

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

General Graves B. Erskine

U. S. Marine Corps (Retired)



Mr. Benis M. Frank, Interviewer

HISTORY AND MUSEUMS DIVISION

Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps

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FOREWORD

This typescript, the transcribed memoir of General Graves B. Erskine, USMC (Retired), results from a series of tape-recorded interviews conducted with him at his home in Washington, D. C., on 8, 16, 22, and 29 October, and 5 November 1969, 25 January, 11, 18, and 25 February, and 4 and 11 March 1970 by Mr. Benis M. Frank for the Marine Corps Oral History Program. As one facet of the Marine Corps historical collection effort, this program obtains, by means of tape-recorded interviews, primary source material to augment documentary evidence.

Oral History is essentially spoken history, the oral recall of eyewitness impressions and observations recorded accurately on tape in the course of an interview conducted by an historian or an individual employing historical methodology and possibly the techniques of a journalist. The final product is a verbatim transcript containing historically valuable personal narratives relating to noteworthy professional experiences and observations from active duty, reserve, and retired distinguished Marines.

Unfortunately, General Erskine died before he had an opportunity to edit his transcript. All corrections therefore, have been made by the Oral History Unit, History and Museums Division. The reader is asked to bear in mind that he is reading a transcript of the spoken rather than the written word. The classification of this transcript and the tape recordings from which it is derived is OPEN, which means that a potential user may read the transcript or audit the recording upon presentation of appropriate credentials.

Copies of this memoir are deposited in the Marine Corps Oral History Collection, Historical Division, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, Washington, D. C.; Special Collections, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York, N. Y.; and the Manuscript Collection, Breckinridge Library, Marine Corps Development and Education Command, Quantico, Virginia.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "E. H. Simmons", is positioned above the printed name.

E. H. SIMMONS

Brigadier General, U. S. Marine Corps (Retired)
Director of Marine Corps History and Museums

Signed:

13 January 1975

GENERAL GRAVES B. ERSKINE, USMC (RETIRED)

(DECEASED)

General Graves Blanchard Erskine was born in Columbia, Louisiana, on June 28, 1897. At the outbreak of World War I, he was a member of the Louisiana National Guard, and enrolled in the U. S. Marine Corps Reserve, May 21, 1917, while working his way through Louisiana State University. Upon graduation he reported for active duty in the Marine Corps as a second lieutenant on July 5, 1917.

In January 1918, he sailed for France, and as a platoon leader in the 6th Marine Regiment, participated in the Aisne-Marne Defensive (Chateau-Thierry), where he was wounded in action; Belleau Wood; Bouresches; Soissons; and the St. Mihiel Offensive, where he was again wounded in action. He was evacuated to the United States in October 1918 for hospitalization.

For bravery in action, he was awarded the Silver Star Medal, was cited by the Commander-in-Chief, AEF, and in General Orders of the War Department, and entitled to wear the French Fourragere as a member of the 6th Marine Regiment.

Following recruiting duty in Kansas City, Missouri, he was assigned foreign shore duty with the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade in Haiti; sea duty aboard the USS Olympia; and again foreign shore duty, with the 2d Marine Brigade in Santo Domingo. In September 1924, he became Depot Quartermaster, Marine Barracks, Quantico, Virginia. He later completed instruction at the Army Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia, and was assigned to the Marine Corps Schools, Quantico as an instructor.

In March 1928, he was assigned two years' duty in Nicaragua, serving briefly with the 2d Marine Brigade, and later with the Nicaragua National Guard Detachment. During this period, he organized the Presidential Guard, served as aide and personal bodyguard to President Jose M. Moncada, and commanded a battalion of the Guardia Nacional in jungle operations against organized bandits in northern Nicaragua.

Upon his return to the United States, he was an instructor at the Basic School, Marine Barracks, Philadelphia Navy Yard; completed the Command and General Staff School, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; and served as an instructor again at Marine Corps Schools, Quantico. From January 1935 until May 1937, he was stationed in China, serving as a member of the Marine Detachment at the American Embassy in Peiping. In June 1937, he began a three-year assignment as a section chief at Marine Corps Schools, Quantico, then served as Executive Officer of the 5th Marine Regiment at Quantico and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

When World War II broke out, he was serving as Chief of Staff, Amphibious Force, Atlantic Fleet (later redesignated Amphibious Corps, Atlantic Fleet). In September 1942, he joined the Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet, in San Diego, California, as Chief of Staff, and performed duty in Alaska in July and August 1943 during the planning and training phase of the assault on Attu and Kiska in the Aleutians. Immediately after this, he assumed duty as Chief of Staff of the V Amphibious Corps and embarked for the Pacific area. Overseas, he was promoted to brigadier general in November 1943 (with rank from September 1942), and was assigned additional duty as Deputy Commander, 5th Amphibious Corps. For exceptionally meritorious service during the assault and capture of Kwajalein, Saipan, and Tinian, he received two awards of the Legion of Merit, both with combat "V". He also performed additional duties during the Marianas campaign as Chief of Staff of Fleet Marine Force, Pacific.

Following the Marianas operation, he was promoted to major general in September 1944, and the following month assumed command of the 3d Marine Division. He led the 3d Division in the battle for Iwo Jima where members of the division were awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for heroism, and he was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal.

Immediately after the war, as Commanding General of the 3d Marine Division then stationed on Guam, he organized vocational schools on Guam to aid Marines under his command in postwar trades and skills, prior to their return to civilian life.

In October 1945, General Erskine was ordered to Washington and as a result of a special Congressional Act was appointed Administrator of the Retraining and Reemployment Administration (RRA). In June 1947, upon his request to return to duty with the Marine Corps, the general assumed command of the Marine Barracks, Marine Training and Replacement Command, Camp Pendleton, California. The following month, with the return of the 1st Marine Division from China to Camp Pendleton, he became Commanding General of the 1st Marine Division, as well as Commanding General of Camp Pendleton. In May 1949, he was assigned additional duty as Deputy Commander of Fleet Marine Force, Pacific.

During this period, the Marine air units at El Toro were molded together with the 1st Marine Division troops at Camp Pendleton, and it was this combination that embarked for Korea when hostilities erupted in that area.

In June 1950, the Secretary of Defense appointed General Erskine as Chief of Military Group, Joint State-Defense Mutual Defense Assistance Program Survey Mission to Southeast Asia. In carrying out his assigned duties with the Mission, he visited the Philippines, French Indochina, Malaya, Thailand and Indonesia. Upon completing this assignment, General Erskine received orders in December 1950 directing him to assume duties as Commanding General of the Department of the Pacific, San Francisco, California. He also performed additional duties as Member of the Advisory Group, Western Sea Frontier; and Commanding General, Marine Corps Emergency Forces, Western Sea Frontier.

In July 1951, as a lieutenant general, he became Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Atlantic. He was authorized to retire from active service by Special Act of Congress in June 1953 for the purpose of accepting a position as Assistant to the Secretary of Defense as Director of Special Operations of the Department of Defense, and served in this post for over eight years, until October 31, 1961.

Upon his retirement from active duty in the Marine Corps, General Erskine was advanced to four-star rank, July 1, 1953, by reason of having been specially commended for heroism in combat.

General Erskine died at Bethesda Naval Hospital on 22 May 1973, and was buried with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery.

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MARINE CORPS ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM.

Interviewee: Gen. Graves B. ERSKINE, USMC (Ret.)

Interviewer: Mr. Benis M. Frank

Place: Gen. Erskine's home in Washington, D.C.

Session I - 8 October 1969

Tape 1, Side 1

Q: You have the outline there that we sent, General?

Gen. Erskine: Yes.

Q: But we have a little gimmick we use sometimes. I'd like to talk to you first about your early days, before you went into the Marine Corps -- your family back in Louisiana. I've never been down there. You are from ^{LA} were originally, sir?

Erskine: Originally from Columbia, Louisiana.

Q: That's whereabouts in relation to . . .

Erskine: South of Monroe, about 25 miles. I was born on a little ^{farm near a place} town called Perrins Island. It was near Columbia -- I guess about

four miles away -- and when I was about 8 or 9 years old we moved to another farm which faced on the Ouachita River, just across the river from Columbia, Louisiana.

I still remember my first day in school. I was 5 years old, and I went to school in a one-room schoolhouse, at a place called Death Bridge. Death Bridge was really a sort of a dike that had been put up across the little stream. There was no post office, it was just a country school. I went with great fear and trepidation of what might happen, because in those days the schoolmasters -- in this case it happened to be a woman -- were very strict with the youngsters and they did not spare the rod, and my grandfather had told me that he never expected me to get a whipping in school or to let any of the schoolboys lick me, that if there was ever a man teacher that whipped me in school he wanted to know it the first thing so he could whip him. The old man was quite a guy!

Q: Where did your family come from originally? Were they New Englanders way back?

Erskine: No. On the Graves side, my grandfather was seriously wounded in the Civil War; he came originally from the western part of Virginia, and by some means in was sent south on a boat, and he ended up in Louisiana. My great-grandmother was French. She came from around Columbia, Louisiana, someplace. She was an Acadian and was one of those who had been pushed out of Acadia in the early days.

On the Erskine side, as far as I know they were mostly from around that area of Louisiana. The main clan seems to be over

around Winfield, Louisiana. You might remember that as being the home of Huey Long.

Q: Oh yes. But Erskine is an old Scots name.

Erskine: Yes.

Q: So the Erskines probably go back maybe to the group of Scots that wound up down in South Carolina and Georgia. Is that possible?

Erskine: It is possible, yes. There are some in Pennsylvania, but not near relatives. As a matter of fact I run into them almost every place. But very few in the Marine Corps.

Q: Ha! Now, what did your father do, sir?

Erskine: He was a farmer. A dirt farmer.

Q: How close were you to the Mississippi?

Erskine: I think about 60 miles.

Q: So the river really didn't have too much of an effect on your life.

Erskine: No. Well, it did in the flood seasons -- spring as a rule -- because the waters would back up. I remember when I was about 12 or

14 years old we had a terrific flood around my part of the country, and the water was at least 5 feet deep in the house.

Q: You went ^{to} all your grade school ^{years} down around Columbia?

Erskine: Yes, in Columbia.

Q: And then went to Louisiana State University.

Erskine: Yes, from there I went to LSU.

Q: What was your major there, sir?

Erskine: I wanted to be a doctor. My uncle, Dr. James Q. Graves, was a well known and very fine surgeon, and he was practicing in Monroe, Louisiana. I thought the world of him and spent a good bit of time in as a sort of a corpsman around his place, particularly in the operating room, and I became fascinated with the idea of being a great surgeon some day.

Q: You went to LSU when, about? You graduated, did you not?

Erskine: Yes, I graduated in 1918. That would make it 1914 when I went there, I suppose. I specialized mostly in the sciences, but got a B.A. degree. I had hoped, after completing the course at LSU, to go to Tulane and take medicine there, because I graduated before I was 20, and my uncle told me that if I went to medical

school instead of taking a university course first I'd be too young and nobody would have me, because I'd be around 21 years old when I came out. So the idea was I'd complete LSU and then go on to Tulane for medicine.

Q: How do you spell your uncle's name, sir?

Erskine: It was James Q. (for Quarles) G.R.A.V.E.S., which is my first name.

Q: That's right. I had misunderstood you, I thought you'd said Q. Graves. I know that you've been called by your contemporaries and friends either Graves or Bobby, depending on how close they were to you and how formal or informal they were, and by your juniors you had the reputation of being called the Big E.

Erskine: There are probably some other names too! (laughs)

Q: (laughs) Now you were still in school when the war in France broke out. How did the world war affect you?

Erskine: I was a senior at LSU. I had the previous year gone to the border with the National Guard, the 1st Louisiana Infantry, and we were late getting back, and when war was declared I was still a member of the Guard. My grandfather's lawyer was the colonel in command of this regiment, and when they didn't call everybody ^{to duty} to go to war I felt pretty much upset. So I sent him a telegram, and

told him that we had a war on and I wanted to know when the hell we were going. I happened to be sergeant trumpeter at that time. He sent me a very curt note back saying to wait till I got orders. In the meantime many people were signing up for the Plattsburg Training Camp, and I tried to get into that, but I was too young -- you had to be 21, and I was not yet 20. So I found myself in what I thought was a very serious predicament. I went down to see the adjutant general of the Louisiana Guard, who was ~~then~~ at Baton Rouge, and he gave me pretty short orders and practically threw me out of the office, and reminded me that I was only a sergeant, and sergeants didn't come to see the adjutant general.

This went on for a while, and all my friends were getting off to Plattsburg, and our National Guard wasn't going any place, so I went to see the Commandant of the school, the Commandant of the cadets, who was then Capt. Sanderford Jarman. He told me about the Marine Corps, which at that time wanted 10 applications from cadets at LSU for the reserve commission in the Corps, and two for probationary commissions. So I went down to New Orleans with all of the candidates, and I remember two of the people on the board there. One was Maj. Andrew Drum, the other was -- it slips my mind now, but we always called him Buzzy. (Pause) Backstrom.

Q: Both Army officers?

Erskine: No, Marines.

Q: But wasn't Drum -- there was a Hugh Drum.

Erskine: Yes, Hugh Drum in the Army. But this was Andrew Drum -- a well known character in the Marine Corps for many years.

We took the examinations -- which ^{were} ~~was~~ mostly oral and physical, they had us get up and walk around so they could look at us and see how we walked and so forth. I had more experience by that time, that resulted from my National Guard duty, than most anyone else.

One of the fellows that had been designated as-one-of by the Commandant of cadets as one of the two provisional commissions flunked out on his eyesight. Then the board looked us all over, and even though I was still under age by several months, he gave me a waiver and gave me that appointment, which I felt very happy about.

Q: These were two probationary appointments to --

Erskine: Marine Corps commissions.

Q: The others would have to go through the school first.

Erskine: Well, it was time of war then. The probationary commissions lasted for two years: at the end of that time you took an examination in various subjects, and this was all done under the supervision of a board convened at Headquarters Marine Corps, and depending on how you came out on these examinations you were commissioned or not commissioned into the regular service.

Q: How long after this did you leave Louisiana?

Erskine: After this examination, which I think was in April, I went back to the University and I thought I was going to be ordered out right away. But I would not be 20 years old until the 28th of June.

Anyway I went to see the President, Col. Boyd, and told him I thought I'd be going to war within a very short time, but I found out I had to have a diploma, and the schoolyear hadn't ended, and this was quite a chapter in my life. He talked to me almost like a father and said he appreciated my situation and he would consult the faculty board, as to whether they would give me credit for the rest of the year or not. I didn't have any orders, I didn't know exactly how they ran the Marine Corps at that time, but I wanted to be ready when they called me. The faculty board decided that they would give me credit at the end of the schoolyear for everything that I had a passing mark in; ~~that~~ I had excellent marks in the things that I had wanted to ~~xy~~ study, but you had so many things you just had to ^{fill in time with} ~~xxxxxxx~~, and somebody talked me into taking political science, which was really my downfall.

I got cleared on everything except political science, and the old colonel -- this was an honorary title -- who taught this course was a great, big, husky fellow; his name slips my mind at the moment. He was a character that always tapped the girls on the head and put his arm around them and gave them good grades, but he raised the devil with the cadets. When I found out I ~~was~~ didn't have a passing grade -- I think I had a grade of 62, and it had to be at least 70, I think; I think my grade in chemistry was something like 94 for four years, ^{which} ~~xxxxxxx~~ is quite a difference there -- the old colonel let me come in to talk to him about it, and he just gave me the

devil and he said, "I don't think you've opened a book." I thought I'd butter him up a little bit and I said, "Well, when I took this course, those who'd been in your classes told me you didn't have to open a book, you were such a marvelous professor, and all I had to do was sit down and listen." He said, "You haven't ~~asked~~ answered a question in the entire year." I told him I knew that to be true, but I thought I was absorbing enough to have a passing grade. Finally he said "No." So I ^{got} ~~was~~ lost. But I went back to see him twice more, and on my third visit he finally said, "You are so damn persistent I'll give you a passing grade to get you out of my class." So that's how I got my diploma at LSU.

Q: Had you ever heard of the Marine Corps before the time you went down?

Erskine: I'd heard of it, but I had never been associated with it. Of course I had come in contact with the Army a great deal, and with the Navy on some occasions, but I frankly knew almost nothing about the Marine Corps.

Q: Which I guess is pretty much standard for a lot of the young lieutenants who came into the Marine Corps at that time.

Erskine: Oh yes, I think so.

Q: ~~Erskine:~~ So you got your diploma. When did you get your orders to report to active duty?

Erskine: I got my orders around the 2nd of July 1917, as I remember.

I was ordered to a little post which doesn't exist anymore, across from Cherry Hill, Virginia. The name escapes me -- Winthrop . . . There is a rifle range.

I was ordered there.

I was in Washington on the 4th of July, and I reported ~~at~~ on the 5th of July, I think. I remember that date very well because somehow I had gotten all of my uniforms except a pair of puttees, so I walked around the city and finally saw a pair in one of the stores here, and I called up the store manager -- *I first got the watchman at the store who* ~~had~~ told me who the manager was -- and I told him my predicament, and he came down and opened the store on the 4th of July and sold me that pair of puttees.

Q: That was very nice.

Erskine: That's how I can put my finger on that one.

Q: Who was at Winthrop when you reported in?

Erskine: I think it was LtCol. George C. Reid, a lieutenant colonel.

Q: Ben Reed?

Erskine: It doesn't sound right. Rather heavyset, good stature, sort of a florid face and grey hair.

Q: I was thinking of the other lieutenants.

Erskine: I was one of two Southerners in that camp.

Q: Oh really?

Erskine: And I had a very deep southern accent. I had great difficulty in getting people to understand me and understanding the others, particularly the boys from Maine.

Q: Everyone has!

Erskine: One of those fellows from Maine was one of my tent mates; his name was Colomy, he was there. Getner was the other man from the South, and he claimed he was from the South because he came from Oklahoma. At the moment I don't remember an awful lot of names. It's so long back. Colomy and I had one hell of a time understanding each other and the instructors when we had a class at any time would call me at every class so they could hear me try to speak so they could understand me.

Q: Yours was particularly a southern accent rather than a Cajun?

Erskine: No, it was purely like a native dialect.

Q: Very very deep southern.

Erskine: Uh-hh. *yes.*

Q: Son;

Q: Gen. Lejeune of course was from Louisiana. Did he have as deep a southern accent, or was his a Louisiana French sort of thing?

Erskine: I never noticed it. I knew Gen. Lejeune quite well. Matter of fact he was the first Marine general I ever saw, I think. He was in command down at Quantico for a short time, and I was detailed ^{as} ~~to~~ the Fire Patrol officer. He had a little office which was a little primitive in those days. I shined myself up, it was a muddy and rainy day, and I ^{cleaned up} ~~looked on~~ every place so I'd look real snappy when I got out there, and he let me stand in the doorway about five minutes before he spoke to me. He was looking at me, and I was putting on my best military brace, and finally he looked up and he said, "All right, Napoleon, come in and tell me what you want." (laughter)

Q: Did he recognize you for a fellow Louisianan?

Erskine: Not for the time being. I made my fire patrol report for the night. Then when he got up his shoes were muddy and his puttees were dirty and his pants were too big in the seat, and I wondered, "I don't think I'd ever get away with that."

But he was a very fine man. A very fine man. ^{You} He couldn't help but have confidence when that fellow was standing around talking to you.

Q: He was rather short, was he not?

Erskine: Not very tall.

Q: Big jug, ears?

Erskine: Yes, and a sort of a French nose. Actually, at a distance he reminded me of the pictures of an Indian.

Q: Yes, very dark. Old Gabe, I guess he was called.

Erskine: Yes.

Q: Arthur Worton told me that he recalled that he was down there at the time that you reported aboard, and he was one of the first lieutenants or junior officers there to welcome you aboard. We have on paper his recollections of a young, good-looking, tall officer from Louisiana coming aboard.

Erskine: I don't remember. Actually I don't remember exactly where I reported. (Pause) No, I guess I do. They were building the camp at Quantico at that time, temporary buildings, and we went from Winthrop Rifle Range to Quantico by boat. We got off and marched down -- I think there were maybe 200 or 300 of us in this group -- to an area that had been set aside then and was called Officers Training Course. I think it was the first officers training course. I don't remember any reception committee, but Arthur Worton was already there, and I believe he was assigned to the 79th Company at that time, which was being organized; it was part of the 2nd Battalion commanded by then Maj. Thomas Holcomb.

I went back to the school there and I was billeted down.

I remember my bunk mate was -- what was his name? And yet I knew him so well, we used to go out on weekends and walk around the camp . . . Mulcahy!

Q: Oh, Pat Mulcahy.

Erskine: Pat Mulcahy.

Q: He was just in town, by the way/

Erskine: Yes? I'd like to see old Pat again. He's a ^{great} ~~good~~ guy. He didn't like hiking at all. One day we climbed up on a platform that was quite ^{high} ~~up~~. Aviation was something brand new -- at least to us -- and Pat said, "I am going to be a flier, that's all there ~~is~~ ^{is} to it." So he made his application, and by golly he made it, and he became a flier until through Korea.

I was supposed to be
I got the bug. ~~It was~~ either too old or too heavy. Too heavy I think, at that time. Pat was very thin. The planes weren't very ^{big} ~~good~~ either. I didn't get in. I was in the school a very short time. They graded everybody at the time we came in by age, and I was the youngest one, so I found myself in, I think, the 2nd Squad, in the rear end, which was the lowest.

The corporal of our squad -- we were all lieutenants, but we had a corporal in the squad -- was a young fellow whose name slips by mind at the moment, a very fine man who made a very fine officer. He had never been to military school, had no military training whatsoever, and I felt that I was a veteran having been to the Mexican

border and three years at LSU, which was rated pretty high as a military school, so I was pretty disgusted that I wasn't learning anything that I could figure out. They were just giving us lectures on the customs of the service, plus we had a drill, and they were changing the manual then from the old Navy manual which had only three counts to the Army which had five minimum, I guess. And I could do that, I had been doing it for so long, that it was the only time I had ever instructed anybody was to try to teach from the Army manual

So I finally got pretty well disgusted with the school, and this was the first school.

Then I resigned, I sent in my resignation, because I felt it was my duty to go to war. My grandfather had always told me -- he was an old Civil War soldier -- that when your country is in trouble you volunteer, and I felt I would not have been true to him if I didn't get to war, and I didn't see any chance of getting to war in that school.

When my resignation got up to the Colonel -- this was Lt. Col. P.M. Rixey --

Q: Oh, Presley M. Rixey.

Erskine: Yes. He sent for me and gave me quite a lecture without asking me any reason for resigning -- quite a lecture on patriotism, my duty to my country, all of this. Finally he said, "Have you got anything to say?" I said, "Yes, that's why I am getting out of this outfit, I haven't learned a damn thing since I've been here, I am getting pushed around." He said, "What are you going to do?"

I said, "I am going to Canada and join the Black Watch." And that's exactly what I planned to do.

Q: Why the Black Watch, sir?

Erskine: I'd heard so much about it, and they had quite a reputation. Anyway it seemed to fascinate me. Then he said, "I am going to disapprove your resignation." Within a few days I was assigned to the 79th Company, which at that moment was commanded by Arthur Worton, and we became very fast friends and have been friends throughout the years. He is one of my oldest and closest friends, and a fine fellow.

Q: He's been a very good friend to me too. I enjoy him immensely. I don't think I have met anyone who has exuded love of the Corps as much as he has.

Erskine: He is absolutely absorbed with the Marine Corps, yes.

Q: You know, it's very funny hearing you talk about going to see Col. Rixey, because I am trying to recall who else went to see him ^{for} *The same reason [note: Gen Farrell]* I think that he had to act as the school chaplain -- more people, more young lieutenants went up to him (newly appointed lieutenants), wanting to get out and wanting to go to war, they'd had it. And he would let these young lieutenants cry on his shoulder and say, "Look, I am here, I am stuck here myself! There is nothing I can do, these are the orders." He must have been a fabulous old character

Erskine: ~~W~~ He was a wonderful man. I was his operations and intelligence officer at Peking, which was his last command, I think. There just before he left ~~he~~^I became his executive officer. That was quite a coincidence, quite a reunion!

Q: Yessir. We'll talk about Peking and we'll get to that.

Now that 1st DTC, I think John Kaluf may have been in that.

Erskine: Yes, John was there.

Q: He has a picture of that group. We are trying to get hold of it. As a matter of fact this is one of the ancillary obligations of my duty -- trying to find pictures and artifacts and memorabilia which our interviewees may have ~~slashed~~ away or stored some place and I don't know what to do with, so we are gathering all this in for the Marine Corps Historical Program. So I put this bug in your head right now, sir.

So you were with the 79th Company. The battalion commander was T. Holcomb. What was he like?

Erskine: He was a grand old man in every way. I considered him to have been one of my best commanding officers.

Q: Of course he had 16 years in the Marine Corps by then.

Erskine: Yes, he had quite a long time. Of course at that time most of the captains had 12 years of service. I was very friendly with then Maj. Holcomb. One of my first experiences with him was --

We were billeted in some temporary quarters, I think about 8 or 9 rooms, partitioned up partly for the junior officers there. I used to get up and walk down the street every morning in Quantico, down Barnett Avenue at that time, and we had a little snow. And I thought I'd show my Major how industrious I was, so when he came walking down I got a shovel, and I was out shoveling the snow off the walk and he stopped and watched me a minute, and then he said, "Just what do you think you are doing?" I said, "I am cleaning off the walk here." He said, "Let me tell you something, young man. You are a commissioned officer; you get paid to use your brain and not your hands. Now put that shovel away and get an orderly to do it." That I've never forgotten. (laughter)

Q: I've heard stories of what Quantico was like, at that time, and I'd like to get your memories of it on tape.

Erskine: Quantico was a very poor billet in my mind. Barnett Avenue in the rainy and the snowy season was quite a mire of mud. As I remember the story -- of course we had no trucks in those days as we have now; we had mules or horses, and we had a ration and baggage wagon for each company, that carried a few pioneer tools, some extra rations and a few things, some ammunition.

The Marine Corps bought a few of these old quad trucks with solid tires. I think we had either two or four at Quantico. So they ran one of these trucks down Barnett Avenue one day, and it got stuck. They sent the other one in to pull it out, and it got stuck. So all the trucks of the Marine Corps were stuck on Barnett Avenue! They had to send over and get a couple of mules --

two teams of mules -- to haul them out. So I think most of us got the impression that this thing was not here to stay.

Q: Ha! I understand that they had quite a construction crew, and that it was like a boom town.

Erskine: Yes it was. It was. As I recollect they had said they had 10,000 workmen there. You could hear the hammers going all night long, it was a round the clock operation.

Q: Did it appear to you at that time that Quantico was going to be the type of permanent base that it turned out to be?

Erskine: No, I never thought about it. Of course the Marine Corps was very small when I came in. I think we had around ~~extremely~~ 1,080 officers. We also had 27,000 men, but we only had enough money for about 17,500. Most of us, I think, felt that as soon as the war was over they'd chop it back again and Quantico would probably go out of the picture altogether.

Q: Had you thought about becoming a regular Marine officer at this time?

Erskine: No, not yet.

Q: Why don't you go on, sir, and tell us, if you will, without my interruptions, about your assignment to the 79th Company and what transpired from then on?

Erskine: Capt. *Rudolph T.* Zane came down and took command, (Arthur Worton was second in command) and ^{Carl Wallace had} ~~the 1st Platoon;~~ the 1st Platoon; I had the 2nd Platoon; I don't remember now who had the 3rd; but Jack West had the 4th Platoon. Jack was a big husky guy, I think a fullback at Michigan.

Q: By the way, sir, did you play football at LSU?

Erskine: No, I did not, I didn't have time, I had to work my way through college most of the time. We had a very strenuous training schedule with lots of hiking. I remember they got some cold weather training in; it wasn't called cold weather training but it was the same thing. We had a few French and British instructors who would come over and relate the way the war was going and how you had to live, and they talked mostly about the trench life and the ~~hazards~~ hardships. I remember at one time there they took our company and lined us up. At that time we had a very heavy snow. As a matter of fact the river was completely frozen, and one time there the 10th Artillery that had horse-drawn guns, went across the river on the ice to shoot on the range over there.

Q: In Maryland?

Erskine: Yessir.

Q: And the river was frozen over?

Erskine: Completely frozen over -- '17 was a very heavy winter. Of course in those days we all wore heavy underwear. They'd start us around in single file. The idea was not to perspire. We started out with heavy overcoats and heavy underwear, and we'd keep moving sort of at a trot and when you felt you were going to perspire you removed another piece of your clothing until you got down to your shoes, and we'd actually be naked. Then we slowed down and gradually as we got a little cooler we picked up a piece of clothing and put it back on.

I think that did us a lot of good. By golly, we were a pretty hardy crew when we finished our training.

When we arrived in France we had another pretty stiff training schedule.

Q: Did you think that cold weather training so-called had any effect on what casualties you may or may not have suffered from the influenza epidemic?

Erskine: I think so, I frankly do. I think it had a great deal to do with it. I know that ^{on} many of the hikes we had overseas we would have 40 pounds on our backs. We had a blanket but that didn't do much good high up in the Vosges Mountains. I remember more times than one I had icicles in my hair. We'd sleep on the ground. I think that was good preparation for that kind of training over there. I don't remember that we had any serious trouble with the influenza. A few of our people died, but I don't have any recollection of it ever having been a serious thing in my battalion,

because that's about all the people you saw -- the people in your own battalion.

Q: I've been told that Mrs. Holcomb was expecting.

Erskine: That's right.

Q: And the battalion was supposed to mount out and it was held up for a month, ~~xxxxxx~~ until Mrs. Holcomb was delivered.

Erskine: I understand that to be true.

Q: While the other units were leaving was there any unhappiness or grumbling in the 79th Company or Maj. Holcomb's battalion over the fact that they were not going out?

Erskine: I have no recollection of it.

Q: I understand that your battalion marched out to the trains, with Maj. Holcomb leaving the battalion mounted on his horse and so on.

Erskine: Uh uh. And we went to Philadelphia and embarked on the old USS Henderson and went overseas.

One funny joke here. I don't know whether you'd call it a joke or not. Arthur Morton was officer of the day. This was just as we were mounting out -- it might have been the night before. Some one of the fellows got a civilian friend of his to bring in a suitcase of liquor. And I had had maybe one or two drinks in my life up to

that time. We were all having a hell of a big night; I don't think anybody went to bed that night, and we were raising so much racket that Arthur, who ^{was} ~~is~~ very serious about his duty came in with his sword on and ordered us to pipe down, and we decided that Arthur didn't have much authority, so Jack West and I ~~a~~ caught him and nailed his shoes to the floor. So we had our OD nailed down for once.

Q: I think he told the story. But he also said some liquor was forced upon him.

Erskine: I don't doubt that. We were having a big night.

Q: And he also told the story about how he was OD one day ordered to chase the prostitutes out of Quantico.

Erskine: I don't know that one.

Q: I think it probably was before you got there.

Erskine: I don't know that there were any houses of prostitution around Quantico.

Q: I think what with this big work force there were a couple of cribs that were set up there.

Erskine: Could be. But we were kept so darn busy down there with our troops that we never had much time. About the only time we got out of the camp was to go maybe to Washington for the weekend.

Q: I think these girls were just down there for the convenience of the workers, who were a rough crew.

Erskine: At one time they had any number of these little what would be shops, before they had stores there even; they had a gasoline torch out, the torch would be burning there, and they sold candy, cigarettes, all kinds of things.

Q: What was the trip ^{across} ~~course~~-like? You'd never been aboard . . . You'd never been far from Louisiana before this.

Erskine: No. The trip was pretty rough. I had never been aboard a Navy ship. Yea I had -- when I was in school I took a short ^{cruise} ~~course~~; one of my subjects was journalism, and some destroyers came down to Baton Rouge one time and I was sent down in connection with our lab work, which was working with the local paper. They sent me down to interview the sailors, and I got to walk through the destroyers, and that was about all that I had had.

But the first thing that happened to me when I was aboard -- I was assigned to ^{post sentries.} ~~the post sentries.~~ All Marines who were sent to different places to report what they saw. They were observers and were given a certain sector to keep their eye on, for I think two hours. And I had one rough time finding out because they used seagoing expressions.

I remember very clearly that one man was supposed to be at the scuttlebutt, and I hadn't the faintest ~~ix~~ idea what the scuttlebutt was. I was marching along, and I didn't want to show my ignorance

to the Marines. I happened to be going along and I saw this spigot and I happened to stop. A sailor had just had a drink of water there, and I said, "Where is the scuttlebutt?" He looked at me and he said, "That's it right there." So I went to the sentry and gave him his orders about the scuttlebutt.

I think I had about 15 sentries to post -- in other words, the eyes of the ship. I remember it very clearly. This was the last man I had to post. I guess we must have hiked a couple of miles around there because I didn't want to show my ignorance to this guy, the eyes of the ship.

Maj. Holcomb was standing right up on the bow and I sneaked over to him and confided to him that I could not find the eyes of the ship. He said, "You are standing on them right now." That was my last sentry to post. But it was a very rough trip.

Q: You spent considerable time seagoing after this.

Erskine: In transports, maybe, in training, but I had very little sea duty as such.

Q: I think you had one tour perhaps.

Erskine: Well, I didn't have a full tour then.

Q: But we are again getting ahead of ourselves. You got to France. You arrived at St. Nazaire on the 5th of February. You were aboard three days before disembarking, is that correct?

Erskine: What was that?

Q: You arrived at St. Nazaire on 5 February 1918 but didn't debark until three days later.

Erskine: We were there a couple of days anyway.

Q: Unloading ship, I suppose.

Erskine: Yes. We had a problem there. Arthur Worton on one of his tours around Quantico had gone out some place and stopped on a farm and he saw a goat, and he thought the company should have a goat for a mascot, so he bought this goat and brought it back, and gave it to the company. And we had one hell of a time getting the goat aboard the ship. We got the goat aboard and the men hid this goat out until we got ready to disembark. The French found out about this goat and they had a fit about bringing a goat over there. I guess it was a question of inoculations and so forth. So we thought we had lost our goat until we got down on board the train and the goat showed up. These fellows -- we had part of the regimental band -- they ^{took} kept the drum head off and put the goat in the drum and tried to get ^{him} up and put him on board the train. You can't beat a bunch of Marines.

Ex Q: You can't beat a bunch of Marine bands, ^{men} that's for sure.

Now where did you head for from St. Nazaire?

Erskine: We went to a training area. We had those little ^{carts} cars, 8 horses and 40 men.

Q: Forty-and-eight.

Erskine: ~~There~~ We had a little straw in those. The officers did have passenger (accommodations), must have been the 3rd or 4th class because they were pretty poor accommodations.

I can't think of the name of this training area at the moment. But on the way they sidetracked the train there and we had quite a little wait.

Q: You went to Gondrecourt.

Erskine: That was the school. I went to this school. But this training area -- en route to this training area, I'll think of it, I am sure.

Q: I know what area you are talking about.

Erskine: It was up in the Vosges Mountains. While we were side-tracked, there was a big cask of ~~ship~~ ^{they shipped wine in casks on freight} wine, and a bunch of ^{cars} officials came down to Col. Lee, who was the senior officer present, and complained that somebody had stolen their wine. I was on the sidetrack there. He turned everybody out, called the officers together and said, "Somebody has ^{tapped} ~~kept~~ the wine cart over there, and I want you to turn every man out and sample his canteen."

Well, they lined them all up, and I had my platoon out there, and every blessed man had the canteen full of white wine. And just as I was leaving the sergeant reached over to me and took mine out. I knew nothing about this thing. He pulled my canteen out and he said, "You'd better check yours Lieutenant." ~~Www~~ Which I did, and it was full. Anyway I reported I didn't find any, and I think everybody else reported the same thing. Nobody found any wine.

Q: The time when you had a division or one of the regiments in World War II, out in the islands, in the rear area everybody put raisin jack or something under the washstand. You could smell it and you didn't know where it was, and the only thing that directed you there were the fruit flies flying over the washstand.

Erskine: When we arrived at this place we were billeted down, in some cases actually in stables.

Q: This was not Villeneuve, was it?

Erskine: No. God, I can't think.

Q: I know the place you are talking about, but I can't recall it either.

(Ed. Note: DAMBLAIN)

Erskine: I think the battalion was actually located in two or three villages. The officers lived in homes that had been taken over there, but the troops lived mostly in stables and places like that; sometimes the old cow was in there with them.

We had a pretty stiff training program there, mostly hiking. There I think I learned a very good lesson. Our shoes at that time wouldn't compare to the shoes that we have now, and blistered feet were quite a problem. After every exercise we had to inspect our men's feet and see that they had the proper socks, the proper fit, and take care of any blisters they had. Of course you couldn't expect *the sick bay* to do all this with 1000 men every day. And see that their toenails were properly cut. And I never realized that people could cut their toenails in so many different ways and really wear their shoes so that it made them a darn poor hiker. I thought of that many many years afterwards, when we'd have a hard hike. I'll tell you this later, I guess, but Chesty Puller was in command at Pearl Harbor. I was out with the Fleet Marine Force there, and he invited me to come over and inspect his ~~troops~~ ^{and have it reviewed, which he did.} one Saturday morning, ~~they were going to have a review.~~ ^{had them spread out, pitch their tents, and lay all their gear out.} I ~~saw the tents, and had them take all the gear out.~~

Then I asked that every man in the front rank take off his right shoe and sock, and in the rear rank that they take off their left shoe and sock. And I thought ^{Lennie} ~~Louis~~ would die of apoplexy. "What's this?" he said. I said, "I want to see what their feet look like, and if they have proper fitting shoes and socks." I found a great many discrepancies. I explained to him that a man is no damn good in the infantry unless he has feet, and his feet have got to be in good condition, and that's one of the most important things. (Pause)

It was from this training camp that I was sent ~~down to~~ ^{down to} Condrecourt to take a course in automatic weapons and musketry. It was the 1st Army Corps school. I think I was there a month,

or maybe six weeks.

Q: I think from 1 to 31 May 1918.

Erskine: Uh uh. Yes, because when I came back our outfit moved to the vicinity of Belleau Wood, up near Meaux. I actually left before the school was out. I don't know that they ever did ~~give~~ ^I ~~me~~ a diploma, ^{because} I had heard that the Marines had gone into action, but the word we had was that they were near Soissons. Our paymaster was in Paris, and I thought he would know, so I got the train down to Paris and went to see the paymaster to get a couple of months' pay that was due. You didn't have all the services in those days that you have now. He ~~wxx~~ wrote down on a piece of paper "Meaux." I had no idea where Meaux was, but it wasn't Soissons.

I spent most of my paycheck ^{right} there in Paris, and I was ~~xxxx~~ there two nights and one day

I arrived up at Meaux and inquired about the 2nd Division. As a matter of fact I got down to 2nd Division Headquarters, and I wanted to know if they could send an orderly with me to take me up to the 2nd Battalion Headquarters of the 6th Marines, Maj. Holcomb.

When I arrived there he looked up. Our troops had already been in the line, and some of them were in the line at that time, and he said, "You are supposed to be in school." I said, "School is out, Major." He said, "I don't think it's out. That's not my recollection. I didn't expect you back for a week or 10 days."

Anyway I left a few days before the school closed and got on the train and thought that's where I'd go.

About three or four weeks later

/ We had been in the line and had been shot up pretty badly, and Maj. Holcomb came by ~~me~~ our place and he said, "You know, you gave me some incorrect information." "What was it about?" *It was for me*
"You said school was not out when you reported." I said, "I thought I could do more here than I could in that school." Anyway I didn't miss more than five days. We had already had our school closing party, in which everybody *really* got pretty well *snocked*.

Q: (laughs) Let me turn this over now, General, we are just about at the end of this ~~xxxx~~ side of the tape.

End of Side 1, Tape 1, Session I.

Session I continued

Side 2, Tape 1

Q: Going to this school, assigning young Marines to the schools over there, as I understand it was quite important. They really were not too well grounded in tactics. Did you feel when you landed in France, ready to take a platoon to battle?

Erskine: I thought so.

Q: Of course you had been in the National Guard, you had been on expeditionary duty and had some Army ground (experience).

Erskine: I felt that I was qualified. I don't know whether I was or not. Looking back I probably wasn't too well qualified.

Q: Was the school at Condrecourt of any help? Did you learn anything there, do you think?

Erskine: I think I learned something in automatic weapons. We did have machine guns in the States, and we trained on them, we had the Lewis gun which was a very fine gun. We could take those apart at night, repair them, do night firing and everything else.

When we arrived in France, it seemed that the Army Aviation at that time was short of machine guns, so they took our guns and put them on aircraft and gave us this \$7.50 Chauchat rifle, a little automatic rifle, and of course we'd always been taught in marksmanship to really sight what you are shooting at and hit it. With this damn

thing, it ^{was} ~~felt~~ like a hose, you never knew where it was going to go, so we had no respect for that weapon, and we thought we'd been given a pretty dirty deal. Whereas the Lewis gun was good and accurate.

Q: Did you have a BAR at this time?

Erskine: No, the BAR didn't come in -- we didn't get the BAR until the end of the war. I think we got most of those when we camped one time near the Army 79th Division.

Q: Moonlight requisition.

Erskine: Yes.

Q: What was your attitude regarding the French troops and the British troops?

Erskine: I was never around the British troops, except once in a while we'd see a few British soldiers. But I thought the French troops were whipped, I didn't think their discipline was very good from what I could see, and from a Marine's viewpoint I didn't think they had any idea of marksmanship with a rifle. They wanted to throw a grenade at everything, and we wanted to *kill at* 500 yards away, a little bit beyond grenade range. I was not impressed at all with the French troops that I came in contact with.

Q: When you took French leave, so to speak, of the Army school at Condrecourt ~~and~~ ^{you} went up to join the 79th Company in front of Belleau

Wpp Wood, at Meaux -- I guess battalion headquarters was at Meaux.

Erskine: Yes.

Q: The 79th Company, if I recall, was on the right of the Paris-Meaux Road. The 5th Marines was . . .

Erskine: Oh I don't know about the right of the road, but we were on the right of our battalion, and the 9th Infantry was -- there was a little ravine, and that was our boundary, going into the town of Bouresches.

Q: The 96th Company then must have been on the left.

Erskine: On our left. Capt. Duncan was in command. I for some reason -- I don't know why -- was going back to see my captain, I think I saw Capt. Duncan's body, where he was killed.

Also we had a dentist who was acting as surgeon killed right near him.

Q: That's when Lt. Cates took over command of the company, and took the town of Bouresches.

Erskine: Uh uh.

Q: What was it like up there?

Erskine: It was rough, very rough. I had the 2nd Platoon and we went over what they called going over the top 5 O'clock in the afternoon.

I don't remember the disposition of the other platoons, except that ^{our 4th} ~~the 5th~~ Platoon was ^{held} picked out as a nucleus to form the new company which . . .

Q: That's ^{that} 10% held in reserve as cadre...

Erskine: That was the cadre for the new company. That was not the best psychology, I don't think, when they gave you that reason because it made you feel that you were 100% expendable and probably would be. I had about 900 yards to go through this wheat field. You hear so much about the poppies, but I don't remember seeing too many poppies, but there were some there, and ^{we had to cripw/most of the way because} the fire from the Germans was pretty darn intense and accurate.

I think we had only one machine gun company in our regiment at the time. It was commanded by Capt. Cole. XM I guess he was Maj. Cole then.

We had a battalion in the brigade, I guess.

Q: That's right. ^{The 6th} Six Machine Gun battalion.

Erskine: Yes. Anyway he was killed there, as I remember.

Q: Was he related to Eli Kelly Cole?

Erskine: No[†] that I know of. In my company we got a hell of a lot of machine gun fire after we started out, and it just cut us to pieces. I remember very clearly there was one young fellow -- I think he was in the 4th Platoon -- name of Nelson, a very fine looking kid, one you'd never forget. He was crawling back to get evacuated and he was shot right straight through the nose and he was such a bloody mess. And I took his first aid kit and bound up his face and told him to tell the captain that we were pinned down. And ^{that} I could not advance. Nelson crawled back, ~~was~~ about 20 minutes later, and said, "I told the Captain what you said and he said, get going, goddammit."

Q: Zane was a pretty rough character from what I understand.

Erskine: He was calm as a cucumber. He was a very fine, gentlemanly guy, but I don't think he ever had any feeling for anybody who was in the Reserve who didn't come from the Naval Academy.

Q: Very gentlemanly and very gentle^{ee}. He had about 12 years' experience, you said.

Erskine: Yes. He grew up in the Navy, and if you didn't come from the Naval Academy you didn't stand very high with Capt Zane. But he was as calm as a cucumber; I never saw the man excited, ^{not} in the midst of fire.

Anyway we got into the town around 8 or 9 o'clock and we captured one machine gun getting in. This fellow was still firing; I walked up behind him and kicked him on a shoe; he fired a few

more bursts and he finally got up, slung his gun over his shoulder. I was holding my pistol on him -- a great big husky German, and my hand was going just like that.

Before I knew it he had turned me around and was drinking out of my canteen. They only had about five or six men left at that time out of 58. I think this boy's name was Slattery. Anyway he could never throw a grenade -- I remembered him very well in the company. Yet he could play baseball. But somehow that grenade had him foxed; he'd aim it here and it would go off here at a 45 degree angle. He was a good shot and pretty much of a track man type. I saw him. I wouldn't send one of my ^{men}/back and he was lost, so I said, "You come here and take this prisoner back to battalion headquarters."

Q: Gun on shoulder and all.

Erskine: Yes, he unloaded it. He took off with this fellow, marching ahead of him.

He was back, I thought in much less time than he should have been back, and I said, "Slattery, you shot that prisoner." He said, "How did you know?" I said, "You didn't have time to take him back to battalion headquarters. Don't you know you are not supposed to kill prisoners?" He said, "Yes, but I haven't had a chance to kill one of the bastards all day, all they are doing is killing us, and I can't go back to Minnesota and tell them I didn't kill a German." That's how cold-blooded he was.

Q: Did he last out the war?

Erskine: I don't know.

Q: Were you able to hold Bouresches?

Erskine: Yes. I was going to say, we were supposed to rendez-vous down around a little water fountain, which wasn't selected too wisely because naturally the Germans would look for a water hole because that's where most people would go to get water. When I arrived Capt. Zane was already there, and he said, "How many men do you have?" I said, "I have five, I think." I might have had a couple more. And I checked them off, and cool as a cucumber he said, "I want you to go out and locate the Germans." I said, "Captain, I know where the Germans are." He said, "Where are they?" I said, "They seem to me to be all over the goddamn world." He said, "I am serious. Take what you have left of your platoon and go out and locate the Germans."

I didn't have a grenade, we'd used our grenades. He oriented me and he said, "The little railroad station is right up there, then the stream is down here, there is another little stream that goes up here which is on our left."

So I took off with these people and thought, "By God, this is my last trip." And we finally got out there, and we would crawl up places where we heard a noise and threw a rock, and if anybody fired back we figured there was a German.

So we got in about 3 o'clock in the morning. It was wet, the wheat was wet from dew, and it was cold. We came back and we ran into this stream bed, and came back in right close to Bouresches. Some of the men, (they were really darn good at patrolling, very quiet)

happened to roll a rock down, and when this rock rolled down I heard a voice that I recognized right away: it was that of Sgt. Mazarou. Mazarou was quite a character in our company; he was tall and thin, Irish, smoked a pipe with a long stem; he could be very military, but he had the vilest mouth, I think, of any man that I have run into in a long time. When this rock rolled down there he came out with a string of oaths, "You goddamn bastards, if you'd stayed with me, you would have been in Berlin."

So I crept down very carefully, and *had the patrol cover me.* ~~patrolled.~~

And here was Mazarou shot through the leg, right at the knee. He started talking again and I said, "Shut up!" He said, "You goddamn bastards if you had stayed with me ^{we} ~~you~~ would have been in Berlin in the morning." ^{And I said,} "You can't even walk, now, one more word and I am going to crack you one." ^{And he said,} "I'll be goddamned if you will." ^{With that I wacked him one.} Then we lugged him up the hill and brought him in with us.

But I had to smack him a couple of times more. He'd break out once in a while. I couldn't sacrifice a whole patrol to listen to *his profanity.*

Q: How do you spell Mazarou?

Erskine: MAZAREU, I think.

Q: It's not a very Irish name.

Erskine: No. Of course he couldn't have had a Polish father.

Q: Yes, he could have.

Erskine: A chap I'll never forget.

Q: Was Cukela ~~xx~~ in the 6th Marines? Or was he in the 5th Marines?

Erskine: I think he was. I think he was in the 5th, I am not sure.

Q: I think probably he was.

Erskine: But the man whom I always will be grateful to, and who I think had a great influence on my life in the early ~~days~~ ^{1st Sgt.} was ~~xxx~~ Bernard L. Fritz. Fritz was a very learned man. He was a graduate of ^{Heidelberg} ~~Hanover~~, so I understand, then he ~~xxxx~~ decided to become a priest and he ended up finishing his education some place here in the States. Then he decided he didn't want to be a priest. Whether that's his correct name or not I don't know.

Q: That's the one that Gen. Worton gave me, I remember the name, Fritz, a very fine . . .

Erskine: He enlisted in the Marine Corps, and I think he had 18 or 19 years' service when I joined the company. He had a presence that was superb. Fritz would walk like a great man in front of the company and call attention. I don't know the way he did it, but I guess it was the force of his character or something that made you want to stand attention. He was very sharp and very much to the point in everything he said. Fritz took a ~~xxx~~ liking to me, and many times I was stumped when I was out in the drill field, and

he would sneak over and he would -- he always spoke in the third person -- he would say, "Maybe the Lieutenant would consider doing this or that or something else." Which I found later was pretty damn good.

Q: Was he a big man?

Erskine: Yes, a good 6 feet, maybe 6 feet one. Pretty husky. Fritz knew the Navy regulations almost by heart. The paragraphs were numbered, and he could say, "That's article 201, page 82." That way. He was a very brilliant fellow. I don't think he'd ever been considered for commission because he was a German, and they suspected him of being an intelligence agent and never found any reason to continue this suspicion. Anyway he told me that later and I got him commissioned.

But I think Fritz really had a greater influence on my career than any other one man.

Q: I understand that Gen. Worton had been acting company commander or something when Gen. Pershing was making an inspection, and Fritz knew that Worton's pistol was not too clean, and that Pershing had a habit of inspecting young officers' pistols, and he exchanged his own for Worton's. This is at least Gen. Worton's memory of it. He spoke quite favorably and remembered Sgt. Fritz quite well also.

Erskine: When we finished this ~~xxxxx~~ patrol, we came back in and I reported to the Captain on what we had found. He assigned me a

little sector to defend, and about that time some 15 or 20 men from the 2nd Engineers came in as reinforcements and they were assigned to me to hold this sector. And we had been taught never to dig in behind the hedge: this is the artilleryman's viewpoint because it's so easy to register on a hedge, or the edge of the woods. But I found that sometimes I was much safer by violating this, because the German artillery had the same thought, and unless you had movement to give away your position they'd never know you were there.

I think the hedge was 7 feet high on, I believe, the northeast section of Bouresches. There was a big tree at the other end of our sector. I had I guess close to 30 men at that time, so we dug in there, individual foxholes, and as time went on we tied them together. I think we were attacked three times there by the Germans. Night attacks each time. And I found that hedge was the best protection I could have because to get a grenade over that hedge they wouldn't fall on us, they'd have to throw it so high, and they'd have to heap grenades or get close enough to throw grenades over ~~the hedge~~ that hedge.

Q: They had good fields of fire from the other side of the hedge.

Erskine: Yes. On one night attack they got down their machine gun in the street over there. It wasn't covered evidently. Then they ~~were~~ *were* ~~enfilading~~ *enfilading* our line, but they didn't shoot close to the hedge. They thought we were further back. We stayed there till we pulled out. We went back.

Then the 26th Division came in.

Q: I think so.

Erskine: At Belleau Woods. It was part of the Belleau Woods attack.

Q: And ^{you} they had to go back to relieve them.

Erskine: Yes, we went back there to relieve them. ~~Maxxxx~~ On the way in we went over what ~~xxx~~^{we} called Suicide Lane: we were going in 5 yards apart, almost 200 men, and it was quite a long column. The German artillery cut our company headquarters, and that was one of the most intense bombardments that I think we had. It just came down, and it knocked out most of our . . .

The then 1st sergeant was 1st Sgt. Barber. Fritz and Capt. Zane didn't get along too well together. ~~Rxxxx~~ Fritz, if he thought something was wrong he'd tell the Captain in no uncertain terms, and he knew his business. I think Fritz had gotten hurt or something. Anyway he was away for a little while and they put Barber in.

When Fritz came back I asked the Captain to assign him to me -- I didn't have a platoon sergeant at that time. So he did. And while we were taking cover there in the woods -- this was a battalion relief that night -- in the midst of this bombardment, I'll never forget the picture I saw, Fritz standing up saluting, "Sir, you are in command, what are your orders?"

Q: I'll be darned.

Erskine: And my orders were, ^{Lie down,} "Lie down, goddammit, just as fast as you can." ^{"Sir, you are in command."} He finally took cover, but I had to tell him at least three times. When the bombardment was over we collected our people, went on and made the relief. I think we were relieving the 1st battalion of the 5th, I am not sure.

Q: That Berry's outfit?

Erskine: Berry had been wounded.

Q: Sibley's?

Erskine: All I saw, of course, was the company sector at that time. We were right in front of the hunting lodge.

Q: Yes.

Erskine: ^{It turned out} ~~Until~~ the next morning at dawn ^{that} we were the only company of the battalion that managed to make its relief that night, and here I was not yet 21. I spent my 21st birthday up there in command of this outfit, and Gen. Holcomb later told me that that was one of the biggest ^{worries} ~~worries~~ he had in that whole battle. "This kid up there, I wonder what the hell he's liable to do next." (laughs) But he said he was pretty much satisfied.

Q: These wheat fields that you went through of course are pretty famous in the history of the battle of Belleau Woods, through the wheat fields. The wheat was about waist high, was it not?

Erskine: I'd say almost up to the waist.

Q: So going through it you could just about see the tips of the wheat being snipped off by the machine guns.

Erskine: Oh yes. But the crack is what we'd listen to. If you heard it it didn't hit you.

Q: Did the German machine gun have a characteristic sound?

Erskine: Yes. Well, it was about the same thing except that after they'd passed you there'd be this feeling of the vacuum at high speed. They had a damn good machine gun, an excellent one. I suppose they had the best gun in existence at that time.

Q: What did they have, the Spandau?

Erskine: Er . . . *They've got a name for them.*
I forgot what we called those.

Q: How about the Marine marksmanship in musketry at this time?

Erskine: When we first went out and the Germans got out, our people knocked them off at 600 yards. They couldn't understand it. To be a member of that battalion you had to be -- and this was on the old marksmanship course -- a ~~sharp~~ sharpshooter or expert. A marksman couldn't get in, he was not eligible.

Q: Oh really? They were that handpicked a group.

Erskine: Yessir. That's officers and men.

Q: Had you done ^{much} any shooting before you went into the Marine Corps?

Erskine: Well, I'd hunted from the time I was 10 years old, I guess. I'd used rifles and shotguns. The shotgun was my basic weapon. But I don't think I was a good shot. As a matter of fact I think my first qualification in the National Guard, ^{I made} ~~was~~ marksman. But ~~with~~ ⁱⁿ the years I think I was an expert rifle and pistol shot for maybe 40 years.

Q: You said it was pretty rough when you got up there and you started entering the lines. How would you compare the fighting in France in World War I with the island fighting in the Pacific in World War II? Are there any grounds for comparison?

Erskine: Yes, I think so. The German artillery was first class. The Japanese artillery was very poor; they didn't have in these islands any large quantity of artillery. But they had machine guns, and they had grenades, booby traps and guts. The Germans had sense enough to get the hell out or surrender when it was hopeless. The Japanese didn't. I was a lieutenant in the one and I was a general in the other. Our headquarters on Iwo Jima were not over 500 yards, I don't think, from the front line. We'd frequently get a spray of machine gun fire over there.

Frankly, my recollection would make me feel -- maybe it's because I was closer to it for a longer time -- that World War I was a little harder than the so-called island fighting, when we had greatly improved weapons over those we'd had before; although I spent a lot of time teaching machine guns I'd frankly go back for the individual soldier ^{with} to the old Springfield rifle as my choice; with proper training you can fire that rifle pretty damn fast -- if you get the training with it. And I think today marksmanship is sort of approaching a stage where they might use a hose.

Q: Well of course automation and . . .

Erskine: But you waste so much ammunition that way, and you really put an extra load on your logistics setup to keep it there.

Q: I think this has always been a problem with the semi or fully automatic weapons.

Erskine: It always will be.

Q: When you pulled out of the line from Belleau Woods you went back for the so-called R & R?

Erskine: No, we didn't have all that.

Q: I mean -- xxx you didn't go back to Paris?

Erskine: No.

Q: Just to take new men in and to . . .

Erskine: To rebuild the organization and train. We'd go back to another training area, and from there we went back to Autreville, I believe.

Q: Yes, Autreville.

Erskine: Then I think we went over near the Moselle River to what was called a rest sector there. And we went back to a little place --

I was sick and I was away from the battalion for a little while ~~before~~ toward the end of this thing. I think they went over near the Moselle River, as I remember. The right flank of the battalion was down on the west side of the Moselle River. There were French troops on the other side, called the Rest Sector. This was a place -- this big raiding school was not far from there, and we used to practice our raids, and I understand they called it the ^{Hindenberg} ~~Hindenburg~~ Circus. They would come in and raid these places, and almost every outfit that went in there lost prisoners. So the French bet our colonel that we would lose prisoners -- bet him a champagne dinner. We didn't lose any prisoners but we captured some of their people when they came over. That I remember so well, but I am not sure exactly when we went in there.

Anyway I had an unfortunate little incident. ^{Holcomb} ~~Hokum~~ ^{still in} was given command of the battalion. I went back up there, and I went right back to my platoon. They were in this Rest sector and they were taking life a little bit easy, I thought. I had heard the story about everybody lost prisoners. My instructions were the minute

we see anything that looks like a barrage we get the hell out of these trenches. They've been here long enough that they can certainly ^{hit them} ~~go~~ any time they wanted. *and get out into that wire.*

There was lots of barbed wire there.

I guess I'd been there only two days, and my left flank hooked on to the 26th Infantry which was part of the 5th Army Division. ^{1ST} And I heard somebody say, "He", I got up and looked around, I didn't have my whole belt on, I just ~~g~~ had ~~xxxxxx~~ my pistol stuck in my trousers belt. And here was a great big husky fellow, with slightly reddish hair, and he wore an Army enlisted man's uniform with major's ^{leaves} ~~xxxxxx~~ on, and he was giving this Marine hell there, "I am your battalion commander." So I stepped up and said, "You are not my battalion commander, I know who my battalion commander is, and this is a Marine sector, and you get back up in the Army, *and stay up there."*

Well, he insisted he was my battalion commander. We had been told several times about the Germans putting on our uniforms and sending spies in, issuing orders and things like that. I never saw it, but I am told it did happen more than one time. He got a little ~~bit~~ bit rough and I yanked out my pistol and made him stick his hands up. He said, "I am Maj. E.C. Williams, commander of the 2nd Battalion of the 6th Marines." I said, "Well, you don't look like my battalion commander." I marched him all the way back with his hands up to Battalion Headquarters. I thought I had a prisoner.

Capt. Van Dorn was adjutant at that time, and when I marched him in I could see Van Dorn's face just change, and I realized that something was wrong. And he said, "Tell this goddamn fool who I am." And he said, "This is the new battalion commander, Maj. Williams."

Q: Was that Red Williams?

Bull

Erskine: No, ~~Red~~ Williams. And I thought, "Boy, that has finished me." (laughs) And then I said, "I am sorry, I have been away from the battalion, I didn't know, and I don't take anybody's word for anything up on that line, if I don't know them. That's the way we run it up there." And he was new over there too at the time.

Anyway he didn't say much, he sort of half smiled, and he said, "About face." I didn't know whether he was going to shoot me in the back or not. He said, "Now double time all the way back to your CP." And I did. (laughter)

Q: But shouldn't there have been an order notifying . . .

Erskine: They didn't have any orders.

When I went in, my Captain was a new captain, I didn't know him and I didn't care for him, and I went right back to my platoon. They had some young fellow up there in command of it, and I told him to get out, "This is my platoon, I organized it, and goddamn it, that's that."

Q: What happened to Zane?

Erskine: Oh Zane in Belleau Woods was hit, wounded, and 1st Sgt. Barber was killed. This is when we went in to make this relief. I think we had about 15 or 20, maybe more, wounded and killed. He went to the hospital, was evacuated, and died of influenza, ~~while~~ while he was in the hospital.

Q: You were wounded on the 25th of June in the hip, but you weren't evacuated.

Erskine: That's right. Matter of fact that was a couple of days before, because we were back in the woods there, and the artillery got us, and hit me, it bruised my hip and I got a fragment in my leg. But I could still walk.

Pont-à-Mousson was the name of the place in this west sector.

We were sent back to another camp to get ready to go into St Mihiel.

Q: You commanded the company for about two weeks in Belleau Woods.

Erskine: Yes.

Q: From June 26th until July 10th.

Erskine: Must have been.

Q: Had Worton been wounded and evacuated already?

Erskine: Worton was hit the first day.

Q: In Belleau Woods?

Erskine: No, this was on the Triangle Farm. This was just before -- I think it was one or two days before I got back from the school.

He was shot through the throat, and I don't think he ever did get back.

Q: No, I don't think so. Then he was gassed.

Erskine: He might have gotten some gas. But he got hit through the throat. Whether he had any other wounds I am not sure.

Q: Did you ever come under ^a ^{attack} gas effects?

Erskine: Yes. When we went through the areas I got burned a little bit down around my crotch.

Q: That's where it generally wound up.

Erskine: Wherever you had perspiration. And some in the lungs. But I never went to the hospital with it.

Q: Let's see. You went up to --

Now this Belleau Woods operation, the Army as I recall classified it as the Aisne-Marne offensive, Château Thierry.

Erskine: It was included, I think.

Q: It was included. They never gave credit . . .

Erskine: It was a small area. The Aisne-Marne covers quite a large area. I don't know exactly how they picked out the names for these things.

Incidentally, at Belleau Woods, we were up there and we had -- again I dug in right at the edge of the woods. The place was just covered with dead Germans. I sent a working party out there when I could -- ^{usually} ~~XXXXXX~~ some guys that needed some sort of punishment. And around the crest of the hill we put a number of Germans, we propped them up with our rifles and put American helmets on their heads. This was on the crest of the ridge, where the Germans would think we should be. We were actually 100 yards or more, dug out at the edge of the woods, where we could see what the hell was going on. ^{they had an order in the AEF that that wouldn't be done.} Then ~~we had another way up.~~

Well, I was sitting in my foxhole and Fritz was right next to me one day, when a gentleman in a French helmet and an armband -- a white and green armband -- came up (and he had an orderly with him who had the same kind of thing), very neatly dressed, and he said, "Who is in command here?" I was sitting in my foxhole and I said, "Who the hell wants to know?" ^{Q: you were a pretty cocky Lieutenant. Erskine: H/t} I was company commander. And I was just about 21. ^{It's the only way to do it.}

Then I thought ^{here's some fresh egg who's come up here,} -- my first impression was that he was a war correspondent, and I had heard some of the stories they had been writing about us and I didn't like them, and I had no damn use for them up there. He said, "I am your brigade commander." I said, "Don't give me that, I know my brigade commander, and it's not you."

Fritz stood up and took a look, and he motioned to me to get up. I got up and I looked on the other side of his shoulder -- brigadier general. "I don't know what goddamn army you are in, but you'd better pull out of here pretty damn quick. We don't tolerate any goddamn strangers up here." It turned out to be Harbord.

Finally I made him show me his identification. He had it. And I told him, "You don't know how close you came to really getting it up here." *It would have been terrible if I had shot my own brigade Commander, but we just don't take any goddamned foolishness from anybody."*

He never said a word. He smiled and said, "Now show me your positions." I took him down around the edge of the woods and showed him, *and then I showed him my Germans up there in the logical positions to occupy*

He said, "Don't you know, hasn't anybody told you that it's forbidden to dig in at the edge of the woods?" I said, "Yes, I know about it. But everybody else *in the AEF is not* knows you are not doing it. The Germans know where you are, but they don't know where I am." *and lobbing them all behind us.* And they had been shelling the place. And I said, "I don't think I had one man killed, and I think only two wounded up there during that period."

He shook his head and he said, "How long have you been in command of the company?" I told him, "Just about a week, I think." "How old are you?" I said, "I'll be 21 in a couple of days." He said, "You want to command this company?" I said, "Yes." He said, "If anybody ever relieves you, you just communicate with me and you will get it back."

Q: Oh boy! He became quite a good friend of the Marine Corps.

Erskine: Oh yes, the Marine Corps made him.

Q: You probably chipped in for that portrait that's down there in the ^{Army} Navy Club.

Probably did.

Erskine: I don't doubt it. He was a good man, a hell of a good man.

He understood I thought, *troops, too, because when I gave him a*
tongue lashing
~~I gave him a lesson~~, he never said a word, he just sort of
 smiled. I guess he thought, "This young fellow will get the ~~work~~ ^{word}
 done sooner or later."

Q: So few of the staff and general officers came up to the front,
that close to the front...

Erskine: I never expected to see him up there. I thought he was
 a newspaperman. He had a C.

Q: What did C stand for?

Erskine: I don't know. I didn't have to use it anymore so I never
 inquired.

Q: Of course Floyd Gibbons was wounded and lost his eye at Belleau
 Woods, which of course gave prominence to the Marine Corps and later
 led to this Army attitude regarding the Marine Corps, as you probably
 experienced and well know.

Erskine: Yes.

Q: Well, General, it's a couple of minutes before 12 and you have
 a deadline. I think this is a good place to end the session right
 now.

Q:
 Erskine: All right. ^{Q!} Very good, sir.

End of Side 2, Tape 1, End of Session 1.

Session II - 16 October 1969

Tape I, Side 1

Q: As we concluded our first session last time, General, we were still in Belleau Wood. You were in command of the 79th Company at this time. You'd been wounded, but had not been evacuated. I think you'd been hit in the hip.

Erskine: I was hit on my left side and bruised pretty badly on the hip, but I was still able to carry on with the help of a hospital corpsman.

Q: Also just about this time you came down with the flu.

Erskine: I came down with the flu, but I can't quite place where this happened. I remember hiking out with the company, and it was very bad weather, and the next morning I had one hell of a bad cold and a pretty high fever. So the doctor turned me in, and I was in the bunk in the camp there for about three or four days. In the meantime, the outfit was ordered up to Soissons, and I ^{recovered} ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ just in time to catch up with them. They left and left me in the so-called sick ^{bay} ~~bed~~ at that time, but I managed by means of rides on trucks et cetera to rejoin them the night before the attack at Soissons.

Q: This was at Pont-à-Mousson?

Erskine: No, Pont-à-Mousson was down at the other end of the sector. This was Soissons, the big drive that went in at Soissons. I don't

remember the date. But the 2nd Division was ordered up there. We had no real formal marching orders as was the usual case. It was just sort of an informal thing in a way, because the Division Commander called in the regimental commanders and said, "This is where we are going, you have so many trucks." And he just marked it out on the map, and that's how we got to Soissons. We got there on time, believe it or not, in spite of all this congestion that we ran into.

But I did not make the march up there because of the flu that I'd just gotten over. And incidentally I was knocked out with a concussion the first hour, I guess, and evacuated back to Paris. I was first put in a hospital behind the lines there, the name of which I don't remember. The Germans came over and bombed this little hospital, and we were all taken out and put ~~xxxxxx~~ outside of the hospital in the open, then put on a train and taken to Paris. It turned out that I had, I guess, a slight concussion. I was sent to Hospital No. 5, as I remember, and they had quite a number of casualties, and since I didn't have any open wounds or anything, I lay around right on the ground for a large part of the first day of my arrival. Finally they took me in for an examination. They were supposed to have some of the best doctors in the country in this particular hospital. I had a very sore head; ~~xxx~~ the right side of my head was very sore, you could hardly touch it, so the doctors decided that I had a mastoid. The next thing I knew they had me on the operating table. I figured that this wasn't right, so I got up from the operating table and said, "No operation on me until you find out what the hell is wrong with me." I found myself

evacuated from there very quickly to another hospital, just outside Nantes, and there a doctor came in and gave me about the same examination, tapping me on the head, and it was very sore then. So I gave him a piece of my mind, and I didn't get much attention for about a day there. Finally a nurse came in and asked me if she couldn't syringe out my ears, because it looked like I had a clot of blood in my ears. And she did, and by golly that was all that was wrong with me. I might have been a little insensitive, not listening to the ~~war~~ doctors, but I am glad I was. I was around there about a week or 10 days, I guess, and I recovered from this so-called ear infection.

Then I went back to my outfit, which was up I think in the Pont-à-Mousson area at that time.

Q: The Marbach sector.

Erskine: I think that's what it's called.. My memory on those points is sort of hazy at this time.

Q: At this time you ~~were~~ had the 2nd Platoon.

Erskine: 2nd Platoon, 79th Company. Bull Williams had relieved Col. Holcomb as our battalion commander, and Holcomb had become the lieutenant colonel of the regiment. It was a quiet sector. That's the one I mentioned in the previous conversation as being the sector in which the ^{French} ~~German~~ bet our Colonel that we would lose prisoners, but we didn't. Actually we captured some prisoners when the Germans made one of their raiding attacks. This was an

area where they used to ~~praxe~~ practice their raiding.

I think it's called the Hindenberg Circus School, which was located not far from that area.

Q: How long did you remain there?

Erskine: I think a couple of weeks.

Q: Yes, and then you took ^{off} for the . . .

Erskine: We moved back to another training area. We got some replacements. I remember a tough hike, I think about 20 or 25 miles, in which we left just after dark and got ~~in~~ into this little camp about 8 or 9 o'clock the next morning. It was really a tough one.

Q: A lot of hiking, into position.

Erskine: Yes, this was before the day of the jeep. Hiking was considered good training and also ^{good} disciplinary training ~~it~~ not only ~~it~~ toughened up the soldier, but by golly it took a lot of grit sometimes to make that hike.

Q: The idea of hiking, say 20-25 miles or so and being ready to fight once you attained your *line of departure*...

Erskine: That has happened more than once!

Q: Now on the 25th you were detailed as battalion adjutant of the 2nd Battalion 6th Marines.

Erskine: Yes, that was in the area of Autreville, which was the battalion headquarters at that time.

Q: I think about that time you were also promoted to captain.

Erskine: No, I never got my captain's bars until after I got home, after the war.

Q: Did you get back pay for all this time?

Erskine: No. I don't think I was actually promoted to captain. There ^{is} ~~was~~ something wrong there. (Pause) Oh yes, you are right, I made temporary captain, then toward the end of the war ^{when} they started cutting back I dropped back to 1st lieutenant.

Q: That's right, in September of 1919.

Erskine: Yes. Then I went to Haiti. Let's see. I went on recruiting duty for a brief period, then I was sent down to Haiti. I was there only about six months, I think, when I was ordered home on temporary duty to take the Guard of Honor for the Unknown Soldier to Europe, pick up the body on board the USS Olympia, and bring it home.

Q: But we are getting a little ahead of ourselves, because we haven't finished World War I yet! Was there any more action after you were assigned to the Marbache sector?

Erskine: Yes, we went into St Mihiel. At that time I'd been made battalion scout officer. Our battalion, as I remember, when we jumped off at St Mihiel, we had another one of those terrific hikes to get into position, and this was one of the worst traffic tieups I've ever seen -- troops were marching in the ditches alongside the road; we had one battalion on one side, and another battalion in single file, at night, and sometimes the MPs had never heard of the unit that they were supposed to direct to a certain area, and we got into our position I think two or three days before the attack. All night marches up in the forward area. And we jumped off in the morning. Maj. Williams, evidently jokingly, told me that when our battalion passed through the leading battalion I would precede the battalion 1000 yards and keep him informed on the enemy situation. I thought the man was serious. We had all our contacts, we had men up with the leading battalion. So when we got ready to pass through I got ready to move out, because an order is an order, and he laughed and he said, "No, we won't do that now."

Q: That would be with the scout company.

Erskine: We had a platoon of scouts in the 8th battalion headquarters, and I was what they called the scout officer.

Q: That was very much like what Gen. Thomas did, I think.

Erskine: I don't know what Jerry was doing.

Q: I think he was a sergeant's scout in Johnny-the-Hard Hughes' battalion. Did you ^{know} Maj. or Lt. Col. Hughes?

Erskine: Yes. I didn't know him too well. I was a lieutenant, and I don't think many lieutenants knew Johnny very well. He seemed to be a pretty tough customer to most of the junior officers. He had a good outfit, though, as I remember. The men sort of gave me the impression that if you served with Johnny Hughes and survived you were all right.

Q: ~~Was~~ You were wounded again, I understand, on the 15th.

Erskine: That was in St. Mihiel.

Q: This was pretty bad I am told.

Erskine: I got a pretty severe wound. We had gone through and gotten our objective and we were sort of in a reserve position just outside of Thiacourt. I was sent on numerous patrols there at night -- I guess we were there four or five days. We were ordered to go up -- I think it was the 3rd Battalion of the 6th Marines in line, and Maj. Williams was not the best map reader in the world, and he didn't listen to his junior officers very much.

I thought I knew the ground very, very well, having been on night patrol every night I'd been there. There was a little stream that I'll never forget, called Rup - de-Mad. I knew this battalion was just south of that stream -- there was a little bridge across. I crossed that bridge a couple of times. When he started out he gave very sketchy orders, and as I remember the battalion was lined up, you might say, in a column of squads, one right behind the other ~~right~~ down through this road and across this bridge.

I had a pretty good idea of the front lines because I'd passed through them several times at night, and I'd watched them in the daylight. And ^{well} ~~they~~ ^{we} ~~go~~ ^{go} down on this road, and the Major was on his horse. He always expected me to keep up with him, and run half a mile around the countryside and come back and keep him posted on what was going on.

^{so we} They got down and I saw they were going to head for this bridge, and I asked the Major if ~~he was~~ ^{he was} going to cross the bridge, and he said Yes. I said, "By God, that's right in the middle of no man's land. I've been out there on patrol." He said, "You don't know what you are talking about." So he kept marching, and we had a little advance guard, we didn't have much. We had mostly guides from the other battalion. Why the guides let these people go there, I don't know.

This bit of action is written up, I believe, in the 2nd Division's history as sort of a special operation. Well, it was special. I kept pulling at the Major's leg while he was riding along and telling him, "You are going right in the middle of no man's land." Finally he stopped and halted the outfit down

the road. ~~They~~^{He} got off and took his flashlight and said, "Come here and show me where you think we are. I know where I am." I said, "No, sir, the place is full of Germans right up there. I've been there, I know. I am not coming near that flashlight." He finally gave me a tongue lashing, got on his horse and started the march and we hadn't gone 50 yards before it seemed like every machine gun in the world opened up. We had what I guess they call now an SOP -- Standard^{ing} Operating Procedure# -- *that if we were ever* surprised that the leading unit would continue to go ahead, the second would go to the right, the third to the left, and -- *in each* *battalion* -- and the fourth would be in reserve. We had four companies in the battalion at the time.

They just broke right out without any orders -- so far as I know, I never heard an order. But ^{fortunately} this machine gun fire was too high and it missed. We didn't have many people hurt in this particular thing; as I remember we only had about 190 casualties altogether.

But in this situation we kept moving forward. I went out with a couple of my scouts. And Bill Uhlich, who ^{was} ~~was~~ the sergeant major of the battalion at that time, went with me. Tom Wirt was also in my scout platoon. He is retired now as a colonel. I think he is in Washington here some place. He was a brand new 2nd lieutenant then. It was just before daylight, and I thought I saw some movement. I lay down and I saw any number, I thought, of German soldiers, moving backward, moving away from us, down ^{the hill} ~~down~~ into a little woods. So I went back and told the Major about this right away, and he said, "Well, goddamn it, take a couple of people and go

down there and capture them." So I took Bill Uhlrich, Tom Wirt, and some place along the line we picked up a soldier in that night march, and he ^{had} attached himself to us. There were about 10 of us altogether. We rushed down this place and we saw a few Germans in this little woods, just about dawn, so we rushed in and I told Bill, who could speak German, to tell them that they were surrounded and to surrender. For a moment everything was sort of quiet, and some of them threw down their arms. There must have been 150 or 200 people in this woods. We started collecting them, and I put Uhlrich ^{in charge} because he could speak German in charge of these prisoners, and I think they were 40-odd xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx prisoners that we got out of there with.

Finally some wise German figured they were being fooled, so they started shooting, and we started firing back, and for some reason they started withdrawing and going up the hill. We started running after them, and taking the helmets off and ^{banging them} ~~xxxxxx~~ over the head with our pistols to disarm them, and thought we would get some more prisoners. And we got up to the top of this hill, and there was a reserve machine gun position up there.

On the way up we passed a house and threw some grenades in there, and I don't know how many we got, but about 15 or 20 came out, but I know there were some that stayed in.

I saw Tom Wirt, he got hit, I think in the ~~xx~~ hand. He had to go back. The first thing we knew we were inside the German lines.

I had some people ahead of me and I kept trying to stop my people from chasing these Germans. Finally there were two men

just ahead of me and got their attention, "Come on back, let's get out, you go around that side of this woods, and I go around this side." Well, as I started around --

Oh, before that I got to this little patch of woods, then a column of Germans started coming up. All I had was my pistol, and I got a few of them. The others sort of dispersed. I was hiding in these bushes, then I ran out into the open to try to get down under some cover, but two machine guns opened on me and caught me in the leg and busted it up pretty badly, and I lay there until 10 o'clock, I guess. I managed to put a tourniquet on. In the meantime they'd take potshots at me, but I had just enough cover so that they couldn't get me. They hit my canteen. But I was so flattened out they couldn't really get me.

Then about 10 o'clock I heard some voices coming and I pushed my helmet up with my hand and the Germans fired at it, and then pretty soon I heard a lot of firing all around me. These voices kept going right up the hill: it was not a very steep hill, it was really a little slope. Finally one big husky guy came up and grabbed me by the arm and started pulling me to the rear. When we got back under some cover I said, "What's your name?" He said, "My name is Pvt. Vale." A name I'll never forget. I said, "I think you probably saved my life, and what in the world can I ever do for you?" He said, ^{"I've wanted a .45 cal. pistol} ~~xxxxxx~~ pistol ever since I've been in this outfit. You can give me that gun." So I gave him my gun.

We finally got back down in the woods where these ~~xxx~~ 40-odd prisoners were corraled. I guess it was Bill Uhlrich who detailed two of these prisoners with an improvised stretcher to take me to

the rear. So that's how I got out of there. I finally got back to the sick bay, and our regimental surgeon gave me first aid and fixed me up, and I really credit him now with ~~my leg being saved~~ having really saved my leg, because both bones were broken right at the ankle, and the upper part was sticking out about six inches.

From there I went back to the Army surgical team -- a special unit. The doctor took a look at me and he said, "I think I am going to have to take it off." And there was a very nice nurse there, and she looked at him and she looked at me and she said -- I remember this so clearly -- "He is so young, try to do what you can, Doctor." He said, "We don't have time, we have so many thousands, we don't have the facilities." She said, "Oh please, Doctor." And this went on for a few minutes. Then he said, "All right." So he fixed it up, and from there I was evacuated to an evacuation hospital." Finally I think I went back to Paris for a brief period of time, and from there I was sent to Bordeaux, I think it was.

Q: Brest is where you sailed from.

Erskine: Was it Brest?

Q: Yes sir.

Erskine: Well, I guess it was. I came back and landed at Portsmouth Naval Hospital. That was in Norfolk.

Q: They had you in three hospitals -- Base Hospital No. 116, Base Hospital No. 22, and Base Hospital No. 8. Then they sent you back down to Brest. You were embarked on the USS Madawaski.

Erskine: Yes. I landed at Hampton Roads, I believe it was, and I went to the Portsmouth Naval Hospital where I was for quite a while. The wound didn't heal completely. I asked for duty -- I was so tired of being in the hospital -- and they let me go to duty at the Marine Barracks in Norfolk. And it didn't heal there, I had to have dressings almost every day. Then I asked for duty in Haiti, and I was sent to Haiti.

Q: Was the leg still in bad shape?

Erskine: Yes, it would break open every once in a while, and some of the shattered bone would come out. I think they said I also had osteomyelitis, which was a disease of the bone. However, I went to Haiti and they sent me right out in the middle of the country to Hinche. I took command of the 54th Company, I think it was. Or the 59th?

Q: Let's see, I've got it right here. (Pause) No, I don't have what company you were commanding.

Erskine: I think it was the 54th Company. We had ~~two~~ two companies located at Hinche, under command of Maj. Robert Voeth, V.O.E.T.H., and a third company was located at a place called Maisad, which was

about 5 or 6 miles away. In the meantime I had reverted to 1st lieutenant. We did quite a bit of patrolling there, mainly pacification patrols. We ~~was~~ never had a single combat in my organization as long as we were there. As long as I was there.

Then while there I was ordered home for some reason to organize the Guard of Honor for the Unknown Soldier and go aboard the Olympia and pick up the body.

No. I landed in Norfolk~~xxxx~~^{VA} and Col. William McKelvey was in command there. He was a little excited. "How are we going to do this overnight?" I just had about one night there and he made everybody available that he could to help. The old ship didn't have any regular quarters, they hadn't had any Marines on there for a long time, and we didn't have very much in the way of facilities.

Q: ~~xx xxxxx~~^{Dewey's} old flagship.

Erskine: Yes. So we took off and we had a pretty rough trip over. We went first to Plymouth and spent several days up there, and made quite a number of calls. We of course had a reception from the British naval people there. Then we went down to Brest.

One of the reasons I think I was assigned this job was that I was supposed to speak French ~~xxx~~^{fairly} well. As a matter of fact I grew up in Louisiana and for four years I had three Frenchmen as my roommates and I studied French for four years, and I had an average of 85, and I could do pretty well with it, but I hadn't had any practice. So my French was just practically gone, and I

found that when the body was to be turned over I was supposed to translate. And I made a pretty poor job of that, but I think it got over all right. Adm. Chandler was the senior officer present, and he was a wonderful old man. I am trying to think of the captain's name, whom I liked very much, he was a real twofisted seagoing guy. I'll think of it before we finish this session. Oh, Capt. Wyman. Henry Wyman, I think it was. He was the skipper of the Olympia at that time.

Q: You brought back three bodies?

Erskine: No, one.

Q: That's right, three had been chosen, and they had already made the choice there ^{at the cemetery -} ~~(at the Sûreté ?)~~

Erskine: We ^{had} ~~got~~ one body turned over to us. The Captain didn't want to put it down in the hold for fear that something might happen to it. He wanted it kept under surveillance the entire time, and as soon as we got out of the harbor in Brest we took this casket up to the signal bridge -- the old Olympia had two bridges; the ~~fore~~ forward bridge was for the navigation and the operation of the ship, and the after bridge was where they gave all the signaling, all the signal lights were there. We lashed this fellow down with everything that we could tie on him; ~~because~~ we had some very rough weather coming home, and there were times when we thought we might not make it home. We had a very famous chaplain we had picked up I think when we were at Plymouth, to bring home. It was so bad

For several days that we couldn't eat at the table. You just sat down with sandwiches and coffee, and you'd hold on ~~with~~^{to} something ~~with~~ one hand and grabbed your sandwich with the other. In the ward-room we had at least four inches of water most of the time. The chaplain and the captain got together and he held a special service, praying to God that the ship wouldn't sink.

Q: Of course the Olympia was quite old by then.'

Erskine: She was pretty old, she was just long enough to pick up the long ones and short enough to pick up the short ones. Many times the waves would go up to the bridge. We had a real rough trip back.

Q: They chose the Olympia for . . .

Erskine: I think for sentimental reasons. As I remember the Olympia was the oldest ship in the Navy at the time too. After this she made a midshipman's cruise. No. I stayed on, she went down as flagship of the Train of the Atlantic Fleet, and I was ordered aboard with written orders, by golly I think it was six weeks maximum time, then I was to go back to Haiti.

So the six weeks was up and I didn't get any ~~orders~~^{orders} to get off.

I went to see the captain and the admiral and they said, "What are you kicking about? We want you to stay on here." I had had enough sea duty, and I wasn't looking for any more sea duty.

After I guess a week we were in the Navy Yard here in Washington and I had to go down to ~~the~~ see the Commandant of the Marine Corps

about this thing. It was Gen. Lejeune. While I was in London there was a gentleman over there who knew the Quartermaster General of the Marine Corps, he was an old friend, and he asked me if I'd take him back a bottle of good Scotch. This was in Prohibition days. I finally agreed to it, and I had this bottle of Scotch that I had smuggled back aboard the ship and smuggled off the ship, and I was ~~xxx~~ on my way to Gen. McCawley's office to give him this quart of whiskey. ^{As}/I went up the steps, Gen. Lejeune walked out of his office and saw me and he said, "Hey, come here, come in and tell me about your trip." Well, I sat there and I thought, "My God! It's bad enough getting caught with a quart of whiskey here, but to be caught by the Commandant is something." I guess he kept me there 40 minutes, talking about the trip over and the trip back and everything. Finally I brought up the subject of getting off the ship, and he said, "Well, the Admiral has asked that you stay on there with your Marines. ~~xxx~~ ^{He} said you did a good job, and I am just going to forget about it."

So that was that. We sailed late in January, I think, down to Guantanamo, as the flagship of the Atlantic Fleet Train.

Q: This was 1922.

Erskine: That's about it. Adm. Chandler had been relieved and Adm. De Steiger had taken over, and De Steiger assigned me two 5-inch ~~gunners~~ ^{guns} for my Marine detachment in his cabin. But he wouldn't let us man those guns half the time because it disturbed him. We never fired a shot as long as I was on board.

Q: Oh really? The breach and loading apparatus and everything was in his cabin?

Erskine: Yes.

Q: ^{His} Sea Cabin?

Erskine: cabin. He had two guns in his cabin on the starboard side. I think actually that the ship was so old that had we fired those guns ^{they} ~~it~~ would have jumped off the barbettes. We never got any gunnery practice. But we did a lot of ^{dry run} ~~drive~~ sea stuff. I enjoyed my time on that cruise, but I must say the cruise across the Atlantic and back disabused me of life at sea.

Q: You did get detached in May 1922 and went up to the Marine Barracks at Philadelphia for a period of about *nearly six months*.

Erskine: Yes, we were ordered off the ship, so the ship could make a midshipman's cruise. We got off in Philadelphia, and I was sort of a spare file around there at the time, and I was waiting to go back to Haiti. In the meantime I got appendicitis, and I guess they got tired of waiting for me to go back to Haiti, so they evidently replaced me. The next thing I knew I got orders to go to Santo Domingo, 2nd Brigade, and while I was on board ship -- I was going down on the old Kittery, I think.

Q: The Henderson.

Erskine: That was a real luxury cruise compared to the Ki&tery.

I was detailed to be the quartermaster, and I've always attributed that to the fact that while I was convalescing we had two books, one was Marine Corps Orders & Regulations, and the other one was System of Accountability. I'd never read the System of Accountability and I thought while I was getting over this appendectomy that I would read it. And I always felt that somebody found out about that and so I was quartermaster! I arrived down there a depot quartermaster, and I spent the next two years there, commissary officer and depot quartermaster for the Brigade.

Q: What was duty like down in Santo Domingo?

Erskine: I liked it very much. I thought it was very pleasant duty.

I liked the people down there, I seemed to get along with them all right. ^{I finally enjoyed the Qm duty -} ~~I learned a great deal~~ ^{being the} ~~in this~~ ^{the four years I} ~~quartermaster~~ ^{was there.}

I went through the ^{evacuation} ~~immigration~~ of the troops and was supposed to be the last man to leave the island, but at the last minute something came up and orders came down for the brigade quartermaster, who then was Eddie Banker, to go to Haiti. He was to drive across country and go to Haiti, so he stayed over and took care of the very last minute things.

Q: Who was the brigade commander at this time?

Erskine: Gen. Lee, Harry Lee. But the brigade staff had gone and they gradually started cutting down and cutting down. As the troops

moved out we got some of the supplies out, and some went to Haiti, some went to the Virgin Islands, some came back home, and some we just sold. Of course we had a number of installations there, we'd built a couple of camps and put in wells and pumps. We couldn't very well pull a well out and take it home, so I had to try my best to sell these things. And I did, I sold most everything we could ~~xxx~~ sell down there. Then we took down the barracks and shipped some of these portable buildings. I think they went to Guantanamo, and one shipload to the Virgin Islands.

Q: I imagine it must have been some trip for Banker from Santo Domingo to Haiti.

Erskine: It was old dirt road, but we had those old Model T Fords, and ^{the} Old Model T could do most anything, you know. But some of the people had made the trip while I was there, you know -- ^{it was} ~~as~~ a sort of vacation to go to Haiti; ^{it was} ~~was~~ supposed to be a real humdinger of a trip.

Q: Then you went up to Quantico in 1924 as . . .

Erskine: Depot quartermaster. I was there about two years as I recall.

Q: Yessir, this was during the reign of Smedley Butler.

Erskine: No, Smedley left just before I got there, and Eli Kelly Cole was in command when I was there, and the post quartermaster, who was the overall quartermaster, was Walter E. Noah. I remember

so well, he was a lieutenant colonel at that time, and -- I think it was the 12th Marines there, the artillery regiment anyway -- Maj. Moses happened to be in command at that time, and one morning . . we had Marine telephone operators, and this thing really happened.

Maj. Moses called up the post quartermaster and he answered and said, "This is Noah." And Moses said, "This is Moses." And the operator couldn't hold it any longer and he said, "Jesus Christ!" (laughter)

Q: This was Mink Moses.

Erskine: I don't know whether they called him Mink or not.

Q: Emile P.

Erskine: I think so, yes. E.P. Moses. Anyway it made Noah mad and he wanted to ^{have} ~~make~~ the operator disciplined, but ~~xxxxxx~~ nothing ever happened, except that people laughed about it.

Q: What went on at Quantico during this time?

Erskine: We had a good bit of construction going on. One of the things I remember ^{was} that they were building -- and this was all being done by post labor, they even cut out the stones. ^{Because I remember} I had to buy for them -- for the first time I knew we had diamond saws to cut the stone with for the basement. I think it's used as a club now. The Harry Lee Hall.

Q: Marine labor built that?

Erskine: ^{yes.} ~~Uh~~ uh. I don't know whether they finished it all or not. That thing was under construction for a number of years. When they could spare the people and had the money they'd do a little building. As I remember they had all ^{of} the basement put in, and up almost to what would be the second floor. Of course as the years ^{have} passed there was a lot of remodeling there. But whether they did it by contract ^{on their own} or that I don't know.

Q: Had the stadium been built already?

Erskine: Yes. Butler built the stadium.

Q: In '22 or '23, I guess. It had to be. You ~~was~~ got there in '24.

Erskine: They were still doing a little work on it when I arrived, but the real job had been done when I arrived.

I enjoyed my tour there very much. From there I talked myself into going to Fort Benning. I wanted to go to Fort Benning and I made my application a couple of times. In those days the feeling was a little bit strong between the services, and various senior officers would tell me what a damn fool I was for wanting to go to an Army school. Well, I had always wanted to go to an Army school, because I thought the Army had a damn good school system as such. I had only one experience in the Marine Corps School, and that was the one I described before. I had enough of it in a few weeks and wanted to get out. And incidentally, I have never gone as a student

to a single Marine Corps school.'

Q: During your whole career?

Erskine: During my whole career, except those few weeks there.

So finally I got assigned to Fort Benning, and I thought it was a hell of a good school, and I still think it was one of the outstanding military schools in this country at that time. All of it was so practical, you had to do everything; you'd make inspections, and -- I don't want to go into a great deal of detail, but I must say that they are pretty damn thorough in their instruction.

Then I came back as an instructor in the Marine Corps Schools.

Q: Were there any other Marines down there with you?

Erskine: Yes, Jim Baines and Ruffner, and a man who became quartermaster later. I think there were four of us altogether -- two in the company school and two in the advanced school. I went to the company school.

Q: Did you ever go to Leavenworth later?

Erskine: Yes.

Q: This was much later though.

Erskine: Yes, a good deal. I came back to Quantico and was assigned as an instructor in the Marine Corps Schools. And we didn't finish

that year --

The other Marine who was there was named Jacobsen.

Q: Oh, Arnold Jacobsen.

Erskine: Yes. (Pause) Our year didn't go through. The school was broken up and we were sent down to Nicaragua. They were forming some units of the 11th Marines, as I remember, and again I was called to post headquarters and told to organize the 61st Machine Gun and Howitzer Company. And as we brought them in they'd be arriving on the trains.

We had what they called Plan A in those days, in which each post would send over the ^{burns} ~~bums~~ they had out, to get rid of them, you know.

Q: ^{For the} Expeditionary force.

Erskine: Yes, expeditionary duty. Henry Larsen was the battalion commander of this battalion that had been organized. We stayed up all night long. We drew a set of machine guns out of the depot in Quantico. When I ended up I had ^{only two} ~~few~~ men in my company who had ever had any machine gun experience. One was 2nd Lt. Dawson, who later became an aviator, and he had been in the Basic School and had had some instruction. Another one was a sergeant. But I had about a dozen people who had been mess cooks, and I looked forward to having a very good mess, including the machine gun side of it.

I think we were delayed one day. This was almost an overnight thing. And this Washington boat that used to run to Norfolk came by and picked up my company and took us down to Norfolk, and we stayed at the Marine Barracks there for a couple of days. We were supposed to sail within 48 hours. But we were there several days.

In the meantime I managed to draw another set of machine guns. I checked these guns which were old and pretty badly worn, so I ended up actually with two sets of machine guns, and I don't know how many rounds of ammunition we managed to pick up there.

From there we embarked on the old USS Oglala, and on the way down we managed to get in a good bit of machine gun instruction, nomenclature and functioning and so forth. Finally we reached the stage where we could throw boxes over the side and fire. So we did a good bit of firing on the way down. We had a pretty good outfit.

We got down to Nicaragua and we were sent up to Leon and put in billet in some of the old buildings, and we started our training schedule -- a pretty tough training schedule there. It wasn't long before I had some good gunners. One of the best shots I had for a machine gunner in the company was a hospital corpsman. I had Lieutenants Dawson, Frisbie.

Q: Julian Frisbie.

Erskine: Julian Frisbie and Bill Whaling. Bill Whaling was a marvel, he was an Olympic pistol shot, an Olympic skeet shot and an Olympic rifle shot, but he didn't know anything about machine guns and didn't seem to care a hell of a lot about them.

Shortly after we landed -- oh, I don't know, it was several months -- I was assigned to the Guardia Nacional. José Moncada was running for President at that time, and they had a temporary President by the name of Diaz, he was sort of an interim President. I had met Moncada, and I had also met Somoza, who was the ^{Governor} ~~Mayor~~ of the Leon Province. We got to be very good friends; as a matter of fact ~~we~~ ^{he} used to come out and fire machine guns with us in our range once in a while. I think that's how I happened to be assigned up there. I was ordered right over to be Moncada's aide as soon as he was elected -- bodyguard -- and organize the Presidential Guard.

Somoza was the secretary to the President, and was Minister of Navy, Minister of Army, but he had no army and he had no navy, because we ran all that under our supervision. I don't know whether he drew pay for those jobs or not. Anyway the pay wasn't so much, I am sure of that.

Q: You said this was a ~~Machine~~ machine gun and Howitzer company. What were the Howitzers?

Erskine: The Howitzer was an 81 mm mortar -- light stuff. The company was finally sort of split up, as I remember, and we never had much chance to use these guns. There was a heavy Browning gun at that time, and ~~they~~ ^{it} didn't have much mobility to go around on mule patrols. I didn't have much chance to find out really what happened to this company in the end. They didn't function as a machine gun and Howitzer company as such. ~~xxxxxx~~

Q: They probably went to the Guardia also, to help staff the Guardia.

Erskine: No. Well, a few of the personnel might have gone to the Guardia. But I was pretty busy then, ^{during} with the inauguration and going around with the old man: he wouldn't go any place unless I was with him, even when he danced on the floor -- it was quite a job to keep an eye on the girls and to dance -- I had to pick up a girl and dance right alongside of him.

We took a trip down to Leon one time. He always carried two pistols, and I carried one, and he always insisted when we were in his automobile that I have my ~~hand~~ pistol in my hand. He had a very small one that he carried in a large vest pocket, and then he had another one, a 38. It was quite an experience.

I started out -- I went up to see the chief of the Guardia Nacional. I think he held the rank of general, maybe, in the Nicaraguan Army. But he was a lieutenant colonel. ←

← Col. Beadle.

Erskine: He was to give me all the assistance in the world, and impressed on me that I was responsible for security at the so-called palace, everything. So I started looking around for good noncommissioned officers, and I got complete cooperation from Guardia Headquarters. One day the President called me in and he said, "I am sorry, but you cannot have Sgt So-and-so, and So-and-so, and So-and-so. "Why? He's got a reputation of being one of the best noncommissioned officers in the whole Guardia Nacional." "No, his father, his grand-

father and he are conservatives." They had two parties, the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party, and he would not let me have anybody whose as far back as a grandfather had been in the opposite party. And I tried to explain to him that we were trying to teach these people that it made no difference who the hell the politicians were, they worked for their country and their country alone. But he would have none of this, and I had one hell of a time getting a good command together that I felt I could trust.

We finally got it formed; I think ~~was~~ we had about 80 or some odd in this outfit, and it turned out to be a pretty good group of people. I had to have breakfast almost every morning with the President. Sometimes I'd spend the whole night there in this so-called palace. He wouldn't go in the old palace, you know -- he rented a new place. He sent me up to take over the automobiles and some of the office property. For instance they had silver blotters that had a little ^{blue} ~~pink~~ handle on, and he wouldn't let that come into his palace at all, because that was the color of the opposing political party. He gave me all of that stuff, and I don't know what happened to it.

He called me in one day and said, "I understand you get aide's pay in your service." I said, "Yes." He said, "You are my chief aide. How much do they pay in your service?" I said, "I think it's \$150 a year. I've never been an aide." He said, "All right, that's good." The first thing I knew somebody brought me the ~~Exxxx~~ Gazette in which he gave me \$150 a month. And I went in and told him about this, and I said, "You must have misunderstood me, or I didn't make it clear to you." He said, "Oh, that's all right, I think you'll

need it."

Q: It helped out in your captain's pay.

Erskine: Yes. I had a house down in town, and he came over to the house one afternoon to have a drink -- which was quite ~~frequent~~ frequent with him -- and he said, "I don't think you should live in this house and be my aide." I said, "Where am I going?" The Nicaraguan Government had a place just outside of the city on the shore of a lake called, I think, Kintanina. I believe it had a 7-hole golf course, a very nice house, which they used as a place to receive foreign dignitaries, and he said, "You move out to Kintanina." Then he gave me a bodyguard of about 30 people, and about three automobiles and two horses. That was all what you call fringe benefits.

Q: Very good. May I turn this tape over now, sir?

Erskine: ~~uh uh.~~ *Yes.*

End of Side 1, Tape 1, Session II.

Session II continuedSide 2, Tape 1

Q: I was going to ask you a question about the Guardia, but it slipped my mind. So we'll go on to what we were discussing -- your quarters at Kintanina.

Erskine: The President would come out and sit. There were big wicker chairs outside under a great big tree -- lots of palm trees and lots of avocados. He'd come out there sometimes just to relax and sit by himself with me there.

Q: Were any attempts made on his life during the course of your tour?

Erskine: No. There probably were times when I think we managed to find out things and we'd put the guy in jail if he was suspected of anything like that. I was authorized by Presidential decree to pick up anyone, ~~me~~ and not put him in the local jail but in the penitentiary. One of the first things he gave me to do was to go out and find Gen. Delgado, (Gen. Delgado had ~~commanded the government~~ ~~troops~~ ~~against him~~ ~~during the revolution~~) and to put him in the penitentiary. ~~xxx~~ ^{you} could put a man in the pen for seven days and if ~~xxx~~ ^{you} didn't have a specific charge within seven days you had to let him out. But you were supposed to charge him when you first put him in the pen. So I asked the President what the charge would be. ~~xxx~~ ^{He} said he was a bad man, no good. I said, "That's not a criminal charge, that's somebody's opinion." He said, "I am the President, and you put him in jail." I knew where

Gen. Delgado lived, and I took a couple of Guardias and went up to his house, and stationed one behind the house and one in front, and I went in the door, and asked for Gen. Delgado. His wife answered the door, and she said -- she started to cry, because we wore this armband with ^{blue and} the GP on it, "Guardia Presidencial" on our left arm, and she was certain that that was the end of her husband.

Q: With blue? You said he didn't like blue. Was it a different shade of blue?

Erskine: It was a heavy blue.

Q: In other words it wasn't the same blue as that of the opposing party.

Erskine: No, it was a ~~dazzling~~ blue with a white GP on it.

I asked if the General was in and she said yes. I asked if I could see him and he came out and said, "I guess you have come to take me to be executed." I said, "No, that's not right. The President has ordered me to take you to the penitentiary. So will you pack your bag, and let's get put and go." He was very calm about, he went and packed his bag and finally came out and said, "I am ready." I put him in the car with me and the Guardias, and we took him up to the penitentiary. My friend Arnold Gladden was in command of the penitentiary at that time. He asked me what the charge was and I said, "Well, we don't have a specific charge." But he had to lock him up for seven days at least.

I believe it was close to the end of the seven days when the President sent for me and he said, "The seven days is about up. We'll lock him up on another charge now." After considerable discussion with the old man I told him I would be responsible for Delgado because he impressed me as being a pretty decent sort of gent, and I said, "Just because he fought you in the war, ^{but} ~~he~~ it ~~was~~ his duty to his country, as it's your duty now, to protect the country." Finally he said, "All right, we'll get him out."

So I went up to get Delgado and I've never seen a man who was more grateful.

But we had a number of things like that down there. Anyone he suspected, he called me in and I'd have to go. But I don't think we ever really preferred charges of any serious nature against any of these people. But I had to travel with him every place he went.

Q: That was a pretty responsible position. You were what, 23 or 24?

Erskine: I don't know. I think I was older than that. When was that?

Q: This was 1929. I guess you were over 30 at this time.

Erskine: Pretty close, yes.

Q: But you still had a very important position as almost the primary Presidential adviser.

Erskine: Well, I was with him a great deal. I remember one trip we made. It was over ~~the~~ holiday -- I think it was around Easter, a religious holiday, when it's customary in that country that no wheels can move, not even a wheelbarrow or a bicycle. The people will stone you. There is just no locomotion, you can ride a burro or a mule, but nothing with wheels. And this goes, I think, from Friday through Sunday. I think it's the Easter season.

He called me one morning and said, "I am going this weekend to the Masachapa Beach" -- "Which is a beautiful beach, he said, "and you'll enjoy it more than Atlantic City."

Q: He spoke English?

Erskine: He spoke pretty good English, but he wouldn't when he could find somebody who could understand Spanish. I told Somoza about it and Somoza said, "Yes, we are going down there." I said, "Is it like Atlantic City?" Somoza was educated in our country. He said, "Well, not exactly."

So we packed up two trucks. I guess they were about one-ton trucks, and I left all of this to Somoza, he was going to have all the supplies and everything down there. I gave the trucks drivers orders, then I went in the car with my wife and with the President and Mrs. Somoza, and Somoza drove the car. There were pretty bad roads, and several times we had to get out and with the tools that he had in the trunk of this car dig a place for the car to go through.

We finally got down to the beach around 9 o'clock at night. I had a guard that was sent down ahead, and I had a guard with us in Reo trucks.

When we got down there, the first thing I did was, I looked around for this Atlantic City boardwalk, and there was no such thing, no buildings or anything on the beach. They had just put up a lot of shacks out of poles they had cut out of the jungle there, and there was a lot of cactus.

But it was beautiful sandy beach, there is no question about that. I guess there was a couple of miles of beautiful beach.

Also accompanying us was the band of the High Powers, which has a status down there like the Marine Corps band here, and they had some real good musicians. We didn't have the whole band, but we had about half of them. And the President had a great, big, wide Panama hat, and somebody had sold him a ladies' bathing cap, and he had very loud colors on the next morning. But the night I arrived he took along with him one of his mistresses, and we had quite a time. Mrs. Somoza is a very fine lady and came from a very fine family, and the President insisted that ~~wixx~~ these two women and my wife sleep in a room adjacent^{to} where he was sleeping, and I was to sleep in the room with him. I vetoed that right off the bat, I said No. I didn't say why at the moment, but I wasn't going to.

So I found the two truck drivers and the guard, and each of them dead drunk. I also found that Somoza ~~xxx~~^{let} somebody else make up the provisions we were to have for the weekend down there, and there wasn't a single piece of bread or any food of any kind. But we had two truckloads of liquor and ice!

I finally took one of the trucks. There was a very gradual slope on the beach; I drove it out and got away from there and posted sentries who were sober, and we unloaded this truck, and

my wife and I put a cot in there and that's where we spent the night.

The next morning I heard what sounded like water up against my truck. I looked out and we were at least 150 yards at sea. The tide had come in. So I waded out and went in, and the President was already up. He had a big hammock that he had strung up in his place. The royal barber was there shaving him, he was lying in the hammock.

I said, "What are we going to have for breakfast?" He said, "Send a guardia out to shoot some ducks." I said, "They'll be too strong; you can't eat those things." He said, "Oh yes, that's all we have to eat. Somebody didn't give us any food and we can't send the truck any place, you know. No wheels can turn."

So after he had his shave, the band came down and they started to play some beautiful music and he said, "You get in and get shaved." So I got in his hammock and was shaved! And we had a few drinks. This was about 8 or 9 o'clock in the morning. And he said, "I think we'd better go get some food." I said, "Where?" He said, "We'll buy a cow." So he and I went off to find this cow. We marched about a mile and we came to a little finca, and they had a very nice little yearling there and he paid 5 dollars for this yearling. He was in his bathing suit and I was in my bathing suit. The band stayed behind. And we walked back, we were both barefooted, and by that time the rocks were getting so hot they just blistered your feet.

So we went back; he led the steer and I went along behind him. He called in the Guardias and they took this little cow out and had him butchered in no time, they built a fire and that's all we had, by God, the whole weekend down there.

The Guardias did shoot some of those ducks. I was surprised, with these old Krag rifles, ^{but} ~~by~~ by God, they went out and they really hit them and brought them in.

Q: What did these ducks taste like?

Erskine: Just as fishy as could be and so tough, you know. They boiled one, then they tried to broil them and ^{tried} ~~do~~ all kinds of things with them. I tried that as a kid, you know. But you can't eat those things.

So we ~~xxx~~ spent -- I guess you could call it a very pleasant weekend there in a pretty primitive way. After we had the cow butchered he put on his big sombrero and some *luzales*, which I guess ^{they} ~~functioned as~~ ^{under} the treasury -- ^{denim} they were dressed in a sort of blue dinner outfit with a big sombrero, a rifle, and the traditional bandoleers of ammunition -- showed up to greet the President and fired a couple of shots in the air. I didn't know what the hell was going on, I went out there and I disarmed them, and the President was very much put out. He said, "They are my friends, that's a salute to me." So I said, "All right." And I gave them back their rifles! I wanted to get the hell out of there. But they didn't go, they stayed around. The old man was so sentimental about things like that that I let them stay, but they were always firing off shots somewhere.

A number of people had come down to this beach and were camping out in these little shacks. They were not quite as luxurious as the President's, but . . .

Q: Was Cutts brigade commander?

Erskine: No, our Marine brigade commander at that time. Was it Feland? I believe it was Gen. Feland.

Q: Yes. X

Erskine: Anyway he dropped in for a couple of hours there to see the President. It was Brig. Gen. Feland, I think.

On Monday morning we packed up and came back, and I stayed with the President for lunch and dinner that day. It was a little different from what we'd had down at the beach.

Q: How old a man was he?

Erskine: I think he was pretty close to 60, because at my age I thought he was pretty old. Now that I am over 60, looking back I think I might have been wrong about some of these things!

Q: He was a pretty lusty 60.

Erskine: Yes. Many times he'd be driving to the country and he always had brandy in the car -- Napoleon, he wouldn't drink anything that didn't have the name Napoleon on it. This is sort of a side remark now; when I was first assigned to him I said, "What shall I call you? Shall I call you General or Mr. President?" He said, "Call me General, because anybody can be a President, but damn few people can be a general."

Q: How did you keep communication with what was going on in the rest of the country while you were on the beach?

Erskine: We didn't bother about it. It was very simple.

Q: Kind of a mañana existence?

Erskine: Yes, a mañana ^{and a grapevine.} existence, /And as I look back, it was~ pretty damn effective! You see, the military situation was controlled entirely by the Marines at that time.

In a discussion with Somoza one day I realized he was quite ambitious, and we were very close friends. He said, "I am going to be President some day here." He first started out by saying, "Erskine, you Americans are a bunch of damn fools." I said, "I can ^{sabily admit that all right, but} what stimulates you to bring this up now?" He said, "Chasing Sandino. You've got 5000 Marines down here and you are just not getting ahead, you'll never get Sandino ~~off~~." Then he said, "Some day I will be President." And ^{he} I said, "You don't understand the Central American way or the Latin American way of doing things." I said, "All right, how would you do it?" He said, "It'd be very simple. ^{I would} ~~get out and~~ declare an armistice, I would invite Sandino in, and we'd have some drinks, a good dinner, and when he went out one of my men would shoot him." That's exactly what happened. He became President, he invited Sandino in, they had a big soiree up at the palace, ~~they~~ ^{he} went out, and he was shot. When we were discussing this he said, "That's the way to do it. Look at the trouble you save, and all the men and all the money you save. That's what you want to get him for anyway, to shoot him, so why not shoot him?"

Q: Moncado ended his régime peacefully. He wasn't deposed, was he?

Erskine: No, he survived. I didn't stay with him the whole time. I got a little worn out there, and I wanted to go out with the troops anyway. From there I think I was sent to Granada, the capital of Granada Province. I was in charge of the police and the Guardias in Granada and Masaya Departments. Granada was one of the best towns over there, I think. I mean in Nicaragua. They had a very high type of people living in the Granada Department, and some of the wealthiest people lived over there. Masaya was dominated by the Masayan Indians of course -- with an Indian strain -- and they were the meanest devils that I ran into in all Nicaragua.

You see, Nicaragua -- as I remember the history -- is made up of 13 separate Indian tribes, and ~~xx~~^{they} still ~~xxxx~~ retained, at that time, some of their earlier characteristics of dealing with people and amongst themselves, and in some of the places they had different customs than those you'd find in another province, to some degree. Not completely integrated, I'd say. But it was really very interesting work over there.

One thing about the people in Granada, though: the young bucks would get out and raise Cain, and the police would pick them up. They thought all you had to do is let them loose. You never put a first-class citizen in jail. I said, "You are gonna go to jail down here while I am here if you don't behave yourself."

Well, that same night they had a big dance and some of these boys kicked one of my Guardias and I locked the whole crowd up, and they stayed in the jail. And I went down for the trial.

They got all fined 50 dollars -- that's a big fine down there.

You see, in a way it was a sort of a feudal system out in the countryside. Somebody was sitting on top, and his family had been on top, and his family owned the property, and they owned the land. And these people ^{had} were peons, and my God, they were almost in a status of slavery in many of these places.

Q: I think the history of the government of Nicaragua -- ~~the~~ the Somoza's have ~~been~~ been in and out of power, and other names in Nicaraguan history have been in and out. There have been a couple of families that have been very . . .

Erskine: Somoza's family I don't think was very prominent until he came into the picture. He took me out one day, ^{to Diriamba -- I think it was --} we went horse-back riding together and he showed me the house in which he was born and ~~it~~ it didn't have a floor in it, right on the corner of this little street in this little village. But he was a smart fellow, and the government sent him to the States for education. I think it was Pierce College he went to, in Philadelphia. I always felt that he was a very ^{Pro-} ~~poor~~ American, he spoke English beautifully. He married the daughter of one of the most prominent doctors in all South America, and that family was a family with great prestige.

Q: Sacasa?

Erskine: No, Debayle. Dr. Debayle. I think that's right. On the main plaza in Leon the Debayles had a home, one of the most imposing

houses in the whole area down there. I'd been over there many, many times. Mrs. Somoza was a small girl, when I was there. And Somoza was ~~xxxx~~ younger than I, I think. No, I beg your pardon, Somoza was married and had two children, and one is now the wife of the dean of the Diplomatic Corps here, Sacasa. I remember I had a lot of fun at the Sacasas. He is a very serious kind of a diplomat, very ^{in every way,} suave, ~~and we~~ were at his house for a cocktail party. His wife's name was Lillian.

/ He was telling me that all his 11 children were born in the United States, that he'd been here long enough for that, and what a great girl Lillian was, and I said, "You don't have to tell me what a nice lady she is, I had her in my arms a long time before you did." And he almost dropped right there. He said, "WHAT?" And I repeated it, and he yelled, "LILLIAN, Lillian, come here!" So Lillian came. He said, "This man here says he had you in his arms a long time before I did. What about that??" She said, "That's right, ~~as~~ I remember he used to come and bring me candy at my father's house." And I did that, at Somoza's, when I was down in Leon, ~~and~~ he was the Governor and I spent quite a bit of time with him, and whenever I'd go to the house I'd take candy or something I could pick up ~~for~~ ^{to} the kids, and she sat on my knee -- a beautiful little girl. So that was my joke with Sacasa here, when ~~he~~ ^{she} asked ~~her~~ ^{her} and ~~she~~ ^{she} said, "Yes, that's exactly right." (laughter) He said, "Don't you do it again!"

Q: You finally let him on to what'd happened.

Erskine: Oh yes, we told him.

Q: Did he appreciate it?

Erskine: He laughed!

Q: You were down there for a little more than two years, I guess.

Erskine: Close to two and a half years. I don't remember the exact dates now. I asked to be relieved down there at the guard, because as I say I was worn out -- going to parties every night, the old man wanted me to drink more than I wanted to drink, and start^{ed} off with hot ~~xxx~~ champagne for breakfast, and go on through the day. So I told him, I said, "I want to get out in the field and get some experience while I am down here."

I left there and went over to Granada and stayed over there a while, and from Granada I went to Jinotega.

Q: That's right, you were executive officer.

Erskine: Yes, executive officer of this -- mobile battalion I think it was called.

Q: Who had that?

Erskine: Plug Lowell. I think he was a colonel in the Guardia, but he was only a major in the Marine Corps. I don't remember his first name.

Q: Who were some of the other Marine officers who were down there with you at this time?

Erskine: I remember Wynne. Wynne came up when Plug went home. Plug got sick and was evacuated home. Hanneken was there, and I had ^{Lewie} ~~Louis~~ Puller there with me. That's about the limit on commissioned officers. The others were noncommissioned officers but held commissions in the Guardia Nacional. Puller actually relieved Hanneken. ^{Lewie} ~~Louis~~ Puller was a lieutenant in the Marine Corps, and he was the supply officer up there. He was always *griping* about his job. So when I went up and reported, Plug Lowell was the most likeable man, I think, that I ever ran into; very likeable, but he was a pretty hard drinker, and he sort of went along with the old Marine Corps idea about being rough and tough and that's about all you need to do. But I always looked at it a little differently. I thought the more I could learn about my profession, the better I could really do my job and understand what my job was. And I had been to Benning, which actually was a black mark against me in the minds of a great many of those oldtimers. And I'd been in the Marine Corps Schools. As a matter of fact Plug had been an instructor in the Marine Corps Schools himself, and the day I reported he was feeling pretty high and he said, "All right, you are a sort of schoolteacher kind of a fellow. You think you know all the answers, don't you? Now you are the executive officer, and you run this place, and I don't want to have a goddamn thing go wrong around here." And with that he picked up and went on patrol, and he was gone about 10 days. And Altimirena, one of the big bandit leaders around there, happened to make a sweep around that time, and there was a bridge that they had to cross -- we thought -- to get back into his area in the jungle.

He had a little radio with him, and we had a little radio down at our place. He stopped over at one of our posts, Corinta Finca, which was a coffee plantation. I sent him a message that Altimirana was on the way down and the general direction that we understood he was following, so he said, "Issue orders." So I did, I issued him ^{orders} to go up and lay an ambush at this little bridge they had to cross to get across this river. They didn't come through there, but they came down, and some of our boys ^{had gotten} ~~we~~ ^{to} be a little more aggressive there, when they heard the bandits were there instead of sitting on their pants around the post to defend the post, they would get out of there and ambush them, goddammit, you are all the same people.

So they gave the old guy a pretty rough time ^{that time.} Groups of three or four lay in ambush and fired a few shots into this crowd and took off.

Q: What was Lewie Puller like at this time, General?

Erskine: He was about the same kind of a fellow that he finally turned out to be.

Q: Really?

Erskine: Yes! He was, I'd say, a rather smart officer, I mean in appearance and mentally. He smoked a pipe all the time. I never had to get after Lewie more than once or twice. We had an unwritten law: never lay a hand on one of these Guardias because they resented it.

and we had a number of people who were shot, and when you investigated you found out that it probably had stemmed from some time when this man had slapped him or pushed him or did something like that, and this guy just resented it. And to their way of thinking it was the only way out.

Finally when Hanneken went home we gave ^{Lewie} ~~Louis~~ this M Company which was a mobile outfit, and spent a lot of time out in the jungle. And I'd watch ^{Lewie} ~~Louis~~ when he'd go make his inspection, and when he first started off making his inspection with his pipe in his mouth. So I gave him a little talk on that one, "You just don't do those things, whether you are in the Guardia Nacional or the Marine Corps or any other place, it's a damn poor example, a pretty sloppy way of doing things, and you don't do it here." Well, I never saw him do that again. Then one day he was making an inspection, and something was wrong with this boy -- I don't know what it was, but I saw him give him a big slap in the face, so I had quite a little lecture with him on that. As far as I could see his men really thought the world of him. And he got into several combats down there and distinguished himself each time. I thought he was a hell of a good soldier man, as a young officer.

Q: A good small unit leader.

Erskine: Yes, and with the years he became a very fine large unit leader. He had a great desire to be a topside Marine -- a great personal desire -- and ~~xxx~~ the Marine Corps was his religion and

his life, even as a young officer. He never tried to bug out on anything. If a job needed doing I could always depend on ^{Lewie} ~~Louis~~ to get the job done, one way or another.

Q: He stepped on a lot of people's toes.

Erskine: Yes, he was pretty blunt, but the thing I liked about him in that respect was that you didn't have to guess what ^{Lewie} ~~Louis~~ was thinking -- he told you, and he did it so simply you could understand.

Q: In later years, when you were chief of staff at FMFPac, did this problem ever come up?

Erskine: With ^{Lewie} ~~Louis~~?

Q: Yessir.

Erskine: I wasn't with ^{Lewie} ~~Louis~~ in the same unit, I don't think, at any time.

Q: I don't think you were either.

Erskine: No. He was in command of the Barracks at Pearl Harbor when we had our headquarters located there for a time, and he was begging and begging to get out of that job so he could go to war.

Q: During Korea or World War II?

Erskine: World War II.

Q: He was at the Barracks then. Of course he was at the Barracks when Korea broke out also.

Erskine: At Pearl Harbor?

Q: Yes, sir.

Erskine: Maybe he got a second tour out there. I don't know how he did that; that was supposed to be one of the juicy jobs in the Marine Corps.

Q: He was CO of the Barracks. He had had the Reserve District down in New Orleans, and then he got assigned out to Pearl Harbor, and he was there when Korea broke out.

Erskine: I guess that's right. I don't remember where ^{Lewis} ~~Lewis~~ was during World War II, because I went over and reviewed these troops one time -- I told you part of that story the other day.

Q: About the shoes, yes, sir.

Erskine: I was deputy commander of the Fleet Marine Force Pacific and I was also in command of the 1st Marine Division and I was in command of Camp Pendleton at the same time, and this is how this happened. Tommy Watson was in command out in Hawaii of the Fleet

Marine Force Pacific. I was the deputy but I was back in Camp Pendleton, and he became ill and I was to go out there for 10 days and then come home for 10 days. This went on for quite a while until Tommy finally retired.

Q: Terrible Tommy Watson?

Erskine: Well, I don't know. I guess I've heard him called that. Terrible Tommy.

Q: Puller was with the 1st Division, I think, from its formation. He was in the 7th Marines, on Guadalcanal and at Cape Gloucester.

Erskine: Uh uh.

Q: And he took over the 1st Marines at Peleliu.

Erskine: Yes, I know he was in Peleliu. My memory of course is a little vague on a lot of these things, and I hesitate sometimes to say, "This was a fact" when as a matter of fact it was a pretty ~~xxx~~ ~~xxxx~~ widespread organization out there, and it's easy to get mixed up on it.

Q: Well, I am going to really dig in when we get to FMFPac and the formation of the Amphibious Force Atlantic Fleet at the beginning of the war. But this will come. This is an area on which there is so little documentation and so many personalities were involved. Of course the major personality here was Holland Smith.

Erskine: Uh uh.

Q: I don't want to, now . . .

Erskine: Well, ^{I'm trying} ~~xxxx~~ to follow that a little bit chronologically.

Q: Yessir, we are getting off of it.

Erskine: I think Nicaragua gave me more practical experience over a long period of time than I'd received up to that time. I spent a lot of time out on the trail with the troops. We had a lot of things happen down there. We actually had no rules for the Government of the Guardia approved by the Nicaraguan Congress or Chamber of Deputies or anything like that, so we published the articles for the Government of the Navy, translated them into Spanish and tried to train the people along that line. As far as they knew, that was the law, but you still didn't change some of their philosophy or their way of life in many respects. The average soldier had no conception of being on time for something. He just hadn't been brought up that way. They'd leave it to mañana. And of course we trained just in the opposite vein. After a while ~~xxx~~ you could get them, but you had to punish some of these guys two or three times to get them to realize that if you said 8 o'clock it was 8 o'clock, not 9. They were a little lackadaisical in that respect. But I found these fellows out on the trail to be damn good men. They had a simple life, everything was simple, and if you treated them decently and got into their family or tribe ... Actually it was a tribal feeling.

Q: Clannish.

Erskine: Yes. I tried to explain sometimes to these people that I had a boss in Managua. That's all right, but "As far as we are concerned you are the boss." I said, "This is against the rules." They didn't give a damn about the rules, you were his chief, and that's what they called you, the Jefe.

Q: How do you say Rocks & Shoals in Spanish?

Erskine: I don't know. They didn't pay much attention anyway. They rarely asked a question about it. They had it in the back of their mind, "This is what the Jefe wants, this is what I am going to do." Or, "It's not what the Jefe wants, I am not going to do." Either one or the other.

Q: Your tour was up on April 30, when you went up to Basic School to become an instructor at Philadelphia.

Erskine: Yes, I went up there as executive officer, and Maj. Dulty Smith was in command of the school, and I was his exec there. I think I stayed there about two years.

Q: Who had the Barracks, Allie Rorex?

Erskine: No, it was Col. -- he died out in China, in Peking, a great big fellow.

Q: Ray?

Erskine: No, Ray was down in Shanghai. As a matter of fact he died just before I went to Peking, because I know I was making an inspection out there one morning and I ran into his casket which was awaiting shipment back to the States, in one of those storerooms in the Tartar Wall. I can't think of his name at the moment. (Pause) Gulick!

Q: Oh yes. Luther?

Erskine: No. We had another Gulick who was paymaster in the Marine Corps.

Q: That was Roy Gulick, I believe.

Erskine: Yes. I've forgotten the old man's first name. G.U.L.I.C.K.

Q: I think he was an uncle to Roy . . . I think it was Luther Gulick, but I may be wrong.

Erskine: I can't remember his first name right now. It might come.

Q: You know this other man I was talking about -- Allie ^{Rorex} . . . very dapper, with a moustache.

Erskine: Oh yes, and he had black eyebrows.

Q: Yessir.

Erskine: I knew him very well too, and I can't think of his name. He was down in Shanghai. He might have been on a visit up to Peking, but he was never there on . . .

Q: No, I am talking about Basic School. I thought *he had the Barracks at Philadelphia*
(cross talk)

Erskine: Oh . . . Rorex.

Q: Rorex.

Erskine: Rorex, he had command of the Basic School, and I think he preceded Dulty Smith.

Q: Allie Rorex -- I've heard that name. * Very smartly turned out ~~examine~~ all the time.

Erskine: Yes. I think he was finally inspector general, wasn't he? Of the Marine Corps, I mean. He was in that office, I know.

Q: A & I?

Erskine: Yes.

Q: It had to be A & I because the first inspector general was after the war when Gen. Del Valle became the Marine Corps' first inspector general.

Erskine: Yes? Anyway he was out making an inspection. I don't know whether he was in charge. I don't remember whether he was in charge; I think he was for a period of time. He had been in there before, and I knew him. He was also down in Santo Domingo when I was in Santo Domingo.

Q: Rorex was.

Erskine: Rorex.

Q: General, I think you have a time factor here, and . . .

Erskine: Yes, by golly.

Q: I've been watching it for you. We'll start off our next session with the Basic School at Philadelphia and your tour there.

Erskine: Yes. Some of my boys turned out all right. Wally Greene was one.

Q: Yes, he was! Brute Krulak?

Erskine: No, I think Brute went through ahead of Wally, before I was there.

End of Side 2, Tape 1, End of Session II.

Session III - 22 October 1969

Tape 1, Side 1

Q: We ended last time, General, when you finished your tour of duty in Nicaragua, with the Guardia Nacional. We spoke about your duty as aide to President Moncada. Then the next tour of duty was at the Basic School in Philadelphia. You joined there on June 23, 1930. So let's talk about Basic School, if you will.

Erskine: Well, Maj. Dulty Smith was the commandant of the School at this time. A very nice gentleman, and I was his executive officer. I was also instructor in ~~xx~~ scouting and patrolling, machine guns, and another one or two subjects. One was customs of the service, but at the moment I don't remember what else I did have. But it was a full schedule, believe me.

Q: You would have had the class of 1930 from the Academy there.

Erskine: Yes.

Q: Gen. Greene was probably there.

Erskine: Gen. Greene was one of the 2nd lieutenants at that time, and he was a very fine student.

Q: Who were some of the others, do you remember?

Erskine: I think Whitey Lloyd, Bauer, who later went into aviation and was killed in the Pacific.

Q: Harold Bauer?

Erskine: Bauer. Wieseman, who is now a lieutenant general. It's hard at the moment to remember the names of all those people. There was a 2nd Lt. Pottinger whom I remember quite well, and ~~Mac~~ Mahoney. I was trying to think of the other fellow, who had a fight with Mahoney. I thought I'd never forget. Mac Somebody. He retired as a brigadier general, that I know. (Pause) My memory is not good on names anyway. But I can see the faces of almost every one of those rascals.

Q: Bauer -- I guess theykcalled him Indian Joe Bauer.

Erskine: Right.

Q: He was part Indian?

Erskine: I think so. A big tall fellow, he'd been a football star at the Academy.

Q: Oh, he was an Academy graduate?

Erskine: Yes.

Q: You ~~me~~ were there for two years.

Erskine: I was there two years, and from there I went to Command & General Staff School at Leavenworth.

Q: Was there anything outstanding during your tour at the Basic School that stands out in your mind?

Erskine: Well, it was quite a thrilling thing for me to be involved with those ~~young~~ ^{YOUNG} officers. You see, as soon as they graduated from the Academy they were sent down to Basic School, which was then located in Philadelphia. They were all commissioned, and I felt that they had an attitude of, "I am already an officer and I don't have to work too hard at this damn stuff anyway." And it was quite a job sometimes to really get them deeply interested.

Q: Was there any discernible difference in the quality of the Academy graduates as opposed to the men who were commissioned from a civilian college?

Erskine: We had no civilian college men at that time at the Basic School. We had a few who had come up from the ranks. I am trying to think of the names. The fellows from the ranks ~~were~~ were much more serious ~~in~~ in trying to make grades -- it appeared to me -- than the Academy people did. They were all a fine group of fellows. We had, of course, a few disciplinary troubles from time to time, but nothing very serious.

Q: Wasn't this the time when the services sustained a cut in pay, and it appeared that President Hoover was trying to get rid of the Marine Corps?

Erskine: Yes, yes. There was a great deal of rivalry between the services.

Q: Was ^{Amor}Leroy Simms there at this time?

Erskine: No, I don't think so, I don't remember him being in the school at that time.

Q: Or Jerry Thomas?

Erskine: Jerry Thomas was -- much senior.

These were all brand new 2nd lieutenants

Q: I mean on the staff of the school.

Erskine: No, Jerry was not on the staff at that time. We had Johnny Walker. Wright, whose first name I don't remember.

Q: Raymond Wright, who later became paymaster?

Erskine: No, he was a line officer; he was also an Academy graduate and he was killed in an automobile accident during the time that he was at the school. Another student I remember now is Heyward. Dick Heyward.

Q: His brother was the admiral.

Erskine: That's right.

Q: Had you put in for Fort Leavenworth?

Erskine: Yes, I think I requested it twice. And I remember I was given lectures ^{by several senior officers, when they heard about it,} about what a damn fool I was for wanting to go to an Army school. There was a great deal of rivalry between the schools at that time. Frankly I didn't think a great deal of our own school system, and I'd always thought the Army had a pretty good school system because they had been at it for quite a long time. I don't suppose they had too many applicants -- maybe that's why I was assigned.

Q: Who were some of the other students -- Marine officers -- in your class at Leavenworth?

Erskine: We had a flier . I think Ruffner was there. I can't think of this ~~Rxxxx~~ flier's name at the moment.

Q: It wasn't Wallace, was it?

Erskine: No, it wasn't Wallace.

Q: Mulcahy?

Erskine: No. Oh, he made wonderful grades at the school, but somehow he didn't last out in the Marine Corps. (Pause)

Q: Was this a two-year course?

Erskine: This was a two-year course.

Q: How about some of the Army officers who later became prominent?

Erskine: Well, Joe Collins ^{was in the class ahead of me ; Charlie} Johnny Bolte was in the class ahead of me. Mark Clark was in the class behind me when I was a second year student; Delos Emmons was my section leader throughout the whole period of two years. We were captains and majors mostly, a few lieutenant colonels. There was a Capt. Ernest ^{a cavalryman} who later became a major general in the Army and commanded a division, I think, in World War II. In our second year we had a German, allegedly captain, but the rumor was he was actually a major general of the German Army, Von ^{or} Reifenberg; I believe Von ^{or} Reifenberg supervised the dive bombing by the Germans against the British in driving them back to the sea.

Q: At Dunkirk.

Erskine: At Dunkirk. (Pause)

Q: What was the attitude of the Army instructors regarding amphibious warfare, or the role of the Marine Corps at this time?

Erskine: It was my impression that they thought the Marine Corps was completely wrong, because we insisted in all of our doctrine ^{upon} of rigidity of formation. I remember a lecture was given by a

Col. Lane which I'll never forget. He was a very gifted speaker, and he had quite a number of slides. He really took the Marine Corps apart in this by saying, "All you had to do was get your men ashore; ^{it} ~~there~~ wasn't a question of lining up and going in in waves, just put them in the boats and send them ashore to a certain beach." And I took quite a ribbing as a result of this lecture, because Lane had quite a reputation as a smart Army officer and a good instructor. But they didn't think much of the Marine Corps way of doing things.

Q: Were the Marines able to hold their own there?

Erskine: Oh yes, I think we did pretty well at Leavenworth.

Evans was the name of that aviator who was out there with us.

Capt. Evans: he made very fine grades all the way through.

I might say I didn't distinguish myself on grades because instead of trying to G-2 the instructor I tried to solve the problems the way I thought they should be solved.

Q: This wasn't Khaki Evans, was it?

Erskine: No, Khaki Evans is another Evans.

Q: How do you think this two-year tour of schooling at Leavenworth helped you later?

Erskine: I think it was most valuable. I went to Fort Benning too.

Q: Yessir, earlier.

Erskine: Yes, before I went out there, and before I became an instructor in the Marine Corps Schools. I think Fort Benning was the most practical school I've ever been to, or that I know of.

At Leavenworth the first year we were limited more or less to the division level, and the second year went into corps, army, and groups of armies. I thoroughly enjoyed the course, and I think it did me a world of good. I think it was the best military school in the United States.

Q: They call it the Command & Staff School. Where was the greatest emphasis placed, on command or staff *functions*?

Erskine: I think command. You'd get quite a lot in staff functioning. We had problems called troops leading, in which you'd have a given situation and you'd have to work out all the staff work and recite on paper how each one of the staff officers operated; almost by the minute, so you had to visualize this thing pretty carefully. And the same thing for the commander. They were separate requirements, of course, but I thought those troop leading problems were wonderful. It ~~was~~ gave me a different insight from anything that I had ever seen in the Marine Corps, I can tell you that.

Q: Of course it's been said that -- from the people I've interviewed who had gone on to Leavenworth, that the Marine Corps at that time really had no concept of true staff functioning, that their exposure to the Army schooling gave them for the first time . . .

Erskine: Yes, and they resisted it. The Marine Corps didn't visualize anything bigger than a separate command and a reinforced regiment at that time. And they thought we were wasting our time going into division and going into the higher echelons of command -- it was just a waste of time. It might ~~perhaps it would~~ be well to know how to read the Army history, but that was about all.

And frankly I think it was a matter of absolute mental laziness on the part of many of our senior officers.

Q: Of course up to this point the selection system had not come into effect, so there was no real spirit . . .

Erskine: I think the selection system came in around that time.

Q: 1933 I believe it was.

Erskine: Was it 1933?

Q: That's right: '33-'34.

Erskine: I didn't leave Leavenworth in '34, did I?

Q: December of '54.

Erskine: I remember some of the senior officers when the selection system was put into effect. Prior to that they were talking about this selection system as being the finest thing in the world to get

rid of a lot of dead wood that we had in the Marine Corps. And I could -- but I won't -- recall the names of some of these senior fellows who were passed over by the first board, and some of the fellows who had resisted the selection board idea who were promoted!

Q: During the time that you were at Leavenworth, the Fleet Marine Force had come into being, and the students at Quantico under, I guess, the direction of Charlie Barrett -- certainly Ellis Bell Miller was there -- were working on the new concept of the amphibious warfare doctrine.

Had any of their thinking, had any of their achievements come to you? Did you know what was going on? Were you aware of what was going on?

Erskine: Yes, I was aware of what was going on, and also in the little Marine Corps Schools that we had at that time in Quantico, there were several people who had been to Leavenworth and who were instructors on the staff. I think Charlie Price was one.

Q: Yes, I think he was.

Erskine: Charlie was a real sharp fellow. The others I don't remember. I can see them but I don't remember their names right now. They had injected into the course there problems dealing with the division. This was in the Senior School. And that was the first time, I think, that we ever got up to the division level. But the Marine Corps did not envision having a division. The division concept

was not popular at all/

Q: Actually there probably was no reason to think of this, unless they were really farsighted thinkers.

Erskine: I guess that's right. It's pretty difficult to get people to change their ideas and look to the future. We fought World War I in order to make the world safe for democracy, and they were thinking more in terms of banana wars and things like that. We never got into a banana war that was big enough to have a division, so nobody could ever conceive of getting into one that size. The Marine Corps wanted to be small, it wanted to be good, but I must say that I didn't feel even then as a young officer that they were looking to the future in the proper way of being prepared and thinking about these things before we got into a situation and have so few people with any background that could understand the magnitude of the operation.

I remember the Marine Corps Schools when I was there. I had the Operations Section for one year, maybe two years, and when I looked over the schedule for the courses I really thought it was very poor, there was no continuity in the teaching effort. For instance, one day you'd have a problem in defense and the next day it may be advance guard, and you'd finally get around to the offensive. I thought you left the student with the impression that when you had to defend you'd have to go back and think what you did in the school problem. And I thought the way to do this thing was to start right out as you would in a campaign -- let's visualize the whole campaign from the beginning, even the

mobilization, get into the positions, start our march to our objective, and have a meeting engagement with the enemy. And if and when we were forced on the defensive we assumed the defensive to give^{as} a complete picture to the student as possible of how our campaign would be conducted, instead of one day have defense, the next day offense and so on -- they didn't get the picture in between.

So the first thing I did was scrap all those little problems. We spent the whole summer working on this project problem, which wasn't too popular with the instructors I had, I can assure you.

Q: I can imagine. We'll talk a little bit more about that later, because this is an important area.

Is it possible, considering the thinking of the senior officers in the early 30s, say '33-'34, regarding the future of the Marine Corps, that their concepts of the future of the Marine Corps vis-à-vis another war, were based primarily on their experiences in World War I, as being a brigade within an army unit, within an army division.

For instance, Gen. Shepherd mentioned the fact that he always felt, he always remembered his experience with the 4th Brigade within the 2nd Army Division, and he always was convinced that he never was going to allow his unit to be broken up and replaced them with the Army, or have a brigade within an Army division or Corps.

Erskine: I don't know how much damage it did to the Marine Corps to have had the 4th Brigade as a part of the 2nd Marine Division.

As a matter of fact I think it was one of the greatest things the Marine Corps ever did. They went in there and they did a wonderful job, and I didn't find anything too bad that the Army did to us in World War I. We went over, and we had a Marine brigadier general in command of this brigade, and after a period of time he was relieved by Gen. Harbord who was then a brigadier general, and I don't think we ever had any better commander than Gen. Harbord. And incidentally, I've always ~~felt~~ felt that the Marine Corps contributed a great deal to Gen. Harbord's career. I thought he was a good commander. I don't remember -- now at least, anyway -- any dirty deals we got from the Army. Of course there was always great discussion about the publicity the Marine Corps got, and the Army I think did feel that the Marine Corps emphasized a great many things in the public eye much more than the Army, when some of the Army units and officers felt that the Army had done just as well, maybe better.

Q: Yes. Of course that was always -- has been down to the present time -- a thorn in the ^{sides} ~~minds~~ of many senior Army general officers.

Erskine: Yes, I think it still exists to a considerable degree.

Q: Of course the Marine Corps, as you recall, was not responsible for that. The Army were the ones who allowed ^{Floyd Gibbons} ~~a given~~ story to get through the censors and get publicized.

Erskine: Yes.

Q: Did you have to take equitation as the other officers did at Fort Leavenworth?

Erskine: Oh yes, we had an equitation course there. But most of our field exercises -- the physical exercise requirements, were like this: we would have field problems and you'd ride the whole day, sometimes you'd ride as much as 20 miles a day to cover the field problem. And that went through the winter. And I can remember some of those Kansas winters were pretty cold. It was very difficult to figure out the weather: you might go out in the morning and it seemed mild, and it'd be down 30 degrees and freeze you to death before you got in that afternoon.

Q: Of course the Ecole de Guerre -- the course at the Ecole de Guerre is well known for having these military rides, these voyages and stages. Gen. O.P. Smith was telling me about them. I am wondering if the influence of the Ecole de Guerre was what led Leavenworth to institute these rides.

Erskine: It could, but the Army then was very fond of horses, even the infantry ^{had} polo teams. The infantry had a polo team as well as the cavalry. The horse was a very important item in the Army in those days.

Q: The cavalry probably was the supreme arm of the Army at this time.

Erskine: Well, they thought they were. The cavalry was a pretty proud outfit. They had some good officers in the cavalry, too.

Q: Now, following your graduation from Leavenworth, you were detached in June of '34, and you went to Marine Corps Schools for about six months. What did you do there?

Erskine: I was an instructor. Where did I go after that?

Q: You went to China, to Peking. This was a rather short tour as an instructor.

Erskine: I started thinking back, and it looked to me like I'd been in the school longer than the average officer should be, and I was assigned there as an instructor, and I ~~was~~ think I started off with Intelligence.

Q: Yes, F-1 and F-2 sections.

Erskine: F-1 and F-2, Staff Operations & Procedures, Intelligence. It seemed to me that I had either been teaching in school -- the Basic School, Fort Benning, the Marine Corps Schools -- so I felt I was getting a little bit overeducated and undertrained.

So I went to Washington, and Gen. Holcomb had just been made a brigadier general, and he had been selected to come down as the new commandant of the Schools. So I went to Gen. Holcomb and I told him that I felt I was being overeducated and undertrained, and I wanted to get out and go with some line unit. He took a rather dim view of this and he said, "That's not a very good thing to do, to come up here and ask me, who ^{has} ~~have~~ been selected to go

down as commandant of Marine Corps Schools, and you want to get out." I said, "Well, I just feel that way and I feel it's time for me to get out. It's better for me, I think, and it would be better for the Marine Corps, maybe." He finally agreed, and I was assigned to Peking. I went out to Peking at that time.

Q: He was very strong on education, I understand.

Erskine: Yes, very strong, and I think he was a pretty well darn educated officer.

Q: I think he was one of the earliest language officers.

Erskine: Yes, he was in China for quite a while as a language student.

Q: What was duty in China like at this time, General?

Erskine: I guess, you must go back to the old days to explain that. In Peking we had a guard of between 400 and 500 people, ^{who had been there} (not the same strength all the time) since the Boxer Rebellion. This guard was one of several foreign guards. They had the British, they had the Italian, they had the French and they had the Japanese. The Russian guard was no longer there, the Dutch guard was no longer there, and those compounds had been pretty much closed up, or at least they had no guard. These units were organized into international unit, and by gentleman's agreement the American commandant would command

the international guard in case of trouble, and he supervised the so-called planning for the defense of the Diplomatic Corps.

Q: Against whom?

Erskine: Against anybody. Probably Chinese, or insurgents, or anyone else. And around the guards' area in the Diplomatic Corps, outside, they had cleared out all the buildings, ^{for} I think ~~xxxx~~ 100 meters, to give us fields of fire in case we needed it, because the diplomatic section of Peking ~~was~~ ^{is} surrounded by a wall known as the Tartar Wall, and they have a separate police force within the main city, which is also walled.

When I arrived over there I was replacing Lt. Col. Sullivan. I went over as a major and was made lieutenant colonel soon afterwards, I think.

Q: You were made lieutenant colonel in July of '36.

Erskine: I thought the military training and so forth had got to a pretty low level, one that I didn't think was befitting to the Marine Corps, and as Operations officer I went to Col. Rixey and told him that, and he more or less agreed at the time. We had a good bit of sickness, it was cold weather, it was January and darn cold in Peking at that time of the year. And we had several men die from pneumonia, and I attributed this to the fact that they had too much time to drink beer and too little time for exercise out in the field. I am not exactly sure of this, but every officer

in the guard except myself and Sullivan, had been passed over by the Selection Board. Col. Rixey had also been passed over for promotion. He said, "I more or less agree with you, and you take the bull by the horns and straighten this thing out."

We set up a pretty stiff training schedule, which included hikes in this cold weather, and musketry exercises out at the rifle range which was 4 or 5 miles away. Of course we were quite limited in the areas we could use down there, so we had to march to the rifle range and use as much of the rifle range as possible for firing problems.

Our death rate ^{just} dropped to zero, and our people improved tremendously. Our rifle team had lost every match, I think, in the Asiatic Quadrangle ^{three} for 5 or 6 years. So we concentrated on this. Actually what I really did was to take ~~xxx~~ some of these professional oldtime shots off the team and put some youngsters who were expert riflemen and had some promise, and I had a very good coach by the name of Otho Wiggs. And by God they won the next championship, and I think we won the succeeding three. We were really out to get it. And they did it.

Life there as an officer -- there were so many parties going on that the average officer didn't have time to do his duty. For instance, ^{many} ~~some~~ times you'd start in the morning, there'd be some sort of a reception at 10 o'clock. You might go to the Italian Embassy at 10 o'clock, and over there you would drink and end up with champagne. You had about all you needed for a whole day there, but then this was followed by something over at the British Embassy -- you were invited there. And it seemed that if you

declined these invitations, the person who invited you would have his feelings hurt. It was not an excuse. So we'd go to the British Embassy and drink gin until you were so tight you could hardly eat your lunch. Then from there we had a cocktail hour, maybe, and that was followed by a dinner which kept you up at least till midnight. So there was no time, really, for an officer to get down to business. There was a lot of pretty damn hard drinking while I was there.

But our training schedule did bring some of these fellows back to a normal life again. Finally all these people who were passed over were transferred and other people came in, and I thought we had a darn good little outfit there. I had my personal problems making these people work.

Q: I was always under the impression that duty in China stations, especially at Peking, was pretty choice duty at this time.

Erskine: It was supposed to be, but so far as the performance of people as Marines, and be prepared to carry out the functions that they were there to perform, I thought the level of training had dropped to a pretty low level. The reason it was considered to be choice duty was the social activities that were involved. Also, service was cheap, living was cheap, and families could enjoy life more there than they could, on their pay, in any other areas of the world.

Q: Especially in the States during the Depression.

Erskine: Oh yes.

Q: The reason -- er -- if the duty had been that choice it would seem to me that a lot of people probably would put in for it, and if Headquarters had the responsibility to pick and choose, it would have assigned ~~XXXXXX~~ the topnotch people, ^{or} maybe under the buddy-buddy system, those who were more in favor with the Detail Section.

(above sentence partly blotted out by noises in tape, so it may not be what Mr. Frank actually said)

Erskine: I think your assumption is perfectly correct. But I am just telling you what I found when I went there.

wasn't arguing with you,

Q: Well, no, I didn't -- er -- it just seemed incongruous that the situation was as bad if the assignment was so choice, because I know that a lot of the people at this time -- and perhaps earlier, Gen. Vandegrift and some of the other Marines who attained high rank, Gen. Thomas, Worton and a number of other people -- were outstanding individuals who were sent there.

Erskine: Yes. Well. Soon after I was there we had a noncommissioned officers school, three times a week, I think. And I ran into some of these so-called periods of instruction. I think some of the officers who were teaching the course didn't know a hell of a lot about it themselves. So I decided to have every noncommissioned officer in the guard take the correspondence 2nd lieutenant's course,

even though he was a corporal. Well, that raised the protests of a lot of people, that it wasn't necessary and so forth, but they did it, and I assigned certain officers to certain subjects, and when these people reached those subjects they'd first give you a lecture on the subjects and then took the examination that was sent out from the Marine Corps Institute.

Then I looked the papers over before they were sent in, and of course many people didn't have too much education, but they got along, and ^{for} a man who needed help we had somebody tutor him to bring him up to standards. And I think that was one of the best things we did the whole time I was in Peking.

World War II came along, and I found any number of those fellows who had been in the Peking guard, who came to me and they had the rank of captain or lieutenant colonel. I remember one was Lt. Col. Thompson, he was an outstanding gunnery sergeant over there, and he was a lieutenant colonel in the Pacific. And any number of these people. I think one of the *privates*, who would get busted about every three months, he was a good soldier, but couldn't stay ~~xxxxxxx~~ away from his booze, *ended up* my sergeant major in the 3rd Marine Division when I first arrived. I had been on his neck so much that the first time I sent for him he came in trembling and said, "What ~~about~~ *have I done now, sir?*" I said, "I just want to know who made you the sergeant major. You must have improved a hell of a lot!" ~~xxxxx~~ He said, "I have, I have improved." He got along and he turned out to be a darn good sergeant major.

Q: During the time that all this partying was going on, what were the enlisted Marines doing? Were they pretty much thrown on their own?

Erskine: No, we had clubs there, and that was really a headache in many ways. We had a noncommissioned officers' club and a private's club, and we tried to keep these people in the ~~xx~~ club as much as possible. I also was assigned the job of supervising these clubs, that is ^{the} financial~~the~~ setup and otherwise. The clubs were places where they could go and drink. They couldn't bring women into the club except for a drink. It wasn't the kind of club that some people may think it was, you know.

There was entirely too much drinking and once in a while in the privates' club particularly, somebody would break into the slot machine and things like that. They had Chinese servants in all these clubs. As a matter of fact we had Chinese cooks in our mess in Peking, with the result that the Marines sort of forgot how to run their own mess.

Q: Every man had his own servant?

Erskine: We had all the time I was there, but they did restrict to -- so many Chinese servants to a squad. The Marine was really living on the cream of the land over there: he would have this boy clean his rifle, look after his clothes, shine his shoes and everything like that. All the Marines had to do was come out and stand at attention. I remember several times when I made an inspection

of a boy and would find him with a dirty rifle ,or something like that he would say, "My Chinese boy didn't fix it." Boy, I'd let him have a piece of my mind right there. Not only that, maybe he had a little extra duty until he found out how to do it, and no Chinese boy in the meantime.

That was ~~part~~ sort of the way things went. The food was always good, the rations were plentiful, and the Chinese did a good job of preparing it.

Q: Who were some of the officers out there at this time in the Embassy, do you recall? In the Embassy Guard.

Erskine: Lt. Col. Buckley was the executive officer for about, I guess, 8 or 9 months, after I arrived, then I was made ~~exec~~ exec plus Operations and Intelligence. Carvel Hall was paymaster. I think Dave Shoup was there as a 1st lieutenant. I forget the names of the company commanders except one. It was Lloyd Pugh for part of the time. We had a young Capt. Humphrey.

Q: Was Griffith out there at this time?

Erskine: Sam Griffith came out and was with us for a while, then he put in for the language course and he became a language student. We had a very fine looking young lieutenant by the name of Ty Cobb. He got in a little jam in World War II. I had a letter from him the other day, down in Mexico.

Q: Was Banks Holcom-b out there at this time?

Erskine: Banks Holcomb was there but he was also with the naval attaché.

Q: He was studying Chinese.

Erskine: Well, he studied Chinese, but he spent part of his life out there and he could speak Chinese so well that this course was nothing to him. As a matter of fact he ~~xxxxxxx~~ acted on the Chinese stage out there, on many occasions, and was billed as Mr. Ho.

Q: Mr. Ho. That's right, he was born and raised out there until high school age, I believe.

Erskine: I think he was born there, but I think he spent a period of time back in the States and then went back out.

Q: He went to the Naval Academy.

Erskine: Yes. I had met him in the Basic School when I was there. He was a hell of a good rifle shot, but he never proceeded to be a team shooter. Another man who was there was Larson, retired recently as major general.

Q: Gus Larson.

Erskine: Yes. He was a fine shot. I also taught rifle marksmanship and pistol marksmanship in the Basic School.

Magill, Freddie Magill was in Peking with us as a 2nd lieutenant
And Ramsey, I forget his first name.

Q: Fred Ramsey?

Erskine: Yes.

Q: I think his father was a retired Marine officer.

Erskine: That's right. He had the mounted detachment.

Q: Tiny Fraser wasn't out there at this time, or was he out there
later?

Erskine: I don't think Fraser was there then, I don't remember him
being there then.

Q: Was the mounted detachment an actual part of the 70?

Erskine: Well, it started out -- You see, ⁱⁿ horse racing in Peking,
they use little ponies they get from up in Mongolia. And it's
quite a thing out there, they have a race horse out at ~~Pa~~ ^{PIAO MACH'ANG} ~~Pomanchang~~.
^{PIAO MA CHIANG}
~~P.C.M.A.N.C.H.A.N.C.~~ is the way I think it's spelled, I am not sure.
It was outside the city. This was sort of dominated by the British.
But we had participation of all of the foreign colony in this thing.
The people would buy their horses and race them. If they didn't
turn out to be a good race horse, they would turn them over to the

Guard for consideration of one dollar. Of course we had to have special dispensation from Headquarters Marine Corps to buy the food, the equipment, the saddles and so forth, but people preferred to turn their horses over to the Guard because they knew they would ~~get~~ get good treatment. I guess we had 30 or 40, and we also used those horses for polo. We had a polo team from the command there, and we participate^d in that. We had a tough little fellow -- sometimes you could put on a rein and change your direction, and he'd break the rein. I had that happen to me several times, especially playing polo, because they become ball crazy, and they just keep going after that ball and you have a hell of a time changing his mind about it.

Q: When did you become interested in polo, General?

Erskine: The first year I was out there they prevailed upon me to come out and try out. They'd give a cup to the best ~~player~~ ^{griffin} -- that's the first year polo man. So I won the Griffin Cup the first year and ~~also~~ also made the first team the first year, as number 4.

Q: Very good!

Erskine: I played, and we won. Peking hadn't won a North China championship in polo for quite a while. But we won. Tientsin was the main competitor, the 15th Infantry, in Tientsin.

Q: Yes, I was going to ask you about them. They were called the Chocolate Candy Soldiers or something? They'd been there so long that they . . .

Erskine: I don't remember hearing that myself, but it could be. They had better horses and bigger horses than we had. I think their horses were owned by the Army, and had been purchased for the Army. Of course polo was a very important sport in the Army at that time. But the first year that I played we won the North China championship, and the second year we won the North China championship. For the first time in, I think, six years.

Q: This was a ~~xxxx~~ two-year tour, generally?

Erskine: Yes, but I was there almost two and a half years. I think it was two and a half years by the time I got home. As I remember I arrived in January in ^{Tongku} Tenku, and the port was filled with ice. God, it was a miserable time. And I think I left in April.

Q: May. You were detached.

Erskine: May. And went home through Japan.

Q: On the President Lincoln.

Erskine: Did I?

Q: Yes sir.

Erskine: I guess that's right.

Q: You sailed from Kobe.

Erskine: No, I sailed back home from Yokohama. I went over, I think on one of the President lines. I don't remember whether it was the Lincoln or not. But we landed in Kobe, and from Kobe we took a Japanese ship and went down to ^{Tangku} ~~Tenku~~.

Q: That's right. President Johnson. You went on the Choan Maru from Kobe.

Erskine: That's going over.

Q: Going over. Then you came back on the . . .

Erskine: Uh uh. I had about 10 days in Japan on my way home.

Q: What were your relations like with the other foreign military, with the Japanese, for instance?

Erskine: I got along ~~xxxx~~ beautifully with the Japanese. They had a liaison officer by the name of Kishinami, who would always come down to me when we had any difficulty between our two guards, and we would settle these things very well. It was difficult for our people to sort of stay out of trouble with the Japanese.

Q: Was there always conflict with the Japanese?

Erskine: The Japanese would go on liberty by squad, and have a noncommissioned officer in the squad in charge of the group. Or occasionally you'd see two Japs, but they always had to have at least two together. Of course the question of sex out there -- I don't know whether you want to get into this.

Q: Sure.

Erskine: It's a very important thing. Venereal disease is also an important thing, so one of the solutions to it was to set aside a certain section of the city where the ~~xxx~~ Americans would go, that is the red light district. The Japanese had a section that their people went to. And when somebody would invade the other side you had some sort of a fight on your hands. The British came into our sector, and the Italians I don't think respected any sector. But the way this thing was run -- and I made several inspections through there -- they had a doctor who was employed to inspect all of the girls, and he did this I think twice a week. And everyone found with any sort of an infection would be sent out. I was surprised that most of these people were under 20 years old. At least they seemed to me to be.

Q: All Chinese girls?

Erskine: Occasionally you'd find a Jap, but not many.

Q: What about the White Russian ~~princess~~ princeesses so-called?

Erskine: They were more or less on their own. We had quite a lot of White Russians out there, and some quite gifted people who had left Russia. As a matter of fact, before I moved into the Guard I lived in a part of the old Russian Legation which was then under the supervision of Lt. Gen. Horvath, who was a former Governor General of Manchuria. He had also participated in World War I as a cavalry commander -- a very fine looking fellow, about 6 feet 6 tall. He was a very accomplished artist and musician. It was pitiful to see the way they had to live. I think he had leased this old building and it was a gorgeous place -- or had been, at one time, of course the ~~xxx~~ furnishings were pretty sparse because the Russians when they left there took everything of any value. I think I paid about \$60 a month for a very nice apartment, and he lived in the apartment down below me. I got to know the old man pretty well: he had a long white beard that came almost down to his waist, he ~~was~~ a very regal looking gent, and he walked like a ramrod. We had spacious ground around this building, part of the old Russian compound. And the Japanese used to taunt us by sending up their people ^{for} ~~in~~ training in the grounds, and they had no right, they never asked anybody's permission, and they'd send them over there and they'd have drills and physical exercise.

One day when I was coming home in a rickshaw they had a signal group out there and they had wire scattered all across the path that came up to the door. They yelled at me and I didn't do anything except get out and take my knife and just cut the wire, and hold my knife in my hand. That stopped that one.

They came over for ~~phxx~~ physical exercise. I had one of those old Bilibad chairs, you know.

Q: Yes.

Erskine: And we had quite a little porch out in front of the main building. And while they were putting on this exercise like a bunch of monkeys out there, I had my number one boy in his white suit get down my Bilibad chair and put it on the front of the porch while they were doing all this right there, and stand there with a seltzer bottle and a bottle of Scotch, and then he would pour me a Scotch and I'd drink it ^{and when} ~~while~~ they would finish one exercise I would applaud and thank them very much for putting on this demonstration for me every day. And they damn soon quit.
(laughter)

Q: How about the relations with the British military?

Erskine: We were very close to the British.

Q: How about the enlisted men?

Erskine: They got along very well. We had very few cases there of friction with the British, and very few cases of friction with the Italians. The French had some Annamites, and they had to be controlled pretty much by the French commandant. We did have several little incidents with them -- nothing too bad, feuding and fighting down in the red light district or something like that.

But I think the worst case we had -- at least I thought it was going to be the worst -- was . . . Let me go back and explain the way the ranges were laid out.

There was a certain area, and we had the butts built up, I guess 20 feet high, and there was a mud wall down each of these ranges. We had the British range, the Japanese range. I guess we had around 15 targets on each range. And the Italian range -- all with a mud wall between each one.

We ~~would~~^{as a rule} send our people out to shoot in a truck. The Japanese always hiked out -- they didn't have much ammunition: I was told over there that they only had five rounds per year for training. And they were not very good shots. Then one day when our people in the truck were going out to the range, some of the Japs were going alongside the road -- this was a pretty narrow road -- and one of our boys leaned over and ~~sparked~~ slapped one of these Japs, a Japanese officer, and knocked him down, and I think the truck ran over his hat. Well, Kishinami was over to see me about this, and I could hardly believe it. Gen. Vandegrift was then in command of the Guard and he told me, "You go find who did that and you bring him to me."

They brought this young officer over, and he still had the finger marks on his face where he'd been slapped, so there was plenty of evidence. And I had Kishinami sit with me while I questioned every man who was in that truck, and of course nobody knew anything about it. ^{Which is} ~~just~~ typical. Finally I said to Kishinami, "I'll go over and call ^{on} ~~on~~ ^{your} ~~the~~ Commandant, and if my Commandant says it's worthwhile, and explain to him that you heard me question these and you didn't have any extra questions. I just don't see any way we can solve it, nobody will admit it. And none of my people is going to tell on the other. Don't you think that's a pretty good

trait among soldiers?" Yes, he thought it was good. I said, "If it had happened to us, I am sure your people would do the same thing." And I try^{ed} to build up their integrity a little bit.

Gen. Vandegrift finally told me, "You go with Kishinami and explain it to the Japanese commandant." Which I did, and he said, "All right, we'll drop it there."

I thought that was really going to develop into something.

Q: It could have.

Erskine: It could have, yes. Toward the end of my tour -- I am trying to think of the name of the new commandant -- there was a lieutenant colonel commandant, a great big husky fellow; he'd been to German military schools, and acted very German in his manner. He was relieved by -- I can't think of the man's name at the moment -- a full colonel who was senior xxxxxx to our commandant. And that was contrary to the gentleman's agreement for the command of the International Guard.

There was much discussion about that. But he was there, and he was the senior officer. When he arrived, I went in to see then Col. Vandegrift and told him about it, and he was pretty furious. In other words this man had usurped his command. He went over to see the Ambassador -- I don't know what transpired there -- and they came back and I said, "We got to buckle on our swords and go pay an official call on this gent." He said, "I am not going to do it, I am not going to call on any Jap."

This went on I think most of the day, and I reminded him two or three times. The next day he buckled on

End of Side 1, Tape 1, Session III.

Session III continuedSide 2, Tape 1

Q: I am sorry, General, that we ended abruptly. You were saying that Gen. Vandegrift did agree to . . .

Erskine: Yes, he called and he found this fellow to be a pretty affable gent. He wanted to participate more in the activities of the Guards. We had an athletic event each year, and we also had an international competition with small weapons. The Japanese had always refused to participate in any of these things, they couldn't stand defeat. Of course we always won the rifle championship, the small ^{bore} ~~board~~ championship, and we won the athletic competitions. Our stiffest competitor in the athletic competitions were always the Italians. They would send down to Tientsin or even back home and get athletes to participate in this thing, to be assigned to the Guard just for a short period of time. They did the same thing in the rifle competition.

The old colonel said he would like to participate more, and I brought up the question of the small ^{bore} ~~board~~ competition. I thought you'd have less physical contact there than you would by bringing them into the athletic competitions. And he said yes, he'd like very much to do that. They had been saying that the Jap was so nearsighted he couldn't shoot. He had no rifle, he had no ammunition, he didn't have any *coach*, and didn't know the rules, he said.

I said, "I'll take care of that; I'll give you the rifles, the same kind of rifles, for the period of the competition; I'll give you my second best coach -- I won't give you my best coach -- and I'll give you the ammunition you need, and I'll give you a place to practice over in our Guard." I thought that would bring us closer together, particularly since he was the senior commandant.

I forget whom I assigned as coach. Otho Wiggs coached our team. This disproved the theory that the Japanese couldn't shoot. Usually the thing went off with the Americans winning, either the British or the Italians second, the French down some place below. But this time in their first competition, we took the competition, but they were number 2. And the old commandant was so happy about this he went back and got a small truckload of saké and brought it over, because after this competition we always had a dinner at our place for all the competitors. And he arrived himself to present this saké to the team. As I remember he wanted to go in and eat with the team. I think we always had broiled chicken on this day -- half a chicken -- or a beefsteak, I don't know, but anyway we had a good meal.

I spoke to Col. Vandegrift and told him what was transpiring and he said, "No, we cannot turn those people loose up there. They can have beer and that's all. I am not going to ~~xxxx~~ let them start drinking saké up here in the mess hall." We didn't do it, but we kept the saké. I forget what we did with it. Originally we put it in the sick bay, and I think it was eventually parcelled out here and there among some of the old noncoms.

Q: I've heard a story -- I don't recall who told me, someone who must have been out there at this time, when this new Japanese commandant came out and made the statement that well, if the Americans sent someone senior to him he had in the safe a warrant for promotion to general. I don't know if this has occurred here or down in . . .

Erskine: That was a common statement, not only relating to the Japanese, but for the British also. I've heard it many times, but nobody could ever say that they knew it to be a fact -- that in case of real hostilities they could reach in and this colonel would become a general.

This colonel finally, at the beginning of the war, went back to Japan and he became a lieutenant general, and commanded Japanese forces in Burma. His name slips my mind.

Q: Was this Tominaga?

Erskine: It doesn't ~~xxx~~ sound like it.

Q: Gen. Tominaga? He I think was a senior ~~xxx~~ Japanese officer at either Tientsin or Peking when war broke out.

Erskine: It doesn't sound like the name to me.

Q: You mentioned the fact that when this new Japanese commandant wanted to participate in an athletic event you were concerned about the . . .

Erskine: He never got into athletics, but he did want to get into the rifle shooting.

Q: You said there was some fear about body contact. Was there an attitude of "here is our coming enemy", or a prejudice against the Japanese, or something like that?

Erskine: I think everybody felt that way, and the Japanese were pretty cocky at that time. You'd see in the city almost every day one or more Japanese officers with a briefcase, a camera and a pair of field glasses; they would actually walk upon our section of the Tartar Wall and look over and make pictures and everything else. But I had something that I'll tell you about later when I went back through Japan -- about how cocky they were.

They had already seized Jehol and had occupied it, and a short time after that they had a big sukiyaki party, over at the Japanese Embassy: I think it was in the commandant's quarters over there. And we were all invited to it. And they had round tables with charcoal braziers in the center. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~
~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ They had about two Americans at each table and the rest were Japanese. They would cook your food there for you. We had a hell of a lot to drink there that night. The whole place was decorated with Jehol flags strung across the room and around the walls. During the dinner, one of the Japanese officers gave to each American a ~~R~~ Jehol flag, and the one who gave it to me said, "This is our little brother Jehol, please be good to him." I still have the flag around some place, I don't know where it is right now. But that ^{was} purely propaganda.

Toward the end of this period over there -- the period that I was over there -- they had a cavalry brigade sitting on Chinese soil, I think only about 10 or 12 miles outside of Peking. And the Chinese general who was in command had some 90,000 soldiers around the city, in barracks outside the city. I was invited to lunch at his place in the city -- ~~Si~~ tiffin they call it over there. And we got in a conversation toward the end of the meal, and I asked him what he was going to do: the Japanese were already invading China, and Doi Hara was making quite a number of visits back and forth, and he was referred to by the Japanese over there as being the Lawrence of Arabia from Japan.

I met Doi Hara on several occasions. We were having a drink at one of the cocktail parties over there, and he was present one time, and I said, "Just what are you doing over here? You seem to make a lot of visits." Well, he had gone to Manchuria to present a flag to a certain Japanese organization, and he thought he'd come by China and see what the situation was in China, and what the Americans were doing in China. He was a very outspoken fellow. I said, "Well, what do you think now that you've been down here?" He said, "I think old lady China sick old lady. I speak in parable about China," he said. "She do not need Uncle Sam, but what she need is Doctor Japan." I said, "That sounds like a pretty ^ostright doctrine." He said, "It is. It is a good doctrine." I've never forgotten that.

Anyway this Chinese general whose name slips my mind -- yet I have a picture of him here some place with his chop on it, but I don't know where any of my things are, really.

Q: I hope you find these things.

Erskine: He said, "We can't do anything." I said, "My God, you've got 90,000 troops around this city, I understand." He said, "Yes, maybe more." I said, "There are only about 10,000 Japanese, why don't you go out there and beat the hell out of them?" He said, "Oh no, that won't work." I said, "Well, if you have that attitude, the Japanese are going to take over China." He said, "Oh, not for long." I said, "What do you mean by not for long?" He said, "Two or three hundred years." I said, "But if they move in what are you going to do in the meantime?" They'll just take over." He said, "Well, you don't understand the Chinese philosophy. Let the Japs come in and take over China. In two or ^{three} ~~xxx~~ years they will all be Chinese. They only have 90 million Japs, and we have 600 million Chinese. The Chinese women ^{will} make Chinese out of them ^{all}, and in 200 or 300 years there will be no Japan."

That was, I think, the philosophy of the Chinese at that time.

Q: Was this general a war lord?

Erskine: I think at one time he had been a war lord. He was the general who moved in after Chang Chen moved out. Chang Chen was very close to Chiang Kai-shek, and I think when things began to get more tense up North ~~they~~ -- (Gen. Ho was Minister of Defense; they had a very large defense building with I don't know how many people working in it right in Peking. But I understand they also had another one in Chungking) -- they had a meeting -- I am not clear right now as to where this meeting was -- in which Japan made certain

demands (I believe they were strong demands) on the Chinese, and of course the Chinese didn't agree with this. Gen. Ho -- who was one of the representatives -- came back to Peking (he was then living in Peking) and the Japs a few days later flew up some bombing planes, they looked like about 100 pound bombs, and they flew right over our guard compound time after time, I'd say no more than 200 feet high. And they flew over Ho's house.

Gen. Ho cleared out of there and went down to the other Defense Department in Chunking.

How they worked it out I don't know, but anyway the Japanese were showing them that they were ready to do business, and also they were evidently showing us that they had equipment over there available that we didn't have. We knew they had the bombers, but we didn't think they'd be so brazen as to fly time and time again over our compound and actually circle it.

Q: This wasn't Chang Tso-lin, was it?

Erskine: No. It's something like Loo. He came from Shansi, I believe. He moved in there from Shansi into the Peking area. I forgot a lot of the things -- I used to know the terrain pretty well, but it's slipped my mind now.

They had a big review. They had a large field, I think it was south of Peking; he went through the south gate to get there, anyway. The review was outside the city, and of course almost all of the foreign colony was invited to come out and see this thing. He had a reviewing stand, quite large: I guess seats went up 20 deep.

Lots of flags flying. It was several miles from the gate up to this camp, and he had troops stationed about every 20 yards apart on both sides of the road, and as you drove out in your car they all came to a "present arms". This was a real show; when they put on a show, they put on a good one.

We arrived there at a specified time, which I think was 10 o'clock in the morning. Then they fired a salute: instead of firing 20-odd guns like we do, they fired 101 guns. Then on a signal -- these troops wore grey-blue uniforms, and they blended into the background so you could hardly see them. This was a terrific flat area out there -- he gave a signal (they had a band, it didn't keep much time but anyway it was music) and all of those troops started double timing toward the reviewing stand. And I thought, "What a hell of a mess they are going to be in now! Who is going to stop them?" They evidently had practised this a lot: they stopped in perfect formation, he made a talk, then he gave another signal, and they all double timed back to their place. Nobody fell down, nobody ~~ran~~^{ran} over each other, and there must have been 100,000 there. A tremendous crowd.

Then the parade started. I think it was five or six hours, going by the reviewing stand. It was led by this single band. The bandleader instead of carrying a baton had a sword, and he moved out in front after passing the reviewing stand, just like our bands do, and he'd use his sword to give the directions and the signals to the band. And they played and played and played and played. When a fellow would get tired he'd just put his horn down and sit down. And when the bandleader got tired, he'd stick his sword in the ground and sit down. So you can see how much direction they had.

I never saw such poor equipment in all my life. They had no modern equipment. Many of the troops had rifles; they had one outfit called the signal outfit; they had a few pieces of wire; they had one group that came through with what amounted to a 37 millimeter gun on steel wheels that were about the vintage of the . . .

Q: Russo-Japanese War.

Erskine: Chinese, wasn't it? Way back. The Russo-Chinese War. But they had any number of battalions of broad-sword soldiers, and all they carried was a big broad sword, plus their sleeping equipment and things like that. Then their train came through, and they had spare rifles, not in boxes, just thrown in into these carts, and many of these carts were pulled by men, not animals. They had a cavalry detachment that was afraid of the band -- they had a hell of a time getting it by the band. The band finally had to stop playing. They had these little Mongolian ponies. But it was one of the most interesting shows I've seen in my life, and I thought then, "There is nothing truer than the fact that a Chinaman's life is worth nothing," because they would launch these people into battle, and against modern weapons they couldn't do a damn thing. They'd get slaughtered. They could probably overrun you because they had so many.

Q: Weren't the Germans advising the Chinese Army at this time?

Erskine: They had German equipment, and I think yes, they had some German advisers. Not all German equipment. But everything they had was ancient. They had German packs, and they used to march through the streets of Peking, and as part of their march discipline they would quite frequently sing. They'd have a whole regiment coming down, maybe 2-3000 people, coming through the city, and they'd be singing a hymn. "Onward Christian Soldiers." And the band would probably be playing Alexander's Ragtime Band.

Q: Ha! But this is an interesting point about the regiment singing. Gen. Worton was saying that as far as this type of spirit goes, World War I was the last romantic war, where the Marines would sing. And World War II was a little more cynical, and of course the songs were somewhat more obscene and vulgar. Then of course in Korea I don't think there was too much singing.

Erskine: No, I never heard much about it. And some of the big funerals in Peking were really sights to see. Sometimes it'd take a couple of hours for the procession to pass. Usually the people who sent flowers would send flowers in little tubs -- the whole bush, blooming: I've seen it in the wintertime. And there would be maybe 100 of these tubs, with coolies carrying them. And the big casket was mounted, and sometimes you'd have 100 people carrying it. How they ever figured it out to equalize that load, I never will know, because they had a ~~xxxxx~~ couple of long poles that went underneath the casket, and from that they rigged poles with two men.

Q: A crossbar type thing.

Erskine: Yes. And they would bring this thing down the street. Preceding the casket would be the heir, who usually was carried under a sort of a white canopy with several people accompanying him, and he always had to look very sad. There would be people coming along with paper money, with streamers with Chinese characters on them telling about the life of this man, this great man, and so forth. Then frequently, in a little carriage coming along there would be paper mâché reproductions of his mistresses, and the band would be playing anything from "Over There" -- I've heard them actually playing "Over There, somebody had given them the music, I guess, it was the only music they had maybe -- to "Alexander's Ragtime Band." I've got a lot of movies I've made of all these things that I haven't looked at for years.

Q: You know what we'd like to do? (Turns off tape) (Interruption)

Getting back to China, was there anything else that sticks out in your mind as being of particular interest? Anything outstanding during this tour? Personalities, problems, involvements?

Erskine: I was there with three commandants. I was there at the tail end of Col. Rixey's tour, throughout Vandegrift's tour, and stayed on a while with Col. Marston, later Maj. Gen. Marston -- John Marston. (Pause) I can't think of anything. I was very proud of that guard when I left it. We had some good men, and I ran into many of these people later in World War II, and I think the training

program that we had there was very beneficial to the individuals.

Q: Now, when you left China you were assigned to the Marine Corps Schools, and you remained there from June '37 to May of '40. This was three years filled with fantastic changes as far as the Marine Corps was concerned -- as far as instruction, as far as the fleet landing exercises, the Flexes, were concerned, as far as curriculum was concerned. I know that you were very much involved with the Guam problem, the Roebling Swamp Buggy came up. As a matter of fact I was told about the fact that you raised all sorts of hell with your Guam problem, in the sense that you'd ~~fixed~~ inserted the use of the LVT, the Amtrac, into the problem, which just threw out the previous school solution.

Erskine: Yes.

Q: But I'd like, if you will, without my (interrupting you) . . .

Erskine: I left there and I went to Japan, and a Japanese colonel gave me letters of introduction to a couple of people. One of my assignments while I was in Peking was Intelligence officer ashore for the Asiatic Fleet. They didn't give any money, they didn't give me any staff; I was just supposed to find out things. They had a naval attaché; I never saw him, I saw most of his reports, but he never found out anything that was of particular interest to me.

Q: Was C.C. Brown there at this time?

Erskine: C.C. Brown was there, and Schack, I believe, was the naval attaché.

Q: And Worton . . .

(cross talk)

Erskine: Col. Stilwell was the Army attaché, and he had several language students there with him plus a Capt. Barrett, who I think was his assistant. I had very little to do, ~~xxx~~ they had nothing to do anything with. I would follow through on certain things.

The only thing I ever saw the naval attaché's office put out that was of any particular interest was maybe the location -- or rather the suspected location -- of Japanese fleet units.

I don't know whether this is classified or not, but we had a big radio tower, and this was to assist the Ambassador in getting his messages through. At the same time we had a crew there that was a handpicked crew -- all Navy, there might have been one or two Marines in it -- and they had their own defensive weapons.

Q: Was ~~xxxx~~ Lasswell out there at this time?

Erskine: No, Lasswell was in Shanghai, I think.

Q: How about Rochefort -- Joe Rochefort -- this commander. They were both later involved with MAGIC.

Erskine: I don't know.

Q: Okay.

Erskine: We would pick up -- we concentrated on picking up and intercepting Japanese naval communications, and I was designated as the only officer who could go into this thing, and my job there was mainly to collect this intercepted stuff, bundle it up and get it back to Naval Intelligence by courier. We had no regular courier,^{so} it just happened that some naval officer^{who} was being ordered home would come to Peking for a big ringding, and I'd find out about it and get him and detailed him as courier, and give him a suitcase full of this stuff to take home! (laughs) But I understand that what was collected was quite valuable.

Q: I think Zacharias was the brains of this at this time there.

Erskine: Yes. (Pause) That's about all I can think of now about Peking. It was a very pleasant duty. There is one story I'll never forget. You know, when you did go there in those days you took over the house and you took over the servants that your predecessor had. You shouldn't go out and hire somebody. There was this little organization that they had there among the people, and they ~~par par~~ practically decided who'd work for you. So I took over the people that Sullivan had. This old fellow who was my number one boy was really cheating me in every way. When he dressed up he looked like a banker when he went down the street.

After considerable time I finally got rid of him, and I hired a boy who I think was half Mongolian, a fine looking fellow, he had a crew cut: he could be very polite and he could be very ~~xxxxxx~~ ^{ornery}. He was in one of his bad moods one day. He always used to bring in a menu because we bought certain things outside for so much, and give him the money and he'd buy that, on a daily basis.

He brought the menu in one day to my wife, and she called me and said, "~~xxxx~~ ^{Hu} is in one ^{of} his bad moods again." She said, "Look what he's given me as a menu." I looked at it, and the main ~~xxxx~~ item was fried mice, and I said, "Hu, do you mean fried rice?" "No, fried mice. "Do you know what mice means?" "Oh, yes, rats." I said, "You mean to tell me that you were going to buy some little rats and cook them for us? You know goddamn well that Americans don't eat things like that." He said, "Very fine food, very fine food. Finest people eat fried mice."

I was a little perturbed, so I gave him a good scolding.

I played ~~px~~ polo, and I frequently got my clothes pretty well messed up, and my boots were all messed up, and I'd get home from the office and wanted to play polo, and he'd have everything laid out for me -- my helmet, my mallet, and everything, and a pair of clean ^{riding} trousers.

I came home this afternoon, and he had muddy trousers, muddy boots -- he hadn't touched them. I sent for him. By that time I was really furious, so I called him and I said, "Look at this! Why haven't you cleaned it?" He said, "No reason."

I said, "You can be a good servant when you want to be, but when you are ornery you can be the loudest son of a bitch I've ever ~~knxx~~

known. Sometime you are going to make me mad and I am gonna grab you by the neck and put your head between my knees (I had a riding crop in my hand) and I am gonna whip you like a small child until you cry." He never moved a muscle or changed his expression. He bowed and said, "Master, a gentleman never loses his temper."
(laughter)

We never had this happen again.

Q: Oh gosh! They are funny people to deal with, I guess.

Erskine: Well, they think differently. And you are wasting your efforts if you try to change them. They've been doing this for centuries.

Q: Did you go back to China after World War II?

Erskine: No, I haven't been back to China. I've been to Japan a number of times.

Q: You said something happened when you went through Japan.

Erskine: Oh, when I arrived there, I finally got down to the address where I was supposed to present this letter of introduction, and I had a hell of a time getting the sentry to take it upstairs -- he was down in the defense building. He finally took it up, and then another soldier came down and escorted me up. I can't think of his name now but he was the G-2 of the Japanese imperial staff. He spoke excellent English, he welcomed me to Japan and so forth

and so on, and he said, "Do you have any friends here that I might get you in touch with?" And I said, "I think Maj. Kishinami, who is liaison officer in Peking, is probably in . . ." He said, "Yes, he is in my office." He called one of his boys and within three minutes Kishinami was there. He said, "I am going to assign Kishinami to you as a companion, to take care of you while you are here. What would you like to do? But before you answer I want to tell you something. I was attaché in Washington, and I was ~~going~~ to go down to the Marine Corps Schools to deliver a lecture on the Japanese capture of Tsingtao in World War I." (They did a good job over there on that one) And he said, "I kept being delayed and delayed and delayed." I said, "I can't understand that." He said, "Oh, I do, very well. They could not let me come down and visit the Schools until they took the maps of Japan off the wall." So he gave the lecture down there.

Q: When was this, sir, do you know?

Erskine: Before World War II. I can't think of his name now. Anyway he said, "Where would you like to go, and what would you like to do? I know you are in the Intelligence business, and I'd like for you to get all kinds of valuable information while you are here." I said, "Frankly I'd like to go out to the Navy Yard, and go aboard some of your ships. I'd like to go to your college, I'd like to go to the Naval Academy, the Military Academy, things like that. I'd like to go see them." And he looked at me with a half smile and he said, "You are only going to be here ten

days. It will take me longer than that to take the maps of the United States off the wall!" (laughter) What could be plainer? I said, "Oh I don't think so. Of course on a quick visit the only thing I could ~~me~~ do is pick up what's in sight, because I don't think anybody is going to tell me anything over here that you don't want to be told to me."

Well, I didn't get very far with him, but he said, "I am giving you a big Buick automobile, and a chauffeur and all the maps that you can ever use. If you ever need them in the future in Japan . . ." And again he had a big roll of maps and it turned out they were all road maps.

So I spent my 10 days there, and Kishinami went with me every place. I saw the museums, I saw the temples, I saw all kinds of things, but damn little of any military value. And the night before I was leaving they had a sukiyaki party for me. I guess there were a dozen or 15 Japanese officers ~~between~~^{between} Army and Navy present. It was a beautiful room and there were beautiful geisha girls, and they had -- I still remember -- great big black cushions embroidered in gold for you to sit on. And the geisha girl cooked your food and even put it in your mouth, and brought you your drinks. We were drinking both saké and Scotch. After a while everybody was feeling pretty good, and this colonel -- I think he was a colonel, he might have been a general, (I was only a lieutenant colonel at the time, so I don't imagine there was anybody over the rank of colonel there) -- said to me, "You know, you have good friends here in Japan. I know Kishinami here, he is an old friend of mine, we were school mates."

When I am in command on the West Coast, if you have any trouble you come see me or contact me, and I'll see that you are all right and that you are taken care of." That prompted another guy to say, "When I am in command in New York, you do the same thing with me." The this naval officer spoke up and said, "I am going to be in the Los Angeles area, I think, and you come and see me if you have any difficulty." And I said, "Well, that's all very nice. What is your name, again? I want to remember this San Diego fellow." It was Saito.

Then we had a few more drinks and then Saito spoke up, and I was pretty goddamn furious at this point. I didn't know exactly what to say, and I thought saying nothing would be the best.

Saito then said to me, "Now if this all fails, what are you going to do for us?" I couldn't think of anything decent to say, and I said, "I'll give you a military funeral."

Q: Oh oh! What was the reaction to that?

Erskine: It was, "Oh ho, ho, ho, ho!" Then they told me that they had copied the British Navy because it was the best navy in the world and the American Navy was no damn good, and they had adopted the German tactics and the German equipment to an extent because the Germans had the best army in the world, and how superior they were in all respects. I thought this was going to be a good going away party, but it left me in a pretty bad mood, and maybe some of those fellows didn't feel too well.

Well, things went along. They got out to Saipan. ~~We were~~ ^{we} in command of that area and ^{we} located his Headquarters on Saipan -- Saito.

After the island was just about overrun and they'd made their benzei attack and failed, Saito committed hara-kiri. And I hadn't realized that this might be the same Saito, and I started checking back, and it's slipped my mind. I started thinking back and I looked through some old files and everything we had, and I thought we established pretty well that it was the same Saito: he was a vice-admiral at this point. I remembered my promise to Saito, and I sent a patrol out to get his body, and we buried him, fired three volleys, and we captured a lot of Japanese flags out there in one of the warehouses, and we spread this big Japanese flag over him. These Marines who were around there just thought I had gone completely nuts. But I felt like I should carry out my promise.

Q: Do you think he had any idea that you were there?

Erskine: It's quite possible.

Q: Did you ever run into Kishinami after the war?

Erskine: No, but I had a note from him after the war? What I had wanted to do was to go back and re-establish this evening with the names of the people who were there.

Q: And find out where they'd gone.

Erskine: And I got the Japanese military attaché here on one occasion; (I^d met him down here at Fort McNair) and I asked him if he knew Kishinami, and he didn't, but he said he would go back with my letter and find out.

I finally got from him a little brief history on Kishinami. I have in the files around here some place. Then I had a little note from Kishinami, congratulating me on surviving the war, and he told me how happy he was about it. I didn't follow up. I always have so many irons in the fire I couldn't follow it up; it didn't seem important at the time.

Q: Of course a lot of people who have done duty in China -- Shanghai or Peking -- have come across and made acquaintances and some friendships with some of the Japanese. Did you have to work up a real personal animosity against the Japanese; when we got into the war and you became division commander and so on?

Erskine: You said, "Did you have to" ?

Q: Yessir, did you have to, or was it a natural reaction, or did the memories . . . I guess you were pretty good friends with Kishinami.

Erskine: Well, I don't think you had to work up any particular animosity -- I didn't. As far as I was concerned they were enemies, and to me that was a cold blooded deal -- you or me, or my people. I didn't give a damn how good a friend you were years ago. You

are going to get hurt if I can hurt you. After we got in the war I must confess that I didn't feel guilty of helping to kill anybody or anything like that. It was my duty to do this, and I finally sort of developed a feeling, I guess you'd call it, just like shooting rats. And I'd ~~next~~ go to the battlefield sometimes and they were just stacked up there, and I had no feeling about that whatsoever, except, Good God, how many more we are going to have to kill.

Q: There was no feeling of sad regret, that this had come to pass?

Erskine: No., I never had any sad regret. I don't have it today. As long as he is an enemy of the United States and he's killed Americans, Marines, there is no feeling on my part.

Q: Was there any feeling of sympathy?

Erskine: Well, in a way I sympathized with some of their families on account of what I considered to be idiocy in the way they treated their people. But I figured if they were there on the battlefield they'd be just like this guy. Now for instance I think one of the things that made the Japanese soldier fight absolutely to the end was that if he were captured in his name and his real name came out his immediate family lost their property back ~~home~~ home. And there were a number of other punishments like that. So this poor fellow figured it was better for his family and probably for himself to go ahead and die.

Q: I think that ~~xxxx~~ was the prevailing attitude, because I feel based on the studies I have done on this, that the Japanese -- that's why American POWs ^{were} ~~was~~ treated so poorly, the Japanese were treating them as they expected a Japanese POW would be treated. They were surprised that they gave up -- they should have died. The Americans should have died.

Erskine: X Well, the old Samurai spirit was like that too.

Q: Yes.

Erskine: They go in there and if they get killed they go to heaven, they get on a cloud, they had ~~xx~~ a lot of good looking gals around and some sak~~e~~.

Q: Something along that line. (~~xxxx~~ Pause) You know, General, I think we've pretty well exhausted ^{China} ~~ed~~ -- well, we haven't exhausted it, I am sure there is a lot ~~xx~~ more that we probably could get into, but I think we've covered it fairly well. Perhaps at this point, rather than starting out on Quantico -- I have a lot to ask you on that, as I mentioned -- we should start on that with the next session, that is, if you are agreeable, sir.

Erskine: Let me take a look at my book and see how I stand here next week.

End of Side 2, Tape 1, End of Session III.

Session IV - 29 October 1969Tap 1, Side 1

Q: In our last session, General, we talked about your tour of duty in China. I think we went through it pretty completely, although I don't know if we exhausted everything, I am sure there are many stories and incidents and anecdotes which just by the very nature of this program you couldn't recall or couldn't call to mind. They might come up during the rest of the interview sessions. But we enter a very interesting period, I think -- both for the Marine Corps and for you -- with your assignment to the Marine Corps Schools.

I have on the record here that you joined there on 21 June 1937, and you were the chief of the F-1 and F-2 sections. This was for the senior course, or for both the senior course and the junior course?

Erekin: It was for the senior course. I had F-1 and F-2. The F-1 consisted mainly in teaching staff operations and procedures, and I followed pretty much the system of the general staff, which I had learned pretty well out at Leavenworth. The F-2 section was practically nothing when I started with it. I had seen some of this instruction before I went to China, and when I had a brief tour of the Schools, and it consisted mainly of a series of lectures on the organization of naval intelligence in Washington, with not one bit of the instruction that I ever found pertaining to ^{collection} ~~collection~~ and evaluation of intelligence as far as troops in the field were

concerned. So I looked this over and I thought it was pretty sad, and I took every damn bit of it and dumped it in the dump and set it on fire. And I started out ~~wixk~~ and wrote a pamphlet which was the basis for the course of instruction that I had set up, and I got a few extra hours allowed for the intelligence section, and tried to get down to the combat intelligence operation procedures.

This book was based largely on concepts and theories that were being taught at Leavenworth at that time. Maj. Schwien was one of the intelligence instructors at Leavenworth and he had written a book called Combat Intelligence, which impressed me very much, and I found in later years that he had some pretty sound principles.

Prior to that, in most of the so-called intelligence estimates which didn't amount to very much, they tried to determine the ~~enemys~~ enemy's intentions, which no one can do with any degree of accuracy, if you have a smart enemy. But the change in concept was that we would try to determine from the information available -- and also from the background that you may have on the enemy himself and his nature -- the enemy's capabilities, so that you could be prepared, when you made your decision, to meet more than one capability instead of trying to focus on the enemy's intentions.

I must say that I think our intelligence concept up to that time was pretty, pretty sad. We had really no intelligence training that was effective. Most every commander ~~determined~~ made a decision as a result of what little he knew, he had very little intelligence collection, he depended on outpost, and at that time of course some aerial observation. He had also patrols. But our communications were very poor, and most of the reports

were late in getting in. I finally made, I thought, a very comprehensive course in intelligence, and a large part of the officers in the senior class were senior to me, and when I gave them an unsatisfactory report or mark on the little tests and examinations that we had, believe me they came around and let me know where I stood in the Marine Corps! (laughs) That didn't ~~deter~~ ~~me~~ me one damn bit -- I just made it tougher for them the next time.

Anyway I think we got over a few points on the collection and evaluation and determination of capabilities, instead of intentions.

Q: I think -- hadn't the Naval War College in their curriculum -- er . . . of course they had intelligence . . .

Well, weren't the naval commanders more concerned with intentions than capabilities?

Erskine: I think until about that time even the Army -- the Army in my mind has always been ^{of the other services} ahead/in intelligence techniques, and I think the Army today is probably ahead of ~~xxxxxx~~ the other services. And I had close contact with them during my last few years of service, and the Army's techniques are good, there is no doubt about it.

The Navy had one thing in mind, and that was naval warfare. And of course the Marine Corps was so_r_t of a second thought in their mind. The big sea battle is what they looked forward to. Possibly a naval intelligence was better for the Navy than it was for the Marine Corps, but it wasn't worth a goddamn for the Marine Corps, I can tell you, up to the middle of World War II.

Q: We had a number of people who had primarily been assigned to intelligence jobs. I think Worton may have been one, and several others who during their careers had been doing this sort of thing.

Gen. Omar Bradley in his book mentioned the fact that when the war broke out and reserves and civilians came in and were assigned to these intelligence billets, the regular service really had no concept of what intelligence could do, of what a smart intelligence officer could do, and unfortunately during peacetime situations, and even in the early years of the war, the intelligence billets were filled by so-called odds and sods.

Erskine: That's incorrect in my opinion. Whenever an officer studied ~~xxxxxx~~ to qualify in a foreign language he was pretty sure of being assigned as an intelligence officer. It's always been my concept that you had to be a good operations officer before you could be a good intelligence officer, because if you don't know how to handle your own troops, I'd just like to know how you are going to figure out what the dispositions or the intentions or the capabilities of the enemy troops are. So I think you should be grounded first in operations before you are assigned to an intelligence job,

Q: It seems to me that here you find the chicken and the egg concept: which comes first, the chicken or the egg? -- where you have commanders reluctant to accept what their intelligence officers gave them because they knew -- were just reluctant to accept any information they got from their intelligence officers period, or the fact that the intelligence officers generally were such a sorry lot that commanders were reluctant to accept any intelligence

information they received.

Erskine: From the time I was in the Marine Corps Schools until I left the service with the Secretary of Defense, I devoted a great deal of effort to getting the status of the intelligence officer appreciated more, not only in his own command but in promotions and so forth, because if you look back and look through the records you'll find that many officers were penalized simply because they had written on their record that they were intelligence officers here or there. I have been on selection board⁵ and I've heard senior officers say, "This guy here has no operations experience; he is one of these ^{crystal} ball gazers." And that didn't ^{help} ~~work~~ him much with the rest of the board.

Q: When you became chief of staff for FMFPac and its predecessor command, and later became commanding general of the 3rd Division, what was your attitude concerning your intelligence officers? How willingly did you accept -- how willingly did Gen. Holland Smith accept -- what intelligence he got?

Erskine: I think Gen. Holland Smith accepted the intelligence because he knew that I had had some experience in it and that I had been teaching ~~it~~ the techniques. I don't think we ever had a difference on our intelligence reports.

It's another thing when I was in command of the 3rd Marine Division. We had a pretty thorough intelligence organization there. But this was after the war had been going on for some time,

and it seems to me that sometimes the military people have to get hurt before they really learn. It's like going to school. In the early days, if you went to school some of the officers thought that you were just one of those boys who were not out for hard work, looking for a better job, usually a staff assignment some place, because many of the people who went to school did go to the staff assignments. I guess I was pretty tough on my intelligence officers because when they gave me an estimate they had to know what the hell they were talking about, because I would question them very carefully on why you think this and ~~what~~ why you think that, and why didn't you collect this other information, why didn't you get some information on this point or that point; what's a good reason? And I think all in all we had a very good intelligence section.

Q: Perhaps a comparison between the intelligence you received at FMFPac and the intelligence you received as division commander was different. As division commander you were a tactical commander, an operational commander, and while at FMFPac you had to depend on CinCPac, for instance, or on the JICPOA, for intelligence.

Erskine: That's true. When we first went on to Pearl Harbor and took our staff out there -- which was pretty much of a skeleton staff at the time -- the intelligence we got through the Navy was practically of no use whatsoever to us. It dealt with things that were not of critical importance to the landing force. They had a series of monographs which had been made up by ~~the~~ ^{ONI} ~~ONI~~ ^{ONI}.

One of our problems that we presented at the Naval War College was on Saipan, and I presented the intelligence up there, and I had

a hell of a time finding even a decent map of Saipan. Well, we didn't have one at that time. Of course we had no amphibious tractors in those days. Well, we did have a few but we hadn't sold the concept that the amphibian tractor was one of the critical things that we needed in an amphibious landing, particularly out where you had areas surrounded by reefs.

Most of the information that I got from the Navy --, I remember so clearly, I felt so badly about it -- was these monographs, which had been made by certain naval officers who had gone out, and I think one or two Marine officers from time to time had written these things up. They dealt with the incidence of disease, mainly gonorrhea, syphilis, the number of whorehouses in the town or on the island, and things like that. I remember on the island of Saipan in particular they showed one heavy gun on top of Mount Tapotchau, and this thing was kept in a safe that was double locked and everything, and they didn't even want me to take a look at it.

Well, if you studied even the hachured maps, you could figure that a big gun on top of Mount Tapotchau wouldn't be able to hit a boat or a ship within possibly five miles of the beach because it couldn't depress; if you depressed it that low it'd jump off its barbette. And when we got there there was no gun up there. And there had never been a gun there. And I doubt that any of these people who wrote this report ever went up to the top of Mount Tapotchau, because the Japanese kept them pretty well restricted when they were in those areas.

Q: I don't think they ever went there -- any Americans, I mean.

Erskine: Yes, a couple had been there. At least they claimed they had been there. Then there was another battery of -- supposedly I think -- 8 inch guns down at Nafutan Point shown on these records. Well, we got there and they did have ~~xxx~~ a battery there, but I doubt that this battery was there when this report was written because the Japs were still in the process of installing some heavy guns, and this looked like a fairly new installation on Nafutan Point.

When we first went out to Pearl Harbor we had a serious deficiency of intelligence. I don't know whether it was JICPOA or the other command in Pearl Harbor, but we complained so bitterly about this that they got busy and they made a lot of photographs of areas that we were going to. Some of these photographs were in color and they were excellent, ^{because} they showed up the reefs much better than the ~~xxxxxx~~ black-and-white. And one of the greatest things they did, I think, was to put an ~~an~~ Army officer in charge of this intelligence. His name was Brig. Gen. Twitty, and in my mind he brought that outfit right up to strength as far as I was concerned because *he was oriented towards* the land operation more than the Navy. And he evidently satisfied the Navy because he had a choice organization there. He stayed on there quite a while, and I think he did a marvelous job. That was my impression.

Q: He was head of the Joint Intelligence Center, ~~xxxxxx~~ of the POA, Pacific Ocean Area.

Erskine: Yes.

Q: As a result of your revision of the intelligence course at the Schools, in the senior course, could you see that it bore any ~~fruit~~ fruit? You mentioned the fact that some of the senior officers . . .

Erskine: Of course I don't like to say that I was responsible for it, but I think it did. I'll give you an example of what happened to me. I was so concerned about this business that I decided that you didn't have to go to all these places to get the information, and when you went to a place, the average man -- unless he was really deeply interested in the subject -- didn't get the things and he had to be a good operations officer to know what the troops wanted and what the commander wanted.

I started out -- we had a school problem each year, and they tried to being in a new one. And I was told by the chief of staff of the school, who at that time was Col. Clapp, to pick out an island for a project problem, and to work up an intelligence study. And they had been fiddling with little islands and thinking in terms of reinforced regiments and things like that. So I picked out the island of Martinique, and everybody was shocked, "It's too big. The Marine Corps is not going to go in there and do this or that, and so forth." But I insisted that we try it anyway. There was not a map available in ^{ONI}~~G-2~~ on Martinique. When I asked why, they said, "That's one of our friendly countries, it's a French colony." I said, ~~X#~~ "Well, Goddamn it, you may fight the French some day." That was unbelievable in those days, and probably still is. So they had no information on Martinique, and I wrote to the Furness Line, which ran ships into Martinique, and told them that I was

contemplating a trip to Martinique, and would they tell me about this or that, could I take an automobile with me, what were the communications, were the roads good enough -- I asked a long series of questions, and I got pretty good answers back, and once in a while they'd send me a little folder. This started me off on quite a tack, and I worked sometimes until 2 o'clock in the morning, collecting data by writing to people. I'd get the name of some firm and I'd write them and ask if they had some kind of foolish thing like a certain kind of ~~xx~~ fish bait. When I finished with this study I had four drawer files full of data, and I had an opportunity to have some of that checked. But we still didn't have a good map. The Atlantic Fleet was having maneuvers down in the Caribbean, and some of our officers from the Schools were assigned to go on these maneuvers. And Col. Sam Woods -- I guess Sam was a major at that time -- had talked to me a lot about this project I was working on, and I asked Sam to see if he couldn't steal a map while he was down there of Martinique. I had gotten ^{ONT} ~~S&I~~ to write to Paris to see if they could find a map in Paris. They did finally get me an old chart, but it had ~~xxxxxx~~ hachured marks on it and topographical work for tactical operations.

So I gave Sam a rundown and he arranged with the skipper ~~xx~~ of his ship -- which was one of the battleships which was going in to Martinique to pay a call -- and the naval officers that went ashore were given an assignment to check out certain parts, maybe you follow this road up here and see how accurate this theater is; you go to this gas station and see how much gasoline they have, and so forth and so on. And everything I had in there --

and this represented a year or two years' work, ^{over} a year anyway -- was correct, except that I had made a mistake on the width of some of the roads: the roads were a little better than I had contemplated, just from writing letters.

I continued this thing. I remember when Adm. Robert was in charge, and they had this French carrier there with some planes, and ^{we} ~~he~~ got very excited over this. I was then chief of staff on the East Coast with Holland Smith at Quantico, with what was called the Amphibious Force Atlantic -- they changed the name of this command several times. One time they made it secret and tried to send us orders, and nobody knew who we were, and Adm. King did that one.

Q: And you worked for Adm. King.

Erskine: Oh yes, Adm. King was commander in chief of the fleet at that time. But before he was commander in chief of the fleet is when we had this trouble with Martinique, and Adm. Ellis was commander in chief of the fleet.

I wanted to tell you that Sam Woods bought a map off the post office walls -- just a small map, a topographic map -- for \$1.50. He brought it back to me and I gave him \$1.50, and I considered that to be my map, and that's the map that I used in making up the school studies. But I thought I would be smart and change some of the things, so that if anything did come up and the French found out about this thing, I'd be on the safe side.

I changed a lot of the hydrographic information, the depths of the water, the slant of the beaches, and things like that.

When this thing ^{first} came up, Gen. Holland Smith and I ~~thought~~ brought it up to New York; (At least he was ordered up and he took me with him) to go aboard the ship and talk to Adm. Ellis. They were thinking about landing a Marine brigade or some force in Martinique at that time.

Q: This had to be about '40-'41.

Erskine: Yes. However -- I am getting ~~my~~ ahead of myself here a little bit -- I kept on writing down there, and Bob Blake -- who had been one of the instructors at the school -- gave me the name of a Ford dealer in Martinique, ~~xxx~~ whom he had met some place. So I wrote to this Ford dealer -- I was getting pretty bold at that time -- and asked me to take me some pictures of certain beaches, my reason being that I wanted to bring my family down for a vacation, and I just wanted to select the beach, and I gave him certain locations, and each one was what I suspected to be a pretty fair landing beach.

When the letter got down to Martinique, this fellow was away, and I was not aware that he had a partner -- a native partner, and the native partner -- or a Frenchman, I am not sure which it was -- took it up to Adm. Robert. Adm. Robert went right back to Vichy with it. Vichy came right ^{to} ~~xxxxxx~~ our State Department. Our State Department went right to Secretary Knox of the Navy: he never said one damn word to me, he just wrote me a letter of

reprimand. They were all so furious that I should embarrass them by doing such a thing. Well, I had no compunction about gathering information. I don't give a damn where it is or who it is. You may need it sometimes. It turned out that right at this time we needed it.

So we arrived aboard the ship in New York. Adm. Ellis during our conversation asked me if this study -- he had a copy of our school study -- if the data in there was correct. I said No, some of it is incorrect. He said, "Why?" I told him my reason for changing it, and also to make a decent school program out of it. He said, "I want you to sit down and correct all of these things." I said, "I decline to do it." He said, "You mean you refuse an order from the commander in chief to make the corrections, and you know the corrections?" I said, "That is correct." And Holland Smith had apoplexy! He said, "What in hell do you mean?" I said, "I mean just that, I got a letter of reprimand for getting that stuff. You get the letter of reprimand off my record, and ~~xxx~~ I'll change it, and I'll change the map." They did. Now wasn't that a fast one?

Q: That's almost like Henry Stimson's old saying in the early 30s when he took over as Secretary of State, I guess it was, and abolished the State Department so-called Black Room ^{on that} "Gentlemen don't read other gentlemen's mail."

Erskine: That's right. I can tell you another story ^{on that} when we get further on.

So I made the corrections. Adm. Ellis was soon relieved and Adm. King took over. I remember when Adm. King took over, Holland Smith was again ordered that same morning to come up -- to get there before noon -- to Newport, to have a conference with Adm. King.

We got in a couple of observation planes.

Field Harris flew with Gen. Smith, and I flew in another plane. I forget the name of the pilot, I think it was an enlisted man. We got up to Quonset Point and landed in a field, a cow pasture. There was no place there to land at this time. Field did a good job of jumping over a fence and landing up there, and we got down to Quonset Point and we learned that the ship Adm. King was on, which was a cruiser, was out for some trials. So we got a boat in Quonset point and went out, and she was coming down the stream and they never stopped, they just slowed down a little bit and got the ladder over the side and said, "Climb aboard." We got on board, and there was Adm. King waiting for us; he seemed to be very nice. You know King was a pretty hard taskmaster.

Q: Oh yes, he was.

Erskine: He used to try to scare the hell out of people, but it never worried me! (laughs) Anyway we had a long conference. As I remember ~~there was~~ ^{there was} Adm. Lowe, who I believe was his operation officer, and Bill Riley was the Marine officer on board at that time. This was just before lunch. King laid it out on a chart and said, "We are going to land the brigade here and you are going to send up a regiment here and a regiment there, and a

regiment here, and so forth.* The 1st Marine Division had just been formed and had just about completed its organization down in Cuba at that time.

Q: That would be February-March of '41.

Erskine: Yes, around that time. I could see Holland Smith getting ready to explode. He drew himself up, and usually when he was real mad he would start breathing very heavily, and I could see it coming. He finally exploded at King and told him he was going to issue the orders and he would determine the scheme of maneuvers for any operation, that no admiral was going to give orders to the Marines and tell them how to go and fight. That was his job. And King said, "I am commander in chief of the fleet." And I noticed a junior officer starting to get out of the room, but I stayed in a corner and listened to this thing.

King made a statement at one time -- he said, "I'll have you relieved." He said, "Relieved or not, as long as I am in command I am going to command." He stood right up to old Adm. King.

By lunchtime I think King had realized that he'd gone too far on this thing. He and the old man were walking arm in arm on the quarterdeck.

But situations like this one happened many times, because King would try to take right over. He told Holland Smith, he said, "You know, I commanded // a regiment of midshipmen at the Naval Academy. When you question my ability to command ground forces, then . . ." The old of man sort of laughed and snickered.

I forget now what the reply was, but he gave him one that was quite appropriate to what he had said. But I heard King make that statement.

Q: I think later on -- we are getting ahead again -- when Kelly Turner tried to pull the same stuff on Vandegrift out at Guadalcanal, when Holcomb made his trip out, if you recall, and they had conferences at Noumea, the decision about the responsibility and assignment of the landing force commander of the post of the landing, the amphibious force commander, was pretty well ~~expressed~~ spelled out -- it went all the way up through Nimitz, to King, and then he endorsed it. This division, ~~xxxxxxx~~ according to FTP-167 and everything else, was to be observed. The amphibious force commander would command the amphibious force, and when the landing force had landed the landing force commander would take over.

Erskine: We had many arguments on that, even in the development of the doctrine down in the Marine Corps Schools. I also had many arguments with Kelly Turner, and I am one of the fellows whom think a hell of a lot of Kelly Turner. I think he was a wonderful admiral in every way. He may have had his faults, but nevertheless Kelly would make a decision: it might not be exactly what you wanted, but he'd make it, and I think that's one of the greatest accomplishments of a commander. Another thing -- Kelly didn't back off from a bad situation that I ever saw. I had lots of dealings with him, and he used to ~~xxxx~~ raise merry hell with me, and I'd not back off one inch. It usually ended up by us having a martini. That's the kind of guy he was.

He was a three star admiral when I was still a brigadier general. I remember one night -- I am getting ahead of myself -- we were having a hell of an argument over the command of the amtracs. The Navy was trying to take this over. Kelly called me up about 10 o'clock at night, and I thought he sounded a little tight. He didn't call Gen. Smith, he called me. He had a house -- one of the old houses -- in Pearl Harbor Navy Yard. And I went over and he had this operations plan (which hadn't been approved, but it was in the process of being completed) scattered all over, up the stairway, all around, all over the place.

Q: Was this for Tarawa?

Erskine: I think it was another place, but I don't remember. I think it was Saipan. So he said, "^{You are}~~Why are~~ the goddamn fellow who is causing all this trouble about the amtracs." I said, "Why do you think so?" He said, "By God, you just keep opposing it and you stand up, and you don't have to stand up and oppose it." I said, "If I oppose it, it doesn't matter whether I am standing or sitting, does it?" And we got in a hell of an argument, and he was pretty tight at the time. He said, "I am going to have you relieved." I said, "You may run a hell of a lot of people in the Navy, but you don't run anybody in the Marine Corps." That ended the discussion. Finally he said, "You have no damn reason in the world; those things are in the same category as boats and we command the boats and we should command the amtracs."

I said, "To hell with that, it's a tactical vehicle in my mind," and I still feel that it's a tactical vehicle. ~~Most~~ Most of our people call it a logistic vehicle. But what I wanted to see this amtrac do -- and I believe it's in the operations orders for Saipan -- was not to stop at the water's edge, but go as far as they could inland, even though we lost a good many of them. At least ^{to go} ~~by~~ by this defense zone if possible, then capture them from behind.

That was the intention, I know, for the 5th Division in Saipan.

Q: The first operation of the 5th was in Iwo, so it had to be either the 3rd or 4th.

Erskine: No, the 3rd wasn't there.

Q: Then the 2nd.

Erskine: (Pause) The 2nd Division Watson ~~was~~ had, and he was on the left. The Division on the right was . . .

Q: It had to be the 4th.

Erskine: Yes, I guess it was the 4th.

Q: Sure, it was the 4th.

Erskine: Anyway they got in on the water line, but they didn't get ~~as far~~ ⁱⁿ as I thought they could have gone. Some got beyond

a little railroad that was in there. I think they were more afraid of losing their amtracs than they were about getting across that reef. Well, that's a tossup decision, but I have always felt that if they had pushed a little harder we would have been in a much better position in the early phase of that operation. But we might have lost many amtracs on this deal.

Going back to Kelly Turner, the same old thing -- we had a fiery argument and it finally ended up with having a couple of drinks. But I really liked the old fellow, he was pretty good to me.

Q: ^{ONCE} ~~He~~ wants the Marine Corps ^{taught him} , * He and Harry Hill ^{were} ~~are~~ probably two of the leading amphibious force commanders in the Pacific.

Erskine: I was with Harry Hill on his ship on several operations. We had a few littl(e) arguments to start off with, but I have the greatest admiration for Harry Hill, and he was fine. Another man, whp was the chief of staff for Harry Hill was now Adm. Withington, who was commander, I think at that time. A very smart fellow, and he understood the amphibious game. But Harry was a little like Kelly in trying to take over. I usually would have an argument with him. I can give you an instance.

We were going to Saipan -- I guess it was -- to Tinian, and there were a lot of ships in Pearl Harbor, and it was only a few days before we were to sail. And Harry Hill invited me aboard his flagship (and I was going to sail with him on his flagship) to have lunch. I arrived, and there was Harry Schmidt and Tommy Watson.

They had been there, and I think Harry had been telling him how this amtrac deal was going to be handled. So I got up -- we'd had most of our lunch, I think we were at the main course -- and he brought it up to me, and he said, "We have decided that the Navy is going to command the amtracs." This little argument was still going. And I said, "Well, I think we have decided that the Marines are going to command those amtracs. They wear our uniform and goddamn it they are going to be . . ." -- this was right at lunch. No response from either Harry Schmidt or Tommy Watson. Harry thought he'd really give me a rough time over it and didn't know how the hell to do it. He said, "What are you going to do if they run out of gasoline while they are out there?" I said, "Hell, that's up to you, put a Bowser boat out there." "What do you know about Bowser boats?" I said, "I don't know anything about Bowser boats, but I know there is such a thing, and it can be done." And he said, "That will take the boats away from the troops that are going to land, and the troops can't land over this reef in a boat." "So use some of those boats as Bowser boats."

It finally ended up that they finally did that. But he was so damn nasty about it that I said, "Admiral, let me tell you something. I thought I was invited here for a friendly lunch. If you think you can use this kind of technique on me you are wrong." And with that I got up from the table. And mind you, I was still going to sail with him. By the time I reached the door he was over and had me by the arm and he changed his whole attitude, he put his arm around me and he said, "Come on and sit down. Goddamn it, we have good reasons for taking over the amtracs."

I said, "You don't, and that's it. I am getting the hell out of here, I am not going to eat with anybody that treats me this way. You don't push me around one goddamn bit, Harry, and get that through your nut." But our two good friends, the two Marine officers, never said one goddamn word in this whole thing.

But we went on, and we commanded the amtracs.

Q: You were on a first name basis with Harry Hill at this time?

Erskine: Oh yes. We were good friends. But you know, sometimes among your commanders you can get into some pretty vitriolic arguments.

Q: Oh yes. I must say for the record that you had quite a reputation for being hard-nosed. You stood right up there on your hind feet and would give as good as get.

Erskine: I guess I had two arguments with Adm. King, and after that I think I was pretty good to the old man. We had Edson's Raiders on some -- what the hell do they call those little destroyers?

Q: The APDs.

Erskine: The APDs. And Capt. Emmett was the commodore of this group, and they went down off North Carolina, and it was pretty rough weather as I remember, it was raining and they had a hell of a time. There were no facilities on these boats at that time.

Mr Well, they had facilities, but not sufficient facilities for even washing up or shaving or bathing, and they were short of bread, they werexx short of all kinds of things, and the sailors got the preference on anything that was there.

~~Emmett~~ They went through this training cycle and ~~xx xxxxxxxxx~~ came ashore in ^{Charleston} ~~Shower~~ and brought these people ashore. Holland Smith made a hell of a big squeak to Adm. King about this, and Adm. King sent Emmett down to make an investigation of these allegations. Holland Smith came to me and he said, "You go too, but you don't go with Emmett, you go by yourself."

I got a plane that afternoon and flew down there, and they had just come ashore, and those people had had a hell of a rough time. I went around and talked to them and everything. I think this was Friday. On Monday morning we went back to see King, and Adm. Emmett had put in a pretty rosy report for his Navy boss, they were just short of facilities, and Holland Smith said, "What the ~~hell~~ hell are you going to do about it? These people may be aboard for a month or two. And if in one week or ten days -- whatever the period was -- they had to put up with all of this, they won't be worth a damn when they get ashore."

Then they asked me for my report, and I gave them my report, which was 100% different from Adm. Emmett's. Emmett and I were about ready to ~~take off~~ ^{on each other} -- and King said, "Sit down. I don't want to hear anymore from either one of you."

And then King asked me to write him up a report on something. I wrote up the report, and in some place in it I made some mistake, I used the wrong designation, and I gave it to King -- it was on

one sheet of paper -- and he read it and he threw it at me, and he said, "That's wrong." "What's wrong?" He ~~was~~ pointed out what it was, and I said, "I don't think so, it's not wrong." I said, "But let me tell you something." I picked up the paper and I threw it back at him. "Don't ever throw anything at me. I don't take that kind of stuff from any man, whether he wears a uniform or not." King's face turned ^{so} damn red, he ~~pepped~~ ^{puffed} his cigarette and he said, "All right, sit down." (laughs)

I went back to the ship. And by God I was wrong, so I went down to see him, and told him. I said, "I apologize for giving you the wrong report, you were completely right, but don't throw any papers at me." And he laughed and he said, "Okay, okay." If you stood up to King, he liked it.

Another time, the Navy insisted that a transport group would be four ships, one for each battalion, plus a supply ship, an AK. And we were making a plan to go to the Azores, which I think was purely a cover plan.

Q: I think there were plans afoot because Oscar Brice had made a tour ~~with Juan Tripp~~ ^{with Juan Tripp} before we got into the war, and he was nearly arrested, he had some young Navy officer who spoke Portuguese, and ^{he and} Juan Tripp were coming through.

As a matter of fact that's where Jerry Thomas ^{and Jimmy Roosevelt} met him on the way back from their tour, so there was a plan at one time to take over the Azores. This was one of Kelly Turner's brain-
childs when he was in ^{the} war plans section.

Erskine: Yes. I can tell you some more about that.

Q: Okay, fine.

Erskine: I had been complaining -- take the old transport Lee. She was crazy, she would rock on one side a while, then rock on the other, and it wasn't big enough to take a battalion with all its equipment. And we had a number of other ships. We really had a variety of ships that were not sufficient, and I insisted on having another ship available. And I did make remarks, and I guess some of his staff officers told him that I was criticizing the commander in chief of the fleet. So one day I was in there. Actually I was then getting up an estimate of the situation, and King had an office there in the Main Navy. And I walked by his office one day, and I had gotten just beyond his office when a sailor came running down and stopped me and said, "The commander in chief wants to see you." That was Roosevelt at the time. "What the hell does he want to see me for?" And he said, "I don't know, sir." I said, "Where is the commander in chief?" He said, "Right down the hall." And I walked down there expecting to see Roosevelt, and here was King sitting behind a desk. If he had said commander in chief of the fleet, that would have been different.

I walked in and I said, "Admiral, you'd like to see me?" And he said, "Yes, come in." He pointed his finger at me and he said, "Erskine, I understand you've been criticizing some of my decisions." I said, "In what way?" He said, "About the organization of some of my naval units. And what the hell do you know about naval organization?" I said, "Well, I think I can speak as well as some other people about it. I've been around this outfit for quite a while. Specifically what organization have I been

Q: Chief of the War Plans Section -- CNO Office.

Erskine: Yes, War Plans Section. He and King were pretty much at dagger's points at that time too. And King had this group up there making an estimate of the situation for a number of plans. We were still in Quantico but we came up. I headed up the estimate of the situation for the Azores, I think it was.

Incidentally, ^{showing} ~~xxxxxx~~ this to King, I found out that if you drew him a diagram he got the picture right away, and you didn't have too much argument. I took a chart and drew most of the operations order out on this chart, and used conventional signs, which he was unfamiliar with. I showed this to him and I said, "This is practically everything, but it won't cover your communications, it won't cover logistics and other things, but this is your operation right here, on one chart." I explained that this sign was a battalion, this sign was something else, and this sign was something else, and while I was in there Kelly Turner came in to say something to him, and he said, "Look at that, Kelly. That is the whole operation, right there." Kelly looked at it and he said, "Doesn't mean a damn thing to me. You may run your fleet that way, but it doesn't mean anything to me." Then King said, "It's because you are ignorant and you can't read it." (laughter)

Q: Oh, beautiful! (laughs heartily)

Erskine: He said, "Well, what's that there?" "That's a battalion." "What is this?" "This is a company." King had just gotten his

briefing, you see! But he really told Kelly.

Q: In the War Plans Section at this time I think it was Peck, was it not?

Erskine: Either Peck or Pfeiffer. (Pause) I go back here to this Martinique thing.

Afterwards I found that this War Planning Section -- I always had difficulty with the planners that came out of Washington and the Navy. The war plan called for two destroyers, I think, with about 100 Marines on each destroyer to go down and take Martinique if we ever had to do it.

Q: And that's all?

Erskine: And what's the other little island? It slips my mind at the moment -- one destroyer over there, with 90-odd men on board.

Q: There were two islands, called St Pierre and Miquelon. They were up further north.

Erskine: That doesn't sound like either one to me. And Lord, how many hours I spent on that darn problem! But that's what they had. They got ready to carry those war plane out -- that's when we went up to see Adm. Ellis up in New York. Whoever had that fancy idea I am damned if I know.

Q: That came down from Roosevelt?

Erskine: No I don't think so. No, this brain trust right here in Washington did it, just like the Navy Intelligence monographs.

I think there were over 9,000 or 10,000 Senegalese troops on that island, pretty well equipped.

Q: They are good fighters.

Erskine: Yes, damn good fighters. What a disaster that would have been.

Q: The Marines who were in the War Plane Section -- Riley I think was very closely associated with both King and Nimitz. King first and later Nimitz, then of course Peck and Pfeiffer. And I think Nimmo was there for a while.

Erskine: Yes, I think so.

Q: And I don't know who else. Did they pretty much protect the interests of the Marine Corps? Silverthorn was up there.

Erskine: I would think Silver would. And Riley was a pretty darn well educated fellow. He was sort of a politician, though, there is no doubt about that. He was a good friend of mine, he was my ADC. He and I had our little problems from time to time. One one occasion, I had issued an order and he came in and say he didn't think ^{it} ~~he~~ ought to be issued, and ~~xxxxxx~~ ^{I said} "Well, you are a little bit late, it's issued, and you comply with it too, and that's that. I don't want to discuss it, the decision is made, Bill."

Session IV continuedTape 1, Side 2

Erskine: The problems were ^{usually set up} ~~xxxxxx~~ with two old battleships -- no new battleships -- old destroyers and maybe a couple or four APDs. This was the Navy concept at that time -- that's all the ships they could spare, and my thought was to hell with that, if we are going to land we need sufficient gunfire. And you could go back and look at the experience tables from World War I, of how much ammunition it takes in 75 millimeter shells to cut a path through about four bands of wire, ^{I think that it} actually something like 600 shells.

And you can convert that into ship's gunfire in a way. Of course ^{the} gunfire has different characteristics from artillery, but nevertheless the explosive charge can be converted to ^a fairly ^{accurate} ~~active~~ ^{degree.} ~~debris~~ ^(?)

When I took over the Operations Section of the Schools there I looked at this thing and I said, "The hell with this. If we are going to land they are going to make a major decision to land, and we are going to land a large force, whatever it's called, Fleet Marine Force now, and we'll have a hell of a lot more if we have war." I was harking back to World War I, where when I came in they had 17,500 troops, and I think we had some 90,000 before the war was over.

Q: Yes.

Erskine: And I envisioned the same thing to happen in a larger degree. So I put the whole Atlantic Fleet in my problems. By God,

if we are going to be in, we are going together. This is part of the Fleet, and the Fleet has got to support us, I said.

I was harassed by a lot of the instructors and even by the chief of staff of the school. "You think the Navy is ever going to do that?" I said, "If they don't and I have anything to do with it we are not going to land, and that's it. It's that way.

You can sit down and figure this out with pencil and paper, the fire power you'll need.

/If you don't get it, I am not going to put flesh and blood in there instead of steel."

I believe it was Arch ^{Howard} ~~XXXXX~~ who called me and said, "I don't think you are going to have anything to do with it anyway." I didn't think I would either, but I was trying to put what I felt was a sound idea into the concept of these problems. Well, by God, it ~~was~~ practically ended up that way, in World War II in the Pacific.

Q: Yessir, it did.

Erskine: You've got to have the fire power there, and you can figure out about what you need.

Q: You had a very big argument with another Marine -- with Holland Smith -- about naval gunfire about Tarawa, I understand.

Erskine: Yes. Well, in that case I didn't agree with the scheme of maneuver~~s~~. They wanted to go right in straight in a frontal attack, which they did, into Tarawa. My thought was that we should seize an island as an artillery base, because Tarawa as I remember was only about 6 or 7 feet -- maybe 9 feet -- elevation. With 5

inch shells you'd have to hit that island maybe 2000 yards ahead of the Marines in the front line, with a high velocity gun. That's no good for a landing operation. ^{With Naval} ~~They have~~ gunfire, if you have a hill to shoot at you, you can get pretty close support. But I wanted to land our artillery on one of the other islands, and ^{give} ~~put~~ our people in the front line enfiladed fire as close as possible, which could probably have been up to 75 yards in front of them.

Harry Hill was ^{so} one of the main people in this argument. ¹ Holland Smith voted me down, and I had so much to say about it they wouldn't let me go down on the operation.

Q: Was there any reaction afterwards?

Erskine: Well, on our next operation we did that, at Kwajalein.

Q: I understand there were no recriminations, that the after action and the special action report and so on proved that --

Well, this was one of the plus things that came out of the Tarewa operations -- the fact that the naval gunfire support was ~~not~~ ^{adequate} ~~(cross talk & cough)~~

They had ^{need of} greater naval gunfire support, and the nature of it -- what was it, neutralization versus pinpoint ^{fire}. I forget exactly.

Erskine: Concentration.

Q: Concentration. The ships did not provide adequate naval gunfire.

Erskine: Well, they can't raise to the gun or such,
^{unless}
~~unless~~ you have a slope, you are going up a hill, you take your 5 inch gun, and the big guns too. It's the same thing. They have such a high velocity that you have some elevation here if you are going to get close support for this front line.

At Kwajalein I brought this up to the Army. The 7th Army Division landed on Kwajalein Island, and they did this -- they landed all the artillery . . . they seized the first island, they landed the artillery and put it over there and then gave direct support to their troops.

Q: Just like we had in Saipan, where all Corps artillery went down to the southern part of the island and supported ^{the} Tinian operation.

Erskine: Yes.

Q: Of course Tarawa did not lend itself to a so-called rolling barrage provided by naval gunfire.

Erskine: No, the terrain was such that your gunfire was just ineffective. It wouldn't hit the island. By the time your front line got the beach they would be shooting over the island, unless they ~~went~~ ^{went} around and got an enfiladed position, which I think a few ships tried to do there. But I still think it would have been much better to have seized one of the small islands, they could have gone there in a very short time and had the artillery up and started the bombardment, say the first day. You didn't have to have a whole armada there. You

could have had a small task force, and so they could have been in a position where they had to give ^{these} ~~the~~ people direct support, I'd say within 75 yards of the front.

Q: Why was Holland Smith so adamant? After all he fought so many nose-to-nose, eyeball-to-eyeball fights.

Erskine: I don't know, I'll never know. The day of the landing I was in Pearl Harbor, and Adm. Nimitz invited me to lunch -- he knew about this. His operations officer was a Capt. Steele of the Navy.

Q: I think that's ^{Gen.} ~~Shepherd's~~ ^{son's} father-in-law.

Erskine: No. This is Steele; his wife is a sister of a big beer man on the West Coast. Coors.

Q: That's right, I've met him at the Army & Navy Club.

Erskine: At this luncheon I sat on Adm. Nimitz's right, and Steele sat on his left, and there were several other officers there whose names slip my mind now. We had about finished our meal, and Steele looked at me and he said, "I guess you'll be satisfied when the Navy blows the goddamn island away down there in Tarawa, and wastes all the ammunition, all the effort and everything. I just don't understand why you insist on so much fire power and so much help to get them ashore. All they did is just walk ashore there." And I told Steele he didn't know a goddamn thing about it, and Nimitz said,

"Look, you two fellows wait till afterwards and get outside." You see, we ^{were} ~~are~~ having lunch."

The battle was over. Steele was relieved too and assigned to either the West Virginia or the Indianapolis, or the Indiana, was it?

Anyway, it wasn't very long before he distinguished himself by colliding those two ships right into each other at sea. And Steele was relieved again.

Q: He is retired. He lives here.

Erskine: Yes. He used to have a 25,000 dollar a year job here, representing some company, I forget which. I have seen him a number of times here, but I've never mentioned this discussion to him again.

Q: He is the uncle of Shepherd's wife. ^{Hee} His father was the admiral.

Erskine: Shepherd's father-in-law lives right over here near Wyoming Avenue, and it's not Steele. What the hell is his name? I know him very well, too.

Q: Beau is the oldest one; That's Lemaul Shepherd, Jr.
The young one is ^DD. That's the one.

Erskine: Oh. Oh. (Pause)

Q: What was Gen. Smith's reaction after the Tarawa operation? Because there had to be a lot of soul searching on this whole business.

Erskine: I never ~~re~~ brought it up to him. You don't do any good by .

Q: I know that. *you didn't*

Erskine: When I suggested it to the Army they picked it up right away -- to take this island first in making their plan. He didn't say anything. I don't think you gain anything. I think ^{that people} all you do is open old wounds.

Q: I am sure that this was the size of the man, that there was no cause for recrimination or hard feelings. The fact that you were with him after Tarawa for a while . . .

Erskine: We had our problems once in a while, personal things. And I lived with it. Sometimes he'd get mad at me and wouldn't speak to me for three or four days, and we'd eat breakfast right across the table! I would do things and not tell him -- not deliberately, but I'd forget, I was busy and I didn't have time to tell him, and when he'd find it out he'd give me hell, and I'd say, "As commanding general you ought to be thinking about something else. I am running this outfit, and you think about the next operation and keep the outfit out of trouble. You look after the politics and do things like that. I know how to run this outfit and I am going to run it as long as I am chief of staff." On at least two occasions he said, "All ~~right~~ right, you are fired!"

Q: You fired a couple of people in your time also.

Erskine: And I'd go and get my gear and go in and say, "Where am I ~~supposed~~ supposed to report?" He'd say, "go back to work. Goddamn! you know I don't mean that. We were really close friends, but these little things would come up and he'd get mad. ~~2M~~ He was under strain all the time. He had to fend off the Navy. I told him, "Your job is to fend the Navy~~x~~ off, and keep these people out of my backyard. I can handle all the internal affairs." I think he felt more or less the same way. I don't think I did a ~~very good~~ ^{perfect} job, ~~but~~ ^{by a helluva shot.}

Q: I don't think many people would agree with you on that, General. I think the success of the Marines in the Pacific is ample testimony to the kind of job you and Gen. Smith did do.

Erskine: But we had to fight the Navy, I would say, almost as much as we did the Japanese to get what we considered to be our rights. I didn't realize that the same situation was going to come up in our country today.

Q: I don't want to get too far into that, because I want to go back to the Schools. I want to ask you a little bit more about Adm. King, about the relationship, what kind of person he was. You've given a touchdown of your relations.

Erskine: I thought Adm. King was a brilliant man myself. We was a very hard taskmaster. I think you had to stand up to King. I don't think, although he had some fellows around him ~~xxxxxx~~ who I thought were yes-men from time to time, as a rule King tried you out the first time he met you, and then afterwards if he thought you were

weakening he'd give you a push, and if you came back and stood up to him and you had a reasonable answer, King was all for it. I liked him very much after I got to know him. He came out to Saipan when we had this -- Army officer relieved.

Q: Yes, ^{Ralph}~~xxxx~~ Smith.

Erskine: Yes, I knew Ralph quite well. He ^[KING] came over and came ashore, then he talked to Gen. Smith a while and then he came out and said, "Come and take a ^{walk}~~look~~ with me." And we walked out there and he put his arm around me and he said, "Goddamn it, keep on arguing. Things are going all right."

Q: That's the kind of man he was.

Erskine: I was very fond of King. There is one thing -- I had ~~a~~ confidence in this man; if he decided to do something, he was going to do it, and ~~xxx~~ he was not afraid; he was not afraid of a decision. As I say he was a hard taskmaster. He could give you a directive in one paragraph that was the most all embracing directive I have ever read; it'd cover almost everything. He was a master at that sort of thing.

Q: I think you probably read Walter Muir Whitehill's ^{book}~~xxxx~~, The Admiral King Story.

Erskine: No, I haven't.

Q: Capt. Whitehill, I guess. ^{He} is a scholar. He was with King for quite a while.

He indicates that most of the people he had around him and who worked for him, whom he trusted, were the same kind of people whom he ^{had} detested and who stood up to him. As a result he had a very tight ship and a very . . .

Erskine: I think you almost have to do that when you have a job like commander in chief of the fleet or commander in chief of anything.

Q: What about the relationship -- of course this is funny, this has been remarked about, he called himself CominCh, or commander in chief, which more or less took the prerogative, the title away from President Roosevelt. But he was in a sort of incongruous position in the sense that here he was, commander in chief of the fleet, the senior naval officer, and yet Adm. Leahy, who was the chief of staff to the President . . .

Erskine: The chief of staff to the President was not in the naval chain of command. He was just a ~~staff~~ staff officer for the President and the White House. But he couldn't issue orders to anybody. He could recommend that Roosevelt issue orders, but he was not in the chain of command.

Q: But of course Roosevelt was naval minded, much like Churchill, a former naval person, and didn't he have any inclination to dabble with naval affairs, military affairs?

Erskine: I never saw it. I never noticed that. I think Roosevelt was smart enough to leave the immediate decisions to the commanders. He I believe liked to look at it in a grand strategy viewpoint and let somebody else work out the details.

Q: One thing I've been trying to pinpoint -- and I haven't been too successful, although I think there is enough circumstantial evidence there to indicate ~~kw~~ what the answer might be -- the formation of the raiders, the raider concept, (Of course Evans Carlson was a protagonist, he was always for it, and his relationship with President Roosevelt was always ^{filled with} hints and tips and recommendations) may have been the thing which moved President Roosevelt to say, "Well, let's form some Marine raiders."

Erskine: It could be. I don't know. Of course Carlson was very close to Jimmy Roosevelt, and Jimmy Roosevelt was in Carlson's battalion, I guess the executive officer.

Q: Yes, he was.

Erskine: And of course that's a pretty close link to the White House right there.

Q: I think Carlson had been the commander or the executive officer of the Guard down at the Little White House in Warm Springs, Georgia, where he got to know the President.

Erskine: I don't know, but I knew Carlson in Peking. He was a 1st lieutenant at that time over there and he was adjutant to Col. Rixey who was in command in Peking.

Q: Now getting back to the Marine Corps Schools again, who were some of the other instructors there?

Erskine: Joe Smith was in my section; Hogaboom.

Q: Which one is that, Bobby?

Erskine: Bobby Hogaboom. Oh gosh, it's hard to remember.

Q: Shoup?

Erskine: Yes, Shoup. I brought in the Intelligence Section there with me, and Shoup turned out to be an excellent speaker. Beecher.

Q: Oh yes, he was a POW during the war.

Erskine: A POW in Shanghai. (Pause) Emmett Betts. For a while Arnold Jacobsen was in the Schools there.

Q: He was the personnel expert, was he not?

Erskine: No, he was logistics.

Q: Who had the F-3 section? Was Jerry Thomas there at this time?

Erskine: ~~At~~ No. Noble had the F-3 section before I took it over. I had it I believe only two years. Noble was there ^{for} one year after I came to the Schools, and then I relieved Noble.

Q: At this time the Landing Force Manual, the amphibious doctrine had been written, and been experimented. The Fleet Marine Force had been formed, although the Marine Corps was finding it very difficult to man the FMF up to full strength. This was just before the defense battalion concept came into being. I believe Charlie Barrett was the one who really pushed that.

I believe that ~~at~~ this time also was a period of fleet landing exercises employing this doctrine. Am I right, General?

Erskine: You are right. And another very important thing, it was a period in which they were developing the landing boats.

Q: Were you involved with this development at all?

Erskine: To a degree, when I was chief of staff of the Atlantic Amphibious Force, I think it was called at that time, and ~~Brute~~ Brute Krulak ~~was~~ was a member of our staff, and Brute was the man what really did most of the leg work and a lot of the thinking too on the boats. We had as you know the old Navy motor sailers when we started out, and they were pretty poor. One operation we had down at New River -- we had just taken over New River at that time, ^{it became} ~~in~~ Camp Lejeune -- we had part of the Army 1st Division with us down there, and we had, I think, the Mt Vernon, ~~which~~ was a sailing

ship, she could carry I think around 2000 or more men ~~and~~ but only equipment enough for one battalion, that is arms and so forth, artillery. And she was pretty weak in the ~~booms~~ ^{booms} and couldn't handle very heavy loads. Of course she hadn't been assigned to transport ^{duty} very long, and she was not fitted -- as a matter of fact none of our ships at that time were really fitted out for real honest-to-God assault transports. And I know that the old motor sailers, they'd go in and approach the beach, and they'd always drop an anchor to stern. In one period in this operation we lost so many anchors we had to call off the operation and let the troops on the beach, go out and swim and dive and retrieve the anchors. That's how hard up we were. And each man who retrieved an anchor got a carton of cigarettes. I remember that quite well. That's how hard up we were.

Q: This business about the booms on the transports related to the Mt. Vernon -- as I recall the Marine Corps at this time, in the development of weapons specifically designed for amphibious operations, was working on the Marmon-Harrington tank. And again as I recall they were trying to get Marmon-Harrington to reduce the weight to conform to the boom strength of the transports, which according to the information someone at Headquarters had was five tons. It later turned out that the boom strength of these transports -- so I have been told -- was actually 15 tons.

Erskine: I am not sure of that, but they couldn't lift much weight. We had quite a problem. We took over the first two real assault ships on the East Coast here, the ~~Marmon-Harrington~~ McCawley and -- what was the other one?

Q: Of course the Henderson was World War I. The Neville?

Erskine: No. We took two ships over from one of the steamship lines, and they were made assault transports, and they had very weak lifting gear. I remember this because I was an instructor in the Marine Corps Schools -- to go back to the Marmon-Harrington tanks -- and they had an equipment board down at Quantico which Gen. Holland Smith was the president of at the time. They called me over one day as a witness to give my opinion on what kind of tanks we needed in the Marine Corps. I think at that time they only had four of these little tanks, ~~which~~ ^{which} were just paper shells; they weren't tanks in my mind at all. And they named each one of these tanks for one of the Canadian quadruplets I forget their names.

Q: The Dionne quintuplets.

Erskine: Quintuplets. Then I ~~guess~~ guess we must have had five. We had a tank for each one. I took one look at those things and I said, "This is no damn good." I remember Col. Moses was also a member of this board. Mink Moses. And they asked me what sort of tank -- I was then running the Operations Section of the Schools -- I thought the Marine Corps should have. I said, "Well, you've got to have one that's got to survive. What we have now I wouldn't take into battle, they are not fit for that." Then Holland Smith hit the sky and he said, "You know we spent a half a million dollars for those things." As I remember that was the figure. I said, "It doesn't make any difference, they are no good for combat." "Well, what do you think?" I said, "Let's take the Army tank", the

one we had at that time which had a 75 millimeter gun on it.

Q: The M-3?

Erskine: I don't remember the number. It had a 75 millimeter gun. Then they hit the ceiling, "Don't you know that transports can't hoist ~~xxxx~~ them aboard?" I said, "That's not the problem, get transports that can, or put hoisting gear there so they can lift them. You need so much equipment and manpower to fight a successful battle, and that's the only kind of battle we want to fight. And that is the best tank for us today." I hadn't been very long out of Leavenworth, and of course they thought I was influenced by the Army, and of course I probably was. But I couldn't see those other tanks. I thought it was just killing yourself.

I think they had most of the tanks armed against 30 caliber fire, but that's about all. But even then it was too light.

We finally had some tanks that had 75 millimeter guns on them. I think they were the first ones in Army style. I'll tell you, it ~~xxx~~ took an awful lot of fighting and much heartache in those days to get people to understand they wanted to do something with nothing. They'd figure up the cost for these things, and the Marine Corps doesn't have that much money. ~~xxxxxxx~~ ^{Well, I said, "we might} ~~as well~~ go out of business."

But this is a different thing now. When I made inspections, any time I could tear a man's canteen off with my hands -- and I have a pretty good grip -- it was no damn good, and I used to deliberately go along and tear them off and throw them down, and the quartermaster would follow cringing and I'd say, "You get these

people some good equipment." "But that's all we have, goddamn it."

"Get these people some equipment! I'll tear off every bit of it.

Anything I can break with my hands is no damn good in battle."

Well, pretty soon we had pretty good equipment.

Q: What do you think it was, a frame of mind?

Erskine: It was a frame of mind. Just a frame of mind. I suppose it's the same thing today. A lot of the senior officers, if you are not actively engaged in this kind of thing, you^{'d} just get an opinion in your head that was good enough, and why spend all of this money, and they don't keep their minds open, like going to the moon after you go around the world, improving everything. However, today I don't think ~~there is the~~ ^{that this} same complex ^{pervades the} ~~for~~ major services.

Q: Was there a fear on the part of certain Marines of making waves or rocking the boat?

^{well,} Erskine: It could be ^{now.} We had a task force set up to go to the Azores. It consisted of the 1st Division Army and the 1st Division Marine Corps, and we had an anti-aircraft artillery brigade of the Army also attached. I made the study and wrote the order for this thing, as chief of staff. I made the estimate, and I was telling you about talking to King, and King had his little fun over the conventional signs. In making up our requirements for ammunition, I asked for 10 units of fire for the anti-aircraft. The thought at that time was that Hitler might seize a base there and from there

bomb New York and probably some other place in the country, and ^{that} ~~was~~ the idea ^{that} was given to us as to why we were making this plan. We had the Army in on this thing too.

I went to Headquarters Marine Corps one day. My dear friend Vandegrift I believe was assistant commandant at the time. And I walked in and he said, "Hey, come here, I want to ask you something." I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "You mean to tell me that you are serious when you ask for 10 units of fire for this anti-aircraft battalion?" I said, "Absolutely, and probably another 10 in reserve. It depends on how long this brigade is going to be there." He said, "Do you know how much ammunition that is?" I said, "I can tell you to the round. I know exactly." He said, "Don't you ~~xxxxxx~~ know there is not enough brass in the United States to make that much ammunition?" I said, "Well, we'd better stay home then, if ~~xxxxx~~ we haven't got enough brass for that. And if you haven't got enough brass to ask for what you need, you'd better stay home too."

Q: What was his reaction to that?

Erskine: Ha! He was ready to throw me out, but he didn't. I had been ~~xxxxxx~~ ^{his} exec a long time before, and I'd known him for a long while.

I often laughed to myself about it. Another time I went in. It was the day when we were getting shoulder patches. Actually we only had one division under our control -- the 1st Division at that time. And we had designed -- I had a little to do with it, but somebody else came up with this amphibious patch for the 5th Corps,

which is an alligator head with three stars on it. The first time I went to Headquarters Marine Corps when Vandegrift was there, he looked and said, "Turn around and let me look at that." He looked at it and he said, "Do you have any hallucinations that we are ~~w~~ ever going to have a three star organization or a three star general in the field?" I said, "I certainly think so, it won't be long. We got to have them. This is a big war, Vandy, it's not a little thing. Forget the regiment and start thinking now that this is a corps. The Army comes in and we've got two divisions -- that's a corps, plus all the ancillary troops that ^{have} ~~got~~ to be in there." Those who didn't go to Army schools didn't realize how much of these ~~xx~~ supporting troops you have to have after you have the combat unit, like signalmen.

Q: Of course the Army always overdid it, as far as support, *troops went.*

Erskine: The Army overdid it, and I have always sort of felt ~~that~~ they overdo their staff and their staff work. But when you get out into combat and you start losing a few of these guys, you should have enough to go through -- the sustaining power. It's more than you need for a little operation, but it's always damn handy to have when you need it. Just because you ended up with something left doesn't mean you had too much to begin with. The ability to continue in action after you have suffered casualties is what's important. Our people got that into their head too, finally, particularly with reference to personnel.

Q: Anyway Vandegrift saw that patch -- that 5th Corps patch.

Erskine: Yes, he saw it, that's why he was ribbing me. "Do you think you are doing to make Holland Smith a three star general?" I said, "Sooner or later. I'll make you a bet."

Q: Was this when he was still assistant commandant before he took over the division?

Erskine: Then he went down as assistant division commander to Torrey.

Q: Yes, Phil Torrey. But your patch was designed before Twining designed the 1st Division patch? I guess it must have been.

Erskine: I don't know. I don't really know.

Q: I know that the 1st Division patch was designed on Vandegrift's way to Australia, after Guadalcanal.

Erskine: Was it? Maybe it was later. No, it couldn't have been. But I know I was right down here in Headquarters Marine Corps. After that Vandy went down to be ADC to Torrey, and when Torrey was relieved, I was sitting in -- we had these old combat cars in those days, a few of those things around, instead of the jeeps -- in the combat car when Gen. Smith sent for Vandegrift, he was out with the troops, and we drove out there, and Gen. Smith told Vandegrift he was going to assign him as division commander. Vandy

could hardly believe it! (laughs)

Q: Oh really? While we are on the subject, would you care to discuss the circumstances surrounding the relief of Torrey as division commander?

Erskine: (Pause) It's pretty hazy in my mind now, and I'd hate to make remarks about it because as I say it's hazy, and I don't want to be unfair or unjust. But Torrey and Gen. Smith didn't seem to get along together very well. And I really think the concept of a division ^{was} a little bigger than Torrey could really understand, and that is a modern outfit and how to run it. He ~~he~~ was a man who had always been meticulous in his administrative work and things like that, but I think it was just beyond his real comprehension. At least the way Holland Smith wanted it to operate. I am certain on that point. Torrey would frequently half carry out orders of Gen. Smith, and as a matter of fact I think he sort of felt that he had more drag in Washington than Holland Smith had, and that was an important factor in those days. Torrey and I didn't get along either: he ~~thought~~ thought I was a young upstart who was putting Smith up to a lot of these things. (laughs softly)

Q: Did Holland Smith make these decisions independently?

Erskine: I think so, but I think he talked to Gen. Holcomb first. I think he talked it over with Gen. Holcomb before it was finally settled.

Q: Did the del Valle-Torrey incident bring this to a head?

Erskine: It came along close to that time. I was in Martinique I think, somewhere. I forget exactly what it was now. But I know I was down at *New River* when Pete had just been over some place to a meeting and he'd gotten up and sounded ~~up~~ off on what he thought about certain things. I don't know what really transpired. I don't remember now, but I know Gen. Smith sent me to see Pete. Pete was out with the artillery at that time, and I drove out there and talked to him, and I told him he had better lay off this kind of stuff. I said, "You've got enough to do training this artillery here, and you'd better stick to that for a little bit." Pete was very senior to me, and he said, "Are you speaking as my junior or as my senior?" "I am speaking as chief of staff. That covers a big field. I just think you are going to get hurt badly if you don't . . . And I am also speaking as a friend." I think that was the reason for this trouble between del Valle and Torrey -- wasn't it?

Q: Well -- Let me turn this off for a minute, and then you can decide whether or not you ^{want to put this on tape.} / (turns machine off)

You were telling me about talking to Gen. del Valle about this matter, and he asked you whether you came to him as senior or . . .

Erskine: Yes. He was kidding me, you know. Pete and I have been good friends for a long time, I knew him well.

Q: It's an interesting point, because I think Gen. ~~Smith~~ Thomas brought this up -- the role of the chief of staff vis-à-vis the

the regimental commanders. If you have a chief of staff who is a senior to the regimental commanders, I guess he is going to try to run the division to the point where the regimental commanders can't get to see the commanding general. But if you have a chief of staff ^{who} ~~xxx~~ is junior, and you don't load up the staff with all the senior officers, you don't have, say, a G-1 or G-2 who is senior to any of the regimental commanders, the regimental commanders who are really fighting the division commander's battle have complete, direct entrée, if need be, to the commanding general.

Erskine: ~~xxx~~ I always felt they should, but I'd like to know what they are going to talk about first. I was always junior to all the division commanders, and I never had any problem on this thing at all. At least I don't remember ever having any difficulty on it.

Q: ~~Erskine~~: Maybe later when we get to talk about FMFPac, there may have been a little wheeling and dealing as far as reliefs went and so on. I think Holland Smith and Gen. Vandegrift when he was commandant stopped it -- if you are going to relieve someone ~~xxx~~ it's . . .

Erskine: I have to go now.

Q: We'll end this session then. I think we are going to have to go back to Quantico, General. But this has been a very outstanding session, I think, and I thank you for speaking frankly, because the matters you spoke of, there is no documentation on them, and they

are very valuable.

Erskine: I appreciate your prompting me, because my memory is pretty dim now on these things. I don't remember the details, and I should remember the details on that del Valle thing because Holland Smith was . . .

Vandy at that time was ADC, wasn't he?

Q: No, he had not come down yet.

Erskine: This is another occasion.

Q: This came just after the division landed at New River, and took over New River. Then del Valle was up there, and then Gen. Holcomb sent Vandegrift down, and I think Stover Keyser had been made assistant commandant and relieved Vandegrift.

Erskine: Uh uh.

Q: Thank you very much, sir.

Erskine: I think I am free next Wednesday.

End of Side 2, Tape 1, Session IV. End of Session IV.

Session V - 5 November 1969

Tape 1, Side 1

Q: We went a little further ahead of ourselves last time, and I wanted to continue on with your tour at the Senior School. You were chief of the F-1 and F-2 sections and finally the F-3 section in the senior course.

Erskine: Yes.

Q: It seems to me that at this time all of the early initial studies on amphibious warfare technique and doctrine were being collated there. There had been enough of the fleet landing exercises -- flexes -- perhaps by now, with experiments on the West Coast, the West Coast Expeditionary Force, the FMF out there, and perhaps on the East Coast down at Vieques, to indicate what some of the problems were.

Erskine: Yes. That was one of the important things that we were doing in the Schools at that time. I don't know that any one person could take credit for developing the various techniques that we finally came out with, because many people were involved in it.

One of our great problems in that particular period was having a suitable landing boat. We had a boat board, and the boat board had come up with various types of boats that they had seen, but we had nothing resembling the ramp bow. Matter of fact that was thought

to be more or less impossible by members of the board, I think.

But Mr. Higgins down in New Orleans came up with a ramp bow boat, and he brought it up to New River -- this was after I'd left the Schools -- and ran some tests with it. At that time we had to land our artillery by towing a boat that had no engine in it, it had a couple of what you might call tin planks to get the artillery off with. But we were absolutely up against it to carry a tank of any size and get it ashore. So Higgins in his peculiar way finally built a tank lighter, which was ~~an~~ also of the ramp type, and brought it up and tested it. I remember one of the tests -- which I didn't attend -- was conducted down in the Norfolk area. They loaded an artillery piece on one of the Navy type designs (the ones that were towed), and Higgins put the tank in his ramp bow boat, and it was a pretty rough day, and they started to cross the Bay there, and we were minus one tank when they got to the other side, plus one boat. But Higgins' tank lighter negotiated the crossing in excellent manner. That was proof that sort of got us by this boat board in Washington, that maybe they didn't know everything in the Navy Department about boating and sea.

Q: This was one of the problems, was it not, in the development of amphibious warfare techniques and doctrine -- the fact that the Navy had a correlated responsibility for developing the landing craft and the transports to carry amphibious assault forces, and they weren't doing enough of it.

Erskine: They didn't have the concept of getting the Marines ashore, the same concept that we had.

We had to land with unit integrity and be able to fight from the moment we went ashore. They expected us at that time to carry very light equipment, so that we could jump out of this old motor sealer type boats and run ashore. But we had a different concept. In order to fight there was a certain type and a certain amount of equipment that we needed if we were going to be successful. The day of the Banana Wars was over in the concept of most Marine, I think, and we had to have modern equipment, and we had to have modern ships, the ships had to have hoisting gear that could hoist the boats aboard, and lower the boats, and hoist all of our heavy equipment and put it in the holds. They didn't have it in those days, and it was pretty hard, they'd think about how much money it's going to cost. Well, one of our answers to that was always how much is your freedom worth. You can't be penny-wise on this kind of stuff, we've got to have it. And a few naval officers finally got the idea. When they found out that they were going to be involved in this thing it was a little different story -- and involved in a big way. We had any number of types of boats tested, but we ended up with the ramp bow boat as our standard landing boat.

Q: By this time -- '38-'39 -- the planners and thinkers down at Quantico, and of course in FTP-167, had pretty well lined up what the conduct of moving ashore was going to be. Intelligence -- well, you built this up; there was a greater awareness of the type of intelligence, estimate of the situation, and of course we had the 5-paragraph operation order. But there were certain ancillary problems, were there not, such as logistics, which remained a constant problem throughout the war.

Erskine: Yes. Logistics was always a problem. But we learned a great deal before we actually got into the war. But we had other problems. Many of the areas that we probably would be assigned to had coral reefs, and the ramp bow boat was not the answer to the coral reef. So we were at the same time working on the amphibian tractor, and a great deal of money was spent on the research and so forth.

Another thing we needed was waterproofing of vehicles. Brute Krulik I think played a great part in developing that. I remember while we were down at Quantico with the Amphibious Corps Headquarters, Brute took a jeep out and ~~with~~ ^{with} improvise^d material he'd waterproof this jeep so that it could at least run out of a landing boat with water up over the seats in the jeep. We ran a number of experiments on that. I am not sure who actually conducted the final test on it, but we came up with pretty good waterproofing for the jeeps.

I also remember that we at Headquarters -- and I think Brute also had a hell of a time explaining to the quartermaster general of the Marine Corps why this jeep was ruined and who the hell authorized him to put it out there in salt water and put all these little attachments on it, and why did we want to have a jeep that would be amphibious in a way. Well, the answer to that ^{ONE} ~~was~~ ^{to} ~~one~~ get the damn things ashore. ~~xxxxxx~~

Q: Now this is another point, going back to '33 when the Fleet Marine Force was organized: you had enough of the oldtimers around in the Marine Corps who were opposed to it; they didn't have the

vision, they couldn't see what the future of the Marine Corps should be. And now you mention the Quartermaster, who I guess was Seth Williams at the time.

Erskine: I think it was.

Q: And he was constantly putting on the brakes, as I understand it, about many things.

Erskine: I think actually at that period of time the Quartermaster General sort of controlled the Marine Corps, because he ~~was~~ had achieved a position ~~where~~ where he was almost in ^{the TSAR} charge of the money that could be spent, and any idea that didn't fit ^{the Archaic thoughts} of some of these oldtimers was just out, that's all. It had to be an emergency. And even then there was quite a feeling among some of our senior officers that the Marine Corps should never go beyond an ACT -- a reinforced infantry regiment -- and that was about as big as we were going to be. I know I was kidded many times because of problems on the division level et cetera by these people. And the one thing that I often sort of laugh about now is that these * things actually came to pass -- I don't take credit for all of this, I was one of a number of people who were preaching this doctrine. But I have felt too that some of these oldtimers who wanted to keep this ACT concept going were a little bit afraid of the future, because they didn't think, ~~theyxxxxxxx~~ ~~theyxxxxxxx~~ they didn't have the confidence that they could do it. ^{be side lined.} And therefore they would ~~not~~ ~~for it.~~ I think that was part of it.

Q: Of course ~~a lot of good came~~. When war broke out, didn't this prove to be the case -- that the high command was beyond their capabilities?

Erskine: Yes. And of course you know how they made promotions in those days ^{and assigned people.} It would be pure heresy to put a young fellow over some of these people because they had to be tried out and they had to be relieved when they made a mistake. And some were. Some fell by the wayside physically and various other reasons.

Q: You were down there for a period of about three years, at Quantico. Was there anything outstanding during your tour in the Schools before you were transferred to the 5th Marines? I am ^{a lot of} ~~sure~~ things went on. It seems to me this was a period of ferment.

Erskine: I can't think of any particular event being outstanding. But I think we did manage to sort of get a more forward looking concept in the Schools doctrine, and I think there were improvements and progress, but I think that's sort of normal. Times were getting tense and people began to think a little bit more seriously about these things. But I can't think of any particular event at the moment that I would call outstanding.

Q: How was the stature and posture of the Marine Corps at this time?

Erskine: I don't remember the strength, but it was, I think, around 27,000 enlisted. I don't know the officers' strength.

Q: Was the Corps in good shape generally speaking?

Erskine: Yes, I think it was. Looking back on it, I think they had progressed a great deal since World War I, but I still didn't feel that we were up to what we had to be for World War II. And we were still fighting with the Navy to get the proper consideration for gunfire. One thing that we did develop in the Schools was a good theory on naval gunfire in support of the landing force. Of course it was tried out on a small scale each year. One of my great disappointments always was the fact that there was such great resistance to assigning sufficient naval gunfire to support a real landing. The Navy could not understand that. ^{Until} ~~xxxxxx~~ the *opposite* fleet was completely defeated, they felt that we got what was left over and mostly second rate stuff.

Q: They had to save the tubes for a surface engagement.

Erskine: Oh yes. Once the Navy got into it, though, they really gave us considerable cooperation, but that was long after the war had started, when they really found out what we had to have in order to be successful.

Q: Who were some of the great ^{proponents} ~~xxxxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxxxx~~ and experts in naval gunfire down at the Schools at this time?

Erskine: We usually had an artilleryman as a chief instructor. We had a naval officer as a liaison officer from the Navy Department

there in the Schools, who was sometimes considered to be the final authority on what the Navy would give and what the Navy wouldn't give, the types of ships that would be available. But I took all of that with a grain of salt; I figured when we got into a real mess we would have to have our nose blooded once or twice before people really got down to business. I think that showed up in Guadalcanal, and from that time on the Navy was perfectly willing.

Actually when we moved our Headquarters to the West Coast they set up a naval gunfire test over there, which we had recommended, and every ship that participated and would support a ship in an operation would have to pass a test which was given by the Marines. They set up our OP in San Clemente in a target area there, and ~~xxx~~ a lot of these ships didn't pass. The commander in chief -- who at that time was Adm. King -- had decided that they would pass, and many young captains of cruisers and destroyers got a little spanking from the boss man and had to run back through this course until it was satisfactory.

Q: Was it a hard job to persuade King that this had to be done?

Erskine: After King saw the facts there was no difficulty. He said, "If that's what we have to have, then we will do it. But remember one thing (and this was a watchword with King), we do the best we can with what we can." Which is still good advice. But that doesn't excuse the top level from providing sufficient equipment and sufficient personnel to take care of a problem. It's no use sacrificing talented men just because you don't have enough

force and enough equipment. To my mind that's murder.

Q: Of course at this time the equipment of the military services was pretty low.

Erskine: That's right.

Q: It was obsolete and there wasn't enough of it.

Erskine: But I thought always that this country had plenty of money and our industry was probably the greatest in the world, and all we had to do was decide what we wanted and design it, and industry could certainly produce it.

Q: What about aviation in your course of instruction? How did you figure the role of aviation?

Erskine: We had a chief aviator who was an instructor, a lieutenant colonel. I believe for the most part I was there it was Great Farrell, and he had several other aviators. We had at a certain period of time a lot of aviation, but they didn't get around much to the bombing side of aviation -- it was mostly CAP and reconnaissance, to protect our own area, and direct support. Of course our people were very strong on the dive bombing concept, which was the best thing going at that time. The Army Aviation didn't go in for that. They'd have a level flight and drop their bombs -- what they called saturation bombing. But ours was more of a precision type thing.

Our communications had to be improved to take care of all that, you see, and I think we had a pretty good team. But I doubt that it was as closely integrated as what we call our air-ground team today

Q: Of course aviation had been suffering from outmoded equipment. It didn't have modern equipment at this time.

Erskine: That's right. I've always looked upon the airplane as basically a means to carry a ^{projectile} ~~projectiles~~ from one place to another. But until about the time of World War II, it was a sort of a flying club. You could fly two missions, two hours a day was the maximum. And there was one plane and one pilot in the squadrons, and Geiger was the head of the 1st Wing at that time, and while I was chief of staff, in one of our exercises off New River I decided to prove my point that this group could not stand sustained combat with one pilot and one plane. So we had a number of exercises, and as fast as they would land I'd call them up for another one.

Pretty soon Geiger was yelling about his aviators being exhausted, and I said, "Goddamn it, didn't I tell you that this machine is here to carry these things, not for the pilot's own pleasure? This is what you are going to have in combat." I think after about three or four days the whole damn wing was grounded with exhaustion. I said, "That's the way war is going to be, boys."

So they got together and they had a big thing. I think finally they got about 1 and 3/4 pilots per plane, which was stepped up to 2 pilots or 2 1/2 pilots before the war was over.

Q: This has been a problem that exists down to this very day. There has always been this schism, this gulf between ground and air Marines. The aviators have always been unhappy that the ground officers ~~xxxxx~~ don't quite understand them, don't quite understand the problems, and the aviators have been a breed apart. ^{They} ~~it~~ almost can be called the wild blue yonder boys in a sense.

Now a number of your aviators like Great Farrell and Megee, and maybe Jerome and some of the others, had started out as ground officers, so they had an idea -- they had had infantry training. But some of these other people went right into aviation.

Erskine: I think that's correct, and I don't doubt but what it exists to a considerable degree even today. The old gravel cruncher down there would march maybe 20 miles a day with 40 pounds on his back, and he doesn't go out on a mission for two hours and get back here and get a steak and a good shot of rum. That's sort of been the feeling of the ground trooper. Of course I've been a ground trooper all along, but I think our aviators really have an easier life than the ground troops. However, when that boy is up there on his own he is simply there by himself in air combat, and I respect that -- it takes a hell of a lot of courage and a hell of a lot of good sense to survive there, and that's what we wanted, we wanted to survive, both the ground and the air.

Q: Now this conflict may get down to a more basic point, ~~as regards~~
 the proper role of aviation. I am sure most ground commanders
 believe that aviation is nothing more, nothing less than a supporting

arm, along with naval gunfire and artillery, whereas some of the aviators conceive of it as a separate arm.

Erskine: They do. Of course in addition to ground support you have reconnaissance, photography, and also air combat that they have to be prepared for. And I think it's proper that they should.

However, the Marine Corps had an advantage: we had a single commander of the landing force who commanded his aviation and the ground troops. It wasn't like the Army had at the time, where aviation was almost-- well, it was in a way -- a separate arm, and when they went in they had a separate command. In the Navy we could always call, but we had to request naval support, and we had to do that some period of time ahead of time before we could use it, because the overall Navy responsibility when we were at sea was the protection of the ships and so forth, in addition to any anti-submarine activity, and of course the movement to the beach. And ^{we} they weren't concerned too much about any support. The Navy aviators weren't trained to the degree that the Marine aviators were, and we never used them as close to our front lines as our Marines, because our Marines were especially trained for that particular type of work. The air combat was really a secondary role in the Marine Corps; we never had the better planes; it was always my impression that the Marines always got second rate planes.

Q: Of course they'd rely upon the Navy to provide these aircraft.

(Pause) The question I want to ask you here is that because Marine Aviation depended so heavily on the Navy for equipment, planes and

~~xxxx~~ stuff that was not peculiar to the Marine Corps, there was always a feeling -- at least among some people -- that Marine Aviation was too close in bed with the Navy, and that there was sort of a divided allegiance.

Erskine: I think that's true.

Q: How was that solved, if ever?

Erskine: Personally, when I had ^{the} Fleet Marine Force I never had too much trouble. I did have a little problem from time to time, because the Fleet would want to always keep a couple of our squadrons prepared to go on board a carrier, and they would from time to time set up a schedule ^{carrier} for training, and that was preceded of course by what they called bouncer training,ⁱⁿ which they'd come in and bounce off the field. There was a simulated landing, they'd draw white lines across the field to represent where they should land on a carrier, and they'd have to bounce in there at a certain speed, and then take off, come back and bounce. That was preliminary training. And then they went aboard ship for a period of time. And we always had at least one squadron on one of the carriers training. I can recollect ^{that} on at least one occasion one of our squadrons on board hadn't been properly trained, and I had been talking to the commander of the wing about this very thing for some time, and he assured me everything was all right, that I didn't have to worry about anything. Well, this squadron was sent aboard the ship -- I can't think of the admiral's name at

the moment. A big tall guy who was commander in chief out in the Pacific later. (Pause) Stump. And Stump, ^{happened to be} ~~having been~~ in command of this task force at the time, and they had a couple of crashes and ~~we~~ did a pretty bum job. So I called the commanding general of the 1st Wing in -- or was it the 2nd Wing?

Q: I think it was the 2nd Wing.

Erskine: The 2nd Wing.

Q: It wasn't Air FMFlant, was it?

Erskine: No. And I raised hell with him and he didn't improve, so pretty soon I said, "This thing is bigger than you, my friend, you are just relieved from command."

Q: I know who it is. From Kentucky. He's dead now.

Erskine: No, West Coast. I think he is still alive. Cushman.

Q: Oh. I thought it was Field Harris.

Erskine: No. Field got in a jam with me later when he was my deputy.

Q: He was relieved too.

Erskine: No, he wasn't relieved. I gave him a letter of reprimand.

Q: Was this T.J. Cushman?

Erskine: Yes, Tom Cushman.

Q: He lives out at Coronado.

Erskine: He is a good friend of mine; we used to go goose hunting together and everything like that. But I told Tom ^{"This} ~~this~~ hasn't a damn thing to do with the proficiency of your outfit, and you not only failed, but you threw some pretty damn bad ~~xx~~ reflection on Marine Corps Aviation, and if you can't improve it, and you are a little reticent about accepting any strong suggestions, I don't think you are fit to command it, and you are hereby relieved, right here, right now." And I must say that they ~~pkkad~~ perked up, and I didn't have that happen a second time.

Q: It was an embarrassment.

Erskine: It was.

Q: We'll get to that when we come to the point where you had FMF~~ant~~, because I think there are probably a lot of considerations that you were faced with during that period.

You became the executive officer of the 5th Marines at the end of May 1940. Had you been asked for, or was this just a routine assignment?

Erskine: Noble was in command of the regiment at that time, and he told me that he had asked that I be assigned to be his exec. That's all I know about how I happened to go there.

Q: Had you known Houston Noble before?

Erskine: Yes, I'd known him for years. We were lieutenants together.

Q: He was just a couple of numbers senior to you, then.

Erskine: Yes, he was senior to me. And we went down to Guantanamo for a period of training, which was finally ended up to where they organized the 1st Marine Division.

Q: I think the brigade was formed first down there.

Erskine: That's right, they had the brigade.

Q: Now, you and Houston Noble and several other of these people -- Gen. Shepherd and so on, Arthur Morton -- were lieutenants together. Was there seniority amongst lieutenants in these days?

Erskine: Oh yes.

Q: I am sure there was by the number, but I mean did you have the respect for a senior lieutenant? Was there rank amongst them?

Erskine: No, we had the same relationship we have today. Exactly the same relationship. Of course once in a while, after the selection was started, this didn't continue, because some of the people would be passed over and those who were selected went ahead of those who were passed over. But your relationship was the same then as it is now.

Q: There used to be the old saying that the degree of rank amongst lieutenants was like the degree of promiscuity or chastity amongst prostitutes, which I am sure you've heard!

Erskine: I've heard that. I think that interpreted would mean that there were some lieutenants that were more desirable than others.

Q: Well, I would interpret it to be that some lieutenants would pull rank on other lieutenants.

Erskine: Oh yes, that's happened!

Q: I mean, even though you say you were a lieutenant together, all of a sudden Houston Noble became senior to you by some numbers . .

Erskine: He'd always been senior to me; that was never a point of any friction between the two of us. As a matter of fact . . .

Q: No, I wasn't thinking of friction, I was thinking about the relationships -- you were still very close regardless of the fact

that you were a lieutenant colonel and he was a colonel.

Erskine: Yes. (Pause) We went to Guantanamo and we had quite a strenuous schedule down there. We had to practically build our camp. They gave us a place that had to be cleared off with bulldozers. There was a lot of coral. It was one of the most miserable damn camps I've ever been in. In order to pitch our tents -- you couldn't use a regular tent stake because the surface was so hard that your stakes would break; we had to use compressed air hammers to dig many of the holes to put the stakes in and to get them down. It was very dry and very dusty. We had a hell of a time.

Then some experts in the field -- I don't know whether they were in the B-4 Section or whether it was the medics, but I think the medics -- came up with a new type of latrine, which was built above ground, and as I remember there was a sort of a cement box with lids on top and holes in them, out in the open. And the idea was that they'd be burned out each day; we'd put in ^{strong} fuel oil and burn these things out. Well, that turned out to be pretty much of a flop, because the heat evaporated a lot of this excreta which was in there, and that went into the air and scattered it around, and pretty soon the whole damn camp smelled like a latrine.

Another thing I remember about that very clearly. We had an allowance for a couple of folding chairs for the Headquarters offices and the company office. Outside of that there wasn't a thing in God's ~~xxx~~ world for a Marine to sit on down there, and to me that was one of the greatest things, because when they had to go to the movies they sat on the ground; when they wanted to

sit down around their tents they sat on the ground, or sat on their bunk. Houston and I got together and we got engineers to make some cheap little canvas stools, which we issued. I don't think we ever did get enough to go around the whole regiment. But I supposed the sergeants all sat on the stools. But that was one of the things. Doesn't seem important, but I think it is an important piece of equipment. A guy has to sit down once in a while! And if it rains where is he going to sit?

Q: Who were your battalion commanders?

Erskine: I swear I don't believe I remember. Charlie Brooks had the 1st Battalion of the 5th, I remember him very well. I don't remember the other two battalion commanders who were there.

Q: Edson hadn't taken over a battalion yet?

Erskine: No, not at that time. I don't remember how long I was there -- I think four or five months, and I was made B-4 -- Brigade 4.

Q: Who had the Brigade at this time?

Erskine: Holland Smith. And Dave Brewster was chief of staff. And Dave Nimmer was B-3, I guess we call it.

Q: Yes.

Erskine: We had quite a time down there, getting our supplies straightened out. The system -- the so-called logistics -- was pretty well fouled up.

Q: Had Twining joined the 3 Section . . . No, I guess not, this was too early.

Erskine: No. Anyway, I spent a great deal of time trying to get things straightened out, and find out what we were supposed to have and what we did have. I was unfortunate enough to pick up some sort of rash, which eventually covered my whole body, and I lost all my fingernails. I didn't get on my face, it didn't do much damage there, but I was just peeling off. I made one exercise -- a landing exercise -- on Vieques, in which I had my pajamas on and I was covered with sulfa ointment, and the only thing that gave me any relief whatsoever was to lie in the sea water. Dr. Brown was the chief surgeon, and he made me do that for quite a while, and finally I developed a terrific cough and he thought I was about finished, so they sent me back home. I went to the Naval Hospital -- the old ~~Naval~~ Naval Hospital which ^{was} down here on E Street, which is now quarters occupied by senior people in the Navy Department -- and Dr. Hook was the surgeon there at that time, and he took me in hand and gave me X-ray treatments and cleared this thing up. After that was over I went back to Quantico, I guess, because I don't remember going back to Cuba, because they'd moved the Headquarters up to Quantico. Then I was made chief of staff.

Q: Were you the senior colonel?

Erskine: I was still a lieutenant colonel, I believe, at that time.

Q: How was it that you were selected for chief of staff? Who was the chief of staff before?

Erskine: Brewster had been chief of staff, and for some reason he was transferred to command the camp then called New River. Camp Lejeune. So Holland Smith appointed me chief of staff -- that was his prerogative.

Q: There was no particular reason outside of this feeling that you were perhaps the best?

Erskine: He never did tell me why, but he ^{said I} was the chief of staff and he issued an order to that effect.

When we got back to Quantico we got involved in what you might call the joint operational concept, in which the 1st Marine Division and the 1st Army Division would constitute an amphibious force. That meant that we had to have a sort of a joint staff. So I asked Gen. McNair to send me three good Army officers with staff ability. And he sent down John Blizzard to be the G-2 of this new type of thing, and a man by the name of Pascual as G-1 -- they were both lieutenant colonels at the time -- and a Maj. Schmeisser in the 4 section, who had a very good grasp of logistics, incidentally. Blizzard was considerably experienced in Army intelligence, and a Lt. Col. Ely, who I guess was in the 3 section.

We had two of the section chiefs who were Army and two Marines. I believe Emmett Betts was the G-4 at this time.

Looking into this thing -- of course I had Army training -- (we were making plans then to go to the Azores) it struck me as if we were setting up here what amounted to a ~~xxxx~~ corps level position. We didn't have any corps communications, so I asked the Army to come through with a signal company, which they did. And I must say we had excellent support, except that I knew that these people were reporting back trying to give the poorest impression of the way we operated.

Q: Really?

Erskine: Oh yes, I am sure they did. I never saw any of these reports, but they made quite frequent visits to Washington. It didn't bother me, because *the first one I ever caught doing it was* ~~it~~ going to finished up real good, and they knew that. But I knew it was done. But I would go occasionally up to Headquarters here in Washington -- I think it was called the Ground Force at that time, and Gen. McNair was the commander, and have a talk with him on these things. And Maj. Gen. Culberson was in command of the 1st Army Division that was still stationed at Fort Devens.

I might be well to mention ~~that they~~ ^{how this came about. They} decided to form this organization. They had a meeting in Washington. I accompanied Gen. Smith.

Q: Is that the one in April of '41 when you were up there on temporary duty at Headquarters Marine Corps in connection with

conferring with the commander in chief US Atlantic Fleet? I think for the rest of the month you were back and forth from . . .

Erskine: No, this was only one or two sessions. Gen. Culberson, the commander of the 1st Army Division, was senior to Gen. Smith.

It finally ended up with a meeting in Gen. Marshall's office, who was chief of staff of the Army at that time. I think the Navy had given Gen. Holland Smith a very good sendoff and wanted him to command this joint force. And I was present when Gen. Marshall asked Gen. Culberson -- he first said, "You know that you are senior to Smith, and I would like to see Smith command this organization. Do you object to serving under Smith?" And with Gen. Smith present Culberson said, "No" he did not, he had great respect for Holland Smith. And that was it. (Pause) I forget who relieved Gen. Culberson. Gen. Culberson was a very senior major general in the Army at that time. So we started our joint staff from that point on. And I think it probably was one of the first real operating staffs in this country. It worked out very well.

Q: Going back to World War I, when the command of the brigade and then of the 2nd Division devolved upon Gen. Lejeune, you had more or less a joint staff.

Erskine: I think they did have a couple of Marines on there, but I don't remember who they were. It was essentially an Army staff.

Q: And also I think some of the Marine officers -- I think Frederick Wise -- commanded an Army battalion. Maybe several other Marine

officers commanded Army battalions in France. Well, it wasn't a joint staff.

Erskine: No, in the sense that I described.

Q: Of course the thing that's interesting here -- you had to be a very brave man to stand up and say to Gen. Marshall, "I want Gen. Smith to command it." I mean, knowing what Marshall's reputation was.

Erskine: Well, I don't remember any friction between these two commanders at all. At that time, I think Torrey succeeded to the command of the 1st Marine Division. We had our Headquarters in Quantico.

Q: What was this series of meetings you had in April 1941 in Adm. King's office?

Erskine: I think that was a planning session we had up there.

Q: For the Acres?

Erskine: I suspect it was the plans we were making for the Acres at that time.

Q: I think that must have been the one you were talking about at the last session, when you were showing Adm. King the diagram.

Erskine: Yes. And we were back and forth there I think a month or longer, maybe. Not every day, however, as I remember, because we had work to do down in Quantico. We had to go back and do our work down there. And Gen. Smith attended most of these sessions up there.

Q: Of course May of '41 is when you went up to Newport, that trip you made with Gen. Smith that we spoke about last time.

Erskine: Yes.

Q: And the I Corps was formed in June of '41 -- ^{the joint corps} /the I Corps Provisional Atlantic Fleet, that later became Task Force 18.

New River -- which later became Lajeune -- was not quite ready at this time, was it?

Erskine: No. We were still in the throes of moving out some of the people who had owned land there, some didn't move out according to agreement, and I remember one rather hairy question that came up. There were a couple of cemeteries there, and a couple of churches in the area, and the problem was what to do with these bodies. One was in an area which we had planned to use as an impact area for artillery. ~~XX~~ Finally -- and this was Dave Brewster's job -- they satisfied the people, and I think Dave did a pretty good job. I am not sure whether they moved all these bodies from their graves, but they moved the cemeteries over

to another area, I think on the south side of Lejeune which was not considered to be a very good ^{training} trading area. And the churches the same way. Of course this caused a considerable feeling among a lot of the people down there because they'd grown up in those parts, their grandfathers and their great-grandfathers, and in some cases they lived on the same farm, and to ~~be~~ picked up and put out you had to have a pretty strong national situation. And we had it at that time.

Q: I think Congressman Barden was closely involved.

*Ed note: No -
Barden was from
North Carolina*

Erskine: Yes.

Q: He was the Congressman from this district. You had a joint training exercise. There were a lot of redesignations: you went from I Corps Provisional, then Task Force 18 in June ~~XXXX~~ of '41. And then in July it was changed again, to 1st Joint Training Force Atlantic Fleet, and then in August of '41 it was changed to Atlantic Amphibious Force. And then I think it was changed again later on.

Erskine: Our people in the Navy -- it was actually a corps. During this whole period of time they wouldn't use any Army term if they could possibly avoid it. So that was called a corps, then everybody would know what the hell it was. But I am afraid a number of our senior naval officers didn't know what the corps really meant, and they thought they were probably losing a little

control over this outfit. I guess it was a number of months later before they finally decided to call it the I Corps, the 5th Corps and so forth and so on.

Q: It was finally the Amphibious Force Atlantic Fleet. Then in March of '42 Amphibious Corps Atlantic Fleet. I think Force had more of a Navy designation probably.

Erskine: Well, a task force has a special meaning as you know in the Navy. It amounts to about the same thing. We ~~gaw~~ had Army troops assigned to the thing, there was no reason why we couldn't use the term corps. I think that was finally the reason why they changed it. The Army officers didn't understand this force structure any more than the Navy understood the corps ~~xxx~~ structure.

Q: How did that joint training exercise go?

Erskine: I think that's when we had the 1st Army Division down at New River, and that's when we had the Mount Vernon. They loaded I think a whole regiment on the Mount Vernon, but only had enough covered space, and ^{the} booms weren't strong enough to handle any more than about one battalion of actual gear. We had quite a miscellaneous group of ships down there at the time. I thought it went off all right, and we still didn't have the proper landing boats. We were using motor sailers. We might have had half a dozen ramp bows, I guess, and I don't remember whether we had tanks or not. As I

remember, they couldn't get ^{their} tanks on the Mount Vernon because the booms weren't strong enough to handle them. When they would take the old motor sailer in they would always drop an anchor in the stern. so we could pull off the beach. They wouldn't ^{hit} get the beach ~~if they could~~ ^{hard} with a motor sailer, because if you ^{had any} got in the sea at all it would probably broach, And there was a boat gone.

And that was the reason for using ^{the stone} ~~this kind of~~ anchor.

Well, after a few days ' exercise and they lost so many anchors, I think I mentioned it before, we had to stop and get everybody who was on the beach ^{to go} swimming and retrieve an anchor, and the guy who found an anchor got a carton of cigarettes. That's how hard up we were. But ~~otherwise~~ otherwise it went off pretty well.

I guess we had the 1st Marine Division involved in this thing too

Q: Yes.

Erskine: Oh! We had so many exercises it's hard for me to keep them straightened out.

Q: There was one in August of '41. I think this was just about when the Division may have returned from Guantanamo, and this was at New River. It was a nine day joint training exercise.

Erskine: As you know, you have this intercoastal canal that goes right behind the beach there at New River. And the Army came down

and they brought with them some pontoons. I think we had some pontoons that we put across, and built bridges across this inter-coastal canal. ~~But the Army had the southern zone. After they crossed the canal their zone of action was heavily wooded, and some of it was a bit swampy, and to get their equipment forward and move their trucks, they built a number of roads by cutting down trees. They built quite a good road cutting down trees, what we call a corduroy road, and put them in the swamp and get through there.~~

But there was one main road that went through. We called it the main supply route. It went down to Onslow Beach and crossed over on a bridge. Brig. Gen. Ord was in command of the division at that time, and I had known Jimmy pretty well for quite a while, and he was actually the ADC of the division. I think Gen. Culbertson was sick and Ord was in command. I went over to see him quite a number of times and I told him I thought he was very vulnerable, particularly his communications lines, and these people would be easy for a few saboteurs to get in and cut all of his communication lines. Well, I think he resented it. I was a colonel at the time. And I think he resented ~~to~~ having this information ^{going} to him from a colonel in the first place -- a junior colonel -- and also the fact that it was a Marine telling him how to run the 1st Army Division. So he proceeded to tell me the history of the 1st Army Division, how good it was and so forth and so on.

We didn't have an umpire setup. I had a young fellow who was then a captain who was a very smart guy, and never had any
 xxx

military training either, but he was instructor in romance languages at Harvard, by the name of Rogers, and we put him in the G-2 section. As a matter of fact because of his linguistic ability we got special arrangements to bring him into our G-2 section. I got Rogers and gave him quite a number of sessions on tactics and techniques and so forth, and I used him -- we'd write up a little situation, what we wanted to create to see if we could keep the Army troops occupied and with some interest in the exercise -- to write up a situation to present to the ^{front} ~~rear~~ line commanders and by God, singlehandedly he did a pretty good job of this, and he'd come in every night and we'd sit until about midnight and figure what we were going to give them tomorrow.

I talked to ~~Brax~~ Ord a couple of times about his communications and lack of security. It ~~was~~ is almost impossible in peacetime training exercises to get people to observe proper security precautions. It's hard, until you get them right on the battlefield, to make them really go to work on this thing. I thought, "By God, I'll teach him a lesson." We had a parachute battalion at that time, and I asked a parachutist to drop a small group -- maybe 10 men, at least one officer -- in the 1st Army Division's zone, and wreck their communications. And it turned out that young Bob Williams was the man assigned to this job. I knew where they were going to drop, the Division didn't know they were coming. They went out to the drop zone, and those fellows dropped into a corn field and disappeared like a bunch of rabbits, and went wild over the place; they cut off all of the 1st Army Division's

communications, and then went to work on the 1st Marine Division's communications, and it just stopped the whole damn operation.

One of the funniest things that happened there was, they also considered this supply route to be a means of communication. Bob Williams was down at my house for dinner here last Sunday, and we were talking this over and he said, "Of course that^{was} a communications route."

Q: Sure it^{was}.

Erskine: Yes. Well, they pulled a very smart trick there.

L.B. Cresswell was provost marshal, I believe, of the 1st Marine Division; he was wearing the MP band; one of ^{these} fellows approached L.B. and arrested him, disarmed him, and then used him to halt this big truck that was coming down the road -- it was a two way road -- and the Marine got into the truck and took the keys and threw them into the swamp. He waited until another one came along, and he had two, and they completely blocked this road. And threw the keys in the swamp.

Q: L.B. must have been fit to be tied.

Erskine: Oh! But he thought the guy had authority -- a guy with a gun. But I thought, "You people are going to be a little bit more realistic down here." Anyway that happened. By that time Gen. Ord was really in a beautiful mood. He called me up and said plenty of things, and I said, "Well, goddamn it, I've been telling

you that this could happen, and you . . .

End of Side 1, Tape 1, Session V

Session V continued

Side 2, Tape 1

* He ^{armed} ^{with axe handles} One battalion ~~was accidental~~, and he sent them out to catch these paratroopers and beat them up. (laughs)

Q: Oh really? ^{Ord} He ^{was} that mad about it.

Erskine: Oh he was furious.

Q: Didn't catch them, I bet.

Erskine: No, these boys just laughed at him. I think as a matter of fact they caught a couple of the ^{Axe handle} ~~accidental~~ boys and disarmed them.

Q: Did ^{int} ~~the~~ ^a 5th Battalion of the 5th Marines do this down at Vieques? ^{made an} ~~-- amphibious~~ ^{night} landing, ~~not~~ amphibious landing, in '38-'39, I think it was Shepherd's battalion -- and captured an Army battalion or an Army division? I think it was Walter ^{Shorts} ~~Shetta~~, the guy who later was the Army commander at ^{Pearl Harbor}.

Erskine: I wasn't on that exercise. I remember something similar to that, but I don't know the details.

Q: This Ord, is this young Jimmy Ord's uncle or father?

Erskine: I think it's his father. *The Ords have been in the Army since I guess they've had an Army*

Q: Young Jimmy Ord is a colonel, he's Gen. Shepherd's son-in-law.

I meant to ask you before about communications equipment, which was always a problem. It hadn't reached the level that was needed for combat. What did you do at the Schools? How did you solve the problem? You weren't back to the old heliograph and semaphore days, were you?

Erskine: No. I don't know, communicators were always a problem to me.

Q: Why?

Erskine: And I frankly think that they had too much gear. They could have had better gear probably. But I have seen such abuse of these things that --

One time when I had the Fleet Marine Force we had a big communications annex about four inches thick, and I waited till 30 minutes before the landing, and I issued an order, "No radio communications," to see what in the hell they would do.

The mass of communications we had, I think, influenced some commander to sit there and wait for somebody to tell him something instead of getting off his fanny and going out to find out what was going on. I made it my point to get in the jeep and go around and see these commanders, "Well, I haven't had any communications." I'd say, "Well, get off your ass and get out there and look and see."

That's the way Stonewall Jackson did it. Sure, he got shot, and you might get shot too, but at least you know what you are seeing, you are not depending on some guy who doesn't know what he is talking about half the time. Get out and get around." The idea was to make these commanders get out of their CPs and let the troops see them, talk to the troops and know what the hell was going on, instead of reading reports and listening to the radio all the time.

Of course you have to have a hell of a lot of training to get good communications, even with telephones and radios. Our equipment has been greatly improved, but I frankly feel that even today we have too much communications.

I remember on the West Coast, when we had a division exercise over there at one time, I went up to one of the front line battalions, and it was one one side of the slope of a hill, and another battalion -- this ridge line was the dividing line between these two battalions,--and ^{it} ~~here~~ was probably 30 yards from the top of this hill. The radio was down the hill a little bit. And on the other side there was another battalion. I asked him if he had any contact whatsoever with the battalion on his left. He said, "No, "I've been trying to raise them all morning." Of course these radios don't work very well there when you have this barrier between them, and I said, "If you walk here with me about 30 yards I'll show you where they are." And we walked up there and here they were sitting in a nice little bunch of woods. He'd spent three or four hours instead of getting off his fanny and go up there and take a look. So I gave him a little bit of a lecture on that.

(knew) I'd
^ Once in a while I'd have a radio silence⁺ operation, and they'd
be out in a jeep and . . . ^{checking on them} ~~(laughs)~~ (laughs)

Q: Of course the problem of radio discipline and training, it seems to me, did not devolve entirely upon communications personnel. Everybody was . . .

Erskine: Yes, everybody had to have a hand in this thing, and they had to understand it. We had courses in the Schools on communications, preparation of the annex, the line charts, everything. The theory I think was generally understood. In actual operation it was always one of the most difficult problems I had -- to get good communications.

Q: Even in the later years of the Pacific war?

Erskine: Yes.

Q: How receptive was the 1st Army Division to amphibious training? Did it learn well? Do you think it could have been equal to a Marine Division in an amphibious assault?

Erskine: Yes, I think they could have. I don't remember having too much trouble. They had their own ideas about command, and they still have them, and about how things should be done. Sometimes we'd have a little different view on these things, and I'd say, "All right, you just go do it my way and say it's wrong as

hell if you want, but goddamn it do it that way." After all I had been long in the Schools and I knew a lot of these people personally, and I think that was one thing that Holland Smith thought I could be a good chief of staff -- dealing with the Army, because I knew most of the top commanders; we were classmates, as a matter of fact.

We had an exercise down in Chesapeake Bay, that I think can give you a little idea of what we are talking about. It seems that Roosevelt was on a cruise, and he was up around Martha's Vineyard fishing, and he took a look at Martha's Vineyard and said, "I feel sorry for those Marines down in North Carolina. I think we ought to have a landing exercise up here, a joint landing exercise." King was on board there with him, and ~~he~~^{Roosevelt} said, "Let's have the 1st Army Division defend Martha's Vineyard, and have the 1st Marine Division come up here and seize the island from the Army, and let's see how that'll work out. I think this weather up here would help the boys a lot." King took this hook, line and sinker. He said, "I'll send a dispatch to get ready for this exercise right away."

We had no maps of Martha's Vineyard, and we'd always looked upon it as a resort, with lots of valuable property, probably no beaches there that we could land tanks on without doing a lot of damage. I made a protest to Gen. Smith, and we later had a meeting up in Washington, and we put up all our protests, "This is not a suitable place to do it, the damage that would come out of this would cost a great deal probably, and we doubt it that it would be worth the time of these people, whether they would learn anything in such an exercise."

the commandee of Land

In the meantime I went to ~~landing Force~~ ^{the commandee of Land} Army, and told him what I would need for such an exercise: five marking teams to run a two sided exercise, which we didn't have. Gen. McNair was very generous, he called in Mark Clark who was then his chief of staff, and told him, "You give Erskine everything he wants." Lemnitzer was the operations officer at that time, he was a major.

I talked to Mark a while and he said, "You go down to Lemnitzer and then we'll have the G-4 join you there, and you tell them what you want."

This was hardly over before we got reports that there were a couple of submarines lying off the Carolina coast -- German submarines. At that time we had 12 ~~xxxxx~~ ^{assault} transports, I think. That put a different picture on the thing. So Gen. Smith went up and I went with him to protest having this exercise down there until we ~~go~~ could get those submarines out. As a matter of fact we flew up to Newport. Adm. Ingersoll was then commander in chief of the Fleet, and he was on the old Ironsides -- he had his headquarters on the old Ironsides. We arrived and Gen. Smith went in and told him the hazard of such a thing, we only had 12 assault transports in the whole fleet, and what if they ~~were~~ just sunk one full of Army troops under Navy supervision? What a hell of a repercussion that would be! And we advised against having it there: if we were going to have a maneuver, let's have it some other place.

I can remember Adm. Ingersoll, (I was sitting right there) say, "What about it if they sink a couple of those ships? Don't you know the Navy is very expert in salvage?" The old man started to get a little mad and he said, "What about the men? You can't

salvage the men that are on board those ships." And he gave him quite a good lecture on this.

Well, the thing ended up in limbo. They didn't rescind the order, and it was up to us to go ahead with this thing. They finally decided to bring them down ^{to} the Chesapeake Bay area, and land around Virginia Beach. And as far as King ~~was~~ concerned he said, "Just go and land there." I remember telling King, ^{of} "I have a faint recollection ~~There was~~ some Redcoats landing in that area some years ago, and Virginia didn't like it, and they shot their tails off." ~~xxx~~ "This is war." I said, "Maybe so, but we still have property rights in this country." Well, I had a handful. In the meantime I had sent Oscar Brice up with some reconnaissance planes to photograph Martha's Vineyard so we would be able to get some maps ready for that thing, and that was coming in. I called in the staff, and Ely of the 2 Section was a man whom I had a great deal of confidence in -- an Army officer -- and I told Ely, "We've got this problem on our hands now. It's decided to bring the 1st Army Division down and land at Virginia Beach. We don't have any rights to land down there. You go down and make a reconnaissance of this area, give it to me, and see if we've got enough space." We had almost enough space. Then, "This is Virginia soil. You get on your horse, go down to Richmond and see the Governor, and tell the Governor what our proposition is, and what our problem is, and will he let us use this land for this exercise. And remind him that this is time of war and we need it, and we can't afford to wait."

ely
~~He~~ was very successful. Then the few landowners in the area he went down and contacted personally and they said, "Okay, go ahead." "Pay the damage *when you're done!*"

This was in February, I think, and it was pretty damn cold. The setup was that we, the Marines, the Corps Headquarters, would act as umpire. We brought up a tank company I think, from Lejeune, to be the opposition. We got the Virginia National Guard unit to participate, and picked up some more troops, some of the coast artillery. We had quite a conglomerate force; on the beach to defend the beach. We brought this 1st Army Division down, and they anchored them out there in the Chesapeake. I think they were sitting there in three or four bays where they could see the beaches. The beaches were excellent. We had our Edson's raider battalion as part of the landing force.

Now we were going to let the Army and Navy run this thing to see how good they were. They always claimed that that was the way the thing should work. There were groups in the Navy at that time that wanted to go back to the old joint Army-Navy operational doctrine, and they had quite a manual on that thing.

They made their plans, ~~we~~ didn't interfere in the planning, we gave them the areas that they could work in, and we took the defense force on here. I was appointed chief umpire, and we set up a series of signals: landing successful, landing unsuccessful, et cetera, and had some communication with them.

The day of the landing they came in about 8 or 9 o'clock, I think. It was so cold, that the ice from the waves actually froze on the bows of most of those boats.

They wanted to try
~~they~~/a little armistice there and let the boys build
 some fires on the beach, change clothes, get warm and dried out,
 before we let the defense force take over.

As the landing came in, only one organization hit the beach
 when it was supposed to, and it was Edson's battalion, the raiders.
 I asked Edson later how he managed, when every other boat was
 screwed up out there, to get to the beach. He said, "I told my
 men to look at the beach, that's where you land, and you make
 that coxswain take you there. If you have any trouble with him,
 take your gun and stick it in his back and say, 'You so-and-so,
 that's where I am going to get out.' And they said they didn't
 have to do that more than once or twice." But that's the way
 he went to the beach.

I have never seen such a conglomerate mix of boats landing.
 Hardly a unit landed with any tactical integrity. The ADC was
 young Teddy Roosevelt, and he landed outside the zone,^{of}/what we
 called -- and this was prescribed in the problem -- neutral territory.
 So I ^{interned} I said,
 So I ~~asked~~ him, "You are out of problem. Think what would happen
 if you land in the wrong country."

Q: I think he landed in the wrong zone during D Day in Normandy,
 didn't he?

Erskine: I wouldn't doubt it! I don't know. Anyway I interned
 him, and the Army was furious about that.

They came ashore and this bit of defense force did a good job.
 We used blank ammunition, and we had blank artillery ammunition too,

and there was some realism to it. Then we had a little snow, and I think the thing went off in three or four or five days -- which was followed by a critique aboard the flagship. I can't think of the admiral's name now. There was an admiral from the Navy Department who had joined our Headquarters, and was sent down especially to report on this operation. Even before the troops had reembarked he went back to the Navy Department and praised it in every way, everything went perfectly.

Well, I with my staff as the umpire had to justify it before they even ~~we~~ got to the beach. I saw where they were going and

I filed "unsuccessful landing" -- which burned a few people up. So I had charts drawn with all the ships, and where the boats landed their people. It looked like . . .

Q: ^A Chinese fire drill.

Erskine: Oh! It was impossible to believe, that they could get that mixed up. Then of course some of the Army ~~xxxxx~~ battalion commanders were complaining on the beach about not having their troops, some of their troops were down at the other end of the whole zone, and some were not in -- they couldn't have done anything, really, as an organization.

We had this critique. Finally they asked me to get up and say my piece, and ~~asked~~ why I had filed "unsuccessful landing." After they landed we went ahead with the maneuver, got them back together and let them have a maneuver against the defense force.

And I produced these charts, and the Army commander -- who I think was Culberson at the time -- shook his head and he said,

"We are so resourceful in my division I think we could have gone ahead and made a pretty good success out of this. I don't think you are justified in calling it off." I said, "The amphibious landing was a failure." The admiral got up and he said, "I don't understand this. Why do we have all of this discussion here, when the Navy's job is to land the troops, and didn't we land them?" I said, "Yes, but in such a conglomerate mixup that none of the organizations could have functioned."

Q: Much loss survived.

Erskine: Yes. And none of their gunfire plans -- you see, they'd made gunfire plans and they had a ~~xxxxxx~~ schedule of fires, and my umpires would take these schedules and put them in places where there were no troops, most of it. It was the most unfortunate . . .

A lot of recrimination came as a result of this thing, and Gen. Smith was a little downhearted on it, and he thought -- and some other Marines thought -- "Now the Army and Navy are going to try to take this thing away from us." Well, somehow, Mr. Truman who had this investigating committee heard something about this. Of course I wouldn't know how he heard about it. The first thing I know, the attorney for this committee showed up in my office and wanted to see all the records.

Q: The Senate Preparedness Committee, was it?

Erskine: I think it was. Whichever committee he was the head of at that time. So I said, "I'll have to see Gen. Smith, I don't know whether ^{I can} ~~he'll~~ give this to you or not." (I didn't want to get involved with these politicians up there)

The final result was that he had complete access -- he got permission from the Navy Department to have complete access to all the records, take testimony and so forth and so on. So the Truman Committee took this up, and the best I could ever find out was that they raised merry hell with the Army and Navy and told them to stay out of ^{this} ~~his~~ business. It was a complete failure from the exercise standpoint.

You asked me how they got along and so forth, and I gave you that as an example. I cannot understand this admiral going back and telling the chief of naval operations that it went off beautifully. In the first place I don't think he had any idea of what an amphibious operation was; he had about the same opinion of the situation ^{they were in} ~~when~~ they landed; it didn't mean anything to him, I think.

Q: King must have known better after the thing was over, didn't he?

Erskine: Oh, I King took our side on it. But this -- they went back to try one of these old Army-Navy, what the hell do they call it?

Q: JANAC -- Joint Army Navy . . .

Erskine: Joint Army Navy Procedures or something like that?

Q: Oh!

Erskine: Anyway, that was the result. It was a mixed up thing. Thank God they didn't try it in combat. But I think after that the Army listened a great deal more.

Q: Yes, because in May and June the 9th Infantry Division was trained here at the Solomons Islands, where of course the 1st Division trained. Then when you went out on the West Coast, a certain number of Army Divisions -- the 77th . . .

Erskine: The 7th -- they went into Kiska.

Q: That's right.

Erskine: I can tell you some stories about that one.

Q: But I think you want to leave now.

Erskine: I've got to, I am sorry, but I have been up since 6.30.

End of Side 2, Tape 1, Session V. End of Session V.

Session VI - 28 January 1970

Tape 1, Side 1

Q: I want to ask you something before we continue on with the interview where we left off. I've heard a story -- you may have told me, but I don't think you did -- about the barracks in Peking, China, when they woke up one morning and found that someone had raised a red flag in the barracks compound.

Erskine: Yes, that did take place there. We had a couple of young fellows who went over the hill there. I don't think we ever did find out what the hell was wrong with them. Vandegrift was commandant of the Guard there at the time, and these fellows were, as I remember, from ^{the} mounted detachment, and that at that time was commanded by Capt. Oglesby. I believe that's his name.

Q: Don Oglesby?

Erskine: Yes. We investigated and evidently what they did was, they went out and found a piece of red cloth, pulled it up the flagpole and took off. They stayed out in the Chinese boondocks for I guess a week or more and finally came back. That was about it.

Q: I understand that you had all the Marines brought down and interrogated, and the 1st sergeant was doing a . . .

Erskine: Yes, I think we talked to almost every man in the whole Guard, as a matter of fact, to find out what this was all about. It just seemed that these two fellows were pretty much misfits, and they thought this was a good way to show their feelings. Maybe they were ahead of their time, like some of these kids we have today.

Q: Ha! There must have been quite a spirit^{ed} of group there -- the young Marines, the enlisted Marines.

Erskine: We had a fine bunch of men, there is no question about that. Matter of fact I was amazed during World War II as to how many of those people who were noncommissioned officers in the Peking Guard were commissioned. A very good number became commissioned officers.

Q: When we left off last time, General, we were talking about the preparations and training of the Army divisions on the East Coast, ^{at} Solomon Island/, the Amphibious Force, and the various names that it went through -- Amphibious Force Atlantic Fleet. You were chief of staff at this time.

You'd been down at Guantanamo for the formation of the Division. I think you were the brigade chief of staff, and then when Gen. Smith went on up to become the Corps Commander you went with him.

I just want to review a bit of that. You were talking about the Army divisions that you trained at Solomons Island, and some of the joint training that was conducted there: the 1st Division and the -- was ^{it} the 1st Army Division or the 2nd Army Division?

Erskine: We had part of the 1st Army Division, but I don't think we had them down at the Solomons Islands. We probably had some of the units, but we didn't have it as a division. That division was stationed at Fort Devens, and it was assigned to what at one time was Amphibious Force Atlantic, then it was changed to Amphibious Corps Atlantic, and I am not quite clear now on how many titles we did have. I remember at one time when they made one of the changes Adm. King^{who} was commander in chief of the Atlantic Fleet made the damn title confidential. And then within a very short time he wanted to get hold of us and send us a telegram, and nobody knew where the hell everybody was. I finally got a telephone call from Bill Riley who was on King's staff at that time and^{he} asked, would I be coming up to Newport that day. And I told him no, there was no reason. Then we found out that he'd classified our title and we didn't get the message, so Gen. Smith and I got in two planes from the squadron that was at Quantico. Field Harris was with Gen. Smith, and I don't remember who flew me, and we flew up to Newport.

Q: I think that was in May of '41.

Erskine: About that time, yes.

Q: And that was that time that the designation was changed again from I Corps Provisional Atlantic Fleet to Task Force 18 Atlantic Fleet, and then the designation was changed again in August of '41 to Atlantic Amphibious Force and so on.

Erskine: Down at Solomons Island the largest Army unit we had for training was the 9th Division, which was stationed where the Special Forces are now.

Q: Fort Bragg.

Erskine: Fort Bragg. And we sent the whole division through amphibious training there. We had some of our people go down and give instruction at Fort Bragg, and then we brought the units up. And this was all during the period of time when we had a threat of German submarines lying off the coast, and that's why we selected Solomons Island.

Q: It was sheltered in Chesapeake Bay.

Erskine: It was in the Chesapeake Bay and there was very little chance of the submarines coming up there.

Q: Now I don't recall whether or not we dealt with this or not, about the selection of New River as the permanent base of East Coast amphibious training -- were you involved with the selection?

Erskine: No, I was not involved in the selection of the base at all. That was all done by Headquarters Marine Corps. They were the housekeeping unit and we were the fighting unit.

Q: I was told at one time that President Roosevelt had recommended Cape Cod as a site for a permanent amphibious training base.

Erskine: That I don't know, but I know he was on a cruise up in that area at one time, and Adm. King was with him on board ship. It was very good weather -- I believe it was summertime -- and we had the 1st Army Division under our operational control at that time, and the 1st Division down at New River. And I am told that he turned to Adm. King and told him, ^{that} it would be a real blessing if he could have an amphibious operation at Martha's Vineyard and get those Marines out of the hot weather down in Carolina. Then Adm. King apparently thought it was a good idea too, and the next thing I knew we had a message to get ready to have a two sided exercise with the 1st Division defending Martha's Vineyard while the 1st Marine Division put up an amphibious assault against the island. My first reaction to that was that it would be an impossible thing, because Martha's Vineyard was too built up, it was expensive real estate and not a real good place to get any real training. And the first thought I had was the damage that might be done to the landing areas in the adjacent property inland. So I called up the aviation wing -- I think Geiger was in command at that time -- and told them to send up a reconnaissance ^{plane}. (As a matter of fact we had no real topographic maps of Martha's Vineyard) and photograph the entire area. In the meantime I started checking around to see if we could locate maps or we had to make our own maps for this particular thing. It was my conclusion and Gen. Smith's conclusion that we couldn't get any training out of going up there and we were liable to do so much damage it would really harm the so-called prestige of the amphibious forces and actually of the Armed Forces.

So we had a conference in Washington with Adm. King. He was still pretty adamant on the subject. The main reason as I remember

was that the President had said it should be done. Well, that's all right, but I always felt the President was a pretty reasonable guy, and he was thinking maybe of doing something good for the Marines, when as a matter of fact I think he would have done a great deal of harm as far as the Marines were concerned.

Anyway we fought it out, and we had to have an amphibious operation. So it was decided, since ^{there} ~~it~~ was a submarine threat off the coast, that we were also to ~~think about it~~ . . .

I think about that time Adm. Ingersoll -- who had his headquarters on the old Ironsides -- was commander in chief of the Fleet. King went up to chief of naval operations around that time, I think.

Q: Yes, about that time. Before the war, I believe.

Erskine: Anyway we flew up to see Adm. Ingersoll about this thing. That was one of the greatest surprises I ever had in my life. I went aboard this old ship -- I'd never been aboard this old ship before.

Q: This was in February of '42?

Erskine: About that time. I know it was cold weather.

Q: Yes -- there was a conference with CinCLant up at Newport.

Erskine: Yes. And Gen. Smith explained that he thought it was too dangerous to take these troops out, and particularly the Army troops, or the Marine troops, and put them on to the ships. And

we only had 12 assault transports in the whole Navy. And if the Germans really wanted to sink those ships they could sink them.

I'll never forget Adm. Ingersoll's reply. He drew himself up, puffed on his pipe and said, "Don't you know that the Navy is outstanding in salvaging? We could probably salvage all of those ships." Which really set Holland Mad Smith off. He drew himself up and he said, "Admiral, how in hell are you going to salvage those soldiers and sailors who may be blown up with these ships?"

Well, a lot transpired, and there was pretty hot talk there for quite a while. Anyway I think that was the thing that broke the back of the outside amphibious operation. Then they told us to get a place -- go down to Chesapeake Bay, land at Virginia Beach. Then I put in my penny's worth that Virginia Beach was not Government property. However, we went back and made a reconnaissance, got some maps, looked the place over. There was a little Army down there called Fort Storey that had a beach area. And instead of bringing the 1st Division up -- which was almost an impossible feat at that time, to get ~~on the beach~~ ^{on the beach}, and you don't want one division against another division -- we improvised a defense force which consisted actually of some Virginia National Guard; we brought up a tank company, as I remember, from New River; some troops, I don't remember how many. And at this point the Army and Navy had gotten together and decided they would utilize the old system of Army and Navy command policies. I forgot what they called it.

Q: Joint action?

Erskine: Joint action.

Q: There was a document.

Erskine: There was a document that described the relationship between the two services. And it was also decided that our Headquarters would be the umpire. I was designated the chief umpire.

To get the land we needed and the permission to use an adjacent park, I sent our G-2 then, a Lt. Col. Ely of the Army, (We had a joint staff) down to Richmond to see the Governor and ask his permission to use the state land in that area, which the Governor agreed to. However, in the meantime when they kept telling me that all you had to do was go and land, goddamn it, this is war.

I remember that the Virginians chased a few red coats around that part of the world at one time, and I didn't want to incur the ire of the people of the State of Virginia by begging off their property. We in the Marine Corps always had a hell of a time paying for anything that was damaged. Our people were pretty cheap in that respect.

The Army then had Gen. McNair as the commander of Land Forces, I believe it was called. His headquarters was down near Fort McNair. We didn't have the necessary equipment or the trained personnel to run a two sided maneuver. In the Marine Corps we never had such a setup. It's always been improvised. I realized that this thing was going to draw a great deal of attention simply because of the tryout of the old policies of Army and Navy cooperation in an amphibious operation, which I didn't think would work very efficiently anyway.

So I went to Gen. McNair and asked him if he could give us some fire marking teams from the Army which the Army had trained, transportation, some automobiles and so forth to carry around visitors, which I knew would certainly show up. The Army always had a very nice setup to take care of visiting firemen, and we did not

Incidentally I phoned Headquarters Marine Corps and talked to the top boys up there, to see if I could get the necessary transportation and extra personnel to carry these people around, and we were going to set up a visitors' bureau for them. And when the word got out there were any number of people that wanted to come, from very high posts in the Government, some Congressmen as well as any number of naval and Army officers. It seemed apparent to me that now the Army and Navy were trying a deal to take over the entire amphibious operation, and leave the Marines as ship's guards or something. That was my feeling, and I think Gen. Smith felt very strongly the same way.

Gen. McNair was very, very generous. He called in Mark Clark and Lyman Lemnitzer who was a major at that time, and he said, "You know about this operation. You give Erskine everything he wants." So the three of us got together, and we set up an umpire organization and we thought it'd be sufficient down there. The Army ordered artillery fire and gunfire people. We had to train artillery people in the gunfire procedure. But they were pretty hep kids. Then I said, "What about the damages down there?" Mark Clark asked me how much I thought we might need, and I said "possibly \$10,000." "Do you need any money for special equipment?" I said, "Well, your troops are going to do the landing." He said,

"I'll give you 50,000 dollars." They didn't skimp when they wanted to get something done. He said, "You can have 50,000 dollars, and if that isn't enough come back and see me." I thought that was pretty damn nice treatment, compared to what I had got at Marine Corps Headquarters, where they offered me a few half ton and quarter ton trucks to haul around distinguished visitors.

Q: Who was that, Seth Williams?

Erskine: It was the ^{PJT}Command of the Marine Corps' policy. They didn't bother. ~~XXXX~~ You were on your own usually when you went to a Marine maneuver, unless you knew somebody personally. They didn't have the public relations feel at that moment.

Among the units that they sent down there was a special communications outfit to handle the communications for the umpire setup. They also gave me one automobile company with drivers and maintenance people -- maybe two or one and a half. Anyway, the Army was in there trying to help us get this damn thing ~~xxxx~~ done.

They made up their plans and they came down, and ~~xxxx~~^{it} was pretty bad weather, and they anchored out in the bay. They had practically all of the 1st Army Division aboard. We had this nondescript outfit ^{that we} put together -- a few coast artillery people that we had borrowed from the Army to form a defense force. They got into their positions, and they had a little snow and some damn bad weather, it was cold as hell, and we still had a number of those old Eureka boats without ramps. I think they anchored out there for three or four days, maybe five days, waiting for a little better weather, and finally we had the landing.

Attached to this outfit was Edson's Raiders, and Edson's Raiders, when the landing force came ashore, was the only unit that landed on the beaches with any tactical integrity, that is, where they were supposed to land. Gen. Roosevelt . . .

Q: Archie Roosevelt, or Theodore?

Erskine: Theodore; Teddy. He was the ADC of the 1st Army Division. He landed in neutral territory, and we had laid down the rule that anybody who landed in neutral territory would be interned. So they came to me about this and said he was ADC and I said, "Well, goddamn it, you just lost him, that's all, he is interned." And you know, I understand that on the Normandy beaches he did the same thing.

Q: Yes, I've read Ryan's book, D Day. He was way off to the right and had ^{to bring his} ~~his~~ troops way over to the left.

Erskine: In this case he landed on the left. But the Navy did not bring the people to the beaches where they were supposed to go. It was the worst goddamn messup I have ever seen. And we had plenty of people charting this whole thing, and marching the units as they came, and it was so cold, ^{that} ~~and~~ some of that salt water was just frozen ice all over the boats.

We got them ashore. ^{Well,} [^] I was supposed to fire a signal, Successful Landing or Unsuccessful landing. From where I was sitting, with my telescope I could see landing craft from one ship on the right going to the left, ^{and vice versa} [^] and they'd crisscross ~~the~~ the

~~boats were laying~~ ^{lanes} like a bunch of ~~tracer~~ ^{tracer} bullets in night firing.

So by the time they hit the beach I fired Landing Unsuccessful. And boy, were they hot! Then we drew a chart showing from the different transports where the ships left, where they were supposed to go and where they actually landed. There was no tactical integrity to any unit, and we knew this was going to come up in the critique. Well, the boys on the beach did a damn nice job. We had blank ammunition and even ~~for~~ ^{for} artillery, which incidentally we got from the Army, I think.

I think the maneuver lasted two or three days, after we let them start again after they got on the beach. We built fires so they could dry out. I guess most of that morning was shot, and then they resumed the operation that afternoon when they got the boys back and sorted out again.

Well, they had the critique right aboard the flagship. I don't remember the admiral's name now. And when it came my time to show why I'd fired the unsuccessful landing signal, I produced this large chart that showed these boats going in every damn direction except the one they wanted to go in. One unit came ashore where it was supposed to, and that was Edson's ~~Raiders~~.

I asked Red Mike about this later, how in hell he managed to get it done, and he said he had given orders to his men -- he told his men that the senior man in each boat would see that the cox'n went to the beach where they were supposed to go, and when he was asked the question, "Suppose he won't do it?" He said, "Take your gun and stick it in his back and tell the son of a bitch to go. You are responsible for getting on that beach

today." And it worked.

In our critique the admiral, when I showed this chart and said, "That's the reason I ~~was~~ declared it to be an unsuccessful landing, because there was no tactical integrity, some of the leaders were lost and nobody knew where the hell they were supposed to go," the admiral got up and said, "What in the hell difference does that make? It's the Navy's job to get them ashore and we got them ashore, didn't we?" I said, "It's the Navy's job to get them ashore where they are supposed to get ashore."

And we had quite a fiery argument. The Army was very disappointed, and I frankly was very disappointed too, to think that the admiral had so little comprehension of what an amphibious operation required.

We went through the critique. There was one admiral whose name I don't remember who came down as an observer for CNO. I don't think he had any background in amphibious operations. But before Gen. Smith and I got back to Quantico he had gone to Washington and reported to the chief of naval operations -- this is hearsay -- that it was a highly successful landing, and there probably would be some repercussions because we had declared it to be an unsuccessful landing.

This little argument went on and I don't know how it happened, but one day an attorney from Harry Truman's committee showed up in my office, and he said he wanted to look at all the records, orders and everything, pertaining to this operation. We were not permitted to show records to anybody, so we telephoned the Commandant and told him our story and asked what we should do

about this thing, because these were classified records. After some time -- I think he had taken this up with the Secretary of the Navy -- they decided to let him see the records and the charts, everything. After a short time, the Truman Committee got into this and investigated.

Q: Was this the ^{Senate} Preparedness Committee?

Erskine: Yes. Somehow it quieted down, because both the Army and the Navy, it is my understanding, at that time were still contending that they could run the amphibious operation without any Marines. I didn't testify before the Committee. I don't know that Gen. Smith did, but he made several trips to Washington about that time, and I am not sure whether he went before the Committee or he was up there to talk to somebody else.

So that's about the story of this landing.

Q: In 1938, I believe, the Fleet Training Publication 167 -- which was the Bible for the conduct of amphibious operations -- was published, as you recall, and this was the combination of all that had been studied and clarified and purified and synthesized as a result of the work that had been done in the Schools in '33. It was really the culmination of amphibious warfare doctrine.

Now you talked about this joint action -- JANAC I think it was. Joint ~~xxxxxx~~ Army Navy Action, which dealt with joint operation. Was there any contradiction between the two publications as far as command relationships went?

Erskine: That's difficult for me to answer because I never was an expert on the Joint Action document. Matter of fact, I read it several times but I don't remember whether there were conflicts. But one thing that struck me about the document was the question of who exercised command in different ^{phases.} ~~bases.~~

Q: This always has been a conflict, has it not?

Erskine: Yes. Well, actually in the FTP-167 the naval superior command is in command of the whole operation, until you reach a certain phase. There was the contention, of course, when we were making this thing up, that actually the ^[officer in tactical command] UTC commander could say to the troops on shore, "I want you to do this, I want you to do that." After many arguments and so forth it was finally decided that the troop commander on the beach commanded the troops on the shore.

Q: That was the result of the Turner-Vandegrift arguments later at Guadalcanal, which I think were resolved . . .

Erskine: That was also the doctrine, at that time. And it also included naval personnel who were on the beach, or any other. In other words you had a commander of a unit going ashore^{and}, when he set up his headquarters there he commanded everybody whose foot was on the dirt.

Q: That's right, and that went all the way on up till the landing force commander established his CP ashore, at which time he took over command of all the troops ashore, and assumed command ashore.

Erskine: I think the doctrine was absolutely sound. It was a question of getting people to understand it, and not think about trying to further the interests of their own service too damn much.

Q: Actually FTP-167 applied primarily to the conduct of amphibious operations, whereas this JANAC -- this Joint Army Navy Action -- had a broader scope, and it covered general warfare, it didn't particularly apply to amphibious operations.

Erskine: Well, you got to get ashore before you can extend yourself up to these broader angles.

Q: Yes. I hadn't realized until just now that there still was this conflict over who was going to undertake amphibious operations, and that the Army was still trying to horn in on the act even though it hadn't had the training and the background other than the training that Gen. Smith's command supervised.

Erskine: Well, the Army had had various exercises in prior years, but they went by the old Joint Action -- what the hell is the name?

Q: The ~~JANAC~~ - J.A.N.A.C.

Erskine: That's right, they tried to follow that, and that was "you scratch my back and I scratch yours." But nothing takes the place of a centralized command in any operation.

Q: I was reviewing one interview of Gen. Walter Rogers, when he was out on the West Coast and they had this landing at Ford Ord, in Monterey Bay, and it was a complete foul-up too. I think this was later on after the war had begun.

Erskine: Yes. I think that was the 7th Division.

Q: Up around Fort Ord, and Monterey -- they had this problem with the landing craft ^{were all} ~~telling~~ out of . . .

The same thing happened here at Fort Storey.

Erskine: Yes. (Pause) I was up there on this landing, but as I remember I didn't have a hell of a lot to do with it. We did go up for numerous conferences, but ahead of time. I think at that time we were getting the 7th ready to go to Kiska.

Q: Yes, the last time we were talking about that, and I think you said you had several stories to tell about the Kiska thing.

Erskine: Yes, well. When they did go up to Kiska, I went up ahead of time to help in the amphibious training. You see the Army was a little bit unwilling. I think I told you this story.

Q: I don't believe so. We were just about to discuss it. We talked about the Fort Storey thing to a certain extent, and I think it's just as well to get back into it, to review it.

Erskine: I guess it's just my memory that is a little hazy, particularly about details.

Q: I think we ought to wait for this Kiska thing until we get you transferred out to the West Coast, when it became the Amphibious Corps Pacific Fleet. And that of course was in September of '42.

You were still on the East Coast when the 1st Division left for the Pacific, and I recall there was a division maneuver at Solomons Island that was pretty God awful, before it left the East Coast. Is this correct?

Erskine: We had some amphibious training down there which was pretty lousy, of the 1st Marine Division.

Q: Yessir, during the winter -- February-March-April of '42.

Erskine: Actually when we had this submarine threat -- I'd like to go back to that -- there was serious concern about how in the hell we were going to get in our amphibious training. And I was in a conference with Gen. Holcomb who had come down to New River, (Camp Lejeune), Holland Smith, Phil Torrey, and Vandegrift, and I think Roy Hunt was there. We had to discuss every possible way. As you know the intercoastal canal runs parallel to the beach at Camp Lejeune. We were quite concerned about how we could get our people off the ship in the right order, with the proper cargo, the proper supplies to go with them.

It suddenly struck me that maybe we could build on the canal for debarkation training a sort of a replica of a ship, just the structure.

Q: A mockup.

Erskine: A mockup. I suggested this to Gen. Smith and he said, "Well, maybe we could do that." Then he took it to Gen. Holcomb who was sitting right there and said, "Maybe we could something like this." And Holcomb said, "You and Vandegrift go right down the canal now, and look over and select a place and let's try this."

So ^{we} ~~we~~ came back, and Vandy and I drew out a sketch on the back of an ~~xxx~~ envelope of what we thought we had to have. So we had our engineers start to work within a very short time. What we did there was make this mockup of at least two decks of a ship -- the forward deck and the rear deck ~~xxx~~(the after deck), -- bring the cargo and things in, carry them over the side, the men debark into the boats. Then we went down the canal and landed.

That was a poor substitute, but you could get over the point of what had to be done and how things had to be handled in an amphibious operation. That thing became more or less a standard piece of equipment. We have one on the West Coast at Camp Pendleton, and finally we had a pretty sophisticated one down at New River.

Q: Of course one of the problems you were faced with at this time was -- aside from suitable landing craft, and I don't know whether

we discussed (perhaps we ought to discuss it) the development of ~~the~~ the LVT and of the Higgins boat. But there just wasn't enough suitable amphibious shipping available, was there?

Erskine: No, we didn't have transports either. Around that time we had about 12 old assault transports, some ^{were} very old ships, and the lifting gear wasn't sufficient, to haul out large size tanks, and a hell of a lot of things had to be done. Some ~~xxx~~ ships had been taken over which were really passenger ships, where you could carry about the equipment for one battalion, but maybe a whole regiment of men. The Mt. Vernon was one of those. We ~~w~~ had several exercises where we tried to use that kind of a ship, but the result was, you put a whole regiment aboard and one battalion's equipment, and ~~xxx~~ they'd rotate the use of this equipment. That's no good for an operation in an area. You couldn't fight that way. But you could get some training -- it was better than nothing.

But as time went on --

When we had the Mt Vernon I remember one time we still had the old motor sailers. I think we had only a few ~~xxxx~~ Eureka boats then. We had some Eureka boats, but the Eureka boat is a boat without a ramp. That was the first boat that we got.

Q: The Navy developed that.

Erskine: No, I think Higgins did that.

Q: Higgins was the Eureka man?

Erskine: I believe so. Brute Krulak can give you all the exact ~~was~~ dope on this because he was pretty much in liaison with Higgins on the boat business all the time.

When we used the Mt. Vernon-- I think I mentioned this once before -- we had an ~~an~~-Army part of the 1st Army Division on there, and we had to stop, because in those days the Navy insisted on throwing out a stern anchor to keep the boat from ^{broaching} ~~lurching~~, and after about ~~xxxxxxx~~ a day and a half we lost so many anchors we had to stop the operation and offer a carton of cigarett^es to every man on the beach who would go swimming and find an anchor. And then we utilized the time to get over some of the points we were trying to stress.

Higgins built this boat. The Navy had a boat board that had some Marines on it, and for years they explored every type of boat they could think of or find, or designs, and never came up with a suitable boat. Higgins had been building boats for the rum runners, which were pretty fast, they could run up into the beaches where the Coast Guard couldn't follow, and get away from them. Higgins was a pretty heavy-drinking man and he got into this thing and he said hell, he'd bring up one of his boats. So he built a boat and brought it up -- I think a couple -- and he brought his own cox'ins to demonstrate. The Navy always had this great fear of ever having a boat touch the bottom. Well, Higgins came in with his Eureka and he just slammed her right upon the beach, sometimes full speed. The men would debark and they'd back off. Well, that was a revelation to a lot of these boat experts.

So he went in for the Eureka type which did not have a ramp, and he later came out with a ramp bow boat, and brought that up, and demonstrated it down at New River. That was good. So the next thing the Navy had developed an artillery barge which had to be towed ashore, and of course you had all kinds of trouble with that, it would broach, it was absolutely unsatisfactory. So Higgins decided he'd build a tank lighter. And he built one and brought it up and slammed it right upon the beach. I was down there for this test, and the tank rolled right out on dry ground.

That was the beginning of the tank lighters.

Other boat companies did build some ramp bow boats, but always by Higgins' specifications.

Q: How about the LVT?

Erskine: The LVT had started some years ago. I think a Mr. Roebling invented that gadget. The first design was mostly aluminum or light metal, and it had quite a long little history before people really accepted it. I remember we had at least one -- maybe two -- down in Guantanamo when we were there. In the early model this thing could climb right over the mangroves, but it had no armor, it was pretty light. This was really an experimental model, so they started making modifications. It's my recollection that Mr. Roebling didn't want to build anything for warfare, and he didn't take to this idea of building a lot of these amphibian tractors -- we called them something else then, I don't even remember the name.

But we experimented with this a great deal, and then of course the boat board took it on, and many modifications were made before we reached the type of vehicle we have today.

Q: Actually it was a swamp buggy for rescuing^e operations during hurricanes in the Everglades.

Erskine: I think that was the original idea.

Q: And someone picked it up down at the Schools -- saw it in LIFE magazine. But I've been told that when you were down at the Schools in '38 *or when you were working in the Guam Operation*, so that when you were working on the Guam operations you upset the whole cart. I don't know whether it was you or who else was involved, but you upset the school solution because you introduced the element of the LVT as a reef crossing vehicle, and that the whole concept of the operation -- both the defense and the attack --

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Session VI continuedSide 2, Tape 1

Q: But the Guam school problem was changed considerably with the introduction of the LVT.

Erskine: Yes. I think I was head of operations at that time, but I was not the only one who felt that way. But of course we'd always get this song and dance from people, "You'll never get enough money to do this, you'll never get enough money to do that, the Navy won't do this, the Navy won't do that." I had this argument all the time. But my view was if we went to war, god-damn it, everybody did what he was told to do, and if we needed amphibian tractors we would get amphibian tractors, the best that could be made, and if the Navy had to go in and lose a ship or some men they had to go. But some of our people I thought took a very wrong view of what war was like. Of course some of these people had never been in real honest-to-God combat.

Q: What I wanted to ask you about was, about the time after the Division was formed, about the time the 1st Division made its maneuver off New River and came up there, there was a whole re-organization as far as personnel was concerned. First of all, there was an incident involving Col. del Valle, who had the 11th Marines, and then Gen. Torrey was relieved as division commander.

I wonder if you'd care to talk about these events, since they dealt with personalities, who were involved in Marine operations to a great extent. And I think this is an important part of the ~~Erskine's story~~ story, and I know you were very deeply involved in this.

Erskine: I was involved in that thing. I was chief of staff, and Gen. Holland Smith made a couple of *visits* down there.

I don't remember exactly how Pete del Valle got into his trouble.

Q: But Torrey was involved with it.

Erskine: Yes, and then I think ^{Pete} went out and made a couple of speeches. Whether he maligned Torrey in his speeches or how, I don't know, but I know he was involved in talking out of turn. And Pete is a very ~~xxx~~ voluble man, as you might know.

So Gen. Smith went down there to look into this whole matter. The Commandant had talked to him -- whether it was on the phone or in personal conversation I don't know. I went with him, and the upshot of the thing was, as I remember, that I think Gen. Smith told Gen. Holcomb, the Commandant, that Torrey had not demonstrated that he was able to command and improve the 1st Division, and that he was unsatisfied with his leadership. Somehow Pete del Valle got a clear bill out of it, and Torrey was relieved, and I was in the car -- we had one of these oldtime reconnaissance cars -- in the morning that Gen. Smith drove down to see Vandegrift, (Vandegrift had just come down as ADC for Torrey) and told Vandegrift that he

was going to be the division commander, (This of course had been approved by Gen. Holcomb) and that Torrey had been relieved as of that date. I don't know -- I never did know -- all the ramifications, but that's what I think happened.

Q: I think the chief of staff of the Division at this time was a man by the name of Munson, is that correct?

Erskine: Yes, George Munson.

Q: Yes, and he was very much involved with this whole thing, was he not?

Erskine: He played a part in it. I don't know exactly what George was supposed to have done or not done, but as I recollect he was one of the people in contention.

Q: Talking about irascible old characters in the Marine Corps, or about difficult people to deal with, I don't recall whether we discussed a man by the name of Ellie Bell Miller. I understand he was a rough one to deal with.

Erskine: I don't think I ever knew him. Now wait a minute. E.B. Miller?

Q: E.B. Miller. W He was with the Brigade out in China. I think he was either the adjutant or the chief of staff out there, and then

he was back at Quantico. He in the early 30s did^a considerable amount of work on the early development of the manual for landing operations.

Erskine: Mmmm. I don't remember him. I know the name, but I never served with him. E.B. Miller. Now we had another Miller who was quite an athlete and was quite involved in . . .

Q: C.J. Miller?

Erskine: C.J. Miller, yes.

Q: There is still a third one, a Hein^{ie} Miller from Washington.

Erskine: C.J. Miller was a topside man in every way.

Q: Do you recall where you were, what the circumstances were, what the situation was at the time the war broke out in December of '41? I guess you were at Quantico?

Erskine: On December 7th? I was at Quantico, chief of staff of either the Amphibious Force or the Amphibious Corps, I don't know which it was. We had our headquarters there, and I was chief of staff to Gen. Holland Smith. And on December 7th I was having lunch at the Army-Navy/^{Country} Club here in Washington, when the news came. As I remember, Tommy Watson was there -- he was on duty at Headquarters -- Bob Denig, Harry Schmidt, I think, and several other senior officers in the Marine Corps.

This news came over just about 12 o'clock, just after we sat down for lunch, and they left, I remember that. I drove back to Quantico as soon as lunch was finished. The first thing I did was to go down to . . . (interruption)

Q: You were saying that you went to Quantico and reported back on the 7th.

Erskine: I arrived at the Headquarters building in Quantico on Barnett Avenue, and Geiger and Louis Woods were at the door, ^{banging on it} the door was locked and I had the key. The sentry inside wouldn't let anybody in unless it was some designated person.

Anyway this guy was away, and Geiger was jumping up and down and he said, "My gosh, don't you know that the Japs have hit Pearl Harbor? When are we going?"

Q: Had you any contingency plans at all?

Erskine: No, we didn't have any then. You see, we were then still there, and the 3rd Corps was being organized on the other coast. I took them in the office and told them, "We didn't have any orders." We had gotten this message that went out -- was it green? whatever the color of the plan was. I said, "Here is the message, but we haven't any commitment, we don't have any orders to go out there right now. I don't know who will be the first person or persons out there, which outfit will be first." We had to wait and get orders, they had to come from the Fleet.

Goddamn it, it was a hell of a situation! He would have wanted to take off right there with his Wing, fly to the West Coast and fly to Japan or any other damn place.

He stayed around a while; he was a young brigadier general at that time, and finally went back. Then I got hold of Gen. Smith and told him what had happened, and he came down and we talked about things and brought out the plan and notified everybody to be ready to execute it. But we had no objective and no orders at that time.

This dragged on a few days. As you know, the Navy had lost most of their fighter planes in this Pearl Harbor attack, and they were very short of planes. We had a bunch of real hot pilots with a lot of experience in amphibious operations.

One day Gen. Smith was asked to come up to Headquarters Marine Corps, and I accompanied him, and we had a conference there with Gen. Mitchell, who was then the chief of Marine Corps Air, and the ~~2nd~~ Commandant, Gen. Smith, and myself. The Navy had sent down instructions to take the planes away from this Marine Corps Wing and fly them out to the West Coast and turn them over to the Navy. That was one of the saddest conferences I ever attended -- taking the planes away from this real hot wing. True, it might not have been as good as the Navy fliers from the carriers, but this was done. They finally agreed to do it -- to turn them over. The conference was really to determine whether or not we should protest this and what did we have to say in protest. So they figured that in the interest of the country and the Navy it was probably the best thing to do.

Here was Geiger dismounted! (laughs) He was so Goddamn mad! Oh Lord!

That was one of the things that transpired soon after Pearl Harbor day.

Q: Of course right through '42 you supervised the training of both the Army and Marine Corpsⁱⁿ amphibious operations, and in September of '42 you were detached to form the Amphibious Corps Pacific Fleet in San Diego.

Erskine: The first thing we did, we moved to the West Coast. You see, the 3rd Corps moved out, and we had what was called the San Diego Area: that included San Diego less the Recruit Depot -- we were not involved in recruit training -- and Camp Elliott ~~XXXXXX~~ which had just been taken over, and had a lot of troops up there. We had several little camps, we had several schools, tanks, and we were there some months before we actually became the ^V~~5th~~ Amphibious Corps.

Q: Yes. Of course that came much later, I guess, when you formed up for the . . .

Erskine: The Marianas.

Q: Yessir. But what I wanted to ask you was, were you informed, were you a party to the move of the 1st Division to the Pacific when it was detached, and did you know where it was going to go and what it was going to do?

Erskine: No, I was not involved in that. The orders came from Washington. Whether Gen. Smith knew it was going to happen or not, I don't know, but I don't think he knew it before he told me. I think he told me as soon as he found out.

A little sidelight on this. When this happened they called me up from New River and said, "We have to have some sort of address for our people who are going to move to the Pacific." The decision had been made, of course, to put all the Marines in the Pacific and let the Army take over, and we were still at Quantico waiting for the Army general to come down, whoever he might be, and the first man designated was Patton. No, first Stilwell and then Patton. I think Patton never did show up at our Headquarters, but Stilwell did. I knew Stilwell quite well in China, he was military attaché in Peking when I was there, and he was a very able man. His nickname was Vinegar Joe, as you know. ~~When he came in~~ The last time I'd seen him he was a colonel, and when he came in that morning he had three stars on. So I was a little bit surprised, ^{it looked like the army was really running away with this star business} and I said to Joe, "My God, congratulations! Looks like you've been out and somebody has been giving you a lot of presents. They shine like hell on your shoulder." He said, "Don't congratulate me. Don't you know that the higher a man goes up the pole the more of his backside people see?" I've never forgotten that.

Anyway they called me from New River and asked about what address they could have. I didn't know, I wasn't too familiar with the Navy's system of handling the mail anyway.

They called back about an hour later and I talked it over with Gen. Smith, and he said, "Find out one, get a name."

I said, "Well, just tell your people that they are going to Solomons Island." We had been doing training up there.

I guess it was a month or more later, and we had moved to the West Coast, I believe, when the news came that they had landed on Solomons Island, and here this was all supposed to be so damn secret. And I had no idea they were going to land on Solomons Island. For one time in my life I just guessed that and it was right. But of course it was wrong to give this address. We should have given something else to tell their families. That broke the security on it, but nobody realized it.

Q: I don't think they realized it at the time. But at the time the 1st Division was detached from Gen. Smith's command, had ~~you~~ ^{you} any idea where they were going, what was going on?

Erskine: No, we didn't.

Q: They were just taken away from him/ Now you were still on the East Coast. The Amphibious Corps in August of '42~~x~~ became the Amphibious Training Staff FMF. In September you went out to the San Diego area and ^{it} became the Amphibious Corps Pacific Fleet. What did you do out there? Just continued your type of training of both Marines and Army, such as you conducted on the East Coast?

Erskine: Yes. We had the 7th Division for one, which was located at Fort Ord, and then they went up to Kiska and I went up there.

There were some troops up there already, in Kiska.

Q: This was in July of '43. Adak.

Erskine: Adak. The Gen. Smith came up later. I took about five or six people with me. I had one Army lieutenant colonel, then Maj. Shisler, Col. Ray Knapp, somebody else whose name I don't remember. We were the advance party. I think they had the 4th Army Regiment in Adak, and they had been there a long time.

Those fellows really had 10,000 *yard street*

The colonel commanding this outfit was named Kotzebue.

Q: Really? Russian?

Erskine: No, he was an American, but I think Kotzebue is^a French name. He was quite a character in many ways, and I think quite an able officer.

We went out in a DC-3 plane. We flew up there, and that was one of the worst flights I ever had in my life. We finally got there, and the crew chief -- I'll never forget, his name was Tiger Laws -- ~~as soon as he opened~~ ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ the door he jumped out of the plane, he lay down and kissed the ground and said, "Boy, this is one I walked away from."

It was a terrible flight. Cold, no heat, we had on all our heavy gear, and damn near froze to death before we got there.

The Army billeted us down and took a rather dim view of a bunch of Marines coming up there to tell them what to do.

Q: This was Buckner's command, was it not?

Erskine: He was in command of the whole area.

Q: The Alaskan Command.

Erskine: And Adm. Kinkaid was the naval commander up there. Kinkaid did everything he could to help us maintain good relations. I was billeted down with Kotzebue's regiment, and just before we left San Diego for this flight up there, I went and bought a case of Old Forrester bourbon. The Army were not permitted to have liquor in that area at that time -- no hard liquor; they had beer, but no real drinks. So about the second day I was there it was cold and windy as the devil, and I stuck a bottle of this Old Forrester under my jacket, and went over to ^{Col.} Gen. Kotzebue in his hut. I had been told by several people that he was very difficult to get along with and that he didn't like Marines in the first place.

I went in and I sat down in this little hut. He had a little fire in there and he said, "I understand you came up here to take over my regiment." I said, "No, I didn't come up here for that, I came up here for a highly specialized operation, to give you a few little hints on the way we think things should be done." He said, "I am perfectly able to command my regiment, and I don't look with much favor on you fellows, and you are going to have a hell of a hard time up here." I reached under my coat, I pulled out this bottle of bourbon and put it on the table, and I said, "I really came up here this afternoon to bring you a little drink."

He said, "Jesus Christ, you can have the goddamn ~~xxxx~~ regiment!"
 Z(laughter) We started out beautifully from that time on! The
 goddamn regiment! Ha! I would sneak him a bottle every once in
 a while, and we got along beautifully. We ate in the mess there
 with their officers. Then Gen. Smith came up and he had most of
 his business with Kinkaid and Buckner, while I was dealing mainly
 with the regimental groups.

Q: The invasion of Kiska took place in August of '43, and it was
 pretty much of a bust, evidently: the Intelligence was faulty,
 there were no Japanese there. Is that correct?

Erskine: Yes. I talked to everybody I could in our small group
 we had up there. I think Bobby Hogaboom was with us on this trip
 too. I think he came up with Gen. Smith and several other officers.

We tried to keep in as close touch as possible, and we finally
 came to the conclusion that maybe the Air Force people were the
 people who really knew more about what was going on.

At this season of the year there was a very heavy fog that
 would settle around those islands; sometimes it was so heavy -- it
 didn't persist all they long, but at times it was so heavy that
 you could move your hand through it very quickly and it would be
 wet as if you had put it under the shower. Then you'd have a
 very quick change of weather, and you'd have sunshine so bright
 you'd ^{be} blinded, and you were ~~up~~ either up to your backside in mud
 or knee deep in dust. It was just that way, the weather was terrible.
 Not too cold, but so changeable, and you were wet most of the time.

(Pause.) I forgot what I was going to say.

Q: About the Army troops -- they had been there for a long time.

Erskine: Yes, they had been up there for quite a while, and they weren't too interested in things, but they pounded the island ~~all~~ all the time. The Navy had a couple of destroyers that were supposed to be circling around.

However, ~~xxx~~ ^{three} about ~~three~~ or four days before we left Adak, Gen. Smith and I went down and had a drink with the commander of ~~the~~ the aircraft unit up there at Elmendorf Air Force Base. I've forgotten his name at the moment. He told us that afternoon -- he said, "I don't believe that there are many Japs, if any, left on Kiska." "Why do you think so?" "We got no response from anti-aircraft fire, and we believe that either there is something damn funny, or the Japs have gotten out of there."

Gen. Smith went and told Adm. Kinkaid this, and he said, "That's absolutely foolish." Then he told Buckner about it. He said, "Oh, no, you are absolutely mistaken."

The Army was going to make a big thing out of this operation.

Gen. Dewitt, who was the commander of the Western Sea Frontier, came up there with Buckner, to be on hand as one of the observers.

The Army had divided the 7th Division into two brigades -- two regiments in each brigade, and the Navy insisted that the Japanese could not have gotten out because they were patrolling the only places where they could come out.

Well, they made up that plan, which I saw but I never paid a hell of a lot of attention to it because I didn't want to be involved because I just had a feeling that this thing was going to abort. So I asked Adm. Kinkaid if I could go on this operation, and he said, "Yes, I'll give you a letter, and you go and be my representative, to observe for me. I am not delegating ~~you~~ your authority to choose anything, but you will be my personal representative." "Could I take some other people with me?" "Yes." So I think about four of us went along, the same crowd, an Army doctor, Ray Knapp, Shisler, somebody else whose name slips my mind at the moment, and we embarked with all our gear. We went aboard the St. Mihiel, which was an Army transport. This ship didn't have the gear that we had on our amphibious assault ships. We arrived in the area, and to my consternation, by God, it was a very forbidding coast, very rocky, with big rocks, and very few places where you could land. You could land two boats here, a 100 yards away another two boats, and 50 yards away maybe four. I don't remember the unit I was with -- it was an Army battalion.

As we were bringing the boats alongside, Tokyo Rose came on the loudspeaker, and why they let this thing go on, I don't know. She would sing a little song and tell the soldiers, "We know all about Kinkaid and Buckner and everything else, and this is your last boat ride, you are going to be massacred." So it was a pretty tense thing. ~~They~~^{We} gave the order to debark, and nothing happened. I was on the after deck with the fellows who were with me, the Marines, by their group, including one Army officer.

So we gave the order a second and a third time and nothing happened. So we felt that maybe if you could climb over the side here they'd all go. They climbed over the side and got in one of the boats. About that time I heard a pistol shot on deck. It turned out that the company commander of this company that was to debark right at that particular point shot himself. And I think it was all brought on by Tokyo Rose.

After a little fiddle-faddle we finally got these troops in boats and we headed for shore. So we went ashore in the first wave. Two machine guns could have slaughtered us from those promontories on each side of this beach.

We had the 13th Canadian Brigade with us. That was an experience to get them into this show.

Q: How did that work?

Erskine: I'll tell you that, better put it on another one. Let's finish here.

Q: Yessir.

Erskine: So we approached the beach, and they had already landed some scouts on the beach, on the island.

Q: ~~Waxxth~~ Did they use Eskimo scouts there, those Alaskan scouts?

Erskine: Yes, Alaskan scouts. They weren't all Eskimos. God, they were loaded down. I think each man had an automatic rifle plus a

pistol plus something else, plus something else. But they were darn well trained soldiers, and they had made reconnaissances all around.

But when the gunfire came down, it came down on the opposite side of the island from which we were to land, which I couldn't ~~understand~~ understand, but I said, "I guess I am young and I have to learn." So we kept going and not a damn shot was fired.

We got out of the boats, and some other boats which had been used by these Alaskan scouts were on the beach. So we decided we'd stay the hell out, all we'd do would be just stand by and watch. That was our job anyway. It was pretty nasty weather; we took some (four or five) of these rubber boats and built ourselves a little igloo out of the beach area, and stayed in there most of the time.

They came ashore, and there was a stream that came down near where we landed, and to get their artillery up, (because up there the terrain is very rugged and very rough, there was this muskeg and also a covering of grass that grows there and that just peels off like a carpet) we had ~~this~~ bulldozers, and we cleaned out the stream bottom and moved their artillery up in the stream bed -- the water was only 6 or 8 inches deep.

We had a little shooting as the troops approached, and there was gunfire like hell on the other side of the island. Then they started bringing back a few casualties, right there on the beach. (Interruption)

Q: They had boxes of medals, you say, every man who . . .

Erskine: Yes, they had boxes of medals on the beach. Then I heard later that they had hoped to promote a number of people on the

battlefield. I think the Canadians had a few people shot by our people, but not many. But it was worth your life to move around after dark on that beach in the area where we were.

We stayed four or five days on Kiska, and then we went out and caught a transport that was out there, climbed up the Jacob's Ladder. When I first hailed the ship not a damn soul (tape defective here, it skips)

So I got up on deck and I pulled out my letter from Kinkaid and I said, "There it is, you are going back to . . . (what the hell is that place?) . . . to Adak, and I am going with you."

He was pretty nice after that, but he was the most unwelcome host I ever had. A fine looking naval officer too.

Q: You reported to Adm. Kinkaid when you got back to Adak?

Erskine: Yes, I went back and told him what I had seen, and of course (I told) Gen. Smith. Then we were pretty soon back in the San Diego. That was the biggest fizzle. I don't know whether that's ever been written up in history or not.

Q: I am sure the Army has written it up in its official history, but I imagine at the time they had it as a grand and glorious campaign. Were you impressed with the Army staff work and estimate of the situation, and Intelligence? Or did they have such a thing?

Erskine: Of course they had it, but I didn't get copies. I never saw their whole operation plan. Our job was strictly one of training and they wanted to keep it exactly that way, to assist in training.

But I wasn't impressed at all. There was one thing that I do remember. Kotzebue's outfit's actual mission was one of defense on Adak, and he had every man dig a spider hole, then from the grass they had they built a little cover for this hole, and I think twice a week he'd require all of his command to go out and sit in these spider holes. His theory for the defense of the island was that if the Japs came in they would go through and there wouldn't be anybody there. Then when the Japs passed by they'd get up and shoot them in the back. And that same theory came up when they didn't encounter any Japs on Kiska -- all were hidden in spider holes, watch for spider holes, watch for spider holes. But I don't think anybody ever found a spider hole in Kiska.

Q: Did you get to talk with Gen. Buckner or his staff at all?

Erskine: I went to a number of their staff meetings when I was there on the island. I knew him pretty well, we'd occasionally have a drink, something like that. He had a colonel -- Post -- as chief of staff, whom I knew pretty well and I thought he was a very able man.

Q: Post stayed with him as a matter of fact, ^{with} ~~Maxwell~~ the 10th Army on Okinawa.

Erskine: Yes.

Q: You had another story about the 13th Canadian Brigade and how it became involved in the operation.

Erskine: Well, I don't know what went on behind the scenes. We were on the West Coast when this started, of course, and the word came out that the Canadians were going to send a brigade. They had some amphibious training up in Victoria, and an ~~amphibious~~ amphibious base at Nanaimo Island, across the bay. Anyway I was told to take a few of our staff and go up there and talk to the commander of this outfit and tell him that we would provide the artillery, the ammunition, the communications, and the doctrine.

The commander of this brigade when I arrived was a Brigadier Sergeant, and he told me in no uncertain terms when I told him what I came up for, he said, "We are Canadians, and we are not about to let you Americans come in here and take over our troops. We remember the British in Singapore and how they forced us to surrender our whole corps without firing a shot, and we are not about to get mixed up with any more people like that."

I had my trouble trying to convince this fellow. We had a meeting and a dinner, not staff night but --

Q: Mess night?

Erskine: Mess night.

Q: Even in wartime?

Erskine: Yes, but nobody dressed. But it was the same as the mess night. He had all of his officers there, and I tried to explain the necessity for having our communications, that we

would provide the equipment, and of course it was easier for the gunners to understand that our ammunition, their ammunition -- they had 25 pounders and it wouldn't fit, and it ~~was~~ took only a little bit of training for those people. Communications was a little bit complicated for them, I think.

This brigade had at least one French battalion, and that was to be the shore party setup. They all spoke French. We had quite a go-round. I finally had to go see the commanding general of the National Sea Frontier of Canada, because Sergeant was anything but cooperative, and at this mess night he tried to give me a pretty rough time. However -- I've forgotten the name of the general that was in command of the frontier there, but he was quite a man, he had the Victoria Cross from South Africa, and he was a man of few words. He said, "You tell them what you want and that's it."

So I brought back with me I think two communicators and a couple of artillerymen. The artillerymen were to get a little indoctrination course in ship's gunfire, which of course it turned out they didn't need because the gunfire was on the other side of the island.

We flew back, and Gen. Galer was our pilot -- also a Medal of Honor man in the Pacific.

Q: Yes, I know ^{of} Galer.

Erskine: We had a little bit of an overloaded plane, and we had a hell of a time with the takeoff.

Anyway we made the trip back and brought these people down.

I went out to see some of their amphibious operations, and they had^a tank lighter that was built of wood, that they used in this little operation. They had a 2 inch ^{mortar}~~meter~~ that sort of impressed me: it was very accurate. They simulated a landing, and I sat on the beach and watched it; they fired these little mortar shells^{all} around, smoke and so forth. But I felt that their amphibious training was pretty sketchy, particularly in the concept of getting ashore and going some place. In a number of conferences they had I thought they talked too much and did too little.

So we sent some instructors up, and the ~~people~~^{thing} they needed most of all were transport quartermasters, people to show them how to load their ships, so they could get what they wanted. I think these quartermasters stayed with them.

Anyway, when I got back to San Diego, we had organized a ship's gunfire training course on San Clemente Island, and we built what we thought was a pretty good OP up there -- a concrete OP. And each ship that was going out to participate in any of these operations had to go through this course.

So we took these two ^{artillerymen}~~gunners~~ up there for a little practical on-the-job training, and this new destroyer that hadn't been there before came down. Somebody got the order wrong, and the first goddamn shell they fired hit our OP, and it wounded one of these officers, a major, not seriously but badly enough to put him in the hospital.

They didn't take the right offset; they took the offset from the target and hit the OP.

So I thought, "Well, this is the beginning of a hell of a situation here now. What am I going to tell the Canadians? We bring them down, and the first day one of them is wounded." But nothing really bad came from that.

Then when we moved all the troops up to Adak, and they embarked at Adak, while the Canadian Brigade was up there they had got a new brigadier up whose name slips my mind at the moment, who had just been a short time before at the Dieppe operation. He was a hard charger in every way (tape skips ^{from} here to end)

I went over to his place one day and he said, "If you are going to be with us you ^{ve} got to wear our uniform." I said, "All right. Where am I going to get it?" ~~*****~~ And he issued me a uniform, and I wore it, quite a bit. As a matter of fact I went ashore in Kiska in this Canadian uniform.

I thought it was so distinctive that at least an American soldier wouldn't mistake me for a Jap. I said,

I got to talking to him one morning in his CP I said, "*Per your gunners familiar with* the artillery." He had new guns, you see.

(Interruption)

and I'll see what I can do about replenishing the

This was about 11. About 1 o'clock he had all his guns in a . This was right in the middle of Adak

It just happened that these targets.
 (Tape skips too much from now on, impossible to transcribe)

As soon as I heard this I went over there and said, "What the hell is going on?" ~~They~~^{He} said, "Goddamn it, you said we should have some practice." I said, "Yes, but I didn't say you had to have it here." He said, "What's the matter?" I said, "Goddamn it, people live on the other side of this island, and you'd better stop." So he did. Then he went into a little lecture and he said, "You goddamned Americans have too many safety precautions." He was just back from Dieppe, and I don't think he had gotten over his war nerves. He said, "All you do is put so many regulations down you'll never learn how to fight, you'll never learn how to win a battle. I see no reason why I can't fire my guns from here." I said, "You have to have an ^{impact area} ~~amphitheater~~ (?), my friend, one that's approved and one that people will want to stay out of." He said, "I don't think it's going to hurt anything up there." Anyway he stopped shooting.

I thought I was going to get merry hell for that, but all they did was shake their heads, I guess they thought . . .
 (end of recording)

Session VI continued

Tape 2, Side 1

Q: You were saying that they really wanted to do a good job.

Erskine: Yes, I thought the Canadians -- the command echelon certainly struck me as being very good. Very good, and their fighting spirit, as far as I could determine, ~~was~~ would have been wonderful in battle.

The Brigade landed at the same hour that we landed on the island of Kiska, and seemed to make quite a good progress, but encountered no resistance. I didn't get in touch with them after the landing was made because I really didn't want to get involved up there -- I was trying to see what the Americans were going to do.

Q: And General Smith, how impressed was he with them?

Erskine: He didn't see much of the Canadians, but I never heard him make a remark that indicated that he was not well satisfied with their performance. But you couldn't tell too much because there was nobody to fight them there.

Q: Was he observing the operation too?

Erskine: He went along on the flagship.

Q: Which was what?

Erskine: I believe the Pennsylvania. I think it was.

Q: That's ~~what~~ where Kinkaid ~~had~~ ~~get~~ his flag.

Erskine: No, Kinkaid stayed back in his headquarters. He didn't go on the operation.

Q: Who was the Amphibious Force commander?

Erskine: Rockwell, I think. Adm. Rockwell. (Pause) I think he was in command there at the time.

Q: What kind of cooperation and reception did Gen. Smith get from the Army? Was he considered an interloper also?

Erskine: I think so. There was no real warmth for any of us. They were courteous, but I always felt -- and I think everybody with me felt -- that we were not very welcome.

Q: Was this sort of a harbinger of things to come later on?

Erskine: That same division came out to the Pacific -- the 7th.

Q: As Arnold's division?

Erskine: No, Arnold was the artilleryman in that division. What's his name -- I can see him.

Q: Bradley had the 96th.

Erskine: I don't know. This was the 7th. Oh hell, I'll think of his name.

(Ed Note: MajGen Albert E. Brown)

Q: Griner?

Erskine: No, Griner had the 27th, he got it on Saipan. Oh hell!

Q: It wasn't Arnold?

Erskine: Let's see -- what operation did he go in over there? I know at one time they were making plans for this division and one of our divisions to take a couple of small islands which we later didn't take.

Q: I'll tell you in a minute because it should be right in this book here. (Pause) (Interruption)

Erskine: The 7th went out there. One of the colonels' name was Zimmerman, I remember ^{him} quite well. Gosh, I'll think of it by the time you come back next time. I think I'd better stop now.

Q: Okay, we'll close up here and continue next time. This is a good stopping point.

Erskine: Let's try the same time next Wednesday.

End of Side 1, Tape 2, End of Session VI.

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

General Graves B. Erskine

U. S. Marine Corps (Retired)



Mr. Benis M. Frank, Interviewer

HISTORY AND MUSEUMS DIVISION

Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps

Washington, D. C.

1975

Session VII - 11 February 1970

Tape 1, Side 1

Q: In our last interview session we spoke about the Kiska operation. I think we've pretty well covered that. And so we are now about to -- and ~~xxxxxx~~ you made some comments on that --

At the time when you went up to Kiska the V Amphibious Corps had been established I guess while you were away.

Erskine: I think so. But it was the same outfit.

Q: The same outfit, it just changed the name.

Erskine: Yes, it just changed the title.

Q: In September you transferred out to Pearl Harbor.

Erskine: Right.

Q: Had the staff been pretty well formed? Had Gen. Smith pretty well established what he wanted in the way of corps staff?

Erskine: We knew what we wanted, but we didn't have all the personnel. We went out there with pretty much of a skeleton organization. I took an advance group and flew out, and the rear echelon came out on board a carrier that was coming out.

I forget the name of the carrier. And we set up a very small organization there in the Pearl Harbor Navy Yard; we took over one of the buildings there which I think probably had been a set of quarters.

Q: Is that where FMFPac was in 1950? The same building, right across from the barracks?

Erskine: Yes. It was on the parade ground.

Q: Yes.

Erskine: So we tried to operate there, and we finally expanded into a bunch of huts that we set up on the parade ground when we got the rest of our troops out there. And of course we tried to keep the staff down to the absolute minimum number. But that was our base of operation for the next year or so.

Q: The V Amphibious Corps reported up to CinCPac. You were a ^{type} tight command.

Erskine: Yes.

Q: Under the aegis of CinCPac.

Erskine: Yes. We of course functioned with the 5th Fleet, which was Adm. Spruance.

Q: Spruance had the 5th Fleet yes. And you had a task unit designation within the 5th Fleet?

Erskine: That's right.

Q: What was your reception when you got out there?

Erskine: As I remember, everything was all right, particularly with the Navy. It was my impression that Adm. Nimitz was delighted to have us there at Headquarters. However, I must say that Lt. Gen. Richardson, who commanded the Army forces out there, was not even courteous.

Q: This is something we might as well talk about because he -- Nelly Richardson I guess he was called, who was head of USARPac, I guess, was a constantly a thorn in the side of Nimitz and a constant danger to the Marine Corps during the whole war. Why was this? What was the story? What were some of the involvements, and why do you suppose this was so?

Erskine: I think he was one of the old hardliners who thought the Marine Corps had no place in this thing, and if possible you ought to get rid of ~~thixxguy~~ these guys. They were showing us up a little bit. That's my feeling -- he was just an old hard-liner, and he carried out the theme song of the Army -- I wouldn't want to call them ~~any names~~ ^{enemies, I would call them} -- misinformed individuals.

Q: There ~~was~~ was a time in '44, I think it was, when Richardson proposed a plan for the Army to take ^{the conduct of} over/all amphibious operations in the Pacific. Is this right?

Erskine: I think that's right; I never saw the plan myself, but that was of course always under discussion and pushed by the Army, and that might have been one of his great ambitions -- thinking that he would be the commander of all Army troops, all amphibious troops in the Pacific. I never knew him personally; I met him on several occasions, and he was generally so cool to me that I said, "The hell with you, ^{you} son of a bitch."

Q: He was kind of flashy with his boots and breeches, wasn't he?

Erskine: Yes, a little of a flashy fellow.

Q: What were some of the ~~things~~ ^{run-ins} that you had at FMFPac, or that actually the V Amphibious Corps had at the time you were chief of staff, before you took over the 3rd Division?

Erskine: You mean with Richardson?

Q: Yessir.

Erskine: ^{we only had} One real serious thing, as I remember. Of course there was always a little friction -- ^{of} who had the authority here, and who had the authority there, particularly with reference to the 27th Division, which when it came out to Pearl it was billeted in what is now the air base over there, ~~Fort~~ ^[HICKAM FIELD?] Fort Stetsenberg. There were several occasions there. Ralph Smith and I were very close friends; he had been one of my instructors when I went to school

at Leavenworth, and we got to know each other there, and I always considered him to be a very brilliant individual, particularly in the intelligence field, and he was teaching part of the intelligence course at Leavenworth when I was there. A very nice guy. But Ralph to my mind was not a field type soldier. As a matter of fact we would have dinner or lunch together from time to time, while we ~~were~~ were still in Pearl before the Marianas operation, and ^{on} one occasion (we were in the Halakalani Hotel for dinner that night), Ralph told me, "I don't think I am really a combat commander. I've been highly trained for staff work, particularly in the intelligence field, and that's where I feel my abilities could be best used." I tried to disabuse him of the fact that with his background and his training he couldn't become a good field commander, and I told him he had to be a sort of a tough son of a bitch in order to be able to do it on the battlefield. It wasn't really his nature. But I was very fond of Ralph Smith, and I was sort of heartbroken over the final outcome of our association.

I remember one of the first times I went out and had lunch with Ralph Smith at his headquarters he had some of his staff there, and I met his staff, and there was only one regular officer on his staff at that time, and his name was Stebbins, he was a colonel. Stebbins had served some time in the Marine Corps -- I don't know how long -- and I think he got out and got into the Army Reserve and finally moved into a career position. I thought Stebbins was a very able guy, but every other man he had was either a National Guard fellow or a reserve officer.

This 27th Division, called New York's Own -- a National Guard outfit originally -- had a lot of old customs. For instance, I remember on one occasion they had quite a stir in their barracks because they were electing officers and electing noncommissioned officers, believe it or not. And the story I got on it was that some of the corporals there were really the employers of some of the lieutenants and captains. And that didn't make for a very good atmosphere. As a matter of fact I talked to Ralph about this. He said, "Well, ~~my~~ goddamn it, I know that, I have a hell of a time giving those people the right ~~a~~ idea of discipline and relationships, but it's a problem I have to deal with." He asked me ~~how~~ how I would handle it, and I told him I would bring all the officers together, and the noncommissioned officers, lay the law down to them, and by God, ^{these are} ~~this is~~ the rules from now on, and that's it, brother, and you are going to live by it.

Q: Did he ever make the effort?

Erskine: I don't think he ever did. I am not so sure but what Richardson tried to exercise a great deal of authority over him. I know that little things would come up -- nothing of any material significance -- and Ralph would say, "Gen. Richardson wants me to do this or that, or something else." I said, "Well, if it's not too much of an issue, go ahead and do it and keep the old bastard satisfied as much as you can."

Q: The 27th Division was under the operational control of the V Amphibious Corps.

Erskine: It was. We had a lot of things about amphibious training, you know. We would set up a schedule, and it took a hell of a lot more trouble to get them to carry out this schedule ^{than did any} ~~and get in in~~ one of our Marine Divisions under our direct command.

Q: The administrative control remained in the hands of the Army?

Erskine: The administrative control remained in the hands of the Army, except of course administrative things that had to be handled through us, particularly casualty ~~reports~~, reports.

Q: Courts?

Erskine: No, we didn't bother with their courts; they ran their own courts. That's an administrative rather than an operational matter.

So when we went out on the Marianas operation, the 2nd and 4th Divisions landed -- or was it the 5th?

Q: The 4th. The 5th hadn't been formed yet.

Erskine: Oh, the 5th got in there somehow.

Q: No, the 5th Division's first operation was Iwo.

Erskine: I guess Harry Schmidt had the 4th. That's how he got it.

Q: Yes sir.

Erskine: The 2nd and 4th . . .

Q: He was expeditionary *Commander* at Iwo.

Erskine: And they had a pretty tough time getting ashore. Then after we'd gone up about halfway up the island we brought in the 27th Division. They landed; of course they had no opposition in landing, but once they got in and got into position they just didn't fight. And I talked to Ralph about this on the telephone, and also personally -- I went down to his headquarters -- and I said, "I have a hell of a goddamn problem: I give the orders and they don't carry them out." I thought at the time -- and I still have the feeling -- that the Army had given him some instructions to use his own mind to make up decisions rather than to take direct orders from us. In other words, I didn't think he was really pushing the way he should. And it wasn't in his own heart, but he was carrying out a plan which I blame Richardson for, to not get too much under the control of the Marines.

This thing went on there for quite a while, and Bobby Hogaboom made several trips down and talked to the staff, and talked to him. It finally reached the stage there where there was nothing to do but to have a showdown on it. And I talked to Gen. Smith -- Holland Smith -- and told him we had to do something about this goddamn thing, and he agreed. He went out to see Adm. Spruance, who was really exercising the overall command there. He also talked to Kelly Turner, who was the Amphibious Force commander, on the same echelon as our task force.

Adm. Spruance decided made the decision, and I wrote the directive which -- I was told to come back and write the directive for his relief, which I did. I wrote the directive, gave it to Gen. Smith, Gen. Smith took it out to Adm. Spruance, who was aboard his flagship, and Adm. Spruance issued the order. That really set the fireworks off.

Q: Did Holland Smith do it reluctantly? But he recognized . . .

Erskine: Yes, he recognized it, but Holland Smith was a man who didn't worry about the consequences to himself when he thought he was right.

Another little story that sort of fits in here. I think I told you that Capt. Sanderford Jarman was command of the cadets at LSU when I was a cadet there. He recommended that I get into the Marine Corps, and I think I mentioned one time before that he had reported in as island commander for the Island of Saipan. At that time I understood him to be the senior major general in the Army. I was a young brigadier general, just appointed.

Q: We didn't mention that. You were appointed brigadier general in August of '43, I guess.

Erskine: Just before we went out to the Marianas, I think.

Q: No, before you went to Kwajalein.

Erskine: Kwajalein??

Q: Yes, sir, Kwajalein came first.

Erskine: That's right. Anyway, I was still pretty low on the totem pole, and Sanderford Jarman was anxious to get ashore, very anxious to get his outfit set up. And we had much improvised situations there: we built some foxholes, a couple of dugouts. But I had my little setup in a house in which over half the roof was blown off in the early fighting: we put a tarpaulin over and occasionally we'd hear light rain; and we had a hell of lot of mosquitoes. And Sandy would sit in with me and watch the operations with the maps. I wanted him to know everything possible about this thing, and I felt we were very close friends.

When the 27th was not making any progress, Sandy would shake his head and say, "My God, what the hell has happened to these Army boys?" And he made a similar statement on more than one occasion.

When we relieved Ralph Smith, Holland Smith said, "Now who is going to take his place?" I said, "Why not put Sanderford Jarman in command? It will give him a good feel, being island commander here, and with his rank and experience I see no reason why he shouldn't be in command." "All right, assign him."

So I assigned Sanderford Jarman, and told him that we were writing him orders to take over command of the 27th Division, and he said, "Hell, I am the island commander here." I said, "You haven't got any island to command yet, but use spare parts in the mean time. So you are it. If you want any briefing or anything here, say what you want and I'll give it to you, but

that goddamn outfit's got to get going or you'll get the ^{sack.} ~~kick.~~

Well, he was very reluctant, and his attitude sort of changed from that moment on. We were not the same boy scouts we were the day before, as old LSU buddies. There was a cooler atmosphere right there. But he didn't improve the situation very much.

In the meantime of course Richardson was notified about it, the War Department was notified about it. I don't remember the date, but another man came out, a major general by the name of George Greiner, and took over the Division. All I know about Greiner -- I never knew him too well, I never knew him before.

Greiner took over command of the Division. He was a Leavenworth graduate, and he had a hell of a proposition on his hands. So we moved him into the line and pulled out the 4th, and left the 2nd and the 27th going North with the boundary just about dividing the island between the two Divisions. I used to issue abbreviated orders: no use going back and getting it mimeographed, and ~~withingnoesxndetifgentebannontxndyxtkbnmbbixknddiznbbskbbk~~ writing an order for the next day that would be 3 inches thick with a new intelligence annex, and a new this and a new that, and all the damn things. You had the basic order: all you had to do in this particular case was, "Continue the attack, no change in boundary, artillery support will be this and that, gunfire support will be so much, air support will be so much, and your communications *and your changes in* CPs" and so forth.

The first time Greiner got one of these orders -- and sometimes we used to write on a page or a page and a half -- he called me up and said he didn't understand the orders. I said, "What is it you

don't understand?" He said, "You said to continue the attack," "Do you know where you are now?" I said, "Well, just go North, I don't give a goddamn, and you can go just as fast as you want." And we went over each item over the telephone. He said he'd never seen an order like that. I said, "Well, I graduated from the same school you did, and I know how you liked to put all these ~~commas~~ and periods and so forth in there, ^{and} ~~set-~~infrequently put in question marks. There are no question marks around here. You got your objective, go get it. If there is anything else you want to know about this attack tomorrow morning, you call me on the telephone." I don't think I had anymore calls, but anyway I sent Bobby Hogaboom down, I think the next day, when they didn't accomplish anything, to see if he could find out what the real problem was. And as I remember Bobby told me that these people just wouldn't get out and go ahead -- that was the main thing; they had their fire support but they didn't take advantage of it.

This continued. In the meantime, I overlooked the fact that a few days -- or maybe the next day -- after Smith was relieved and Jarman had taken over the command, Gen. Richardson arrived at Saipan, and whether he checked in with the 5th Fleet, Adm. Spruance or Kelly Turner, I don't know. But he came ashore and went right over to the 27th Division, and never once came to our headquarters. I don't think Gen. Smith ever saw him -- he may have had a conference with him, I don't know, I can't remember those details. But I understood he had a formation and gave medals to quite a number of his people, and he even gave Sandy Jarman a damn good brotherly talk. He didn't come back after

Grainer came in there. But that was certainly an indication that there was no cooperation or help or assistance on the part of Gen. Richardson.

Q: Some more documentation has been found and written up about this fact, that he told the Army people that he'd stand behind them, he'd start holding his own investigation, and he ~~was~~ ^{not} against all the standard military courtesy and protocol, didn't ~~report~~ pay a courtesy call on Holland Smith, his actions were completely reprehensible.

Erskine: I didn't quite get all of that now.

Q: He ^{He against} ~~was~~ all the canons of military ~~was~~ courtesy and protocol had not paid ~~any~~ a courtesy call on Gen. Smith.

Erskine: I don't think he did.

Q: That his actions were reprehensible, that he told the Army people that he would stand behind them, and that he'd started to conduct his own investigation, so he was going to ~~prepare~~ ^{prefer} charges against Holland Smith.

Erskine: I don't know what charges he could ~~prepare~~ ^{prefer charges} against Holland Smith. He didn't have ~~was~~ the jurisdiction in the first place. (laughs) That to me would be laughable.

Q: This was it, and of course Gen. Smith was well within his rights as the expeditionary ~~R~~ troops commander to appoint the reliefs, since the island commander came under his command.

Erskine: Yes.

Q: Getting back to the situation that existed in the 27th Division, hadn't it been Army practice that ~~was~~ once a National Guard division had been federalized and brought in, the Army would break it up? They knew that this old militia, the old Fencibles concept would exist, that the election of officers, this type of thing, existed, and they tried to break it up?

Erskine: I am not sure what the Army policy was on that, but I would think that in the case of the 27th from New York they had probably had too much political influence, which could be brought to bear there. Anyway, at that time it continued to function more or less along the lines of the old National Guard concept. (Pause)

At that time I was chief of staff of the area back in Pearl Harbor, ^{which included} ~~with~~ all the rear echelon of the Corps. I was chief of staff of the amphibious troops. I was chief of staff of the Northern ^{Troops and} Landing Force, and the Army brought up a big discussion with Nimitz before we got Pearl Harbor. This again I think was designed to put Gen. Smith in the box. Their objection was that for the Army to operate they had to have something similar to their organization, so the Army could function properly in logistics and everything.

That of course was designed to get rid of the task force organization, which is a very flexible and a good organization particularly for this kind of an operation.

Q: That's what I think I was referring to before.

Erskine: So they had quite a conference there in Pearl Harbor before we left. I was present at this meeting, and the Army contended that Gen. Smith, if he were overall commander of the Amphibious Troops, he could not exercise that command, and at the same time command the landing force. You see, we had two corps there involved in this operation. Geiger had the III Corps, which set out to take Guam. We had the other organization called the Northern ^{Troops and} Landing Force. The Southern Landing Force was down South. Gen. Smith was overall commander of all the landing forces, and the landing was to be made in an echelon. The Saipan-Tinian operation first, then after, if we got going on that pretty good, the gunfire ships would ship down, the air support would ship and they'd take Guam. However, there was a pretty stubborn fight there, and it was delayed I think a week or 10 days.

But they had got in a hassle over this command setup, and Mimitz listened to it for quite a while, and Spruance did too. And they couldn't see where it would make a damn bit of difference whether Holland Smith was on the beach in command of ^{Northern} the Landing Force, or if he were aboard the ship: he should go where he thought was the best place to go to exercise his command.

Well, the Army opposed this, and I think maybe it put Gen. Smith in some sort of a difficult situation.

Finally Nimitz said all right, he'd solve the problem, and he asked Spruance, "What do you think about giving Erskine the command of the landing force, until they are established on shore? Then we won't need the expeditionary commander aboard ship, and then Smith could come ashore." Spruance said, "fine, that's good."

So he did, and he issued an order. I've lost the copy of the damn order, and I hope if you ever find it you'll see that I would command the landing force until they were established on shore, on Saipan. And that settled that. I was chief of staff and commander during this preliminary phase. I had two division commanders whom I had known for many, many years -- Harry Schmidt and Tommy Watson -- both of whom had been in the *Marine Corps* a long time ahead of me, and were very senior. So I immediately went over and talked to them, and they said, "Well, you are going to call the strikes anyway if you are chief of staff, so what the hell do we care about it? You go ahead." I said, "Well, I am going to try to exercise the best command I can here, and but if I am in this position by this order, it may be the last position I'll ever hold, and I am sure it's going to require 100% performance." (laughs) *They laughed.*

Q: I have here that down there you were chief of staff and on temporary duty with the Northern Troops & Landing Force -- Task Group 56

Erskine: I was chief of staff for the Amphibious Troops. I was chief of staff for the Northern Landing force, and I was chief

of staff of the Corps as such -- the administrative organization. That's three. And then when we finished up with Tinian, they formed the Fleet Marine Force Pacific, and put in the two corps together, and I asked Gen. Smith who was going to be the chief of staff, and he said, "You are." So there, I had another chief of staff job. And for quite a while there we were the only two people on the Fleet Marine Force staff.

Q: In August of '44 the Northern Troops and the Landing Force divided up. I think it divided its staff ⁱⁿ ~~half and~~ half -- half to go to *TINIAN* and half went to the V Amphibious Corps, which Harry Schmidt later took over.

Erskine: No, I don't think that's the way it happened, because the staff was divided on board the ship after we finished. We went back to Guam first, I think. ^{Adm.} Reifsnider was commander of the operation down there for the Navy.

What happened was, after we finished up the operation on Saipan, we were going into Tinian, and Harry Schmidt then took over as the Northern Landing Force commander, and he asked Holland Smith if I could be his chief of staff too. So I got another job as chief of staff with Harry Schmidt, and ran the operation over there under his supervision on Tinian.

The concept I had on this this thing was -- in the first place the task force organization was supposed to be pretty flexible. Every time a new job came up for the chief of staff, Gen. Smith said, "That's yours, you get it, you go, and that's that."

Now when we had to leave Pearl Harbor to go out on an operation like this one, I assigned a deputy chief of staff to represent me in these various locations. ^{For} The Corps chief of staff, which was the headquarters remaining in Pearl Harbor, I picked out Col. Shaw, an Army officer, and I assigned him as my deputy. He had formerly been aide to Gen. Richardson, and I told Shaw -- who was a very thorough individual, he was a cavalryman, a nice guy, who knew his business very well, but he wasn't very forceful --, I said, "You know Gen. Richardson very well, and you've got to tell him to get behind the wheel and try to win the war instead of trying to put the goddamn monkey-wrenches in here when he comes in. One of the reasons I am assigning you to this job is because you know him."

Then we left a planning group there, which operated this way. We really had two planning groups: one would plan for this operation, another one was getting ready for the next operation. And most of these people who ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ participated in planning for this operation -- the current operation -- went with us, and they had to be there to answer to me.

But they all had staff jobs, staff assignments. They weren't a separate entity at all.

I put Col. Joe Smith as the deputy chief of staff for the Amphibious Troops, and he stayed aboard the ship with Gen. Smith, where that headquarters was located, and it was a small headquarters.

That was my concept on working this thing, because no two of these operations had the same structure, and if I was going to get the bag for all of these things, I tried to put a confident man

in there to represent me. The next thing I did was to write up a little memorandum of what I thought the responsibility of this deputy chief of staff would be, very briefly, I think it was only about one page. These were routine matters that he would take care of without bothering me. However, if anything came up outside of this list of items, which he thought ^{they} had to have my comment or my judgment on, they could get in touch with me by radio. And my last paragraph was, "I don't expect to hear from you until I return." And I didn't. The boys ran it all right. But if they thought they could lean on you, they'd lean.

Q: The two platoon system.

Erskine: Yes. It worked out beautifully, as far as I could see. But they had one chief of staff of everything out there, actually, in the end, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ and that was *funneled back to me*. I'd get basic decisions from Holland Smith, and tried to keep him posted on everything all the time in all of these areas, which would not have been possible if you'd had three or four; you'd have had a great time delay there.

That's a little variation here, but I thought it might well be covered.

Q: I'd like to get back to a couple of questions if I may. Number one, let's talk about Adm. Nimitz and Gen. Smith's relationship with Adm. Nimitz.

Erskine: So far as I know ^{their relations} they were very nice and very fine.

Of course there were times -- I wasn't present when any of these things came up -- when they had differences between themselves.

But I went to Adm. Nimitz's conference every morning, most of the time, and Gen. Smith attended: of course he was the number one representative, and when Gen. Smith was away I always represented him there, because I was also deputy commander, by golly.

Q: Nimitz's chief of staff was who^{was}?

Erskine: I don't remember.

Forrest
Q: ~~Floyd~~ Sherman had . . .

Erskine: Sherman was there for a while.

Q: Sock McMorris, I think.

Erskine: I think he was there when we went out -- when we first arrived in the area -- but Sherman finally came in and stayed with him all the way through. I got to know Sherman very well, and I have a very high respect for him.

Q: The thing that strikes me in going through the history of the Central Pacific campaign, once Holland's Smith's command went out there and reported to CincPac, was-the-fact-that and in reviewing his correspondence with Gen. Vandegrift, was the fact that he was

fighting the Marine Corps battle in the Pacific.

Erskine: No doubt about it. Now Kelly Turner and Holland Smith were at dagger's points quite frequently. Kelly had a hard time realizing that he didn't command ~~all~~ the Marines. Kelly and I were at dagger's points from time to time, but old Kelly was funny that way, he thought since I was so junior to him -- in these early days I was a junior brigadier general and he was a three star admiral -- that he could push me around. But he didn't get very far with that. We had many battles, all verbal, and Kelly got so mad at me one day -- we were discussing the orders to go to the Marianas, I guess it was, it was about 6 inches thick, and the main point of the argument was over the control and the use of the ~~amtracs~~ amtracs -- who can do it? And I had ~~xxx~~ determined that by God the Navy was not going to take control of those amtracs. I guess I did most of the talking on it. But Gen. Smith and I had decided the policy to follow on this, and we were going to stick it out. He got ~~up~~ so mad at me one day in a conference, that he got up and ~~flew~~ ^{threw} the goddamn order at me! (laughs) Every time I ^{would} bring this subject up he ~~says~~ would say, "Goddamn it, you stop arguing about it, I am going to have it this way." I said, "You are not going to have it that way. These are our troops, and we are going to command them."

I have always felt that the amtrac could have been used more as a tactical vehicle rather than a logistical vehicle to a better advantage than we used it. And I tried to use that in Saipan, but

I don't think the division commanders and the troops were convinced that this was the thing to do, they were afraid to lose their amtracs. I wanted to go ashore and run as far as possible in the amtracs, even though we lost some amtracs: you saved a hell of a lot of time, and if you could get beyond their machine gun defense, it should be easier to continue.

Q: Yes, the beachhead defense of the island.

Erskine: Yes. Get as much of the beachhead in one rush as you could in the amtracs. And that's what I mean by tactical use. And those that were left from this, would come back and be used as logistical vehicles, but not to designate those vehicles as a logistical vehicle at all, because I still think that the amtrac can be used in that role.

Q: Hadn't this been one of the lessons learned at Tarawa?

Erskine: I don't know that we learned a hell of a lot at Tarawa. (laughs) I am wondering.

Q: Well, I thought that the correct application of naval gunfire was one of the lessons learned, and also the need to improve communications was one of the lessons learned at Tarawa.

Erskine: They didn't have very many amtracs at Tarawa. I think I mentioned to you in one of our previous discussions that in

making the plane to go to Tarawa I again objected to this business of making a frontal attack. Tarawa as I remember it, its highest point is maybe 8 feet. That's no good for naval gunfire, because with the high speed of the gun and the ammunition we were using at that time, the guns would have to put down their fire maybe 2000 yards ahead of the troops, and that was no good. You shoot over the island, you see, by the time you get the troops in there. And we did not have at that time the reduced charges, *particular* for the larger guns. By the time a man covered 2000 yards, the enemy would just be mad and really waiting for him to get in there.

My solution to that Tarawa problem was to land the artillery first, seize one of the smaller islands, which were not defended very strongly if they had any defenses, and use the artillery and enfiladed fire with our artillery, and we could ~~xxx~~ give very close support to our troops that way.

The Navy was having a ~~xxx~~ a spasm about the time it would take, and how much ~~x~~ longer they'd be out there. They were ~~xxx~~ afraid of the Japanese aircraft and they were afraid of submarines. And they wanted to run in, fire a few rounds, throw the Marines ashore and get the hell out of there.

I thought that one through, and I still think that ^{with} this idea of seizing another island within artillery range and laying down enfiladed fire with artillery, we could probably put some in there up to 100 yards in front of our troops. But the naval gunfire was not the answer to Tarawa, and I think a lot of people's *lives were lost there because of* this scheme of maneuver.

When we went to Kwajalein the 7th Division did exactly that: they seized an island first, established their artillery, and then went ashore. And you could use naval gunfire to more advantage on Kwajalein than you could on Tarawa

. But nevertheless I thought it was a great improvement.

Q: This is the end of this tape, General.

End of Side 1, Tape 1, Session VII

Session VII continuedSide 2, Tape 1

Q: Now this controversy over naval gunfire became quite heated between you and Holland Smith, did it not -- to the point that you were not present at the Tarawa operation?

Erskine: Kelly Turner I think was the main one, and I think Gen. Smith agreed with me, but he felt that he had to give in to the Navy here on the time element which frightened ^{them} ~~him~~ so much. It would take longer; well, it would take maybe one day longer, but I think we would have had a lot less casualties and a much better operation. When it came time for Gen. Smith to go down there, I found that I was not on his list to go with him. I don't think that interfered with our friendship at all -- I think he thought I was a bad character to have along with him in this trip. However, on the day of the landing, Adm. Nimitz invited me to lunch -- I don't know whether I told you this or not.

Q: I think you may have, but it won't do any harm to repeat it.

Erskine: Just as we sat down to lunch his operations officer, Capt. Steele, made a nasty remark to me; he said, "Well, I guess, those Marines, if ^{we} ~~he~~ goes down and blows the goddamn island clear out of the ocean, then they can walk ashore and say they had a victory."

I thought I would take him to task about this, and I told him what I thought about the whole damn plan and Nimitz was listening, and Nimitz said, "Now look, you came here to my be my guest for lunch, there will be no arguments." And he told Steele, "You understand that too." So we didn't have a very pleasant lunch, but Nimitz was always himself, a gentleman, you know. Steele and I were both sitting there waiting for the time when we could bite each other at the next chance.

After all of this, I don't know what happened or transpired, but Steele was relieved, and he was given, I think, the Indianapolis. He hadn't been on there very long before he and the Washington had a hell of a collision. Then he was relieved from that. I don't know, but I think he is here around Washington now, working with some company.

Q: I have seen him at the ^{Army} Navy Club.

Erskine: I've seen him several times.

Q: I think he is the uncle of young Shepherd's wife, ²⁰¹⁴ ~~xxxxx~~ Steele

Erskine: Could be.

Q: * When you went out to the Pacific, there had already been a couple of operations in the Southwest Pacific -- Guadalcanal and planning . . .

Well, just about the time you got there, in November of '43, there was the Tarawa operation and the Bougainville operation.

Had any of the lessons learned from the Guadalcanal operation been applied to the conduct of operations in the Central Pacific? There was a different concept; you were fighting atolls, small islands -- ~~there~~^{there} weren't these large island masses out in the Central Pacific as there were in the Southwest Pacific.

Had anything that transpired on Guadalcanal -- the conduct of the operation, the conduct of the landing, the conduct of operations ashore,--been applied to what your planning called for? Logistics particularly.

Erskine: I am not sure of what was learned at Guadalcanal. I've never seen any document that listed these items, and I wasn't there. I was just too darn busy with other things to try to go back and have a critique on this thing, because right after a battle it depends on who you talk to, what reaction you get. So I don't know that I could answer that question. I could answer it maybe this way. I don't think there was any change in our concept of how the operation should be conducted. If so, I don't remember it, but I don't have any idea that it had any effect upon our planning.

Q: This concept of utilizing the LVTs, the amtracs as a tactical vehicle, and driving through the ~~weak~~ enemy's beachhead defenses -- had this come out of your planning, in the school problems at Quantico in the 30s?

Erskine: No, we didn't have amtracs then.

Q: I was told that when ~~we~~ you had the Guam problem, one of the factors inhibiting the landing on the coast, on the beaches where the landing actually occurred, was the coral reef, and as a result the southeastern coast of Guam was to be hit, but by that time someone discovered the Roebling swamp buggy, and this was . . .

Erskine: Oh, we had that when we were down in Cuba -- this Roebling swamp buggy from which the amtrac finally drew. We didn't have very many amtracs until we got out really in the Pacific.

I remember quite well a problem -- and I was on the team that presented this to the Naval War College -- the seizure of Saipan. In that operation we landed on the east coast of Saipan, because we didn't have any means of getting over this big reef that was on the west side of Saipan. I don't know whether the Japs ever found out what the concept was there, and that was more or less the accepted plan if we had to take Saipan -- to land in that area, in Magicienne Bay, which is really a beautiful little bay, but it certainly would have been murderous to go into it.

Incidentally, another little story I can tell you here -- when we were planning these operations we had amtracs when we were ready to go to Saipan, and the old Naval War College problem and the other Navy plane was to land on the east side and use Magicienne Bay, which would split the island more or less in two, if we got in there and concentrate all kinds of gunfire on it.

I didn't think we had enough troops. In other words, there was just the absolute minimum, (and I don't like to play with minimal quantities) to do this operation on Saipan.

So I managed to get ^{reinforced} one battalion sent up to go into Magicienne Bay as a flank attack, while we landed on the western side of the island, to seize the high ground over there, hoping that this would be a delayed attack, hoping that ^{if} we could draw the Japs to the westward side, ~~and~~ we might be able to get some of those defenses out of there, and go in. This was the song and dance I gave, and everybody bought it right off the bat.

But the reason I was doing this was because I wanted at least one extra reinforced battalion, and the Navy didn't catch on to this until they assigned the ship for it. They claimed they were short of ships. Because you can make a plan and by the time you get there you can change it.

Of course we waited until a few days before, then we just cancelled this mission for this battalion that was supposed to go into Magicienne Bay, and put them in general reserve -- that's where we wanted them in the first place. The Navy didn't understand the general reserve, and they thought that was something fancy that you didn't need. That's how we got it -- by putting this thing in there. It looked like a beautiful maneuver, of course.

Q: It was supposed to be a nighttime landing. I think it was Kyle's 2/6, wasn't it?

Erskine: I don't remember. I think it was part of the 6th Marines. We were going to put them in there. From our viewpoint-- certainly from my viewpoint, and I think Gen. Smith's viewpoint, because we talked this over quite a bit -- we put this in there, this delayed

landing, to sort of stick them in the back, if we could draw them down to the western side. And of course that appealed to the Navy and they found a ship for us right away. But we in our own mind were considering this to be a general reserve, so a few days before we got to Saipan we just changed it and cancelled that part of the operation and put it in general reserve.

In our planning we had to do a lot of things like that, in order to get what we really felt we needed to carry out the operation.

Q: To put it past the Navy. They had no concept of what the requirements were.

Erskine: No, they thought they had -- that's it! And many of these concepts were derived from the fact that they thought so many ships was all they could spare to put in this operation. My view was, if you haven't got enough ships you'd better stay home. And I still think it's a good sound concept.

Q: Now let's go back a little earlier to the Tarawa operation. The 2nd Division landed at Tarawa. Gen. Smith was the Expeditionary Troops commander?

Erskine: No, we didn't have the Expeditionary Troops commander. Gen. Smith went down there because he was the commander. In that operation, Gen. Julian Smith was in command of the Division and Kelly Turner was the Amphibious Force commander, and the Attack Force commander was Harry Hill. Kelly was down there, and Gen.

Smith went down, I believe on Kelly's ship.

Q: But your command had nothing to do with the training?

Erskine: We had the overall supervision and responsibility.

Q: But neither you nor Holland Smith went down to . . .

Erskine: We were not included in the task force ~~xx~~ in a command chain.

Q: You never made a liaison with it down to New Zealand, or . . .

Erskine: No, I didn't, because the 2nd Division was down there. A number of our staff officers went down, but I didn't go myself personally. And we brought the 2nd Division back to Maui.

Q: Now for the Kwajalein operation in January of '44, of course you had the 4th Division plus the 7th Infantry Division, and also the -- was it the 24th Marines?

Erskine: The 25th, I think. Johnny Walker.

Q: And Underhill was the proposed island commander. ^{No,} He was ADC.

Erskine: He was ADC, yes. I forget, ~~whxxxxx~~ *they assigned* an admiral to be island commander there, whose name elips my mind at the moment.

Actually atoll commander. ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ The 4th Division went in at Roi Namur, and the 7th Infantry Division went into Kwajalein Island, ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~.

Q: Then later went on to Eniwetok.

Erskine: No, the Division didn't go. As I ~~mentioned~~ mentioned a moment ago, the 7th went in there and they adopted this idea of seizing a small island first and putting their artillery on. And incidentally that's the first time we used the UDTs to any degree. It was a conglomerate organization, I guess you'd call it. We had some Navy men, a few soldiers and engineers, and some Marines, and this had been put together and they'd been trained. And I'll never forget standing on a flagship and watching these people operate. They went in under the naval gunfire and searched for mines, found a few and disabled them. And the Japanese brought down a great deal of fire on these people, and I don't think we lost a man, but I can remember my heart being in my throat just watching this through the binoculars.

Another thing that doesn't have anything to do with military operations, but it was certainly a phenomenon to me. When the gunfire opened up -- and it opened up before daylight -- the battleships that were involved on Kwajalein Island had reduced charges by that time; you could see this big ball of fire going way up and coming down almost like a Howitzer. They did a good job. But this firing evidently frightened the fish there, and I looked over the side just after daylight, and there was at

least 100 yards of fish there against our ship. And it looked like you could just walk out there and just walk on those fish -- thousands of them.

Q: Was there anything that sticks out in your mind particularly about the Kwajalein operation?

Erskine: No. The only thing is, I felt that the 7th Division could have gone faster, and I went ashore with their people several times there, and went around, and I didn't feel that they were aggressive enough in this operation. But in the end -- I don't know whether that's a legitimate comment or not, because they did finally take the island, but it was pretty damn slow.

Q: Meanwhile, back at the ranch, so to speak, at Pearl Harbor, your 2nd Platoon was planning for further operations -- for the Marianas operation, which we've discussed.

Erskine: While we were there we had an extra battalion -- No. We made up a task force to take Eniwetok. We did not have plans. We had tentative plans to take Eniwetok, and we had enough troops left to go to Eniwetok. So we decided to send these troops down. Two regiments: one was the 102nd, I think, which was an Army outfit; we sent these fellows down there and took the island.

Q: The 22nd Marines.

Erskine: 22nd, Yes. But the commander of this Army regiment, -- I was

told by several people who were there, would leave his troops overnight and go back aboard the transport to sleep. And his regiment was not very aggressive. And I think I mentioned once before, that shortly after this operation we were back in Pearl Harbor, and they had a ceremony while I was ~~some~~^{out of} the office, and this colonel came out -- I think it was the 102nd -- and I had known him; I think he might have been from the 7th, but I thought it was 27th Army Division, ~~and~~ -- and he showed me a Navy Cross, and he said, "Look what I got while you were out of the office." I said, "What the hell did you get that for?" He said, "They said it was because of my wonderful leadership and so forth in this Eniwetok operation." I was so shocked, although I never reported this to anybody because it just wasn't ~~done~~ done, when you were going to create trouble between the Army and the Marine Corps: we had enough without this. But I never thought anybody was ever going to give him a medal for this business of going back aboard ship ~~at night~~ at night.

So I went in and I told Gen. Smith about it, and he said, "Yes," ^{but} I think I told you about this guy back aboard the ship every night." I said, "Yes, you told me, but you didn't produce very much evidence." ~~Next day~~ He said, "The Navy wanted to do something to recognize him." In other words, he didn't go along with it either, but he didn't see any reason to oppose it.

Q: Do you feel that there was much cheapening of combat awards as the war went on?

Erskine: No, I didn't think so. This was the only one that I knew that I didn't think was deserved. But I never knew the details about it. And I may be wrong on this, but I've heard this from several very reliable people ~~whom~~ whom I trust.

Q: You were also chief of staff of the administrative command of FMFPac.

Erskine: Yes.

Q: That was another hat.

Erskine: That actually was the Corps organization.

Q: Corps troops?

Erskine: Yes.

Q: We've talked about the Saipan operation. Did you participate in the Guam?

Erskine: No, after Saipan -- toward the end of Saipan we started planning on taking Tinian, and we did some reconnaissance. That was the first time we used our corps reconnaissance company in any real operation.

Q: That ^{was} Jones's outfit?

Erskine: Yes. And we sent these people in on what I think is called White Beach, and they did a marvelous job. We didn't send the whole company in, I think around 20 some odd people participated in this operation. And I almost had heart failure the next morning when these people didn't show. They went in, got on the beach, went around, they even brought back foliage, they measured the cliffs, and the Japanese were laying mines. Sometimes -- most of these people spoke a little Japanese -- the Japanese would tell them to do something in the dark and they didn't know whether it was a Jap or not and they'd go ahead ^{try to} and do it and then managed to hide out. But it was a very hair-raising experience they had.

Young Silverthorn had the company.

No. He later had the company, but he was in this first reconnaissance operation. We got enough information. As a result, first we had the planes looking for these people, and some of these people were in the water, I think 8 or 9 hours. We got them all back, didn't lose a man. Then we took this information, and we knew that the main defenses were set up on the southern end of the island, and that they had some big guns down there. The concept that we evolved was to put a demonstration down at the southern end of the island, with ships, and pretend to debark, but put our landing force mainly in . . .

Q: LCVPs?

Erskine: No. LSMs. Then they said, "How are you going to get up the cliff?" We had a very resourceful civil engineer, a CB,

and there was a railroad on the island, and he went and took some of the rails off this railroad and built a ramp that was flexible: it would ride on top of an LVT. We had the measurements that these fellows had made, and we could push this rail up against the cliff, then back out from under it and let the tanks go up the ramp.

We tested that out on the island of Saipan, and we put in I think five LVTs with this mission. And it was carried out very beautifully. The main force seemed to be going downhill with transports and everything. They got down and became engaged, and set up gunfire on the southern end of the island. We had some ships giving us gunfire, up this White Beach area. And the second echelon of ~~the~~ this naval force came in, and from the landing ships they debarked and went ashore. I think only one of these LVTs turned over.

Q: Top heavy?

Erskine: Top heavy. But we got the tanks up there, and we caught them really with their pants down. The Colorado was a little over ambitious, and I think got in a little too close, and the Japs had some 9 inch guns down there and they let her have it.

Q: This was at Tinian?

Erskine: Tinian. Once they found out that we were landing -- I think we only had 250 or 260 yards of beach to land on that we thought we could use to land on over the white beaches. It was the 4th Division, I think.

Q: Cates had the 4th.

Erskine: Yes. It landed on this beach to begin with. The FTP-167 says you should have around 300 yards per battalion. We landed two divisions on about 600 yards, we got our tanks ashore and did most of that in one day. The Japs were not well fortified in that area: they considered that it would be almost impossible for us to land.

They were already set up down ~~at~~^{to} the South, and they had good positions down there, and we would have had a hell of a lot more trouble. However, the operation went along beautifully until we got down to the southern end of the island, where they had some of their guns. There was a cliff area there, dug in behind these cliffs, with portholes that they fired from, and it took us a while to get them cleaned out of there, but we finally got them out.

Q: This whole period -- in September, right after the organization of FMFPac in August, it says that in September of 1944 "no duty shown on the ^{muster}roll" and on the 26th you got temporary duty to the Department of the Pacific in San Francisco.

Of course on 8 September you got your second star as major general and got the 3rd Division.

Erskine: I didn't go to San Francisco till 1950.

Q: No, you didn't take over MarPac, but in September of '44 you went to San Francisco for temporary duty.

Erskine: Oh hell, that must have been a conference or something. I don't know.

Q: But you got your second star at this time.

Erskine: No, I got my second star when we finished Tinian. They had a conference ~~max~~, and Vandegrift came out, and Kelly Turner, Gen. Smith and several other people -- they had a conference on Kelly Turner's flagship, and I went with Gen. Smith, and Vandegrift told me there; he said, "I am going to see that you are promoted to major general and you are getting the 3rd Division." That was the tail end of Tinian. And incidentally, old Kelly Turner and I used to fight a hell of a lot, and he said, "That's the best goddamn news I've heard. He is a rascally SOB, but by God, I don't know how I'd get along without him!" (laughs)

Q: Of course the command relationship problem which had been such a hairshirt to Vandegrift at Guadalcanal, and supposedly was settled at a conference on Halsey's flagship down at Noumea in '42 with Kelly Turner, supposedly had been settled by now. Kelly Turner couldn't fight the Marines anymore.

Erskine: Well well, you can say they settled it ~~with the command~~ ~~standing~~ but you take an aggressive guy like Kelly Turner, if you

don't keep one hand up he is going to be in there. One way or the other.

He used to sit up at night, I am sure, to see how he could evade these things. You had to be what I call very alert to these things.

Q: When you took command of the 3rd Division -- it was at Guam I believe --

Erskine: Yes.

Q: What condition did you find it in?

Erskine: I thought in rather poor condition for my standards, I would say. The Division was not functioning as a division. It had been divided up into three regimental combat teams with division support behind. ^{An} The artillery battalion was assigned to each regiment, some amtracs -- they did have a division hospital, but each one of the regiment was doing some of the hospitalization by having a company from the division hospital assigned over there.

And I felt that it was not a division from my viewpoint. A division should be a very highly ~~integrated~~ integrated organization, and it should be absolutely sensitive to the division headquarters and the division commander. In other words, the troops had been divided up and there were about four parts: three were to be the combat teams, and what was left was division supporting elements,

extra signals and so forth and so on. And I felt that ^{regarding} even/the training -- you see, you'd have three different ideas, you could have a general directive from Division Headquarters, but ~~xxxxxx~~ when it's broken down by three different people it doesn't say the same thing. So I immediately changed all of that.

Q: Did you take anybody over with you as your staff?

Erskine: That's when we split up the staff. I took Bobby Hogaboom over as my chief of staff, and quite a number of other people.

Q: Whom did you take over as the ADC?

Erskine: I had Adolphus Andrews.

Q: Andrews? He was an admiral.

Erskine: His son, Adolphus Andrews Jr. Then I had young Ray Knapp. I don't remember whether Ray joined me right there or not, but he was my aid there for a while.

Q: Oh. I was talking about the Assistant Division Commander. Was it Worton?

Erskine: Yes, I took Worton. But Worton came out after I took over the Division.

Q: You relieved Turnage.

Erskine: I relieved Turnage, and then Worton hurt himself in a rehearsal. He went back to see some of the rehearsal in Pearl Harbor, and he hurt his knee very badly and he couldn't function. It was at a very late date that time, and we ~~WAS~~^{WERE} getting ready to go to Iwo Jima, and they didn't give me anybody, in the meantime. But I brought up Bushrod Wilson who was in command of the 12th Marines, the artillery, as acting ADC, and Bushrod did a hell of a good job. Then after Iwo Jima I think Bushrod was due to go home, so they sent me Bill Riley, and Bill stayed on until I was detached.

Q: When did you first get your warning order for Iwo?

Erskine: I don't remember.

Q: What was your concept of the operation, do you recall?

Erskine: I was then ~~the~~^{the} division commander, and this planning came down from the Corps Headquarters. The concept was to land the 4th and 5th Divisions abreast on the east side of the island, and my Division was put in general reserve. That was the way we were supposed to go in. The 5th Division was on the left, and the 4th Division was on the right. They would land on this beach, and the 4th Division would turn right and head North. The 5th Division went straight across the island and ~~then~~^{turned} left up to Suribachi and took Suribachi. And this scheme went along until they were pretty well pinned down, and then they brought in one

regiment from my Division and attached it to the 4th Division. That was the 21st Marines. They were put in a very hot sector and had a pretty rough time. I don't remember how long it was, but I guess it was four days or more, before the rest of the Division was ordered in, but then they wouldn't let me bring the 3rd Marines.

Q: Yes, why?

Erskine: I asked the question of Kelly Turner and Holland Smith, and the usual answer was, "You got enough Marines on this island now, there are too damn many here." I said, "The solution is very easy: some of these people are pretty tired and worn out, so take them out and bring in some new ones." And they practically said, "You keep quiet, we've made the decision." That was that.

Q: I understand that you wanted to turn your guns on the 4th Division, is that true?

Erskine: No. No!

Q: Well, not actually, but -- cooperation between the division commanders was good?

Erskine: Yes. Cliff and I always got ^{beautifully} along/ from the time we were 2nd lieutenants. We'd get out of pitch sometimes with them, because we thought they should be moving a little faster, and

we'd get a little ahead and they didn't keep abreast, and the damn Japs would come in on our flanks. But I don't think we ever had any conference or what you might call a confrontation on it.

I didn't get all of my artillery ashore either. I got only about around 12,000 men altogether ashore, I think, in the 3rd Division. There was one battalion of artillery which would have supported the 3rd, that was embarked and they wouldn't let bring that ashore.

Q: You had to go up through the middle of the island?

Erskine: We went up through the middle.

Q: And that was the most rugged part.

Erskine: It was pretty rough. But I think we had a darn well trained men in team work particularly, among these troops that we had there in the 3rd. Then when we reached the objective, our Division was the first one to get down to a sea coast.

We got there -- I don't know the real distance, but the 5th on the left had been stopped dead, and it was very rough territory, and in our zone of action here we kept going down and going down the cliffs, and the 5th had their lines over here quite a ways back from ours: maybe it was 500, maybe 1000 yards. And after several days there we were still busy mopping up in our area. There were a lot of caves in there.

I believe Rogers was acting chief of staff, for Harry Schmidt. Walter Rogers. He called me on the telephone and he said, "We want you to start making plans to join up with the 5th Division to clean out what's called ^{the} Ratano Point area." That was a bunch of big tall buttes which were on the other side of the island. And I said, "You want me to do what?" "We are going to have the two join up." I said, "Goddamn it, the 5th Division has got ~~it~~ the zone, why the hell can't they take it?" And we were pretty well decimated. He said, "I want you to maybe swing left and go down there." I said, "I'll be goddamned, I am not going to do it?" "Do you want the place taken? Give me the job. Those guys are finished."

Well, there was another angle there too. You see, Rockey was senior to me, and I thought we'd get the dirty work, and they'd sit on their ass, just like they were doing. I said, "If you want me to take the damn place, I'll take it." He said, "The 5th Division has been trying for about five days and they can't take it." And I said, "Well, we can take it. If we only have one Marine left we'll fight."

I had a long argument, and ^{Schmidt} ~~Smith~~ got on the phone, and he said, "What's all this I hear that you don't want to have any joint operation?" I said, "That's right. You want me to take that place, Harry, I'll take the goddamn place." I said, "I don't know who I'll give the job to right now, but if we have to take anything joint it will be within my Division. I don't want any joint planning or anything else." "How long do you think it'll take you to take it?" I said, "I think I can

take it in one day, even though we are pretty well beaten up." He said, "The 5th has been trying for five days." I said, "Hell, I am talking about the 3rd Division, not the 5th."

He finally said, "All right, I'll give you the job." I said, "Okay, give me the gunfire now, and give me the extra artillery support that I'd like to have. I'd like to have a hell of a lot of gunfire, artillery and air support." He said, "You can have it all." I said, "That's all." "It's as good as yours right now."

I sent for Withers who commanded the 21st Marines. They were pretty well ^{beaten} ~~beaten~~ up in the beginning, but they were probably pretty much . . . And I told him what the thing was, and I told Harry Schmidt that we were going to take this place in one day and he said, "Jesus Christ, the 5th has been over there for five days." I said, "I am not talking about the 5th Division, I am talking about the 3rd Division. You are part of the 3rd Division and you are going to take that place. I think I've changed my mind: we take it in half a day." He said, "I don't think it can be done." I said, "Get that kind of thinking out of your mind. You can do anything, I am convinced you guys can do it. You have all the gunfire you need, all the air support, everything. You come up with a plan by about 4 o'clock, and you jump off tomorrow morning."

Then he sat up with this plan, with the gunfire and everything, and we got all our messages out, and I went up there and sat in the CP with him, in his CP. There was Japanese radar

around there and they had built a ^{little} fortification around it, and it was sort of cramped.

90.13 We started off, and those boys really went to town. We had enough gunfire to keep their spirits going. I don't think we lost 12 men. I think there was 12 killed in this whole operation. There must have been 30 or 40 or more wounded. But I watched one little crew there running a ^{grader} ~~patrol raider~~. There were no roads in this area. They were trying to make a path there for the tanks to come in, and by God this guy was shot off this thing, and he had hardly hit the ground before another one jumped on it, back and forth, absolutely oblivious to any fire. And the kid got away with it, and there were machine guns all around him.

Another thing that I remember is -- I have always been very allergic to accidental discharges, the careless handling of weapons. I think it's the saddest thing in the world to take a man and train him, put him through all the ^{tough} ~~the~~ training in and then some careless guy pulls the trigger and kills him. I used to ^{be} pretty tough on that, and I gave them a general court every time.

I was sitting in the CP and the signal officer was over there, and he was listening on the telephone and talking a lot, and all of a sudden he looked over, he got his carbine and he reached over the side and fired two shots. I was so surprised, and I thought the guy was just nervous, and I said, "Goddamn it, don't you know you are liable to hit somebody?" And I just gave him merry hell. I said, "This accidental shot business gets right under my skin." And he said, "I only shot

two Japs." And I looked, and by God, here were a couple of Japs climbing ~~xxxx~~ up toward the CP, and he saw them. Then he went right back to his work.

To me that was one of the most interesting experiences I've ever had.

Q: This matter of accidental discharges is said to have been caused by nervousness on the part of fresh troops, new troops, and also by a lack of discipline and lack of control on the part of the commander. Did you give the commander a letter? Did you take any action?

Erskine: I think I did on a couple of occasions, after they'd been warned. I think it's a question of discipline, a question of supervision to see that they carry out ^{the} instructions that are given about when they load their weapons and when they unload them, and not to shoot when they challenge somebody and don't get an immediate answer. A lot of it is ~~done~~ ^{done} that way. Then plain damn carelessness. Plain carelessness I think is probably the greatest factor.

Q: For the Iwo Jima operation, about this time the table of organization of ~~xxxx~~ the Marine Divisions was changed, and some of the equipment was changed. I think the halftracks 75s were taken away as a regimental commanders' weapon, and the ^{number of} 37s reduced. [^] You got this M-7, 105 millimeter self-propelled Howitzer, a siege gun. Did you get that in your operations, do you recall?

Erskine: No, we didn't have that. Let me go ahead with our Katano Point operation. Withers was a little worried, and he suddenly didn't want me looking over his shoulder, and I knew it, but I said, "This is your regiment and you are going to run it, and I am not going to interfere unless I think you are making a serious mistake." And he did a masterful job. At one o'clock he turned around to me and said, "Sir, the island is secured" And I said, "Give me the telephone." I called Headquarters and got hold of Harry Schmidt and I said, "The island is secured, Katano Point has been taken. " He said, "Oh no, it can't be." I said, "Hell, I am sitting here and I am looking at it, and I see our people down there. They've got it. It's all over. Don't ever put me in one of these joint operations." Gosh, we'd have been there three or four days.

But we had a wonderful bunch of men. They were trained, and after being ~~they knew~~ in battle there for a couple of weeks believe me they knew a lot.

Q: Was the air support provided by Megee's Landing Force Air Support Control Units? Was Megee with you there?

Erskine: No. This was mainly Navy, from the carriers.

Q: Who controlled them?

Erskine: We did, from the ground.

Q: Your own air liaison parties?

Erskine: They had -- what the hell do they call it?

Q: ~~Some~~ JASCO.

Erskine: JASCO.

End of Side 2, Tape 1, End of Session VII.

Session VIII - 18 February 1970Tape 1, Side 1

Q: I think we have pretty well covered the Iwo Jima operation, sir, when we ended last time. Unless something comes to mind that you think we haven't covered . . .

Erskine: I can't think of anything now. Of course these recesses of a week at a time don't help me to recollect too well in connection with where we stopped the last time.

Q: Yes. Anyway, you went back to Guam, is that right?

Erskine: That's right, we went back to our home base ~~xxx~~ which was Guam.

Q: I think you said that you ~~prepared to take the next step~~ went through the training cycle again, and then prepared for the occupation of Japan.

Erskine: That's right.

Q: Were those orders waiting for you when you got back?

Erskine: I think they were. I think we had the general outline of the general plan, and how we were going to fit into the picture. We had a great deal of intelligence information by that time, and

we started planning there, to go to Japan.

Q: I guess March was when you returned to Guam. Was all the time from March till you were detached --

Yes, you flew back from Iwo on the 28th of March, so you were with the Division from April until November, I think it was.

Erskine: I think that's about right. I came back -- I flew back with part of the staff, and the remainder of the Division came in on transports. I would like to say that I am mighty proud of this crowd, after all the fighting they'd gone through up there.

I went down and met each unit as it came in, and by golly, they were neat and clean, and some had gotten haircuts. This was one time when I thought the Navy had done a pretty good job by these boys. They had a pretty dirty, lousy job to do on Iwo Jima. We did manage up there -- my engineers were very resourceful and they started drilling a well, hoping that we could get fresh water on the island. Instead, a very hot stream of water came out -- because you know this is really a volcanic island -- and they rigged up shower baths by getting pipe and drilling holes in the pipe, and in at least two places we had a long line of shower baths, and we would relieve our people from their positions, those who wanted to go back and take a bath. Some of those fellows had at least three baths while they were there. And then when they got on board ship some of them washed their own clothes, and they got to look pretty damn respectable.

Q: You reoccupied the quarters that ~~we~~ you had when you left for Iwo?

Erskine: Yes, we went back to the same camp.

Q: You had over you an island commander, is that correct?

Erskine: No, the island commander had nothing to do with the fighting troops.

Q: That was Gen. Larsen, I believe.

Erskine: Larsen was the island commander, but he had nothing to do with us; he was not in our chain of command.

Q: You didn't have to get any supplies or transportation?

Erskine: They were responsible for having the supplies and issuing them to us: that's one of the reasons for the island commander -- he's sort of the housekeeper. But he had nothing to do except fill out a requisition. And I remember when we'd bring that point up, a thing that touched me very greatly.

I think we'd been gone almost six weeks. At that time each man was entitled to get one case of beer or Coca Cola or a soft drink that he desired. And when we got back we applied to get our beer ration and I thought we ~~shoud~~ should get two rations.

The answer came back from the island commander that we were not entitled to any. I don't think I was ever so goddamn mad in my life -- to think of these big fat asses sitting on that island taking life easy when we were up there dying by the dozens. To say that because we were not present on the island we didn't rate a beer when we got back! ~~ANXXX~~ And Henry Larsen and I had been friends a long time. As a matter of fact I served ~~for~~ with him for a short period of time at the Marine Corps Schools and then later when the Schools were broken up and we went down to Nicaragua he had a battalion in what was called the 11th Regiment, and I was machine gun commander in machine gun and Howitzers in his battalion.

We had quite a go-round there, and we got our beer.

Q: I understand a lot of the line troops and line organizations on ~~XXXX~~ Guam had problems with the island commander at Guam.

Erskine: I had mine. I think they were trying to assert their authority over us, and they were not even in the chain of command. As a matter of fact, when I was chief of staff back in Pearl Harbor I wrote the order that prescribed the relationships between the expeditionary troops and the island commanders in our zone of action. I thought I had a pretty good draft of what his responsibility was. And we had several clashes. But I always felt that Henry had a considerable amount of bitterness because he was never given an important combat command.

Q: Talking about bitterness, wasn't there considerable bitterness when, after having only commanded the 2nd Division in one operation,

Julian Smith was relieved by Watson, and Smith went over to become head of the administrative commander of FMFPac?

Erskine:
W: Did he?

Q: Yes, sir.

Erskine: I guess I don't remember that. If so, it didn't come to my attention.

Q: I think he wrote directly to Gen. Holcomb as an old friend, and there was quite a to do about having bypassed Gen. Smith -- Holland Smith.

Erskine: I really don't know. As a matter of fact this argument never came to my attention. Gen. Smith took numerous actions, particularly with reference to the assignment of people without ever consulting me. Could have been, but he just didn't feel like he should bring me into it, which I am glad he didn't because I was a very junior brigadier general at the time, and there was no place for me in a fight between a major and a lieutenant general.

Q: When you were chief of staff I guess Jordahl was the G-1.
(Pause) Maybe he was there later. But was there much of this business of field commanders asking to have certain of the senior commanders relieved, and have someone replace them without cause,

playing the old school tie game? I understand that it came back that Gen. Smith said -- I guess Gen. Holcomb, maybe Gen. Vandegrift later said -- that if you want a man relieved, then I want it in writing; it has to reflect on his fitness report why that man has been relieved, none of this kind of stuff.

Erskine: I never saw that. I know after the Guadalcanal operation a number of officers were relieved, but our Headquarters didn't get involved in that: that was within the divisions. Whether they gave them bad fitness reports, (these reports didn't come through our Headquarters) or not, I don't know.

Q: In other words it was handled on a strictly personal basis. It was privileged, private official type correspondence.

Erskine: I know when I relieved an officer I gave him a bad fitness report, and just relieved him, that was all, and requested a replacement. I'd relieve him and just order him back home. I did relieve a number of officers after I took over the Division, and quite a number were due to go home, and soon after I took over the Division, I needed, I think, nine battalion commanders. They were sent out, and I was not impressed with several of these officers. Matter of fact one officer came to me and said that he wanted to be on my staff, and I asked him why he thought he should be on my staff, and he said he had had a lot of staff duty. I said, "Well, you haven't had a goddamn bit out in the field, and I try to put people on my staff who have been in combat.

After you get a few battles under your belt I might think about that." So I assigned him a battalion. And he told me he didn't think he could command it. I said, "You are having the chance to do it." And I kept a pretty close eye on him.

One of the first things they had to do was set up a makeshift rifle range for people to have a refresher course in with their weapons, and his battalion was due to go out there, and every time I went out for the first three days he wasn't around any place. I finally found him one morning around 9 o'clock in his bunk, and I gave him a good boot in the pants to get him out of the bunk and I asked him why he wasn't on the rifle range. He said, well, he'd leave that up to his own officers, he was the commander of that battalion and he'd decide how he'd run it. I said, "I am going to decide right here that you don't run it. You are out, pack your bag, you leave tomorrow." And out of those nine battalion commanders I think eventually -- before we went to Iwo Jima -- I relieved five, because they could not and did not cut the mustard the way I thought they should.

Q: Were these regulars or reserves?

Erskine: The man I was just referring to was a Naval Academy graduate, and that's one of the things he told me at the time -- that he was a Naval Academy graduate and he'd never cared too much about this kind of thing and he was a very fine staff officer.

I ended up --

I think two were regular officers. By that time Geiger had

taken over back at Headquarters, and I was on Guam. Two of these fellows I believe were Naval Academy. I never asked where they came from, as long as they could do the job that's all I wanted. So I felt I should send these people back when they didn't measure up and ask for a replacement. And I got a letter from Geiger who

I wanted to know what in hell I had against Naval Academy officers. Well, I didn't know until that time, except for one man, that they had ever been to the Naval Academy, or whether they were reserves or regulars. I didn't pry into that because I didn't want to have that influence me in any way. And out of these nine I think the ones that remained were reserve officers, as I remember. When this point came up, I started checking. I asked Bobby Hogaboom. I said, "What the hell is this all about?" He said, "Well, I can see how Gen. Geiger probably thinks that, because the reserve officers have been able to stay on and the regulars have been bounced." But they were fellows who had sort of skimmed along in the service for a long time, evidently feeling that maybe the old school tie or something like that would get them by, but I feel nothing can get you by except real skill, in my mind.

Q: I spoke to Gen. Hogaboom, Monday I believe it was, and he sends his respects and regards to you. I'll be seeing him again at the beginning of March.

Erskine: He is a great guy.

Q: What do you think are the essential elements which make a good field commander, a good company commander, a good battalion

commander, a good regimental commander?

Erskine: The first thing, a man has to know his business. He should know his weapons, he should know the tactics for those weapons, and he should not only be qualified for the grade that he is assigned in, both at least for the next higher grade.

Wx He must be a man who has a great deal of dedication, he must have a feeling for his people, he must have -- in my mind, a very high regard for accomplishment, and a feeling for his men. He should be a man who never thinks about the number of casualties that he may get when he does go into combat, but one who thinks of every possible way to train his men so he can bring the maximum number back. That's always been the thing that has concerned me. Regardless of the casualties, we want to bring every possible man back, and the way to do that is to have them as highly trained as you can possibly do it within your ability.

Q: Gen. Norton told me once that he was about to be assigned to a school and he complained to Gen. Holcomb that he didn't want to go to school, and Gen. Holcomb said, "Why Arthur, don't you know that all the time here in the Marine Corps as an officer you are teaching ~~xxxx~~ your men, that when you lay down on the rifle range next to a man who is shooting a target, you are teaching, that the time you spend in combat is only a brief time, and if you don't want to be a teacher you don't want to be in the Marine Corps?"

Do you think this is a pretty valid statement?

Erskine: Absolutely. I've always felt ~~about~~ the same way. The basic job of an officer is being a teacher.

Q: This concept did not always prevail in the Marine Corps, did it?

Erskine: No, I don't think so. When I first came in I don't think it did. There were very few people who had that concept of what an officer's responsibilities were. I know that when I applied to go to Leavenworth, my commanding officer whose name I won't mention called me in and told me what a foolish thing that was, the Army didn't know anything about fighting, why would I want to identify myself with that crowd and all of that. But I persisted and I went to Leavenworth, and I think it was one of the two of the greatest years of my life. I worked hard, there is no question about it. It was a tough school, and I had the two year course, and in addition to what I picked up out of the instruction, I had in all ranks, all the way down from the top, when World War II came on, in the Army. Hodge and I were classmates. Quite a number of those people were my classmates.

Q: I know that Gen. Butler was not particularly hot on schooling. I heard that Gen. Holland Smith ^{did} ~~not~~ not have this drive, this particular interest in professional education, in professional schooling.

Erskine: I never served with Gen. Butler, but I never ranked him very high as being a skillful officer. He was a big talker,

his father was chairman of the Naval Committee in those days, and of course that gave him a hell of a lot of prestige and backing which other officers didn't have.

I was with Gen. Smith for quite a long time: I was his chief of staff for four years, and I never heard him make such a remark. Matter of fact I think he went to the Naval War College, and he went to the Staff School in France in World War I, and I don't think you could properly say that he was against education. He had a very keen sense of ~~building~~^{sizing} a man up by watching him and talking with him, and he usually had a darn good idea of what this man's qualifications were.

Q: He was a pretty shrewd individual.

Erskine: I think so.

Q: He was a crusty individual; he put on a good front, but as I understand it he was a sensitive person underneath. Is this a fair evaluation?

Erskine: Yes, very much so. He might get out and be mad as hell, but he'd come back and he would think of the hardships on these people and I'd see tears rolling down his face. I've seen this happen many times. He was very sensitive to the hardships that these people had to go through.

Q: What was his role on Iwo?

Erskine: He was in command of the Expeditionary Troops. And he stayed out on the ship with Kelly Turner. Kelly Turner was the Amphibious Force commander. And Harry Schmidt was the Corps commander -- the V Corps commander.

Q: But it was a difficult role for him to play. In other words he was superimposed over *the rest of the MARINE forces.*

Erskine: That was the organization. Kelly Turner was there as the Amphibious Force commander, and he was Kelly's opposite for the Marines -- the Task Force commander. Of course Kelly was giving orders direct to his ships, the division commanders, and there was very little occasion, I think, for Gen. Smith to get involved in the actual operation on the beach, because our plans had all been made pretty damn well in advance. However, he was in an equal position to see that we got the support we needed if it ~~hadn't~~ had not been forthcoming.

Q: Now for the Okinawa operation, I understand that because of the enormity of this amphibious assault it had been considered to have him take over the 10th Army, that ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ the command should have gone to a senior Marine general officer, that it should have gone to him.
/Had you heard anything about this?

Erskine: You mean to take over the entire operation?

Q: Yes, sir.

Erskine: I've heard it discussed. Of course at that time I was not at *FMFPAC* Headquarters. I was in Guam on the . . .

Q: CinCPac Headquarters and FMFPac Advance was there at the time.

Erskine: Yes. I think I told you about the Okinawa operation, how that came about in Okinawa instead of Taipei.

Q: No, sir, we didn't get into that, I don't think.

Erskine: I thought that was one of our early sessions. Maybe we didn't record it. I was then chief of staff and deputy commander of the 5th Amphibious Force, and ~~Max~~ Nimitz had a conference every morning at his headquarters, ~~and~~ the various task force commanders attended. Gen. Buckner, whom we had been with up in the Aleutians, came down to command the task force to go into Taipei. (Pause)

What the hell is the name of that island?

Q: Formosa.

Erskine: We were supposed to take Formosa -- that was the original plan that came up from the JCS.

Q: Formosa, Amoy, Foochow, and then . . .

Erskine: This pertained solely to Formosa. And of course one of the things that we needed at that time were places where the Navy could go in and have a base, and we needed air bases, or

areas suitable for air bases. Adm. Spruance had the 5th Fleet, and he was present that morning. I don't know why Gen. Smith wasn't there, but in his absence I always attended, so I was present.

I noticed that Buckner instead of sitting down in front in a row -- Adm. Nimitz would usually sit at his desk and we'd have chairs facing him, and Buckner pulled his chair up usually and would sit alongside Nimitz, which I thought was assuming a hell of a lot.

Anyway he brought the subject up on this particular morning, and Buckner appeared to think that he knew a little bit more about this operation than anybody else.

Q: He was going to command the operation.

Erskine: He would command the Army, the landing force.

Q: Yes.

Erskine: Adm. Spruance had also advance information on this thing, and in the back of this room where we held the conferences was a series of charts on little rows, and Spruance listened for a while and he said, "I would like to give you my estimate of what this operation will or will not accomplish, and what changes should be made in the orders from the JCS." Nimitz said, "All right." He went back and he pulled down the charts of this particular area, and he gave one of the most professional off-the-cuff estimates of the situation for an operation that I think I've ever heard.

He pointed out the main points in his discussion -- that Formosa was a rugged country but it didn't offer much when we got there; there were no real areas suitable for a naval base; very limited areas for air bases. And those were the two critical things that we needed at that time.

Then he moved into what other area would be better, and he covered the ~~xxxxx xxxxx~~ terrain, the topography, the hydrography and everything of Okinawa, and pointed out that Okinawa was a much better target, that it would provide us practically everything that we required, and probably wouldn't be as hard, actually, to take, because it had so many places where we could land, as Formosa.

My impression was that Gen. Buckner thought this was heresy. We had instructions to prepare to take Formosa, and here we were trying to find a way not to carry out that order.

Spruance recommended that we go back to Washington and point these particular points out and say, "We think this is a better way to do it." Buckner didn't agree, but Nimitz thought there was a good bit of merit in this idea, and the discussion finally ended by Nimitz saying ~~that~~, "That's exactly what I am going to do, I am going back to tell them in Washington that we think this is a better way to do it. I think we are out here and probably closer to the scene of action, and have had more ~~exp~~ ~~exper~~ experience in this thing than most of our friends back there." That's how it ended up. He went back, and after a period of time -- not a very great period of time, either -- the next step was to go to Okinawa.

Q: Now had this been before or after -- I guess it had to be before -- MacArthur, Nimitz and President Roosevelt had the conference at Pearl Harbor which determined what the future of the war in the Pacific was to be? Because you recall that there were two divergent views as to ~~the~~ --

The ^{AXIS} ~~access~~ of attack had changed from up the South Pacific across the Central Pacific to take these islands.

Of course MacArthur wanted to have the Philippines first concept -- they were going to take the Philippines before Formosa and the Chinese mainland.

I think there was a compromise -- MacArthur to go into Leyte in October of '44, and then before proceeding further, Okinawa would be taken, and instead of taking Formosa and the China mainland, which they recognized would be a difficult task, they would cut that out and then use Okinawa as a staging base for further operations -- operations Olympic and Coronet against Japan. But I guess this was . . .

Erskine: I don't know when that conference was held.

Q: I think it was June of '44.

Erskine: I was not involved in it.

Q: You were busy with Guam.

Erskine: Yes, I was in Guam.

Q: Yes, you were just about ready to take over the 3rd Division by that time.

~~During~~ The rest of your period on Guam before being detached, was spent generally in getting ready for the invasion of Japan and so on?

Erskine: Yes, until we had V J Day we were very busily engaged in planning for the operation and training, and having live rehearsals under live gunfire, with units and battalion size. When V J Day came, then I realized that we had another problem on our hands. First thing, everybody wanted to go home, who was going first, and all of this. I made a point of going around and talking to our people, and ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ assembling the officers and telling them that I didn't want to hear a word about anybody wanting to go home. You were in the Marine Corps.
7 As far as I was concerned it was the Foreign Legion.

You might remember that in this period of time out in the Philippines they had all sorts of delegations of enlisted men going up and actually putting on demonstrations to get sent home.

Q: Yes!

Erskine: But I knew I had to do something to touch their imagination in a way, so I got busy and made a survey within the Division, to see how many people I had who could teach school. I felt very strongly that any men who joined the Marine Corps -- in particular if he ~~served~~^{served} in my command -- should go

home and be^a better qualified civilian than the people who'd stayed home. And I was determined to give them an opportunity to do this.

So I thought one way to do it was to start ~~the~~ schools -- all kinds of schools -- the first idea being to get these young fellows' minds back on studying, getting back into the habit of studying. And then to do everything we could to give him credit for any studies that he did while he was out in the Pacific -- that is academic credit.

In a survey that was made to see how many people could teach and what they could teach, I was amazed at the number of Master's degrees, at the number of Ph Ds even in the rank of sergeant.

Q: Oh really?

Erskine: Yessir! I talked to many of these people, and I said, "Why in the world didn't you apply for a commission?" "Because I wanted to get ^{the war over} ~~there~~ to war and I wanted to go home." I said, "That's fine." Maybe he was a mathematic teacher, an English teacher. We had quite a number.

And also in the manual training field, I felt that if you took an old master sergeant in ~~engineers~~ he could probably teach welding and things like that better than some of the Ph Ds, so we included those fellows -- men who were specialists in a field. Carpentry, the same thing: you don't get a Ph D in carpentry, but you can find a good one in the engineers.

So I got a young fellow whose name slips my mind, who had been Dean of Men at North Carolina University. And I wish you

would check with Bobby Hogeboom on this man's name, because I want to give him full credit, he did a marvelous job. I made him the Dean of Men, and we set up a school. We had no textbooks. There are a lot of problems in setting up a college, I can tell you.

We made our plans to send ^{him} back to the mainland, after he made up the courses, and he indicated what type of textbook he needed, and get a copy. I think we ~~w~~ might have paid some of this out of our recreation funds, but we got copies of these textbooks, then we used our mimeographs to copy them.

Suddenly *my lawyer* came to me and said, "Don't you know that you are going to be in a hell of a lot of trouble with copyrights?" I had forgotten all about that, I thought anybody would be glad to help these kids out.

So I got busy and -- Well, first we duplicated many of these textbooks on mimeograph, to be used in the various classes that we thought were going to be held.

I got busy and I wrote to the publishers of every darn one of those ~~ps~~ and told them what I'd done, that I considered it an emergency measure, and I thought it was for the good of the country, and I wasn't able to understand why they wouldn't approve it. Every damn one of them came back and said, "Go to it, boy."

Q: Wonderful!

Erskine: So our training concept was shifted a little bit. We had V E Day and V J Day, and now it was Going Home Day that they were waiting for.

So we started these schools under the Dean of Men, and our concept of training was, you are either going to have a brain, or you are going to have a lot of muscle. The fellows who didn't want to take a course of any kind didn't have to -- this was all purely voluntary. But in the meantime we needed *brass*, so we put up a pretty damn stiff training schedule, and the other fellows were excused from the larger part of their training in order to go to school.

I think this program was well on the way, we had over 6,000 men going to school almost every day.

Q: Were you able to establish accreditation for the courses?

Erskine: For a large number, yes. A very large number.

Q: How did you do that?

Erskine: That was quite a job in itself, we had to write to the school authorities in the various states -- the state where this guy came from -- and we had a little system on it. And many of the courses were given credit. That was fine. But I felt that if they didn't get credit, anyway they had that much under their belt and maybe they'd make a better grade when they did go back and take that course. And I think that project went over pretty darn well. There was no loafing on it. I had on my desk every Monday morning the grades of these people in various chart forms, and if a man didn't make a passing grade -- which I think we

established at 60% -- two weeks in succession, he went back with the *brown* squad. I think there were damn few that we had to take out. Of course it was voluntary in the first place.

Q: Were you strong for athletic programs?

Erskine: Yes.

Q: Did you mount a good, strong athletic program?

Erskine: Oh yes. Our baseball team ^{damn near} beat everybody out in the Pacific. I had ^{Peewee} P.V. Reese as my coach.

Q: That's right, he was a Marine.

Erskine: No, he was in the Navy. The Navy had given chief petty officer billets to a large number of athletes in different places, so we requisitioned him from the Navy. I remember ^{Peewee} P.V. Reese had been a famous third baseman.

Q: Brooklyn Dodgers.

Erskine: Yes, with the Dodgers. He came in to me one morning, we had a big game -- I think with the 2nd Division, on Saipan -- and something had happened to our third baseman, he couldn't play, he was ill or something, and ^{he} we didn't have another good third baseman. I said, "God damn it, you are famous on that spot, you

play it." He said, "Oh no, I am the ~~same~~ coach, I am not supposed to play." I said, "You play 3rd base today." I had a report from the coach before every damn game on what he thought was going to happen, and then he had an explanation for me afterwards if it didn't happen that way.

So Pee wee went out there and I thought he played the lousiest game on 3rd base that I had ever seen, and here he was one of the great third basemen of the world. I really gave him hell for that.

Q: He was a great Dodger. Have you kept in touch with him?

Erskine: I've seen him several times since. He was real nice company -- good company.

Another thing we did there -- I don't know whether I've told you about this or not -- and this was before Iwo, actually. They would send these USO shows out, and I thought some of them were pretty damn lousy, and some of our people thought they were lousy, and they'd throw cigarette packages at them and things like that.

I think the thing that really upset me -- I was over to see the show that Gertrude Lawrence and her crew were putting on, and she was trying to get these boys to sing songs that the Army was singing in Europe, and one of her *ACTS* was there going around picking up cigarette butts, pretending to be so poor, so my boys had cigarettes and they started throwing packages of cigarettes!

I got up on the platform and stopped the show and sent these young fellows home, and I took Gertrude Lawrence over to the Club

with two or three of her troupe, and we had a late supper and a few drinks. I apologized to her for the conduct of these little scoundrels. Then I got hold of my recreation officer and I said, "I know we've got better talent in this Division than we are getting out here from the States, and I am not going to have any more USO shows." I said, "You go out and make a survey." We finally looked around for somebody who had been running a show.

Well, we found a fellow by the name of Billy Miller, who had been on the vaudeville road for quite a while, and I got hold of him and I said, "You start a show here, ~~you~~^{we} make a survey and see that you get all the talent." Billy was a corporal.

Then I tried to get each regiment and each battalion to get up a little orchestra of their own, and we bought them the instruments from the recreation fund.

Really amazing the turnout that we had. We had some people that were really sort of professional, but they weren't in the high bracket of the profession, and Billy's concept of a show was an oldtime vaudeville with a lot of nasty stuff. So he got a show together and I went over to look at it before he put it on, and there were all kinds of profanities, and I just gave Billy hell.

Q: He was probably an old burlesque comedian.

Erskine: He was an old burlesque man.

Q: And he probably knew a lot of blue material.

Erskine: Yes. But it was lousy. Then we had some Red Cross girls there in the Division, and one I understood had been a very famous radio singer. So I told him to go over and get the names of these people and tell them to report down there to make up a skit, and by God we were going to have a show, that's all there was to it. If we started in on something, we were going to finish it, I said.

The Red Cross out there on Guam threw up their arms and said, "We cannot let these people participate in anything like this, it's against Red Cross rules." I said, "The hell it is! The Red Cross doesn't run my Division; if you ^{ARE} ~~were~~ in my Division you are going to take orders, don't kid yourself."

Then a man from the island command came down to talk to me, and ~~xx~~ I told him the same thing. I said, "All right, if you can't obey orders in this Division you can get the hell out of here, but I am going to see that you do." It just happened that Adolphus Andrews was the son of former Adm. Andrews who was in charge of the Red Cross for the Pacific. So I told him. I said, "You write a letter to the old man and tell him I am getting ready to throw all these damn Red Cross people out of here, because of they can come in here and sit on their fannies and just try to look pretty, that's not what we need, because that~~xx~~ leaves the men thinking of something ^{they} ~~we~~ don't give them. Now you tell him that by God I am going to heave everyone out, and I am going to put it on the air, they are no damn good."

The old man came out to see me and he said, "I agree with you 100%." So there we were. We had several girls who were marvelous singers.

So we finally put on a show. About that time we ~~was~~ replaced a number of bandmen. I think there were 21 bandmen replaced. And in this crowd was a group of real professionals and some well known singers as well as musicians. One man was famous ^{-Beu} Old Man River, and when he'd sing that out there under those palm trees with the moon sitting up there, he'd bring down the house. Now this was in addition to what they could do in the band.

I think we finally called it THE MERRY MINUTE MARINES. We got a little crowd together there -- I think 20 odd of these fellows -- and after a few people heard them around there, everybody asked that they be sent over to entertain them in their camp. So here we started a competition.

We got together a damn good show of local talent. ZaSu Pitts's son was in the Division, and he was also . . .

End of Side 1, Tape 1, Session VIII.

Session VIII continuedTape 1, Side 2

Erskine: We had a darn good show, and the men would turn out to see it, and we sent it around over to the 2nd Division and other places. I think that helped a great deal, because we never had a show come from the 2nd Division or the 5th Division or any other thing. But I found that you had to make these people feel that this was their organization -- we can do anything, we can run a show, we can build a goddamn stadium. We built a swimming pool down there, and incidentally, there again I found a guy that used to be Eleanor Holm's swimming partner. I used to go down and have lunch and swim a little bit at noontime every day -- Bobby Hogaboom and myself, and anybody else who wanted to go -- and he was down there swimming, and I thought he was loafing, and I had a x conversation with him and it turned out that he'd been her swimming partner in the big thing in New York.

Q: Aquacade?

Erskine: ~~xxxxx~~ Yes, Aquacade. So I told him. I said, "You think you can get an Aquacade together here?" He said he'd try. He was just a corporal. I said, "Okay, go ahead and get it. Find the best swimmers and anything we can use down here." So we took our light bridging and built the diving ~~xxxxx~~ boards on there, we hauled in a lot of sand and put it around this swimming pool,

because it was mostly sort of volcanic rock around there, and made a damn nice swimming pool, which we had blown out with 90 tons of dynamite which we had captured from the Japanese while they were on the island. And this pool was built by our engineers and it was designed so that the high tide would come in and bring fresh water. It was regulation size.

I remember Wedemeyer came through there one time, and we were getting ready to put on our Aquacade and I asked Al if he'd like to go down to see it, and he stayed over a day to see it. And these boys had really done a damn nice job. Some place they had gotten hold of some submarine lights -- I think they got them in a submarine base down there -- and put the lights ^{under} the water and rigged up lights all around there. And we had our generators out for this big show. And in this particular show, (I was sitting with Wedemeyer right down on the edge of the beach) we had a stunt guy there who took another fellow, put him up on the high diving board, put handcuffs on him and threw the keys in the pool, then put him in a mail bag, locked the mail bag and threw those keys in the pool. Then he threw the guy in the mail bag into the water. Well, I am telling you, my heart went right up in my throat -- those goddamn fools!

Wedemeyer turned around to me and he said, "MY GOD! How are you going to explain that one?" And while I was sitting there, wondering how the hell I was going to explain it, this guy came up right in front of me, and he solved all my problems right there.

But they were really good, and he had synchronized swimming I think for as many as 30 or 40 people. He was a damn good little coach and instructor.

Q: You had a real good rec program.

Erskine: Oh I thought we had an excellent program. I had them build a great big sort of pavilion type thing as a recreation hall, and that's where the Red Cross gals held out. They were very good -- when they got the spirit of this thing they even had tea parties for these boys.

Q: The disciplinary problems were . . .

Erskine: It helped, I am sure. And this big pavilion was stuff that we'd just salvaged, that size, but no walls around it. I named it Marvin House.

Q: For Slug Marvin?

Erskine: For Slug Marvin, who had been killed on Guam. He was a man with quite a reputation.

Q: Yes indeed, I saw some ~~xx~~ old China papers of the early 30s, and of course he was well known then.

Erskine: Yes. After we came back from Iwo, one of the first things we did was to have a carnival, believe it or not, and these girls ran that carnival, and we had all kinds of things like throwing a baseball and knocking a guy in the water.

Q: Generally an officer.

Erskine: No, I wouldn't permit that. Never, never permit people to degrade the position of your men. I never had that question come up until I was with Fleet Marine Force down in Vieques one time, and then I sent the guy out so goddamn fast *he didn't know how he left there.*

Q: You left the Division before it was disbanded, is that correct?

Erskine: Yes.

Q: You went over to Japan in October ^{of '45} for a short period of time to observe the occupation operations.

NO,
Erskine: [^] That came about this way. Adm. Nimitz told me after V J Day that my Division would be the occupying troops -- the first -- to go to Japan. That was before MacArthur got into the picture *very soon.*

So I went back and told my people, *and we were all very elated.* and I kept promising these fellows how they were going to march down the Ginza and how we would do a hell of a lot of other things.

We went so far that the Navy had gotten all of their planes on a standby status to fly in. We were going to fly in the first group to Atsugi Airfield. Halsey was going to land the Fleet Marines from the ships. We would come in behind those fellows. Their main job would be to seize Atsugi, and we would fly into Atsugi and then we would carry out whatever the occupation plan was at the time. We didn't have a real plan. Everything was rather in general terms.

So we started packing up our gear, and our heavy stuff was to come by ship. All the Navy planes were to be at our disposal.

As the thing went along, MacArthur got into the picture and it ended up that this was all out, and here we had a lot of our gear packed up ready to go. So I went down to see Adm. Nimitz, and I said, "You really put me in a hell of a spot." "How did I put you in a spot?" I said, "We were getting all ready, we were going up there and march down the Ginza and do other things, these boys haven't seen a girl for a long time, and I suspect that maybe they were going to have a little fun out of that." He said, "You know, it's beyond my control now, it's absolutely beyond my control." I said, "I am in a hell of a fix! I never lied to these people before. Look what's happened now. This is all a hoax." He said, "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll send you (and I think he said 10) ten of your staff officers there." I said, "To do what?" He said, "Well, let's say to observe the bomb damage and the gunfire damage." I said, "What sort of a report you want?" He said, "You can come in and tell me you did it."

So he sent us up there. We went in two echelons. I sent up a jeep: the jeep that I had the boys kept in pretty good order, it had all kinds of little extra things on it. Toby Munn was in command of Marine Aviation up there, and they were very short of jeeps, so Toby got after me to give him my jeep. I said, "I won't give you anything. You aviators fly around and take life too damn easy. You've got to be a gravel crusher for me to give you anything." He said, "I'll give you an airplane for

a few days, and of course I invited him to come right up, went down to pick him up, brought him in. Well, Shaffroth showed up right at the time that McCain was there, and McCain is noted -- or was noted (he is the father of John McCain, Jack McCain) for his . . .

Q: Jocko McCain.

Erskine: I told him that Shaffroth was there and what he was out there for. And he had a few salty remarks to make about that. And then my mess boys -- trying to do something real nice for me -- went down that night and caught a whole bunch of langoustas on the beach, and next day for lunch they came in with this big tray of langoustas, and Shaffroth looked at me while Adm. McCain was sitting there and he said, "My God, and you were complaining about the food out here, uh?" I didn't have a chance to answer, but by the time McCain finished with him, about how fat he was, and how little experience he'd had and so forth and so on, and what a poor damn inspector he was, with a lot of salty remarks in between -- I never heard anything like it in my life, I was really embarrassed -- Shaffroth decided he'd completed his inspection, he packed up his bag after lunch and went home.

Q: Never went out to the troops or anything?

Erskine: I think he had a ship or two out there. He had served in the amphibious thing at one time, but I don't know the details.

But that finished the Fleet Inspector, and old John McCain could finish any of them.

Q: Did the food improve as far as the Division was concerned out there?

Erskine: Well, I came home soon after that.

Q: You reported in to CNO, to Op Nav in November.

Erskine: Op Nav?

Q: Yes, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations.

Erskine: Not me.

Q: You were in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations at Headquarters Marine Corps from November of '45 to February of '46, and then you went over to the Department of Labor.

Erskine: No, no. I was never in Headquarters Marine Corps.

Q: Didn't you have duty with the CNO?

Erskine: No. I came back, when I was ordered home --

I would get these messages that came in at night, at breakfast every morning in our little tent. So they rushed in this morning

with a cable ~~detaching~~, ordering me back to Washington, D.C. They never said anything about detaching ~~me~~.

At that time everyone who was being ordered back to the States, when they got back they had 30 days before reporting to their post. So I sent one right back and asked for 30 days delay on the West Coast -- my family was on the West Coast at that time -- in accordance with the existing policy and so forth. I got a message back the same day, giving me immediate orders -- that means you leave within 12 hours -- to report to Washington, D.C., priority one, air travel authorized. In those days only the President and the chief of naval operations got that.

Of course I sort of tied this in to this Shaffroth incident. (laughs) I arrived in Washington. I had flown straight through and didn't even have a chance to stop and see my family on the West Coast. Jerry Thomas met me out at the airport and told me that the Commandant was waiting to talk to me and that I would have lunch with the Commandant -- Gen. Vandegrift at the time.

So we went in and we had a brief talk, and it was almost lunchtime when I got there. I went in and had lunch, and as I was finishing lunch I said, "What the hell have I done, to have been brought back here? I don't know what I am here for. The message I got didn't detach me at all from the Division." He said, "Oh, you are detached, you are going to stay here." I said, "What is this all about?" He said, "We have a new job for you." I said, "What is it?" "It's called the R R A." "The R R A? What the hell is that?" Well, he wasn't quite sure, but he'd take me over and maybe the Secretary of the Navy would tell me ~~xxxxxx~~ about it. That was Forrestal at the time.

He didn't know much about it, but they had asked for me to take this job. "Well, I said, I'd like to find out something about it, find out what it's like." But here I was, and right after lunch we went over to see Forrestal; we checked in with him, and he said, "I am awfully sorry, I've got to go up to a Cabinet meeting; drop back in here tomorrow or some other time." And I said, "What is the R R A?" He said, "I don't know much about it." I said, "Who in hell put me in the job?" Nobody has ever admitted putting me on the job, but I got the orders.

Well, it turned out that Vandegrift didn't know much about it, I don't think, they just asked him for somebody to do this job, and my recreation program out there -- they were talking about the Marvin House, my school and everything like that, and Forrestal had visited this area when he was on his way back from Iwo Jima -- I think had something to do with Forrestal thinking that maybe I should fit into this job.

Now the R R A was a Retraining and Re-employment Administration, which ~~was~~ had been organized about two years as a result of the Baruch-Hancock Report, and had been in operation down in Sixth & Pennsylvania, I guess it is, right across from the Mellon Art Gallery. And Gen. Hines, who was Veterans Administrator at that time, had had both jobs, and I think he had used the Administration as a sort of haven for his old broken down drunks, to push them over the edge so they could retire. Actually, from what I could find out they hadn't done a thing for two years.

Q: Was that under the Veterans Administration?

Erskine: No, it was actually a part of OWMR -- in the laws it's in the same Act with OWMR.

Q: That was the Office of Wartime Manpower . . .

Erskine: Reconstruction or something. W War, M Manpower, and Reconstruction, or Rehabilitation or something.

And I had to be confirmed for this job by Congress, so they ~~send~~ sent a recommendation over there from the White House, and it was hanging around there about a week, I guess. In the meantime I went over to the Labor Department, because I'd been told that the President was going to be issuing a directive for the Labor Department to do what amounted to our logistics -- administration and logistics, basically. In other words, they'd provide the money and they'd take care of all the damn vouchers and all this stuff for us, they had a going outfit.

There was no limit to the number of people I could have over there, and they had about 40 or 50. Before I was confirmed, I called on the telephone and asked what programs they had and what they were supposed to do.

Prior to this, in order to find out what this was all about, when I heard about the Baruck-Hancock Report, I said, "All right, where is Mr. Baruch?" And it turned out that he was here in Washington and he had an apartment at what is now the Sheraton Park.

Q: The old Wardman Plaza?

Erskine: Yes, the old ~~Wardman~~. So I went over to see Mr. Baruch, and I told ~~him~~ him what I was in for, and he said, "Well, you can't do it. Nobody can do that job." I said, "Didn't you recommend it, you and Mr. Hancock?" And he handed me one of these little pamphlets which was a copy of the Act, ~~XXXXXX~~ and he said, "Yes, and here is a part of our report." He said it seemed like a very good idea then, but he said, "I don't think anybody can accomplish it." I said, "Why don't you go on record by saying that?" He said, "I can't very well do it. ^{But I'll} ~~XXXXXX~~ help you as much as I can."

Q: What was the idea?

Erskine: The idea was -- let me see if I can tell you. I don't have a copy of the darn Act, I've lost so much of this stuff moving around. (Pause) Reintegrate the veterans and workers into civilian life -- that was one of the basic statements in it. To reintegrate them into civilian life.

Q: Train them?

Erskine: That's a pretty big order. Now you take a lot of people who left and went in the shipbuilding business. They didn't want to come home when the shipbuilding stopped. The same thing for many other industries. They made better money. This was particularly true as far as the farms were concerned. And I really had a problem on my hands. Mr. Baruch would come down about every two weeks there for a while, then he came once a month, to see how

we were getting on and to help me out. Anyway I finally was confirmed. I had gathered over the telephone, talking with the man who was the executive here and had about 28 years of civil service. He was one of these fellows that gave me the impression that you can't do everything, in other words you couldn't do anything, you know.

Q: A negative attitude.

Erskine: He had taken over the office I was supposed to have. Finally I couldn't get anything out of him about any programs they had, so I said, "I'll tell you what, as soon as I am confirmed -- which will probably be around the end of this week -- you are fired." And he said, "You can't fire me, I am civil service." I said, "I don't give a goddamn what you call it, but you don't work there, and I want you out of the building the morning I arrive. And I don't want to see you." I heard later that they were all betting 10 to 1 that I would never be confirmed. I said, "That's the way this thing is going to work. You've been most uncooperative, you don't work for me, I don't want a goddamn thing to do with you and when I arrive there you'd better be gone." He said, "It'll take me a week to get out of here, to pack all my stuff." I said, "It'll take me five minutes to throw it out in the goddamn street. I am in good shape, I just got back from the war, and if you ~~are~~ ^{are} in the ^{when I arrive} building, I'll knock your goddamn cock off."

I've never seen him.

Q: He was out.

Erskine: ~~xxxxxx~~ I was confirmed, I think it was on a Thursday, and I went over the following day to take over, and I went in, the office was all there, there was no executive: he had been sent over there from the Veterans Administration, just waiting his time for retirement, so I am told.

I met ^{my} a very voluptuous blonde secretary who was all peaches and cream. She told me she was to be my secretary, and that that was her job over there. I said, "All right, show me who is in these cubbyholes." I went in and I talked to every damn one of them, "What are you doing? What do you plan to do?" And so forth.

I never heard such double talk in all my life. As far as I could determine, they hadn't done one thing in two years, and they didn't have any plans to do anything for the next two years. That was my feeling on it. So I gradually told most of them -- I think I had five people left when I finished, and there were 40 some odd -- "You are fired, don't come to work on Monday morning, get your things and get out. That's it." Each one told me I couldn't fire them, they were civil service. I said, "Well, you don't work here, that's all. Not for me."

That took all day. It was about 5 o'clock when I finished. I sat down, and this girl moved over sort of close and patted me on the knee and said, "You are awfully tired, and you had a terrible day, and I've been admiring your courage, in putting up with this kind of stuff. You are going to have a lot of backwash from this." I said, "I don't doubt that, I am always

having it." She said, "Why don't you come home with me and let me fix you a nice lamb chop?" I said, "Well, I don't think I'd better do that." Then I said, "What's after the lamb chop?" She said, "Well, I'll get you up early the next morning, if you want to get up that early. I'll be sure to get you up and I'll get your breakfast." I said, "Where the hell are you in the meantime?" She said, "Well, I'll be in bed with you." I said, "Sister, I don't play that game. You are fired too."

Q: It sounds like a put up job.

Erskine: Well, er -- I am not that gullible. It turned out later that in her case she had been more or less living with the No. 2 in the Labor Department -- I forget his name at the moment, but he'd been a congressman from Maine. And she put up the same thing. She said, "I have very good friends over in the Labor Department, and I can get you kicked out of here right away." I said, "That's the first thing I'd like to get done., to get kicked out."

Well, there we started. In the meantime I hired a girl called Louise Skinner, she was married -- this other girl was not married,** but her boyfriend was married. I haven't seen her since, I don't think. As a matter of fact none of these people came back to see me after I fired them.

I picked Louise Skinner, who had been around 12 years in the Government, she was of French extraction and very nice and very thorough and efficient as an administrative assistant.

Then I served notice. The Labor Department was supposed to get me replacement personnel. I think there were about six or seven left when I finished my rounds there. I prescribed that they all be veterans, and if possible people who had been in combat. And we had quite a go-round over that one. I said, "I won't let them in the building, and what the hell are you going to do about it? I didn't fight the war to have some goddamn bureaucrats around here telling me what to do."

Then Louise came one morning very disturbed and said, "The Civil Service Commission is coming down here to see you." I said, "Fine, bring them in!" Here was Ma Perkins. The chairman at that time was a nice guy -- we finally got to be very close friends -- but I can't think of his name. He left here and went out and was president of a school some place in the eastern part of the Middle West. I'll probably think of his name later. I think there were about six or seven members there. And they started to take me to task ~~about~~ and telling me I couldn't fire anybody. I said, "Use any name you want, but they don't work here. If you are talking about these guys I told them they were fired." They said, "You have to go through a long procedure." I said, "I haven't got time to monkey with that kind of business. And the President has put me in here to do the job, and I am going to do it, and nobody is going to get in my way." And I said, "Louise, come here. And you people just sit down and be comfortable for a few minutes." She came and I said, "Call a press conference right now, right here in

my office, and get Jim Lucas to come if you can." And they looked at each other and they looked at me and said, "A press conference? What do you want with a press conference?" I said, "I want the reporters to hear what you are going to tell me, and what I am going to tell you. ^{They} ~~you~~ are the most inefficient people I've ever come in contact with, and I am not going to have these people come in here unless I think they are qualified. They don't work for me. You can hire them, I don't give a damn what you do with them." Well, boy, they found one excuse after another, they got out of there and I never heard another word about this.

Q: Were you able to bring any Marines over with you?

Erskine: I had a couple, yes. One was Bill McCahill. Another was a man by the name of Tinney, who had lost his leg. I finally borrowed a Mr. Chester from the State of Connecticut who had quite a reputation in the field of rehabilitation, and I put ~~him~~ him in charge of the rehabilitation program. And I had a young man come in on crutches there one day, with both legs off, who wanted a job. His name was Charlie Potter.

Q: Oh, ^{the} ~~a~~ Congressman.

Erskine: I thought, "By God, it's my duty to give him a job." So we got him hired and put him in ^{Chester's} ~~xxxxxx~~ place over there, because he was a little bit depressed at the time, and we kept telling him, "What you have left is worth something, you know."

So I put him there with Chester, and when we finally folded up that administration over there Charlie went back to Michigan; and we had encouraged him to do this, and had been ~~trying~~^{trying} to build up a little publicity out there for him, through personal angles, and he ran for the Senate and was elected. Then he ran for the next term and was elected the second time. Now he is here as some sort of consultant, I think. I've seen ~~in~~ about six months ago.

Q: Actually under your R R A, you also had retraining and rehabilitation of the handicapped/

Erskine: Yes, we started that program.

Q: This is what Bill McCahill now . . .

Erskine: He is running that. That was one of our programs.

The first ~~thing~~^{thing} we did was -- we did a lot of studying there. I had Dorothy Stratton with me for Women's Affairs, and she was the head of the Coast Guard Women, the ~~SPARS~~ SPARS, during the war. She was a very able woman. We had quite a number of very qualified people, and they've all done good after they got out of there.

So we started in trying to get centers organized -- particularly in the large cities -- with no cost to the Government, ~~where~~^{with} people who understood the various businesses there, where a veteran could go in and find somebody who could give him ~~the~~ advice and some guidance about the kind of work he could get and about his chances of success in that particular field. The same thing regarding

whether they should go back to school -- and help them out on these things.

Everybody said that wouldn't work. My policy ~~council~~ ^{council} consisted of most of the Cabinet by law, plus a couple of agencies. I don't remember exactly who they were. We wrote up this order. I was empowered by an Act of Congress to issue orders that you work with the States as well as with the Federal Government officials. We had a hell of a lot of power. So I was going to issue this order that within each state, community and so forth, it was my feeling and concept that these people that come from certain communities, the people who could best advise them were the people in the communities, and not some expert from Washington. And it was quite a move on the part of the employment agencies, and also Selective Service under Hershey wanted to get a finger in this thing. Everybody wanted to expand their agencies, and I think the placement agencies felt this was just a heyday for us, which could well amount to having some guy from Maine who'd never seen a cow down in Texas, advising some cowboy as to what he should do. Well, I felt the people in the communities knew the business, and where there was a chance -- this man wanted to go in this thing, another man wanted to run a restaurant, so many of them wanted to run hardware stores, it was amazing, and restaurants and cleaning joints -- this would be a local effort, no pay, they would arrange it and they would advise the people in their community on what would be best for them, and then follow through and try to help them get started in a business.

Well, I think in over a year we organized over 3000 throughout the country. I made a survey -- ~~xxxxxx~~ I didn't do it myself, but I had some people make it in New York -- as to how many welfare agencies and others were in existence in New York City who might be able to help a veteran in some way, and it turned out, I think, either 600 or 800 plus. And then you have them cut down, the Jewish, the Catholic, the Polish and the God knows what -- divided up.

Q: Veterans organizations got involved too, I guess.

Erskine: They came in with us on a lot of things. But if a veteran started out in New York City to find a job and get some help, and he went to every one of those 600 agencies it would be two years maybe before he found the right one. And then they would be able to give him probably very limited help.

So I felt it was the responsibility of the communities. That was heresy, really, because everybody in the Government wanted to bring every damn thing in Washington here and have centralized control. Now this was putting it back not only in the states, but in the communities. And I went over the country making talks on this theory, and I found a great deal of sympathy for it. It became so controversial around here that I decided to call in my policy ~~council~~ ^{council and issued what was} ~~council~~, called R R A Order No. 3. Louise Skinner has a copy of it I am sure, some place.

They came over, and attending as a guest was Mrs. Rosenberg, Anna
~~xxxxxx~~ Rosenberg.

Q: Yes, from New York.

Erskine: Who then was in very great favor at the White House, and pretty much of a protégée of Baruch's. This session was rather long. We had the Secretary of the Army, the Secretary of the Navy, the Secretary of State -- we had damn near the whole Cabinet on this ~~policy~~ policy council.

In this building they had a very ~~sumptuous~~ sumptuous conference room, the chairs were so nice and soft. It was so well decorated. We got in there and I explained the reason I'd called the council together. Not all of ~~the~~ ^{Cabinet} officers came themselves, but there were a half a dozen ~~Erskine~~ ^{Cabinet} officers there. But the Number Twos came, and I could sense from the things that were said that it was no use talking to this crowd. They ^{all} wanted everything right in their hands.

So I finally asked them. I said, "Vote." Everybody voted against the order except one man who was a major general in the engineers in the Army. He had a job here and he said, "I know Gen. Erskine and I know he is going to do this thing right, and I know the Marines don't let you down." I said, "I thank you very much for that. I take it that this order is rejected by the council. But I've read the law, I think very carefully, and it doesn't require me to take your opinion. I am convinced this is the ~~a~~ best way to do the job in the least possible time. I think you are wasting your time over here, but I am issuing the order, and it goes out to the Governors. It's going out tonight/"

Anna Rosenberg followed me down to my office and she was having a fit. "Oh, what these fellows can do to you!" I said, "What can they do to me? I got that Act of Congress in my hands." "The White House isn't going to like it." I said, "How do you know?" "Oh, I am very familiar with their thinking and everything up there." Of course she got out and telephoned the White House at about 6 o'clock at night. One of the President's secretaries -- Truman was in then -- called me up and said, "I understand you are going to issue this order by telegram tonight." I said, "That's right." He said, "The President isn't going to like it." I said, "How do you know? Did he tell you that?" He said, "No, but I know what the President is going to think." I said, "Well, I don't give a goddamn what you think, and secondly, get the idea out of your mind that I am paying attention to any goddamn flunkie. That's where I stand on this." And I issued the order. No reaction from the President. I also told the policy council, "This is the first time I've called you in session, and it's probably the most important thing we have before us in our little administration down here, but you can rest assured that from now on I won't call you, because I don't think you are in touch with the people. I am not in very close touch with them, but I know what the soldier boys think, I think."

Well, it turned out to be a very great success, and this big program they have on now for handicapped people was the program that we initiated in this administration. We started out just with the handicapped. And there were several other units trying

to work along this line, and we got this thing broken out on a statewide basis, part of it through the service centers that we had started. I know when I'd go out and make speeches like in Chicago, every time I stopped there there would be a dozen or more people in wheelchairs who had found out I was coming, ~~people~~ people on crutches and everything, and they'd go in my room, and it'd look like a hospital.

Q: I've seen pictures. Bill McCahill showed me some pictures, where he was speaking at the various places.

Erakine: Bill McCahill was our public relations man. When we started to fold up the administration --

Of course you had to go out and defend your budget, so I put in the budget there for the second year. In the meantime I had rummaged around and I thought everything that we had been doing was a part of the responsibility of one of the departments or agencies of Government already. They already had this responsibility. So I went up before this committee, and they started questioning me about the budget, and finally one guy said, "Do you think you really need this?" I said, "No." "Why do you put it in?" I said, "I was told to." I told him. I said, "I think everything we've tried to do is a part of the responsibility of one of the ^{regular} agencies of Government right now. I don't see any use in putting it all here and having all these people fight us. I am ready to go back to the Marine Corps. I ~~xx~~ think we started off a few programs, with some

support, mainly from the President, I think it's going to help."

That was the first time anybody had ever come up and said he didn't need money. I said, "That's right, I think you ought to close it up. But hold this up until I contact the President."

I sat down and I wrote the President a letter, and I told him that in effect I thought this responsibility should be placed in this Department, that Department, or some other place, but to see that it was carried out -- that was the point. And everything except the handicap program, which of course by that time the Labor Department wanted.

He sent for me, and I went up and talked to him and I said, "Do not give this particular program to anybody, put it right under your office, and it will succeed. Otherwise it's going to be watered down, you'll have more bureaucrats involved in it, and no progress."

Q: You went to see the President?

Erskine: President Truman.

End of Side 2, Tape 1, ~~XXXXXX~~ Session Eight.

Session VIII continuedTape 2, Side 1

Q: So you went to President Truman.

Erskine: I went up to President Truman, and asked him to not give this program to any agency of the Government, because I didn't think it would get off the ground with them, and we were just getting off the ground at that time. Matter of fact we had a week for employing the physically handicapped, and we did all kinds of publicity, and had the help of many agencies and institutions around the country. And that week we got over 29,000 jobs for handicapped people. And I was convinced then that the program was a viable program. This is the reason why I went to see President Truman, and I gave him this as an example, but (I^{asked} ~~told~~ him) to keep that under his general supervision; he wouldn't have to do anything about it, but appoint somebody who could run it. ^{He said} ~~xxxxxxx~~him, "You go back and fix me up a budget for this thing and bring it back." Which I did. I think it was around \$260,000 a year. He took that, but he did not reassign this. He kept this committee under his office, but designated several people from the Labor Department ~~task~~ to look after it in the meantime. Finally Bill McCallhill was one of the people ^{in that}, and Bill is a very resourceful guy and he is pretty much of a public relations man.

Q: Oh yes, Bill is quite an operator.

Erskine: I think Adm. McIntyre was finally appointed chairman of the committee.

Q: That was the President's Commission.

Erskine: Yes, the President's Committee for the Employment of the Handicapped; and it just continued to grow and grow. I think it's been a very successful operation.

Q: Bill McCahill was in on this from the very beginning, I guess.

Erskine: Yes, Bill was in from the first concept.

Q: During the time that you were the administrator of this R R A program, you were out of the Marine Corps stream completely, I think. Is that right?

Erskine: Yes.

Q: This was the time when the unification fight was going on.

Erskine: Yes, that's right. Yes, I was out of the Marine Corps, for all intents and purposes, by an Act of Congress.

Why don't we stop there? I am getting a little . . .

Q: All right.

End of Session VIII.

(This session starts on same tape where tail end of Session VIII is recorded)

Session IX - 25 February 1970.

Tape 1, Side 1

Q: Last time we were talking about your job as administrator of the Retraining & Re-employment Administration of the Department of Labor. You were talking about the setup in the organization, and about some of the personnel problems that you had, and some of the things that you accomplished.

You mentioned two people who were fairly prominent -- extremely prominent, amongst others, but I am interested in these two.

I was wondering how closely you worked with them, and what was your involvement with them. One was Frances Perkins, and the other was Anna Rosenberg.

Erskine: I had very little to do with Frances Perkins. She was a member of the Civil Service Commission at the time, and I think I met her on only one or two occasions when she came to my office, always in connection with some Civil Service regulation that she thought I didn't understand.

As regards Anna Rosebberg, I had quite frequent conferences with her from time to time. She had a program of her own for veterans in New York. And incidentally we never managed to establish a little group in New York, and I think largely because she sort of

dominated the political angle in that particular regard up there. I think Anna wanted to be known as a real patriot and a ~~woman~~ do-gooder for the GIs, and she was involved in many, many sessions and conferences and so forth, involving the veterans. Toward the end of my administration I appointed her as a consultant, and gave her a very nicely engraved . . .

Q: Certificate?

Erskine: Certificate to that effect, and it appeared to me that she enjoyed that very much. She was going to tell me what she thought I should do, so I thought I might as well make her a consultant officially.

Q: Hmmm! How about some of the other people who were prominent in American political life, prominent in Government at the time?

Erskine: It's quite a while back, I don't know that I have too clear a memory on it. Of course President Truman -- his door was always open to me. Omar Bradley, who was head of the Veterans Administration at the time -- we had many conferences. Mr. John Snyder, who was secretary of the Treasury was involved in many cases in meetings of groups involved in veterans' affairs. I knew him quite well, and he was very close to the President. A great five percenter, Gen. Vaughn, was involved. Gen. Vaughn was finally appointed by the President as the veterans' representative at the White House, I think. But it was done

through our office. Incidentally, I saw him not long ago, and he is still the same active guy.

Q: Was his character as black as it's been portrayed and painted?

Erskine: I don't know, I think he was just an average politician, but not of the highest speed. He was just a politician like most of the other people who were in Government at that time, and at this time. He was a big-hearted soul. Matter of fact I liked old Harry very well.

Q: He certainly made the headlines, didn't he?

Erskine: Yes. And of course there was Gen. Hershey, who was involved in a great many of these things. He was then director of Selective Service, and just retired here recently. (Pause) Those were the top guys that I had a great deal of contact with from time to time.

Q: You were there for 13 months. Did you have any difficulty getting out? Was there any length of time placed on your appointment when you went in?

Erskine: No, no limit was put on it when I went in, so far as I know. My appointment was approved by the Senate. But after looking this over, I think I mentioned that I felt that almost

everything that we were charged with doing was also part of the responsibility of some ^{other agencies} ~~agency~~ of the Government, and they hadn't been doing their job. And I didn't think that I was cut out for this kind of a thing for any length of time. I think I mentioned that I recommended to the President that this agency be disbanded, and the various responsibilities assigned back to the agencies, where they had originally been, with the exception of the employment of the handicapped committee which we had organized, and I felt that would die on the vine if we let it go back to some employment agency of the Government. The President agreed, and I put in my resignation, and out I went.

Q: Did you feel that you'd accomplished everything that you set out to do, or most of the things that you had (envisaged) ?

Erskine: Not that we had set out to do, but I think we accomplished a great many things. The Veterans Service Centers I think were a considerable accomplishment, and certainly the employment of the handicapped committee was a considerable accomplishment. Those were really our two main programs, and then of course coordinating affairs of the veterans with various veterans organizations was another thing that we were pretty heavily involved in from time to time. Actually, I was chairman of 12 inter-agency committees involving veterans' affairs, while I was in R R A. These involved education, employment opportunities, employment preferences, and all kinds of things. I couldn't even name all the committees now.

Q: At first blush it would appear that the administration was just set up to take care of the veterans -- just another GI Bill of Rights type of thing in a sense, or one aspect of the GI Bill, the rights of the returning serviceman. But didn't it fit into the economics of the country? I mean, it had a much more important and higher purpose, in the sense that the economy of the country and the future economic health of the country in the organization of manpower, of the mass of manpower returning to the civilian economy, had to be fitted in purposefully and thoughtfully.

Erskine: I don't know whether I can answer that very clearly. I don't know the reason behind it because I was out in the Pacific when the thing was set up, and it was set up actually quite a time before the end of the war as a part of OWMR, Office of War Mobilization and Reconstruction, and it just hadn't functioned.

I think the thought was that by putting these various responsibilities in this small agency we could concentrate more, and we could probably keep the public better informed, and particularly the veterans. The Administration, I think, had a considerable fear of having another Veterans' March, and they wanted somebody to do something to ~~keep~~^{make} the veterans feel that they were getting everything they were entitled to.
(Pause)

Q: When your resignation was accepted, you went back to Headquarters Marine Corps for a brief time, did you not?

Erskine: No. I might have been carried on the muster roll there, but I went out to Camp Pendleton. There was probably an interim

period there, ^a week or 10 days.

Q: I think for a period of three months -- April-May-June -- you were president of a board concerned with the size and organization of postwar Marine Corps Aviation.

Erskine: Yes, that's right. I was on that board. Let me go back to R R A again. I don't know whether I have told you about the taxicab drivers' march ^{from} ~~in~~ Chicago.

Q: No, sir.

Erskine: This was one of the first groups that got really up in arms. Their complaint was that they had been veterans, they had been to war, and they couldn't get taxicab licenses in Chicago, and they claimed that Mayor Kelly was the man who was responsible for ~~not~~ not letting them either start a new taxi outfit or -- I think this organization in Chicago was called the Veterans Cab.

So the news broke that at least 100 taxicabs were leaving Chicago for a march on Washington. One Saturday afternoon about 1 o'clock I was summoned to the White House, and Secretary Snyder presided over this meeting. They had the Civil Service Commissioner there, the surplus war material boss, Gen. Hershey, Gen. Bradley, and myself. I don't recollect the others, but I think there were one or two other representatives at this meeting.

Q: Was Bradley chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time?

Erskine: No, he wasn't. There seemed to be considerable concern about letting these people come to Washington on a march. They were afraid that would be the first group and that many other groups would follow. So there was great discussion as to who would meet and deal with this group. I suggested that maybe Gen. Bradley should do it because he was here with the Veterans Administration. No, he wanted nothing to do with it, he had many reasons why he shouldn't get involved in this.

Well, Hershey had always been quite outspoken about his concern regarding the veterans; he used to say that he got them in the service and he thought he had the responsibility for getting them straightened out when they came out of the service. So I then suggested ~~that~~ that maybe Gen. Hershey would do it. Then Hershey and Bradley teamed up and said that I should do it; that it was my job to get these people back into civilian pursuits.

Anyway ^{they} ~~we~~ finally decided that I would be responsible, and they had hardly saddled the responsibility on me before Mr. Snyder who was the chairman of the meeting asked me what my plan was for ~~handling~~ handling it, and I said, "My God, I've just gotten the ~~thing~~ job!" I said, "I don't know what my plan is right now." And I said, "I tell you frankly that my feeling at this moment is that I'll send them an invitation to come to Washington." And I thought most everybody would die of apoplexy. I am sure that was contrary to everybody's views: they wanted somebody to stop this thing, they wanted to forget it, they wanted to go away. Well, I felt that the ~~best~~ ^{worst} we could do would be to tell a bunch of veterans -- if they were legitimate veterans --

they couldn't come to the Capital City. But inviting them here didn't give them any license to raise hell.

The meeting broke up, but I had it understood that I had the job and I didn't want ~~any~~ anybody going around getting messed up in it. If it was a failure it was my responsibility, if it was a success it was my responsibility, and keep your cotton picking fingers out of it.

So when I went back to the office I got in touch with these people and sent airline tickets for three or four -- the head man's name was Bucholz -- to come and see me so we could make arrangements for them, and we were delighted to have them as our guests in Washington. So Bucholz flew in with three members, I think it was, of his so-called staff, and we had quite a talk.

I talked to them and asked ^{what made them feel} ~~whether they were veterans or not~~ that they were veterans or representing any real bunch of veterans. After talking to them, there wasn't a single man in this group of representatives who had ever really been in what I call combat: they had been truck drivers, one had been in an anti-aircraft outfit back on the coast, and nobody had been really wounded.

At this point I gave them a little lecture on what I considered a veteran to be. I didn't feel that they were real representatives of the veterans -- they were probably trying to do something for themselves, which I am sure was the case, because they were in here trying to pressure the government of the City of Chicago to give them taxicab licenses, when as a matter of fact every city in this country of any size has a

limit on the number of taxicabs that are authorized to operate. They cost a certain amount of money. I think in New York a license costs over 2000 dollars^{for} one car.

Q: There are politice involved in any number of these things.

Erskine: I suppose. That's what they claimed, that they were getting an unfair deal. So I told them I thought that if they had been wounded two or three times, had lost an eye or a leg or something like that, I'd considered them a full fledged veteran, but in my book they were a bunch of fringe benefit guys. They didn't like that very much, but by the time we finished they got on the subject of Mayor Kelly -- he was a dictator, he was this, he was that, he was a politician, he wasn't honest, particularly with their group, and he didn't go to war and they did. I said, "Well, all right, you wore the uniform, so you have clear title to veteran, but I want you to understand you can't come here and raise hell. Now tell me what you want to do when you come here." They outlined a little program. First thing was, they would be ^{met} ~~made~~ by ^{the} police and they would drive around the White House. I said, "Sure you can do that, we can arrange that, we'll take you around twice, so you can get a damn good look at it. Part of that White House is yours, if you really went to war, as far as I am concerned, and you certainly have a right to see it." Then they wanted to get publicity, and I said, "That's up to your organization. You have our permission here to go see every public media, radio, TV, newspapers. But

you sell them your products."

One of the requests was that they have a large auditorium where they wanted to have a big mass meeting, and I asked what good this was going to do to have this mass meeting in Washington when their problem was in Chicago. They were going to create public sympathy. "All right. I'll get you an auditorium. You let me know when." I told them to come on in, we'd have somebody meet them, they'd drive around the White House and we'd have a place where they could stay, ~~xxxx~~ ^{but} they were on their own. And Bucholtz as far as I was concerned was like a battalion commander, and we'd hold him responsible for the conduct of this whole crowd. Many of them brought their children.

I called up Col. Leonard who had just organized here in Washington, D.C. a little service center in accordance with our R R A Order No. 3, and gave him the background of everything I knew and turned the job over to him. I said, "Now this is your area, you've got to contact these people, get these things ready, and get the Labor Department Auditorium, have it fixed up with red, ^{and blue} ~~and white~~ ^{drapes} ~~xxxxxxx~~, ^{damn thing} ~~everything~~ that they want, for whenever they want to have it.

Q: Was this Marine Colonel John Leonard?

Erskine: Now, he is Army. I don't know whether he ^{is} ~~was~~ National Guard or not. But he is still down at the District Building here in charge of veterans' affairs, I think. This little service center actually grew into a part of almost every local government,

particularly in the states, that is the state Capitols.

So Leonard went to work. He met this caravan when they came into Washington, they went around the White House a couple of times. Then he had arranged for a whole camp, that used to be -- it's not there now -- just beyond Memorial Bridge in that area.

Q: North Post, Fort Myer?

Erskine: No, the North Post is on the south of the road. This was a small camp just after you cross the bridge, on the right hand side of the road, which has been torn down.

He took them over to the camp and laid down the law as to what they could do, and he was their boss as far as I was concerned.

After a few days of going around and talking to newspapers and trying to get time on the radio and TV et cetera, Bucholz came back to me and said, "The newspapers around here don't seem to pay much attention to me." I said, "Damn it, this is a Chicago problem,^{it} is not a Washington problem. They are looking for national news." Well, he could make national news out of it. I said, "Well, go to the newspapers and do it. You have that right, and I am here to give you every right that I can give you and try to guide you into a program that won't spoil what you are trying to do."

Then when they came for this great mass meeting he had got a few little notes in some of the newspapers, and maybe one or two radio announcements, and I showed up at this place -- the Labor Department Auditorium -- and asked Bucholz if I could sit

on the stand with him. He was delighted. We had it decorated.

After waiting at least half an hour -- I think the meeting was supposed to be at 2 o'clock -- (there were only about 25 or 30 people, he didn't have his own people there, many of them) I said, "I think you'd better call this off, don't you think?" "Oh no, lots of people will be coming in a little later, let's wait a little longer." We waited, and I doubt that we ever had more than 40 or 50 people who showed up. And I told him there. I said, "Look at this draped auditorium, this is a national thing. Look at your small group, the people who are backing what you want to do, or if they are backing it, some may have come here to be convinced that you have a worthwhile program. Now this makes me sort of feel that your problem is just about this size compared to the whole country's problems over here that I have to worry about. I have given a great deal of time to this. What's your next step?" Well, they didn't have any meeting, didn't have any speech: in other words, it folded up, and I told Col. Leonard to keep in contact with them, to try to see what they could do.

After a week or two, I think, they ran out of money, and they were short of food, and Leonard arranged with the Red Cross -- to the best of my recollection -- to get them some food, and pay for the gasoline to get some of these people back to Chicago.

Leonard followed up on this through some channel he had out to the city government in Chicago, and he told me not long ago -- we were talking about this -- that they had managed to get their licenses although it was delayed some time, and I felt that

by handling it this way rather ^{than} ~~bringing~~ bringing out a line of policemen saying, "You goddamn people, you can't come here", ^{(If that had been the case, if I had been} on their side I would have thrown a few rocks, I think, because if he was a veteran he certainly had the right to come and look at the White House, but as I said they didn't have any license to come here and raise hell, but they could contact anybody that they wanted, newspapers, TV, radio, Congressmen, and so forth). As I ~~xxxxxx~~ tried to tell Bucholz, "You've got to sell your problem before it's going to amount to anything here."

Anyway it ended up peacefully, and as I recollect that's the only march we ever had in Washington by veterans.

Q: Actually this certainly was in contrast with the way the bonus marches were handled by MacArthur. Probably that's why the Army's Generals Bradley and Hershey wanted no part of it.

Erskine: Uh uh. Well, not only that, but I think they had in the back of their mind to use a certain amount of force, saying, "You can't do this, you don't have a right to do this." But I had an entirely different feeling. I had a feeling about their responsibility of getting these people back into jobs, and I think the system we followed had some effect too on not having more marches on Washington, because I tried to put the responsibility back into the communities where these people came from, and if the communities couldn't handle it, then we could step in and see ~~if~~ what we might be able to do to help the communities. But the thinking in Washington at that time -- and I know the employment services here -- was that they actually wanted to

take over our service centers. I used to tell those people, "Goddamn it, you haven't done anything about it before, what makes you think you could do anything about it now?" But there was a feeling of centralizing all of the authority right in the Capital, when I felt this was one thing that should go right back into the suburbs, you might call it.

Q: ^{With} the control or the guarantee that -- the control from the center here -- that the service centers and the local governments would guarantee the rights of the veterans.

Erskine: We finally organized -- we finally got the service center business going, and each state appointed an officer (they had different titles in different states) to be responsible for the veterans affairs in that state. Then I started working directly with them, and the law provided me with authority to work directly with the states. And of course that built them up a little bit back at home, and pretty soon we had our own little political organization, you might call it. I invited those fellows into Washington several times for conferences, and it finally ended up by them forming a State Veterans' Affairs Officers Association, of which they made me an honorary member. I still get letters from some of those fellows, asking me if I couldn't come back and give them another hand, that I gave them a fair deal all the way through.

Now let me tell you what the service center was in our mind.

It was really a panel. It cost a certain amount of money. It cost the Federal Government nothing, but like your hometown organizations basically there was a panel of people who knew the area, knew the opportunities for employment, and in most cases knew the men who needed the employment, and they would give their time free. The manager had a varieties of ways of getting space for this thing and hiring: some of the businesses in town would donate a certain amount of money for office space, ~~somebody~~ ^{somebody} else would donate a clerk, somebody else would donate typewriters, in some cases they had enough money they could buy the typewriters, in some cases the city government ~~anted~~ ^{anted} up the money to do this, or most of it.

Its success depended on the desire and the resources in the community, and the number of problems they would have in that community that needed solving. All of this was done without one cent cost to Uncle Sam or the taxpayers, except possibly in some cases some state money was spent. But we had over 3000 centers operating within a year, and I think this kept a lot of these people at home, and it gave the people at home a feeling that they had a responsibility to these people. Some of these communities finally became very jealous of this responsibility -- they didn't want anybody outside. On the other hand, the USES (United States Employment Service) was always badgering me to help push them into the various centers which were located where you had USES employment offices, to use them as a reference. I said, "Fine, ^{if} you'll do anything about it, but you goddamn people, you come from Maine and send them down to Texas to teach a cowboy ^{Maine people} who grew up down there chasing cows. You are not fitted. But,

if you will cooperate, and I hope you'll have one of your representatives, a member, on each panel, wherever you are located" And they did that, and they did from time to time do a certain amount of good. They would help, they knew of certain employment ~~opportunities~~ opportunities. But the business people of that town -- now here is a kid who wanted to run a hardware store (and we had many cases like this -- hardware, dry cleaning, and restaurants seemed to appeal to so many of these boys), and how the hell was ^{he} going to get started? USES couldn't do anything about ~~it~~ that. This boy wanted to run one. Well, we'd get him in touch with some man, maybe he was the No. 1 hardware man in the town, who owned the biggest hardware store, and this fellow would sit down and say, "Here is the problem in running a hardware store, you have to have some money to start with, to get all kinds of tools and implements and things like that." A hardware store in the East is different from one in the Middle West or in the West, there are different kinds of machines that are used. And the man would discuss this problem, and in some ~~xxx~~ cases he would give him a job to let him learn what the business was. And I suppose some of these fellows followed through, stayed with that concern, or managed to raise enough money to start their own. But that was true with all kinds of businesses.

Q: Say you had a center in a town that was a strong company town for a big industrial organization~~ly~~ or a big steel plant, which needed manpower, which had control of the town's manpower, were

there any problems with wages, with how the manpower was being fed, was being utilized, were there any pressures brought on ~~xxxx~~ the organization that you know of?

Erskine: Nnnno. Of course I had representatives throughout the country, (I think we divided the country up into something like 12 areas) and they kept in touch with all the employment opportunities. This didn't only involve veterans, this involved workers too, and of course that put us in contact with the labor unions. I had sometimes a great *deal of help from* ~~the~~ the labor unions, but the labor unions officials usually were very adamant, if they thought we might be encroaching on some of their little private privileges, and that was particularly true in the apprentice program.

Q: Yes, it's still so today.

Erskine: Yes. They wanted to limit the number of apprentices to a very small number so they could keep the wages up when he gets up to be a journeyman, and you can only get to be a journeyman in a labor organization by going through the apprentice program. We didn't get into too much of that because we didn't have a very large number of really skilled workers. The majority of the people that came to our centers and needed help were people who were, you might say, unskilled in a way: they may have a certain amount of skill, but not enough to really put him into competition with the labor unions' skilled workers. So that was

not a great problem, although it was raised several times.

Another thing that we ran into was the insurance policies. That was particularly true of anybody that had a handicap. The insurance companies claimed that they were more accident-prone than the worker that was not handicapped. I think we disproved that completely, and I understand the insurance companies have let up on quite a lot of their requirements now -- I've been told that by the Handicapped Committee.

We ran a series of experiments -- or had it done by the various chapters of the handicapped organization throughout the country -- and I think it was clearly proven that a handicapped worker was subject to less absenteeism, was a better worker than the man who had all of his physical abilities. I think that's still being proven today. There are many jobs that don't require the whole body. Many jobs don't even require a leg to stand on, and we have included in this the blind people. There ~~was~~ were several schools set up for the blind: one was up at Hartford, Connecticut, and I went up there. I was a little embarrassed on my arrival: I went to this school, and it was just right after a very heavy snow, and then rain, and everything was so icy, and the men in this school were mainly Army people who had become blind in the war. ~~They~~^I had to walk up a walk, and here were two guys in GI uniforms, privates, they came there and said they couldn't see

I got out and they said, "I'll help you." And I said, "No, I can do it all right." I got out and I slipped right on my fanny and almost broke my back. And these two blind

picked me up and ^{guided} ~~gss~~ me to the front door. They held me up on each side, and I certainly felt foolish. Here I had two good eyes and two good legs, and these two blind boys took me to the door!

I was amazed at the things that these fellows were being taught, at the things they could do. Not only typing, but they had a little workshop with buzz saws and all kinds of tools they were working with, making pieces of furniture and everything. They had devised means to keep a man from getting his fingers in the saw, and he was given a certain amount of training to move his hand so far, and here was something that would be a warning sign to him, you see. And he would stand or sit in a certain place. I was really amazed. And many of those people went out and they got good jobs, and doing things that I doubt that I could do without a great deal of training.

Q: Tell me, how about pressures from the veterans organizations? You said you worked with some. Say the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Veterans Committee.

Erskine: I never had any trouble with those people. As a matter of fact I tried to help them carry out their programs as much as we could, and at least three made me a life member -- the VFW, the American Legion and the DAVs. (Pause)

Q: Now, you went over to Headquarters after this, to become president of the board concerned with the size and organization of postwar Marine Corps Aviation. This was a real problem facing the Marine Corps at this time, I guess, concerning personnel.

The Marine Corps had been cut down to 180,000 or less, and the aviators were ~~screened~~ screaming .

You had your officers, many of whom were skilled pilots, well decorated, many of whom were not college graduates.

And also I guess you had to decide the role of aviation ~~xxxxxxx~~ or the ~~re~~ organization vis-à-vis the role of aviation in the Marine Corps, did you not?

Erskine: Well, we had quite a problem due to the cutback, and what it really amounted to, as I remember, was we didn't have enough money to ~~carry-out-and-to~~ hold on to all the trained aviators we had. I don't think it was a question of the educational level of these fellows. This did not include going through their records -- it was a matter of policy to be adopted.

As I remember we came up with a solution to this thing -- to assign a certain percentage of aviators to the line, and of course that put a man under a handicap if he had not had a considerable amount of training and had not been in a combat organization during the war. It's one thing to study this thing in school, and another to get the experience on the field.

That was the main problem, as I remember it, and we came up with recommendations to assign a certain number of aviators to the line. This was done, and later on I had some of these aviators who had been in aviation their whole career up to the time that they were assigned to the line, and my recollection is that they made damn good line officers. In the first place, a boy has to have many qualifications to be a good aviator.

Q: What were the criteria for reassigning aviators?

Erskine: I think it was done on a percentage basis: a certain percentage at this time to be assigned to artillery, a certain percentage to infantry units, and so forth. We also had a cutback in ground troops, you see, so this was quite a personnel problem, but what the Commandant was searching for there was a policy to follow, how to meet this particular problem, and the solution was to ^{take} ~~put~~ the aviators out of aviation; those who wanted to stay in the service -- and as far as I know they all wanted to stay at the time -- and assign them to line duty.

Q: There ~~was~~ were a lot of unhappy aviators, I take it.

Erskine: I think so. But many of them became happier on the ground ~~xxxxxx~~ than they would have been had they stayed ~~on~~ in a flying status.

Q: Tremendous pressure from senior aviation officers on the selection and establishment of criteria for this reassignment?

Erskine: Yes. (Pause) I don't quite understand what you mean by pressure.

End of Side 1, Tape 1, Session IX

Session IX continuedTape 1, Side 2

Q: Perhaps I am using the wrong ~~or~~ choice of words here, when I say pressure. Aviation had always been on the defensive. Field Harris I think was director of Aviation at the time, and he had a real problem. The situation got so bad as far as size of the Aviation establishment, and the number of people in there, ~~and~~ ^{and} a retention of non-college graduates that there was a gap, when the Marine Corps was not accepting any new aviators, and there was a hard time ~~xxxxxx~~ catching up, to the point/where they had to retrain ground people as aviators -- I think junior ^{field} grade officers and company grade officers were retrained, and they didn't prove too happy a choice.

So instead of "pressure" I mean screams of anguish from somebody whose bull is being gored, in a sense.

Erskine: No, I don't remember that. As a matter of fact, I don't think it would have made any difference to me. We had a precept from the Commandant to come up to study a certain problem, and come up with an answer. If we thought any of these people involved could give us any information, we would call them before the board and let them tell their story. But I wouldn't tolerate any pressure if I were on a board, because it's up to the members of that board to carry out the precept that's given to them by the Commandant or the Secretary of the Navy.

Of course we had to call people from various departments to get the exact data. As I remember, one of the most frustrating things to me was that when I asked for a statement of the number of people by ranks in the United States Marine Corps, they gave me a statement as of that date.

About a week later I asked for another one, to show changes between it and the previous statement. Well, I think it was about 2000 men different. In other words, the Marine Corps didn't know how many people they really had on duty. I raised a real ruckus over that. I don't know that it did any good. I doubt if it's any better today.

Q: I remember Gen. Deakin telling me that one time, ~~before~~^{after} the Division was formed, down at the maneuvers at Guantanamo Bay, perhaps it was, they had to get an exact head count, and they had everybody stand at attention right then and there, to get the exact size and strength of the Division. I imagine this happened once or twice, when the muster rolls were incomplete or not correct.

Erskine: I don't know that it ever happened at any other time. It didn't come to my attention if it did.

Q: After being away from the Marine Corps for a while, you took over command of the 1st Division out at Pendleton in July of '47. I guess the Division had just about returned from China by then. This was just about the time the Division had pulled out of China, was it not?

Erskine: Uh uh.

Q: What did you find the conditions to be out there?

Erskine: I thought it was pretty lousy. (Laughs softly) And the Commandant didn't help me out much. He authorized 30 days leave for all when they came home. They came in and ^{would} dump their gear one unit after another, ~~for~~ and they got 30 days leave. I complained about this and he said, well, he had promised it to them and he had to live up to it. Well, who the hell was going to look after all of this? You could do it ^{that in} ~~at an~~ echelon, you know, but there weren't enough people left to look after the gear and everything, and we had a ~~was~~ hell of a time.

Finally, when the 30 days was over, they started getting into the property, there were many property shortages, and the Post Exchange was screwed up more than anything I have ever seen, their books and their accounts -- we had to go through all kinds of legal formalities to transfer what they brought back to the Post Exchange at Camp Pendleton, balancing books, well, I'd say there was more imbalance in books than balance.

Q: Did you take anyone out with you especially? Did you select your own staff? or you just took what you had up there?

Erskine: Yes. I had a very auspicious beginning there at Camp Pendleton. First I took over the camp, then the Division came in and I also took command of the Division.

As I remember I arrived there around the 1st of July. You know that on the West Coast you have a very heavy fog sometimes. I stayed in the Hostess House ~~when I first arrived~~ ^{the first day I} arrived, and the first night I was there the officers' mess burned down.

They called me on the telephone and told me about it, and the Fire Department started out, and they didn't get there until it was too late to do anything for the officers' mess, because of the heavy fog. The first thing I thought was the Fire Department was pretty damn lousy -- they live on that base and they should have some way to get up there. I'd say it was about 700 or 800 yards that they had to go, and it was a good road, except for one tunnel, and some of those blind men up at the school in Hartford, Connecticut could have done a better job, I am sure.

So that was one of the first things I concentrated on. I found out that of course they were mostly civilians, but they hadn't been exercised very much, and some were not really physically able to be in a fire department where you have to do a good heavy day's work. And I gave them hell and finally cleaned them out.

The chief warrant officer in charge of the Fire Department -- what the hell was his name, starts with B, a good man -- he made a good Fire Department out of it.

Going back to the Division, like most organizations that is going to live in North China, especially if you live as a victor up in that part of the world, they sort of deteriorate. They forget there are such things as honesty and punctuality, and the discipline really suffers. And I had quite a time bringing those people back to what I thought was a well disciplined organization. They

responded, but there was a little bit of rough times at times.

Q: There was as much trouble with the officers as with the enlisted Marines?

Erskine: Probably more.

Q: Really? Why was that? Were these all regulars?

Erskine: No, they had some reserves.

Q: Let me put it this way. Were ~~there~~ they all young Marines? Were there a lot of prewar Marines there?

Erskine: Yes, a good many prewar in the outfit, but they had just let down. You see, everybody was saying, "This is the last war. Why kill yourself?" And my ~~xxx~~ thought was, you never know when you are going to be called, that's been my experience, and I tried to get this point over to them, and had a hard time doing it. There was nothing on the horizon where anybody thought they were going to call the 1st Division out again. Matter of fact there was a great deal of thought that they'd probably be completely disbanded, because we didn't need that many Marines, and after I guess a year or more there we started having these two briefings on the Orient. We ~~didn't~~ covered ~~xxxxx~~ most of the potential landing sites, ~~xxxxxx~~ and landing areas, we had one hour a week on this. I was trying to keep the attention ~~xxx~~ focussed

on these different areas, and have some little background on the areas and the people of the areas. We didn't get to Korea before Korea broke. (Laughs softly)

Q: Did you have to do much wholesale cleaning of house? Did you have to do much relieving?

Erskine: I relieved quite a number of people, yes, but they were people who had been sent out there to me by Headquarters Marine Corps. In many cases I knew that these people had never done a good day's work in other outfits where they had been, and in other places where I'd been with them but I was not in command. I tried to set a pretty high standard -- you either cut your muster,^d or out. And right after the war that was a pretty hard thing to do -- to have them all come up.

The same thing with administration.

Q: You mean field administration?

Erskine: Yes. Well, they let their standards down, you see. Unless there is a threat of something happening, then it's pretty hard, like after World War I. We sat there, and everybody said, "That's the last war, you'll never have them anymore." But the Army kept their schools going, the Navy kept their schools going, and true we were cut down in troop strength every place, and we had the Hoover Depression in those days. I think I was a captain 12 years.

Q: Yes.

Erskine: No promotion. You have that attitude each time right after the war -- a great letdown.

Q: What were some of the problems you had, and what did you do to bring the Division up a fighting condition?

Erskine: I just put in a pretty strenuous program of training, field exercises, division exercises, and of course in conjunction with the Navy amphibious landings -- one battalion to what we could get aboard, ^{get} ~~xxx~~ ships enough to carry the Division.

We trained with the air wing up at El Toro, we had a great deal of training there, and I think we certainly improved the ground support. And incidentally Field Harris was in command at that time. This way we really built up the air-ground team. We ~~did~~ went into night exercises, which you can't do very successfully until they are pretty good in daytime. And we had night firing problems. For each platoon in the Division we had a ~~xxxxx~~ little test range; we ran them through a live fire problem, and we had a little group -- I think three or four officers ** whom we considered to be just about tops in this type of an operation -- grade these platoons, and if they didn't make good they'd go back to it again, ~~and~~ had a little more training and then went back to it. In other words it was a qualification course.

Q: Who were the judges or the ~~xxxxx~~ umpires for that, do you remember?

Erskine: Officers whom we thought were very well qualified.

Q: No specific . . .

Erskine: No, we didn't have any set group. We had a board that would continue on through, but we didn't necessarily have all the men on it: I think it was about four officers, all of whom had either made good grades in this kind of thing or had professional ability.

Q: You reported to FMFPac, did you not?

Erskine: Yes, for the Division, and to Headquarters Marine Corps for the Base.

Q: Did this create any problems -- this two-hat job?

Erskine: No. At the same time I was deputy commander of the FMF Pacific.

Q: Under whom?

Erskine: Watson. I only had three hats there. (laughs)

Q: Only three hats! How were your relations with Watson?

Erskine: Fine, fine. Tommy would bark like hell about things. Finally I would tell Tommy I would let him go ahead and get the

steam off, and that's all right now, "You know who the hell is running this thing and who is going to run it? That's me. Now go on and let's have a drink, that's that."

Q: Was there anything in the three year tour as commanding general of the Division that sticks out in your mind.

Erskine: Not so much with the Division, but with the Barracks, yes. I had quite a hassle over there with the school business, with a lot of people. I don't remember now how many families we had, but we had a hell of a lot of families there, some in Quonset huts, which were located in two different locations, one down the beach side, some in *base* housing.

I forget the year now; it must have been around '49, just a few days before schools opened around Oceanside, the word came to me that there were no places for Marine Corps children to go to school: the schools were already crowded with the people who were over there, the civilians in the area.

Of course that hit the families in the Division and in the Barracks area right between the eyes, and I got in touch with the school officials and they said that was it. We had one hell of a time. I took it up with the State Board of Education, and my recollection is that they said there would be provisions made.

At that time they were not getting what's called impact aid in an area. I still don't think that that is a -- but they were not getting it at that time. But I don't yet justify

in my mind the reason for the impact aid. I can look back to the little village of Oceanside when we first went there, in the early part of the war, and it was a sleepy little place, a little town, and after we had the Marines all through there a lot of these people made a hell of a lot of money, but they didn't want to put any of it out to help the Marines. All they wanted to do was to get it away from the Marines. And I think probably ^{our} ~~in~~ payroll ^{was} ~~it's~~ a million dollars a month there. It didn't all go to this town, but a hell of a lot of it did, and it changed the whole face of the whole countryside around there. So I am still not a very strong supporter of impact^{ed} aid, because when you bring in these socalled ^{government} ~~employment~~ employees for short periods of time, it builds up the community and the community makes a hell of a lot of money, but they make no provisions to give you the services, particularly on the school side.

Q: Except that I can see the point of view of the community in the sense that where you have a large service population, schools are supported directly by taxes, and this large service population very often doesn't support -- er -- it's not taxable.

Erskine: I can see that, but I also think you are looking through the wrong lens! You don't change your tax system when you get these people in, but you change the economy of that area tremendously, and they could well afford -- all you have to do is go and look at it. ~~Is~~ If I had a picture of Oceanside when I first went there, and you go back and take a look at it now, you wouldn't even

recognize it. You see, they make no provisions for (these people), they want these people in, they want to get their money but they don't want to give them anything back. But ^a ~~year~~ proportion of profit could well be fitted to take care of the various civic needs of this new population.

Q: Well, that's the story, I think, of any big service . . .

Erskine: It's a racket that they put on the Government. That's the way I felt about it then, that's the way ~~we~~^I feel about it now.

In talking to the school officials, they said they didn't have this extra money, they couldn't build any new places. "Well, why in hell didn't you save some of this money that these Marines have been spending here? Look at all these new places going up, and everything here." That was not the way they ran the system you see. They didn't run it that way. We had to do it.

This thing went on there, and one day -- I think it was on a Saturday, just about before the school was to open. I used to drive around on Saturday in my jeep by myself to see what the hell was going on, and on those trips I put my stars underneath my collar; I wouldn't put them out unless I had to -- I drove down to the tank park, and I saw these people gassing up tanks, and I talked to this fellow who was a sergeant. I said, "What are you fellows gassing up on Saturday afternoon for?" "Oh, we got a lot of work next week, and we'll be all ready to go, and we are going to let the people go on liberty." And I thought a little bit, and I said, "Now, this is a little unusual." I didn't say that

to him, but I had with me the training schedule for the next week or so for each unit, battalion and -- and I thumbed through my papers and the tank battalion didn't have anything scheduled on Monday morning.

Finally I said -- I turned up my stars where he could see them, he apologized for being so informal, and I said, "That's all right, but I want to hear the truth. What the hell is this all about?" He said, "Well, just in case we need them." "What are you going to need them for?" Then he said, " You know, some of our people want to go down and ~~xxx~~ shoot that goddamn Oceanside up." (laughter)

I said, "Oh no! You don't do that!" But the feeling was about that strong.

Well, the newspapers got into this thing. The ~~xxxxxx~~ county superintendent -- whose name I don't remember right now, he is a great, big, husky guy -- and the local Congressman came storming up. He was a little pipsqueak, looked about 3 feet high, but I guess he was about 5 feet, and he came storming in, and I gave them all a rough time ^{every damn one of them} -- ~~everybody~~, the school board and everybody else. And I set some of my intelligence boys on the county school superintendent because I had a feeling that he was leaning pretty much in the communist camp. And we got the dope on this fellow, ~~xxx~~ and managed to get some of ~~xxxxx~~ his papers, which convinced me that he was a communist. For instance, one ~~xxxxxx~~ things he did, he required his teachers to read the life of Stalin, and several teachers told me that he said Stalin was even more of a great man than George Washington, so why shouldn't they read the life of Stalin?

The Congressman came up to see me and he brought this fellow with him, and when they got to my door I said, "You can come in, Mr. Congressman, but this fellow traveler of yours can't." He was astounded and he said, "Why not?" I said, "He is a goddamn communist and I won't have him around here." His name was Carroll. He said, "I don't think you are right, and I am going to demand that he come in." I said, "It won't do any good, you get the hell out of here and get off the post right now, or I'll lock you up." That finished that. The Congressman came in and he raved and ranted about what rights I had and what rights I didn't have, and I said, "I don't know, but I think I have all the rights here. At least I've got the authority, and I think you're barking up the wrong tree, Mr. Congressman." He went to Washington and tried to get me relieved and everything, and the newspapers got into it -- the San Diego Journal, I believe it was, and I'd known the editor very well: he used to come up to Camp Pendleton and drink with us. He started to take off on me.

So I called up my friends at the Los Angeles Times. He'd been down there and I'd known him for quite a while. His left arm was paralyzed. His name was Ed I'll think of it. Anyway he was chief editor of the Times. And I told him, and he said, "You are damn right, I'll send you some ^{reporters} ~~xxxxxx~~ to write for you." I said, "Good."

The next day I think three reporters came down, and they started working on the local boys and the San Diego newspaper. Ed Haynsworth was his name. And old Ed called me up and he said,

"We've got the biggest damn paper over here, and if we can't straighten this thing out here and get the people to see the right side of it, ~~but~~ by God we ought to go out of business."

So the Los Angeles Times really came down on them. And they were distorting every damn thing that would come up, even the relationship with the State Superintendent of Education, with the local man and . . .

Well, they weren't getting very far on this, so I called in my assistant maintenance officer, Bill Davis. I'd known Bill since he was a corporal down at Guantanamo, and he'd gotten to be a major, then was busted back from major to chief warrant officer.

Q: That Stinky Davis?

Erskine: Stinky Davis. I've had Stinky around quite a while. Matter of fact I am Stinky Davis' son's godfather.

Q: I saw Stinky a couple of years ago in Fallbrook.

Erskine: Yes, he lives over there. ~~And~~

Q: Carpenter.

Erskine: And we had some vacant ^{barracks} ~~box~~ over in the 17 area, it was called, which is the old artillery area, in Camp Pendleton. And in this area we had an old infirmary. I looked it over and

I figured that would be all right maybe for the primary school and so forth, and I told Stinky. I said, "Get out there and get some plans and build a school right away. And here is about what I think we need. And when you build it paint it red, so we are going to have a ^{little} red school our here."

So that guy worked day and night ^{with his people} and he came up in time to open the school. In the meantime somebody found an old bell that had been used on the ranch there many years before and now was in the river bed. So they got the school bell and put it up in front, and painted the place red.

In the meantime I took some of the civil service slots for civilians allowed there and hired a principal and teachers for I think four grades to start with.

On opening day I had invited the school board from the Fallbrook area and the school board from the county, minus Carroll, plus a couple of Congressmen who came over by that time on some junket trip. We brought the Division band up there, which was 86 pieces, and we had a little preliminary music. I think it was 8.30 when I told them to hoist the flag up on the flagpole, and they hoisted the flag up, they played the Star Spangled Banner, then I went over and rang the bell and I said, "School is open." And we set up our school.

That took the pressure off. The big problem the younger kids.

Then of course the school board wanted to come up and tell us about accreditation and so forth, and I said, "You get the hell out of here, this is my school, that's it."

Q: I was going to ask you about the state accreditation.

Erskine: ^{couldn't beat it. I had} You ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~/the Los Angeles Times on ~~xxxx~~ ^{them.}
They couldn't have justified anything else. I raised the rate a little bit on schoolteachers pay and put them under civil service. So they couldn't beat that. They couldn't do a damn thing about it either.

We had a damn good school there, and everybody was pretty well satisfied ^{with it}, ~~except~~ these people who were down on the Oceanside school group who wanted to run it. I wouldn't even let them in the post -- none of their damn business.

After I left I think they got impact ^{ed} aid. They had never applied for it. They built the school at Camp Pendleton and named it after old Col. Pendleton. I went over and visited this school, and they still had the same principal I had hired and even the same teachers. ^{We had made out} ~~xxxxxxx~~ specifications to build a school there, but they arranged to have this one now operate under the Fallbrook School District. And when I went back on my trip over there to see the school, some board members came over to see me, and from all I could gather they were as happy as they could be over the whole thing.

Q: No repercussions from Washington?

Erskine: No, except that once in a while the Commandant called me up and said, "What in hell are you up to out there?" I said, "I am not letting any of these sons of bitches run over me out

here, or over anybody else. I am representing the Marine Corps, and I am running this thing, and I think you people are too damn busy back there to even ask questions over here."

Q: What did Vandegrift say to that?

Erskine: No, it was Cliff Cates. (laughs) He was too busy to help me when I was in trouble.

This Congressman came to Washington and made a big hullabaloo and Cliff Cates was there, and I requested a complete transcript -- it's down on tape, you see -- of every damn thing he said. I was going to sue the bird you know, for -- what do they call it?

Q: Defamation of character.

Erskine: Defamation of character or something like that. He asked me what I wanted it for and I told him I was going to sue him. The Marine Corps couldn't get into that, they wouldn't let me --

I guess the Statute of Limitations is gone now. But he didn't get elected either. That finished him. I got rid of Carroll, and I got rid of him.

Q: How about the water rights there? You must have been involved with that.

Erskine: Oh yes.

Q: Getting money for improving the camp, and you couldn't get it because the water rights to the camp weren't clear? I guess every commanding general of the Division at the Base had that problem until just recently.

Erskine: It's been a problem for a long time. And I remember, we had a copy of the court records, and water resources board records and everything, and ^{the} ~~an~~ fine print was about 4 feet high, covering a period of 70-75 years, and there had always been litigation between the Camp Pendleton -- or the Santa Margarita Ranch -- and the ^{Vail} ~~Watts~~ interests which were up North on the same river. The Water Resources Board of California had made a halfway decision that Santa Margarita, I believe, was entitled to two thirds of the water in that area, which came down to the Santa Margarita River. Now the Santa Margarita River sometimes was just a little stream about the size of a spigot, and sometimes during the rainy season, when we had heavy rain,s, it would flood the whole area around there. So we had various water levels, and ~~we~~ depended mainly on the water that came from the wells that had been dug there. There was no reservoir. We did have a lake which at one time had been a part of this thing, but it wasn't suitable to be a reservoir, so we made a recreation area out of it.

We had litigation all the time, and *Maynard* Vail, who ran the Vail Ranch up North of us, and also the Santa Barbara Ranch (and the next big plot ^{of} ~~ten~~ land in there was a federal forest, what the hell do they call them?)

Q: Reserves?

Erskine: Cleveland National Forest was adjoining this area. And on the coastline side was Santa Margarita Ranch which was in Camp Pendleton. The river ran right on up through this area and on beyond the Vail Ranch, just northwest of the Cleveland National Forest. And after I'd been there a little while, I thought the best thing for me to do was to go up and see Mr. Vail. Which I did. Mr. Vail was a man of very small stature, he didn't see very well, but he was as tough a little cowboy that you could ever run into, and he prided himself on being a tough cowboy, a smooth businessman and a damn good shot. And he was -- all three!

He would spend some of his time down in what was a hunting camp which he made from a prisoner of war camp during World War II when he got some sort of a deal to take some prisoners of war and take care of them, and he built the place; I think the Government paid him so much money to do this, and he utilized these prisoners to help run his ranch. Another smart move he made was to make a game preserve out of his ranch there for a while, and after he got it well stocked with quail and all kinds of things he decided this contract wasn't worth a damn. It's quite a large area. The result was that he spent a lot of time down there hunting. He invited me to go up to hunt with him, to spend the weekend and so forth, and he was quite frank about it, he said, "God damn it, I am going to ~~***~~ get somebody's *water* and I'll take what I need."

And we'd argue this every once in a while, then we'd have a few drinks and maybe argue a little bit more, and he'd come down and hunt with me on Camp Pendleton, where the hunting wasn't anything ^{as good} like what it was at his place.

One morning I killed ^{thirty} ~~maybe~~ two quail. He was good company, but a little bit difficult to deal with.

On one visit up there he said, "Let's go up and see how my dam is coming on." "What kind of a dam have you got?" "Oh hell, I am building a dam up here, and I am going to have all the damn water I want." So we went up the river, and ~~on one~~ ~~kick~~ of the two little hills there quite a little sweep that would make a nice lake. They had begun to build a dam, and they spent \$900,000 plus on this dam, to make sure he got his water. He said, "Now what the hell are you going to do about this?" I said, "Well, all I got to do is have a couple of ~~razes~~ ricochets go from one of my big tanks down there and accidentally hit this goddamn dam. Or planes might come over and accidentally drop a bomb any time we are short of water." He said, "Well, then I'd come down in and kick your ass!" (laughter)

Q: Boy, he was fearless.

Erskine: I loved him. He had a brother who ran most of the Vail business. They owned Santa Rosa Island, which is one of the best stocked game places you'll ever run into. And I'd been over there with them. Matter of fact Donald Douglas used to hunt down there, of Douglas Aircraft, and Don and I hunted many days there, and then he had a tuna boat, a big one, that he used as his company boat to entertain visitors, and we'd go to Santa Rosa on this boat and kill a lot of deer and bring them back over. Then Ed Vail had a big hand in running some kind of market there -- I forget

the name of it right now, but it's a very popular place -- and he'd take it up to his place and have it all cut up and skinned and everything. I killed an elk there that weighed 1300 pounds. I put the horns out here in the lobby.

Q: Oh really?

Erskine: Uh uh. But I am sort of getting away from the subject.

Well, this water business ^{has gone} ~~was~~ on there for I think 70-75 years, and there was no solution to it. Anyway I don't think we suffered too much; I don't remember any time that we were so short of water that we had to --

Of course we didn't have Camp Pendleton full of troops at that time either. One thing we did do. It came to my attention that the Water Resources Board had made a decision that any water that was permitted to escape to the sea would be counted on your allowance. Vail didn't have that problem, but we had that problem because we were on the end of the river that went in to the sea.

We had some engineers that needed a little extra work and training, so we brought out the bulldozers and we went out and built a sort of a herringbone series of dams; there must have been 20-odd dams in there, to hold back this water, to keep it from getting in to the sea, and to show our good intention and good faith in not wasting any water.

Well, the only real reaction I got out of that was that one day the Oceanside Times came out, and the San Diego Journal again -- who were never my good friends -- GENERAL ERSKINE IS BUILDING A SERIES OF DUCK FARMS FOR HIMSELF. (laughs heartily) I'd never

thought about it. Matter of fact I did kill a few ducks there one morning, but it was never a shooting area.

We got along on this thing all right. We'd have an occasional flail^{le}-up with somebody, but usually the trouble was started outside of the two interested parties. What happened was, in this little distance between the Santa Margarita Ranch and the Vail Ranch, people that bought some land and built little houses wanted to have rights for the water, and by the Water Resources Board's decision of the State of California, they had no rights, and they were the people who were stirring up a lot of this trouble.

Q: They were out of the City of Fallbrook, I take it.

Erskine: Between Fallbrook and up the river.

Q: Now while there was no serious water problem on the base, did the fact that there was this litigation over the water rights affect the amount of funds the base got for building up?

I understand that Mr. Vinson, and even . . .

Erskine: I don't know about that. But I know we had a hell of a time getting money over there.

Q: And this brig situation that occurred at Pendleton -- they needed a new brig for a long time and they/never have gotten the funds based on the fact that . . .

Erskine: It was still carried as a temporary camp when I left.

Q: Gen. Allen who was quartermaster general, ^{and} also was the base quartermaster out there at the time, was saying that the fact-that whenever they went up to the Hill, Congress would say -- the Armed Forces Committee would say, "Well, we can't give you funds for building up, this thing is still a matter of litigation."

Erskine: Well. The Vails had brought down a man who had been their consultant for years in this thing, from Los Angeles, and they came to my house and we had lunch. And I had been in this water business. Finally I made this remark to this fellow, I said, "You know, I didn't know much about this water business when I came out here, but my friends here have been kind enough to try to teach me everything, ^{by} ~~but~~ trying to steal half of my water. And I've learned a good deal about the water situation over here." And I remember his reply was, "That's fine, but let me warn you: you can spend your lifetime learning about water in California, in the dry areas, and have all the answers. If you try to carry out everything you know, you can lose your life damn quick on it, too."

Q: Was that a threat?

Erskine: No, no, it was just like that, it can happen, it happens to a lot of people.

Q: It gets so hot that . . .

Erskine: They shoot each other!

Q: I understand you were quite unhappy when you received orders to join that Joint State Defense Mutual Defense Assistance Program Survey Mission in Southeast Asia, because Korea had broken out.

Erskine: No, Korea didn't break out till afterwards.

Q: In June of '50. Oh, you left in July of '50 for this mission, did you not?

Erskine: I was in Manila when Korea broke out.

Q: Then you must have left earlier.

Erskine: I don't know, I don't remember dates. I was in Manila.

End of Side 2, Tape 1, Session IX. End of Session IX

Session X - 4 March 1970

Tape 1, Side 1

Q: When we left off last time, General, we were talking about the 1st Division getting ready for Korea, although you didn't know that it was coming, but this was the rationale on which you prepared any division in peacetime, for any contingency, and as I was saying, I've been told that you really drove that Division hard, that you really got it organized. You told me the last time that there was a lot of chaff that had to be separated from the wheat, that the Division had lived too well in China and had gotten away from real soldiering.

Erskine: Well, I think that's right, Ben. I did believe that they should be ready to go any place, any time. This idea of no more wars, the wars are finished, we can rest on our arms, never fitted with me at all.

Q: What were your duties as deputy commander of Fleet Marine Force Pacific?

Erskine: Mainly to substitute for the old man when he wasn't functioning. At that time it was Tommy Watson.

Q: He was sick often at this time?

Erskine: Toward the end of his career out there he was ill. I think on one previous occasion he was ill and I went out a couple of times while he was hospitalized. Then finally they put him in the hospital for an extended period of time. I don't remember exactly when it was, but I think it was 1950. It might have been 1949, but I think it was 1950 because I left soon after that, and went out to Southeast Asia on this mission for the Defense and State Departments.

Q: Did you have to go out to Pearl Harbor at all?

Erskine: Oh yes, a number of times. I don't recollect, but I'd go out there and spend 10 days there and then come back for 10 days with the Division in the barracks. I think I made at least four trips on this base.

Q: In June of '50, the Secretary of Defense appointed you as chief of the military group Joint State Defense Mutual Defense Assistance Program Survey Mission to Southeast Asia.

Erskine: Right.

Q: What was your mission, and exactly what did you do?

Erskine: I had with me representatives of the Army, Navy, Air Force -- I think two from each service -- a Marine aide, and our naval interpreter who taught romance languages at the Naval Academy

at the time. I can't think of the man's name, a hell of a nice guy.

Q: Who was your aide?

Erskine: Nick Thorne. I took him as an aide, because Nick had a flair for languages and we didn't have anyone who could speak the languages available right at that moment. The funny thing about Nick -- he could pick up these Army courses in various Asian languages, and by God after a week or two he'd speak enough to get along, even Indonesian!

Q: He had had World War II experience in the OSS, didn't he?

Erskine: No, not in the OSS. I am not sure where Nick was. He is in the State Department now.

Q: Yes, but . . .

Erskine: I don't know where he was in World War II, but he was in the service in World War II. But what his experience was, I don't remember.

Q: Did he have any particular background, a flair for covert activities at this time?

Erskine: Not that I know of, no. (Pause)

Q: And your mission was to do what?

Erskine: The mission was to confer with the people in various countries which were listed, to determine how much military equipment these countries could need in the Military Assistance Program. Then Maj. Gen. Lyman Lemnitzer was heading this particular thing in the Secretary of Defense's office. But that was basically what we were supposed to do.

The State Department side ~~xxxx~~ -- which was headed by Ambassador ^{John} Melby -- was supposed to look into the political and economic problems that would be associated with the aid, and also into the potential stability and probable stability of the country that we visited.

We were listed to go to Korea, then Indo-China -- of course the French were still there -- the Philippines, ^{Si}Malaya, ~~Rix~~ Burma, and Indonesia.

We arrived, as I recollect, on the 15th of June in Manila. The 14th being Bastille Day we stayed there a couple of days, so we wouldn't get in the hair of the French on Bastille Day in Indo-China. Then we moved out to Indo-China, and from Indo-China we went, I think, back to the Philippines, then Malaysia, and about that time we were due to go into Burma. I had my scouts out ahead in the country that was to be next, and I got word that Na Wen -- who is now a very good friend of mine, and who was dictator at the time -- had planned to make us cool our heels for a couple of weeks there before he'd recognize our presence. So I said, "The hell with that!" And we skipped Burma, and went

into Malaysia. Why we went to Malaysia was never quite clear to me, because the British were still there, but we had, I think, some very worthwhile talks with the British and the Malaysians. We traveled over the country a good bit: matter of fact we spent three weeks there.

On the recreational side, I always carried my hunting rifle with me on these trips and a few grenades, in case I needed them. As a matter of fact we had a load of maps in case we did go down in any place. We had an Air Force plane -- a ~~four~~^{four} engine plane -- that we kept for three months on this trip.

The Sultan of Johore was away at the time, but the Regent, his son, was sitting in for him, and invited me to go on a tiger hunt while I was there. And incidentally, I stayed with Gen. Harding, who was commander of the British troops out in that part of the world; he later became the chief of the British Imperial Staff. He had a very nice set up of quarters up on a hill called Flagstaff House, and he invited me to stay with him, and I had a very pleasant tour there with him. He was very cooperative, and turned over a big Cadillac that used to belong to -- er, this big shot over there, Admiral, Lord . . .

Q: Mountbatten?

Erskine: Mountbatten. He turned over Mountbatten's car to me, so I cut a real nice figure driving around in Mountbatten's car.

So I accepted the invitation to go tiger hunting, and went to General Harding and I said, "How should I present myself over

here to the Regent of the Sultanate?" And he said, "Well, you go ahead in your hunting clothes, go up to his little residence and say that you are Gen. Erskine, that you've been invited to hunt within his domain, and you request permission to shoot any game that you may encounter."

So I did. I arrived at the appointed time, and he was waiting for me in the living room. I went into the living room and said, "I am Gen. Erskine, I've accepted your invitation to hunt within your domain, and I request permission to kill any wild game that I may encounter." And he was a rather affable gentleman and he came over and put his arms around me, and he said, "My dear General, you may kill any game that you encounter, including a ^{goddam} ~~Sed-dome~~ Britisher."

die
(chuckles)

Then he took me out to his stables -- he was quite a horse fancier -- and he had some beautiful animals there, most of them from Britain, that he had bought.

He had some beautiful saddle ponies and hunters -- I think about 10 altogether.

We went out and he sent a guard with us, because the communists were all over the place. We had about 25 men from his little army that went along to guard us, and then we had the chief hunter, who was supposed to be the best shot in that part of the world. His name slips my mind at the moment. Then we had beaters with about 25 or 30 dogs, and we would stand in the rubber plantation, and there usually was a very ~~thick~~ thick little jungle between -- ~~because~~ because the rubber trees grow not in a swamp area, but

sort on the side of the hills, nice easy rolling ground.

And we'd take our stand there and the beaters would go around to the other side and make a hell of a lot of noise, the dogs would bark, and if there was a tiger in there they'd probably chase him out. So we jumped a couple of tigers, but when they got to the edge of the jungle they'd turn back and ran back through the beaters.

Finally about 11 o'clock that morning we jumped a couple of big mule deer, they are as big as young oxen, and only two came out. I lined up ^{on} one, but he didn't look much like a deer to me and I peeped around right quick and it turned out to be one of my bodyguards, so I didn't think I ought to shoot him. But I managed to kill this deer from about 150 yards, with one shot. And the chief hunter got the other one, so we quit hunting that day and went back, and I had lunch with the Regent. People told me that he didn't have all of his mental facilities, they thought. But I thought he was a pretty smart guy from many of the remarks that he made. He just didn't knuckle down to the order of the day on everything, and he didn't like the British at all. And incidentally, his father I think was 76 years old. At that time he was in Switzerland with his wife, who was a young Roumanian he had married, helping her have her baby.

Another experience I had out there. Malcolm MacDonald, who was the British representative in that part of the world for the Foreign Office, carried quite a lot of weight, particularly in that particular area. So we had several sessions with him. He was living at that time in one of the Sultan's palaces called

~~Bukit~~ Vukit Serene, a beautiful place, it was modern Malaysian architecture, very spacious, and it had the most beautiful grounds around it that I think I have seen, and it really lived up to its reputation of Serene.

Now the story connected with that is that the Sultan built this house, or small palace, for his former wife. His Malaysian wife had passed away some years before, and the story goes that he was enamored with a redheaded British girl who was the wife of a British doctor out there with the British Army. She finally got a divorce and married the Sultan, and he built this home for her and for himself. But after a short period of time, she inveigled him into letting her wear the crown jewels on a trip to London -- or a large portion of them -- and he was a great scotch drinker, and she was Scotch ancestry. She went back to London -- so the story goes -- and never came back and never got the jewels back. I was told that from that day on he's never had another drink of scotch. He'd had it! After that he got a divorce from her and married this Roumanian girl whom I didn't meet; she was said to be a very beautiful gal, 35 or 40 years younger than the Sultan.

That's a little sidelight about that part of the world, and incidentally, about four years ago I was on one of our trips in that part of the world, and I was asked to come over to the real palace, the Government House, to look through it, and when I arrived there, who was there but this chief hunter that had hunted for tigers with me on that occasion, and he still held the same position. When I got out of the automobile he rushed up and

grabbed me and hugged me and said, "Come on in, let's go hunting again," and so forth, and took me to their museum and showed me the trophies that he had killed and the few that the Sultan had killed, and they really had some marvelous things there, from elephants to almost any kind of animal you can think of.

Then they gave us a tour of the Palace, and one of the most interesting things was, they had several rooms of silverware on display -- this was where it was being kept all the time except when it was being used for state occasions -- and they had about 10 or 12 of the most beautiful platters, very large, some 3 feet long, and they ^{were} presented by various potentates throughout the world as part of diplomacy, I suppose. One of the most beautiful things I ever saw was one about 3 feet long, beautifully engraved and made of platinum. Others of gold. A few silver, but mainly gold or platinum. And there was a table, I have never seen anything like it: it was about 4 feet across, with a heavy top on it, beautifully carved legs, all of crystal, pure crystal, not a blemish in it. I've never seen a piece of crystal that big in my life.

Q: Priceless.

Erskine: And six chairs to go with this table, all of crystal. But you think sometimes that these people are poor people -- they are. But they have treasures that are impossible, I think, sometimes to estimate the value of. We not only toured this particular area, but we went through the whole Palace and had lunch there with

the, I think it was the Foreign Minister.

Q: Now in your discussions did you deal at this time with covert activities? Were you concerned with setting up a . . .

Erskine: No, no, this was purely a survey mission.

Q: What did you find in each of these countries?

Erskine: Oh well, each one would take quite a while to cover. I think I covered some on Indo-China, which was the first place we went to, in one of our previous discussions.

Q: No, we discussed this at lunch.

Erskine: Oh, is that it?

Q: Yes sir, we haven't got it on tape here.

Erskine: Well, in Indo-China I felt very sad about the whole thing. In the first place, our Ambassador out there at the time was -- oh
(Donald Heath)
hell, I can't think of his name, but I will -- had had a little experience in World War I as 2nd lieutenant of infantry in the Army, and he was a great Francophile. Another man in his Embassy had graduated from the Naval Academy -- he was one of the secretaries -- and had married a naval doctor's daughter, and that qualified him to become an expert in all kinds of military affairs. He was later ambassador down in South America, I'll think

of his name, I am sure. And he was in my hair a good bit.

We had briefings from these people.

On our first day of arrival we were put up at the old Continental Hotel, which evidently has quite a long and varied history. The French tried to give us the impression that the town was alive with Viet Minh (they were called at that time), and that it was dangerous for anything, and they tried every excuse to make us have a French guard around ~~us~~^{us}, ~~only~~^{only} to see whom we talked to and what we did.

We put our bags down after we arrived, and then we went over to call on the Ambassador, who was in a building about a block and a half away, and while we were away somebody came by and threw three bombs into this hotel. They had the bar sort of open, and they had a little porch, a sort of open bar that looked out on the street, and then the place where you registered and go upstairs with this tiny French elevator on the right side as you approach the building. And it made hell out of that place.

The Ambassador was all excited about this and he wanted us to move to another place, or else take a French guard. I guess a couple of hours later we had lunch, and after lunch four French officers came down all dressed up with their decorations and everything to apologize for this very unpleasant incident.

I suspected that the French had a hand in this, to try to frighten us, to show ^{us} how bad things were, so we'd say, "Oh my God, let's home and get the hell out of here!" and give the French anything they want!" And that was the Ambassador's attitude.

I listened to these fellows and finally when they finished bowing and scraping and so forth, they asked me what my thought was, and I said, "Well, I'll tell you what my thought is, very simply. I am a major general of the Marines and I rate 13 guns, and you can fire the other 10 any time, and I'll be present." And the Ambassador thought I had insulted the French, and the French thought so too. But I didn't give a tinker's damn because I had very little opinion of the French Army, the way they were conducting their affairs -- the way I thought they were conducting their affairs. The Ambassador said, "All you have to do is go down and see Gen. Carpentier and he'll tell you exactly what he needs. He is a very fine officer, he had a fine record in World War II." I said, "My charter tells me to give my opinion, not Carpentier's opinion, and secondly, the French haven't won a war since Napoleon's day. So why listen to a bunch of second raters when they are losing this war? And they are going to show down with me, or I'll recommend that they don't get a damn penny."

That made the Ambassador very unhappy. And incidentally, in the meantime, after this incident, he had convinced me to move into his house with him. This was a rather sore point -- he thought I was hazing the French, which I was not. I was trying to find out just what the hell it was like, and what their ability was to use the equipment.

Finally he and I got into a pretty hot argument, and I told him. I said, "Well, I came here as your guest, and I don't feel happy here at all." So I packed my bags and got out and went back to the Continental Hotel.

We traveled around to different units, and I insisted that they line up some of these troops and let me take a look at them, to see their weapons, to see how well they were taken care of, if they had the same kind of weapons in the same company, and things like that. I found 40 tanks in their tank park that had been deadlined; some didn't have much wrong with them, and they said they had no spare parts. I asked why they didn't cannibalized some of these tanks and put some of them in condition. I was sure they could probably put 20 of these tanks back in condition, from what appeared to me on the surface. Oh, they put up their hands and did a lot of talking and everything. The maintenance for motor transports was just about the same, and so far as maintenance was concerned it was pretty damn lousy.

They had an ^{NCO} ~~Embassy~~ school to train their officers, and I went out and watched the instruction there and it was pretty low standard. They had organized two battalions of Vietnamese, and in my discussion with Gen. Carpentier I had asked him the question why they didn't organize and train the Vietnamese and let them do the fighting and pull at least the ~~bulk~~ bulk of the French troops back into general reserve and gradually removed^{em} from the country, when the Vietnamese were able to take over. Then he threw up his hands and said, "They are absolutely unreliable, you can't trust them, they'll never make good soldiers." And he said that was an impossible thing, absolutely impossible, and I said, "Gen. Carpentier, who in the hell are you fighting but Vietnamese? It seems to me if the natives can train a group of guerrillas that can whip you, then

you ought to be able to train the same people to whip the guerrillas. That irritated Gen. Carpentier quite a bit. Then I asked him, "Will you let me go and inspect one of these companies of Vietnamese?" After a considerable amount of talk on that point he said Yes.

So I went over and inspected one of these battalions, and I found that they had four companies and they had four different kinds of rifles in each company -- French, British, Japanese and American. Now in the first place that would make those people absolutely impotent: the question of spare parts, the question of ammunition, the question of training would be impossible. They really had put these fellows in a position where they couldn't really fight. And I went back and talked to him about this, and he said, "Well, that's all we have to give them." Every place I went they were so poor they couldn't do anything.

Well -- ^{The General} (coughs and says, Excuse me, I still have part of this cold)

I thought I was going to push old Carpentier on this thing and I said, "All right, I haven't seen these people on patrol." He said, "Oh yes, we can arrange it for you." I said, "I'd like to send my aide on a patrol with them." He spoke French beautifully. He said he thought that would be terrible, suppose he was killed? I said, "Hell, that's what we got aides for. They are expendable." He finally consented. He sent out a joint French-Vietnamese patrol. I had already told Nick Thorne about this, and he was very enthusiastic about it.

And he went out on this night patrol. By God, they ran into a Viet Minh patrol, and they had quite a fire fight, and Nick woke me ^{up} ~~over~~ about daylight: he had just gotten back from this patrol and he was pretty much excited, he'd had quite a ~~xxxxx~~ little fire fight, and they killed a few of the Viet Minh and wounded a couple of others, and Nick said, "So far as these ~~xxxxx~~ ^{fellows} ~~xxxxx~~ fighting, it's the goddamnest thing I ever heard of. I personally had to restrain a couple of them from cutting the heads off these wounded men." I said, "What did the French do?" He said, "The French took cover, never fired a shot. And they had a French lieutenant in command of the combined patrol, with a Vietnamese warrant officer as second in command. Then the Vietnamese warrant officer was so furious at the French actions that he put the French officer under arrest and brought him back in."

A couple of days later I went down to see Carpentier on something else and I brought this up, and I said, "By the way, my aide tells me that he can't see anything wrong with the fighting spirit and ability of these Vietnamese who were on that patrol the other night, but he found in his own mind a great shortage of leadership and courage on the part of the French soldiers." I was laying it on old Carpentier. He was lying to me all the time, you know. He couldn't understand it, he had no such report, he thought that this young man probably was inexperienced. I said, "He has more experience than you have, actually, in fighting." "But this is his report to me, I said, and I still think it would be an excellent idea -- it's not my idea, this is a policy I know (of course I knew what was behind this thing) -- if the French ever built that ~~xxxx~~ army up so

they could lick the Viet Minh, then they'd probably turn around and throw the French out." And that's what they had in their minds.

I went up to Dong Dang -- I flew up there -- with the chief of the Air Force. It's either Dong Dang or Dang Dong. They have a tremendous fort there, built by Cuyen, who was a marshal of France and had quite a reputation as an engineer; this was one of the things he built; it lasted quite a long time; it was a very large old fort, built of stone, on a small hill, with a stream in front of this hill about 500 yards. And although they had a good view except for any long range firing, across this little stream was a big rock mountain that would mask the fire of any thing like artillery. But it was a beautiful valley, and so was the trail that went up to this valley. And this, I was told, was the traditional route of invasion from the North by the Chinese. And across this line of course was China.

I spent a couple of days up there. They had quite a number of foreign Legion who turned out guards of honor, did a lot of courtesy stuff, and they tried to convince me that everything was in order. "Don't worry about this gallant Foreign Legion."

In addition they had a battalion of Goumiers. Goumiers are North Africans. I went over to visit this camp. Very few soldiers in the Fort, and all the Goumiers had their women with them, and they had a different way of life entirely. They had a compound that was surrounded by barbed wire, a few little huts, (no walls just shelters), and they had an open fire, the women did the cooking for them.

When I went into this compound, you could hear a very low voice singing all over the whole place, like we have on our radio, you know, in three or four different locations. And I finally asked, "What is the reason for this singing." They said, "That is a welcome song that the Goumiers always sing for anyone they like to have there."

I had a very pleasant visit there, and I was impressed with what might be called the ferocity of these individuals. They looked like real fighting men.

Then I went back over to the fort and I went through most of the fort. I had a lieutenant colonel of the engineers from the Army with me, and I said, "While I am looking over the firing positions up here, you go down and -- Oh, I asked

~~I said~~, "How much water do you have in this place?"

"Got enough water for three months."

"How much ammunition?"

"Beaucoup."

"How much is beaucoup?" "How many days can you fight?"

"Oh, maybe a month."

I also had an Army logistics man. And I said, "Goddamn it, you go and count up this ammunition and see what you think about it."

They had a brigadier in command of that area, who gave me the impression he couldn't make a decent corporal in our outfit, and he had an alibi for everything. I asked him why he didn't have barbed wire -- they had no barbed wire or any obstructions outside -- and he said they didn't have any barbed wire. I said, "Goddamn it, when I was a young lieutenant in France in 1918 the

French engineers taught us to make ~~chevaux de frise~~ chevaux de frise which is just as effective as any barbed wire, and your whole damn countryside is covered with hardwood, and you can make that or you can use bamboo. I've seen it in many places here. The local troops have used bamboo to make chevaux de frise."

Anyway they hadn't gotten around to it, they had no barbed wire, and Col. Lowe -- the engineer I had sent down to check on the water, -- came back and told me, "They've got big storage places down there, but I don't think they've had a drop of water there in 10 years." And my Army logistics men said he thought they had about three units of fire for the machine guns, and maybe five units for the rifles. And they had little mortars. They had one outpost with a mortar about 300 yards away, and the troops in case of an attack were a mile away from the Fort, and the Coumiers were the ones who were going to do most of the fighting in there, and some of the Foreign Legion.

The Foreign Legion was down in a camp at least a mile and a half away. And I just thought it was the goddamnest thing I had ever seen.

Gen. Hartmann was chief of the French Air Force, and he flew up there with me, and we used^a two-engine DC-type plane which they called out there Dakota.

One of the luncheons while I was there -- I was there two days, I think -- we took a lot of snapshots of each other, at lunch, before lunch, and there was the Catholic Bishop who had been assigned to that area; I think he'd been there over 20 years. He was at this ~~xxx~~ luncheon and we got into a conversation and it

turned out that he had been a liaison officer of the French Army to the American troops in World War I, and he told me that he thought the Legion did not understand the tribes that they had in that area up there.

He had listened to some of the briefings and he said, "I would take it with a large grain of salt so far as the security of this place is concerned, because I've lived with these people, I've been here for 20 years," -- and he was quite a likeable old gentleman. When I was getting ready to leave, I said to him -- well, he wasn't a bishop, but he was in charge of all of the missionary work up in that part of the world -- "What would you like me to send you? I'd like to do something for you." He thought a minute, then he said, "I'll tell you exactly what I'd like to have. I'd like to have a bottle of good bourbon, and some old copies of the Saturday Evening Post." So when I got back to Saigon I sent him two bottles up there by Hartmann, and Saturday Evening Posts ~~and~~ and magazines. From time to time -- I guess for a period of a year -- I used to dig up magazines and mail them out to him.

On the top of this Fort they had two 75 millimeter field pieces. The top was sort of concrete with rocks; it wasn't reinforced like our concrete, it was^a softer version. And they had built around a sort of a barbette in which they could stick the trail on -- rocks with cement, where they could butt the trail against that in case they fired it, *and have* 360 degrees *traverse all the way around.*

I took a look at that, and I thought the first time they'd fire it this thing would kick the barbette all to hell, and I asked if they had ever fired this particular gun. They said No. "Why haven't you? Don't you ever have any target practice?" "Oh, if we fire here we create trouble over in China. And our people there are all expert."

Well, I felt sort of licked. We were trying to help people who were no more competent than what I thought they were. Anyway I got out of there without expressing my real opinion -- it was too strong.

Then I went down to Haiphong and spent two or three days there.

Oh incidentally, when we left on the Dakota I tried to convince Hartmann to fly across the river, and let's take a look over on the Chinese side, I wanted to see what this approach was really like. Oh no, he wouldn't go near the border.

Then I thought, "Well, goddamn it," and I said, "Listen, I^m checked out in this plane, let me fly a while. I like to keep my hand in." So he turned it over to me. Well, I didn't know enough to keep it -- I hadn't had enough experience -- I'd keep it level, move right and left and up and down, but I couldn't land it! So ^I_A immediately gave her the gun and went right across the border, right up the valley, and he had a y fit. He almost pulled me out of the seat, and then he put me back, and that was the last time I piloted a French plane.

Lang Son is in the same area, right near Dong Dang, and we stopped over there and saw those people.

Lang Son

Haiphong was pretty much of a logistic base, and of course right close to the Chinese frontier. They had some motorized troops down there -- not armored cars, but they looked something like an armored car, the French version of something, that probably a 45 pistol could knock the hell out of. And I wasn't too impressed with the troops I saw there, and also the naval activities there.

From there we took off and flew late in the afternoon down along the coast, (where they ~~have~~^{have} dozens of little islands, a beautiful area -- what's called the Baie de Long, a big bay with a lot of these little islands) back to Saigon. Gen. Carpentier asked me to come in and talk to him about what I had seen, and I told him what I thought I'd seen. I was very frank about it: I told him I didn't think the troops up there were worth a goddamn in my opinion, and that this brigadier who was in command of that area to my mind was wholly incompetent. Well, he told me this man had a long period of service and he was a distinguished fighter and so on. So I said, "Well, that's all right for the French Army, but I am giving you my opinion, what I think about it."

Another time I went out, and I had a lieutenant colonel, a Frenchman who spoke very good English as my guide -- my personal guide -- and he took me out to a place to show me how the Viet Minh interrupted the roads. You'd have large rice paddies on both sides of the road. The Viet Minh were very smart: they'd cut a trench $2\frac{1}{2}$ or 3 feet wide halfway across the road here, and just notched it, and on the other side they'd cut another one halfway across. And you see, that did not let the water

level change between the two rice paddies, and ^{they} ~~it~~ didn't incur the ire of the local citizens by doing this. And they must have had 200 mostly women with baskets on their heads dumping rock in these holes.

While we were out on this little trip, over to the left there was quite a sizeable hill, about a mile and a half away, and I said, "What's on that hill over there? Do you know anything about that country?" He said, "Oh yes, we know that very well." "Tell me about it." He said, "That hill is occupied by a battalion of Viet Minh, commanded by a Japanese lieutenant colonel." I said, "How long has he been there?" "Oh, he's been there a long time." I said, "Why the hell don't you go out there and shoot him out?" He said, NO, NO, it's not our policy. We know where he is, and we have a very good idea of what he does and what area he collects his taxes in and so forth."

Q: Let's turn this.

End of Side 1, Tape 1, Session X

Session X continuedTape 1, Side 2

Erskine: That gave me a pretty good idea of the psychology of the whole operation. And then he told me too. He said, "You know, 20% of the people in France -- of the armed service in France -- are communists. If we kill too many of these people over here, suppose they change when we get home, what will my future be when I get home?" And that was the philosophy of this outfit there. Then, too, I had some very good evidence that a number of the higher ranking French officers who were there were dealing in opium, and they didn't want this situation changed because they were feathering their nest back home. I think the extent of this type of dealing -- I didn't have time to look into it, but I think it is quite obvious that some of these people were filling their own pockets and were not interested in carrying on a war for any type of victory. Not only that, they didn't have the heart, they didn't have the spirit to do it.

I gave them a pretty unfavorable report. But I had to argue each time with our Ambassador -- Donald Heath was the Ambassador's name. I'd tell him exactly what I thought, and he thought I was very harsh, didn't understand the French. I said, "Well, god-damnit, if they ^{would} ever ^{win} a war I ^{might} have a different view, but these people are not trying to win this goddamn war."

From there we went back to Manila, to look through the Philippines, and while there -- about the second or third day we were there -- I got a message on a Friday (I think it was) from Gen. Carpentier, a very polite message asking that we come back, that they had an emergency that he wanted to discuss.

Myron Cowan was the Ambassador in the Philippines at that time, and I was staying in the Embassy compound in a Quonset hut that had been put up there. I talked to our Ambassador about it and I said, "As far as I am concerned, I am finished with Indo-China. We don't have much more time to waste around here. But you are a big shot lawyer, and if you'll go with me I'll go back." I said we'd have ~~xxxxxxx~~ our own plane. Oh, he'd be delighted to go.

I didn't take my whole crowd back, we picked up a few.

Oh, one other thing. While I was up in this northern area around Lang Son, I had an eery feeling there was something wrong I couldn't put my finger on, and when I'd go to sleep at night I'd wake up and think, "This thing means disaster of some kind. What kind of a damn disaster can it be?"

Well. Anyway we got back on a Sunday morning to Saigon, and the French met us and took us down to the headquarters -- a tremendous old building that had been occupied, I think, by one of the Napoleons at one time -- and they had a long line of tables lined up with a pad and a red pencil for everybody, and Carpentier sat down at the middle of the table on one side and I sat down on the other side with Nick Thorne and the Ambassador and a couple of other fellows that were there with us, and my Navy interpreter.

Carpentier started to read from a document, then he'd stop once in a while and have it interpreted. He never lifted his eyes from this paper for I'd say about 40 minutes, even while it was being interpreted.

The whole story was that they had started to move out most of these legionnaires they had up around ^{the} Lang Son and Dong Dang area. And these boys, including the local tribes that had been mentioned to me by this Catholic priest up there, had ambushed them. They had lost over 2000. That was never reported in the papers, so far as I know.

Now we didn't have definite evidence that these 2000 were all killed or wounded, but they didn't show up again, and I never heard of their ever showing up later. Some might have gotten away, but that was the list -- over 2000 people had been ambushed.

According to Carpentier, he wanted me to hear the straight ~~xxx~~ story so I wouldn't hear it some place else and be exaggerated. But it was admitted that it was over 2000 men lost in this ambush.

I don't know -- I thought many times since that that was sort of a premonition on my part. My God, there were so many things there that didn't make me feel you had a smart military unit in there, that I had a feeling that disaster would rock some damn place. I asked him what he thought I could do about it. He wanted me to get the straight story, so we would understand.

Well, I didn't say so, but I certainly understood it was a damn sight worse than I thought it was, as far as security was concerned.

(Pause)

I think I've covered most of that. We of course made up our reports.

Q: Whom did you report back to?

Erskine: I reported back to the Secretary of Defense. No, the Secretary of State and Defense -- a copy to each one. Incidentally the Secretary of State gave me a marvelous commendation, and so did the Secretary of Defense.

Q: Did you have a feeling at that time ^{if the French took hold} that they could have averted disaster, or was the situation too far gone?

Erskine: I thought it was really too far gone, and the French didn't have the spirit, and I think there was considerable communist penetration and influence, back in Paris as well as in the French forces in the Far East.

When we finished our tour, we went back to Paris. This was the suggestion of Ambassador Melby. He said, "Let's go back there and you tell them what you think." Although I was ordered not to disclose it was a secret report. "But, he said, you can tell them enough and give them an idea of what you think about this thing, and I am going to back you 100%, so long as you don't get into the political side." I told him I would never get into the political side because I didn't have much use for the politics anyway.

Well, I might as well tell this here now, because it was a month or so later that we actually did it.

We went back to Paris and we talked to the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Defense, the Minister of Colonies, and I think one other minister -- I don't remember exactly who.

We had two sessions, and those four people attended, and I gave them a thumbnail sketch of what I'd seen and my reactions to what I'd seen. Then they asked me what my recommendation was going to be.

One other point I don't think I have included. In this setup in Indo-China at that time, there was a high commissioner whose name was ~~REX~~ ~~XXXXXXXX~~ ^{Pignon}, who also had been a captain in the French Army in World War I and had been a liaison officer to the American forces. ~~RAGNER~~ Pignon seemed to dominate the situation, and I got the impression when I was in Indo-China that when Carpentier wanted to do something, Pignon had to approve almost every little operation, which I thought was the wrong setup -- to have a politician with a little bit of military experience that wasn't really combat experience with a hand on the commander of the troops.

So I told both of these sessions that it was then my feeling that I would not recommend that the French get any military aid or assistance for Indo-China, unless the organization be changed. I said, "You've got a war on, you've been fighting it for six years, you've got a high commissioner that sticks his finger in every damn thing that goes on out there, and he is not qualified; you have a top soldier man, Carpentier, who has a fine reputation for fighting in Europe, but he hasn't been very successful here. And I've had a feeling that the politics ^{has} ~~is~~ dominated this whole thing. There might be other considerations." What I was referring

to was the opium, but I didn't use it.

They were pretty much shocked, and told me that they didn't think I had a complete idea of the whole thing and so on and so forth, and that maybe I should go back to Indo-China. I said, "No, I've seen enough, I think. I was there at least three weeks, and ^{we} worked until midnight almost every night, and traveled over a lot of the country, talked to a lot of the troops, inspected any number of organizations, even the Senegalese," who incidentally looked like a damn good fighting outfit. "But after all," I said, "you have to have the leadership, you have to have the will, you have to have the planning, and everything else to go behind these people. It isn't always a question of logistics or weapons and ~~things~~ things like that. I didn't feel it was there." And that was my feeling -- I didn't feel they could properly use any assistance that we could give them, and unless they changed that setup, that was what I was going to report when I went home.

By God, before I got home they had relieved Pignon, sent him out, *eventually* Carpentier went out, and they sent Marshal de Lattre to take the whole damn thing and make a military operation.

Q: De Lattre de Tassigny.

Erskine: Uh uh. He was a ~~marshal~~ ^{marshal} of France, and I heard later from some of the French people that I'd seen there and I have seen later, that the day they heard that de Lattre was coming out the began to perk up out there. They expressed it this way, "We could feel the de Lattre heat from Paris all the way out here."

Because he was a tough soldier.

De Lattre went out, and he took his son out -- or his son might have already been there with him, he was in the army -- and old de Lattre was really raising hell around there, straightening things out. And I put that in my report, that given the present organization and situation and the present personnel in there I wouldn't recommend to give them anything because I didn't think they could use it properly. I had gotten reports that Marshal de Lattre was going out, and I'd made up a list of what I thought they should have, with ^{the} proper command setup and other things I'd recommend that we go this forward. I forget what, but it was way up in the millions.

Anyway de Lattre went out for a while, and his son was killed, and I understand he was very broken up over that. He was quite an old man to begin with, then he finally died. Then they sent out another guy to take his place, Salan.

Q: Yes, Raoul Salan, a paratrooper.

Erskine: Well, he didn't do very much out there as far as I could see. Of course I wasn't out there during this time, but he didn't improve the situation according to any reports that I saw, and I was still with the Defense, and I had a good chance to see a good bit of the information. They brought him from there and sent him over to Africa where he lost the war there.

Q: The Foreign Legion parachuters -- or the Foreign Legion French parachuters who were out there -- were you impressed with them at all?

Erskine: I didn't see any. I don't think they had enough planes to drop any parachutes.

Q: I think Salen was a parachutist.

Erskine: They did have some paratroopers, but the only ones I saw were Vietnamese. And the French had a paper chute that they used, and it was expendable. They'd jump out, and it apparently worked all right. I brought one home and turned it over to the Army, I guess, and that's the last I heard of it.

I was told -- I didn't see any of these fellows -- that the Vietnamese love to parachute, and the way they got started into it was, they had a few go along with the paratroopers, and they watched these fellows jump out and they just went on and jumped out too, with no training.

I went on a bombing mission while I was there. They had a hell of a problem with lack of aircraft, and I went out over to the Air Force operating unit and I said, "I want to see your operating schedule." Well, here it was, up to 30 days: they'd made up the schedule for 30 days ahead, and they were going to drop so many bombs and so on and so forth.

Then I asked to go on one of these bombing missions, and after much talk they let me go. There were three planes in this formation. The one I went in was an old three-engine Fokker, it didn't have a door on it, it actually had telephone wire tying up various things in there; they had no bomb racks -- they had the bombs, which I think were 100 pound bombs, on the deck, tied down

with a line. And we flew I guess 40 minutes or more up, and finally hit a stream bed with a real horseshoe turn in it, and the pilot pointed down and said, "That's the target! That's the target!" So he sailed around a couple of times, and called back to his bombardier, who was just another Frenchman, and they untied these bombs and just kicked them out. They were supposed to be bombing an ~~oil dump~~ ^{oil dump}. And a little smoke came up, nothing. The bomb fell near the so-called target, but I don't think ^{there} ~~it~~ was a damn thing near it.

I could see no indication of a trail, and the *traffic* wasn't too heavy on the road going into that area. Why they would have an oil dump in that particular point I couldn't figure in the first place. I think they were taking me for a ride.

Q: It sounds like it.

Erskine: Then the next time I came back and I told Carpentier that I didn't think a hell of a lot of that, and also Hermann Hartmann, the chief of the Air Force, he was in another plane -- he was on the Dakota.

Then he said, "All right, we have some down on the coast here; some Viet Minh installations, they've built a storehouse down there. But I don't want you to ride in a bombing plane this time; you go in the Dakota with me."

So we went in the Dakota, and we didn't have these bombers. They had a couple of fighter bombers, only two, and we were on station before the bombers came in, not very far away.

When we came up, of course the people all turned out. Here were two storehouses, out on a little peninsula. I guess the peninsula was probably a mile long, and at its tip where these storehouses were it was only about 1000 yards wide, but there were a number of shacks in the same area.

The people all turned out to watch this damn thing when we showed up, to see what was going on. Then in came these two fighter bombers, and they dropped two bombs each, and they landed 300 or 400 yards away from these so-called warehouses, and they didn't hit a damn thing.

Then they went up and they came back and they made a couple of strafing runs. And the people were still standing out there watching, you know. I don't think they hit a building even when they came down strafing. However, in the second run of the strafing they'd go up and they'd do a chandelle -- you know what a chandelle is, a victory run.

Q: Yes, a flip-over.

Erskine: A flip-over. Well, that was my experience.

Q: Shades of World War I.

Erskine: Yes. Well, I don't know, but I think that pretty well covers Indo-China.

Q: Let's see. You went to the Philippines, Malaya . . .

Erskine: I went from there to -- I believe it was Malaysia.
Malaya.

Q: Yes.

Erskine: . We were there three weeks and we visited a great many parts of the country, and I went up to Ipoh, which is up in the northern part of Malaya. It's very, very rugged country up there. They have little hilltops, small hills, ^{which are} ~~just~~ just a rock -- sharp rocks, some of them look like ice cream cones, but if a parachuter would go down there it would just be hell.

They had quite a number of prisoners in the compound up there, and they had a continuous harangue by radio for these prisoners. And I went out and went through this camp. And of course, a Britisher is always a Britisher~~s~~, and they had all of their little ceremonies. This was the Royal Marines outfit up there, and I had a very pleasant visit, but I didn't learn very much. But they did tell me that the place was full of ^{rock caves} ~~rough keys~~, and some would go in quite a distance, and that was a real hideout for the bandits. They knew where they were, but they just couldn't cope with the situation they had there. But they did have one thing which I think was helpful in the end. They had a concerted effort that organized this. They had representatives of the local population, from the British, from the Malaysians, and the local officials in various areas -- which was cooperating to get rid of the bandits. You didn't have to call on that man or that man: each member of this little junta that they had there -- I think they called it

a committee -- when they made the decisions they'd immediately pass the ~~word down~~ ^{right on} to their units, *to effect* cooperation. And I think that worked out to a pretty good degree.

Now However, the British had one operation on there. It wasn't too far out of Kuala Lumpur -- of course I went out there by car -- and they were supposed to have had a group of bandits, a group of commies, as they put it, surrounded, in this jungle area. This jungle area was very thick jungle in a sort of a valley, with a ridge on each side, and the vegetation on top of the ridges was not too heavy, but down in the valley it was extremely heavy. And I suppose it was maybe 1500 yards from one ridge to the other. And I arrived there, and they explained the operation to me.

The British unit had started out to go to the jungle. They had a couple of fighter bombers that were going along, dropping what looked to me like 50 pound bombs in the jungle, but a mile away, and on each one of these ridges they had a ~~couple~~ couple of 81 millimeter mortar units, firing into the jungle. I watched for a while and then I asked a British officer there, "Where are the troops down here?" "Oh, they are cutting their way through the jungle." "Why are you bombing way up there? Almost a mile away, it looks like. Why don't you put the bombs down here?" "That's to stop any of those that manage to get loose and get ahead of the troops." "All right. What are your 81 millimeters firing on?" "They are giving covering fire to the troops." "You know where the troops are?" "No, we can never be certain." I said, "Do you have any such system as -- even on

a time basis -- of having phase lines? You hit one phase line, and move forward from that, coordinate with your mortars?"

Oh no, no, they didn't do that. They just talked to each other on the radio. Well, he had no damn way out in that jungle there that I can see -- and I am only here looking down there -- to know where he is, except maybe keeping time. "I left this place at one time, and in an hour I am up here." I said, "I certainly seems to me you could have a phase line in there, because I can see different kinds of foliage out there, which to me just drew a natural phase line through there -- different types of trees."

I wasn't impressed a damn bit with that. It was to me a waste of ammunition, certainly a waste of aircraft.

But while I was there, every place I went they gave me a Gurkha bodyguard. By God, those boys were good. When we stopped -- we did a lot of traveling out by car on places where we had roads, and we had a platoon ahead of us and a platoon behind us, in small trucks -- we could just stop and those guys just disappeared into the jungle. Just natural with them. And I stayed a little while -- I think three days -- with the commander of this outfit, a big Scotchman, a dark-haired Scotchman, which is hard to figure out. He lived British style, very nicely, in his little quarters there. He had an aide who always wore kilts, dressed up to his teeth, and he had a knife in his stocking.

O? Skee dhu.

Erskine: Yes. He and I hit it off very well, but I don't think the aide ever had a damn bit of use for me. (laughs) I didn't

have much use for him either.

Q: I wonder what a unit of Gurkhas would do in Vietnam today.

Erskine: I think they'd do a good job. I think a Gurkha is a good soldier any place you put him.

Q: . They certainly have had a good reputation.

Erskine: Yes. I think they are good soldiers any place. You know, actually they are mercenaries. The British pay so much, and the Gurkha people just furnish the troops.

Q: Now what was your ~~expert~~ report, your recommendation?
This was before SEATO was formed, is that right?

Erskine: Yes, that's right. We recommended actually orally -- we didn't get anything in writing because they told me it wasn't any of my business -- to set up an organization with representatives from Southeast Asian states, including the French. And our thought was to base this organization in the Philippines, and also maintain in what is now Clark Air Force Base -- which was then Stotsenberg -- a reinforced division of the Army, mind you, qualified for amphibious operations. And the political angle would be very similar to what SEATO is now, but they'd have something they could use right away and close to the scene of action in Southeast Asia.

There was quite a bit of talk on that point, and later they came up with this political organization of SEATO, which has no troops.

Q: No, it's strictly contingency. (Pause) You went to ^{Thailand} ~~Laos~~, and also I understand that you are the godfather of the Prince Regent, or . . .

Erskine: No, no. Let's see. Yes, I guess we went next to Thailand, and the Thais were very cooperative. We traveled over the country, I went out to see their training of every kind. I think I mentioned some place here that they always tried to make me compete, and I'd tell them I came out to see what they were going to do. Oh no. "But we'll shoot, and then you shoot," even the artillery.

One of the first things that they did was to put on a demonstration of the use of their armored cars, and then a demonstration of the firing of their rifles, and at that time they had a little arsenal and they made their own rifles and ammunition, and it wasn't a bad job. The Thais have a great deal of potential, you might say, in ~~manual~~ arts.

They had a rifle range, and they'd put up a ²⁰ inch bull's eye, 200 yards, and on each side of this thing they had a mud fence; you might call it a mud fence; it was an ^{embankment} ~~embankment~~ for the protection of the community out in that area. And they had cloth laid down, and they had a sergeant come up with his rifle, and he fired 10 shots in this bull's eye in a prone position.

Oh, they were very elated over this, he didn't miss his target once, ~~but~~ the bullets were scattered all over, and the bullet holes. And they asked me what I thought about that, and I said, "I think it's pretty damn poor. I could shoot it blindfolded." Then they handed me the rifle and said, "All right, let's see you shoot." "Just give me two ^{sighting} ~~siding~~ shots and I'll shoot it. But I won't lie down to shoot it. Instead of slow fire I'll give you a rapid fire, and incidentally that's my range: 200 yards, rapid fire, standing ^{to} ~~or~~ sitting." ~~I~~ I could ^{always} ~~only~~ make ~~it possible~~ possible, by God, for the last 15 or 20 years!

If I ^{had any} ~~didn't have that~~ kind of luck. I guess for about 25 years I have been an expert rifleman in our A course, which is not easy.

So I took my two ^{sighting} ~~siding~~ shots and got my sights all set, and I said, "Now, you take your watch and time me." And they said, "Go." And I dropped down there, I got a good position, and I let it go, and I put a group in there of 10 in one minute, about 6 inches in diameter.

Q: Good grouping.

Erskine: Yes. I said, "Well." That was my range, it always has been my range, 200 sitting. I said, "Now that's why I say it's no good. Take a look at that." They sort of shook their heads, and then I said to the generals -- they had about 15 or 20 generals standing around there -- "Now you shoot." "Oh no, no!" "How about you?" And I tried to pass the rifle around. I couldn't

get one of them to fire a shot. So I said, "Why won't you shoot? You want me to shoot!" "Oh, we never compete with our enlisted men." I said, "If you can't shoot, how in hell can you teach them how to shoot?" "Oh well, the sergeants do that." ~~Awkky~~ Well, this ^{was} ~~is~~ one of the sergeant instructors who'd just fired.

Then they put on a little demonstration. They had a couple of old Japanese tanks, and they had a couple of armored cars, British type, and these old tanks came rrrrrrumbling out there, the armored cars rushed up. They were armed with, I think, two machine guns. And they fired, and one of the tanks drew out a lot of smoke like it was disabled, and they all withdrew. And my Army officer -- whose name I won't mention -- got a little excited and said, "Jesus Christ, they are killing each other out here!" I said, "Don't you know that that damn machine gun is firing blank ammunition?" I said, "This is just a show they are putting on." He said, "Oh no, no, I see the cartridge shells coming out." I said, "You have blank cartridge shells, sure, but there are no bullets coming out of that gun." Then I took him over and showed him -- here was the blank attachment on it. That put him back for a while! But this was just a little show that they put on, you see.

They took me out to the artillery range, in an artillery camp. They had a few billets around there and a few quarters for their people, barracks for their men, and a headquarters building with a flat top, about two and a half stories high. And the artillery school was there.

I told them I'd like ~~theyxxxxxxxxxx~~ to see a demonstration of artillery firing, and also go through their school and have somebody give me a rundown on the type of instruction that they were giving.

I arrived there about 10.30, and we had talks and coffee, and then we had lunch. Somebody had told them I liked fried chicken, so we had fried chicken for lunch. But they didn't take the claws off the legs, and they also had the head cooked. I like fried chicken, but I had to shut my eyes when I ate the head!

After lunch we went up on top of this building, and they had set up little plain tables there for most of their students. They had one ~~old~~ battery scope, and one old World War II vintage, ~~30~~ 30 centimeter/ infantry range finders. And that was all of the range finding equipment that they had, as I remember.

And they had the boys all around ~~sitting~~ ^{sighting} and looking.

They thought they were going to shoot direct fire, and I said, "No, no, I want to see indirect fire." I hadn't seen the gun and I hadn't seen the battery, but I knew what it was over the hill.

So they jabbered around there a little while, and finally this brigadier general who was in charge came over -- no, it was a major general, they don't have any brigadiers -- and he said, "The battery is ready, you fire the battery." I said, "No, I came here to see your people fire the battery. I am an observer; I want to see how well you fire." No, no, they wanted me to fire the battery. ^{I had} I fiddled around a little bit in training and I had watched our artillery a lot and I knew how to give a

fire order. Finally I said, "All right, I'll fire the battery."

So I stepped up to the *phone*, and I looked through the range finder, and I couldn't get a damn thing out of there.

I looked through the battery scope which was a fairly modern type, and I could see: I picked out a little target about 4000 yards away. *But* it was blind as far as the battery was concerned.

And I started out with the fire order, "Number 2 gun, lay on base stake." He laid on the base stake, then I gave him range -- 4,050, I think it was -- and I went on through, and then when I got to the type of ammunition, this was percussion; rounds, one round -- that was your ranging shot. Normally you fire at least two ranging shots then split the difference.

I have described the target already.

I got around to the "fire!" He fired. By God, he *wasn't but* went about 50 yards over the range I'd given him. So then I cut it down to 4000 all guns. Close on Number 2 gun. So many miles, I *think* ~~xxxx~~ *5 miles* ~~xxxx~~ for Number 1, 5 the other way.

With 5 miles, that's automatic, they know their position.

They had six guns in this battery, I believe.

Then I started out again -- range 4000. Down to the type of fuse, I said VT fuse.

I could see them popping their eyes a little bit.

Number of rounds -- 500 rounds per gun.

We might shoot five, you know. But they had gotten me in this position and I was going to find out something about them.

Q: 500 rounds per gun!!

Erskine: "Fire!" Nothing happened. I called up the battery exec who was down there, and I said, "Did you get the order to fire?" "Yes?" "Why the hell didn't you fire?" I got no answer. And I turned to this general and I said, "Am I firing this battery, or is somebody else firing this battery?" He said, "You are firing the battery." Then I got on this executive officer and I said, "Goddamn it, fire!" Nothing happened.

Then this fellow came over in a very meek way and he said, "General, you know, we don't have^a VT fuse, and we don't have that much ammunition on Thailand."

Q: 3000 rounds of artillery ammunition.

Erskine: But I was going to give them the works on it. Goddamn it, it wasn't my job to do it. So I said, "How in hell do you ever expect to go to war?" That opened up the gate on me there. I said, "How many rounds can you fire?" "Maybe one or two." I said, "The hell with that, you don't get even an *effect* from artillery with two rounds per gun." I wanted to see what they can do.

So I went through it again. Fuse, I just said percussion and let it go at that. Then 5 rounds per gun. Fire! Goddamn it, they were right on it. Right smack on it.

Then I said, "All right, get the commander up here and let's see him shoot." So he got up there and he wanted me to pick the target. I said, "All right."

Here maybe that's 5000 yards, down here 4000 yards. Each damn gun has a different one.

Then you got a slope, and pretty good computation.

So I picked out this ^{slant} target for him, but he never got around to firing, so many things happened, you know.

Then I said to the General, "I want to go down and see the battery."

I went down there, and there were 3 inch, I believe Swedish guns.

Q: Bofors?

Erskine: I don't know the make. I think they were about 3 inch guns, and they were Swedish, and they had a second barrel, about 37 millimeters, underneath the main tube.

So I went down there. I don't suppose more than two of those people could speak any English at all. And they just left the damn guns and they all came around, the happiest damn bunch of kids you ever saw in your life. And I finally got out of this that's the most they had fired for three years. And they wanted me to come back and stay. They thought that would give them some more shooting.

That gave me a pretty good heart ~~xxxxxxx~~ ^{the Thais.} Goddamn it, they ~~xxxx~~ really wanted to know how to do this stuff. They took better ^{care} of their equipment than any people I've ever seen. They didn't have much, but what they had they wore out by rubbing down and oiling and keeping it in good shape.

Then I went out to see their air force, and the air chief marshal at that time -- who is the top airman in the country -- his name was Fuen Ridahgai, a hell of a nice guy. He had sort of a typical flair of an airman, and he took me over to the hanger, and jammed in this hanger were four or five bi-planes, old vintage, a couple of rather modern type, commercial type spotter planes, I guess we call them, the L-type spotter planes.

They didn't have a transport, as I remember. As for the larger planes I noticed they were so damn clean, even around the exhaust outlet. They really were shined up. And I said, "Do you ever fly these planes?" "Oh no!, no. The little ~~new~~ ones yes, not the big ones." "Why?" "We don't have enough gasoline to fly them. We don't have any money to buy the gasoline." I said, "What the hell are you going to do?" And he said, "Not only that, we can't buy more planes because if war comes, ~~as we have~~ ^{if we have} these planes flying around, we won't have any planes in the war." "You won't have any pilots either."

End of Side 2, Tape 1, Session X.

Session X continuedTape 2, Side 1

Erskine: Well, I said, "If you don't have trained pilots, your planes are no good in war anyway." Then I went into their repair shop, and I never saw so few tools in any shop. You could have bought everything in that shop at the 10 cents store, except for one thing which was a gauge -- one of these little gauges, I guess they cost about \$15 -- ^{gauges,} ~~for~~ spark plugs and measuring things.

But their enthusiasm was great. They had a wonderful band and they could play swing music. They had a big party for me down at headquarters, and they gave me a couple of presents, and I presented the bandleader with -- no, this was the Navy.

But they had nothing, except I thought a willingness and a marvelous ~~x~~ personality.

Then I went over to the Navy, and I spent two or three days around with the Navy. They had a few little patrol boats, and they had a big cruiser that had been anchored out in the stream there for several years. But the Navy was almost nothing. And again you found wonderful fellowship. ~~xxxxxx~~ The Navy Headquarters is across the river -- the Pailao River, on the other side from Bangkok. I was ~~xxx~~ going to the lunch that they were having there, and they brought a band out and they tried to play all kinds of music when I arrived. I had taken along with me a copy of the Marine Corps Hymn, and I thought, "This is a good ~~or~~² to give it to." So I presented this Marine Corps Hymn to the ~~xx~~ admiral

over there so his band could play it the next time I came out.

Now Adm. Radford didn't tell me this story, but I heard it --that he made a trip out there later, and he went over to the headquarters of the Navy across the river, and as he got out of the boat, the band played the Marine Corps Hymn for him. (laughs)

Q: How did Raddie like that?

Erskine: I am told that he was damn well put out, and that he finally asked where they got that music and who told them to play it, and they told him that I did! (laughs)

Q: Ha! Who was the ruling head of Thailand at this time? You became very friendly with him, I understand.

Erskine: The same king was there. My real good friend over there was Field Marshal (he was then General) ^{Sarit (that's the English} ~~xxxxxx xxxxx~~ /version. Dhanarata RTA -- Royal Thai Army. He was division commander of the Division in the Bangkok area. I think that was the 1st Division, I am not sure. It was always a key post. And I made him turn these people out, it was muddy and rainy, and they did all kinds of exercises out in the mud, and also lived in -- I inspected their barracks. And all the Thai soldier had in the way of a bunk was a mahogany board that they kept polished, up on a little ~~xxxxx~~ rack like a couple of saw horses, and a footlocker. And they slept on this board; they did have a light blanket. I don't think I ever saw a pillow.

And I visited their cavalry place. Matter of fact I went to quite a number of their places over there.

I got to know Sarit very well on this particular trip, and in subsequent trips when I went over there we got together and he finally became a field marshal, then he finally took the government over. He made himself Prime Minister. And while he was Prime Minister I was there one time, and he was having a big party for some assistant secretary of Defense, who was over there on a visit. I was invited and I went out to this party, and he said, "I'd like to give a party like this for you some time." And I said, "Oh no, save your money, boy. I am the faceless guy out here, you know, nowadays. So don't do that."

We walked along and talked a little bit, and finally he said, "You know, you embarrass me." I said, "Now tell me how I embarrass you. I have been pretty damn nice to you." He said, "You had three daughters and never had a son, and you don't have much face." I said, "What do you want me to do about it? Start all over out here?" Mrs. Erskine was with me. "No, he said, I have two sons. One gets in trouble and the other one is a fine boy. I'll give you a son to save your face." I said, "Well, I'll have to talk that over with my wife. I shouldn't have a son unless she approves of it."

Connie said she'd be delighted.

So I said, "Fine."

He assembled all of his general officers -- and they had a hell of a bunch of them there -- and a few Cabinet members. He sent for this boy, and he turned out to be about 6 feet 2, rather

heavyset, graduate of Sandhurst, paratrooper.

Q: Really? That's pretty big for a Thai. (Interruption. Gen. Erskine is apparently looking for something, and then it sounds as if he is showing it to Mr. Frank) (It's a photograph)

It's inscribed, "To my father and mother from your loving son." His name was Sathar?

Erskine: Sathar.

Q: Sathar Dhanarata. That's something!

Erskine: So I came in and he asked the boy and he said he'd be delighted to be my son.

Q: How old was he?

Erskine: I think he was about 23 or 24. Maybe 23. He looks a lot like his dad.

Q: Was his father a big man too?

Erskine: Not very tall, but pretty husky. I have the old man's picture over here, I'll show you in a few minutes.

Q: I'd like to see it.

Erskine: So we had a little ceremony and we shook hands, Connie kissed him. Then I said, "I am not a rich man, you'll have to send our son home." That's what they call co-fathers out there. It's a custom where you save a friend's face by giving him a son, and they call him a foster son. "You'll have to send this boy to the States to see me." About two weeks after we returned home, there was a knock on the front door, and I went to the door, and here was Sather. I said, "What in hell are you doing here?" He said, "I come to see my father and mother." What he had done was to put him on one of these school quarters with the military aid setup, and he had picked up out the special services in the Army out at Fort Bragg. Being a paratrooper I guess it appealed to him. I told him, I said, "That's the toughest course you can probably pick out over here from the manual side." "Oh, it's all right." He is a phlegmatic type, takes everything easy. I wouldn't ~~say~~ say he is the smartest and quickest guy mentally in the world, but he is a damn good soldier, a lieutenant colonel now.

Q: Was this the good boy or the bad boy?

Erskine: That's the bad boy. So he was going to school down at Fort Bragg, and the military attaché here then was dean of the Attachés Corps, Maj. Gen. Bijinok Kritkara.

Q: You'll have to spell it, General!

Erskine: J.I.J.I.N.O.K. (I think) K.R.I.T.K.A.R.A. Sounds Japanese but he is a perfect Thai. An awfully nice guy. He is a prince, and his wife is a princess, and her name is Coonts.

I can elaborate more on those two people later here, to give you a little feel for some of the things the Thais will do for you when they like you.

So he went down there, and he'd been down there about three weeks or more. Kritkara came to see me, and he said, "Sathar is going to be in trouble, he won't ^{do} ~~give~~ any work with his hands. ~~xxxxxxx~~ He does fine physically and things like that when he wants to, but you know Sathar, he doesn't want to work with his hands, he is a little lazy anyway. And I think they are going to turn him out of school." I said, "well, goddamn it, if he wants to take the course he's got to do it the way they want it done."

A couple of weeks later, Sathar showed up again. They'd kicked him out of the school. And I said, "Sathar, what the hell happened?" He said, "They want me to go out there and work like a Coolie. The work they want me to do, I have a coolie to do it in my home." He wouldn't do it.

Then they wanted me to get him in another school. He didn't want the old man to have his feelings hurt. Well, I looked around. He said he wanted to go to Air Observers School. So I got him into this course. I sent him down to Kelly Field, I believe, and a few weeks later I got the same word. "Sathar is in trouble again. They want him to work with his hands down there, to work on an engine or something, and he says, "The hell with that, he

has a coolie to do that." Well, the same old thing, they kicked him out.

Then Gen. Kritkara said, "Why don't you do like the British do? You want to give a diploma, to have the man graduate from the school. The British, they just put in that he attended the school." I said, "No, I don't go for that, I wouldn't put myself in an embarrassing position by even suggesting such a thing. This man is going to grow up and stay in the Army or the Air Force or whatever he stays in out there, and if he is a leader of men, goddamnit, he ought to know what he is doing, not some casual observation that he might have in a school. So I refuse to do it." But I did sit down and write the Prime Minister a letter telling him what I could about it, hoping he'd be easy on this boy, because he had a lot of good traits.

At that time, the present Prime Minister was No. 2 to the Prime Minister, and he was then a lieutenant general or a general. What was his name? Thanom Kittachorn; he is now the Prime Minister. His boy was going to school down at Fort Belvoir, and was up in the top of his class, and I believe he graduated No. 2 in his school at Fort Belvoir. And that of course would have made old man Sarit pretty damn mad, or make him feel bad anyway.

So I asked Sathar when he left here to go home, I said, "Now what is your father going to do about this?" He said, "I don't know, but he'll do something."

About six months after that we made another trip, and went out and stopped in Thailand, and I went up to see Sarit, then Prime Minister, and I said, "Where is our boy, Sathar?" "He is

in the jungle." "Why, what do you mean in the jungle? Will he be back within a few days?" He said, "I don't know. I sent him to the jungle. He won't go to school, so I sent him to the jungle."

So they gave me a helicopter -- they usually gave me anything I wanted to ride around with over there -- and I flew up to this parachute school, thinking he may be there. I got up there and they told me that Sathar was in the jungle, ~~that~~^{that} when he came back his father said, "All right, you don't want to go to school, you want to be a soldier, you take six months in the jungle. You go out for one week with only 5 days' rations; they will drop you from an airplane; when you get ~~home~~ home you have 5 days to rest; then you take another week with 5 days' rations." And I didn't see Sathar for a year or more after that. When I saw him I asked him, "How do you like the jungle?" He said, "Oh, fine, I like it. It's a wonderful life, a wonderful life." He said, "I know more about the jungle now than anybody in Thailand." He probably does! He said he 'd eat all the food in maybe 5 days, then he'd have to eat snakes, rats, all kinds of things. He said, "You learn a lot."

Q: Good training.

Erskine: It didn't faze that kid at all.

Q: He is a lieutenant colonel now?

Erskine: Yes.

Q: Is Sarit alive?

Erskine: No, he died five or six years ago.

Q: And Kittiachorn. (Pause) I understand when you were quite ill here that Sathar showed up over at Bethesda, and you kicked him the hell out.

Erskine: No. I had a heart attack.

Q: I say kiddingly that you kicked him the hell out.

Erskine: They took me out to Bethesda. I had a right serious heart attack. The third day that I was there -- I think it was the third day -- I was still under the oxygen tent, and I looked out and here was this boy, standing by the bed with Col. Chalermchai, who was Sarit's personal aide.

Q: How do you spell the Colonel's name?

Erskine: Rk C.H.A.L.E.R.M.C.H.A.I. , now a lieutenant colonel.

Q: A lieutenant general?

Erskine: *4/5* He was a colonel then. They were both standing by my bed, and I looked and I thought I was real sick. I waited a while, I looked again, I looked with both eyes, one at a time,

and finally they were still there, and I reached over and touched him, and I realized he was really there. I don't think anybody, any of my friends around here had called to see whether I was dead or alive. Then I said, "What in hell are you guys doing here?" And he spoke up and said, "My father told me to come to see my foster father before he dies." And I said, "I am not going to die, you guys get the hell out of here and go on home. You worry me with stuff like this."

Q: Had they come all the way from Thailand?

Erskine: From Thailand. Of course the Ambassador here wired out right away, and he put him right on the plane and sent him over here.

They stayed three weeks, and came to see me every day in the hospital, read the newspaper to me, took Connie back and forth to the hospital, came home and helped her cook dinner, ^{and} had dinner here, or took her out to dinner, for three weeks.

Then I came home, and the day I arrived home, little Princess Coonta arrived here with a big tray, and she is a marvelous cook, with quite a reputation for cooking.

Q: Is she still in Washington?

Erskine: No, she is back in Bangkok. She is the wife of Kritkara. She showed up with an array here and a couple of servants, and brought me the most delectable lunch. Then she sat down; she is

very shy, a nice looking little woman. She sat down and said, "I am bringing you your food until you are completely well." I said, "You can't do this, Princess." "You are sick, I am giving the orders." And she brought me two meals a day until I was up and back on duty. Now where do you find friendship like that?

Q: It's quite apparent that the Thais have a tremendous affection for you, there is no doubt about it.

Erskine: Well, she did. They've got two homes out there, and this last time they took us down to a beach when we were there.

Q: Last December?

Erskine: Yes, in December, and we spent the weekend at the beach with them. She is a lovely person, and he is a wonderful guy.

I could go on and tell you a little more about him.

After he went home, this attaché here, they made him ambassador to Japan. ~~xxxx~~ You see, most military people out there either end up in the Foreign Service or some kind of business. All the military people are involved in some kind of business; they don't have time to look after their military duties.

Q: Is there much squeeze in Thailand?

Erskine: Oh, plenty.

Q: I guess it's an Asian trait.

Erskine: I don't know that you'd call it squeeze. It's not only Asian, you find it in many parts of the world.

We went down to the beachhouse -- they have a beachhouse -- then they took us down to a little beach area near Sarhib, near where the B-52s are flying from, and we spent the night and a day down there. A beautiful drive down, a beautiful beach, cool.

As I said they sent Kritkara as Ambassador to Japan, and while he was there, Sarit, who had a lovely wife -- he also had 60 odd mistresses --

Q: What a man!

Erskine: Who out there are referred to as the second wife.

Q: It's just like the King of Siam -- Anne and the King of Siam.

Erskine: This is true -- I can tell you a lot about that. His wife was a very pretty woman, and she decided she wanted to go call on the Emperor of Japan. So they sent Kritkara to make arrangements for Madame to come over there and call on the Emperor. Well, that couldn't work out, because he was not head of state. He was only Prime Minister. So he raised hell with Kritkara, because he couldn't make this appointment for his wife to go call on the Emperor of Japan. And when Kritkara just told him it was impossible he said, "Well, somebody can get it done." So he kicked him out of there and sent him to Ethiopia. As sort of a punishment.

Q: Yes!

Erskine: He served his time in Ethiopia and came back, and he is retired out there now. # Probably he is very happy. They both have, I guess, a reasonable amount of money and are very comfortably fixed.

Q: The head of Thailand is now who?

Erskine: Well, the king. Bohmopol. He was born in Boston.

Q: Really? I didn't know.

Erskine: Yes, he can claim American citizenship. He plays the . . .

Q: The saxophone.

Erskine: Yes. His wife is lovely. A beautiful woman.

Q: I've seen pictures. A very beautiful woman.

Erskine: The queen. Now little Princess Coonts is a cousin of the queen.

Q: They are real nobility, whereas Sarit wasn't?

Erskine: No, Sarit was not.

Q: This Bohmopol was a descendant of the King of Siam.

Erskine: Well, he is the King of Siam now.

Q: But I mean he is an actual lineal descendant.

Erskine: Yes, straight down the line. I don't remember the names of his forebears.

Q: Would you say that Thailand of all the nations you visited on this tour on the survey was the one that was most susceptible to modernization and improvement, and as a strong military bulwark out there?

Erskine: I would say they ^{were} ~~was~~ most cooperative, and they are still very cooperative. However, they told me in very definite terms when I was out there that if this involved anything that would ~~interfere~~ impinge on their sovereignty, no soap. They are very jealous of their sovereignty. That was 1950, and they have made tremendous progress in the meantime. We were out there last December: two big new hotels, modern, going up, and they didn't have anything like that in 1950. The old canals that would run along the narrow streets there in 1950, had all disappeared, and they have wide streets of concrete, and they have a road now that runs from one end of the country to the other end -- from Songkhla in the South to Chiang Mai in the North, a concrete two way road. Part of it is four way.

Q: I guess Croizat had a lot to do ^{in that country} ~~xxxxxxx~~, when he was over in SEATO.'

Erskine: He was over there with SEATO for a while, and then I think he worked there for Rand too. He stayed there while he worked for Rand.

Q: Yes.

Erskine: I think I'd better close up here.

Q: All right, General, we had a good session today. We'll continue next week.

Erskine: Okay.

End of Session X

Session XI - 11 March 1970

Tape 1, Side 1

Q: When we ended up last week's session, General, we were talking about your tour, your survey mission, for State and Defense. You'd given your reactions and observations of French Indo-China, which is now Vietnam of course, and of Thailand. And you visited several other countries. I think we've pretty much finished up Thailand. Did you spend much time in Indonesia?

Erskine: I think we went from Thailand, as I remember, to the Philippines. We made a three week survey there in the Philippines.

Q: Let's go into the Philippines, then.

Erskine: We had quite a lot of survey. Magaysay was then the Secretary of Defense, and one of the top staff officers there -- I can't think of his name at the moment, but he was in my squad at Fort Benning, when I took the course in Fort Benning, about 1925 or '26. So we renewed our old acquaintance. We traveled over a good bit of the Philippines with the Air Force. Gen. ^{Cruz} ~~xxxxx~~ was in command of the Air Force as I remember, and he impressed me as being a very solid and capable officer.

Q: Is that C.R.U.2?

Erskine: C.R.U.2.

Q: This was before Magsaysay had taken over as President. Was he in the midst of fighting the Huks at this time?

Erskine: Yes, he was very much involved in fighting the Huks at that time, and I went out and observed several operations where they had at least a regiment in one case, surrounding a mountain up near what is now Clark Air Force Base.

I visited the regimental headquarters and the battalion headquarters, and the general scheme of maneuver was to have, I think, two battalions surround the base of the mountain, and then move out with one battalion and reserves split in several areas, in several detachments, so they could come to the relief of these other two battalions.

They had a lot of artillery firing, some air bombing. As they moved up this hill I think it took a couple of days -- up this little mountain -- to get up there, and I think they captured two Huks, and I believe they lost two of their own men: one fell over a precipice or something like that and broke his leg, and the other one was shot accidentally. So much for the success of that operation.

At headquarters I was very impressed with their operations maps and overlays -- extremely well done. You'd think you were in one of the big Army headquarters. I felt that they had had a lot of staff training and a lot of preparation, but damn little success.

Q: Why? The Huks were too elusive?

Erskine: Well, I think that's probably one reason. I think they were trying to ape our staff operation and so forth, which doesn't exactly fit guerrilla warfare.

Q: Do you think this has been one of the problems in counter insurgency operations -- just using mass . . .

Erskine: No question about it. Instead of getting out and operating like the guerrillas do, we modernize, and we have to have chocolate bars and all kinds of things. Our people don't know how to take care of themselves in the field unless you have a considerable logistic backup.

Q: Do you remember when Gen. Puller came back from Korea and he was interviewed at Pearl Harbor and he made his famous statement about getting the soggy bait and the milkshakes out of the Marine Corps and feed them beer and double time 'em, and so forth and so on? Are you of this opinion?

Erskine: I think that statement was made in San Francisco. I was present when ^{Lewis} ~~Lewis~~ made it! It created quite a stir. ^{Lewis} ~~Lewis~~ came back and stopped off in San Francisco, and of course the newspaper people wanted to see him right away, and I was in command of the Western Pacific -- I guess that's what they called it at that time.

Q: Department of the Pacific.

Erskine: Yes. And when ^{Lewis} ~~Louis~~ came in I told him to go sit down and write out -- and I wrote out a few questions I thought would probably be asked -- write out his answers to these things, and don't say another damn thing except what he had on the paper.

Well, the people came after lunch, and we sat down and ^{Lewis} ~~Louis~~ tried to stick to his answers there for a little bit. Then somebody made a quip that he didn't like and then he took off, and he started out on pogey bait and goddamn it, women and a few other things. These people I think probably exaggerated what he said to a certain extent, but -- I tried to close up this thing as soon as I could, when he got away from his piece of paper.

Q: Did you get a *rocket* from Gen. Shepherd?

Erskine: No. I think he got a Saturday Evening Post writeup out of that interview. Possible that plus another one, in which he carried on the same theme.

Q: I am getting away from the Philippines.

Erskine: Oh, the Philippines were very cooperative except in one case. The senior Army officer out there then was -- damn it, he was in my class at Leavenworth and I know him very well, it's not Hodges, it's a name very similar to that -- had just been up with MacArthur on MacArthur's staff. He at first decided he wasn't going to accomplish very much, that he was a big shot out there, that MacArthur was calling the strikes throughout that whole area.

Well, we weren't there to change anything he was doing. Our mission was to gather information and come to the conclusion on what types and kinds and quantities of military equipment the Filipinos could use and should have. But he didn't seem to want to cooperate very well.

I don't know whether I mentioned this or not. Before I left Washington on this trip, Gen. Lemnitzer -- a major general then, an old friend of mine, was head of the Military Aid and DOD, and he said I must go up and call on Mr. Johnson who was then the Secretary of Defense, and tell him where I was going and what I expected to do and so forth and so on. And I called on Mr. Johnson, and he was very nice and he received me. I explained what I thought I was going to do, and he made the mistake of saying, "Is there anything I can do to help you?" We were very short on clerical assistance, and I said, "Yes, we don't have much clerical assistance, and we probably will need maybe additional personnel some place along the line. I don't know what we ~~are~~ are going to run into in ~~xxxxxx~~ different places, and our time is limited." He said, "Oh, I can remedy that right away. You go and write up a directive for me, stating that you can utilize the services of anyone that you deem to be necessary to accomplish your mission, and that you can also if necessary attach these people to your party at such time as you need them. And also ~~xxxxxxx~~ that you will report your actions to me directly."

Well, that was a wonderful little weapon.

Q: I imagine so.

Erskine: So the Army general -- it wasn't Hodges, but the name is a similar one to that.

Hoge
Q: ~~Hog~~?

Erskine: No, it wasn't ~~Hog~~^{*Hoge*}. I can see him sitting here now. Anyway he was a senior officer out there at the time. He declined to be of much assistance, and I said, Well --

Leland Hobbes, that was his name.

I said, "Leland, the only think I see I can do here is to just attach you to my organization, since you evidently haven't the information but you are unwilling to give it to me." He said, "What the hell are you talking about? Who in hell do you think you are?" I reached in, pulled out my little piece of paper and I said, "Read that. You are notified now that you are hereby attached to this unit, and ^{that} you will accompany me until I get the necessary information or what I think I need from you."

Boy, that was a Christianized gentleman right away! (laughs heartily) From that moment on he couldn't have been nicer. He gave us everything we thought we needed, he was glad to give assistance, he had a party for us, all kinds of things. But that was a very valuable little document. It was the only time I had to use it.

Q: The power of the pen sometimes is mightier than the sword.

Erskine: (laughs softly) Yes. When he came clean I detached him and put him back on his job.

Q: Probably wrote a good chit on him afterwards.

Erskine: No, I never mentioned him in my reports. Because that was really not germane to our work.

Q: What else did you find?

Erskine: In the Philippines? Well, everybody was very cooperative there; I don't remember anything in particular; I think we recommended more aircraft and more infantry weapons, possibly more tanks. I spent quite a while with Gen. Cruz in his aviation setup, and they were very short in their shops in maintenance ~~some~~ equipment. But what they had they were doing a darn good job with, I thought, at that time. However, I think as time has passed they have slipped backward quite a bit.

Q: The Philippines of course have become since that time -- and of course since they were granted independence -- considerably more and more independent of the United States, and have become a force in their own stature in Southeast Asia. Do you think this is important?

Erskine: Well, I think the Filipinos are influenced by a bunch of politicians. The Filipino people are good people, and I know many well established Filipinos who are quite capable of handling the situation out there, but those people do not want to get involved in politics because the politics is so rotten that they just don't want that kind of business.

There is so much graft in all sorts of deals that I think it will be a long time before they are straightened out. And of course the United States is always a whipping boy for the politicians.

The good situation that they have enjoyed since World War II came from the United States in the way of aid, guidance, all kinds of assistance, but it always makes a good whipping boy to ~~be~~ blame the US for their trouble when they don't come through with their so-called promises. I don't know how you are going to handle that. I think the best thing to do is to let them go their own way for a while and see how tough it really is. I ~~do~~ don't think the Filipinos will become communists. They have a considerable population of Chinese in that area, but I don't think the Chinese are the people who are ~~pushing~~ pushing communism as much as other local dissidents.

Q: Is it as much communism as it is a drive for reform of the political system and the social system out there?

Erskine: I don't think they know what their political system is or what they want. I mean the mass of the people. The economic system is pretty poor right now. It was pretty poor right after the war, it was poor before the war. The money that they get into the government is grabbed off, and they don't carry out programs ~~as~~ that are really worthwhile for the people.

Q: That's it. It seems to me that this may be the root or the basis for a lot of the unrest that we find in Southeast Asia,

the inequitable distribution of wealth, the need for redistribution of land holdings . . .

Erskine: Yes, I think that's basically the reason for the unrest and disaffection. But it's quite a problem; this business of land reform doesn't work out as well as it sounds. You can have a land reform program and hand out land to some poor peon, who doesn't know how to farm it, and it's only a question of time when he has borrowed so much money on it that he loses the land and he is back where he was before, and the land eventually gets back in the hands of the banks or the wealthy people whom it was taken from. You first have to have a program of education to teach these people how to handle resources. They have no idea of finance, no idea of modern agriculture, except in very small instances. I am speaking of the general mass of the people.

I think that's true in the Philippines, I think it's true in Thailand, and it's probably true in most of those countries out there. It makes good news to talk about land reform and how much is given to these poor devils, but nobody goes out and checks up to see how ~~much~~ long they keep it and what they do with it once they get it. Of course some are successful, but I think the large majority are not. That's because they don't know how to do business; they have no training, no background.

Q: Were there any other conclusions that you drew from your visit to the Philippines?

Erskine: One conclusion was that we felt the Philippines was a very strategic area as far as Southeast Asia is concerned, from you might say the viewpoint of US policies. I think I mentioned once before that we made an oral recommendation when we came back, which I think was one of the original thoughts ^{for} ~~of~~ the SEATO organization.

It was my feeling that we could keep a ~~main~~ reinforced division and a certain amount of aircraft . . .

End of Side 1, Tape 1, Session XI

Session XI continuedSide 2, Tape 1

Erskine: It was my feeling at that time that we should keep a reinforced division trained in amphibious warfare in the Philippines, and they had plenty of room at old Fort Stotsenberg, which is now Clark Air Force Base, as a sort of a fire brigade and also a deterrent for any operations that turned out to be like Vietnam today. They'd have troops there, and it would give, I feel, to these various communist nations a feeling that we were better prepared, and taking over the smaller countries out there would not be as easy.

But behind all of that you have to have the will to use the tools that we may have, and I think that's where we have made fatal mistakes in the Far East. We've played along out there a little tiddlywinks type of war when we could have won the whole damn thing in a year and a half or two years, I am sure, if we had gone about it the way we should conduct war and keep the goddamn politicians out of it.

Q: At this time had any thought of possible loss of Okinawa as a base been in your mind?

Erskine: No. I didn't think we'd ever be that foolish, to give up Okinawa and Iwo Jima. I think it's a very grave mistake.

Q: You went out to Indonesia from . . .

Erskine: Yes. We went first to Malaysia -- Malaya then.

Q: We talked about Malaya.

Erskine: Yes, I think I covered that. Then we went to Indonesia and I think we covered some of that. The Indonesian were not in the mood to join up with us. Of course Sukarno was there with his guided democracy at that time. He was very nice and very polite and went out of his way to be nice to me. He sent me on a week's vacation to Bali with my whole crew as his guest, and I talked with all of the senior officials. I was impressed with one man, the Sultan of ^{Jok-} ~~Jakarta~~ who was then the Minister of Security for the government: a well educated man, a well balanced man, and I think a very courageous man. And we got to be pretty good friends. Matter of fact, Northrop Corporation sent me back there two and a half years ago on a sort of a search mission to see what the situation would be, with the idea of possible future potential business in the area for the Northrop Corporation. And I renewed my friendship with the Sultan who now is about the kingpin of the present government. He is a very fine gentleman, and I am sure that if Indonesia can raise the money, they are going to come out to be an example of one country and one group of people who realize what communism amounts to and how to lick it.

In the last counter coup, when Sukarno was really trying to take over the government and get rid of all the senior generals

by assassination -- and a few of the generals escape^d, namely Natsution who is now (I don't remember his title) the number one man in the Parliament, and Suharto who is the Prime Minister, or President (I am not sure exactly what his title is at the time).

Q: He is the head of the government.

Erskine: He is the head of the government, but what do we call him?

Q: President, I think.

Erskine: I think he is President, yes.

Q: Did you get the impression that Sukarno was a slight bit mad?

Erskine: Well, I thought he had illusions, certainly. He thought he had a great destiny, I am sure of that. I had a number of conferences with Sukarno, and I always came away with that impression, that he was either dreaming or nutty as hell, I don't know which.

Q: He certainly poured millions of dollars down a rathole.

Erskine: No, they didn't take very much. But he poured millions of dollars down.

On this last trip down there about ~~zh~~ three years ago I saw this new monument that he had built to the Indonesians who gave their lives for the country and so forth. It's designed after

the . . . oh hell, it's in Paris.

Q: The Arc de Triomphe?

Erskine: No. It looks like this (gestures with hands).

Q: Oh, the Eiffel Tower.

Erskine: Yes, the Eiffel Tower. It's designed similar to that with a sort of a oriental shed about one and a half stories from the ground. It's a very beautiful thing, but he cleared out about three or four blocks of the city, which will be a park. And on top there is a big flame, a tremendous thing, and I am told -- it's painted gold -- that in Indonesia it cost \$263,000 just to paint the gold on this damn thing. It's a very impressive thing.

However, when you drive from the PanAm Hotel into the town -- into the City of Jakarta itself -- you see quite a number of buildings that are about two stories of reinforced concrete, which I was told was done with Russian money, which was a gift. And the construction just stopped right there. There are dozens of them along the road.

Q: I've seen on television one of these documentaries. Surely 263,000 dollars or whatever it was, was money they could ill afford, considering . . .

Erskine: Oh yes, they are having a hard time even now, getting enough cloth to make clothing for their people, and basic items

of the food, and all kinds of things -- spare parts, renovation of all their communications system: that includes railroads, steamship lines, docks, everything. You have some 3000 islands in that archipelago, scattered over 2000 miles of area, and communications is one of the things they need very badly. And actually even today the central government doesn't exercise very much control over the outer islands, the main reason ~~being~~ being that they don't know what the hell is going on out there. Not only that, these people have been in a more or less independent position since the Dutch left, and there is a tremendous amount of graft still in the government. Another thing that they are suffering from down there today is the lack of competent people to administer the various projects that they have, and Suharto I think is perfectly honest and wants to do everything possible. But he doesn't have competent people to take the place of many of those crooks that Sukarno put in the government. So, many of these people are still in the government, and they ^{are} trying to replace them, but they just don't have the talent.

Now it's significant to me that the Army for many years had sent many of their officers abroad to take special courses -- engineering, finance, accounting, all kinds of things, in addition to sending people to military schools in foreign countries. The Navy and the Air Force sent a few, a but very few. Now that's one of the reasons, I think, that the Army was loyal, and that's one of the reasons why the Army is in the saddle today down there, because it's really the main source from which the competent administrators come from. The other services don't have them.

Q: I was wondering about your observation of these Southeast Asian countries that you visited, most of which have been part of the colonial empire, say of the Dutch, the British, the French -- that when each nation gained its independence the colonial overlords ^{had} ~~are~~ not really trained people to take over the administration, that this was a serious vacuum that . . .

Erskine: I think that's true. I think that's the only way colonialism could have existed. Now you take the case of Burma. When the British had control of Burma, most of the civil servants --

They did train civil servants in India, ~~(and-that's-one-reason)~~ -- and they trained Indians as civil servants there -- and that's one reason India has managed to survive without too much trouble, but in Burma practically all of the civil servants were Indians, brought over from India, and when they left Burma -- when the Burmese threw the Indians out -- then they just didn't have anybody who knew a damn thing about running a government or the economy or anything else. And they are still suffering from that. I think you find much the same thing in Indonesia.

Now you go back to Thailand -- when I first went to Thailand in 1950, it was really pretty much of a medieval country. But they've always had their own government, even when they were occupied by the Japanese. They are such smooth operators that they convinced the Japanese that they should have the Thais in there to run the government so the Japs could have more time to go out and fight the rest of the people. And they actually ran their own country during the Japanese occupation.

Now some place in here you find an element which developed as a result of a certain amount of freedom, and pride in their own race and country. These people, many of them want freedom but many they don't know what the hell freedom is. I think that's one of the troubles in Vietnam today. The average rice farmer over there doesn't know what you mean by freedom. All he wants in my mind is to have a little piece of land, with security for himself and a reasonable chance for his children to grow up and not be slaves. They don't want too much. I am thinking of the mass of the people. Of course you have in every country a group who become some sort of politicians one way or the other, and the politics follows the same damn pattern of -- (Pause) I can't think ^{of} the word I'd like to use here, but I guess I can say just corruption, that develops in that area.

I think Malaysia, from my observation, probably is freer of this than any country I have visited out there. But they still have it there to a degree, but to a lesser degree than other countries in Asia.

Q: What else did you visit? After Indonesia did you return home?

Erskine: We came back to the Philippines for a little while, and then went home. We went home via Paris so I could have a talk with some of the French officials over there regarding my findings in Indochina at that time.

Q: And you told me about that last time.

Q: But the training that you had certainly provided an important material for strategic planning.

Erskine: Well, I got a very nice commendation from the Secretary of State and from the Secretary of Defense for what we had done, and my report was required reading for every officer who went to Vietnam, for at least five years.

Q: You have a copy of that report?

Erskine: No, I don't. It was classified, you see, and I couldn't keep it.

Q: Then you are unique ~~amongst~~ amongst many of the retired general officers who very often kept for their files copies of reports, whether they were classified or unclassified.

Erskine: Boy, I've been enforcing security a long time, and that to me is dynamite. I don't want the responsibility of trying to protect them, and you can't give them the proper protection -- you move around, you ^{leave it} ~~xxxxxx~~ home, and I don't think that's the right thing to do.

Q: When you went up to San Francisco you had additional duties as a member of the advisory group of the Western Sea Frontier, and you were commanding general of the Marine Corps Emergency Forces, Western Sea Frontier.

Erskine: That didn't amount to an awful lot. When I arrived in San Francisco I thought back to the days of Pearl Harbor, when we had no forces, no coordination whatsoever on the West Coast. I think we could only muster maybe one or two battalions of artillery to repel any Japanese attack that might have been made over there, which would have made a great psychological success, even though it failed. And I recommended that we get this thing together and this so-called Board -- what did we call it? Defense Board or something out there?

Q: Advisory Group Western Sea Frontier.

Erskine: Yes. They approved it and then -- I think the Western Sea Frontier approved it, and then we got together a basic plan for cooperative action of all the armed services on the West Coast.

Of course at this time we had many more troops out there. We had Camp Pendleton, we had the Recruit Depot in full swing. We had the Recruit Depot at Pearl Harbor time, but there was never any thought of using any of those recruits.

But it's happened in many countries ~~where~~ where when you have a sudden invasion, you don't have to have a diploma to go out and fight. If a man has got a rifle he goes to the fight.

Q: Did you find these additional duties occupying your time, keeping you busier than the duties as commanding general of the Department of the Pacific would have normally kept you?

Ereking: I had less to do out there than I ever had in my life.

Q: That's been the comment about that command. You remember the Bohemian Club, of course.

Ereking: Many of the clubs there gave me a membership with no dues. The Bohemian Club, the Yacht Club. I think there were seven. The Commercial Club. The Pacific Union Club, which was one of the swankiest things on the whole coast. The big Golf Club -- Burlingame Golf Club I think it's called. I think it was seven clubs that gave me membership with no dues. And I had to go to those clubs. They'd call me up, by God, if I didn't go once a week. I found it a little bit expensive, even though I didn't have dues to pay. And the remarkable thing about the Bohemian Club was that about five years ago I received a letter from the Club saying that ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ -- this was 1950, when I arrived there -- that they noticed that I had not used its facilities or been to Russian River for the annual soiree they have up there for quite a number of years, and that they had a waiting list of some couple of hundred people, and some had been waiting for 10 years, that if I didn't plan on coming back to the Coast or utilizing the Club facilities more often, would I consider giving up my membership. I had no idea I'd belonged to the Club all this time; I thought it was for the time that I was in San Francisco.

Of course I wrote and told them, "For God's sakes give my membership to some deserving youngster." Very hospitable people in that part of the world.

Q: Yes. Who was your aide at this time?

Erskine: I think Kenny Houghton most of the time I was over there. He came back from Korea and was wounded, had to go to the hospital for a while, he had trouble with his eye, he had a piece of shrapnel in his eye, and he had a little trouble at that time with double vision, so I just put him down as aide. He protested very much about it, but I told him I loved to listen to protests.

Q: Ha, ha!

Erskine: He turned out to be a crackerjack.

Q: He is out at FMFPac now.

Erskine: Oh he is??

Q: Yes, sir, he is chief of staff out there. He relieved Lou Wilson. (Pause) Did you know how long you were going to remain at San Francisco, or was it a surprise when you got your third star to become head of Fleet Marine Force Atlantic?

Erskine: No, I left there and came back to Norfolk and took over Fleet Marine Force Atlantic.

Q: You took Kenny with you?

Erskine: Yes.

Q: Now tell me about your tour at FMFlant, if you will, please.

Erskine: Well, I don't know exactly how to put it. But I didn't feel that FMFlant was prepared to carry out any of the missions that had been assigned to it.

Q: I understand that you were a real hard taskmaster, that you really drove the Division and the Wing very hard.

Erskine: Well, I felt it's a damn sight better to do that than have half of them killed when they get the hell out and they don't know what they are doing. I always believed that when I had a mission it was supposed to be that way every day -- be prepared.

I think, as I remember, that we had about one paragraph as a mission for the Fleet Marine Force Atlantic, and it said, "Be prepared to land in Europe in support of NATO forces within 10 days." Which of course in the first place is an impossibility, unless you wait till you get all your ships together before you start the 10 days. It's a 5-6 day cruise for our best ships to get over there.

Q: Who was CinCLan~~at~~ at the time?

Erskine: Oh hell!

Q: Was it Jerauld Wright?

Erskine: No. ~~Whazzaxxks~~ He went to the Naval War College and
~~xxxx~~ A hell of a nice guy. I'll think of it.

Q: I don't know.

Erskine: He was CinCLant and . . .

Q: SACLant?

Erskine: SACLant. Both. And Felix Stump had the 1st Fleet. He didn't have any ships except on certain occasions, but he had the 1st Fleet staff and headquarters there. You know how the Navy works this task force business.

Q: Uh uh.

Erskine: And Lynde McCormick was SACLant and CinCLant. He had a big headquarters there, international in a way. I thought he was wonderful. When I first there, I believe Fechteler was CinCLant.

Q: Then he took over what became the CIA.

Erskine: No, not Fechteler.

Q: Fechteler was one of the first heads, when OSS changed over to CIA.

Erskine: Could be. I don't think so. Bill Fechteler?

Q: Yessir. There was an interim period there under the National Defense Act.

Erskine: That was Adm. *Hickenlooper* ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ you are thinking of, I believe. But *Hickenlooper* wasn't his name. It was a name similar to that. He was there in the interim, and then Beadie Smith had it for a while, and then finally Dulles came in. But I don't think Fechteler was ever in the CIA. Fechteler was too much of real seagoing sailor to fit into that crowd!

Well, McCormick succeeded Fechteler, or viceversa. It's such a long while back I don't even remember the details.

Q: Did you have a feeling at this time that the Marine forces on the East Coast were just overly committed?

Erskine: No.

Q: You had no Caribbean ready force, or the Med force yet?

Erskine: Oh, we kept a battalion over in the Med, which rotated I think at that time every six months. (Pause)

I read my basic instructions, then I asked for the copies of the plans to carry them out. They were practically nonexistent as far as I could call a plan.

Q: Whom did you relieve?

Erskine: Roy Hunt. So I went first to Marine Corps Headquarters and made my complaint that we didn't have any plans and it wasn't possible to carry out the directives that I had.

Shepherd was commandant at the time, and he sort of told me that he thought . . .

Q: Shepherd was not commandant.

Erskine: Was it Cates?

Q: Yes sir, Cates. Shepherd took over in January of '52.

Erskine: Well, that's probably right. Anyway I came up and said I couldn't do that, and they said, "You are always taking cover that you are part of the Fleet and so forth, and this is a Fleet operation here, and we don't have much to do except to provide you with materials and personnel that you need." Well, I didn't get very far there. So I went out to see SACLant. I think it was Lynde McCormick at that time. And he couldn't elaborate on these instructions I had. He said, "You have your orders, that's all I can say about it." Well, I fiddled around there and I said, "All right, goddamn it, where am I going in Europe? What am I going to do when I get there? Will I have a parade, put on a demonstration, or will I fight?" They said, "Hell, no, this is war." I said, "What my mission? To go in and wait till I am called to do something, or what? ~~Which~~ Which coast will I land on? The southern coast of Europe, the western coast, the northern coast

or what?" They didn't know, that was for me to find out!

So I called up Cherry Point and I said, "Get me a plane ready with some damn good mechanics. I am going to Europe." I flew over to Paris and went in to see Matt Ridgway, and told him what my situation was, and he said, "God damn it, I didn't know that you were available to us? How many Marines you got?" "Christ, I said, I have 50,000 Marines, 450 airplanes, two wings, one wing not complete, the third wing down in Florida." He called in ~~Rumker~~ Gruenther, who was his chief of staff at that time, and asked him if he knew about it. He said he had some hazy recollection that we might be available, but there were no specific plans. With that old Matt jumped up and banged his fist on the table, and he said, "By God, nobody goes home until we ~~give~~ Erskine an answer here today."

Q: Had you known Ridgway from before?

Erskine: No, never met him.

Q: Were you impressed with him?

Erskine: Yes, I liked him .

Q: He had a good reputation when he took over in Korea.

Erskine: Yes. I liked him. We had a little talk and ~~Erskine~~ he explained to me that I may be in the northern or the western --

all the way around in the Mediterranean. I said, "Don't keep anybody here tonight worrying about what I am supposed to do. But I want something specific, an area. We've got to know about this area if we are going to fight in it. I want an area where we may be used. I think if this is the case ~~it~~^I may be under one ~~of~~^{of} several commanders over here, and I'd better go around and see what the hell they are thinking."

Q: Whom did you take over with you, General?

Erskine: I took part of my staff. I had Col Spencer Berger. Not Joe Burger, another Berger.

Q: Spencer ^eBerger.

Erskine: Spencer.

Q: Was he your G-3?

Erskine: He was G-3. I think I had Shiley, and I think I had another fellow who became ill later. I had about 4 or 5 people. And Kenny Houghton was on this trip.

Q: How about Griffith? He was your chief of staff, wasn't he?

Erskine: Yes. He stayed home. Oh . . .

Q: I know who was sick, and I can't remember his name. Tom Roe told me about him.

Erskine: Col T. G. Roe was in Naples at that time.

Q: I saw him down at Norfolk.

Erskine: Oh you did?

Q: He used to be our boss.

Erskine: We first went up to Norway. I said, "I want to go around and see these people and see what their plans are." "It's all right, go ahead, I think that's a good idea," he said.

So I took my plane and went to Norway. Ridgway had already sent word to these people. There was a Lt. Gen. Manserth, a Britisher, in command out there of what I think was called the Northern Sector. Oh, he'd be delighted to have us there in his command. ~~Waxman~~ and they had several briefings and so forth, and he assigned to me a colonel, a Norwegian colonel, who was supposed to look after me while I was there. And they finally had a big dinner for us. It turned out to be quite a party.

In my discussion with this Norwegian colonel I told him I was a little bit disappointed with the reaction of the Norwegians when the Germans went and took it over without any fight worth a damn. And oh, he didn't think so. Of course they never had enough money to have a real Army, they couldn't oppose the German Army and a lot of other things, and I said, "Hell, you could at least fight."

I think the country is pretty damn red. As a matter of fact, I think I stayed in the Grand Hotel, which is the biggest hotel there, and they had a parade around there that afternoon and burned Churchill in effigy right in front of the hotel. Then they moved into the hotel with their band and raised hell around there, blew their horns and all, for about an hour. And I noticed on the car -- it was a Norwegian driver I had -- something that looked like a little red ~~sky~~ chrysanthemum that somebody had posted on my car. I started inquiring about this and nobody knew what it was at first, then a man finally said, "They'll put you down as a communist."

I was a little burned at the gills over a number of things that happened there.

This Norwegian colonel finally told me in a little argument and discussion, "General, why the hell should we worry about Norway? You've got more Norwegians in the United States than we have in Norway." I thought he was really pulling my leg on this. I came back and found out it was true. I checked up on it. I think there were 8 million ^{Norwegians} in Norway and 9 million in the United States. At least we had a million more here than they had over there. And that was sort of his attitude over the whole damn thing.

I finally included in Manserth's responsible zone Holland. And I was quite concerned about the command relationship that would exist between any Marine expeditionary force over there and the others, and I asked him to give me a clearcut story on where I would fight and whom I would fight with. One of the place -- they'd have to change their plans -- if we were made available we would probably go into Holland. All right, who

is going to be in command there ashore? It turned out they had a major general. He gave me his name and so on. All right, what's his background? Did he have any fighting? No, he'd been playing in politics for quite a while. I said, "Well, I am not going there. At least I'll take no orders from him." This ~~was~~^{is} a professional outfit that I have, I said, not a fly-by-night crowd, and we fight with professionals, nobody else. And if my outfit lands and I am in command I'll take no goddamn orders. He'd better be attached to us, because I am not going to take orders from any of these schoolboys you might have over there." He said, "Well, we are not going to bother you." I said, "You are goddamn right you are not. If we come over here we are coming over here to fight."

From there I flew to Izmir, Turkey. Gen. Wyman of the Army was in command there. Commander of Land Force South, I believe was the title. And that's where Roe was -- either there or . . . He later went . . . I guess he was over at . . . not Milan . . . Where the hell is that naval headquarters?

~~RxxxxWxxxxxxtxxxxxx~~

Q: Naples.

Erskine: Naples. I guess I went to Naples first, and I had a talk with them, and of course they wanted us. Everybody wanted this 50,000 Marines and extra airplanes. We had no difficulty down there with the command relationships. Then I went from there down to Izmir and talked to Gen. Wyman and his people and we hit it off beautifully. And I would like to have served with this

guy, he came up pretty high in my estimation.

While I was at his headquarters, when I was leaving he assigned two major generals to me. One was a Greek major general who was on his staff, the other was a Turkish major general. The Turkish major general's name was Tukman. They were to escort me through the rest of my trip in Turkey and Greece. He asked me also to inspect the Turkish air force unit for him on my way to Istanbul.

So we flew to this Turkish air force base, and of course they had been notified. And by God, as we came in on the runway and were landing the fighter planes were taking off right over us, just skipping us. And when the plane stopped we got off the runway, actually, and a Turkish brigadier came up in a jeep, and I came down the gangway, and he said, "All right, what do you want to see?" He saluted, and I said, "You are the commander, I think you should show me." He spoke very good English too. He said, "Make up your mind, make up your mind! Tell me what you want to see." I said, "Well, I think I'll leave it to you, you are the commander here, to show me, and then if I find I want to see something else I'll ask you for it." "No, make up your mind, make up your mind!" I remember he had very ~~new~~ squeaky shoes -- a brand new pair of shoes that squeaked. I also understand that that's sort of the custom over there, that really puts you up in a high class.

Q: Squeaky new shoes?

Erskine: Squeaky shoes. So I said, "Take me down to the headquarters and give me a briefing. Then he pointed to the planes

taking off -- his squadron taking off -- and he said, "We are having a scramble here, so you can see how they scramble." From what I could see it was very well done. Then they did a little acrobatic flying and so forth. Then we went into his headquarters and they gave us a briefing. They had charts. They followed more or less the standard air force procedures -- charts to show you how much training, how many planes, the various operations they were participating in. And when we reached the end of the thing he asked me if I had any questions. I said, "Yes, I have one question anyway. What percentage of crashed do you have in your training and in your operations here?" He thought a minute and he said, "Almost as good as the Air Force." I said, "What do you mean by almost as good? I am asking you a percentage, if you can give me a percentage." He said, "Almost as good as the Air Force." I said, "You mean you have more crashes or less crashes than the Air Force?" He said, "We have a little more." So his record was almost as good!

But I thought they were doing pretty damn well, although their maintenance and equipment struck as being a little bit short, and possibly the maintenance personnel not quite up to snuff.

Q: Did you take any Marine Aviation representatives with you?

Erskine: I don't think so. I don't believe so, I didn't expect to get into that.

Then from there we were going down to Salonika, Greece. The general in Izmir -- what the hell was his name? -- had asked me to stop over there and have a talk with the Greek general in

command of Sacor, which is headquartered in Salonika.

While we were in Turkey, I took some time and flew around over the Dardanelles down at low altitude to have a good look at the old battlefield over there of World War I. And it was really sort of interesting and amusing to see how the two generals with me reacted. The Greek general never said a word during this whole trip. Gen. Turkmen was talking all the time -- background, history of Turkey, everything about Turkey, and was pointing out things on the ground. He sounded as if ^{he} ~~he~~ were an expert on the Dardanelles campaign.

We left there and we crossed over the Greek border, and he closed up like a clam.

Q: Then the Greek took over?

Erakine: The Greek took over. But he was not as vociferous as the Turkish general.

I landed and went and paid my call on the corps commander. He had a dinner for me that night, but in the meantime he asked me to go around and make a survey of the harbor of Salonika, which was a very nice thing. So I went down to the deck.

Oh! They had a guard of honor, and during the ceremony ^{of} the guard of honor, the officer in charge of the guard called them all to present arms, and then the commander of this little area down there came up and presented me with a big bouquet of flowers. I don't know whether they were pulling my leg or not, but I took the flowers and handed them to the aide.

Then they put me in a hotel, and they placed the guards outside, and they had some big ^{upholstered chairs} ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ outside my room. Then these fellows, who were evidently tired, would go to sleep, and I'd amuse myself by tiptoeing out. Then they'd go psep in my room once in a while . . .

End of Side 2, Tape 1, Session XI.

Session XI continuedTape 2, Side 1

Erskine: I went down to the dock, and they had another guard of honor, and this time I decided that if they asked me if I wanted to inspect the troops I'd say yes.

And I went up as we always do in our outfit to the right side, and I got up to the right of the troop formation. I noticed that the commander of this guard was down on the left; normally they stand in front. He ran around behind and met me up there on the right, and I went around, inspected the guard and went back to my post.

We toured the harbor with the harbor master. We came back and they had the guard there again. I thought, "This time I'll show how much I know about the Greek Army. I am going to the left side and meet the commander." By God, I walked over to the left and he had switched his idea to fit my system, and he was on the right. Anyway we got together and we went around the guard again, and he took me into the little harbor headquarters there, and we had what they called a cocktail party. This consisted of bleached almonds, ice cream and scotch whiskey, which was a little difficult for my idea of a menu, but it was very delicious, no doubt about it. Then I had dinner with the old general that night and he took me around. One of the things that I remember -- he came out to meet me at the airport, and he had a very dilapidated old automobile, I don't know whether it

was a Ford or a Chevrolet. And you could see that it had been just washed because it was still wet in many places. And we started in in his car. We got about halfway in and the damn thing stopped. We had three or four other cars around there, and he raised merry hell with the chauffeur, but the chauffeur, poor kid, he didn't know what the hell was wrong with it. So he finally abandoned that car and took one of the other cars in the formation and went on in, and the poor old guy was really chagrined and hurt, really hurt.

But they gave me the impression of operating on very little, with no waste of any kind that I could see. ~~They~~ He took me around to see some of the formations there along the area -- supply and so forth -- and every one was in real shipshape.

We left there and went back to Paris, and went in to see ~~Ridway~~ Ridgway. And Ridgway had several locations where he said, "You can go ahead and make plans to come in these areas, starting on the east coast." I think there were four, maybe five different locations going from some place around Holland all the way around to the Turkish area.

We had something then that we could bite into, you know, collected data and information, everything like that, and you knew something about the area before you were going there.

Of course it would be impossible to even collect the ships.

Then I went over and I told SACLant. I said, "Now I have this, I have everything I need, and I want my ships tied up out here." All he did was laugh and he said, "You know goddamn well you can't have those ships anchored out here waiting for you."

I said, "I know, but that's the order. You couldn't get them here in 10 days." Of course I did this just to gig him a little bit about how impractical the damn things were.

We had considerable training. I set up a training exercise at Vieques Island. When this thing was finally going we had an RCT -- it was a three week period, or something like that -- they 'd go down and fight their way ashore, and they'd stay there and defend the island, at the end of three weeks another RCT and maybe the Division or what little we had available and could get ships for, would go down and attack it. Then they came home and they had to fight their way ashore on Onslow Beach, and my idea was to keep the fighting spirit in these people. And you know, the combat record was marvelous as long as you kept them in this routine. And our aircraft -- we had a higher operational setup down there than we had at home, with all our big shops and everything else.

Q: Gen. Robinson had the 2nd Division at this time?

Erskine: Yes. I guess he had it the whole time. I relieved him toward the end there.

Q: You really kept ^{him} ~~them~~ hopping.

Erskine: He sort of reached the stage where he didn't think he had to pay attention to my orders, I think, and I decided, "Somebody else could do a better job."

Q: You also relieved the wing commander, I understand.

Erskine: Same thing there. He was a close friend of mine too. We fought together. I said to Tom, "Goddamn it, this is not a question of friendship, this is a question of life and death as far as I am concerned. You either get your ~~my~~ goddamn planes and pilots in the air and keep them in the air, or else I am going to take some rough action on you, and I mean it." He said he knew, he understood, but they had a lot of bad luck. There is no bad luck that you can't overcome with training and supervision that I have seen.

Q: Was this a situation where his pilots were not carrier qualified?

Erskine: They had a squadron that would go aboard the aircraft carrier for training periodically, and they'd have to have a certain amount of training before they went ~~aboard~~ aboard, like bouncer training. You know what bouncer training is? You come down and land on the field but don't land.

Q: Touch and go.

Erskine: Touch and go within a certain distance. They sent one squadron aboard a carrier and it flunked right out, and I think lost a couple of planes. I don't know whether any pilots or not. The Navy bounced them off. That's when I had a real serious talk.

We had a period of training, and the next squadron went abroad and didn't do a hell of a lot better. That's when I had my final session with Tom and told him, "We can't have this. Now this is the second time; I gave you a chance last time; you are relieved. And that's that. I won't have troops neglected that way, and to me that's a neglect of your basic responsibility."

Incidentally, his son is working down here in Northrop with me now, and we are the best of friends!

Q: Oh! I have heard a lot of stories, General, about -- you'd send out --

When you had command of the ^{1st} Division out at Pendleton, and all times you were in a command position, you'd send out a letter or a memo or a *rocket*, "Such and such is the situation, give me your reply by the next morning."

Erskine: What??

Q: You'd send a letter to a commander of a regiment, or to a subordinate, that "there has been a discrepancy, that such and such has been brought to your attention, reply immediately, let me have your answer by tomorrow morning."

Erskine: Oh I might have done that ^{on} one or two occasions when somebody was sloppy in handling his business, but not as a routine.

Q: It wasn't a routine gesture on your part to keep them on their toes.

Erskine: No. If somebody had been very sloppy and fiddled around I probably did it. I think I remember one or two times, but it certainly wasn't routine.

Q: It wasn't something that you'd do just to keep them on their toes

Erskine: No, no. (Pause)

Q: What else about FMFLant can you tell me?

Erskine: Each training exercise we had down there,xx we ended up with naval gunfire, we'd always have a critique with the Navy, and we brought all the troops that we could release up on a hill to watch the naval gunfire on various targets from there, with live ammunition, so they'd know what the stuff was really like. It wasn't something they were talking about, they could see it.

I thought it was very successful. That was about the overall routine that we had over a period of two years there. Of course at times we used part of Roosevelt Roads, that old barracks over there.

Q: Down in Puerto Rico.

Erskine: We didn't have a landing field on Vieques, and my engineers, for all their training these people, digging a hole

and filling it up again, I told them to get out there and build a landing strip, instead of doing that kind of work -- do something worthwhile. Well, they had to have drainage material.

I forget the admiral's name, he was quite a guy, over at San Juan -- short, heavyset, he is an aviator. I told him of the problem of having some tile, we had to have it, we didn't have any money to buy it. Well, they had some there in the yard, so he said, "I'll let you fellows steal that." And we stole enough to put in all our drainage! (laughs)

Q: The situation down at Vieques was considerably different from the time you were down there before World War II.

Erskine: Oh yes.

Q: The conditions had improved for the troops.

Erskine: Well, they hadn't built anything there. Finally we got a water system in, and that brings to mind one of the most brilliant engineer operations that I can recollect.

I had my engineers go down and make a survey; we wanted to get water put in there in line, so these people wouldn't have to live --

I wanted to get all the training time we could in while they were on the island and not have to have so much housekeeping work to do. And toward the end of my tour we had gotten approval to put in *tent decks* for the people, because sometimes the

weather is not too good there. And we got this engineers' reconnaissance. I think they spent a week going over this damn place, and came back and told me they'd have to have so much money, so much piping, pumps and all kinds of things.

I looked on the map, and there was a dark line on there, and I followed this thing down and it said WATER LINE. I said, "What the hell is this? You already got the goddamn thing in there, according to this map." "We didn't find it, we didn't see it." You get on a plane and go right back there on this spot here and dig and see if it's there." It was there.

All of this map reading, all of this survey and everything!

So the engineer came back and he said, "I am a little red faced, we've got it and all we need now is maybe some pumps and more pipes to put the branches in and so forth."

But I always called that the most brilliant engineer reconnaissance that I've ever seen.

I enjoyed it very much there.

Q: Had you ~~that~~ thought that you were in the race for commandant?

Erskine: No, I never wanted to be commandant. I realized that for the benefit of the Marine Corps the commandant has to be involved in a hell of a lot of politics, and I ~~is~~ always knew I was never cut out for that.

Q: Your tour of duty didn't coincide. In other words, generally speaking the three star jobs were only two year tours, were they not?

Erskine: Yes.

Q: So at the end of your two year tour you would not have been up for the commandantcy anyway.

Erskine: Well, the commandant -- I think it was Vandegrift -- told me that they way ~~the~~ things were done they sent three names up to the President, and Vandegrift told me he had put my name on with Cliff Cates, and Lem Shepherd told me the same thing, and I ^{forgot} ~~remembered~~ that he had put my name ~~xxxx~~ on there. And I told him at the time that I was not ambitious to be the commandant, that I didn't think I was the kind of fellow that would make a good commandant.

Q: Well, you were a minority of one, General, because I think a lot of people thought you would have made a daggone good commandant.

Erskine: I don't know. About that time, when I retired I went to work for the Secretary of Defense the next day, on this job of special operations -- Assistant to the Secretary for Special Operations.

Q: Can you talk about this assignment?

Erskine: Yes, we can. It wasn't very clearcut as to what I was supposed to do, but he sort of pushed me a in a corner, so I said, "I'll take it and try it a while, as a civilian." Roger Keyes was the Deputy Secretary of Defense at the time, and I don't know where

he got my name and settled down on me to do the job. He never told me, and I asked him, and he just laughed and said he and a lot of ^{lines} ~~guys~~ ^{and that he} out here knew a hell of a lot that I didn't think he knew.

I told him that ^{as} I understood ^{it} that everything was ~~was~~ ^{oral}.

^{They decided}
~~to try~~ to develop a psychological warfare program and to ^{ride herd}
 on a lot of these programs, alleged programs that were supposed to be developed by the Army and the Navy and the Air Force.

And one thing led to another, and finally he gave me a charter that covered a hell of a lot, including the supervision of the entire ~~war~~ defense and intelligence effort, and monitoring that effort, supervision and monitoring of the IGY program -- that's the International Geophysical Year Program.

Q: You had that also?

Erskine: Yes, and ~~that was~~ when that was over we had the deep freeze program that ~~was~~ carried on many of the same things that were done in the IGY Program. So I carried on in that capacity.

Q: ~~Was~~ What was the nature of your supervisory activity for the IGY?

Erskine: ~~Was~~ Go over the programs and watch the funds, and approve or recommend approval or disapproval mainly of the funds in the various programs that had been presented to be carried out in that program.

Q: That was the defense effort within the IGY?

Erskine: Yes. And the deep freeze was purely a defense setup, and Adm. Byrd was the head of the actual program, but I was sent over by the Secretary of Defense to check on programs that he was carrying out and the amount of money he was to spend and what he was supposed to do, whether it would be a permanent facilities or temporary facilities at this place.

Q: This is down in the Antarctic.

Erskine: In the Antarctic, yes. And I went through with Dick Byrd on this for as long as I was there. Did he die before I left the Defense Department or not?

Q: He may have, because I think a man by the name of ^{George} Sauscek . . .

Erskine: No, Dufek.

Q: Dufek.

Erskine: But Dufek was in the program at the same time Byrd was. Byrd was the No. 1 man in the program. Dufek was in command of the troops in the actual operations down there. Byrd had another little office, I forget what it was called, here in Washington.

Q: At the Navy Yard, I believe.

Erskine: I don't know. I've been over there but . . .

It's an old post office building, as I remember. At least it was at one time, for part of the time.

That was very interesting work.

I think in 1956 I was getting ready to go down to the Antarctic and spend a little while down there and see what this thing was all about, and about a week before I was to take off I had a heart attack. That finished my trip to the Antarctic. The doctor said, "No more cold weather for you, boy!" So I never did get down there.

I enjoyed working with those people, they had some very eminent scientists tied in with this thing, and Mr. Seiple -- who had been with Byrd on his trip, I believe to the North Pole, he was one of his key men, Paul Seiple. Dufek was the naval commander.

I don't remember, but I know that when it came time to put in a new naval commander there -- Dufek I think retired as a captain, and I'd known him, and he'd been involved in these things and Byrd thought a great deal of him -- the Secretary of Defense asked me who to put in in this spot, and I said, "I think George Dufek is the man to put in there." And he put him in. He of course stayed on there till he retired, which I think was about four or five years.

Q: Yessir. When you recovered from your heart attack you went back to duty. You remained a special assistant to the Secretary ~~Erskine~~ of Defense for about eight years.

Erskine: I was in there from '53 to '61. I was with Wilson, McIlroy, Gates, and for a while with McNamara.

Q: As time went on you got involved with a considerable amount of classified, surreptitious activities and security matters, did you not?

Erskine: Well, the minute I got involved in intelligence -- which was about nine months after I went down there -- I was involved in that business all the time. One of my specific jobs in that area was to supervise and monitor NSA, the National Security Agency, as well as similar operations in the other services, in the Armed Services.

Q: I don't suppose you could talk too much about that.

Erskine: No, there is very little we can talk about in that particular area. But in carrying out these jobs I did a great deal of travel to Europe, to visit the various installations, and around the Black Sea, and also out in the East, the far East -- Japan mainly, clear up to . . . what the hell is the name of the northern island?

SAKHALIN

Q: Sakhalin?

Erskine: No, that's in between.

PARAMUSHIRO

Q: ~~Irma Shiro~~? That's Russian-controlled.

Erskine: No, it's a northern island -- we had various installations in Japan.

Q: Oh, the Northern Island of Japan.

Erskine: Yes. It's north of Hokkaido. It was colder than hell, about 2½ feet of snow when I was up there on one trip.

Q: ■ That's where these hairy Ainu come from, I believe.

Erskine: Yes. There are supposed to be very robust Japs up there.

Q: I know which one it is, but I ~~xxx~~ can't think of the name.

Erskine: I can't think of the name of it either. [KARAFUTO?]

Q: Undoubtedly a lot of the contacts you made during your six month trip in 1950 stood you in good stead -- the contacts you made in Southeast Asia.

Erskine: It helped a lot, because we had intelligence operations in all those areas, and even when I ~~got~~ go back to Thailand today, the people over there ~~were~~ ^{are} very cooperative, particularly from that angle, and they still think I am connected in some way with Intelligence, and the Intelligence chiefs all get together.

We used to have a little party. When I'd come one time over there I'd give them a party; it consisted of the chief of the

Intelligence Directorate of the Supreme Command of the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and their CIA & -- what they called CIA. And we'd all get together with our wives and have a little dinner. The next time I came back they'd give me a dinner.

The last time I went over there -- which was in November or December of last year -- the same crowd came up, "We've got to have our party." "I am not involved in any kind of intelligence." They laughed and said, "We know, we know! But we have our party!"

Q: I'd say that even though you are a private citizen now you still are able, based on these connections, to provide service to the Government.

Erskine: To do what?

Q: That even though you are a private citizen now, based on these relationships on your business trips you are able to provide service to our Government.

Erskine: I don't. I have no connection whatsoever.

Q: You stay out of it completely?

Erskine: Yes.

Q: General, in the course of these interview sessions here we've covered 44 years of your career. What would you say was your most

interesting and enjoyable tour of duty, or commend?

Erskine: Enjoyable?

Q: Satisfactory -- let me put it that way.

Erskine: (Pause) It's a hard question to answer. I would say Iwo Jima, because that's where we had a chance to do what we were supposed to be preparing for, all of these years. Am And I say satisfactory of course from the viewpoint that we won the battle, but it was the result of a hell of a lot of hard work and long days and hours and months of training before you came up there, because there is no such thing as a rehearsal for a battle.

Q: (Pause) General, I found our sessions to be most interesting and a real joy. It's been a real privilege to have had the opportunity to interview you.

Erskine: Well, it's been a privilege for me to talk with you.

Q: I thank you. I think this has proved to be one of our most valuable interviews that we've had in the whole series. I think it's of considerable importance, not only to get your voice on tape, but for you to tell of what transpired through your long and valuable career. Your reputation and your career have been a real incentive to many people, and I think a lot of Erskine-trained men are in a position of prominence in the Marine Corps

today.

Erskine: I am very proud of my boys. Very proud. I realize that I set pretty high standards, but I thought that was what we were supposed to have -- the best fighting men in the world. You can't win a battle with second best. It doesn't do a damn bit of good to go out there second best.

Q: Well, on behalf of the Commandant and the Marine Corps Historical Program I want to thank you very much for giving us this time.

Erskine: It's been a pleasure. Now I am going to correct . . .

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