recognized it, and the next day he said, "up and at 'em." We took up the offensive.

I started the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines down out of the line to the east, then pulled the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines down out of the line and had them follow the 5<sup>th</sup>. We just forgot all about the



front line, and started out after these Chinese. Almond reached out and got the best regiment out of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, which was the 23<sup>rd</sup>, and he also put them on the road, and about that time, Van Fleet, really meaning to go after the Chinese in this area, released the 187<sup>th</sup> Airborne, which was a damned good outfit, to Almond.

We started up the road. The 5<sup>th</sup> Marines kept trying to go ahead, but oh, they were going through just horrible terrain - over mountains and what not, and the Chinese were holding every mountain top, shooting down at them. It was a real slow process, and I finally proposed to Almond that we forget about the Chinese on the mountain tops and put everybody near the road and get them forward. In the meantime, Nickerson was finally getting forward with the 7<sup>th</sup>, but the 23<sup>rd</sup> and been given priority on the road. The 187<sup>th</sup> was sent forward first with tanks, with their men riding on top of tanks, and the others in trucks. They hit a lot of land mines, had some trouble, but our objective was a little village where they Soyangang split off into two rivers, a little village by the name of Kwandori. Oh, in about a day and a half we were pretty well up there. We finally gave up trying to deploy on the side of the road and got off, got on the highway and just went forward.

The airborne got into Kwandori. There was a ring of hills and mountains around the place, and the Chinese were on top of each of them. Almond sent for me, and I went in a helicopter. He had a little airstrip there that the Americans had had when they occupied the area. Almond had landed there with his liaison plane, and we had a meeting there with Archie Bowen, who was in command of the 187<sup>th</sup>. The Chinese – we didn't worry because they were a long ways away = were up on the mountainside, up on the top shooting at us. It was a real wild scramble.

However, they couldn't clear the road fork at Kwandori; the 23<sup>rd</sup> and the 187<sup>th</sup> just couldn't get ahead. They were supposed to go east towards the coast, and we were to turn left, and go north.

As the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines and the Korean Marines came on the left of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines we saw a valley, and we told them to break through the mountain range and over into the Soyangang and go up that river. I didn't worry about their security. They were good outfits. So they did. They were on the Soyangang road which followed up the valley and the remainder of the division was on the other road about seven, eight miles away.

Our main force almost got to Kwandori – but they had not cleared the junction there. We couldn't get by it – so we saw a way to get through the mountains short of Kwandori with the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Marines. We did get through, but we had to ford the river, and the crossing was a great mass of enormous rocks and water. We got our men across, but we couldn't get any equipment across – no trucks, nothing of the sort. But the men forded it, got up and got into a gorge that was leading through the next mountain range. We took the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines on one side and the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines on the other in that gorge, and they started to fight – the damned Chinese were on north mountain ridges. However, our infantry fought their way through up there. We had quite a fight that lasted three days.

In the meantime, still back at Kwandori, the Army had not been able to clear the Chinese out and go on their road to the east.

The 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Marines had slow going up that gorge. I remember Shepherd came out to visit us while we were fighting there. Van Fleet and Almond used to go there every day to see Nickerson. Nickerson had his headquarters down in the gorge. There was shooting every place and the Chinese were dropping mortar shells down into the

gorge – the gorge walls rose abruptly. That road was long, two and a half to three miles, leading up through a pass in the mountains from whence it looked down over a great plain.

We did fairly well, by then the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines and the Korean Marines had finally broken through by the Soyangang. They came up on the left, and we had the whole division in line. This put pressure on the Chinese flank so it was just a matter of hours. We were up on a ledge that looked down over a broad plain, the plain of Yanggu, leading about four or five miles to the town of Yanggu, and the Hwachon Reservoir. We were back where we had started after the day that I took over. Then we had been at the west end of Hwachon and now we were at the east end of the Hwachon Reservoir. The reservoir is 15 miles long.

The place that we dropped down on was made to order for our power. We could use our tanks, and we were looking down their throats because the land was descending. MR. FRANK: They were retreating?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, the Chinese were retreating. They were withdrawing, and we passed on over – the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines stayed on the mountain range on our right, and they still had some hard slugging. The 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines and the Koreans, they had no trouble. With the tanks they swung down over that low land. Looking down the Chinese throats, we fetched up in the village of Yanggu in about two days and took the place. In the meantime the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines forged forward on the right, and I'll take up what happened the next time I see you, but I think that's a good place to leave it.

We had, as I say, quite a fight, because it was at this point that we got to Yanggu that the Chinese sneaked out, and we found out we were fighting North Koreans. That's the first time the North Koreans had faced us.

MR. FRANK: They came back in the fight?

GENERAL THOMAS: They got back in the fight, and they were a hell of a lot better fighters than the Chinese. Now, the Chinese, even before this fight in the gorge, had started to run. They left their ammunition, they threw their arms away – we picked up stack after stack of arms. They had ammunition dug in on the sides of the valleys. They killed their horses and ate 'em. We got in behind them and they were really panicked.

### **End of Session 9.**

**Interview #10 with General Gerald C. Thomas, USMC (Ret.); Washington D.C., by Benis M. Frank and Col. Robert D. Heintz, Jr., USMC (Ret.), 30 October 1966**

GENERAL THOMAS: We finished the last tape just as the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division had seized the village of Yanggu at the Western end of the Hwachon Reservoir. The dispositions of the units of the division were that the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines were ahead on the right, and the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines on the left. Thus there were two regiments in line. We passed the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines through the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines at Yanggu, and dropped the 7<sup>th</sup> back into division reserve.

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-----to gather in-----

MR. FRANK: Did he spend all the money?

GENERAL THOMAS: They put up some money, he needed money, they put up some money, and he went and he started a bar (page 236 explains this). And the Marines patronized him, and he prospered. By the time I got up there, ten years later, eight to ten years later, seven to ten years later, Happold was the most affluent restaurant owner in the city, in of course the foreign concession, in Tientsin. He had these beautiful dining rooms, where some of them were for Chinese, some were for foreigners. But the main thing was, Happy had a little bar about the size of this room, with some booze and things, and that's where he entertained his intimates, and any Marine that came near there, he had a ticket with Happy.

Well, I took a four-inch battery from Peking down to Tientsin to fire on the range down there, and we used to go to dinner every night with Happy.

MR. FRANK: What kind of battery was this, General?

GENERAL THOMAS: Four-inch naval landing guns, and the Peking defense position of the guns was on the Tarter Wall.

MR. FRANK: Excuse me, are you sure they weren't three inch?

GENERAL THOMAS: Didn't I say three inch?

MR. FRANK: No, you said four inch. Excuse me, but I never heard of a four inch –

GENERAL THOMAS: - no, these were three-inch naval –

MR. FRANK: - I know them well. I'm not nitpicking you.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's all right, I want to be correct. So we had a battery of these, and my company had – I had a rifle company and then I had as a secondary mission this batter of four three-inch naval landing guns. So we would go over to Happy's every night, and my J.O. was Frank Uhlig, he's about the class of '25 from the Naval Academy. He had been in Smedley Butler's outfit when they were out there. He knew Happold there. We went right there and Happy would put on the most wonderful dinners for us. Every time I'd go back to Tientsin we'd always go to Happy's. By the time the Marines had to leave North China he was still there. I tried to find out about him afterwards, and understood that he was in bad health, and that an old Chinese woman was taking care of him up in Peitaiho.

MR. FRANK: Where was Happy's, in what Concession?

GENERAL THOMAS: In the French Concession in Tientsin.

MR. FRANK: I can't recall. Of course I remember Dalconte's.

GENERAL THOMAS: Wait a minute. The time you went out there Frank, he wasn't there any more. No, no, he was an old, old man. He was gone. He was in Peitaiho then and a Chinese woman that he had cared for was taking care of him. But of course the Japanese had fixed him up. His restaurant was about a block, two blocks from the International Hotel in the French Concession and on a side street.

MR. FRANK: We might as well explain the break in this tape. The discussion of Korea – Colonel Robert D. Heinl, Jr., United States Marine Corps, Retired, will now say a few words to introduce himself, so the transcriber can recognize his voice. . .

Col. Heinl: Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their party.

MR. FRANK: (Ben Frank): Thanks Colonel Heinl. He has come in, and shortly after the tape was turned off, General Thomas had mentioned that he would like to go back and discuss Peking and what they did for the enlisted men in the clubs and so on, and we broke in when he was discussing a man by the name of Happold. As I suggested, I have plans that we will have a recap on everything we missed in the last session, because it will be a catchall, and anything you have in mind to put in at that time –

GENERAL THOMAS: - I just happened to think today that I hadn't talked about the clubs in Peking and what we did for the enlisted personnel.

MR. FRANK: Of course, the atmosphere of the old China is something, as far as I'm concerned, as far as I've read, I've seen it only in Thomason. I'm sure there must be others who have written, but –

GENERAL THOMAS: Very little has been written. Thomason's story is all that I know about.

Col. Heinl: I think "The Marine and the Emerald Suite" is the best story – Thomason's story, "The Marine and the Emerald Suite" is to me the best cross-section of the enlisted men of the 1930's and incidentally of China that's ever been written.

GENERAL THOMAS: The old China, the Boxer Rebellion and old Peking, there are several books. One of the best, incidentally, was written by Mrs. Dick Hooker. It's a very well written thing. She was a girl out there. She was visiting this first secretary of the embassy when the Boxer Rebellion occurred. Colonel Dick Hooker was an old-time officer. He died in Shanghai. His son just died the other day, and he has the book.

MR. FRANK: The old Colonel married a White Russian, didn't he?

General Tomas: Oh, no; oh no; no sir. His first wife was this lady who was visiting Peking and who wrote the book, and was visiting the first secretary of the embassy.

Col. Heinl: Mary something-or-other.

GENERAL THOMAS: I've forgotten her name now, but anyway, she died just after World War I and left these two boys, and then after the war Dick Hooker, the Colonel, married an 18-year old girl. She was the daughter of Joseph E. Willard who was the ambassador to Spain, and they lived in Newport at the time that Dick Hooker married this woman, and he sired a second family. She's undoubtedly alive. I don't know where she is. Although I asked young Dick about her. He told me. He said, "I see those half brothers and sisters of mine." She had a whole family.

Col. Heinl: Young Dick was in the first family, I guess?

General Tomas: Yes, he and his brother; there were just two of them. And they were wild ones, and you know what happened to them – one went to West Point and got kicked out.

Col. Heinl: I'll guarantee they were wild ones, because young Dick ended up as a corporal in my battery in 1940.

GENERAL THOMAS: Now, I don't know whether it was young Dick or the brother that went to West Point, but one of them bilged out of West Point.

Col. Heinl: I think it was the brother. I think the only military academy young Dick ever went to was Parris Island.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, that's a good one.

Col. Heinl: It sure is.

GENERAL THOMAS: I'll start out on my outline, on unification. The story of the battle for unification of the armed forces is a long and varied one. Much of it took place under cover and had at time almost brutal moments. I suspect that our Army got ideas when they copied the German General Staff in the early 1900s. At that time they drank deeply of the heady Teutonic cup. Their ideas never boded any good for the Marine Corps, and in fact it is my understanding that they collaborated in the first modern effort towards the extinction of the Corps, the *modus operandi* then being the removal of the ship detachments in Theodore Roosevelt's day.

Now, I have not written this, but it's my understanding that there were two brothers who either lived or hung out at the Army-Navy Club. They were colonels, or one was a colonel and one was a captain. I've never gotten their names. I don't recall their names. One was a captain in the Navy, the other was a colonel in the Army, and they were moving spirits behind this effort of Theodore Roosevelt's.

Col. Heinl: A colonel in the Marine Corps?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, a colonel in the Army.

Col. Heinl: Oh my God, excuse me.

GENERAL THOMAS: A colonel in the Army and a captain in the Navy.

Col. Heinl: I don't identify either one of them.

GENERAL THOMAS: I've been told. Maybe Frank Halford told me about them, I don't remember.

Col. Heinl: It is certainly a fact that in Theodore Roosevelt's letters we find evidence that he was working closely with Leonard Wood, among others, to get the Marine Corps transferred into the Army. He wrote at least one letter on record, which was designed for public release, which smoothed this over and didn't show the naked outline of what he had in mind, and he wrote a couple of private letters to Leonard Wood in which he said flat out that the Marine Corps ought to be transferred to the Army and should be erased, as far as he was concerned.

If I could throw in one other thing about the genesis of Army attempts to plow us under, the first place where it come out into the open, aside from this Theodore Roosevelt thing, is in an attempt about 1912 for the Army to get some legislation through Congress – it passed the Senate, I think, and never came up in the House – to provide that whenever mixed forces of the Army, Navy and Marine Corps were serving together ashore, that the senior officer present of the Army would automatically command the force, and would take precedence over officers of the Marine Corps and the Navy. This thing apparently bogged down of its own legislative weight. There's not much evidence that we mounted any effort against it. But the same proposal re-appears again in 1916. At that time, you find correspondence of Lejeune, then Assistant Commandant, written to people on the General Board of the Navy, and presumably supplying ammunition for any

legislative effort the Navy was making, in which Lejeune makes some very pointed comparisons between the performance under actual conditions of combat, between Marine and Army officers, and says that the Marine Corps has never been one bit at fault or at a loss compared to the Army, and that there's no logic in any proposal that Marines should automatically be subordinated.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, there were from time to time plays and by-plays after Roosevelt's day. It was nearly a quarter of a century before another real try was made, as revealed in the hearing before the Woodrum Committee, and I have already covered the Woodrum Committee, but I will recap generally what I said there.

These various members of the Armed Services appeared before the Woodrum Committee. My recollection was that Admiral King said, "Well, if the Army wants to give autonomy to the Air Force, that's all right with me, but that's their business. I have no say about it."

Various people testified before this joint committee. It was a joint Navy-Army committee of the House called a Select Committee. General Vandegrift, as I've told, testified before the Committee, and he wound up with a statement that if the Army manages to do away with the Marine Corps they'll just have to form another one. That was rather the heart of his testimony.

Also, as I've said, I understand President Roosevelt told the Committee of the House that they should knock it off; "We're in a war and it's no time to have the services fighting between themselves."

Col. Heinl: An indication that they were starting to mount this attack came I think six months or a year before the Woodrum Committee convened, when the Army manpower people began to question the size of the Marine Corps, if you remember. They said that the Marines ought to be held I think to a force level of about 300,000, and they first raised this issue of the Marine Corps duplicating the functions of the Army, which has been hung around our necks ever since, in later 1943, I think, general, and there was quite a bit of infighting from then on, with the Army continuing to attack on these lines, that the Marine Corps was essentially duplicating the Army, and trying to old us down to the level of I think about 315,000 was as far as we got under Holcomb.

GENERAL THOMAS: I know this, and I've heard it too many times to doubt it's true – that Marshall all along resisted every increase in the Marine Corps, every man the Marine Corps got.

Col. Heinl: You know why: he was Pershing's aide. And he had imbibed that feeling about the Marine Corps right at Pershing's knee.

GENERAL THOMAS: He was Chief of Staff of the Army, and it was part of this same general scheme, but in the Joint Chiefs of Staff, where all troop strengths were staffed through all the time, Marshall resisted every effort, and I've already related the story of our 6<sup>th</sup> Division – how King said, "When you got your 5<sup>th</sup> Division, Marshall said that that's the last one, and before he would agree to the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Division I had to promise him that I would not ask for another division."

So he didn't ask for another division, he just said, "Go ahead and do it," and we did it.

Col. Heinl: And you remember that they did it out of the defense battalions.

GENERAL THOMAS: We got the men because – and this is already in what I’ve said on the tape – we cut off the last 4 of the 29 defense battalions, and thereby came by nearly 20,000 men.

Col. Heinl: And they were banked away by Torchy Robinson, if I remember, early in the war – he got high caliber, technical level kind of troops in there and just put them in a bank account.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, Roosevelt quashed the Woodrum proceedings. Oh, I related that after Vandegrift testified, he designated me as his representative, and I did not miss a hearing. I heard every word that was said in the committee.

Col. Heinl: This was really the birth of the Chowder Society. You were the first guy in the game, I guess.

GENERAL THOMAS: And as I say, Roosevelt quashed it, but certain things have a way of not staying quashed. Unification was no exception. Working at a lower level, the Army general staff still kept it alive. Robert Patterson, Secretary of the Army, and ardent adherent of unification, kept pressure on James Forrestal, Secretary of the Navy. Finally he prevailed upon Forrestal to agree to a joint board to explore the matter. Chairman of the board was Admiral J.O. Richardson, and the junior Navy member was Rear Admiral Malcolm Schoeffel. The board traveled to various theaters of operations to take testimony. Unification received support in all theaters, as Nimitz in the Pacific concurred. Nimitz was ever afterwards a prisoner of that concurrence. To us he always seemed blind to the implications of unification.

Col. Heinl: Nimitz was always weak on inter-service matters. He always gave more than he had to.

GENERAL THOMAS: That’s right.

Col. Heinl: You can well remember, for example, after the Saipan controversy, when Nimitz refused to back up both Spruance and Turner in a hard line with regard to the Saipan affair. Well, Spruance you know went along with Turner. Actually he had a solid bank of admirals behind Holland Smith, until it got to Nimitz. In fact, I have seen Spruance’s original report of the Mariannas campaign in which Nimitz excised in India ink a paragraph, and it still stands in the original, completely excised in India ink a paragraph which criticized the Army, too Holland Smith’s position, and defended the correctness of the relief of Ralph Smith. And if you remember also Nimitz had to run Bob Sherrod out of the theater for – about the thing – and he was in Nellie Richardson’s pocket the whole time.

GENERAL THOMAS: Richardson?

Col. Heinl: Nellie Richardson, not Admiral Richardson, very different men.

GENERAL THOMAS: We were in Pearl Harbor once, and after we were through talking Vandegrift and I were sitting there talking to Nimitz. This was early in the game, I mean, even before we came back to Washington. As we got up, Admiral Nimitz said rather plaintively, “Well, Vandegrift, I’ve enjoyed talking to you. I’m in for a hard hour. My relations with Richardson are not very pleasant, and he’s due here right now.”

Well, what old Nimitz should have done was take a baseball bat to him! That’s what he should have done. But he didn’t do it, and he never did. He let him get away with things that he didn’t have to.

MR. FRANK: Well, did he ever take a baseball bat to anyone?

GENERAL THOMAS: No. No, he did not, no. He wasn’t that kind of fellow.

Now, I want to be sure we understand what Richardson we're talking about. Yes, I know Richardson, President of the Board, to his credit never liked the idea of unification, and when they wrote the Board Report for something that was essentially a merger of the Armed Forces, he submitted a very strong minority report.

Col. Heinl: Just as he had opposed Roosevelt, you remember, on deploying the fleet in 1940.

GENERAL THOMAS: Roosevelt relieved him, and Roosevelt said to Stark, "Dolly, what's happened to Joe Richardson? Has he lost his nerve?"

Well, Joe Richardson had told him to get the fleet out of Pearl Harbor. Of course, old Joe's still alive, you know. He's terribly infirm, but he's still alive.

But the other Navy member, Malcolm Schoeffel, voted with the majority. The Richardson Board Report went to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who bucked it over to the Joint Strategic Survey Committee, once a council of elder statesmen but now a shadow of those giants. The JSSC, Survey Committee, acted favorably on the Board Report, and again the Navy member, Rear Admiral Arthur C. Davis, went along. Sherman, Davis, Schoeffel were all naval aviators, and they must have seen some gain, some advantage to their branch in this proposed merger.

MR. FRANK: I was about to ask you if Schoeffel was a naval aviator.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes.

MR. FRANK: Sherman was involved with it too.

GENERAL THOMAS: Sherman was in the background of this whole thing. With the Joint Survey Committee, there may have been some contact, but Sherman was not in the picture then. He was still out in the Pacific with Nimitz, but Art Davis and Schoeffel were in the picture. Schoeffel –

Col. Heinl: Sherman was involved in this unification thing the way Lucifer was involved in "Paradise Lost."

GENERAL THOMAS: Apparently the Army General Staff possessed energies beyond those required to run a war, as they continued to agitate for merger legislation. During the summer of 1945, as the end of the war neared, Congress again took up unification proposals. By that time Lt. General J. Lawton Collins, the very successful commander of a division in the Solomons and of a corps in Europe, had come home and was Chief of Information of the US Army.

Col. Heinl: Just as glib as could be, too.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh yes, he's a glib guy.

Col. Heinl: He sure is.

GENERAL THOMAS: As one of the early witnesses before the Army Committee of the House, he presented a plan that was to bear his name, the Collins Plan. It was unification with a vengeance, foreshadowing merger, a single Department of Defense with a supreme General Staff headed by an equally supreme Chief of Staff.

Col. Heinl: Might I footnote the degree of supremacy? One of the main features of the Collins Plan was that it went right down the line of the German and Japanese military structures, in the relationship between the Chief of State and the Supreme Commander or Chief of the Armed Forces General Staff, whatever his title might be. As you remember, in both the Japanese and the German structure, the supreme always enjoyed direct access, without any intervening civilians, to the head of state, and the functions of the civilian Secretary of War, as he was called then in this plan – and incidentally, they were the



same functions as General Marshall had blocked out in his November 1943 memo, which was and still is the real blueprint of this thing – the functions of the civilian Secretary of Defense were purely janitorial. He swept out the building, he assured an adequate supply of blank forms, allocated parking spaces, and that was the extent – I think ran the Panama Canal Zone, and that was about the extent of his functions. All the real power, the real cojones of this thing, was in the Supreme Soldier, and he went right in the side door of the White House.

MR. FRANK: You know, you made a point while we were discussing King's position, a couple of sessions ago, talking about King and Marshall ran the war and the civilian service Secretaries were purely administrative in a sense. They had no idea about future operations. They had nothing to do with operations.

GENERAL THOMAS: They did not know about them until they were about to take place.

MR. FRANK: Now, isn't there some sort of comparison? It would seem this merger unification plan goes one step beyond and takes them out of the picture entirely. If this is the case, then, what was the function of the civilian Secretaries?

Col. Heinl: Window dressing, that's what they are.

GENERAL THOMAS: Heinl has belittled. They have more to do than that.

Col. Heinl: Yes, I was a little hard on them.

GENERAL THOMAS: They had just about that much –

No, no, under the merger, the Supreme Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the United States just had his own government. The Kaiser didn't know whether he was Kaiser or whether Moltke was Kaiser.

MR. FRANK: No, I'm talking about Forrestal and Patterson, or Knox and Forrestal later. What were their functions?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, they ran the industrial end of their Departments, and they were real busy. They had all the job they could do. Actually, to be truthful about the matter, they did not particularly need to be in close touch. I don't know what they did in the Army, but in the Navy when an operation was finally drawn up and was about to be launched, Mr. Forrestal would be given a briefing on it. But Forrestal, he did not attempt to pry. He was a very busy man. He had a lot to do. He was the manager of the United States naval establishment.

MR. FRANK: He ran the logistic side – you know, in the traditional Nay, logistic equation, producer and consumer. The consumers are the fighting units, the operating units, and the support part is the producer side; the Secretary did run the producer side.

GENERAL THOMAS: I will agree that the Joint Chiefs should have held closely all information about operations. They just couldn't spread it around. There's too much of it now. There's too many people privy to what's going on. I think it's wrong as it can be. But I'm going to get on with my –

At this time, no, I'm talking about after the Collins Plan came out (I believe I'm correct in saying it was just after that), Mr. Forrestal reacted by asking his close friend, a highly regarded New York banker and businessman, Ferdinand Eberstadt, to come to Washington and study the problem. Forrestal told Eberstadt that the Marines had ideas and that he should talk to them. Vandegrift invited Eberstadt, who incidentally is an extraordinarily able man, to lunch, and we had a long conversation, after which

Vandegrift designated me to be liaison to Eberstadt in his studies. I saw him several times, but not many times, because at our first meeting he got about all I had to give him.

Eberstadt grasped the situation and needed little help, but I did have several lengthy conversations with him. Though we at headquarters were alert and knowledgeable about what went on initially, the real source of Marine ideas was Bill Twining's group at Quantico.

Col. Heinl: General, might it be well, I think it comes in about this time, to mention the SCOROR. You remember –

GENERAL THOMAS: - I'll get to SCOROR.

Col. Heinl: Oh, doesn't SCOROR come in about the time Eberstadt did? It seems to me SCOROR was in business in '46 when Eberstadt was, and when we had Hunter Hurst over there. I think SCOROR was the earliest organized body of troops on the field. SCOROR means the Secretary's Committee on Research and Reorganization. It's an acronym.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I'll take care of SCOROR, but a little later on. You may be correct. SCOROR may have come – (crosstalk)

MR. FRANK: - you're probably not familiar – what he does is, we've gotten to the 10<sup>th</sup> session, he will go on, then he'll come to it, then backtrack, so I don't think – (crosstalk)

Col. Heinl: The reason I mention it, I want to tie it to Eberstadt, because I think SCOROR came into being originally as a sort of a supporting group for Eberstadt, to do his legwork and to advise both him and Forrestal in shaping up the efforts and proposals.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, let's make it a point, then that this is the place where SCOROR, which I – I only explain SCOROR later, but perhaps it did get started at that time.

Col. Heinl: It was important to us for one reason, because it had now Brigadier General Hunter Hurst on there –

GENERAL THOMAS: - and we sent him over.

Col. Heinl: Yes, and Hunter got the earliest, I would say, inside technical education as to what this thing was about of anybody in the Chowder business. The Twining group was working on it from the outside, but Hunter was inside.

MR. FRANK: Well, the Twining group, of course, was the –

GENERAL THOMAS: - let me go on with the Twining group, which at Quantico consisted of himself, Don Weller, Brute Krulak, Sam Shaw and Don Hittle. Anybody else?

Col. Heinl: Colston Dyer was an aviation consultant, but he was a pretty reluctant dragon.

GENERAL THOMAS: No, he never got into this battle like those others –

Col. Heinl: - no, he never rolled up his sleeves and got in –

GENERAL THOMAS: - like these people I've mentioned.

Col. Heinl: They brought Dyer along because he had played a role in the original special board on the helicopter, but he had no stomach for this kind of work.

GENERAL THOMAS: This group took the name of the Little Men's Marching and Chowder Club.

Col. Heinl: Do you remember how it got the name, General? At that time there was a comic strip called "Barnaby" –

GENERAL THOMAS: - oh, yes, I know where they got the name –

Col. Heinl: And Brute Krulak of course is about five foot nothing, and one morning some wag in Quantico put up on the glass door there in Breckinridge Hall, put a piece of paper with the initials "L.M.C.A.M.S.," standing for "Little Men's Marching and Chowder Society," and defied anybody to figure out what it was, and after all people beat their heads out as to what this conundrum stood for, and it was revealed that it stood for the "Little Men's Marching and Chowder Society" and it was a joke on Brute, which he took very well, and from that day forward all Marine Corps activities in this area have been generically entitled "Chowder." It's the code name for the defense of the Corps.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, and I go on to say, and they were to grind high grade Chowder for many months to come.

As one close to the Commandant, my position was a bit anomalous, but I had as a chief laborer, Jim Murray, who was convalescing from a serious wound received while commanding a battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines at Okinawa. I set up a desk in the corner of my office where Murray turned out splendid papers, some on unification and others about the general problems of the Marine Corps. He worked there for many, many months, in an effort to get well.

MR. FRANK: You said last time that it was his idea to organize the Marine Corps Board.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, November 1946, Robert Heinl arrived at headquarters and plunged into unification matters. How about that?

Col. Heinl: Yes, sir. Every word of it's true.

GENERAL THOMAS: With the coming of V-J Day, intensive study was given to the postwar arrangement of the Armed Forces. One plan emerged from the White House and was sent to the Navy. Appropriately the recipient of all ideas was the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which now, with the retirement of Marshall, Arnold and King, consisted of Leahy, Eisenhower, Nimitz and Spaatz. As ever the governing factor in planning the future establishment was funds expected to be available. Related to this was a statement made by President Truman at the White House to a group of government officials. Forrestal was present, and later told Vandegrift that the President had said that the economy of the country could support a national budget of 25 billions of which no more than 10 billions would be available to the armed services, inferring no doubt that they should cut their coat to suit the cloth.

Col. Heinl: I have heard, and I think it's correct, that the actual primer that touched off unification consisted of an occasion right after the end of World War II in '46, when Forrestal went around in the usual way of the Secretary of the Navy up till then to secure approval for manpower levels for the Navy and Marine Corps, which in those days were approved by the President for each of the services separately.

MR. FRANK: I think that was the Navy postwar –

Col. Heinl: -right, it was the Navy postwar plan, and Truman, rather than signing off on the thing, bounced it back to the JCS and said that from now on any service ceilings or postwar plans are going to have to be JCS originated, and at this moment of course the Army manpower people who, as we've seen, have been gnawing away at this very issue from late '43 on, moved in, and the fat was in the fire.

MR. FRANK: Of course, further, as far as Truman's attitude concerning Navy and Marine Corps goes, what was his comment about "getting those damned admirals out of the White House."

Col. Heinl: That was, when he became President, he said, if I can remember it, he said, "When Roosevelt was in here the place was like a damned wardroom."

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right.

Col. Heinl: He said, "As long as I'm here the admirals will never get in again," and you'll find that incidentally in Soldiers of the Sea.

GENERAL THOMAS: About this time Eisenhower submitted a paper to the Joint Chiefs of Staff which included the Army's suggestion of the postwar Marine Corps. It happened that these embraced almost word for word the missions of the British Royal Marines. As might be assumed –

Col. Heinl: - the only thing they left out was providing bands for the Navy, otherwise it was line for line.

GENERAL THOMAS: As might be assumed, Vandegrift was affronted by Eisenhower's presentation and told Nimitz so. Nimitz replied, "All right, prepare your rebuttal and go with me to the JCS." This was done, and Vandegrift made a formal statement of the Marine Corps position, which incidentally was prepared by Twining and his group.

Col. Heinl: And it was a beauty.

GENERAL THOMAS: And it was a beaut. At the conclusion, honest, forthright Toohey Spaatz exclaimed, "He sure cut the hell out of us."

Col. Heinl: You might want to label this exchange of correspondence which starts in here. These are the so-called 1478 papers.

GENERAL THOMAS: I speak of them later.

Col Heinl: Papers of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, taking this set of numbers from the JCS filing system, questions generally of inter-service organization are filed I suppose to this day –

GENERAL THOMAS: - always, if you go back you'll get the whole raft of 1478 papers, and they've got the whole thing. It's all right in there, as I'll relate later, after Vandegrift's testimony.

MR. FRANK: Not a question, since we don't deal with JCS papers and JCS matters at this point, but is this designation as such classified in any way?

Col. Heinl: No longer. They lifted the classification.

GENERAL THOMAS: That tape was broken, by Vandegrift, as I'll reveal later.

(crosstalk) Heedless of this warning, Spaatz's comment, Eisenhower soon afterwards forwarded a memo to the Joint Chiefs of Staff which was prepared by his Army G-3.

Col. Heinl: Ed Hull.

GENERAL THOMAS: Ed Hull, Ed Hull, Lt. General Ed Hull, treating in a belittling tone Marine Corps activities. Nimitz also sent this to us and we bucked it down to Quantico, where the Twining group gave it its due, citing chapter and verse from Army sources, to prove that the G-3 memo was in error, "in fifteen important particulars."

Col. Heinl: That is the most devastating rebuttal that I have read in my entire career in the service. It's a pinnacle.

GENERAL THOMAS: They really slaughtered them. I'll talk about it after you turn it off.

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MR. FRANK: While the Twining group was working down at Quantico, had the opponents, the enemy, so to speak, any idea of where the adverse ammunition was coming from?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, I think obviously, yes, because they had liaison officers in Quantico.

Col. Heinl: Did they have any liaison officers at Quantico then, General?

GENERAL THOMAS: There's always been somebody at the Schools.

Col. Heinl: My recollection, and I didn't come to the Schools till '49, till late '49, my recollection is that the Army liaison billet was established after the war and pretty close to that time, about '48 or thereabouts.

GENERAL THOMAS: There were a few corporals there in '39 and '40. But anyway in the back of my mind I have some ideas that they knew about this outfit – that the Army knew about it. Their apparatus was too good. Their apparatus was thorough.

Col. Heinl: Damn right!

GENERAL THOMAS: They were well organized. I'm sure they knew about it. However, this exchange of memos, G-3's memo which was slaughtered by the Twining group, halted for the time being the JCS efforts to put the JCS forward and put the Marine Corps "in its place."

During 1946 there was constantly some activity on the unification front. Negotiations were carried on between individuals but no formal discussion took place between the War and Navy Departments.

Col. Heinl: Was this at the time when Radford was spearheading the Navy negotiations?

GENERAL THOMAS: I'm going to talk about it. At least that was the way it appeared on our side. Read Admiral Radford had led Navy representation, but there was lack of organization until Forrestal set up the Secretary's Committee on the Reorganization of the Armed Forces, SCOROR, with Rear Admiral Thomas Robbins at its head.

Col. Heinl: Lord Plushbottom.

GENERAL THOMAS: Lord Plushbottom, that's right.

Navy public relations was active, but relatively ineffective, as they were dealing not with public relations but with a matter of fundamental policy, and they just weren't in any position to do much good, though they tried. For instance, when Tip Merrill was here he got in trouble over this thing, you know, and got shipped to New Orleans. Tip Merrill was the famous cruiser admiral.

Col. Heinl: They were futile and superficial because they had no ideological grounding, they had no grip on the fundamental idea, the dogmatic struggle that was going on.

GENERAL THOMAS: They didn't understand the fundamental issue. Incidentally, neither did Tommy Robbins.

Col. Heinl: Well, of course not.

MR. FRANK: How about Crommelin's Op-58, was it? That comes –

Col. Heinl: Oh, no, you're talking about 23 surely, aren't you? Op-23? This is much later.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's when Arleigh Burke got into it.

Col. Heinl: This is light years beyond this stage.

MR. FRANK: I see.

GENERAL THOMAS: Early proposals for unification called for not only the three military departments: Army, Navy and Air, but for a fourth department of Supply. Chief

drumbeater for this latter department was the Army Logistics Branch, headed by Lt. General Lutes.

Col. Heinl: And this was an attempt to copy the British system again. All these guys were heavily European-oriented. They wanted to set up something like the British Minister of Supply, which has been a millstone around the British armed forces ever since it was created between the two world wars.

GENERAL THOMAS: The Lutes group produced what was called Lutes I, which was so drastic that it really defeated itself, and this led them to produce what was referred to, a plan referred to as Lutes II. But even this after some consideration passed into limbo. Lutes almost had an ace – the guy's dead now – in the Navy Department. The man was a graduate of the Naval Academy but he was a Rear Admiral in the Supply Department. Apparently Lutes had gotten his sympathy, and his name was Morton Ring. Mort Ring was a patsy for Lutes. Lutes was a very important figure over in the Pentagon, but he brought his plan – the Department of Supply – and as a matter of fact, we almost have a Department of Supply today.

Col. Heinl: We do indeed.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh yes, sure.

Col. Heinl: This really is the so-called Force Service of Supply that Lutes and Marshall were talking about. We might footnote here that for anybody who wants to go into this question of the so-called Force Service of Supply, which is the big catch phrase for it, an almost forgotten book, Donald Nelson's book, Arsenal of Democracy, has got a remarkable treatment with chapter and verse in it of the difficulties of World War II logistics and particularly the way the Army General Staff manipulated these things in the most cynical way. For example, they imagined an ammunition shortage, among other things. And Nelson's got it all nailed down, so if you ever want to see it, Donald Nelson's Arsenal of Democracy, is a good place to dig into. And we made good use of it, if you remember, General.

GENERAL THOMAS: Early in 1946 the Naval Committee of the Senate decided to start hearings on a bill which largely resembled the Collins Plan. A number of witnesses were heard, and then the Commandant of the Marine Corps was called. The Chowder Club had prepared for General Vandegrift a masterful statement in which he expressed the deepest apprehension for the life of the Corps. This has since been known as the "Bended Knee Speech."

Col. Heinl: Oh, boy.

GENERAL THOMAS: The Committee was friendly and obviously impressed. They questioned Vandegrift closely, seeking the source of his concern. Actually it was to be found in the Joint Chiefs of Staff series 1478, but even the titles of those papers were classified top secret.

A question planted with the Committee, and I'm sure it was by the Judge Advocate General of the Navy, called on Vandegrift to break the classification. In doing so he revealed that his sever fears were more than supported by the contents of JCS series 1478.

Col. Heinl: Wasn't Kalbfus, the plant?

GENERAL THOMAS: Kalbfus.

Col. Heinl: He was a good man.

MR. FRANK: How did this happen?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, he went to a member of the Committee and told him to ask Vandegrift about these papers, and – in other words, the question was planted in such a way that Vandegrift practically had to reveal. And of course he wanted to do it anyway, but they got him in a bind and he had an out, and so he said, “Yes, the title of the papers is 1478 series.” I was sitting there listening to him, right behind him.

Col. Heinl: He was rather like Byron’s lady who after protesting she would ne’er consent, consented.

GENERAL THOMAS: This testimony of Vandegrift’s approximated a coup for the hearings on the proposed bill, and the hearings were adjourned and remained so for several months.

After a time President Truman directed War and Navy to appoint representatives to sit down and iron out the differences between the departments on the score of unification. At this time Eisenhower told Nimitz that they had been unable to make any progress with Radford. This was not surprising since Radford is a man of strong convictions which he is always willing to defend.

Col. Heinl: Do you remember, General, that this took place actually at a private dinner party that Judge Patterson gave, at which he had Forrestal, he had Nimitz and Eisenhower and a couple of others in there for him, in the fall of ’46, it was.

GENERAL THOMAS: However, Sherman was substituted for Radford.

Col. Heinl: Unless I am mistaken, somebody on the Army side, it might have been Eisenhower, nominated Sherman. I think after they had thumbed-down Radford, someone on the Army team said, “You know, I think we could work very well with Admiral Sherman.”

GENERAL THOMAS: It didn’t surprise me a bit, because the Army had worked well with Sherman before, and don’t forget the Hollandia Agreement and everything else that happened in the Pacific.

Col Heinl: Right.

MR. FRANK: You’ve not mentioned this in your book, a new element –

GENERAL THOMAS: - well, that’s all right, that’s the Supply Agreement between Nimitz and MacArthur, and the representatives of the two outfits met at Hollandia. I’m not a party to that and I have no first-hand information, but I do believe I know a good deal about it. At that conference where Nimitz was represented by Ed Levy, his logistics man, who was an Army Major General, he lost his shirt to MacArthur. However, that’s an aside, a historical aside.

To back Sherman, the Army was represented by Lt. General Lauris Norstadt of the Army Air Corps.

Col. Heinl: How old was Norstadt then?

GENERAL THOMAS: He’s the class of ’39 at West Point.

Col. Heinl: No, sir, ’30, I think. He’s a contemporary of Don Weller – (crosstalk)

GENERAL THOMAS: - ’30, ’30 at West Point –

Col. Heinl: - which is pretty young.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, he’d been out of West Point – he was about 39. That’s what I was thinking of, he was 39 years old.

Col. Heinl: I believe he was even younger than that, General, but he was real young.

GENERAL THOMAS: He was a very young man. After many meetings, Sherman and Norstadt agreed upon a version, and I’m willing to testify to this, too. There was a

weakness in the way this thing was done, and it's a weakness of Navy officers in their planning and their conduct of business. Sherman would never let anyone aid him in preparing for these meetings. Now, Sherman was no dunce. He was a very, very smart man. However, they'd have a meeting, and they met about three or four days a week in the morning. Sherman would go back and work half the night for their next meeting. Norstadt would go back to the Pentagon, throw the problem to a committee of general staff officers, and go play a game of golf, and he came in fresh the next morning, and he won on every point.

In January – oh, after many meetings Sherman and Norstadt agreed upon a version. Unfortunately Nimitz, probably influenced by Sherman, went along with this version. In January, 1947, Truman sent a proposed bill to the Hill.

Col. Heinl: May I again interrupt? If you remember, these people got together on all but three points. Sherman and Norstadt started in isolating the issues, and they arrived at I suppose eight, ten or maybe a dozen outstanding issues, and they got this log jam broken down to the three points on which the departments could not agree. One was the status of the Marine Corps. One was the status of naval aviation. What the third was, I don't recall, but they in turn submitted these to their Secretaries. The Secretaries jointly took them into the President and said, "We can shake hands on unification if these three points can be resolved."

Whereupon Truman sent down a letter in January, I think the 30<sup>th</sup> of January, if I remember, General – along in the latter part of the month –

GENERAL THOMAS: - January, 1947 –

Col. Heinl: Yes, sir, that's when it was – sent down some kind of a letter in which he gave some guidelines which were supposed to smooth over these points and which could give enough room for legislative draft when they got going. And the guidelines, as you can imagine, were not ones that we would ever have acceded to.

GENERAL THOMAS: With this action of Truman's word went out from the White House that it would brook no opposition within the services to the new proposals. Thus the situation again became dangerous for the Marine Corps. By this time there had been reorganization of the committee structure of the two houses of Congress. Both had now consolidated, that is the Senate and the House, their Army and Navy Committees into Armed Services Committees. Unification had been heard before the Naval Committee of the Senate before this. Now, instead of a Naval and an Army Committee, we have Armed Services Committees.

GENERAL THOMAS: OK?

Col. Heinl: General, I'm sorry to keep interrupting you, but there's one other thing. When the President sent down these guidelines, when we got into the drafting phase you might say, the formal legislative phase of the unification process, General Vandegrift formalized our organization. If you remember, General, it was right after Christmas in '46 –

GENERAL THOMAS: - '47 –

Col. Heinl: - no, right after Christmas in '46, with '47 coming down on us, or perhaps right after New Year's, I'm not sure, that General Vandegrift actually convened on paper the Edson Board.

GENERAL THOMAS: I'm going to get to that in about a minute.

Col. Heinl: OK.



MR. FRANK: Can I put this whole thing in perspective once again? We talked in earlier sessions about what happened later on. As I see it, and I may be wrong, this whole problem was brought about by two factors – first of all, the question of unification, merger of the services, and secondly a cut of the postwar budget, which service was going to be supreme. Now, is it more elementary and basic than that?

Col. Heinl: I think that's kind of an oversimplification.

GENERAL THOMAS: They were equally involved. There was so much money, and also there was the need for changes, or at least they thought so, to be made in the Armed Services of the United States. We didn't see any need for them. We said, "Here's an organization that's fought the greatest war in the history of the world, and they won it, and now you want to change it."

Col. Heinl: Even more to this point, if you go back into history of the War Department, that is to say the Army General Staff, you find that for its first quarter of a century or more, for 35 years of existence, it was fighting a long campaign to get control of the Army. You find a whole series of –

GENERAL THOMAS: - elimination of the branches and corps.

Col. Heinl: Yes, Sir, that's right, you find first they went to the Adjutant General and knocked him out. They then proceeded to attack the branches and corps. And finally, in 1942, after World War II actually broke out, the General Staff for the first time secured absolute hegemony over the command structure of the Army, by a General Staff sponsored reorganization, which as General Thomas said knocked out the chiefs of branch. And at that point they announced, and you can find it in the Army and Navy Journal if you go back in the files, in a War Department press release they announced this great new reorganization of the Army and included the statement which said this is patterned on the successful experience of the Germans to date and we're incorporating all the lessons which we've learned from the Germans in this war and in World War I. Then, within about a year or certainly 18 months of the time when the War Department General Staff had secured hegemony over the War Department, General Marshall prepared and tabled his first memorandum, in November '43, calling for unification of all the services, merger of the services under a supreme Armed Forces General Staff that should work with nothing more than a glorified version of a kind of a – a kind of a transfiguration, an elevation, of the War Department General Staff organization over everybody.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, this happened to the Navy but it was ten year later.

MR. FRANK: One other question. Before that time, had the separate corps been so independent and autonomous and almost at each other's throats that there was some chaos?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no. That's just a General Staff argument. That's a bunch of (crosstalk). They operated real well.

Col. Heinl: They did. With great harmony. Very good.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes, and they built up their own corps and were responsible for its morale and what not, and then their morale went to pieces afterwards.

Col. Heinl: There was a fine spirit in the branches of the Army.

GENERAL THOMAS: Completely unjustified, the whole thing.

MR. FRANK: No jealousy, no - ?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no, they worked very hard.

Col. Heinl: There was healthy rivalry.

GENERAL THOMAS: This new Senate Armed Services Committee resumed the hearings which had been halted by the Naval Committee, but they substituted the new bill for the old bill, the Truman proposal for the unification of the armed services, with Truman's guidelines.

Col. Heinl: S-700 and something, I forget what it was.

GENERAL THOMAS: Fortunately Vandegrift had gotten in his blows when efforts to stifle opposition with the executive branch were most effective. He had gotten in his blows before, because now they had him tied. Nevertheless, there was much that a subordinate echelon could do, so Vandegrift convened a board to study the new proposals and cooperate with Congress to protect Marine Corps interests. It happened that Brigadier General Merritt A. Edson, as a result of major surgery, had been relieved of his duty as OP-09M, and was thus available to head the new board.

Col. Heinl: General, in those days the title was still OP-03M, and in those days the Marine was still under 03 rather than being up on the 90 level where he reported directly to CNO. (crosstalk) Why don't you include him, and I'll say I don't care if it's repeated or not.

MR. FRANK: Who is that?

Col. Heinl: Jonas Platt.

MR. FRANK: Did he have a father who was - ?

GENERAL THOMAS: Uncle. Don't say anything you want to take back.

Col. Heinl: No Sir.

GENERAL THOMAS: The planning group was to continue to function in Quantico while Edson, Schatzel, Heinl, Hurst and Platt made up the Washington Board.

Col. Heinl: Where was Jim Murray at this stage of the game?

GENERAL THOMAS: I don't think Murray ever actually joined in. Murray stayed back with me.

Col. Heinl: Murray, to be exact, was in the southwest corner of your office.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right, and I kept him there or around working like that, and I think the first move that Murray made was to go to Quantico after that.

Col. Heinl: Jim was a brevet member of the Edson Board.

GENERAL THOMAS: He was a brilliant member of the cast, there wasn't any doubt about that.

Col. Heinl: Now, I will footnote this with regard to Platt. The function of Platt, then a major, was as the secretary and recorder of the organization, and he undertook no operations. He was strictly an inside man, and I think this is developed later on in his career. To the best of my observation he's the only member of the Edson Board who ever winced when he was reminded of it.

GENERAL THOMAS: OK. Edson enhanced his value by bringing with him a full copy of JCS series 1478, which the Marine Corps, not being a member of that body, had never previously held.

Col. Heinl: He got it right out of CNO.

MR. FRANK: Oh, he stole it out of CNO?

Col. Heinl: Yeah, right -

MR. FRANK: Now since the Commandant was not privy to JCS matters -

Col. Heinl: Oh, we were. Go ahead.

MR. FRANK: Although we had a representative there, as you tell me, who was, who did you tell me?

GENERAL THOMAS: Nimmer.

MR. FRANK: Dave Nimmer.

GENERAL THOMAS: We got our information regularly through Edson in his position over in OP-03M.

MR. FRANK: In other words, he saw that series and kept –

GENERAL THOMAS: - Oh yes, we knew what was in them, and a lot of them were referred to us for comment by the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Nimitz, oh yes. But we didn't have a copy. We weren't allowed to have a copy of those papers. But we got one when Edson came because he brought the whole volume with him. The most intensive study of these papers led to the conclusion that the salvation of the Corps lay in having its roles and missions spelled out in legislation if it should be adopted.

Col. Heinl: I might say that one reason for this was that the Army line of attack took two prongs. One was the question of manpower ceiling, of force levels, and the other and more dangerous one was a continuing insistence, which originated back in the middle of World War II, that the functions of the Armed Forces, the roles and missions as we called them, were not adequately spelled out exclusively to the respective services. And in fact what the Army's position amounted to was that there ought to be a cartelization of the functions of the Armed Forces. They were well aware that functions could be drafted in such a way as practically to exclude the Marine Corps and secondarily naval aviation. Going even further, the Army position philosophically took departure, so much of their thinking did, from what was called the Tri-elemental Theory of the German Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Germans had originated this Tri-elemental philosophy whereby everything that flew in the air belonged to the Air Force, everything that floated on the surface of the water or sea belonged to the Navy, and everything that fought on the land or was based on the land belonged to the Army. Since the land is the dominant element, even if only in terms of shore basing in this kind of geopolitical analysis, obviously the Army always becomes the dominant service. So it was in the case of the German Wehrmacht, and so the Army wanted to set it up to be in the case of our own defense organization, they wanted to have an air service, and Air Force, a sea service, not a naval service, a sea service that was the Navy, and a land service, the Army. You can find this going on for years afterwards in attempts in interservice negotiations, where the Army would keep trying to eliminate the adjective "naval" and put the word "sea" and try to eliminate truly naval or maritime functions that nevertheless have some shore-based connotations. Excuse me for that . . .

**Tape 1, side 2.**

MR. FRANK: The question I had asked, I'll ask again. We were talking about this Tri-elemental theory or concept. It seems to me that the Army Air Corps was a burr under the saddle of the Army ground forces and vice versa. The Air Corps was subordinate. If this was so, why should the ground forces, General Marshall and so on, try so hard to get a separate Air Corps?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, as the war went on, and as it got started, General Marshall gave increased standing to the Army Air Corps. As a matter of fact, he brought in as his

right bower General Arnold, Hap Arnold, who was chief of the Army Air Corps, and he either by his conduct if not by his intent, he made Arnold a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. (crosstalk)

Col. Heinl: Arnold was a military subordinate of Marshall's. Marshall was his boss, and yet he put him on the JCS.

GENERAL THOMAS: He was the same level, on the same level. Now, King could have said, "Well, let me bring in the chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics," but King was not about to share his authority with anybody. At that he was a naval aviator.

Col. Heinl: And he turned down Holcomb on that very point.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, after Holcomb was relieved as Commandant of the Marine Corps, it was understood, and I'm sure it's correct, that President Roosevelt wanted to make Holcomb a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Col. Heinl: I can testify to that first hand. General Holcomb has told me –

GENERAL THOMAS: - I can too.

Col. Heinl: OK, we know, it is a fact.

GENERAL THOMAS: He was going to be a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and King voted it down, talked Roosevelt out of it, and then Roosevelt, as a reward to Holcomb, made him the American Minister to South Africa.

MR. FRANK: Now, one other point on this matter. If Marshall was as acute, as astute a man as I feel that he was –

GENERAL THOMAS: - oh, he was –

MR. FRANK: - and realizing what game the Army Air Corps, at that time, was up to in a sense – that they weren't satisfied with this, they were going to go on to more grandiose concepts as far as their role and concept of warfare and American defense was concerned – that in effect, as we see now, the Air Force has attempted to subordinate Army strategy and naval strategy.

Col. Heinl: Let me talk to that for a minute, Ben. In order to put unification over, it was essential that there be teamwork between both the Army Air Corps and the basic Army, and it had to be put together in such a way that there were benefits for each of them, that there was something for both parties as there has to be in any kind of an alliance. The thing that the Army aviators wanted above all was autonomy, to get out from under the ground Army and out from under the Army Chief of Staff. They figured that if they were ever turned loose, they could dominate the armed services eventually. They had a typically optimistic view of their capabilities, and they at one time had by long odds the greatest and certainly the flashiest public relations and legislative machine in the services.

GENERAL THOMAS: They had more money than anybody else.

Col. Heinl: Yes. They felt if they could ever get loose, that was really what they needed, and from then on they could write their own script. And of course this feature was provided for in the unification structure. Now, what did the Army want? The Army wanted something which was of far greater importance and showed their greater grip of what was going on. The Army wanted a supreme general staff, and they felt that they could effectively turn the Air Force loose at a lower level and recapture it at the top.

GENERAL THOMAS: Positively that was their plan – we'll let them go down here, we'll set up this great general staff, with an Army officer as its chief, and we will recapture them at the top. Now, after all, General Marshall was working on the Tri-elemental theory, but over all the Tris you can write down, he had this big general staff,

and the General Staff of the Army had practically 90 percent of the supreme General Staff officers in the United States services. The Navy had practically none. They didn't have people trained in staff work, and to a certain extent they still don't have. But the Army had 'em all. They had 'em all over the place. That's the reason they were able to carry on all this skullduggery while the war was going on. They had plenty of officers to work on these things. But they were going to release the Air Force at a lower level, the Air Corps, and then recapture it at the top.

Col. Heinl: Oh, you can say in effect that there was a thieves' bargain between the Army and the Air Force on unification, whereby, although their ultimate objectives were in head-on conflict, for the time being they agreed to suspend any short-term rivalries and plunge all their energies into getting this thing over, because to the mind of each one, the immediate result would facilitate its own long-term success over the other.

MR. FRANK: I think this clarifies it. Very good.

GENERAL THOMAS: We were talking about the hearings before the newly formed Armed Services Committee of the Senate. By good fortune there was a member of that committee, Senator Robertson of Wyoming, who actively espoused the interests of the Marine Corps. One feature did not escape Edson's Board, and that was the arrangement of the items in the Sherman-Norstadt agreement and repeated in the new bill. In its drafting they revealed their analysis of the importance of each element by having as Title I in the bill the military hierarchy, of the proposed Department, while relegating to Title II its civilian components. Dutch Schatzel rewrote the bill, transposing Title I and Title II, and adding a section in which he spelled out the roles and missions of the Marine Corps.

Col. Heinl: And he did that in the old selection board room in Headquarters Marine Corps which later became the Commandant's briefing room, next to S&C files, and Dutch had a corner – corner desk in the (crosstalk)

GENERAL THOMAS: - that's right - . . . typewriter, he rewrote that bill and wrote that out.

Col. Heinl: He wrote that bill on buff paper.

GENERAL THOMAS: Senator Robertson successfully offered this draft as a substitute for the White House bill. As hearings proceeded, we felt it was touch and go as there was substantial opposition to the inclusion of roles and missions, our roles and missions. Some recognition of the fight we were putting up came from the White House, and a proposal was made that service roles and missions be specified in an executive order. This was of course unacceptable to us as the life of an executive order is very uncertain. The fact that Vandegrift was restricted from testifying again was a genuine handicap, as no Marine was appearing as witness in these new hearings.

Col. Heinl: Let me ask one thing, General. Are we still talking about the Senate hearings? You remember, the way this thing was phased, we had Senate hearings under old Chan Gurney, and we pretty much lost the Senate battle. We were steamrolled over. General Vandegrift I think was given only a very limited muffled opportunity to talk.

GENERAL THOMAS: He didn't talk at all.

Col. Heinl: Maybe he didn't talk at all.

GENERAL THOMAS: He never appeared before that committee. (crosstalk) – as I'll relate. But he did not appear before that committee.

- Senate committee, that's right.

MR. FRANK: How can he be muffled if a Senate committee calls up a service chief and asks him to testify?

GENERAL THOMAS: Ah, but Chan Gurney was an Army man.

Col. Heinl: Chan Gurney and the Senate Committee weren't all that eager to hear from the Commandant.

GENERAL THOMAS: They didn't want to hear from him. No, sir, they did not call him. And besides that he would have been under terrible pressure from the White House to change his testimony, which he wouldn't have done. He was a stalwart fellow.

Col. Heinl: Edson did testify.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, I'm going to get to that. I've got it right here. The fact that Vandegrift was restricted from testifying again was a genuine handicap as no Marine was appearing as a witness in the new hearings. At this juncture Edson decided upon a course which he had already been considering. He applied for retirement. . .

Col. Heinl: (interrupting) – huh, General excuse me, I think what happened was that Edson testified before the Senate prior to his application for retirement, and he applied for retirement before he went into the House, because if you remember, or at least as I remember it, the sequence of events was, the Senate hearing with Edson as a witness, when Truman's gag order came out in the form of that AlNav, do you remember? (crosstalk)

GENERAL THOMAS: You may be right – I don't remember, but I –

Col. Heinl: I'd take my oath on this sequence of timing on the thing. Edson, after the gag order, proceeded to apply for retirement, and go on out and talk to the House. I remember he had a big argument with –

GENERAL THOMAS: - Well, I sat with Edson, I remember very definitely, he testified before the Gurney Committee.

Col. Heinl: Yes, I remember he testified.

GENERAL THOMAS: OK, let's let it ride that way, then.

Col. Heinl: Yes Sir!

GENERAL THOMAS: Vandegrift sought to help further by extracting from Senator Byrd of Virginia a promise that the bill would not be reported out of the Armed Forces Committee of the Senate unless it contained the roles and missions of the Marine Corps, a promise which, for some reason, the Senator did not fulfill because the bill came out without our roles and missions in it. The bill was reported out of the Committee minus our roles and missions, and was so passed by the Senate. As it passed over to the House, the bill's adherents viewed its logical destination with much misgiving. The recently organized Armed Services Committee of the House contained some strong friends of the Corps, and they were led by the redoubtable Carl Vinson of Georgia. By a quick switch, the new bill – the Army did this – was sent to the Government Operations Committee, of which James J. Wadsworth of New York, and ardent supporter of unification, was a very influential member.

Col. Heinl: General, one footnote – at that time its title was the Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Department. It's the same committee now relabeled Government Operations Committee two or three years afterwards.

GENERAL THOMAS: General Vandegrift appeared before the House Committee, and during his testimony Wadsworth tried every device to tie him up. He asked for instance

if the roles and missions of the Army infantry and cavalry should be written into the bill. Vandegrift replied that if the Committee so decided he'd certainly interpose no objection. The Committee adjourned, but our people continued to work. The Chairman of the House Committee (Government Operations, I have) was Clare Hoffman of Michigan, a long-time friend and political associate of Don Hittle's father. Hittle made an appointment with Hoffman, and he and Dutch Schatzel spent several hours with the chairman, by the end of which time they had convinced him of the Marine Corps' need to have the roles and missions written in.

Col Heinl: This was the night they took out a great big sack of peanuts in their shells. There used to be a peanut place, down off by the Treasury. It was down thee, and you could get these things, as big as a sandbag full of fresh roasted peanuts in their shells, and for some reason or other, maybe Don knew that Clare Hoffman liked peanuts, but they took along a huge sack of – a five-pound sack of these peanuts, sat down in his office there, and between 7 o'clock and midnight they sat there cracking peanuts and arguing about unification, or so Dutch told me and I'm sure accurately.

GENERAL THOMAS: Hoffman then wrote our roles and missions into the committee bill, and it so passed the House.

Col. Heinl: Don't you remember, General, it seems to me I do, that Hoffman introduced a separate alternate bill of his own, besides the committee bill, and Hoffman's bill had everything in the world we wanted, and he used this as a lever to apply against the committee.

GENERAL THOMAS: May I remind you that at this juncture I left town for China. I wasn't here. I'm testifying now from the record, because I attended the hearings. It was a very hot day, late May or early June, I can't remember which. I went with General Vandegrift and he testified, and old Wadsworth tried to give him a bad time.

Col. Heinl: Was that the time one of our friends said, "You mean they're trying to give us the bum's rush, General?"

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh yes. Oh, he had supporters on the committee. Wadsworth, who was a very able fellow, was all primed, and he did his best, but it didn't do him any good.

Col. Heinl: He had been on the old Senate Military Affairs Committee when he was a Senator. He was always addressed by courtesy as 'Senator' because he'd spent many years in the Senate and had always been part of this Plattsburg group. He was in the pocket of the Stimson-Root-Bundy crowd, and he represented this New York crowd of which Patterson was the surrogate at the time.

GENERAL THOMAS: Of course, then, these two different interpretations of the bill went to conference, and the White House brought great pressure to bear on the Senate-House conferees to have the roles and missions of the Marine Corps struck out, but Hoffman was adamant and held his ground. Almost more damaging than administration actions was a rumor that was spread that Vandegrift was not overly committed to the inclusion of roles and missions. On this we nearly came a cropper due to weakness in our own Headquarters. Vandegrift was his own very able legislative liaison, though there was an office with that title. We never achieved real coordination between that office and the Edson Board, largely due to the absolute necessity for secrecy. We couldn't trust the legislative office to keep their mouths shut.

Col. Heinl: General, this won't appear in your manuscript, but do you mind if I particularize a little bit about this particular officer here on our tape?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, he's probably dead so –

Col. Heinl: What the General is talking about in more polite language is the conflict between the Edson Board and the Chowder Society, and Colonel Knighton, Buddy Knighton, who had been for many years a legislative errand boy for successive Commandants in the old A&I Department and later the Personnel Department, and he was of course perfectly adequate for the purpose of getting personnel legislation fixed up, but he had no inclination and no grip dogmatically of what was going on.

GENERAL THOMAS: He had no convictions.

Col. Heinl: No convictions, none whatever. He just wanted to get along and be able to get certain pieces of personnel legislation through Congress. Knighton also, I think, was more than offended by seeing a bunch of Young Turks, young lieutenant colonels – I doubt many of us had had more than eight or ten years in the Corps at the time – we'd had about ten years when this was going on – swarming all over Capitol Hill going in and dealing in pretty realistic terms with the friends of the Marine Corps out there, bypassing him completely, and he gave General Vandegrift quite a bad –

GENERAL THOMAS: - I kept him in line, though, I kept a noose on him. And I had quite a job, because he was a very close friend of Vandegrift's.

Col. Heinl: Well, the one time you didn't pull that noose tight enough –

GENERAL THOMAS: - but I got out, I left for China.

Col. Heinl: Now, just to give you an illustration, at the very crunch, the final crunch of passage of the unification act by the House or acceptance by the House I think of conference action, I'm not sure which it was, but it was right at the very last, the Edson Board had been formally dissolved by the Commandant after General Thomas left and General Edson had retired and there was increasing pressure against all of our activities, there was some certain language that it was quite important for us to get in the bill. I forget at this juncture what it was, but it would have strengthened it considerably, and Dutch Schatzel and I spent two days on this thing, going all over Capitol Hill, all over the House of Representatives lining up people, and we discovered at the height of this that Knighton was keeping track of where we were going and would come in and say, "I hope you didn't pay any attention to Schatzel and Heinl coming in here, because what General Vandegrift really wants has no relation to what these guys are talking about."

MR. FRANK: When did you find out about that?

Col. Heinl: We discovered it too late to do anything about it, and at the time I doubt that we could have done anything about it because at this juncture we were really headless horsemen. General Thomas was gone. General Edson was retired. And if this fight had gone on for another month, we might very well have had to drop back into the status of guerrillas. We were the last vestiges of organized resistance on the part of the Marine Corps.

MR. FRANK: Did anything happen to Knighton after it was found out?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, no, no.

Col. Heinl: And Don and I took it – they got away –

GENERAL THOMAS: However, as a result of this whole thing, the Commandant wrote a letter to the chairman of the Senate Armed Forces Committee stating that he believed that the inclusion of roles and missions was vital to the protection of the Marine Corps,



which corrected this effort. Well, he sent that letter to the chairman by Knighton, and General Vandegrift will tell you today that Knighton was the one that got the roles and missions included in that bill. And that's not correct.

Col. Heinl: It's just laughable. When you talk about sending letters out and General Vandegrift taking a stand, have you mentioned later, General, or at any point, don't you think we ought to put on the record, his attempt to get our own general officers into this fight? You remember the rather craven way in which some of them dealt with it.

GENERAL THOMAS: = I'll touch on that, OK. As a matter of fact, I made that comment – well, I'll get on that, I'll make a – all right. No, I don't think I want to make a record of that. No. I'll talk about it off the cuff when he turns the machine off. There's no point in going into that.

No, no – let me finish this.

I think I've indicated, General Vandegrift wrote a letter saying that this was vital to the Marine Corps. This carried the day, and the bill passed both Houses, with the Marine Corps' roles and missions set forth in detail. President Truman signed the bill and thus opened a Pandora's box from which, 20 years later, the Secretary of Defense is extracting many weird objects.

Col. Heinl: Now, about this signature on the bill, there's something that happened which is both a coincidence and not a coincidence, which was another Pandora's box that got opened up and is still not closed, and that is, if you remember, General, President Truman's mother died the date the unification legislation came out of conference and was brought up to the White House to be signed. Naturally this was a distressing time for the President and he couldn't have his entire mind on what was going on, and that same day there was presented to the President an executive order. Now, General Thomas has pointed out that the original solution to the question of roles and missions for the services was to be very broad, general, permissive legislation about it, in the law, with an executive order which no doubt could be changed from time to time laying down the specifics of what the services were to do. This was set up this way so that the General Staff people could manipulate roles and missions without ever having to come out in the open or take it to Congress. And in preparation for this, when it looked as if this was how the law was going to be, he had given quite a bit of effort to fixing up an executive order which was supposed to be the implementing order backing up the unification act. On the day President Truman signed this bill, someone, I guess on the White House staff and I suppose it must have been a War Department representative who fed it in, I don't know how it was fed in, but someone presented to Truman not a draft. It was an executive order for signature which was the implementing executive order. Now, this thing having been prepared by the opponents of the Marine Corps and the Navy differed in a number of important particulars from what the law spelled out. And Truman signed this thing off, as he climbed into the airplane going out to Independence to his mother's funeral, without thinking about it, I'm sure. And thus you have in existence, from the minute the unification law came in, you have in existence a kind of a rump unification executive document which was in major conflict with the law. And in the years that followed, for several years afterwards, until this thing was gradually washed out – it never really has been washed out – whenever the Army wanted to put something over on us, they would always say, "In accordance with executive order no. so and so." And we would have to fall back on the law. But this executive order was brandished throughout

the Truman Administration as a kind of a de facto and illegal statement of service roles and missions, and it caused us a lot of trouble. What I mean when I say it hasn't been washed out yet is that in turn when we get around eventually to the Key West meeting and the Key West agreement which became the –

GENERAL THOMAS: - I'll touch on that –

Col. Heinl: - the functions paper, most of the language affecting the service roles and missions from the executive order was set into the functions paper. So to this day, and I know, I worked on the functions paper year in and year out in my later years in Headquarters Marine Corps, when I was in the Plans Branch, to this day the functions paper is a kind of competitor, a divergent competitor sometimes, with the law. That's right, the functions paper is always undercutting the law or frequently undercutting the law in these areas that are of great importance to the Navy and the Marine Corps, and it's always put forward by our opponents as something which is supposed to have the force of law or even overriding the law.

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes. No standing. I doesn't have a bit of standing. It has no standing whatsoever. I touch on the Key West Agreement, because later in my presentation I summarize the things that happened while I was gone, while I was at Tsingtao. I was in touch with them and I heard about them. Twining told me about them. He was in Pearl Harbor those days and so on.

MR. FRANK: Will this be the next session, or later?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I still have an hour. Do you have an hour?

MR. FRANK: Well, why no continue? (crosstalk)

Col. Heinl: I was reminding General Thomas that he once said, I think often has said, the problems of the Marine Corps are like an object which is very small and very heavy, and that because of that, very few people can ever get a handhold on them to budget them.

MR. FRANK: You mentioned, Colonel Heinl, that we ought to get in the genesis of 416, which I believe made the Commandant a member of the JCS, is that correct?

Col. Heinl: Well, there were two principal effects of 416. One was to provide a floor in strength below which the Marine Corps couldn't be reduced, and also to provide access to the JCS level. By way of introduction, I think you have to remember that after the passage of the Unification Act, the direct access of the Commandant of the Marine Corps to the Secretary of the Navy, which in itself was seriously challenged at about or soon after this time when Sherman became Chief of Naval Operations, was no longer always needed to protect ourselves. Increasingly the important decisions which affected the Armed Forces and therefore affected the Marine Corps were being taken at a unified level about the departmental level, above the Navy Department level, and while the Commandant might still be able to get in to see the Secretary, this wasn't enough to help him. He found himself, and the Marine Corps found itself, being increasingly excluded from decisions that vitally affected the Marine Corps, that were being taken in the Office of the Secretary of Defense to some extent, and in those days primarily in the JCS.

General Thomas has told about Tydings' amendment, how the unification process was speeded up to further concentrate authority at these unified levels and drain it off from the services and from the departments, a process that has gone on to this day.

GENERAL THOMAS: - Office of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs –

Col. Heinl: - who was the prototype. The Chairman was the original preproduction model of the Armed Forces single Chief of Staff or Supreme Commander, which is what he has become de facto now

In any case, the fortunes of the Marine Corps waned very badly. As we've seen, our forces were disbanded. The Edson Board had been, of course, abolished while the unification fight was still on. People were sent away in the normal course of detail, and no serious attempt was made to keep the Marine Corps organization going. The only fighting force – did you mention General Selden's -?

GENERAL THOMAS: - oh, yes – public relations.

Col. Heinl: Good. Fine. Splendid. The only fighting force we had was really a kind of people's militia that was raised in a hurry in 1949, to fight the Tydings Act, under the very courageous support of General Selden, who didn't have too great a grasp of the ideological intricacies of the thing but who knew very well that the Marine Corps was in danger.

GENERAL THOMAS: He got the spirit.

Col. Heinl: Yes, he got the spirit and was willing to be advised by the few people who were around to advise him. Nevertheless, after this you had the dark age of the Navy. You had Secretary Sullivan's resignation over the unification issue. You had Denfeld's relief as Chief of Naval Operations, his super cession by Sherman. You had Secretary Matthews, probably the worst Secretary the Navy has ever had, with Sherman one of the most dangerous Chiefs of Naval Operations the Marine Corps has ever served with. I think General Thomas once said that Sherman was a five-foot nine Ernie King, and I think this is a pretty good description of him. In any case the Marine Corps suffered a series of drastic cuts in force levels which were concurred in if not initiated in the White House. We were really hemmed in and everybody could see it inside the Corps and General Cates was putting up this magnificent series of rear guard actions, for which he's never gotten adequate credit in my opinion.

MR. FRANK: We talked to General Shepherd. General Shepherd felt that General Cates was probably the greatest Commandant.

GENERAL THOMAS: I did. I said this.

MR. FRANK: You said that also?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, I've gone all through this. Oh, yes.

Col. Heinl: But in any case, in the dark days of 1949, and you just can't know how dark they were for the Marine Corps, we had some proposals put in from what we always used to call the New York crowd in the Reserve. The New York crowd were mainly, I have to say, 3<sup>rd</sup> Division and to some extent 4<sup>th</sup> Division people from World War II, all Reservists, who hung together. Their meeting place was the 21 Club, and one of the leading lights in it was Bob Kriendler who runs 21 and who was in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division with me. They had, let's see, who were some of the others of that New York crowd?

MR. FRANK: They had Charlie McVarrish and Ray Henri –

Col. Heinl: - those were all in the PIO side of it.

MR. FRANK: Gaston, the major who owned the hotel.

GENERAL THOMAS: George Hunt.

Col. Heinl: Yes, George was part of the New York crowd.

GENERAL THOMAS: Mel Krulewitch.

Col. Heinl: Yes, Mel Krulewitch was in it, Malcolm Byer, and they were looked on in many ways as a slightly disreputable wing of the Marine Corps Reserves by many people. They were full of spirit but they were thought to be wild Indians who were a little bit flashy in their methods of operation, but there was nothing wrong with their spirit. And they had considerable political leverage in New York politics, one way or another. They were acutely aware in a general way that the Marine Corps was in trouble, and they sent repeated feelers down to Washington to see how they could help out, and they were often brushed off. For example, I remember General O.P. Smith never wanted to come near them with a ten-foot pole.

GENERAL THOMAS: Wheels within wheels.

Col. Heinl: Yes, and O.P. Smith, who finished strong – but later, far later – O.P. Smith never would let us do any business with this crowd. The Chowder Society at this period was Colonel Dutch Schatzel, then Lt. Colonel Dutch Schatzel, and myself.

GENERAL THOMAS: DeWolfe Schatzel, for the record.

Col. Heinl: Yes. And we were about the only two members of the Chowder Society left in Washington at that time, and shortly afterward we faded down to Quantico on the staff of the Schools and we had to cover both positions for a while, both Quantico and Washington, after the General had gone to China.

Finally we got a feeler from the New York crowd that General O.P. Smith never heard about. Nobody heard about. They said, “We can see you’re in trouble. Is there anything that we can do? What does the Marine Corps really want as an objective? What are the basic things that are needed to save the Marine Corps?”

MR. FRANK: What was O.P. Smith’s position at this time?

GENERAL THOMAS: Assistant Commandant.

Col. Heinl: Yes. And we had been, as it happened both Dutch and I had been thinking for some time as to what an ideal piece of legislation would be that would protect the Marine Corps. We felt, after a lot of thrashing around on the thing, that there were two elements that had to be built into this picture. One of them was access to the level of decision – that is to say, the Joint Chiefs of Staff – and the other one was some means of presenting the size of the Corps and its appropriations therefore from being cut out from under us, without recourse to Congress. These were in the days when Louis Johnson was cutting us to pieces.

GENERAL THOMAS: He was whittling on the operating forces of the Marine Corps by cutting the Fleet Marine Force. (crosstalk) He had us down to five BLTs, sure.

Col. Heinl: He did indeed, and it was apparent that unless you could get the strength of the Marine Corps under Congressional control, that we were going to continue to be in trouble. We had originally thought of something – this was Dutch’s idea – Dutch figured that perhaps you could have a provision in law to the effect that 6 percent of the manpower money of the Armed Forces would always be appropriated for Marine Corps manpower, an automatic proviso in the Unification Act.

MR. FRANK: Why 6 percent?

Col. Heinl: Well, for one reason, because he thought of a good catchy slogan to go with it, called “Six Percent Spells Security,” and of course this was in the days –

GENERAL THOMAS: - well, that wouldn’t be bad, overall –

Col. Heinl: - it looked like a million dollars to us at the time because 6 percent at that time I think would have bought a 100,000-man Marine Corps, which in our wildest

dreams this was about as far as we were thinking in these days when we were down fighting to keep our heads above 70,000, and going down. And so in fact we even fixed up a bill to that effect. We got Admiral Halsey to sponsor the thing. We lined up some Senators, and it had a very unhappy history. It caved in. Halsey really got in there and fought for us, but he got very fainthearted support if any from the Marine Corps, which didn't understand the thing, and it never came to anything except for this slogan – "Six Percent Spells Security." But this was the genesis of the idea of a manpower floor under the Marine Corps.

Well, let me get back to this New York crowd. The new Yorkers – I think this was in the autumn of '49, might have been early '50, but it was the dark, dark grim period in the changeover between the years. They asked what could be done, and we sat down and decided that the Marine Corps needed two things above all else. It needed membership on the JCS or even access to the JCS. We said if the Commandant of the Marine Corps could be permitted – we used the phrase to "sit in attendance on the JCS" and be heard when Marine Corps matters were under consideration, and if a floor could be devised, and for what reason I don't remember we discarded this percentage figure, and it's a good thing we did because we came out much better as a result of it. We finally decided that if there would be an organizational structure, we started out by saying four Marine divisions and four Air wings, and anticipated of course that this would be cut and cut and cut – actually, we hoped to come out with two and two when the thing was finally over – would be legislated as the permanent combat organization of the Marine "Corps, why, we would be protected against anything that we could foresee happening. And so we sent word up to the New York people that if they wanted to get the New York delegation in Congress interested in what could be done for the Marine Corps, it would be to work on both of these objectives, and at the same time, Vinson's report on Unification and Strategy was being written, you remember, after the October Revolution

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GENERAL THOMAS: - October '49.

Col. Heinl: - yes, right at this time. This report hadn't come out. It was being written, and somehow or other, and I'm not clear on this but somehow or other we fed into Vinson's report the idea that the Commandant of the Marine Corps should be on the JCS, and Vinson liked this idea, and he introduced a bill. He's very cagy about this. He never got behind the bill and fought for it and we just thought he let it die, but he was really putting up a trial balloon and was really plowing the ground to get the Commandant into the JCS. Just the very fact that Vinson introduced this bill was a very good piece of preparation for what later came off.

So the New York people went to work and they created quite a little groundswell, quite a little ruckus, in their disorderly way that didn't look at all tidy, particularly to General Smith and like-minded people. They created quite a little groundswell in their media, which was one that included a lot of public relations people and a certain amount of political drag, for the Marine Corps for these two points.

Along in the spring of 1950, when things were looking worse and worse –  
GENERAL THOMAS: - pretty damned blue. They were real blue.

Col. Heinl: They certainly were. General Cates was well aware of what was going on, and he was getting the feel of the thing, more and more, the detail of it, and more and more began to consolidate the operations into his own hands rather than the hands of his

staff. Dutch Schatzel had been incidentally, on his staff in the 4<sup>th</sup> Division. He was close to Dutch and relied on him.

We finally suggested to General Cates that there was going to have to be a lot more of a national groundswell to obtain our legislative objectives or even to stop Louis Johnson from what he was doing to the Marine Corps, and suggested that we take off on a trip around the country to contact various public figures, people who we had some reason to believe one way or another were friendly to the Marine Corps, to see if we couldn't conduct a kind of a selling tour to educate them, to tell them what kind of trouble the Marine Corps was in, to find out how far they would go publicly or privately in supporting legislation to obtain these two objectives – in other words, to go to the country on the Marine Corps issue. This was a pretty grave question. It was really a pretty high-handed thing that we were embarking on, and it was something that General Smith very much opposed, and it went back and forth in and between various levels at Headquarters, and finally General Cates overruled General Smith on this thing, and wrote up one of these open-ended sets of travel orders for Dutch and me, and finally in May 1949 told us we could go anywhere we wanted in the country and report in when we were done with what we were doing.

MR. FRANK: May '49 or '50?

Col. Heinl: May '50, I mean. (crosstalk)

GENERAL THOMAS: I was home, I remember all this thing too. You went to see John Nicholas Brown.

Col. Heinl: Yes, sir. He was our first – we went –

GENERAL THOMAS: - you went to Providence to see the former Secretary of the Navy.

Col. Heinl: Ah, that was a heartwarming visit too. We worked around through New York. Really it turned out to be a northeastern trip. The place where we really struck gold, aside from a nice, very nice visit with John Nicholas Brown that paid off later –

MR. FRANK: - Providence Plantation –

Col. Heinl: Well, yes, his house, whatever it is. We got in to talk to Richard, what was his last name - ?

GENERAL THOMAS: The Hearst man?

Col. Heinl: That's right, sir, Hearst man.

GENERAL THOMAS: Was his name Greenbaum? Green-something? Greenfield or something like that?

Col. Heinl: No sir.

MR. FRANK: Where was he, New York?

Col. Heinl: We'll identify him as –

GENERAL THOMAS: - he was a representative of the Hearst publications.

Col. Heinl: He was a very powerful man. He was in fact the guy who ran the Hearst publications during the time when William Randolph Hearst was failing markedly and before young Bill Hearst moved in, and he had absolute control. He was the czar, the viceroy of the Hearst publications for eight or ten years, and his name was Richard L. something-or-other.

MR. FRANK: I think I know who you mean, I don't recall the name.

Col. Heinl: He can be readily identified by that description. And we got in to see him, and we made a sale. We made a sale. He questioned us closely. I suppose we were in

his office, which was up at Sixth or Seventh Avenue and 56<sup>th</sup> Street, somewhere along in there – I suppose we were in there for a couple of hours. He questioned us very acutely. You could see how he got to the top of this Hearst Empire, because he had an acute sharp mind capable of gripping complex unfamiliar issues and extracting the nub out of them very quickly.

MR. FRANK: He wasn't one of the pro-MacArthur cabal earlier?

Col. Heinl: I haven't any – no, he said about this he said, "It may seem inconsistent for us to take a position in favor of the Marines when we've been playing along with MacArthur, who is the enemy of the Marines" –

GENERAL THOMAS: - that's good, yes –

Col. Heinl: He said, "No doubt there is some inconsistency in this, but the Hearst chain is pro-American, and if there's anything more American than the United States Marine Corps, I'd like to know what it is.

So regardless of what else we're pro, we're pro-Marine Corps," and he said, "Now, as I understand it, the most important thing you fellows think the Marine Corps needs, and I agree with you from what we've said, is to get the Commandant of the Marine Corps on the Joint Chiefs of Staff."

We said, "You're right, it's really the most important thing we want."

He said, "The Hearst chain, commencing within about a month, will go all out on this thing. We know from experience that we can generate x-thousands of letters in Congress and the White House. We've done this many times before on other issues."

MR. FRANK: The Spanish-American War, for instance?

Col. Heinl: That was a little bit before his time, but they had very tried methods that they used that were well established. He said, "I'm going to turn you over to one of our best editorial writers on this type of thing, and I'll tell him to take the issues that you present and translate them into our language, and we'll go to town and take this thing and really make it move."

We were sent downtown to the New York Journal-American and put into contact with a man named Mr. E.F. Tomkins, I don't think anybody ever heard of, but he was their specialist in this type of writing, and I guess we spent two or three days up there in New York. We'd go in and have brainwashing sessions with Tomkins until he really had the feel of the thing, and we went on home, checked in our orders, and the rows were on the way. Tomkins said, "This series is going to start hitting in the middle or latter part of June."

You can see the concatenation of events which was coming in, because just at this time the In Min Gun was getting ready north of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel to invade Korea. It was also the end of the fiscal year, the last fiscal year in which the Marine Corps was to have more than five or six BLTs on Louis Johnson's force production. What happened was this. The Hearst papers did get to town, as I remember starting I think about the 15<sup>th</sup> of June, with a series of nation-wide editorials, over a period of about two weeks, real hard-hitting hammering editorials on the business of getting the Commandant on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, supporting Representative Vinson, getting him to re-introduce his forward-looking statesman-like piece of legislation that he put in after the revolt of the admirals. That's got to be brought back to life. And what happened besides stirring people up, and it stirred people up emphatically – the advent of the Korean War also stirred them up – it meant that along in about July and August – there was about that time

lag which had been predicted to us by Mr. Richard whatever-his-name was and by Tomkins, he said, "It'll be about two months before the thing really begins to crest after this" – just about that time the White House mail began to crest on the subject of getting the Commandant on the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

MR. FRANK: Truman letters?

Col. Heinl: Exactly, and it was under the needling of this groundswell of mail and opinion from the Hearst publications that Congressman McDonough picked up the ball, and Truman one night over a couple of glasses of bourbon was tried beyond his power of endurance and wrote that great letter. I just wanted to put this on record, and that really is my tale.

MR. FRANK: Who gave you the intro, the New York people?

Col. Heinl: Yes. It was probably Kriendler who did it. I forget – the New York chapter there –

MR. FRANK: The J. Walter Thompson group and Charlie McVarrish – Carl Byoir (sic) who had Defense contracts, this whole group, as I remember, were very closely, very highly placed and very influential.

Col. Heinl: They were –

MR. FRANK: - maybe this is post-Korea?

(crosstalk)

GENERAL THOMAS: - get on that, because there is a very strong post-Korea on the Douglas bill, post-Korea effort on the Douglas bill, which the New York Reserves helped out on.

Col. Heinl: The Douglas bill came in two cycles. It practically died at the end of the first cycle. The first cycle was in the Senate in '41.

GENERAL THOMAS: It was the Douglas bill, January 1941.

Col. Heinl: Yes, Sir.

GENERAL THOMAS: And Mike Mansfield in the House.

Col. Heinl: Incidentally, I talked about moments of conception. If something could have two moments of conception, if we can defy biology for a moment, I think you might want to have on record what I am convinced was the thing that triggered Paul Douglas off. We had created a climate for this, you see, going back as early as late 1949, but if you remember the autumn of 1950, ending up with the disasters of the retreat of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army and the glorious response of the Marine Corps, getting out – (crosstalk) coming down from the Reservoir, the Defense Department's legislative program for the remobilized Armed Forces came out in early January, just before Congress met. This would be January '51, and they announced that the Army was going to be built up by ten divisions, the Army which had performed rather indifferently to date, and that the Marine Corps was going to get on RCT as a reward for our performance, which was somewhat disproportionate in terms of military performance of the services involved, and this of course made us see red, those of us in the Chowder business, and I was at a cocktail party at the home of James M. Minnify, who was then the military correspondent of the New York Herald Tribune. In fact, he was sort of a Hanson Baldwin in those days.

GENERAL THOMAS: Walter Millis, wasn't he?

Col. Heinl: No, Don Minnify was a Washington man and Walter Millis was the New York man, but Don Minnify covered the Pentagon and was really their infighter on these unification things and had always been friendly to the Marine Corps, and I was at a



cocktail party at his house the day this program was announced. This would be, I guess, shortly after New Year's, and I said, "Don, isn't this a hell of a state of affairs?"

"You know," he said, "it really is. It just goes beyond acceptance. Don't you think it would be a good idea if I went out on the Hiss?" He said, "I think there might be a piece in it for us if I went out on the Hiss and just tested the Congressional sentiment toward this disproportionate Army program with practically nothing for the Marines. You got any suggestions as to people I ought to see?"

I said, "Well, whoever you see, be sure to hit Senator Paul Douglas, because I think he feels rather strongly on this thing," and I gave him a number, I gave him a list, of course, of our standard friends out there and he saw them all and got some good reactions, and he hit Paul Douglas last, and he really triggered Douglas' indignation. Douglas had not been aware, he hadn't seen this program yet, and Douglas just blew up, and Douglas ended up by saying, "This is the limit, as far as I'm concerned! I am going to introduce legislation in this session designed once and for all to protect the Marine Corps and more important, to protect the national interest which having a good Marine Corps serves."

Douglas made a public commitment which was duly printed in a dispatch in the New York Herald-Tribune, which ran on the front page, bottom of the front page down on the right, if I remember, the next morning, in which Douglas declared war and got into the fight, and the rest is history.

MR. FRANK: You know, we were talking the other day –

GENERAL THOMAS: - I'll come back to the Douglas bill later, you see, and give credit to the New York crowd, not in any particular detail but it was those Reserves that helped in the last analysis. The Douglas bill took a nap from January 1951 to, oh, April 1952.

Col. Heinl: It really didn't get going until General Shepherd became Commandant – (crosstalk)

GENERAL THOMAS: - well, I came back, I came back, and I said, "Now what has happened to the Douglas bill?" I took over as Assistant Commandant about the 20<sup>th</sup> of January, and one of the first things – and I'll relate that later on, because I'm still in Korea, but I asked, "What happened to the Douglas bill? Give me a fill in on it." Maybe I talked to you. I talked to a number.

Col. Heinl: Well, you asked a lot of people. We were out of phase at that time, General. I was in Korea when you were back, and I was back in Washington during this first phase.

GENERAL THOMAS: But I know that, for instance, Joe Chambers and Tim Hansen were working.

MR. FRANK: Was this MCROA crowd?

GENERAL THOMAS: The MCROA crowd, they were working, and they got help from New York too.

Col. Heinl: Hansen, however, has got a far inflated share of credit for the thing, for this reason, and this brings forward the name of a worker in this vineyard who never sought publicity, who never got it, and that's Ham Hayler.

MR. FRANK: Have you seen the Marine Corps Reserve history that's coming out shortly?

Col. Heinl: I'm aware of it. No, I haven't seen it. And this relates to the Senate phase of the bill, because my war on the Douglas bill was the Senate war, and General Thomas', when the thing was finally won, was the House war.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I didn't hit many blows on it (crosstalk). We had a few sleepwalkers around the Capitol

MR. FRANK: We were talking about this the other day. I don't recall whether you said this on the record or off.

GENERAL THOMAS: What's that? What are we talking about now? I hadn't gotten to it.

MR. FRANK: No, no, we talked about something about the Commandant and the JCS, whether you had some question, I believe, as to what his function should be vis-à-vis the JCS.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I'll get onto that later. I'll talk about our entry into the JCS picture and our letter to Bradley and all that kind of stuff. That come along later.

Col. Heinl: That's the logical sequel to –

GENERAL THOMAS: - to Public Law 416, when the law passed. But the law didn't pass until General Shepherd had been in office six months, latter part of June, about June – Truman signed it in June 1952.

Col. Heinl: Yes sir, along in there.

MR. FRANK: This is the end of Session 10.

**End of Session 10.**

*Session 11. Interview with General Gerald C. Thomas, USMC (Ret.), Washington D.C., by Mr. Benis M. Frank, 5 October 1966.*

GENERAL THOMAS: We left off at the last interview with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division closing up to the Hwachon Reservoir and the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines taking the town of Yanggu, and the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines moving up on the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines' right through the mountain ranges over to the right, to the east (Session 9). After the 7<sup>th</sup> had taken Yanggu the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines passed through them. We pushed them forward a little bit, forward of the end of the reservoir. We didn't worry much about the reservoir because it looked like a fairly effective barrier and we knew that if they did find some means of crossing it, with our armor and our other means on that flat plain, we could take care of them pretty quickly.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Marines were on the left, having passed through the 7<sup>th</sup>. The 5<sup>th</sup> Marines were well off to the right on a mountain chain there. In the prospective zone of action of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines was a towering mountain range which was topped at a distance of four or five miles with a great round-top knob. I've never seen anything like it any place in the world.

MR. FRANK: What was the name of it?

GENERAL THOMAS: It was Taem San. Taem San was the name of the knob. It was a very rugged piece of terrain, and our Korean Marines were really adept at getting through rough territory. So we passed the Korean Marines through the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, and sent them to Taem San. They attacked along with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines on the left, and our objective was to seize the 'Kansas Line.' We ran into unusually stiff resistance, and then we discovered that whereas up until this time we'd been fighting the Chinese, they had side slipped out to the west and in front of us were Koreans, the North Korean Army. They were reminiscent of the Japs. They would die in place. There was no surrender.

Consequently we had a rather rough time. The 1<sup>st</sup> Marines had real heavy casualties, but they finally got in, got up close to the Kansas Line. Over on the right the Korean Marine pushed forward. They did fairly well but finally they were stymied, and then, though they were not skilled or particularly trained in night attacks, they decided to put on a night operation, which proved to be very successful. They killed a lot of North Koreans and ran over the rest of them and they captured Taem San.

MR. FRANK: Two questions here, sir. Is this the first reappearance of the North Korean People's Army since they were licked at the time of the Reservoir?

GENERAL THOMAS: So far as I know. Well, the Reservoir – the people our people fought at the Reservoir were Chinese.

MR. FRANK: Well, the North Koreans had been –

GENERAL THOMAS: - the North Koreans apparently had slipped out of that picture. I'm not familiar with that, but they were not in that picture, nor had they been in the picture during this offensive, Ridgeway's offensive, which led up to the place where I took over, and then the Chinese launched their offensive. I don't know. Oh, it's in the record, undoubtedly. The North Koreans were someplace, no doubt, but they weren't in front of us.

MR. FRANK: That was your first identification of them?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh yes, we definitely identified them, but they were holding the line in front of us.

MR. FRANK: Second question, sir – was this the first night operation under your command?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes. And I didn't order it. The Korean Marines decided to do it themselves.

MR. FRANK: What was your experience regarding night operations?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I'm very much in favor of them when they work out all right. I don't in any way, subscribe to the Japanese idea of always fighting at night. Remember Guadalcanal – they always fought at night. But we learned a lot about night operations, and we would put them on from time to time. But this was the first real one, and though it was the first real one, I didn't order it. The Korean Marines decided to do it themselves.

MR. FRANK: Isn't this still a matter of tactical debate today?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, you see, you must surround a night operation with certain very definite restrictions and qualifications. You must have a definite objective and usually it's a limited objective. Coordination and control are much more demanding than that in day operations. Night operations are special operations, and they should be undertaken on occasion, but they must be very carefully planned and very carefully carried out and controlled or they can cause you just a great deal of trouble.

MR. FRANK: Of course there's always been the criticism, has there not, that Americans are not capable of fighting in the night, they're afraid of fighting in the night?

GENERAL THOMAS: Not particularly so. You've got to train in the night if you want to fight in the night. We've always trained them. Now, you take Gallipoli. There were a lot of night operations on Gallipoli, and some of them worked very well. It was the other things that didn't work out there.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Marines suffered very heavy casualties in their move towards the Kansas Line, and so we moved the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines up on their right and pushed up a road where we could use some tanks. That was our chief trouble, we couldn't use our power, and we lost a lot of tanks because the North Koreans, recognizing that this one road that led to the mountains would be where the tanks would come, so they just lined it with anti-tank mines. We had a good many tank casualties, but we got to the Kansas Line.

In the meantime after the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines were relieved by the Korean Marines, we got an order to slip over into the zone of the 2<sup>nd</sup> US Division who had not progressed very rapidly. So the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines side slipped over, took a regimental area, five or six-thousand yards, and then they also came up on the Kansas Line. When we wound up we had three regiments of the division abreast on the Kansas Line, all the way from way over on the right where the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines were, and the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines in moving forward and seizing the Kansas Line, they seized the southern rim of what's known as the Punch Bowl which was also a very unusual terrain feature.

MR. FRANK: That 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was still hurting from the earlier attack on it?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I guess so, yes. That's my judgment, yes. They didn't fight much. I mentioned the fact that we had considerable casualties in the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines, and that brought up a situation that was sort of a touchy matter. My corps commander, Almond, one day said to me, "You know, at the briefing this morning the corps surgeon says that the heavy casualties in the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines were due to the fact that these men have never been taught to dig in. Most of the casualties came from mortars."

Well, I didn't say anything to him. I said, "Let me look into it." I was shocked that he would receive any such report as that, but it just happened that we had all the figures, we knew how our men got wounded. We had wonderful records of the whole thing, and it proved that this statement wasn't true. So I went back to Almond and I said, "Your First Corps surgeon has lied to you, that's not true. These men are not wounded by mortar shells and they're digging in all right."

He said, "That's all I wanted to know."

Well, a day or two after that, Van Fleet was over in my sector. He was over there almost every day. I used to see him all the time.

MR. FRANK: Your relations with him were good?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh yes, very pleasant. And he said to me, "I'd like to talk to you about your casualties. Do you feel you're justified in taking the casualties you're taking?"

"Well, General, you told us to take the Kansas Line and we took it for you."

I recognized immediately an old Army malady from Europe, and I also suspect that this worry about casualties did not originate in Korea. It possibly came all the way from Washington. The Army was very sensitive about casualties. General Marshall used to talk about them. As a matter of fact they relieved one of their finest division commanders, the one who saved them at (the) Kasserine Pass in Africa, because in that same action he had had heavy casualties, but he had saved the whole Army, but they relieved him and brought him home because they thought his casualties had been too high. That's an old Army – they want to take ground without paying for it.

So I forgot about it. I told Van Fleet, "I'm sure that we paid for what we got, but we got what we paid for."

About this time, we had some changes in the division. Colonel Krulak arrived and took over as Chief of Staff. Dick Weede had been acting as Chief of Staff, after McAlister came home, and I sent Weede out to command the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines. About this time also Tom Wornham came, and I gave him command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines. Wilburt Brown had been in command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines for a couple of months, but I told him that I was not going to give him a regimental command, he'd already had many of them and this was a young man's war, and that I'd send him back to Masan when Tom Wornham came. So after a couple of months, Wornham arrived and he took command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines.

Weede relieved Hayward who'd been commanding the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines. Hayward was actually relieved because CINCFE had asked for him. Well, what they wanted was Hayward to go down on some mission to Vietnam, where investigations were being conducted, so he went off down there. We saw him later. He came back to see us and told us what he'd done in Vietnam, but I didn't relate it at the time to what's going on down there now.

MR. FRANK: Getting back to the casualties, did you satisfy Van Fleet?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, he went away, yes. He couldn't do anything else.

MR. FRANK: Whatever happened to the corps surgeon?

GENERAL THOMAS: I don't know what happened to him. I just told his corps commander he was lying.

MR. FRANK: Was it possible that things were coming out to the corps surgeon –

GENERAL THOMAS: - what it was all about, taking pictures, see –

MR. FRANK: - bypassing the corps commander?

GENERAL THOMAS: No. No, I don't think so. No, I think they all knew about it, see, and they tried to find out something about these casualties and how they happened, and they were looking for some kind of excuse, so the corps surgeon seemed to come up with an excuse. He said, "Well, these Marines don't teach people to dig in." It wasn't true, and I told him and that ended it. It told both Almond and – now, of course, we had the records. We knew how our men had been wounded. We had a splendid record set up in the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines.

MR. FRANK: We always have had. How about Wilburt Brown? Of course, he's an old fire horse and an old artilleryman, and you had him as an infantry regiment commander?

GENERAL THOMAS: He had command of that regiment for two months, that's right.

MR. FRANK: He was considerably older?

GENERAL THOMAS: I'm not going into Wilburt Brown. It's not a pleasant subject.

At this time Custis Burton came up in command of the 11<sup>th</sup> Marines. So I've given you all my regimental commanders.

Late on afternoon about the 1<sup>st</sup> of July I had a call from the corps commander, General Almond, and he said, "I want you to come back to my headquarters right away. There's something going to happen, and I can't talk to you about it over the phone, but come back here."

Well, I grabbed a helicopter and I was back at his place in about ten minutes, and when I got there he said to me, "Somebody is coming, and I've been told to get my division commanders ready and my staff ready, but I don't have the remotest idea who it is." So I sat and talked with Almond and we speculated about who this would be, but we didn't reach any conclusions.

After about half an hour, about eight or nine liaison planes dropped in on the little airstrip by corps headquarter. Out of the leading one came General George C. Marshall, and then Van Fleet, Matt Ridgeway, and Tony McAuliffe, who was the G-1 of the Army. We went into the briefing room of the 10<sup>th</sup> Corps; General Marshall got on the platform, and he said, "I'm out here for a final look before we enter into negotiations for an armistice with the Chinese and the North Koreans."

He discussed all the things that had happened before that time and he wound up his brief talk by saying, "We're going to give these people a reasonable period of time, two weeks or a month, to demonstrate their earnestness in this matter, but if we reach the conclusion that they're not serious about it, we're going to reinforce you and we're going to carry this war to a successful conclusion. Now, we cannot send more units. You have all the units and divisions out here that we'd be able to send. What we will do is to sent vast numbers of replacements and over-strength every unit to where you're a great deal stronger than you are now."

Then the Old Man sat down. He leaned back in his chair and he closed his eyes. He was obviously a very, very worried man, also exhausted.

Almond then took the platform, and he said, "General, all my division commanders are here and I want them to tell you what the positions of their divisions are. It would be better if they told you instead of me telling you." So he started off with the 2<sup>nd</sup> US (Division), Nick Ruffner, then two Korean divisions, and then I got on the platform. Marshall was still sitting there with his eyes closed. I said, "General, I'm going to be brief. I have a division of over 30,000 men, and we're holding 27 miles of

front. Just to put all I have to say in a few sentences, I'm going to say that I know that you're a student of the Civil War. I have always aspired to be the commander of some Stonewall Jackson infantry, and today I command three regiments of it."

And the Old Man sat up like that and opened his eyes, and I got off the platform.

The meeting ended and I headed back to my command post, but I took back with me a feeling of depression. We'd been winning, and I just felt a hand reaching out from some place and holding us back. We weren't going to be allowed to win the war, and as I say, it depressed me, because I like to win.

As for Marshall's part in it, this is connected with all the other things I know about Marshall, or at least that I think about Marshall or I feel about him. But it was a sad evening for me.

MR. FRANK: Would you explain this statement just now about Marshall?

GENERAL THOMAS: I don't want to go into that. I've never understood Marshall's actions in China and all that, and it isn't something that I can back up, and I talk about it personally but I don't – I don't know why the Communists were allowed to get ahead in China. But as I see, the record will have to stand on what I've said about those things.

MR. FRANK: Of course, you knew Marshall from before, did you not?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, he was the assistant commandant, and a very able one, of the Infantry School when I was down there. I knew a great deal about General Marshall.

MR. FRANK: They you'd seen him when you were at headquarters?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, sure. He was a very austere man, you know. He was a very, very cold – oh, I won't say he was a cold man, but he was an unapproachable man. He's a man who had very few friends, I mean intimate friends – because he didn't want them, I suppose. Certainly he was a extraordinarily able man, no doubt about that.

MR. FRANK: Would you say he'd go down in American history as an outstanding –

GENERAL THOMAS: - well, it somebody doesn't tag him with this mess in China. Or Korea. I think he's considered so. There isn't any doubt about that.

MR. FRANK: He was Secretary of State and Secretary of –

GENERAL THOMAS: - Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State. But he fought us in the Pacific. He fought us in unification. He fought us all along the line. I don't have to give him any kudos.

MR. FRANK: The Hollandia agreement was a supply agreement then.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. I connect it with something else, but there was something in Australia too that he mentioned about Marines.

Well, we had some trouble in Australia and I think I've mentioned this. When we left there we left a lot of our gear and supplies on Guadalcanal with Army units. When they started to replace equipment in Australia, we had a good deal of trouble with them because their tables of organization didn't call for many of the things that our did. A Marine outfit going into the field expects to support itself for a period of time. This is an inheritance of the Banana Wars. But the Army operated differently.

OK, we'll go on with Korea. It was only a day or so after the visit of General Marshall that General Van Fleet came up to see me one day and he said, "I want to tell you about a decision I've made. The Air Force has asked to take all the airpower here and use it to cut off the supplies of the North Koreans and Chinese moving in from China."

MR. FRANK: Van Fleet was the commander at this time, was he not.

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, he was Commanding General of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army and all United Nations troops.

MR. FRANK: Ridgeway was what?

General Tomas: Ridgeway was CINCEN back in Tokyo. He had relieved MacArthur.

So Van Fleet said, "I have agreed to let them do that," and again I got a promise that if it doesn't work, he said, "I'm going to give them a month to see what they can accomplish, but if I'm not satisfied then we're going to go back to our former arrangement, but it's going to mean that you're not going to have your close air support."

MR. FRANK: You hadn't had it up to that time.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, we'd had some. Now we were not to get any at all. So I told him, I said, "Well, General, I've been through all this before and I'm convinced they are wrong. It's your privilege to make you decisions and you'll make it and we'll abide by it." And I recalled in my own mind what Roger Peake had told me in Cairo, that the ground forces must not be denied their air support by reason of other air missions which they think they should undertake. But we did, and we didn't get any air support for a month – it didn't last 30 days, it lasted longer than that. It happened however, that we moved back into reserve and we were not denied for a considerable period of time this air support, but when we came back in the line it still was slack, but it gradually picked up. Of course Operation STRANGLE was a rank failure. They didn't accomplish anything. We're going to do the same thing in Vietnam today. Those fellows just haven't got the game, they just can't deliver. You can't stop supplies on the ground by throwing a few bombs at 'em from the air. Look at us at Guadalcanal. I imagine the Japs reported we were wiped out a hundred times, and they'd come in and throw everything at us they had and they'd burn up a couple of gasoline drums and have a hell of a smoke up into the sky and what not, and we just shook it off and we went on and we did our business. Well, they hammered the hell out of us, but we kept on going. I know about air power from the receiving end. And of course they did marvelous things, in Europe. They just blew all the towns down and killed all the people! Maybe that's what they want to do now.

MR. FRANK: How can they come up with these damage assessments, not being around?

GENERAL THOMAS: They're just as phony as a three-dollar bill.

We stayed in the line about a month after we took the Kansas Line. No particular movement, we just held on. And then on the 15<sup>th</sup> of July, 1951, we got a breathing spell. We went back into reserve. We were in need of it. We weren't particularly tired, but our gear was getting worn. You can't keep your trucks up, you can't keep your material up. So we moved back into reserve and it gave us a chance to refurbish our equipment and also to do some training. Combat is a testing of training, but very often it's not very good training, and you do a lot of things you'd rather not do.

MR. FRANK: On this supply program, what was your chain of supply?

GENERAL THOMAS: This is another problem. I'll touch on it later. Everything came through the 8<sup>th</sup> Army except Marine Corps peculiar items, and we never had any difficulty about that. As a matter of fact, until I come down here later to an incident that I'll relate of ammunition, we were very well supplied all the time. We had adequate supplies.

MR. FRANK: Both Army and Marines? All classes of supplies?

GENERAL THOMAS: Everything that we needed, all classes of supplies were really quite satisfactory. When we moved back into reserve, instead of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines coming



back over the mountains from the lip of the Punch Bowl, they simply dropped back to the town of Inje, 12 or 15 miles in the rear. There they stayed in corps reserve. However, Inje was a good area for them to train in, and it worked all right. I had no reservations about it, it worked all right. One thing that I noticed, and now that we're having a narcotics problem, I was up on the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines one day seeking Dick Weede. He said, "We're having a hell of a job destroying all the marijuana in this area." And it was all over the place, planted marijuana. Of course some of the Marines knew about it. But we had no trouble with them. Apparently the Koreans used marijuana extensively. There were great big patches of it. I had never seen it before.

MR. FRANK: Cultivated?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes, sure. Of course in the United States they plant it in the middle of a cornfield so you can't see it, but out there it was just alongside the road.

We were out of the line for about five weeks. We had a very fine training period, put these boys back in shape, got our basic training worked out, had some athletics and what not, let them get back to the movies. We made up a division show troop which was really a wonder. I never saw anything like it. And we sent it around to the various troop units.

MR. FRANK: Shades of Leon Brusiloff?

GENERAL THOMAS: Like Brusiloff of Australia, same way.

MR. FRANK: That was something.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, terrific.

MR. FRANK: Probably we should have talked about it a little earlier.

GENERAL THOMAS: Just terrific. Leon really had a show troop, there wasn't any doubt that.

MR. FRANK: Of course he had all those really fine professional musicians.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right.

During the training period we sent officers and noncommissioned officers, additional ones, over to help the Korean Marines. Of course all the time with the Korean Marines we had advisors. We had regimental advisors, battalion advisors and company advisors.

MR. FRANK: Who was your regimental advisor?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, Charlie Harrison was at one time, and I've forgotten the name of the man who relieved him. The name escapes me now. He's retired. But we beefed those outfits up with the Korean Marines pulled back into the training area, and we gave them a real good going over.

Old Syngman Rhee came up one day, and of course he was a very old man even at that time. He was delighted. He spent a whole day with us going around, watching the Korean Marines train.

MR. FRANK: Were you satisfied with the KMCs?

GENERAL THOMAS: Was I? Oh, they were a fine fighting outfit. Oh yes.

MR. FRANK: Do you attribute their fighting qualities, as opposed to the ROK army's qualities to –

GENERAL THOMAS: - control. Oh, control, oh yes. They had good commanders. I think maybe they'd been selected. Most of their commanders had been Japanese trained, you know.

MR. FRANK: They'd been naval?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, they'd been Japanese Army. That's right. Two of the regimental commanders had graduated from the Japanese military academy up in Manchuria. Oh, they were a good outfit. Some of our business rubbed off on them, but they were a good outfit. The main thing is command. When you got up higher, to division command, that's where it broke down, because that takes more stability, more training, more skill, more professional attainments and the like. But there wasn't anything wrong with the Korean Marines. They did some of the best fighting that was done for us.

While we were in reserve, I'd say around the last of August, our corps commander, General Almond, was relieved by Major General Clovis Byers. Byers was a very personable and pleasant fellow and I had the very finest relations with him all the time he was there. He was not there a great while. I had known him before because he had been corps chief of staff – what's the name of that corps in New Guinea? Anyway, Byers got wounded, slightly wounded, and I met him back in Brisbane when he was back recovering from his wounds. Eichelberger – he was Eichelberger's chief of staff in the 1<sup>st</sup> Corps out in the Southwest Pacific. We had very good relations.

One night not long after Byers took over, Almond called me and said, "I'm coming to your command post." We were back in reserves. He arrived a few minutes afterwards and he said, "I'm concerned about the position of the 2<sup>nd</sup> US Division. They've had some hard fighting, and I'm just concerned about them, and I would like your concurrence in moving the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines back up to the line in back of them, in a reserve position."

MR. FRANK: That's the second time you've had the Corps Commander worried about the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, second time you had to move a Marine regiment –

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, we had moved before. I did some really quick thinking, and said, "General Byers, naturally I'm going to agree to do what you feel you have to do for the Corps. But there's one thing I'd like to ask you. I'm not above commanding a regiment in action, and I would like your assurance that if Marines are committed in action, that they'll only be committed under my command." He said, "Well, I'll give you my promise of that."

That relieved me a good deal because I'd been a little concerned about the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines which were over in corps reserve, and here were the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines going back in to Corps Reserve. I was not about to let some Army major general take a regiment of my Marines and get them all chewed up in a fight, and that's what they would have done. But I got his promise, and nothing eventuated from it, but at least I had his promise, if the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines were going into action they would not go into action under command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> US Division, but under my command.

MR. FRANK: You had no control over what would happen to the 5<sup>th</sup> (Marines) if it was committed?

GENERAL THOMAS: I hadn't had before but I did then.

MR. FRANK: You asked for the 5<sup>th</sup> too?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, I just said, if any Marines were committed it had to be done under my command. I hadn't felt like I could bring that up before but he gave me an opening, and his assurance included both the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Marines. Of course the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines were backing up Koreans and I certainly didn't want them to go into a fight under a Korean major general, division commander.

I believe that the grand tactics of the campaign of 1951, we'll say, in Korea were quite satisfactory. The spring offensive was a good one. However, I believe that the intelligence should have been better. Two days before I took over command, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army got caught by a grand counter-attack, a great counter-attack. While they had both feet in the air because they were also attacking, and I relieve proper intelligence should have told them what was coming.

MR. FRANK: That's the worst time, the best, for a counter-attack.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. But they should have known this was coming, that the Chinese were massing, and if – for instance, if the 6<sup>th</sup> ROK Division, which went out like a light over on the left of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, had been in a defensive position, it probably wouldn't have happened. But there wasn't any doubt, they got caught with both feet in the air, there. There's just no doubt about it.

In General Marshall's talk he made the point that despite these negotiations we had to keep the pressure on. We weren't going to sit down. We had to keep the pressure on the Communist forces. As I say, I had no complaints, and I had nothing to say that would be contrary to the way things were carried out. However, the spring offensive was generally a frontal attack, justified undoubtedly by reason of the fact that they were able to break through. A frontal attack is all right if you can make a breakthrough and then exploit it, but by the end of the summer the chance that – Van Fleet simply didn't have the power to make a breakthrough, much less make a breakthrough and then exploit it. There was one operation that he took up with me, that had a wonderful prospect. In talking with him, we worked out plans that the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, which was at the time reserve, would move down to the east coast of Korea, and there carry out a shore-to-shore operation and land behind the North Koreans up at the city of Kojo, which was about 30 miles behind the front lines. Now, the front lines abutted on the sea on both sides of the peninsula. The North Koreans were over here. We didn't worry about our flank because we had command of the sea, and we also had some islands that we held off the east coast of Korea, but this plan to land behind the North Koreans offered splendid prospects. We worked it up, had completely staffed it. I went over with my staff to Seoul, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army headquarters, and Admiral Tom Hill, the amphibious commander in the Far East came over with his staff, and we worked out all the details. Everything was to be laid on about the 1<sup>st</sup> of September. We had a limiting date I believe of the 10<sup>th</sup> of October, because on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October it freezes out there and it would not be wise to attempt a shore-to-shore operation. In the operation it developed, as we went ahead planning, they gave me the 1<sup>st</sup> Korean Division, ROK Division, and they were to go on our right flank to the north as we went ashore at Kojo.

We were to shuttle the Marine Division around. I was going to bring up all my LVTs and we were going to shuttle troops around in 24 hours and land a whole division and then go back and pick up the ROK Division and land them behind us. The whole thing could have been done in 48 hours and we would have completely destroyed the right flank of the North Korean Army, I don't think there's any doubt about it. We would have been right in behind them then.

However, the end of August came and we were ordered back into the line. Some weeks after that, a bunch of VIPs came to see me – it was General Bradley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs. He had with him Chip Bohlen, State Department fellow who's now ambassador to France. Ridgeway was there and Van Fleet. I drew Ridgeway aside and I

said, "We're still interested in that Kojo operation. We still have three weeks to do it. I can have my men aboard the ships in 24 hours."

He said, "Well, Washington has absolutely turned thumbs down on it. They say if we carry out an operation like that, Russia might come into the war."

I said, "My God, General, Russians will come into this war when they want to come, and nothing that we do or don't do is going to influence it."

Well, he looked pretty sad but he went away and we didn't have our operation. We went back into the line on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August and we went back with an offensive mission. We were ordered to put pressure on the North Koreans by attacking them. I'm not going into all the details of this because the Marine Corps history of the operation is pretty thorough and very accurate. We moved to the line. The 7<sup>th</sup> Marines came from where they were over back of Yanggu, back of the 2<sup>nd</sup> US Division, and the Korean Marines which were nearer moved up into the line, so the Korean Marines and the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines moved into line together. We had some trouble getting the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines over because we'd had some rains and the road, where we tried to keep it – they had a long ride, I suppose about 80 miles to get back of the line and the road had to go over two mountains. We tried to keep to it but we did have some trouble getting that regiment back into the line, but we got them in all right.

So we had the two regiments in line and two in support. On the left we placed the Punch Bowl, which is a most extra-ordinary terrain feature.

MR. FRANK: Like the Punch Bowl in Honolulu?

GENERAL THOMAS: Only 50 times as big. Oh, the Punch Bowl must be 15 miles across each way. Oh yes. And the sides of the Punch Bowl come down in a sheer drop of three or four hundred feet, and maybe in some places 1000 feet. Well, what it obviously was, and it lies almost adjacent to Taem San. You come down off of this great round top mountain of Taem San and then you come to some small depressions. Apparently at some age the Punch Bowl was a lake, a gigantic lake, three hundred feet deep and 15 miles across each way. No, I take it back, it's about ten miles wide, 5 miles north and south and 10 miles the other way. Well, the terrain on the bottom was flat and highly cultivated. Apparently the narrow abutment of the Punch Bowl was on the east and at some time a thousand years ago the water in there ruptured the sides and that started a river that cut it down. This was the source of the Soyangang River that wound all around the area. It didn't flow to the east coast which was near; it went back to the west coast, poured into the Mehong River over by Seoul.

But there were enough springs, free-flowing springs within the ground of the Punch Bowl, to make several really rushing little torrents, and they came together and they came through this ruptured lip of the Punch Bowl and formed the Soyangang River which went down in front of our position, went down in front of the Korean Marines and in front of the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines and then broke through the mountain range there and started south and then headed west. As I say, it was a most unusual thing.

MR. FRANK: Then you hadn't or had gone back in – across the Soyangang again?

GENERAL THOMAS: Been going back and forth across it ever since I took command of the division, but in different places, because it just meandered around through the mountain.

MR. FRANK: Talking about frontal assaults before – is it possible that the terrain dictated the use of frontal assaults? You didn't have room to maneuver?

GENERAL THOMAS: No. No, as a matter of fact, there's nothing wrong with a frontal assault carried out in the right way, where you seek out some enemy resistance and break through them, and Ridgeway did that all the way up the peninsula. You will – you won't find Army officers going to the sea. Army officers will always want to fight on land, just like they did at Okinawa. So they just battered their way up the peninsula, and there wasn't anything particularly wrong with it because Ridgeway had the strength to break through and then exploit it. He made real progress after he took command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, and then continued on under Van Fleet, who had only been in command a few days when the Chinese counterattack came. Of course, I saw MacArthur on my way out. We were staying on the same floor of the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco. The night he arrived in San Francisco, I arrived that same afternoon, so he hadn't been gone but just a few days. When I reported to Van Fleet he hadn't been in command a week, I think, maybe about six or seven days.

We went back to the line. We were ordered, objectives were not for us, and we moved out. The Korean Marines had a very unusual scheme of maneuver, because the only route for them was round the lip of the Punch Bowl. As I've mentioned, they were good cross country, good mountain people. They had a little difficulty getting across the Soyangang where the water breaks through the lip out from the Punch Bowl, but they got over and they went five or six miles along the eastern lip remaining on that crest.

Well, we had a very bad supply problem keeping those people supplied, and we solved it by using air drops. We had a couple of air drops and then one day we got about 20 planes which came over from Japan. They all came from Japan. All air drops came from Japan. They came over; they made this big air drop, and apparently the North Koreans thought parachutists were dropping in behind them or around them, so they took off a little, and our Koreans made a real push, and they finally got around. They had a real fight. They lost a regimental commander.

MR. FRANK: The KMCs?

GENERAL THOMAS: Isn't that what I said?

MR. FRANK: No, you said North Koreans, sir.

GENERAL THOMAS: The Korean Marines had a real fight getting around the Punch Bowl and getting the northern lip of the Punch Bowl. As I say, they lost their battalion commander, their regimental commander, had serious wounds but they finally got around there and they captured and moved along and took the whole of that.

In the meantime, as they moved out, the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines moved. Well, the 7<sup>th</sup>, the 'Cactus Line' was a hogback, a mountain range. They dropped down, crossed the Soyangang River, and started up again. They had a hard job, but they fought their way through. The North Koreans had dug themselves in well, sited their bunkers so they supported each other. The 7<sup>th</sup> Marines had a rough job but they did it and they gradually seized their objective in that area.

After about ten days of this slugging, the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines moved through the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines and relieved them. The 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, who had been back on the lip of the Punch Bowl, went in where the Korean Marines had moved out, and it was fortunate they did because there were still North Koreans down in the Punch Bowl, and they came up on that mountain range after us one night and there was quite a fight up there before they drove them away.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Marines – after the Korean Marines went along the eastern lip of the Punch Bowl, they side-slipped to the left, and there was to be a gap in the line, so we put the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines in between them and the 7<sup>th</sup>. The 7<sup>th</sup>, by that time, was sort of tired out and so we passed the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines through them, but the night before the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines passed through them, the North Koreans launched a big counterattack, and it was really touch-and-go there for a while, but the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines drove them off and the 1<sup>st</sup> moved through and relieved them.

There was a period there of several days of fighting. The KMC, the Korean Marines, had seized their objective. The 5<sup>th</sup> Marines moved forward and seized the objective in their area, but the 5<sup>th</sup> wound up with a sort of a mean situation. They – as I've commented, when you go from the waist of Korea north you go uphill all the time, and every time we'd capture one hill there was another one a few thousand yards away that commanded it. The 5<sup>th</sup> Marines captured a hill like that, and they got up where they just felt they couldn't go any farther, but they had a re-entrant in their line up on a mountain ridge, and for the rest of the time I was in Korea, that re-entrant was in there, and the North Koreans came down, put their defensive line in around this corner of the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, and there were hand grenade raids there for weeks and weeks and weeks. They did throw hand grenades at each other. It was a mean little re-entrance.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Marines were successful. They moved out and gradually, over a period of some days, captured their objective. The ROKs, the Korean Army, had a great habit of going into a defensive position and then surrounding the position with mines, which they never took the trouble to plot, so whenever we relieved them we'd find mine fields. The 1<sup>st</sup> Marines did that and they had a good many casualties from these. As a matter of fact, they had them all through the winter from mines that had been laid by the ROK outfit. The 1<sup>st</sup> Marines, when they relieved the 7<sup>th</sup>, side-slipped to the right a little bit and also relieved the Korean division, the ROK division. So it was a rough time. But they finally took their objective, and I went up. Tom Wornham had his regimental CP up on a ridge overlooking a valley, and then there was another hill up there that they were taking, and I made my way up to this CP, quite a climb, and it was to be the last attack of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines.

Wornham and I were sitting there watching, and we saw Frosty Lahue's battalion and the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Marines. Wornham told me that he had asked for some air support that afternoon for Lahue. We had asked for air support and we hadn't had any. We were sort of upset about the whole thing. It was a raw subject for us.

Well, after a while planes came in. Lahue was having a hard fight and he said he needed the planes. Well, lo and behold, instead of being American planes they were New Zealand planes, P-51s, eight or ten of them. Naturally, we had no common ground for control of that air support, people like that. We had radio so we could talk to them. Wornham decided to let them go ahead and see what they could do, and so Lahue talked them in, because he needed support. He was under very heavy fire. The New Zealanders peeled off, came down and made a couple of dummy runs, and then finally they made a real run and the first three planes dropped their napalm right on Lahue's battalion.

Fortunately it lit between the waves and he had practically no casualties as a result of it. But it was just too dangerous. So Wornham told them to go home, get rid of their napalm and go home.

I went back to my CP. I was upset by the whole thing. I talked it over with the staff. Then I wrote a letter to the Army commander, explained the circumstances to him, and told him that the close air support situation was totally unsatisfactory and that if it was continues – that I had lost men, we had suffered heavy casualties, was the way I put it, by reason of the fact that we hadn't had close air support over the last month or six weeks. I put that in knowing the Army's sensitivity to our casualties. I sent the letter in, and my corps commander concurred. My request was that we only be supported in the future by airplanes with which we could communicate.

Now, I knew that on the day they sent us ten New Zealand planes, that planes from the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Air Wing, which were on 15 miles back of us at K-18, went over to the east front and dropped their loads in front of a ROK division. But that's just one of the ways they played the game. As I said, I asked that only planes trained in giving close air support be furnished in the future.

I wasn't long in finding out that my letter caused considerable consternation. Van Fleet sent the letter on to Ridgeway in Tokyo. Well, this was not a new subject, because General Shepherd had talked to them about it time and again, and when he came up to see us in May he brought Field Harris with him (May of '51) and we had session after session talking about close air support.

MR. FRANK: I think that's the time that that man from PMFPAC came out to study the situation.

GENERAL THOMAS: Harris insisted that we get more support but our air officer, Micky Finn, knew exactly what we'd gotten and he just said, "No, General Harris, you're all wrong. You're all wrong."

MR. FRANK: Was Harris playing the 5<sup>th</sup> Air Force game?

GENERAL THOMAS: He was playing 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Air Wing. Generally speaking.

I realized that there was a great deal of tension about this whole thing, and I also knew that I was almost on the point of being canned over it. Oh, I figured out about it – no doubt about it, if they could get away with it they would have canned me. I had them on the hook because I told them I'd suffered casualties because of their decisions. We had suffered casualties, there wasn't any doubt about it. And they were transfixed with the thought of casualties, you know.

However Radford, who was in command of CINCPAC, made two trips out there to talk about these things, and each time I took him through the whole thing. He's a great guy and he wanted to help us. He talked to Ridgeway. But the 5<sup>th</sup> Air Force was still carrying out the Operation STRANGLE, and we needed airplanes and we were losing men because we didn't have them.

One day my old friend E.E. Everest, who had been Miff Harmon's G-3 down in the South Pacific and who, at the time, was in command of the 5<sup>th</sup> Air Force, the Tactical Air Force in Korea –

MR. FRANK: He relieved Partridge?

GENERAL THOMAS: He relieved Partridge. E.E. Everest came up to my command post and with him was Frank Schilt, commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Air Wing –

MR. FRANK: - who had relieved Harris?

GENERAL THOMAS: Who'd relieved Harris. Well, we had a long talk, and I told Hank Everest, "I can tell you how many planes I need." But in my letter I had said, and I repeated to Everest, "As a division commander, in order to make an attack, and I know

exactly what I have got to do with tomorrow morning in my own division – I’ve got artillery, supporting weapons and all – but you ask me to go into an attack and I don’t know what weapons I’m going to have, I don’t know what planes I’m going to have to support me until JOC tells me tomorrow morning what the hell’s coming up,” and I said, “I simply can’t plan operations on that basis.”

So I told Everest, “I know how many airplanes I need. I need 40 airplanes. I need 40 missions a day in an offensive operation. That’s what I’ll settle for, and the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Air Wing can deliver three times that many, but you just give me 40 missions a day from the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Air Wing.”

So he said, “Well, you know, sometimes planes are short. Would you still insist that you get this support if planes are needed some place else?”

And I said, “If I’m going to fight I do. If I can’t have this support, don’t make me carry on an offensive.”

**Tape 1, side 2:**

GENERAL THOMAS: Several days after the visit of General Everest and Schilt, I had a letter from General Ridgeway, CINCFE.

MR. FRANK: Your letter went via Byers?

GENERAL THOMAS: It went to Byers, it went to Van Fleet, and Van Fleet sent it on to Ridgeway. And then the next thing I knew, although I knew there was a lot going on, there were some very tense feelings about the whole problem – as I’ve related, Everest came up to see me accompanied by Schilt. A few days after Everest was in my headquarters, a letter arrived and it was from General Ridgeway, CINCFE. It was a stern sort of a letter.

MR. FRANK: Through the chain of command?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes, and it said that “my representative, General Everest, called on you and you said certain things to him. Among other things you said that regardless of other requirements in the theater you asked for you air support” and so forth. Well, sat down and I wrote General Ridgeway a letter in which I said, “It came as a shock to me to learn that General Everest came to me as your representative, because he failed to tell me so. I took him to be only the commander of the 5<sup>th</sup> Air Force, the coordinate commander in this theater. However, in all candor I must say that if he had told me he was your representative, I don’t believe I would have said anything to him different from what I did say.”

And I sent the letter on back.

I head no more for a while, a week or ten days. Then Ridgeway was over. He came to my headquarters and he said, “I want to congratulate you. That was a very manly letter you wrote.” And that ended the thing. However, the corps commander got canned, as I’ll relate later on, and I think the air support argument had a hell of a lot to do with him being canned, the fact that he supported me.

But all that was going on. I don’t know what’s going on in Vietnam but we had it out there.

Now, to summarize our offensive, though they turned down the Kojo operation which, with very few casualties, we could have really got some results, we had a frontal attack against one mountain range in a defensive position after another, to keep pressure



on the North Koreans, to make them negotiate seriously. They were being wish-washy. That's one reason we – they met, there was this disgraceful thing of having our plenipotentiaries come there under a white flag. That was the most disgraceful thing that ever happened. And Turner Joy sat down in a low seat and they snapped his picture – oh, it was simply disgraceful. However, we were to put pressure on them, and that pressure cost us 2000 casualties in the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division.

MR. FRANK: Without air support?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, we didn't get much. We didn't get much and what we got was mostly wrong. I spoke about the New Zealanders. I'd had a bellyful by that time and I didn't care whether they canned me or not, I was going to lay it on the line, because Shepherd had been there and talked to them about it; Radford had talked to them about it and I had talked to them about it. And they had bought this phony scheme, Operation STRANGLE, taking our airplanes away from us. It cost us 2000 casualties to keep the pressure on.

MR. FRANK: Was Schilt more favorably inclined to you?

GENERAL THOMAS: Schilt could have told me what they were there for but he didn't tell me.

MR. FRANK: Even the Marine aviators were –

GENERAL THOMAS: They loved that Army recce business, what they were doing. No doubt about that.

MR. FRANK: You have to fly low to support troops.

GENERAL THOMAS: While all this was going on, there was a bit of poetic justice eventually. A helicopter squadron, they came along there, HMR-161 arrived in Korea, the first operational squadron ever to take the field with helicopters, and I felt it was only justice they'd come because I'd been beating the helicopter drums ever since the day Bill Twining had sent the report to headquarters after the Bikini test. We used those people continually and they were a godsend to us. They could take supplies and drop them. We worked out various schemes. I imagine some of the things that are being done in Vietnam today had their genesis in North Korea working with those 12 or 15 helicopters that came in there. I'll tell you later how we shifted men around with them and what not. But they were a terrific help to us. We could carry supplies into men that were fighting on the side of the mountain. We could drop ammunition to them. We didn't drop it - they'd put it on the ground for them. They'd hover, let it go, then come away.

We were a well-supplied outfit, both as to food, ammunition, everything.

MR. FRANK: Any shortages at all?

GENERAL THOMAS: I'll get on the shortages in a minute. The only shortage was salt for the Korean Marines, because you know the Korean uses a terrific amount of salt in his rice. The armored vest came out about that time. Of course the medical laboratory at Camp Lejeune had been working on an armored vest for a long, long time. It was really a helpful instrument and still is. As a matter of fact my boy's alive because of the armored vest. He had a slug inside of his vest – he got hit from a mine, young Jerry. He was really bunged up out there. He got blown up by a mine, and there was a slug half as big as your fist inside of the front part of his vest.

Another thing that helped us a great deal was the boot, the thermal boot. The thermal boot – we had a bonus from that. Not only did it save the men's feet from

freezing, but if you stepped on a mine with a thermal boot on it, ordinarily he'd lose his leg, but with the thermal boot he'd just get a broken leg. The cushion was there.

Now, there was one element of supply that we had a shortage in. There was more shortage of transportation than of supply, because we were very well equipped with motor transport but we were using it right up to the hilt, and during the offensive actually – these dates, from the time the 7<sup>th</sup> Marines jumped off the 1<sup>st</sup> of September or 31<sup>st</sup> of August until they took their objective seemed like a long time, but we had to knock off the attack there for a period of four or five days because we ran short of artillery ammunition. The 8<sup>th</sup> Army told us, “There's a lot of ammunition in the Army dumps but we simply do not have the motor transportation to haul it.” Well, we realized the only thing for us to do was to call off everything else, and every truck that could be spared, no matter who it belonged to, was sent back to the Army ammunition dumps until we built up our artillery ammunition supply to the level that we wanted, and we built up real well. MR. FRANK: Were you going on a unit of fire basis at this time?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes. That's right, yes. I don't remember much of the details about that, but we didn't want to run short of artillery ammunition, and we realized we couldn't have it unless we'd go get it, so we knocked off everything and put all the transportation of the division onto this job of hauling ammunition. After about three or four days we had corrected the situation, but that was the only time that the ammunition supply failed. They pushed things up to us in pretty good shape. We had no complaints whatsoever.

MR. FRANK: The basis of comparison regarding supply, equipment and motor transport, Korea versus Guadalcanal, must have been fantastic in your mind.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, yes. After all, Guadalcanal, you know, they'd throw a can of beans onto the beach and there it was. We were dealing in a haul of 50 and 100 miles in Korea where we were only dealing in one mile at Guadalcanal.

MR. FRANK: I was talking about the amount of equipment. Though actually there wasn't that much shortage of ammunition or weapons, was there, on Canal?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, we had lots of weapons and we got our ammunition ashore. We had a shortage of food and barbed wire, gasoline and things like that, but that all goes back to the day of the landing. They didn't land. If they'd unloaded our ships, we'd have never had a minute's worry, and our only real worry – we never were short of ammunition – we had two real worries. One was food, and that persisted for not too long, because after a while as I've related they got food up to us. But we still stayed on two meals a day, because it was so convenient, you know – a big morning meal and a meal after everybody went home from work at night. And then we had several very touchy situations concerning aviation gas. We were down to practically no gas at one time. Everybody fanned out to look for it because General Vandegrift said the Geiger, “I know damned well there's gasoline on this island, so they started out and started to look, and in one morning they found 400 drums of avgas, that had been hidden out. We dispersed avgas all over the perimeter, and when they found it we had enough.

Geiger had come over and he said, “Vandy,” as he always called him, “I gave all the planes a drink and we haven't got a drop of gasoline.”

Well, they found it.

MR. FRANK: Your comparison again, on rations, you had the new ten-in-ones and Charley rations and everything else.

GENERAL THOMAS: You see, we went to Guadalcanal with commercially packaged food. That's what they sent out to the South Pacific for us. It was all the quartermaster could buy. The move to New Zealand came on so rapidly that he had no time to get combat-packaged goods or anything of the sort. He just went out on the market and bought everything he could buy.

MR. FRANK: There weren't combat rations at that time anyway.

GENERAL THOMAS: Combat packaged.

MR. FRANK: No, but I'm talking about the combat rations.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I don't know – the field rations. We had no C rations or anything like that.

MR. FRANK: The K rations.

GENERAL THOMAS: No, we just had what you could buy in the Safeway, sort of like that. Back to Korea.

The winter was coming on. We'd finished the fall offensive, and what we had was a long line, I won't say how many miles, 20 miles, something like that, and it was all right on the mountain ridge, right on the hogback, the whole line. Well, the men dug in, and they dug a fighting hole forward of the crest, and then back of that they dug and bunkered sandbags, with sandbags, a place for them to shelter. We had small oil-burning stoves for them and they could keep those shelters warm. There was only a minimum of men on watch needed to be out in the fighting hole. We put four regiments in line, with two battalions of each regiment up on the mountain ridges, and they were the 5<sup>th</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and Korean Marines. The remaining battalion of each regiment we pulled down into the valley back of this mountain range, where there was water, and we put up camps for them – good camps, tents, showers, all of that. We'd rotate these battalions in the front lines every two weeks. They'd spend two weeks in the front lines and one week back down in the good camps down below, where they had good food, movies and everything and hot showers and all. This was made possible by the helicopters, because the helicopters would pick up a battalion, bring the new battalion up, bring the old battalion down, and in to or three hours it was done. If we'd had to move these men on foot it would have taken three days to make that exchange. It certainly wouldn't have been possible.

Another thing the helicopters did, they carried to every unit one hot meal every day in canisters. They picked them up from the camps down in the Soyangang Valley and took them up to every man on the front lines. Well, they needed it because the winter weather there is real severe. All through the month of December at my van there wasn't a time at 7 o'clock in the morning that it was less than 12-below-zero. We had a lot of snow, just a world of snow. But these men were just cozy as a bug in a rug. I used to go up and see them every day. I flew up there, took the helicopter up, dropped down on a battalion command post, look at the bunkers, talk to the men.

MR. FRANK: It wasn't bad – I recall the sleeping bags, the warm weather gear was excellent.

GENERAL THOMAS: We had wonderful cold-weather clothing. That first year, that year O.P. Smith was up at the reservoir, our boys really had a rugged time and we lost a lot of men to cold and wind. But we had none of that that second winter. They were just as cozy as they could be.

MR. FRANK: I was going to say that the difference between the two winters was the difference between day and night.

GENERAL THOMAS: As far as the comfort of the men was concerned.

MR. FRANK: Because I remember that I was out a FMFPAC in December of '50, I got out there in December – in December and January, plane load after plane load of frostbite

GENERAL THOMAS: - Another place the helicopters got into the game was, we had a certain number of guerrillas back of our line and they'd stay up on the mountain range. There were shacks and shelters up there so they'd be up there. The helicopters would take small patrols from the division recon company, and they'd cruise around watching for evidence that there was a fire in a house or something, and they'd swoop down on it. The Marines would hop out of the helicopter and burn the house down, kill everybody around there. That's the way we got rid of guerrillas. Of course, guerrillas could come and go. You can't keep a tight line in the mountains like that and there were places they could get through.

One action that I took was – I've mentioned the fact that Marine Corps kept the division over strength all the time. Every unit was way over strength. We were two or three thousand men over strength all the time. Well, we didn't need them and in winter I just didn't see any need to keep them there, so I set forth the rule that no man would spend two Christmases in Korea and we used our excess to send men home.

Along about this time we also set up an arrangement that worked out exceedingly well. I've mentioned the fact that replacements came up to Chungchon by airplane, and then we had to send transports over a distance of about 75 miles and haul them over.

MR. FRANK: I don't think you did, sir.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, that was one of the trying things that we had to do. That was going on when we had to haul this ammunition. No, I don't think I mentioned that, but we did. Replacements would come by plane to Chungchon, about where I took over command of the division. There was a good airfield there and they would come up. But we had then a 75-mile haul to take the home-going detachments over – two or three thousand men a month –

MR. FRANK: Where would they go from Chungchon?

GENERAL THOMAS: They'd go to Japan. They'd go to Japan, and then they'd go to Kobe where their gear was and they'd go into camps in Kobe and they'd get their seabags and things from Kobe, and then they'd get in airplanes or ships and come on home. I think many were handled by ship.

MR. FRANK: Later on they came to Inchon.

GENERAL THOMAS: When we went into line on the 31<sup>st</sup> of August, we were only about 25 miles by pretty fair roads from the east coast of Korea, and our logistics people came up with the suggestion that we set up an administrative beachhead down there. It was a good area with beaches and what not at a little village names 'Sochori,' so we set up a beachhead down there, and administrative beachhead, and thereafter instead of transports coming in to Kobe and using up airplanes to get their men over, they came right into Sochori and they put off replacement detachments. Also all Marine Corps peculiar supplies came in that way. It was really a terrific advantage to us, and as I say, Sochori was only 25 miles from the division. Men would come in on transports, they'd come ashore, G-1 had set up down there. They'd assign the men, they'd get in their trucks, and within three hours they'd be with the unit that they were to serve with. Before then it was a matter of a week, ten days. It was a big saving in personnel. We got

all set for the winter there and it's a good thing we did because it was a real rough one. There was one bright aspect to this – the hunting was wonderful, and I had the greatest old hunter of all in Bill Whaling. For one thing, the summer rains had come late in 1951, and the pheasant chicks had a chance to grow. You see, they lose a lot from pneumonia. But the place was alive with pheasant. Korea is one of the fly-ways, though not one of the main fly-ways of the Manchurian water fowl who go down over in waves over China. They blacked the sky, like they used to say here. They do do that in China. But they also come down over Korea, and those are the ducks and geese and swan that go down into Okinawa, and even Formosa and the Pescadores. There were all kinds of wild geese. One patrol saw a tiger, for there are Korean tigers. They say he was a grey fellow. He wasn't quite as striped as they remember in the zoo, but he was a big fellow. Bill Whaling said he saw tiger tracks several times.

MR. FRANK: How about bear?

GENERAL THOMAS: We didn't see any bear, but I believe there are some bear in Northern Korea. The hunting was marvelous and we had lots of good food. Everybody who could get a gun went out and they did a lot of hunting. We got shrimp, fish and crab from the coast. We passed it around as much as we could. It made for a real good winter.

One day early in November I got a summons over to a place about 25 miles west of my CP, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> US Division was to get a Presidential citation, strange as it seems. I was invited over, and the VEEP was there, Barkley – he came and made a speech.

I got over there and was talking to some people I knew, matter of fact the 2nd Division commander at that time was an old classmate of mine, Bob Young, good friend of mine. No long after I arrived, my corps commander, Clovis Byers, drew me aside, and he said, "I'm being relieved. General Van Fleet wants to talk to you."

Well, I did what I could to commiserate with him. He said, "I'm being relieved and General Van Fleet wants to talk to you."

I said what I could to Byers in an attempt to make him feel better. I knew what had happened – he was getting sacked.

I went over to Van Fleet and he said, "General Byers is being relieved and he's going to Japan, and General Palmer is coming out to relieve him. General Palmer is in Germany and cannot get here for perhaps a month. But in three days I want you to go down and relieve General Byers, take command of the 10<sup>th</sup> Corps and command it till General Palmer gets here."

So I said, "All right," and three days later I went down and relieved Byers and took command of the 10<sup>th</sup> Corps and he left for Japan for his job over there. I'm glad to say that later on Byers got back on the track. It was a question of a three-star billet. They had a system in Korea. A corps commander would come out and if he lasted for six months they'd make him a three-star general. They made up their minds that they'd make him one before the six months was up and that's what overtook Byers, and I'm sure that his loyal support of me was one of the elements. I can understand their – there were other things, but it was one of the elements, on the close air support, and that's one thing that didn't help him.

MR. FRANK: Did you take any of your staff down with you?

GENERAL THOMAS: I took no one. I went right down myself. I took an aide, that's all. I took over with the same chief of staff, same staff, same everything. I was to be

there only three or four weeks. I was there between three and four weeks and then Williston B. Palmer came in and relieved me. As long as Whaling was running the division, all right, there was something I'd wanted to do. I had not been away from the division. There were only two occasions when I'd been out of the division area, when I made that trip to Seoul when Tom Hill came over from Tokyo to plan the Kojo operation, and the time I went over to see the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division be decorated – the only times I was away from the division in seven months. So as long as everything was going well, I told Palmer, "I've got substantial units and materiel in lower Korea and in Japan and I've never looked at them but I'm responsible for them. I'm not worried about them but I'd like to go and have a look.

He said, "Sure, go ahead," so I hopped back to Masan and spent a day there looking over that setup – Masan was where the Marines shucked off all the excess gear that they had taken to Korea. Marines are a bunch of squirrels. They just pile up everything, make all their trips with it, and they had gone to Korea, the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines had gone to Korea with enough gear to outfit two regiments, because everybody said, "I might need it. I'll just take it along."

I thought back to the time when we loaded the Wakefield at Norfolk going to New Zealand. I remember going off from Norfolk and leaving six tanks sitting on the dock because we had no place to put them on the ship. But when we got out to New Zealand we found out that the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines mess officer had taken along about 60 days rations. He said, "I've saved it, nobody's going to get it from me, I took it along." And one of the battalion commanders had taken this roomful of barbed wire that he had on bobbins, and that's where the space went.

Well, here it was at Masan and we had a bunch of men back there guarding it. Of course we needed a rear echelon so it didn't hurt too much. I went to Masan and then we had a most wonderful arrangement in Kobe for our baggage for our personnel. You see, we had the seabags and other gear of 25,000 men.

MR. FRANK: Footlockers, clothing –

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, everything. And they had it beautifully arranged, beautifully arranged. We fed them casualty reports every day, of course, and they knew exactly where a man's – they had it in bins movable – they had it palletized, and they could go in and snake out a man's gear – if they got a report he was killed, they could get his stuff on home in just no time. I went over to look at it. We had an LVT battalion over there too and a big casual nearby. I went over and made a visit and had a real good trip and had a little spell of rest, too, to Kyoto, stayed at the hotel at Kyoto.

MR. FRANK: The 'Miyako,' way up on a hill there?

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes, maybe so. I got a little rest, a little change and I needed it too. The weather was real bad, a lot of snow. Cardinal Spellman came out to spend Christmas with the boys. He came to the division and we set up a ward tent – and all the Catholics came down, and they got in the tent. We had stoves in it, and Cardinal Spellman and these troops – he started to serve Communion, and they wouldn't quit, and it was snowing. We had helicopters there to get him over to the 7<sup>th</sup> US Division. Van Fleet and I were sitting in a heated jeep outside talking all the time, and I'd go in once in a while and look at the service. All these lads had come off the line there, and the inside of that tent smelled like the bird house in the zoo.

Finally, we got Cardinal Spellman to leave, but he got snowbound that night over at the 7<sup>th</sup> Division and he didn't get out for two or three days. We had a terrific snow.

That, except for something I'm going to relate now, pretty well closes out my experiences in Korea. I suppose the most satisfying command a man can have is in the field. I had a wonderful division and I had a wonderful staff, very, very able officers. We had, almost all of the older officers, majors, lieutenant colonels, colonels, had much combat experience in World War II. It was a real good outfit.

General Shepherd came to see us several times. He came out in May, right at the time we made the Chinese eat their horses and throw their guns away. That was the time he brought Field Harris with him and we had the conversations about close air support. This also was the time when he raised the curtain as much as he knew on the future. He said the Commandant, Clifton Cates, had told him that he wanted him to be his successor. Cates was due to be relieved at the end of that year, 1951. So Shepherd didn't commit himself. He said, "It's still a lot of water to go over the dam," but he did indicate that he wanted me to come to Washington with him, and of course I said, "All right." It was a good billet. I was more than willing. So he said, "I'll be back later." He came back at the end of August or early in September when we were having the attack along the line, and he told me, he said, "I've seen Clifton again and he said he as spoken to President Truman, and that I am to come back to Washington in October," about the third week of October, this was the 1<sup>st</sup> of September, at which time this matter would be settled. He told me that he wanted me to come back with him as Assistant Commandant. He went on to say, "Now, when I was Assistant Commandant you were Director of Plans and Policies, and we had certain ideas about Headquarters Marine Corps and there were certain changes we wanted to make, and I plan to put those changes in."

I said, "Well, I want to remind you, Lem, there's an old saying that any changes the Commandant Marine Corps wants to make must be made in the first 24-hours he's in office. Otherwise he'll have 14 fellows standing in front of him telling him he can't do it."

So he said, "All right. You write all that up, and I'll be back. When I've seen the President, I'll come right straight back here and we'll have our final talk."

Well, about the middle of October he came back again, and we had this proposed talk of which you made a copy, and –

MR. FRANK: - for the record, to indicate, this was the Commandant's talk to General Thomas –

GENERAL THOMAS: This was the talk that General Shepherd was to make to his staff, the general officers, and it was the changes he proposed to make in Headquarters Marine Corps.

MR. FRANK: May I ask you a question here, sir? In May, Shepherd said that Cates told him he recommended him to be Commandant.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. That's my recollection.

MR. FRANK: Well, I was thinking not of this particular instance but of circumstances of recommending a successor. Of course the incumbent Commandant's recommendation holds a great deal of weight.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right.

MR. FRANK: Who would he have any opposition from?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, actually, there was not a great deal of opposition, as I will relate. As far as I know, up to this day, every Commandant of the Marine Corps has nominated his successor. There are those who say that Pate didn't nominate Shoup but I am positive that he did. But I don't know of a single Commandant who did not name his successor who later succeeded him. Now, this is way back history and I know it only by hearsay but I know it so well. I mean, I'm sure I'm correct. When General Vandegrift was about to be relieved as Commandant, we talked over the matter of his successor because General Vandegrift talked to me – you remember when he was in the hospital there? Because we talked over everything. He handled it this way. He sent to the Secretary of the Navy and thence to the White House the records of three officers, and he said, "I consider them all qualified. Now, I –"

MR. FRANK: - would you care to go on record who the other two were?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, yes. I believe that he sent the records of Generals Turnage, Cates and Shepherd. I suspect, though I don't know, that he indicated his preference for Cates, for the same reason we'll find the actions of the present. Mr. Truman pretty well settled, I'm told, on Cates and Shepherd, and then he said, "There's a matter of three or four years difference in the ages of these two men. Cates can take this appointment and Shepherd can take the next one."

So that's my understanding of what went on and I have reason to believe that that's correct.

MR. FRANK: I've heard that too. Now, one further question, - the tenure of the Commandancy was two years or four years?

GENERAL THOMAS: Four years. Four years by law.

MR. FRANK: What happened in that situation where Pate was selected for only two years, was it?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, so was Shepherd. Somebody apparently said to President Truman, "These other people are only appointed for two years, you ought to appoint the Commandant of the Marine Corps for only two years."

MR. FRANK: That's JCS.

GENERAL THOMAS: I don't know - other service chiefs. And they're not service chiefs like the Commandant. But that's no law, except in the Marine Corps, covering the other service chiefs and their period in office. So Truman sent down to the Senate an appointment for two years for Shepherd. If you remember, somebody tried to dump Shepherd after two years. Another officer aspired to the job, but it didn't work out and Shepherd was reappointed for another two years.

Then Pate came along, and it was sort of the thing then. Eisenhower was in office and he gave Pate two years and then Pate was reappointed for another two years. But when Shoup came along, he made the point of what the law said, and the law said, "The Commandant of the Marine Corps should be appointed for four years," and they had no right to appoint him for two years. So they sent him through a four-year appointment, and that's what Greene's got. But these people, just like we're sitting here with a bottle of beer and talking about these people getting away with the law. They get away from the law. They say, "Oh no, we will interpret the law" and what not. Well, God damn it, the law says certain things and you should stick by the word of the law and that's where our safety lies. However, he tried that. OK, we'll go on for a little while.

John Taylor Selden relieved me in Korea on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January, and I came home.



MR. FRANK: Krulak had already gone home?

GENERAL THOMAS: I sent Krulak home. Shepherd said, "Put this opening statement in the smooth and send Brute home with it," and Krulak left there the 1<sup>st</sup> of December. General Shepherd recommended that I come home at the same time but that was turned down. I was told to stay and wait for my relief, and so I waited till Selden came in on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January and he took over. We were having a storm on, so I got right in the airplane as he got out and I came on home.

I got home, and I only had five days' leave and then I moved in and took over from General Silverthorn who was the Assistant Commandant. I found the whole situation in Headquarters very pliable and flexible. They had heard General Shepherd's opening statement and most of them had decided to do something about it. He had said in his opening statement that he wanted to establish the general staff system completely throughout Headquarters Marine Corps, and I was to be the first chief of staff, and he named me in his opening talk. I'm a good general staffer and I know how the general staff runs, and I went to work on it. I had no difficulty.

MR. FRANK: You had a dual function, in other words.

GENERAL THOMAS: I did have a dual function, that's right. I was Assistant Commandant, and at that time we didn't have the same arrangement they have now. I was the Assistant Commandant and I was the Chief of Staff of Headquarters Marine Corps.

In his opening talk General Shepherd did not alter the general operation of the Headquarters. We have two big operating divisions in headquarters Marine Corps. We have the Planning Division, the general staff, and we have a big Operating Division. The Commandant operates the Marine Corps. He's the only commander in the armed services. These others are chiefs. There's a Chief of Staff of the Army, the Chief of Naval Operations, and the Chief of Staff of the Air Force. The only commander of a service is the Commandant of the Marine Corps. He commands the Marine Corps. Those others don't command by law. It may sound anomalous, but there's a lot there that should be stood upon.

The two operating divisions at Headquarters are the Personnel Department and the Quartermaster Department. The Personnel Department manipulates personnel, the Quartermaster Department manipulates supply. There may have been some changes in the last few years, but at that time that's the way it was.

Well, perhaps the most important thing that Shepherd had to say was that he wanted to set up a Division of Budgets, Reports and Statistics, the head of which would be the Fiscal Director of the Marine Corps.

Well, this was a harsh edict because – and I go back to the days when Vandegrift was first staff secretary and then Assistant Commandant under General Holcomb – he was the fiscal director. As a matter of fact, General Holcomb was his own fiscal director. I've already told about what General Vandegrift told me when I told him that I thought the way it was arranged was bad. There was no understanding amongst them, no connection in their mind, between supplies and money.

MR. FRANK: After you returned from China.

GENERAL THOMAS: Yes. That wasn't the first time I told him but that was the strongest time. Of course, this took the fiscal matters out of the Assistant Commandant's hands, because when General Barrett relieved General Vandegrift as Assistant

Commandant, Barrett was not interested in money and didn't want to be bothered by it. So a very, very busy Holcomb, who had a terrific job to do, let fiscal matters slide into the hands of the very able Seth Williams, the Quartermaster of the Marine Corps. Of course Holcomb and Williams were very close together. They were very close personally and officially.

In 1952 we found the fiscal functions so melded into various sections of Headquarters Marine Corps that in order to separate them required a major operation, and we had a major operation but it ran and it ran there, because those things had to be cut out of the Quartermaster Department.

Now, of course the stories about who did it, is Dave Shoup's story, but we called on Shoup to come up and do the job. He was then commander of the Basic School. He understood what it was all about, as I've indicated previously, after he came back from China, how he told the Commandant what he found and what his opinions were, and that's one reason we looked to him. It took several months to get hold of Shoup and get him out of the Basic School. It was around April before we got him up to Headquarters and turn him to. But as I say, that's Dave Shoup's story, but he had a real hard time.

MR. FRANK: Why don't you give us some of the details.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, to get this away from the Quartermaster – Hill fought him at every step, and Hill's a fighter. He's got a lot of Indian in him. He's part Comanche Indian. Shoup had a real rough time, and he used to come up and Brute Krulak and I would salve his wounds and he'd go back again. But it took two years. It took two years to do that job. But he stayed with it. And I don't think I could put my hand on another officer in the Marine Corps that would have been sturdy enough to have swung that job like Shoup did.

MR. FRANK: Stubborn enough to, perhaps?

GENERAL THOMAS: Stubborn enough. Mean. Mean as hell. He did the job. They had many battles and they went in to Shepherd many, many times, but each time Shepherd would finally vote for Shoup. They fought all the details out, one by one by one, over a period of two years. Terrific - but we needed that. The Marine Corps needed it. Not only did we need it but we were in trouble over at the Pentagon – and with the Navy Department, because we didn't have a fiscal setup that functioned with them. As a matter of fact, the Secretary of the Navy told Shepherd, "You've just got to do something about it." So it was a good thing we got it done.

One of my first interests when I came back was to say, "What happened to Paul Douglas' bill?"

Remember, when we were talking about that. In January 1951, Paul Douglas in the Senate and Mike Mansfield in the House introduced a bill to put a floor at four divisions and four wings under the Marine Corps, combat force, operating forces, and to – that the Commandant of the Marine Corps should be a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff when matters of direct interest to the Marine Corps were being considered.

Well, I got a fill-in on what had happened. There had been hearings the year before at which Sherman, as I've already related, did an extraordinarily clever job of fending the matter off. Since that time the whole thing had been in the doldrums. I was terribly busy. (We) got word that there was a little something going on under cover – particularly some of our reservists, Joe Chambers, (and) some other people.

In his opening talk, if you remember, in that paper that you made a copy of, General Shepherd gave his adherence to that bill. He supported that bill. He said he favored it. Not long after he took office, the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Fechteler, asked him where he stood on it, and Shepherd said, "Well, I favor it." Fechteler told him, "I don't. I don't believe it's a good thing and I'm not in favor of it."

There was also an atmosphere of pressure throughout the whole executive branch in opposition to this Douglas Bill – from the White House and every place. Shepherd had done quite enough to declare his support of the bill in his opening talk. The Army was resorting to skullduggery wherever they could, and I remember when Congressman Teague, who was a pretty good Army agent, came out to Korea, and I think I've already related that. Teague said nobody believed in the bill. Well, they did everything they could to undermine that bill.

However, here and there, and I suspect Heinl was in on the thing, there was one of the old reliables from the old unification fight and they were working. Some of this had been related already – the Hears papers and what not – yes, Heinl made that trip up to see John Nicholas Brown, former Secretary of the Navy, and also they went to New York where they got some of the reserves together and they got the Hearst papers behind it.

However, the key to the whole thing was Douglas' persistence. He persisted on this thing and insisted that it should be passed. Finally it was passed in late spring, maybe late in May, 1952. The bill passed, but in conference they reduced the four divisions and four wings to three divisions and three wings, which was quite satisfactory. MR. FRANK: Better than was expected anyway.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. But it included the part about the commandant of the Marine Corps being a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Truman signed the bill some time in the latter part of June, Public Law 416. It was another charter for the Marine Corps. Our first charter was the legislation, Railroad Security Act, and then this other one.

We waited after Public Law 416 was signed. As a matter of fact, we waited three weeks to see if we would hear anything from the Pentagon. But no word came out. Then a very carefully worded letter was sent to General Bradley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, by General Shepherd, pointing out that the law had passed, the Marine Corps had a certain position, and that he was prepared to occupy it. Although he hadn't come forward before, I will say for Bradley he never created any difficulties for us. He replied immediately to the letter saying that he understood the situation and that the Commandant of the Marine Corps, the Marine Corps staff should get in touch with the Joint Staff and work out the details of implementing the law, which we did. There was no trouble. General Shepherd and I always felt that the Marine Corps should be very, very careful about the way it implemented the direct concern of the Marine Corps.

So in the early days of the Joint Chiefs of Staff deliberations, before the Joint Chiefs meet, there's a meeting of the operational deputies, and when they would meet, the Joint Chiefs would meet, the senior operational deputies would say to the chairman, General Bradley, "The Marine Corps has declared a direct interest in items 1, 5 and 7."

Well, Brad would say, "We'll take those up first," and they took them up first, and we would have our say. When we were through with those, General Shepherd or I, whichever was over there, we'd get up and walk out.

That procedure continued for about six or seven months. But when Eisenhower came in the following January as President, he took a broom to the Pentagon, and among other places, although he did not sweep Bradley out, and he would not because Bradley was his friend, classmate and successful commander. However, when Brad's tour was up, he went out and Radford came in. After carrying on in our usual manner with Radford for a while, and I will explain that Radford and Shepherd are intimate personal friends and they also had been close officially together in Pearl Harbor, and Radford wanted his friend Shepherd there, so he said, "Lem, I don't want you all to leave when you're through with your item(s). I want you to stay and participate in all the deliberations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff."

Well, Shepherd naturally acquiesced, and therefore we have this situation today in which the Commandant of the Marine Corps is a regular member apparently, of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I believe, and in fact I know, they declare direct interest in a great many more matters than we did in our day. We leaned over backwards before we had direct interest.

**Tape 2, side 1.**

MR. FRANK: We were talking about the JCS.

GENERAL THOMAS: I think I've completed what I had to say about the JCS.

Everything went smoothly. It's gone smoothly ever since. I'm not in sympathy with everything that goes on over there. I think the Joint Staff is much larger that it should be, that the concentration of personnel and the buildup and the robbing of the services of their identity is completely unjustified. But it's nothing I can do anything about and I'm not going to.

MR. FRANK: Let's go back to one thing. Remember, during the Louis Johnson tenure, I guess you were in China at that time – they wanted to cut out Navy Day and they gave the word there'd be no official –

GENERAL THOMAS: - I think I was around, I'm not sure. 1950, that was the bad year.

MR. FRANK: You were down in Marine Corps Schools.

GENERAL THOMAS: Forrestal – I came home from China in April of 1949, and I was on a month's leave, and then I came to the Marine Corps Schools and took the Equipment Board, and it's about that time that Forrestal met his end, but before that Johnson had been appointed. I think Johnson was appointed in early April, 1949. Now, that's from recollection but it isn't far off. What was your question?

MR. FRANK: Oh, we were talking about times, bad times.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, he immediately started out to make the Joint Chiefs of Staff a bunch of Charlie McCarthys, and also to whittle down on the Armed Forces of the United States, and I've often said he seemed to think that he was brought in to dissolve them. But he continued on that course, and this is when the pressure was on to reduce the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps was to be reduced and of course you know the story about Marine Corps aviation, how first he told the newspaper correspondents that no order had ever been drawn up to transfer Marine corps aviation to the Air Force, when Bob Sherrod, who sat there before, knew that the order was lying on his desk at the time.

MR. FRANK: Prepared by whom?

GENERAL THOMAS: Prepared by the joint staff. I'm not sure just who did it. But of course he didn't have very close connection with the joint staff at that time, but the Joint

Chiefs were sort of like Charlie McCarthys. He was a grasping, mean man, Louis Johnson was.

MR. FRANK: Well, of course, he was an agent of the executive, and the President had no particular love for the Marine Corps.

GENERAL THOMAS: - no, no, that's right. So he kept whittling, and in 1950 was just a sad year, just a sad year. That's the year he told us we could not have a Marine Corps Birthday Ball. Nobody could have a birthday ball, and we didn't have on in 1950! In 1949. In 1949. Then he continued on.

MR. FRANK: Same for the Navy on Navy Day.

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh yes, same thing. Of course the Navy wasn't much better off than the Marine Corps was as far as Johnson was concerned. He was an Army fellow. This continued on through 1950. By July when the Korean thing came along he had so whittled down on the Armed Forces that we were really in the hole. Now, we had practically a debacle over there, and principally it was because of what he had done to the Armed Forces of the United States. He'd cut 'em down.

That continued on. I think it was early in 1951 when Truman finally got the word he had to get rid of him, so he canned him, and put Marshall in as Secretary of Defense.

MR. FRANK: Now, what about the comparison of Headquarters Marine Corps in the early '50s and World War II? Quite different, was it not?

GENERAL THOMAS: I don't know.

MR. FRANK: Was it more active, less active?

GENERAL THOMAS: How do you mean?

MR. FRANK: Well, the overall feeling.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I think they pretty much carried on what we had on there during the war.

MR. FRANK: In other words, Headquarters carried on regardless.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. - changes right up to today, and 'm not up to date on all of them, but I don't think there've been any great changes. There have been changes. This unified department of supply and what not; I think our quartermaster department is a lot different from what it used to be, but there mainly because of changes made over in the Pentagon, mostly by Secretary McNamara, I recall.

MR. FRANK: Well, whereas the Quartermaster before was probably responsible to the Marine Corps and the Navy. Now he's part of the Defense establishment and has responsibility -

GENERAL THOMAS: - oh, yes, they've taken away from the Quartermaster a great deal, of his old responsibility.

MR. FRANK: The other thing is, we've talked about a couple of the important Marine Corps trends and decisions primarily in the fiscal area. What others would you say? And the JCS, passage of the Douglas Bill. What other important decisions, trends, changes occurred during your time, this tour at Headquarters Marine Corps?

GENERAL THOMAS: During General Shepherd's tour?

MR. FRANK: Yes sir, or during your tour.

GENERAL THOMAS: I don't know. I don't know as I can spot one.

MR. FRANK: OK. I also had a question on the outline, comparison of methods, achievements, problems, Vandegrift's administration as -

GENERAL THOMAS: - of course there were undoubtedly many changes. Different Commandants, different people used different people. But the biggest, I believe the biggest change that I know, is the greater involvement of the Commandant in the activities of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the enlargement of the section which considers those things. My son-in-law is head of one of those sections, Joe Bruder. But when we first got into the Joint Chiefs of Staff business we just set up a group of five people and that's all we had. But as I said, they declare direct concern of the Marine Corps in many, many more problems than we did. But there's been a constant move in that direction, but I'm really not too familiar with all that.

MR. FRANK: My question was, how did Vandegrift's methods, achievements and problems differ, or in which way were they similar to, Shepherd's? Taking those two men, for instance.

GENERAL THOMAS: I think they were about the same because I served both of them in almost the same capacity.

MR. FRANK: We're trying to get at a comparison.

GENERAL THOMAS: As I've noted, and it's no reflection on the people doing the job, general managers, assistant chiefs of staff, assistant commandants did not involve themselves a great deal in the operation of the Headquarters. During my time as Director of Plans and Policies, I had great access to Vandegrift. I was in his office two or three times a day, but – and it was the same way – as a matter of fact, when I went up there with General Shepherd as assistant commandant, I did almost the same things that I did before and the same way. As a matter of fact, General Vandegrift and General Shepherd had a lot in common. They're a great deal alike, and like Lejeune was. They had that same – they had the Lejeune character. Those three men are stalwart characters and they're a lot different than any other Commandant of the Marine Corps ever was. Those three men were a lot alike.

MR. FRANK: Would you say that the involvement of the Commandant in the JCS or Pentagon arena has taken away a lot of his time and ability to pay attention to the Marine Corps?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I think probably General Greene had had to work a 48-hour day. He has tried to keep them both going. There isn't any doubt preoccupation with the Joint Chief of Staff, something's got to give some place. But I imagine it takes a lot.

Among other people who left Washington not long after General Eisenhower arrived as President was the Chief of Naval Operations, my good friend, and he really is my good friend, Admiral Fechteler. He was relieved by Admiral Carney. I've already said that Fechteler indicated in his honest way to Shepherd that he opposed Public Law 416, but after it passed he adapted himself to it. He was CNO for nearly a year after we began going in the Joint Chiefs.

I've talked about Public Law 432, which is the law, it's the CNO Bill which was passed in 1947. It's the bill about which the Secretary of the Navy wrote General Vandegrift a letter saying that the CNO Bill did not apply to the Marine Corps in any way. That's the bill that gave the Chief of Naval Operations a hold over the bureaus and the naval establishment that the early Chiefs of Naval Operations never had. It was never envisaged that he would have that. The bureaus were powers unto themselves.

Well, Admiral Carney wanted to lean more and more on Public Law 432, which by inference sort of put the Marine Corps in its place. An of course, a Navy Department general order, I guess it's 15, I don't know which it was, at one time written designated the Commandant of the Marine Corps as a technical assistant of the Secretary of the Navy, just like the chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery or Yards and Docks. They were going to put the Marine Corps – it put them in their place, and he had no other standing.

The difficulty lay in the writing of the conditions of the organization of the Department of the Navy under Navy General Order No. 5. The only one was gone and they wanted to write a new one when I came to Headquarters. Coming in with General Eisenhower was a new Secretary of the Navy, Robert Anderson, one of the ablest men that ever was in the Executive Branch. With his honesty and forthrightness, Shepherd very soon developed a close rapprochement with the new Secretary of the Navy. He and Anderson became close personal friends. A few months later, when Carney came in, it became obvious that he had new ideas about the position of the Marine Corps. As a matter of fact, he made himself clear to Shepherd before he came to Washington.

MR. FRANK: Even though he had a Marine officer son?

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. But Anderson rode along with this situation, and of course he was brand new himself, and he didn't know much about the Navy when he came here. He was just a man from the middle of Texas. When Eisenhower moved into the White House, he told the Pentagon and the various segments of the Pentagon, that a great deal of reorganization was needed, particularly reorganization of the military departments. The Army and the Air Force went to work on their reorganization and they go something that pleased everybody, but the Navy sort of dragged its feet. Now, I believe that that carried on for, well, about a year after Eisenhower got in. In any case, Charlie Thomas came in as Under-Secretary of the Navy with the new administration in January 1953, but after about three or four months he went up to be Assistant Secretary of Defense for Logistics, and Tom Gates moved in as Under-Secretary of the Navy under Robert Anderson.

It was in the winter of '52 or '53, I've forgotten, maybe around the first of the year; Charles Wilson, who was Secretary of Defense, gigged the Navy to do something about their reorganization of the Department of the Navy. So Mr. Anderson appointed a board, the chairman or president of which was Thomas Gates, Under-Secretary of the Navy, and the members of the Board were Admiral Duncan, the Vice-Chief of Naval Operations; Rear Admiral Libby, OP-3, Chief of Naval Materiel, Admiral Johnny Gingrich. Then there were three pseudo-civilian members. I say 'pseudo' because one of them was Earle Mills, who had relieved Cochrane as the wartime Chief of the Naval Bureau of Ships and then was president of the Foster Wheeler Corporation in New York. Another civilian was Robert Ramsey, graduate of the Naval Academy, 1915, and then chairman of the board of the Worthington Corporation, and Dick Paget, of a business advisory firm in New York. Dick Paget had had a lot of service in the Navy Department. He knew all about it. He'd been down with Forrestal. So I say they were pseudo-civilians. They knew a lot about the Navy, and two of them – Hobe Ramsey and been out for years, but Earle Mills was a retired naval officer, retired vice admiral. And I was the only Marine member of that board, of the Gates Board.

We started to meet and they filed through the Board, various of the bureaucrats. Each talked to us about the Secretary of the Navy, about the Navy Department and things. I said very little because there wasn't very much to say. There wasn't anything that went wrong so I just kept quiet.

I went back to our Headquarters and I had real good staff work and everything was kept up to date, prepared and what not.

One day the Board met and we'd been meeting for several weeks. We met three days a week. Earle Mills and Hobe Ramsey had to come down from New York, so they'd come down Monday night and we'd meet Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and they'd go back and come back the next week, because after all they were very busy businessmen themselves.

So finally we met one morning, after we'd been meeting two or three weeks, and Gates said, "We can't go any farther with this Board until we have settled with the biggest conflict in the Department of the Navy. I refer to the relations between the Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Marine Corps."

MR. FRANK: Had it been the biggest conflict?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, he was about right, because Carney was trying to put through this –

MR. FRANK: - I see, I see –

GENERAL THOMAS: So I said, "Well, I don't know whether relations between the two are any worse than they have been. What's up now?"

He said "Well, we're going to settle the matter. We can't go any farther till we settle it. The Board is adjourned."

I had an idea what was coming, and so I had taken the trouble, in the first three weeks of the Board, to get pretty close to the three civilian members. Now, Earle Mills was not difficult at all because he had not liked the Chief of Naval Operations taking over the Bureau of Ships, and he talked to Ramsey and I talked to Paget who had been through all this thing before, and we had a real good Marine friend among the admirals, and that was Johnny Gingrich. Old Johnny's dead now, but he was a real good Marine, and he gave me every kind of assistance. The Chief of Naval Operations was trying to take Gingrich's office over at the time, which was Director of Naval Materiel, Chief of Naval Materiel.

Well, the Board adjourned, and then I found out – Gates went in and talked to Anderson, and Anderson sent for Carney and Shepherd, and he said, "My purpose now is to settle this matter of the position of the Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Marine Corps within the Department of the Navy. I would like each of you to go back to your office and have prepared for me your statement of your idea of your position in the Department of the Navy, and your position visa-vis each other."

Well, of course, Krulak was ready to grind one out so Shepherd took his statement and went back to Anderson, and Carney did the same thing. Anderson called in the Judge Advocate General of the Navy and he said, "I want ever letter, law, court decision, statute, everything, executive orders, that's ever been issued about the Marine Corps and the Chief of Naval Operations."

Now, Anderson, in addition to being a very smart man, is a very highly trained lawyer and he took this mass of stuff and these two statements from Carney and Shepherd and he went home –



MR. FRANK: - made his own decision -

GENERAL THOMAS: - for two days, and when he came back to his office he handed Tom Gates a piece of paper, and he said, "This is my decision."

He started out by saying, "I agree with the Commandant of the Marine Corps that the Marine Corps is a service, unique in makeup, but it's still a service." And he laid out the relations between the two. That's the third charter of the Marine Corps. At the general officers' conference last June or July, whenever it was, when they explained the new General Order No. 5, I said, "That's all very fine," and I didn't object to it because Dave Griffin threw the charter on the screen and I saw that it was all right, but I said, "Now, where's the letter that Robert Anderson prepared?" They said, "Well, we're sure it's here." I said, "Well, it ought to be in the Commandant's safe along with Sullivan's letter to the Commandant about Public Law 432."

Well, it was four or five days later before General Chapman called me and said, "We've got that letter. We've found it."

Now, Anderson handed that to Gates when he had to go to New York, and so he said, "Gates, you sign it," and Gates signed the letter and sent a copy of the original signed letter, one to the Commandant, one to the Chief of Naval Operations, setting forth the relationship between the two: that the Marine Corps was a service, and it was an independent service, wasn't in the Department of the Navy, and the Chief of Naval Operations in no way bosses the Marine Corps. He has no responsibility for it at all. The operating forces of the Marine Corps, the FMF, come in the chain of command, but the operation of the Marine Corps, he had nothing to say about it.

Well, the next day we prevailed upon the Commandant to take this letter over, after Robert Anderson came back, and have him initial it, because Tom Gates had signed it. And so you'll find "RBA" - RB Anderson, "RBA" on that letter, signed by Tom Gates but also initials of Robert Anderson.

That was all to the good, but for me, at least, after he signed the letter, he said, "Now, Carney and Shepherd," - this is Anderson - "I want each of you to appoint a representative, one representative to sit down with Gates and write a new General Order No. 5, to carry out what I've written in this letter."

So the Navy named Rear Admiral Libby, the Marines named Krulak, and they slogged it out for about three days, and finally Brute came over with an outline of General Order No. 5, that was pleasing to us and satisfactory in every way, and that was General Order No. 5, the new one, for the reorganization of the Navy Department which took place here just five or six months ago. The new General Order No. 5 is all right. It still shows the Commandant of the Marine Corps as a command assistant of the Secretary of the Navy, and that's what he is, and the Chief of Naval Operations over there - and of course the Chief of Naval Operations moved in and took a lot of other things. Why Mr. Nitze let him do it, I don't know, but he did. But that doesn't affect the Marine Corps, and -

But those things are priceless. They're just priceless. Our roles and missions written in the - and we'd be dead as a doornail today if we hadn't written our roles and missions in the Act of 1947. And you'd be surprised at the number of Marine officers that don't know that.

MR. FRANK: Unfortunately this is probably no one of the things taught down at Basic School or any other.

GENERAL THOMAS: Then we have the Douglas Bill which puts a floor under the operating forces, and Congress said, "The Marine Corps shall consist of not less than three divisions and three wings: and that's in the law. The law of the land says that, and "The Commandant of the Marine Corps shall be a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff," and then this decision of Robert Anderson for relations between them. These are the three high points.

I'll go on here for a couple of minutes. . .

MR. FRANK: This is the end of Session 11.

**End of Session Eleven.**

*Session 12, Interview with General Gerald C. Thomas, USMC (Ret.), by Mr. Benis M. Frank, Washington D.C., 7 October 1966.*

GENERAL THOMAS: We left off, I believe, last time when we were talking about Admiral Libby and Colonel Krulak battling head to head over General Order No. 5 and they came out with one that was eminently satisfactory to us.

I have mentioned before that the Commandant of the Marine Corps is the only legal commander of a service. He is the Commandant of the Marine Corps. The Army has a Chief of Staff, the Navy has a Chief of Naval Operations and the Air Force has a Chief of Staff. They're chiefs of staff, they're not commanders, although they exercise all the functions.

MR. FRANK: Did you ever do any research during the time that you were teaching military history, Marine Corps History – did you ever come across the reasons why the Commandant is called the Commandant?

GENERAL THOMAS: No. I never dug back in it that far because he wasn't called Commandant, he was called the Major General Commandant. The first, the Commandant of the Marine Corps was Thomas Holcomb. Holcomb went into office as the Major General Commandant, and earlier we had the Brigadier General Commandant and the Colonel Commandant. Henderson was at first, the Colonel Commandant of the Marine Corps, and then, I believe as the result of the Florida campaign, he got promoted to brigadier and he became the Brigadier General Commandant. So the Commandant was a secondary name. The first, The Commandant of the Marine Corps, was Holcomb.

All of our Commandants or most of our Commandants have had, before coming to that office, considerable experience as troop leaders – Vandegrift, Holcomb, Cates – and Shepherd was no exception. He had been an eminent troop leader, a splendid troop leader, all the way up the line, company, battalion, brigade, division. He naturally had a great affinity for the troops and he used to go out and visit them as often as he could. I felt the same way about it, but being the housekeeper, I didn't get out as much as he did. I got out occasionally.

I believe I mentioned the other day, that after I left Korea, the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division was moved from near the east coast to the west coast. They wanted to get them over near Seoul. But after I left there were very few contacts with the enemy. There were no offensives and the casualties were low, but the division did have three very, very serious attacks made against them, and those attacks were made against what was known as 'Reno,' 'Vegas' and 'Carson,' and they were all serious and they all cost a lot of men. Generally speaking our casualties were not very high, which meant that we had some men to deal with, and the first thing we did was to increase recruit training. I've forgotten, maybe from nine to thirteen weeks or what not. I've always been a great believer in the recruit depots and wanted to see them built up.

One day not long after I became Assistant Commandant, I had a curious notion struck me about the Iwo Jima memorial which had been sort of in the doldrums, and worse than that, because one man had gone to jail for taking plums from that, Major Dash of New York went to Sing Sing over getting plums from that. He was a Marine Reserve officer in New York. I believe I'm correct in saying that. The Iwo Jima Monument thing was in the doldrums. It had been an idea and it got started and some people got into it,

but it wasn't going ahead. So something warned me I'd better ask about it, so I said to General Shepherd, "Did Cates take up with you the matter of the Iwo Jima Memorial?"

And he said, "Yes, he did."

"Well, what did you tell him?"

He said, "Well, I told him we'd build it."

With a little sinking feeling I went out, because I realized the thing was not on the track. But I went out to talk to the staff secretary, Krulak, and I said, "Brute, our Commandant said that he told General Cates that he will build the Iwo Jima Memorial. We've got to build it."

MR. FRANK: You didn't deal with it before. What was the idea, the inception of it?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, it was a reproduction of the Iwo Jima statue from the Rosenthal photograph. That very able and most outstanding sculptor in America, maybe in the world, Felix de Weldon, saw the significance of this thing, and he sculpted some soft statues, and for a bond drive they put up a statue down in front of the old Navy Building, there on the corner, 18<sup>th</sup> and Virginia Avenue now, but it's where the annex for the Pan American Building is, and that stayed there for a long while, but that was just plaster with some gilt on top of it.

Apparently someone got the idea that that statue should be reproduced in heroic proportions, and they started out and they got quite a bit of money – some tens and tens of thousands of dollars. But as I say, that money disappeared, and Major Dash, I've always understood, went to jail over it for several years. However, de Weldon, who had also been paid some, continued to work on the statue.

Well, as I said, I went out and told Krulak, "Our Commandant told General Cates he's going to build that statue, and we've got to make good on it." We dropped the thing but two or three weeks later Krulak came in and he said, "This is Monday. You know, Saturday I went over to Felix de Weldon's studio," and he said that thing that he had made was simply wonderful. "It's going to be a magnificent statue."

Now, this was the plaster cast over which I judge he made the frame in which the bronze was to be poured.

Well, anyway, Krulak impressed on me that we had to build that memorial, so I said, "Well, there's only one place to get the money from. It's not coming from other places." They talked about people making donations and what not. "It's got to come from the Marine Corps. But before we go out and get money. I want to see this thing in much more businesslike hands than it has been in." So I prevailed upon Merritt Edson, who at that time was back in Washington, executive secretary of the National Rifle Association, to become the president.

Well, it's a long story and I'm not going to go into it any more, but Edson's the person that put it over and in the end he didn't get any credit for it. He's actually the man that brought this thing to fruition and he wasn't even present when it was dedicated.

MR. FRANK: Edson had retired?

GENERAL THOMAS: He retired in 1947 and became the Director of Public Safety in the State of Vermont. He retired just before the law went through, the National Security Act of 1947.

MR. FRANK: Of course there are many stories told about his retirement. One is that he retired so he could fight –

GENERAL THOMAS: - well, yes, that was it partly, but also the politicians had been battling with this Medal of Honor boy from their state, wanted him to come up there and get into politics. And so he was motivated by both things. He didn't see much prospect in the Marine Corps of getting ahead. Eddie was a very ambitious fellow. But it was both things. He wanted to testify – that made up his mind – but also he wanted to go back to Vermont and get into politics.

Anyway, he took over the Iwo Jima project and he drove it to fruition. As I say, in the end he wasn't around. He got thrown out by the Board of Directors, but he was the one. And when I told Krulak, "The money's coming from the Marine Corps," first thing we did was to write a letter, after Edson had agreed to be the president of this association and everything was on the track. We wrote a letter to all commanding officers saying that we wanted to build the monument and that it would take about a half-million dollars. At the time, there were about 250,000 Marines, officers and enlisted, and we said, "We're going to ask you for a dollar apiece now, and some time in the future, maybe next year, we'll tell you when the monument will be completed and when the dedication will be, and then we'll ask you for another dollar."

Well, the thing went ahead, and the next year we wrote to them and said, "The dedication will be on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1954, and we'd like a dollar," and they sent it in and we got \$600,000 and we paid for the monument.

Now, there was some finagling that went on. The landscaping and what not – and the Monument wound up in the hole about \$100,000, but I washed my hands of it. I said, "You guys got that and we paid for the monument. Now if you made a bargain for something else you go ahead and pay for it." Somehow it got paid for.

We had no difficulty but there were some touchy negotiations about location for the Monument, because the Fine Arts Commission, although the designer, the artist, the sculptor, de Weldon, was a member of the Fine Arts Commission, the matter of getting them to approve a location in the District – in the capital – didn't just happen out of hand. It was difficult to do. You see, that Iron Mike down in Quantico, the Fine Arts Commission turned that down for a location in Washington. I took that monument out of the National Museum here in a truck and took it to Quantico in 1921. Because under the urging from the Army – there's a Marine emblem on that helmet, you know, and this French sculptor made a present to the United States. Unfortunately he picked an old shipmate of mine by the name of Carl Millard who was in the hospital, and – as his model – and Carl came along with this Marine emblem on his helmet. When it came here, the Fine Arts Commission would have no part of it. So it stayed in the National Museum here for many, many months, and one day I came up with a truck, picked the thing up and took it to Quantico, and it was put up down there. That's Iron Mike, out in front of what's now the museum there.

But we had a little bit of the same thing going on about the Iwo Jima Memorial. Anyway, it was put over. It's a magnificent monument. It's one of the great tourist attractions in the city of Washington. It's worth a billion dollars to the Marine Corps and the Marine Corps paid for it.

MR. FRANK: Who were the people on the committee.

GENERAL THOMAS: I don't remember the names of all of them. I'm not going into that.

MR. FRANK: So it was outside the Marine Corps one you took it –

GENERAL THOMAS: - there were Marine Reserve officers and retired officers.

MR. FRANK: I'm talking about after this Dash was put away and Edson took over.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, there was a group of people that did the job, but I felt that Edson or somebody like Edson should take hold, you see, and he did, and he put up the monument.

MR. FRANK: This about the time also that General Shepherd was moved to get that Belleau Wood Monument, wasn't it?

GENERAL THOMAS: That was (the) next year, and I'll mention that at the end.

I just want to say that, as I've gone along I've had quite a little to say about Marine Corps aviation. Well, this is simply a continuation of my experiences with Marine aviation all through the years, when I was at Headquarters. I had very little to say about them. They were never agreeable that we would have much to say about them. I tried to get aviation and ground back together, but I was never successful. I worked with them in the finest hour of Marine Corps aviation, which was Guadalcanal, and if they never did anything before or since, they were magnificent then and they practically won that war in the South Pacific.

Field Harris and I were together before the Corps went to Bougainville, and we both knew that we were coming back to Washington, I to be Director of Plans and Policies; he to be Director of Marine Corps Aviation. We sat and talked about a lot of things that we'd like to do about getting aviation back into the Marine Corps. Well, we did some of those things, but it didn't have much results.

I've already mentioned I believe that after I left Washington to go to Tsingtao in 1947, Harris, whom I had prevailed upon not to bring into the regular Marine Corps a lot of aviation cadets, and excessive numbers of them, because there boys only had a high school education – but after I left, Field went in to General Vandegrift and got his consent to bring in another thousand of these lads into this Marine Corps. Well, that gave aviation a very large number of regular officers, you know another 1000 out of 6000 or 5500 regular officers. But they had these aviators that were over age. These fellows were all over aviators that were over age. These fellows were all over age 15 years later. And so when they came out to Korea they had an over-age group and they were in real trouble.

MR. FRANK: Wasn't there also a program in between World War II and Korea, wherein ground officers of company and field grade were trained as aviators also?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, there was some of that all along, but they didn't want much made of those people. They weren't young people. But this thousand additional regular officers, aviators being commissioned as regularly commissioned officers in the Marine Corps in a lump prevented them filling up with young aviation cadets every year, and that's what they should have been filling up with. They should have been taking these fliers over a period of ten years, a hundred every year, and they'd have come out to Korea with a much sounder outfit. But it didn't happen. They came to Korea in 1950 with people that had been flying ten, twelve, fourteen years, and a lot of them were beyond the age.

MR. FRANK: A lot were Reservists too.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, they started calling the Reserves. So they started calling people back, and these were the people that we called the two-time losers. It was a very unpopular program, very unpopular program. Our fliers tried to slide out from under and

say that the ground people had caused this program, but it isn't any such a thing. They caused it. And that's when they called back the Ted Williamses and Jerry Colemans and people like that, a lot of boys that had gone out and gotten themselves settled and got families, and they were lawyers and this, that and the other thing. By God, we called them back to active duty and sent them to Korea for thirteen, fourteen, fifteen months. We should never have done it.

MR. FRANK: Are you talking about the ground officers as well?

GENERAL THOMAS: The ground officers came willingly but most of these fliers did not come willingly. The ground officers were mostly volunteers, you know, people that wanted to come, but the fliers were not. Well, it made for a very touchy situation in our early days, and the Marine Corps was a little on the downgrade, and about that time this Life article came out about Parris Island. You remember – you remember those pictures?

MR. FRANK: Oh, yes. Also wasn't there some young fellow, some officer, who was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross and his father returned it to President Truman?

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, maybe so. I don't remember that. It may have happened, I'm not sure. I don't know. However, after I'd been five or six months at Headquarters, General Brice came back to Headquarters for duty. Oscar and I are old friends, and we got a lot of things straightened out. It helped out a great deal to have him to deal with.

One other thing, one other administrative item, but one of real importance in – well, the Lejeune years, we'll say, and after that, was the Commandant of the Marine Corps each year submitted to the Secretary of the Navy, an annual report. Well, it was a real important document. The Marine Corps really turned to on that report. It gave, to the Secretary of the Navy, a genuine look at what the Marine Corps was doing. Also it was a sort of a directive, with conclusions, suggestions and recommendations, for the Marine Corps for the next year.

Well, during the war years it had passed into limbo, we'll say, but we revived that and we started to write for the Commandant, General Shepherd, a report to the Secretary of the Navy. Well, it's an important item, really worthwhile.

MR. FRANK: These documents are of tremendous historic interest. You take the CMC report –

GENERAL THOMAS: - I hope they're available, hope you can find them all.

MR. FRANK: Oh yes, they were printed up, but I'm thinking of the ones say in the late 1890s. It's the story of the Marine Corps – the reports from the Boxer Rebellion, the reports from Samar. This is Marine Corps history.

GENERAL THOMAS: In the meantime I always had to keep a tight hand on my people down on the first corridor in the annex. They were general staff and I kept them in line. I made them do the duty of a general staff and not get into the work of others, because they always had a tendency to dabble in the affairs of the Personnel Department and the Quartermaster. I also held a pretty tight rein on those departments, because after all I was Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps and I had the responsibility for coordinating them. It happened that I let the Chief of Personnel and the Quartermaster General understand that I was never going to stand in the way of their communication to the Commandant, and they went freely to and from the Commandant's office. General Shepherd understood that he could not enter into any agreement with them about certain things, conclusions, unless he talked things over with his staff, because they would come

in and try to sell something. It all worked out very well. It's something that's got to be kept under tight control, like what happens in a division.

I remember years ago I went down to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, and two young regimental commanders came in to see me. Those two boys are lieutenant generals today. They plaintively said to me, "We're commanding regiments in this division but we have no standing. We can't get in to see the division commander."

Well, the division commander was a man who did not understand general staff duty or major command situations, and the five senior colonels in his division were the Chief of Staff and the 1, 2, 3, and 4, and when these regimental commanders would come up and say, "I'd like to talk to the Chief of Staff," the G-3 would say, "Damn it, talk to me. You can't see the Chief of Staff." And they didn't. And that division blew up. That's a long time ago, but it did, because they simply didn't understand general staff and command. These fine young regimental commanders who, as I have said, are both lieutenant generals in the Marine Corps today, said, "We can't get in to see the division commander. We can't get in to see the Chief of Staff. What are we going to do about it?"

Well, I gave them a little sympathy and a little advice. It didn't do much good because they had a ruction (sic) in the division and it didn't do them or the Marine Corps any good. The division commander got relieved over the matter.

I stayed on in Headquarters Marine Corps from January, 1952, for about two years, I think January 1954. Well, I always had the feeling that the three-star billets were details and that people shouldn't hold them five or six years – no more than three years.

MR. FRANK: Should – could you have held it as long as the then –

GENERAL THOMAS: - I could have held, as I'll relate. So I went in after I had been at Headquarters two years, and besides that, I'd had a lot of duty and I was getting a little tired, and I told General Shepherd that I wanted to retire, and that I would retire that summer, and I'd like to ask that he find another Assistant Commandant.

Well, he very kindly told me that he had expected me to come there with him and spend four years; whereupon I told him that I couldn't do that, but that I'd like his concurrence that I should go ahead and retire in the summer of 1954.

We let things ride there for a time, and one day he called me in, and at that time he gave me some reasons which I do not care to go into why I should go to Quantico, and they were important and I agreed to go to Quantico and take command.

Some months before General Cates completed his tour as Commandant, maybe a year or more, the President posed the voluntary retirement situation. I'm sure that an exception in the case of Cates would have been made but he didn't ask for it, but when he completed his tour he dropped back to three stars and went down to Quantico and took command till 1952.

Well, that freeze order, placing the freeze on retirements, was revoked maybe in the spring of 1954, and also at this same time certain personal affairs of General Cates got in line, and he told Shepherd that he would retire that summer. He was going to retire. So that's when Shepherd, as I say, gave me what a considered very good reasons why I should go down there. Of course Quantico's my old home and I never had any other home really because I come from a traveling family, and so I agreed to go to Quantico. So on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June, 1954, out on the aviation field at Quantico, General



Cates and I each read our orders, and he departed and I took command at Quantico, June 1954.

I was glad in a way to have an opportunity to implement an idea that was the outgrowth of many discussions between General Vandegrift and myself. Before World War II, some time before World War II, we had only two stations, and they each had substantial activities in addition to being troop stations. We had the Marine Corps Base, San Diego, where the West Coast Marine Force was stationed, but the barracks was also the home of the Recruit Depot. Later as we approached World War II, and as a matter of fact I don't know exactly what year it happened, we acquired Camp Elliot, which was a great help. Joe Fegan went to Elliot and actually the Fleet Marine Force got out of the hair of the recruit people to a certain extent. But they always said that – then Quantico, we had a Fleet Marine Force Atlantic, a brigade, stayed as a brigade, matter of fact, almost all the time I was a Quantico – a little more than a brigade, but they also had the Marine Corps Schools at Quantico. Now, during WWII, I used to go down to Quantico and my old friend General Torrey was in command there, and he was always bitching, “If these schools didn't get in my way I could have a real good post.” Well, all they had on the post was schools, really.

So General Vandegrift said to me, “I don't care how you stack up these posts but I want the troop commander to be the senior officer present, and he'll be the one, and I don't want to see anything go through like my boss General Lyman used to have to go through in Quantico.

So we started out with that in view. But in Quantico we weren't going to use it because by that time we had Pendleton on the West Coast and Camp Lejeune on the East Coast, as FMF stations. But I was impressed by this attitude of the various commanding generals of the Marine Barracks Quantico, and we had that, and then we had a Commandant Marine Corps Schools, and I said to the Old Man, “Quantico's just schools. That's all there is there. So why don't we do away with the Marine Barracks Quantico and say, Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, Virginia, the Commandant of Marine Corps Schools, and we'll send up a man whose primary responsibility is operation of the Marine Corps Schools – in other words, a man who'll be the intellectual head of that institution, and he's No. 1 man on that post.”

“Well,” he said, “that's exactly what I'd like to have,” and that's what we set up in 1946.

Well, without reflection whatsoever on Cates, who was not in on all this, I was the first real Commandant of the Marine Corps Schools, and I considered myself responsible for the last word in instruction on that post, and I didn't get myself involved with mowing the grass and tending the trees. I attended to the educational, the intellectual side of that post.

At the time that I took over at Quantico, there were various major subdivisions, the most important of which was the educational center. We had the senior school – it's got a different name now, but it's the same thing. They came back to the name we gave them during the war. The amphibious schools, and they have the communications school and the basic school. Well, no use going into it, you know what those schools all comprise and what they do and generally what their objectives are. And you had the candidates' class. There hadn't been really any major change in the objectives of those schools for some years before, and I don't think there's been any major change. There's

been great improvements, but I don't think they've made improvement every year. There have been great improvements in them, but they're generally the same.

I've already related how Twining came up with the idea of setting up the Marine Corps Development Center. It was the agency for carrying out the statutory responsibilities of the Marine Corps; namely, to develop the tactics, techniques and so forth of amphibious operation. The Development Center was made up of the Tactics and Techniques Board, and the Equipment Board.

Then we had the Ordnance School which is the only enlisted school on the post. It's still there. It should move and I think it's going to move, but – I think General Greene wants to move it, but it should have moved years and years ago. It belongs down at Camp Lejeune in the depot, it doesn't belong in Quantico.

Well, that was it, and of course we had our housekeeping troops, the Headquarters Battalion and the Service Battalion. That's the general makeup of Quantico.

As I said, my concept of my duty was that I was intellectual head of that institution, and I had had time to give to that, and I couldn't run around wondering about what the mess sergeant was going to feed them or who cut the grass or trimmed the trees. But in our original concept, we had a brigadier general set up there as chief of staff. Well, there wasn't a general officer available so my chief of staff was Don Weller, who came in a few days after I got there. Weller was actually the post commander. He conducted inspections. I didn't conduct a single inspection all the time we were there. Every Saturday morning he had an inspection. One Saturday it was the Headquarters Battalion, another Saturday it was the Service Battalion, another Saturday it was the base and what not. But I was involved in the intellectual life of that post, which I thought the Commandant of the Marine Corps Schools should be.

One of the things that struck me soon after I got there was the fact that they had eliminated from the curriculum of the schools the subject of military history. Well, my background fitted me, made this a matter close to my heart. They had a little slack in their hours and I told the school, the educational center, "If you'll find my Gallipoli lecture I'll deliver it." Well, they started to look for it and they never did find it. At least they didn't find my lecture, but they did find the one that was written originally by Art Mason in 1935. It was a five-hour lecture. Well, in the old days there – our visual aid presentations were great maps that were put up on boards. Dave Shoup used to be my stooge to move the cutouts from one place to another. But of course the matter of visual aids had made great strides, so very shortly we went out and made a superior bunch of slides for the Gallipoli lecture, and for the two years I was there I delivered it, two hours one day and three hours another. There are a lot of people in the Marines that remember that I did that, too.

MR. FRANK: Yes, I've heard about it.

GENERAL THOMAS: It was good for them and it was good for us. I said, "A young man ought to know something about his profession. He ought to read some military history, maybe not as much as I did, for I read a great deal. When my boy graduated from the Naval Academy I gave him 15 books from my library, and I said, "Here's what you should start on. I hope you don't stop here. But these are the standard words of military history that I have in my possession and I'm giving them to you to read."

Military history, that's the way you learn. When I started reading military history I had no concept about flanking movements or enfilade or this, that and the other thing,

but gradually read. Go back to the Civil War, read how they opened up formations, automatic weapons, things that cause them to open up today, and we went from machine guns, repeating rifles to machine guns to this, that and the other thing, to a nuclear bomb! That's the concept of operations and that's the growth. But you've got to go back to the beginning, even to Alexander, and really get an idea of how those things developed and where these various things that we do now really spring from.

I was very much interested in military history. I was interested in everything they taught. Their schedules were no mystery to me because, at the Basic Schools and when I was in the schools at Quantico, I used to have to make the schedules out. It's a technique in itself but you have to do it. Lay the problems on, work out your types of instruction and put them up. I knew about all those things.

Every day I visited one of the classes, sometimes in the afternoon but mostly in the morning. I'd go over to the senior school. I told them when I come in I don't want any notice taken. I'll sit in the back of the room. Sometimes if I was interested in what the instructor was saying I'd stay there a half hour, three-quarters of an hour. Sometimes I'd stay five minutes and then I'd go on. But I went to one or more, sometimes I went to both classes in the morning, but every day I was in a class and watched their instruction and knew what they were doing, because I thought that was a part of my job as Commandant of the Marine Corps Schools.

I went out to the Basic School, but not every day. The Basic School is now in new buildings, but the Basic School in those days was largely in Camp Goettge and Camp Upshur. Camp Barrett was the headquarters of the Basic School, had three-quarters of the battalion, school troops. Well, school troops is another thing we had at Quantico in those days.

MR. FRANK: Schools demonstration troops.

GENERAL THOMAS: But I kept in touch, and usually I'd go to the Basic School when they had a field exercise. I liked to see them out in the field. I found a couple of conditions in Quantico that didn't exactly fit with my idea of how things should go. General Walt came in. Now, with Wornham I had gone down a year or so before I took command down there, maybe longer but at least a year, in which we had been impressed that the Basic School was carrying too much of the Quantico load. Everything in Quantico was thrown at the broad shoulders of the Basic School, just hung around it. That was an outgrowth of 1950 when Dave Shoup was there running the Basic School. Everything new that they started they threw at Shoup and he took it. It was still there. They didn't want to change it when Wornham and I went down, so I just put it in the back of my mind and we didn't say any more at the time.

I didn't mention that while I was in Quantico, there was also a Candidates' School, enlisted personnel that were being groomed for commissions. It was actually a screening course of about ten, twelve weeks and from there people went on into the Basic School.

One of the first complaints that Walt came to me with was that the marksmanship of the Basic Classes was way below standard. I said, "Well, why don't you do something about it. We send our companies over to the rifle range, and nobody in the Basic School in authority has anything to say about it. The rifle range takes them and puts them across, and we're making a very poor showing. We're only getting 70, 75% qualification."

So I said, "All right, forget about it." I went out next day to the rifle range. There were two companies from the Basic School firing at the two rifle ranges. I went up to the firing line of one range. I asked for the range officer. He came back. I also noticed there was only a coach every other target. So I talked to this lad and I said, "What's your rifle experience?"

He said, "Well, I haven't had any real rifle experience, except when I was in Basic School."

I said, "What did you do before you came here?"

"Oh, I came here from Korea."

I said "All right." I went over to the other range and I got almost the same story. There was a young second lieutenant running the firing line with a coach on every other target. But back of the two firing lines were the commanders and the officers of the two firing companies about 300 yards back. As it turned out the two company commanders, happened to be Barde and House, both were distinguished marksmen, and they were not allowed to touch the firing.

I didn't hesitate a minute. I went right back by the rifle range detachment and told the commanding officer, who was a lieutenant colonel, old ordnance fellow, that starting tomorrow, General Walt would have command of all of his rifle training. And Walt sent a lot of his noncommissioned officers so he could put a coach on every target.

Well, this old chap, the Rifle Range Commander who had been with me in Korea – and I was very fond of him, he put in his letter the next day and the following month he retired. But Walt started getting 100 percent qualification with his people.

Another thing that I found was, there were a good many complaints about the food at the Basic School, and this is how I happened to come onto it. I said, "What's wrong? Why don't you do something about it?" Well, I found out that the Basic School and all their people had not a thing to do or to say with the feeding of their people. The central mess in the headquarters – the mess sergeant there on Walt's Basic School mess was not answerable to him at all, he was answerable to the mess officer on the post. I changed that. I broke old Mac's heart – central butcher shop and all which is really fine. But I took the mess out and I put it under, because feeding is a part of troop leading, and I said, "Walt, you'll feed your people from here on. The Post mess officer has nothing to do with it. He will give you a standard menu because the butcher shop makes up your meat, processes your meat, and that's all right, but if you want hamburger tomorrow and steak the next day, that's all right. You don't have to feed port chops today because they cut 'em, you can put 'em in your freeze box."

So I got that fixed up.

MR. FRANK: Actually the basic officer, as I recall in my day, not too many years before that, you went through just like (crosstalk)

GENERAL THOMAS: Feeding your men is one of your most important problems, because sometimes you've got to go out and steal food, you know, or dig it up here and there, but an officer feeds his men, that's one of the important things that he does.

We had a summer training program there at Quantico, the PLC – very much as they're doing now.

I had a good deal of speechmaking to do while I was at Quantico, and I went various places, to other schools. Sometimes I went alone, sometimes the Commandant asked me to go in his stead to some of these places. I used to have a couple of very

interesting trips. Every spring the Army War College at Carlisle had a global strategy symposium. They'd have their symposium in April and then in June they'd have one at Newport. The Naval War College was devoted to the symposium. I'd go up there, and I enjoyed them very much, maybe made a little contribution, I don't know.

Also during my time in Quantico – which started a year or two before – was the Secretary of Defense Conferences. When Charles Wilson came in with Eisenhower he decided that this new team of his had not gotten together on a personal basis close enough, so he wanted to get them all together, and somebody along the line, maybe he or Roger Keyes, I don't know, decided the way to get together was to have a big clambake for three or four days and everybody have serious conversations, in the morning get tight in the afternoon and evening, have entertainment and all. So we had the Secretary of Defense Conferences in Quantico. They were really something. Later somebody knocked them off. McNamara knocked them off, but they'd be very wise to put them back on again. They were really wonderful things. All the people in the government – the Cabinet used to come down and take part in events. We'd have presentations all morning from 9 until 12:30, then we'd have lunch, somebody'd make a talk, and then in the afternoon everybody played golf or shot on the pistol range or went fishing or did things like that, and then that night there'd be some real bang-up entertainment. Ed Sullivan came down for a show one time there. It was really a wonderful thing. Everybody got together for about four days, all these people, all the top people, uniformed and civilians in the government. The President would come down and stay for one night. It was very worthwhile.

And then, of course, we had in those days – I don't know whether they still have them or not – the Joint Civilian Orientation Conferences.

MR. FRANK: - oh yes, I was there once.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, they were really worthwhile.

MR. FRANK: They had the outstanding civilians from every endeavor.

GENERAL THOMAS: As a matter of fact, I talked to the first one ever held. When I came back from Guadalcanal the first class of JCOC, really it was the genesis of the thing – Jim Forrestal had them up at the Midshipmen's School at Columbia University, and he told Vandegrift that he wanted something and apparently Vandegrift couldn't go, or maybe he didn't want to, maybe he wanted me. That was when I was back in Washington with Vandegrift in January and February, 1943.

So I went up with Forrestal to New York. He took me there and I talked. I talked at the first JCOC group of people at the Graduate Club at Columbia University, and it was a really worthwhile setup, and I hope they keep them up because it was a really, really worthwhile venture.

As I got along towards the end of my tour, I fell into an old routine that they have there. In those days, and it may continue now, I expect it does, the Royal Marines and the Marine Corps School at Quantico used to exchange a problem every year. And in the summer – they came over to us in 1954, Commodore Maude of the Royal Navy, I remember he landed at, they came down from Canada in Hurricane Hazel. It's one of the most violent periods in the history of the State of Virginia, and they landed at Anacostia from Canada, had a hell of a time getting in, and Maude and his team came on down to Quantico and I had a big cocktail party for them that night.

But then the next year, 1955, I took the team to Fremington in England to the amphibious base there. Bob Heinl was over there and on duty in Fremington at the time. We had a very worthwhile meeting for three or four days. I did a little touring. My boy, young Johnny, was at London in the guard in those days. My wife went over. She flew over to see Johnny. We went to Fremington and then that year we had an invitation to go make a presentation to the French General Staff, which we did. We went to Paris. We used the interpreting facilities of the NATO Defense College there at the Ecole de Guerre, stayed there a couple of days, and that was very handy for me because Joe Bruder, my son-in-law, was on duty at SHAPE in those days.

Then we also were asked to put the same show on at CINCSOUTH in Naples, so we flew down to Naples for a couple of days and then we came on home.

MR. FRANK: It wasn't all beer and skittles. I understand that was really a rough tour of duty, being on an advanced base problem.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, you had to work. These presentations were serious. They lasted three days. We were three days at the Ecole de Guerre. At Fremington, too. Then we got questioned. We were really on the skillet. I made a talk there in 1953. I don't know whether I talked about it when I was going through my experiences, in the early days – one of the first things – no, the year after I came back General Shepherd said, "I'm supposed to go up to NATO Defense College and make a presentation on amphibious operations," and something was coming up and he said, "I just can't get away at that time, I want you to take it."

So I had about a five-hour lecture prepared on amphibious operations, and in February 1953 I went to NATO Defense College and delivered those lectures. Admiral Carney, who was CINCSOUTH in those days, came up from Naples and he followed me on the platform. We sort of fitted in together. But it was really worthwhile. It wasn't easy, because there was a lot of work attached to it.

Apparently some time between World War I and World War II, I never knew when because I had not been back to Belleau Wood – I mentioned that I departed from there the 5<sup>th</sup> of July, 1918, and I did not see it again for many years. Well, I did see it again on my trip of 1953. Ed Forney, who was the Marine representative on the NATO Defense staff, the college staff, drove me out, and I gave him a historical ride over the Belleau Wood battlefield.

Apparently a monument had been put up between World Wars I and II. Most of the things that had been Marine, had been eradicated. The French government changed the name of Belleau Wood to the 'Wood of the Brigade of the Marines,' but in World War II the US Army did everything they could to wipe that out, and on the edge of 'Lucy,' where there wasn't a doughboy within five miles, the monument today says "The United States Army." That's there now.

Apparently, there was a monument down in the woods and it was destroyed by the Germans in World War II, and someone brought it up to General Shepherd, and he was interested in getting it put back up again. I don't remember where he got the money from.

MR. FRANK: When I went to see General Shepherd, he reminded us. He mentioned – I was with the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines in Korea and I was on the regimental staff, and Tommy Tompkins was the regimental commander. General Shepherd visited us and he happened to mention, at the officers' mess that afternoon, how somebody called his attention,

somebody paid a visit down there and said, “You know, we fought there. The Marines fought there. There isn’t a single item of Marine Corps interest in ‘The Wood.’ Isn’t it a shame we don’t have a statue.” Shepherd was worried about that. Thought nothing of it. After he left we, in the 5<sup>th</sup> Marines, took up a collection, and sent him back a thousand dollars, and that was the beginning of – (crosstalk)

GENERAL THOMAS: - Well, anyway, Tompkins went with us. We left France in November 1955. We went to London and spent three days with the Royal Marines there. They had the world’s premier of their picture (movie) “Cockleshell Heroes.” We stopped over at this big theater, and the Prince Consort was there and with him was Dickie Mountbatten. It was a real big show. We stopped at London for three days on the way over. In this party was Houston Noble, besides Shepherd and myself, Noble, Arthur Worton, also a veteran of Belleau Wood, and Tompkins. So we got over and my children were still in Paris. When I went through London I picked my boy Johnny up and took him with me. It’s a magnificent monument. Felix de Weldon went over with us. There is a granite slab with a figure of a Marine superimposed on it.

MR. FRANK: General Shepherd was saying there was some question whether or not it was going to be ready for the ceremony.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, anyway, we went over in November 1955 and dedicated that monument. That was one of my last acts. I was thinking about what I would do after I retired. I was dickering with a college down in Atlanta, to be the President. It didn’t work out. It turned out to be a bad idea. I used up all my time before retirement talking to them. In a blowing blizzard in December, my chief of staff read my retirement orders and I walked out of the door – December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1955.

MR. FRANK: Well, you’ve been close to the Marine Corps ever since, though.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I’m here. I have hostages in the camps, sons-in-law – as a matter of fact, I had two sons-in-law and two sons in the Marine Corps at the same time. Dick Andrews, who is the young architect here, was a Marine lieutenant. That’s when he met my daughter, when he was in the Basic School. And Joe Bruder was in Quantico, and then Johnny was in the Marine Corps, he enlisted when he was 17 years old and they sent him over to London..

MR. FRANK: He’s not with the marine Corps now?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, he’s writing. He’s writing down in Charleston. After completing his two years he went to Columbia University.

That’s it!

MR. FRANK: Well, not quite.

GENERAL THOMAS: I mean it, that’s my –

MR. FRANK: Let’s see. There were quite a few generals that retired, was it when Shepherd made Commandant or when Shoup made Commandant?

GENERAL THOMAS: When Shepherd made Commandant – oh, let me see now.

MR. FRANK: Some went out in a huff, though.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I don’t know what their person feelings were, but they didn’t want to serve under Shoup.

Oh, one more thing was this – the day Shoup came in these people did not retire. Now, let’s get that straight. But the law for tombstone promotion became inoperative after the 30<sup>th</sup> of October of the year before. Shoup came in the next January. Now, these people had to decide to retire, like Twining, Hogaboom, Pollock; they had to retire two

months before Shoup came in or they could not retire as four-star generals, and they were all three-star generals, and they all went out on the 30<sup>th</sup> of October, whatever year it was. The tombstone promotion – that partly motivated them. Otherwise I think they may have hung on a few months.

MR. FRANK: But of course that is only a matter of personal pride since a tombstone promotion did no mean extra money.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's all right, it meant rank, and in my case that meant a good deal, because I later got on the money list. I'm on the list of the four-star generals for pay. Because I went back to active duty and served for three years in my tombstone rank, and the law says two years and you get on the list for retirement pay, and I was on active duty when this pay bill went through. So I'm probably the only four-star general retired, other than Commandants, who gets four-star pay, but I served three years on active duty and the law says if you serve two years on active duty in your temporary rank you become permanent, and then I'm on a different status than any of these other four-star generals, even if they were senior to me before that. Shoup always insisted I was senior to all of them, because I'd been on active duty as a four-star general. It really doesn't make any difference.

MR. FRANK: Well, it's nice. Tell me, did you have an involvement with the Ribbon Creek disaster? Were you brought into the picture at all?

GENERAL THOMAS: None whatsoever. I was on active duty. I just watched it. I was in the Pentagon. There wasn't anything I could do to help or hinder. It was a tragic sort of thing, in more ways than one. I don't want to go on record historically about the matter, but I had absolutely nothing to do with it, except that I was on active duty when it happened.

MR. FRANK: Do you think the Marine Corps came out of it well, all things considered?

GENERAL THOMAS: I can't tell you. You don't do very well with a black eye, and we really got a black eye.

MR. FRANK: Or do you think it redeemed itself?

GENERAL THOMAS: Oh, the Marine Corps redeemed itself, sure, in the public mind. I think Shoup did that. Shoup did a lot to bring the Marine Corps back in the public eye, a lot.

MR. FRANK: Of course, when Strom Thurmond tried this whole business of teaching about Communism and so on, Shoup seems to have stood up to that.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, there was a good deal of misunderstanding about that. I never had anything to do with it. But you can't laugh off the Ribbon Creek thing. We were weak there, and we were weak in organization, and it was something that I had tried to do something about years before and had not succeeded. Our organization at Parris Island invited the Ribbon Creek disaster.

MR. FRANK: What do you see as the future of the Marine Corps.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I think – I don't know if I'm prepared to say particularly. The Marine Corps is doing exceedingly well now. As I've said on many occasions, the Marine Corps is a part of the naval service and Marine Corps outside of the naval service doesn't make any sense. There are probably aspects of the Vietnam campaign that would be more fitting to what they're trained for. But the Marine Corps is an amphibious organization. They can fight any place. We did in Korea and we've been doing it in Vietnam.



MR. FRANK: Talking about Korea, there's been a lot of criticism, I won't say criticism, I'll say statements made about the fact that during the Korean period, the Marine Corps was involved with a static form of warfare, trench warfare, land warfare, and only during the latter stages when the 1<sup>st</sup> Division was over in the Panmunjom truce corridor area and the truce was on, or before that, were we able to get the reserve regiments down off the coast for amphibious training, after this operation, and to carry this on, the statement is made that a lot of your battalion commanders, lieutenant colonels, senior majors and some colonels, their most recent assignment, involvement in combat was during this period, and as such their training was in this form of warfare. They've gotten away from the amphibious concept. There was some concern about getting them back on the right track there.

GENERAL THOMAS: I don't believe that there's a lot to that, because I know that in the years since Korea, in other words since Korea was real active, '53, '54, '55, 12 years, that the Marine Corps has constantly carried out amphibious operations on the West Coast and on the East Coast. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division regularly goes to Culebra and Vieques. Their amphibious operations are carried out regularly. They have to carry them out regularly because they have to carry them out with the Fleet. The Fleet's got ships standing by and they're very jealous of those ships and they want them to have some exercise. If the Marine Corps got involved in too much land warfare, the Navy would have a complaint about it. As a matter of fact, the Navy's complaining a little bit now about having so many Marine in Vietnam sitting up there against the demilitarized zone fighting land warfare, and their ship floating around with no Marines to help train. But that amphibious work is going on. This floating battalion, I believe, off Vietnam – and the battalion over on the coast, it's going all the time. It's handicapped because I think they probably had to drain FMFLANT to get men for Korea, but they're carrying on their training. This is an interim. I'll be over. But the Marine Corps must keep up its amphibious training and it must keep up its helicopter lift, its mobility and what not.

I noticed in the paper yesterday they talked about the helicopters, and the Army needs more and more helicopters, and I think I remarked as I went along about how the Army didn't have any idea about helicopters at all in 1953, '54, '55. We were forcing them down everybody's throat. We made the important gains.

MR. FRANK: Now, how large a Marine Corps do you think we should have aside from the legal viewpoint, the viewpoint of whatever laws are passed?

GENERAL THOMAS: This question came up at the General Officers' Conference, you know. But my, it's my considered opinion that for limited warfare we've expanded to the present point up as far as we ought to go. I believe we should call up the Reserves. I believe we should form the 4<sup>th</sup> Division. But I think that's all the Marine Corps should do for a limited war.

Now, in an all-out war, in the last war we went up to a half-million personnel and six divisions and four wings. I don't see any reason why we can't go at least that far or even farther. We have the cadre. We built a half-million Marine Corps on 1000 officers. That's all we had, 1100 officers, before World War II, you know.

MR. FRANK: I imagine a lot of people are beating their gums and complaining about the way the Marine Corps was expanding in World War II, even though we needed them.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I remember when I came up, this old fellow, a very able officer, Selden B. Kennedy, Mrs. Gus Larson's father, was the detail officer, and I had

occasion to want to find out something about the planning figure for the Marine Corps. I was in Plans and Policies but I wasn't in the part that was talking about the future of the Marine Corps. So I met Selden Kennedy in the hall one day and I said, "I would like to talk to you about the prospective strength of the Marine Corps. What figure are they talking about?" And he said, "Well, are you talking about my figure or are you talking about the figure in the front office of 60,000 men? My figure," he said, "is 40,000, or are you talking about those fantastic fools back in Plans and Policies who are talking about a Marine Corps of 120,000 men?"

So you see, his idea was to stop the Marine Corps at about 50,000 men, that's all, and if we expand beyond that we lose all of our push and all of our skill and what not. Well, you can see what happened. We didn't at all. We went to a half million men. We expanded divisions, slowly, little by little, and very successfully. We put six divisions in the field and they all performed magnificently.

For the present, for a limited war, my next move, if I had the say about it, would be to mobilize the Reserves and bring in the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, but I'd stop there. I believe we ought to stop there.

MR. FRANK: Of course, this is strictly conjecture. The only way the Reserves are going to be mobilized is by Presidential edict.

GENERAL THOMAS: That's right. He might do it, though.

MR. FRANK: Of course, General Greene in his article in US News and World Report said that it did, but of course, I imagine that's executive administrative policy, the administration line.

GENERAL THOMAS: I think we're better off, and I don't think we're a great deal more expensive, except in the case of an all-out war. And I don't see any reason why we couldn't put seven or eight divisions in the field. We've got the personnel to be expanded to do it without hurting us at all.

MR. FRANK: You remember, talking about the various outfits in World War II, the Raiders and the barrage balloons and the Paratroopers and so on – the War Dogs, we didn't mention them, I meant to ask you about them. Did you have any experience with them?

GENERAL THOMAS: No, none whatsoever. I know about them. I think they were all right. And I wished at Tsingtao we had some sentry dogs, because the Chinese, they just robbed us blind. They would dig in there and our poor Marines would get in there and shoot 'em and then we'd be in a lot of trouble with the Fleet. The mayor would come in and say, "They shot one of our people." Well, if we shot one of their people he was digging under the fence to try to steal something. And very often they were children. Oh yes. Tragic thing. They were starving to death. We understood the whole thing, but you just couldn't let them get away with this, you know. No, those war dogs were all right. I don't know, do they have any in now?

MR. FRANK: - yes sir, the Marine Corps has some and the Air Force of course has been using them out there.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, I would have liked to have had some sentry dogs at Tsingtao, but it'll probably work out. They help. Most everything helps, you know.

MR. FRANK: They have them now at Danang, at the airfield there, to guard the airfield.

GENERAL THOMAS: Well, the sentry dogs, yes.

MR. FRANK: Well, General I want to thank you very much.

GENERAL THOMAS: You're welcome.

MR. FRANK: It's been a very interesting experience for me and I believe this will be most valuable for the historical archives of the Marine Corps.

*End of the Oral History.*  
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Emmons, Gen Delo  
Empress Augusta Bay  
Eniwetok  
Ennis, MajGen Thomas G.  
Ennis, Lou  
Enright, Willie  
Enterprise  
Ericson  
Erskine, Gen Graves B.  
Erskine, "Tiger"  
Espiritu Santo  
Everest, LtGen E.E. "Hank"

F

FTP-167  
Faisi  
Fan Han Chih  
Farrell, Maj Walter Greatsinger  
Farrell, Ed  
Fechteler, Adm W.M.  
Fegan, Joe  
Fellers, Bonner  
Fellers, Stan  
Fiji Islands  
Fike, Charlie  
Finn, Col Mickedey  
Fitch, Adm Aubrey  
Fleet Marine Force  
Fletcher, Adm Frank Jack  
Florid Island  
Foch, Marshal Ferdinand  
Foochow Club  
Formidable  
Formosa  
Forrestal, Secretary of Defense James V.  
Fort Benning  
Fort Bragg  
Fort de Plenois  
Fort Holabird  
Fort Leavenworth  
Foss, Joe  
Fraser, Peter  
Fremington

Elliot, Jim  
Freyberg, Gen Bernard  
Frisbie, Dol Julian  
Fuller, MajGen Ben  
Fuller, Ted  
Funafuti  
Fu Tso Yi

G

Galley, Col Ben  
Gallipoli Campaign  
Galveston  
Galway, Geoffrey  
Garrett, Franklin B.  
Gates Board  
Gates, Secretary of the Navy Thomas  
Gavutu  
Geiger, LtGen Roy S.  
Gendarmerie  
General Order No. 5  
Gettysburg  
Ghormley, VAdm R.L.  
Gibbons, Floyd  
Gingrich, Adm Johnny  
Godbold, Dan  
Goettge, Col Frank  
Good, LtGen Frank  
Grassy Knoll  
Greene, Gen Wallace M., Jr.  
Gregory  
Griffith, BGen Samuel  
Griffin, Col Dave  
Gruenther, Gen Alfred  
Guadalcanal  
Guam  
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Guardia  
Gulick, Mason  
Gurney, Senator Chan

H

Haifa  
Hains, Cdr Hamilton  
Haiti  
Hall, Judge Horner  
Halsey, FAdm William  
Hanneken, Col Herman  
Hansen, Tim

French, David  
Harbin  
Harbord, Gen James  
Harmon, Gen Millard “Miff”  
Harriman, Averill  
Harris, MajGen Gield  
Harrison, Col Charlie  
Harrison, Col Willie  
Hart, LtGen Franklin  
Hayes, LtGen C.J. “Fog”  
Heyward, BGen Dick—SPELLING  
Headquarters Marine Corps  
Heinl, Col Robert D., Jr.  
Henderson, Archibald  
Henderson, Lofton R.  
Henderson  
Henderson Field  
Henrico  
Herbert, Capt Peter  
Hermle, LtGen Leo “Dutch”  
Heyward  
Higgins, Adrew  
Hill, Adm Tom  
Hill, Maj Gen W.P.T.  
Hiroshima  
Hittle, BGen J.D.  
HMAS Australia  
Ho, Fisher  
Ho Yin Chin, Gen  
Hoffman, Congressman Clare  
Hogaboom, LtGen R.E.  
Hogue, William  
Holcomb, Gen Thomas  
Holland  
Hollandia Agreement  
Hollandia  
Hong Kong  
Hongchon  
Honningen  
Honolulu  
Hooker, Col Dick  
Hoover, President Herbert  
Hopkins, Harry  
Horn, Adm Freddie  
Horn Islands  
Hornet

Houghton, BGen Kenny  
Howard, BGen Arch  
Huang, J.L.  
Hughes, LtCol John A. “Johnny the Hard”  
Hull, LtGen Ed  
Hunt, George  
Hunt, Gen LeRoy P.  
Hunt, Bob  
Hurst, BGen Hunter  
Hwachon Reservoir

I

Ie Shima  
Illinois Wesleyan University  
Inman, Col Ken  
Inchon  
Inje  
Ismailia  
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J

Jackson, Col Gilder  
James, Bill  
James, Col Capers  
Japan  
Johnson, Secretary of Defense Louis  
Johnson, Nelson  
Johnston Island  
Johnston, Ed  
Joint Chiefs of Staff  
JCS/1478 Papers  
Joint Civilian Orientation Conf.  
Joint Strategic Survey Committee  
Jones, MajGen Louis R.  
Joy, Adm C. Turner  
Juneau

K

Kadena  
Kagoshima  
Kalbfus, Adm. A.L.  
Kamuela  
Kansas Line  
Karachi  
Kashmir  
Kasserine Pass  
Kavieng  
Lawrence, David

Kaawaguchi, MajGen K.  
Kelly  
Kelly, Col B.T.  
Kennedy, John F.  
Kennedy, Seldon B.  
Key West Agreement  
Keyes, Adm Sir Roger  
Keyser, MajGen Stover  
Kilmartin, BGen A.C.  
King, FAdm Ernest  
King of Greece, George  
Kinkaid, Adm Thomas C.  
Kirk, Alexander  
Kirkpatrick, Edgar G.  
Kittery  
Klamath Falls  
Knighton, Col “Buddy”  
Knox, Sec of Navy Frank  
Kobe  
Kojo

Koli Point  
Koo, Wellington  
Korea  
Korean Marines  
Koror  
Kriendler, Bob  
Krueger, Gen Walter  
Krulak, LtGen Victor H.  
Krulwich, MajGen Mel  
Kuhn, Dick  
Kukum  
Kukum Point  
Kung, Dr. H.H.  
Kunming  
Kwajalein  
Kwandori  
Kyoto  
Kyushu

L

Ladue, Gen Lawrence  
Lagos  
Lahue, MajGen Foster “Frosty”  
Landing Force Manual  
Larsen, MajGen Henry  
Lashio  
Marine Corps Board

Le Havre  
 Leahy, Adm William  
 Legette, Wade  
 Lejeune, MajGen John A.  
 Lejeune Hall  
 Leutesdorf  
 Levy, Ed  
 Lewis, LCdr John  
 Li Mei, Gen  
 Libby, RAdm R.E.  
 Limitation of Armaments Conference  
 Lindsay, Jack  
 Linscott, MajGen Henry D.  
 Little, LtCol Louis McCarty  
Little  
 “Little Man’s Chowder and Marching  
 Society” – see Chowder Society  
 Litzenberg, MajGen Homer  
 Long, BGen Earl C.  
 Long Island  
 Lucy-le-Bocage  
 Lunga River  
 Luxembourg  
 Lyman, MajGen Charles  
 Maas, Congressman Mel  
 MacArthur, Gen Douglas  
 MCROA  
 Mail Guard  
 Majuro  
 Makin  
 Malaita  
 Managua, Nicaragua  
 Mangrum, LtGen Dick  
 Manhattan  
 Manhattan Project  
 Manila  
 Mansfield, Senator Mike  
 Mansfield, Bill  
 Mao, P.T.  
 Mare Island  
 Mariana Islands  
 Marine Barracks, Brooklyn  
 Marine Corps Base, San Diego  
 Marine Corps Board  
 Motobu Peninsula  
 Mt. Austen

Marine Corps Development Center  
 Marine Corps Equipment Board  
 Marine Corps Schools  
 Marshall, Gen George C.  
 Marston, MajGen John  
 Martinique  
 Masan  
 Mason, MajGen Arthur  
 Masters, LtGen Jimmy  
 Matanikau  
 Mather, John  
 Matthews, Francis P.  
 Mauberge Route  
 Maude, Sir Francis  
 Maui  
 Maund, Air Vice Marshall  
  
 Mayo, Henry  
 Meade, Col James  
 Meaux  
 Melbourne  
 Melbourne Cricket Club  
 Merrill, Adm A.S. “Tip”  
 Merwin, Ruth  
 Metz  
 Meuse-Argonne  
 Midway Island  
 Military Units: (See end of file)  
 Miller, LtCol Ellis B.  
 Mills, Earle  
 Milne Bay  
Minneapolis  
 Minnify, James M.  
 Minnis, Capt H.B. “Scotty”  
 Mirebalais  
Missouri  
 Mitchell, Sir Philip  
 Mitchell, MajGen Ralph  
 Montreuil-sur-Marne  
 More, Col Bryant  
 Moore, Bishop Paul  
 Moran, Capt Sherwood “Pappy”  
 Morotai  
 Moses, MajGen E.P.  
 New Ireland  
New Orleans



Mount Martha  
 Mountbatten, Capt Lord Louis  
 Mukden  
 Mulcahy, LtGen F.P. "Pat"  
 Munda  
 Munn, LtGen John C "Toby"  
 Munson, Col George  
 Murray LtCol Jim  
 Myers, MajGen John T.  
 McAlister, Col Francis T.  
 McAuliffe, Gen Tony  
 McCain, Adm John  
McCawley  
McFarland  
 McHenry, Col George  
 McHugh, Col Jimmie  
 McKean, BGen Bill  
 McKelvy, LtCol William "Spike"  
 McMath, Governor Sid  
 McMichael, Sir John  
 McNamara, Sec Def Robert  
 McNulty, Col William K.  
 McVarrish, Charlie

## N

Nagasaki  
 Nancy  
 Nanking  
 Nanomea  
 Nanteuil le Laudouin  
 Narvik  
 Nash, Walter  
 National Defense Act of 1947  
 NATO Defense College  
 NATO Defense Staff  
 Naval War College  
 Ndeni  
Neville  
 Neville, Gen Wendell C.  
 Neville Board  
 New Britain  
 New Caledonia  
 New Georgia  
 New Guinea  
 Pearl Harbor  
 Peck, MajGen DeWitt  
 Peiping

New River  
 New Zealand  
 Nichols, Charlie  
 Nickerson, Col Herman, Jr.  
 Niland  
 Nimitz, Adm Chester W.  
 Nimmer, MajGen Dave  
 Nitze, Paul  
 Noble, Gen A.J.  
 No Name Line  
 Norfolk Island  
 Norford, Archie  
 Norstadt, Gen Lauris  
 North China  
Northhampton  
 Noumea

## O

Oftsie, Adm Ralph  
 Okinawa  
 Onslow Beach  
 Operation CAUSEWAY  
 Operation CORONET  
 Operation OLYMPIC  
 Operation STRANGLE  
 Overton, John

## P

Paget, Dick  
 Pai Chung Psi  
 Paikakariki  
 Palaus  
 Palleret, Sir Michael  
 Palmer, Gen Bruce  
 Palmer, Williston B.  
 Palmyra  
 Paris  
 Parmalee, Maj Perry O.  
 Parris Island  
 Partridge, LtGen Pat  
 Patch, MajGen Alexander  
 Pate, Gen Randolph  
 Patterson, Judge Robert  
 Pavuvu  
 Peake, Col Roger  
 Rhee, Syngman  
 Rheims  
 Ribbon Creek

Peitaiho  
Peking  
Peleliu  
Pensacola  
Pepper, LtGen Bob  
Perkins, Sy  
Pershing, Gen John J.  
Peter, King  
Peterfield Point  
Peyton, Tom  
Pfeiffer, MajGen Omar  
Philadelphia  
Philippine Islands  
Pickett, Col Harry  
“Pistol Pete”  
Plans and Policies, Division of  
Platt, Capt Jonas  
Pollock, LtCol A.  
Port-au-Prince  
Portland  
Port Moresby  
Prather, Len  
Price, Gen Charles F.B.  
Prince Philip  
Public Law 416  
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Puller, LtGen Lewis B.  
Punch Bowl  
Purvis Bay  
Pusan

## Q

Quantico  
Quincy

## R

Rabaul  
Radford, Adm Arthur  
Ramsey, Hobart  
Rangoon  
Redford, Dave  
Reeder, Col “Red”  
Reifsnider, Capt. Lawrence  
Rendova  
San Diego  
San Francisco  
San Juan  
Santa Cruz Islands

Richards, Gen George  
Richardson, LtGen Robert C.  
Richardson, Adm. J.O.  
Richardson Board Report  
Ridge, Tom  
Ridgway, Gen Matthew  
Riley, LtGen Bill  
Ring, Adm Morton  
Riseley, LtGen Jim  
Rivers, Congressman Mendel  
Rixey, Col P.M.  
Rixey, P.M., Jr.  
Robbins, Adm Thomas  
Robinson, Ralph  
Robinson, Gen Ray “Torchy”  
Rockey, LtGen Keller  
Roebeling, Donald  
Roger, MajGen F.O. “Tex”  
Rogers, Francis  
Rogers, Otho  
Rogers, MajGen Walter  
Roosevelt, President Franklin D.  
Roosevelt, Capt James  
Rosecrans, Col Harold  
Rota  
Rowell, MajGen Ross E.  
Royce, Ralph  
Ruffner, Nick  
Rupertus, MajGen W.H.  
Russell, Col John H.  
Russell Board  
Russell Islands

## S

St. Denis  
St. Mihiel  
St. Nazaire  
St. Louis  
Saipan  
Salt Lake City  
Samoa  
Samoan Islands  
Samuels, Sir Charles  
Smith, Col John L.  
Smith, Gen Julian  
Smith, Gen O.P.  
Smith, Maj Gen Ralph

Santo Domingo  
Saratoga  
 Sasebo  
 SCOROR  
 Saunders, “Blondy”  
 Savo Island  
 Schatzel, Col DeWolfe “Dutch”  
 Scheyer, Bill  
 Schilt, Gen Frank  
 Schmidt, Gen Harry  
 Schwenke, Ray  
 Scott, Adm. Norman  
 Scozylas, Joe  
 Sealark Channel  
 Sebree, Ed  
 Secretary’s Committee on R & D  
 Secretary of Defense Conference  
 Seeds, Elmore  
 Selden, BGen John Taylor  
 Seoul  
 Shanghai  
 Shantung Peninsula  
 Shatt al Arab  
 Shaw, BGen Sam  
 Shensi  
 Shepherd, Gen. L.C., Jr.  
 Sherman, Adm Forrest  
 Sherrat, Moshe  
 Sherrod, Robert  
 Shertok, Moshe  
 Schoeffel, RAdm Malcolm  
 Shoup, Gen David M.  
 Shubert, Dick  
 Sibley  
 Silverthorn, LtGen M.J.  
 Simla  
 Sims, Col Amor  
 Skinner, Emmett  
 Skinner, Maj George  
 Slim, Field Marshal Sir William  
 Smith, Gen Holland M.  
 The Slot  
 Thomas, Charlie  
 Thomas, Jerry  
 Thompson, Gen Frederick  
 Thorn, Nick

Smith versus Smith  
 Smythe Report  
 Snedeker, LtGen Eddie  
 Sochori  
 Soissons  
 Solomon Islands  
 Soong, T.V.  
 Soule  
Southard  
 Soyangang River  
 Spaatz, Gen Carl “Toohey”  
 Spellman, Francis Cardinal  
 Spruance, Adm Raymond  
 Stafford, Jack  
 Stark, Adm Harold R.  
 Steele, Franklin  
 Stevenson, Adlai  
 Stokes, Cdr Murray  
 Stowell, Capt George  
 Streeter, Ruth Cheney  
 Stuart, Leighton  
 Sullivan, Sec Navy John  
 Sun Yat-Sen  
 Suva

## T

Tacoma  
 Tactics and Technique Board  
 Taegu  
 Taem San  
 Taipei  
 Taivu  
 Takaradi  
 Tanambogo  
 Tangshan  
 Tarawa  
 Tarrant, Guy  
 Taxis, BGen Samuel  
 Taylor, John  
 Tedder, Air Marshal Arthur  
 Tenaru  
 Thatin, LtGen Frank C.  
 Vierzy  
 Villers-Cotterêts  
Vincennes  
 Vinson, Carl  
 Vogel, MajGen Clayton “Barney”

Tientsin  
 Tinian  
 Tokyo  
 Tokyo Rose  
 Tomkins, Mr. E.F.  
 Tompkins, MajGen R  
 Torrey, MajGen Philip  
 Towers, Adm John H  
 Trench, Sir David  
 Tresavaux  
 Trevor  
 Trippe, Juan  
 Trujillo, Rafael  
 Truk  
 Truman, President Harry S  
 Tsingtao  
 Tu Chih Min  
 Tulagi  
Tulsa  
 Turnage, Gen A.H.  
 Turner, RAdm Richard Kelly  
 Turrell, Adm Raymond  
 21 Club  
 Twining, Gen Merrill B.  
 Twining, Gen Nate  
 Tydings, Senator Millard  
 Tydings Act  
 U  
 Uhlig, Frank  
 Underhill, LtGen Jim  
 U.S. Naval Academy  
 V-J Day  
 Van Fleet, Gen James  
 Van Ryzin, LtGen W.J.  
 Vandegrift, General A.A.  
 Vardman, Commodore, J.K., Jr.  
 Vaughn, Harry  
 Vella Lavella  
 Verdun  
 Vieques  
 Wilson, Gen "Jumbo"  
 Winecoff, Col Joseph "Buzz"  
 Wise, Maj Frederick  
 Women Marines  
 Woodlark Island  
 Woodrum Select Committee

Vogt, Bobby  
 Volcano Islands  
 Wadsworth, Congressman James J.  
 Wagon-Lits Hotel  
 Wake Island  
Wakefield  
 Wainwright, Gen Jonathan  
 Wallace, LtGen Bill  
 Waller, Col Duncan  
 Waller, Col L.W.T.  
 Walt, Gen Lewis  
 Wang, Dr. C.T.  
 War Department  
 Ward, Sir John  
 Ward, Lady  
Warspite  
 "Washing Machine Charlie"  
Wasp  
 Watson, LtGen Tommy  
 Wavell, General Sir Archibald  
 Webb, Col Jim  
 Wedemeyer, Gen A.C.  
 Weede, LtGen Dick  
 Wei Li Wang  
 Wei, Yu Ta  
 Weir, Col Kenny  
 Weller, MajGen Don  
 Wellington  
 Whaling, Col Bill  
 Wheeler, Freddie  
 White, Dudley  
 White, Tommy  
 Whitehead, Frank  
 Wieseman, Col Frederick  
 Wilkinson, RAdm "Cousin" Theodore  
 Williams, Dion  
 Williams, Col Bob  
 Williams, Norris  
 Williams, MajGen Seth  
 Wilson, Charles

Woods, LtGen Louis E.  
Woodward, Flight Lieutenant  
Wornham, LtGen Tom  
Worton, MajGen Arthur  
Wright, Carlton  
Wright, Raymond

Y

Yanggu  
Yen Shi Shan  
Yenan  
Yenching University  
Yokosuka  
Young, Harrison  
Yui, O.K.

Z

Zane  
Zeilin

## Military Units

Army of Occupation, Germany	1 <sup>st</sup> Marines
Asiatic Fleet	2 <sup>nd</sup> Marines
Air FMFPAC	3 <sup>rd</sup> Marines
CINCFE	4 <sup>th</sup> Marines
CINCPAC	5 <sup>th</sup> Marines
CinCSOUTH	6 <sup>th</sup> Marines
COMAIRSOPAC	7 <sup>th</sup> Infantry
COMSOPAC	7 <sup>th</sup> Marines
FMFPAC	8 <sup>th</sup> Marines
FMFPAC Service Command	9 <sup>th</sup> Infantry
FMFWESTPAC	9 <sup>th</sup> Marines
Southwest Pacific Command	10 <sup>th</sup> Cavalry
Fifth Air Force	11 <sup>th</sup> Marines
Seventh Fleet	21 <sup>st</sup> Marines
Sixth Army	22 <sup>nd</sup> Marines
Eighth Army	23 <sup>rd</sup> Infantry
Tenth Army	29 <sup>th</sup> Marines
I Marine Amphibious Corps	132 <sup>nd</sup> Infantry
III Amphibious Corps	137 <sup>th</sup> Infantry
IX Corps	164 <sup>th</sup> Infantry
X Corps	182 <sup>nd</sup> Infantry
XIV Corps	184 <sup>th</sup> Infantry
1 <sup>st</sup> Brigade	187 <sup>th</sup> Airborne
3 <sup>rd</sup> Brigade	1 <sup>st</sup> Aviation Engineer Battalion
4 <sup>th</sup> Brigade	1 <sup>st</sup> Special Battalion
1 <sup>st</sup> Marine Division	2 <sup>nd</sup> Raider Battalion
2 <sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division	2/5
2 <sup>nd</sup> Marine Division	2/6
3 <sup>rd</sup> Marine Division	3 <sup>rd</sup> Defense Battalion
4 <sup>th</sup> Marine Division	3/7
5 <sup>th</sup> Marine Division	4 <sup>th</sup> Defense Battalion
6 <sup>th</sup> Marine Division	8 <sup>th</sup> Defense Battalion
6 <sup>th</sup> ROK Division	Rubber Boat Battalion
7 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division	HMR-161
25 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division	VMF-221
26 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division	Seventy-fifth Company
27 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division	14 <sup>th</sup> Naval District
36 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division	Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders
37 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division	Gloucester Battalion
41 <sup>st</sup> Infantry Division	
Americal Division	
1 <sup>st</sup> Marine Aircraft Wing	
1 <sup>st</sup> Cavalry	

