

Today is June 25, 2000, and I am speaking with Andy Whitco from New Kensington, Pennsylvania.

Tell me a little bit about yourself. When were you born for instance?

Mr. Whitco: I was born in Crescent, Pennsylvania, February 2, 1922.

You were still a child during the Great Depression.

Mr. Whitco: Yes

How did your family manage?

Mr. Whitco: My family did pretty well. My dad was a work-a-holic. He provided.

What was his occupation?

Mr. Whitco: He was a coal miner. He was a coal miner for over sixty years. He worked in various coal mines. He worked in Crescent, Pennsylvania, and then he moved to Nanticoke, Pennsylvania. Then he moved back to a place called Lavelle. That is near the West Virginia borderline between Washington and Ohio. That's where we were raised in a town called Lavelle.

Is this close to East Liverpool?

Mr. Whitco: No, it's this side in Pennsylvania. East Liverpool is in Ohio. There is a little town where my wife comes from called Panoya, Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia. I lived about four miles from her in a little town called Lavelle.

That name rings a distant bell. I've heard that name somewhere.

Mr. Whitco: Well down here you've heard of the medicof. They had these excavations by the Indians. They had it down there and its Miller. He was the one that owned a farm down there. He was a racetrack man.

There is one on the West Virginia side. Is that the one that you mean?

Mr. Whitco: No, Pennsylvania. It's in Washington, Pennsylvania. It's medicof, that is what it is called.

I spent some time in East Liverpool and I saw the pepper glips; those Indian markings along the Ohio River there.

Mr. Whitco: Panoya (?) is about one mile from the West Virginia border. You go through the train tunnel and you are in West Virginia.

Was your father laid off during the Great Depression?

Mr. Whitco: My father was off and on. He worked for WPA for awhile. They found out that we had money in the bank. The bank went under and we didn't have money in the bank. They wouldn't give you the money. So he worked with them for awhile and they found out he had money in the bank. So my dad said, "You give me my money back or I quit today!" They said, "Well we can't do that. It was an old country bank with small coal mines around. I'm from Lavelle; Burgettstown and Donneroo; a bunch of little coal mines there. In fact, there was one right underneath our house where we lived. We lived up on the hill about four houses up on the hill. A guy opened that coal mine there and he worked for it. He has been off and on at different coal mines. He made a good living for us. My oldest brother became of age and then he started working the coal mines.

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Mr. Whitco: I had three brothers and four sisters and three died. I didn't even know them. They died from that epidemic. They had the flu.

The flu epidemic they had back in 1918 probably.

Mr. Whitco: Yeah, they died in that and I didn't even know them.

So you were one of the younger children in the family?

Mr. Whitco: I had two sisters that were younger than me. The rest of them are older. I had three brothers; one is in Florida and one is still in Lavelle. I moved to New Kensington from Lavelle.

So you were seventeen when the war broke out in Europe in 1939. Did you have any inkling that you might be called into the service?

Mr. Whitco: None.

No idea?

Mr. Whitco: None whatsoever.

Were you working by that time?

Mr. Whitco: I worked in a creamery, I worked on the railroad, and I worked at ____ in Cleveland. I bounced back and forth at different jobs. My brother and I went to Cleveland when I was about eighteen or maybe nineteen and got a job in there and he couldn't stand to eat. So he pulled me out and went back home. When I went home I went into coal mining and after the coal mine I went into the service.

Did you and your father belong to the United Mine Workers?

Mr. Whitco: Yes we did.

Did you ever meet John Elk?

Mr. Whitco: No I never met him. I seen him but I never met him.

Did you finish high school or did you go to work right away?

Mr. Whitco: I went to work. When I was sixteen I didn't go to high school. I started working for a dairy. I worked for a dairy for maybe a year or so. Then I went on a railroad and a bus and then I went to Cleveland between that time. Then I got a job in a coal mine when I was about nineteen I think. The war broke out in 1941 and all the boys were going. I was working in the coal mine and I got drafted.

(It looks as though the tape had been turned off and started back at a different section.)

Is your background Catholic?

Mr. Whitco: Yes. Re-Catholic.

Where does the name Whitco come from?

Mr. Whitco: Our name was Vojtko. When we moved from Crescent to Lavelle where my uncle lived his kids were going to school and they couldn't understand why we were Vojtko and they were Whitco. So the teacher changed our name right there. So we became Whitco.

Is that Serbian or Croatian?

Mr. Whitco: Slovak. _____ from Czechoslovakia. My dad could speak Austrian; he could speak quite a few languages. That is how we got our name Whitco. It was supposed to be Vojtko; it's Slovak so they changed it.

A lot of times that happened at Ellis Island when people came through immigration. If the name didn't ring any bells they changed it to who knows what.

Mr. Whitco: They gave you a name.

Something that sounded English. How long were you in Washington before you volunteered for the Airborne?

Mr. Whitco: I think about May, June or July; somewhere around there. I think I was at Benning, Georgia at paratrooper school in August. I went through a five week course there and then I was transferred to the 11th Airborne at Camp McCall.

Why did you decide to volunteer for the airborne units?

Mr. Whitco: This was kind of foolish. I was 3000 miles away from home one of the boys there had vacation from Washington and New York. He was home for exactly four days and he was on the road eleven days. I said, "What the hell, I am going to get the hell out of this. I'll stay closer to home. So I volunteered for the paratroopers.

Were you entitled to higher pay, like combat pay?

Mr. Whitco: We got fifty dollars for jump pay. We got jump pay. I was a PFC; I made PFC right away. If I wouldn't have stayed with the tankers, I would have been a Corporal right away because I was a gunner. We went with them and while with them I was in the gun section; artilleries; 75 Howitzer. From there we went to Louisiana. It is water on a hillside; swamps. From there we went overseas.

Let's go back to Fort Benning. They were training people to jump at Fort Benning for the 101st, the 11th and the 82nd Airborne also?

Mr. Whitco: It was a school just for Airborne. It wasn't a specific school for this one or that one and when you graduated from there they sent you out. I went to McCall, some of the boys went to the 101st, just different outfits.

Did you look forward to your first jump out of an airplane?

Mr. Whitco: That first jump was a beautiful jump. You would have stopped. You didn't know what the hell to expect. Then the jump after that you would have worried about it because it hurts. You have blood between your legs; you had blood coming out of your shoulders from a front blast when the parachute opened and the static line. You went out that door and if you didn't have that harness on you just right you were hurt. You had blood in here you had blood on the shoulders, not running blood. It was from the force of the opening shock of when the parachute opened up. The blast, the airplane is going ninety miles an hour. When you went out there the static line was hooked into the airplane and opened your chute automatically. Well when that opened up and that blast hit it you lost everything; rings come off the fingers and stuff comes out of the pockets. If you had false teeth you would have probably lost them too.

So you were hit with that much force?

Mr. Whitco: That is how much force.

What about the fall?

Mr. Whitco: The fall was beautiful. Once the chute opened up you were superman. When you hit the ground you were the bigger superman.

How hard was the concussion when you hit the ground?

Mr. Whitco: Sometimes it would vary. If it was a calm day you came down like a feather. If it was a windy day your chute was oscillating. There was one time I came down and my chute was up here and I was on the ground. Then the chute collapse. That hurts!

Did you ever get dragged by the chute?

Mr. Whitco: No, I'm fortunate that I never did. I was pretty good at that. I was pretty good at paratrooper.

How many jumps did you make at Fort Benning?

Mr. Whitco: At Fort Benning was five jumps, graduating jumps. We were the first one to make a night jump. That is one I will never forget. I landed and I hit a barbed wire fence. I tried to fall forward and roll. I have two marks on my leg and blood was oozing out of it. That was our graduating jump; then we went to McCall. I joined the 11th Airborne.

Did you ever take a test to qualify for this?

Mr. Whitco: Not in the Army. If you went through the procedures and did well then you were a paratrooper. That was it. You went through all the training, you jumped off of a thirty five foot tower, you jumped off of a two hundred and fifty foot tower and you ate a lot of sawdust.

Well the reason I ask is because when I was doing some interviews with the 101st they were saying what an elite unit it was; how high the standards were to get in. I assume the same would be true for the 11th Airborne as well.

Mr. Whitco: I didn't take any kind of test. All I did was sign up to be a paratrooper, they send me to Benning, Georgia, I went through jump school and that was it.

They sent you down to Louisiana and from Louisiana overseas?

Mr. Whitco: We went on maneuvers in Louisiana and then from there we went overseas. We stopped in Pittsburg, California. We stayed there for I think a day and then we went under the Golden Gate Bridge and that was it. It took us twenty eight days to get over there and we were on the ocean two days lifting. The balance went out on the boat. We had ropes tied to the railing upper floors.

Were you worried about Japanese submarines?

Mr. Whitco: You know to be frank with you; I was just like a sheep being led to slaughter. You didn't worry about nothing. If they come, they come. What the hell are you going to do about it you know? You always thought well how am I going to get out of this situation if it does happen? That is the way I have always thought in life. I always

want to know now. I never wanted to get myself into a predicament where I didn't have a way to get out of it. I guess we were concerned you know; a bunch of young kids out on the ocean on ship looking for submarines or airplanes. Not that we could do anything with them.

Was it a troop ship or a civilian....

Mr. Whitco: It was an old Etlin World War I ship. It was repainted when we got on to it in Pittsburg, California. We settled and I waited until we got under the Brooklyn Bridge and I took a book and sat down against the wall and this guy says, "Hey Whitco come on let's play cards. Let's play a poker game." I told him I didn't want to play poker. He said, "Come on, deal with it." I said, "Okay." So I shut the book and tried to get up. I tried to get up. I said, "I can't get up." He looked at me and said, "What the hell do you mean you can't get up?" I said, "I can't get up." I'm trying to get up and I can't get up. The guy told me to give him my hands. He pulled and my life preserver from when I had leaned against the wall like that, all the paint came off. I was stuck to the ship and my ass had paint all over it. They looked and said, "Damn wonder you couldn't get up, they glued you there."

So the paint hadn't dried yet?

Mr. Whitco: The paint wasn't dry. It was dry to the touch but I guess they put so many damn coats on it; it covered the horseshit and everything else on the ship you know. They were looking at me and laughing like hell. I turned around and had a big spot of grey on my life preserver. But I got rid of that thing real quick and changed my pants; and then playing poker, I took all of their money. It was twelve dollars and something cents. They said they weren't asking me to play poker anymore. They got mad at me. So that is why they like to gamble.

So you were on the boat for twenty eight days?

Mr. Whitco: Twenty eight days and I lost twenty pounds.

Did you get seasick?

Mr. Whitco: Did I get seasick; twenty pounds lost. I would get my food here walk down and everything was standing up. You ate standing up. There was a port hole right there and a garbage can right there. I came through the line; I would come to the porthole put my head on the port hole and let it go. I would walk around and look at the food and couldn't eat it. I threw it in the garbage. Hershey bars were the only thing I lived on. I ate a couple of them.

Do you know how many people were on the ship? How many soldiers were there?

Mr. Whitco: I wouldn't know.

A thousand maybe?

Mr. Whitco: At least a thousand. Our whole outfit was on that ship so that was a thousand right there. Then counting the marine guards and everything else on there a couple of thousand were on that ship.

Where did you land?

Mr. Whitco: We landed in New Guinea. We were there for about four or five months doing patrol work.

Was this near Fort Worsby?

Mr. Whitco: No, we didn't go into Fort Worsby.

Do you remember the name of the town that you landed in or the spot?

Mr. Whitco: Bunow. They had all them black women over there.

Bunow, I've heard of that. In fact I think the pt boats operated near Bunow a little earlier on didn't they?

Mr. Whitco: Yeah I think they did not too far from there.

I've heard that name before.

Mr. Whitco: It was a landing strip.

How did you adapt to the heat and humidity?

Mr. Whitco: It didn't bother me too much. I adapted to the heat pretty good; a lot of the time we ran around naked. We didn't have any damn clothes on, only a pair of shorts on. Not even shorts, we had denims, that's all. We lived in tents and had mosquitoes. That is what I couldn't take was the mosquitoes. They were miserable.

Did you take anti-malaria pills?

Mr. Whitco: Yes, I took Adogrene (?) from the time I went to the Pacific to the time I came home from Japan.

You never got it right?

Mr. Whitco: When I went into Japan, I got real sick. I went to the doctors and he said, "I'm busy now; how about you going back and lie down and I will come back over at about five o'clock. I'll check you out then and see what we can do for you." At that time I was already a non-comm you know. I go back and I'm miserable. I sat down on my

bunk bed and a guy came over and gave me a bottle of sa'ke. Another guy also came over and gave me a bottle of sa'ke. I drank that damn sa'ke and I felt better. I passed out. When I woke up the doctor was over the top of me. He's looking at me and I said, "Hi doc!" He said, "How do you feel?" I said, "I feel good why?" He put the thermometer in my mouth right away. He says, "You know you haven't even got a fever. What the hell did you do?" I said, "Well this is between you and me. I don't know I must have drunk about a half a gallon of sa'ke." He looked at me and said, "I'm going to recommend that to all the boys." From then on I never would bother with it until I got home. I had a touch o fit at home. By that time they were cutting us down on the Adogrene. I got married in June and my wife looked at my clothes, we were newlyweds and she said, "How come your T-shirts are so yellow?" I looked at her and said, "What do you mean yellow?" She said, "Look at the bed sheet and pillow case, its yellow too." I said, "Well honey it must have been from that pill still working out of me." It took a long time for that thing to come out of me.

It had a funny smell to it didn't it?

Mr. Whitco: Oh yeah. When you put it in your mouth you didn't stop. You poured that water in right behind it.

What did you do when you were in Bunow in New Guinea?

Mr. Whitco: What we did in there, we didn't do much of anything. We went on patrols and we did some other maneuvers. Basically nothing. In the jungle we walked and did jungle patrols. We went up in the mountains looking for a major that had gotten lost up there. That took two days. Then we went back up there again because they found a bunch of bats up there when we were on patrol. When we went back up there the next day, they weren't there. They had migrated. We had a bunch of ammuniton so we just shot at trees.

By this time the Japanese had been cleared out of ____?

Mr. Whitco: We had one occasion with the Japanese. This poor soul, they shot the hell out of him. He done garbage, he was pathetic.

By this time the Japanese were having trouble feeding and supplying their troops.

Mr. Whitco: Yeah, they were so scattered that there was no officer or anything to take care of them and they needed an officer to take care of them because they couldn't afford to on their own. It was pathetic. I didn't like that part.

You told me you went in; in January of 1943 and when did you arrive in New Guinea in 1943?

Mr. Whitco: I think it was around September; August or September somewhere around there.

How long did you stay in New Guinea?

Mr. Whitco: It was about four or five months that we stayed in New Guinea. We went to school. They would send us to jump school; when we got over there we were supposed to jump. Our sergeants refused to jump.

Why?

Mr. Whitco: They said they were paratroopers already; they don't have to jump no more. The sergeants and the non-comms didn't want to jump so said, "That's fine, and this PFC didn't want to jump either." They busted them and I kept my regular rank.

Where did you go after New Guinea?

Mr. Whitco: New Guinea that is where we went to Lousan (?). We landed on Lousan. That is where we made the first combat jump on T_____ Ridge. They missed the jump point by three thousand yards. We were supposed to jump on top of the ridge; but they jumped us down in the valley. We had a seventy five to put together and pull them up on the ridge. Every fifty feet there would be a gully. You would have to take them apart, carry them piece by piece, and put them together again until we got to the top of the ridge. There was a road up there.

This was part of Macarthur's recon quest to the Philippines?

Mr. Whitco: Yeah.

What role was the 11th Airborne expected to play in these operations?

Mr. Whitco: I don't know. I guess to fight the Japanese, that's all.

Did you have any sense strategically of what you were supposed to do?

Mr. Whitco: I couldn't tell you. Our mission was to jump on the Carigador (?). We didn't take Carigador. We were fighting like ground troops. We were the advanced ground troops. We had 75's and we encountered the Japanese and that was it. We went to Manila, we stayed there. We did a lot of patrol work. I did a lot of patrol work in there. We were always up in the damn mountains; which made us mad. We were in artillery and we were doing patrol. We lost a couple of the guys out there on patrol. Other than that it was very boring. In fact, when I came back to rest camp I volunteered to be a navy deep sea diver. They wouldn't let me go and then I wanted to be a glider pilot and they wouldn't let me go. They said, "You're not leaving this outfit until I leave this outfit."

Let me go back to your drop in the Philippines. I think I wrote the name in here, Takliban?

Mr. Whitco: Takloban.

But you are talking about Lousan right?

Mr. Whitco: Lousan was our first, and then we moved to Latie (?). We were supposed to jump there but the weather was so bad so all I did was aerial re-supply work for the infantry who were up in the mountains.

Did you do an amphibious landing on Latie?

Mr. Whitco: Yes.

Was that your first operation?

Mr. Whitco: Yes that was my first operation.

Did you meet any opposition on the beach?

Mr. Whitco: No we didn't. After we were there for awhile, the Japanese did send some paratroopers in. They didn't get very far. That was it. It was just a bloody mess there.

Did you land with landing craft or did you jump.

Mr. Whitco: Yes, with landing craft off the boat. We came up on the beach just like MacArthur came up.

Did you ever see MacArthur?

Mr. Whitco: I was right there when he landed.

Did you see the photographer taking the famous picture?

Mr. Whitco: I wasn't in the picture but I was there laughing.

I heard a story one time that he made sure that it was done a couple of times so that the photographer got it right.

Mr. Whitco: I don't know, it wasn't that interesting to us guys. We seen him land and then we took off; we had chores to do and then we walked away. "Yes, that is MacArthur." He walked up with his pipe; he walked up just like King Tut.

He was already famous for his...arrogance? Is that the right word?

Mr. Whitco: That is a good word. He was arrogant. He walked up there like he was strutting.

When did you first see action in the Philippines?

Mr. Whitco: That was in Lousan. We ran into an ambush on the hillside. I was with the artillery forward observation which is an infantry outfit. We got ambushed on this hillside. I didn't even get to shoot the gun. I just carried a radio pack. We lost a couple of infantry boys. I was back farther and the Lieutenant hollered for a radio. I had a young kid in front of me and I don't know who the heck he was. The kid says, "I am not going up there." I looked at him, I put a shell in my gun and I said, "You're going up there or you are not going to go nowhere." That kid took off and went up there and I went up there. I got a citation for that and I don't know why. We called in for artillery. So artillery was brought in and the Japanese had left by then. So we took our dead back.

How many casualties were there in this encounter?

Mr. Whitco: Two of them; one had blood everywhere. That was it. We came back and swore we would never go out with the infantry again. We were supposed to go out with a company of infantry. There were eight of us radio men forward observers and there were twelve infantry men. We couldn't do anything on the side of a mountain. If the Japanese had any brains at all, they could have wiped us all off. All they had to do was stay on the other side. That is where we were all watching; the other side of the hill. The guys up front were watching forward. I said, "Keep your eyes on that hillside over there." That's what we were doing was watching the hillside. But they left. They weren't very smart fighters.

Although they were tough fighters from what everyone says.

Mr. Whitco: They were suicide fighters.

Exactly. Tenacious, fight to the bitter end.

Mr. Whitco: Yeah, they were suicide fighters. If I tell you to go over there and hit your head on that tree, you go over there and hit your head on the tree. They were fighters that in numbers they were great. But by themselves they ran. They were good people. They were people that didn't want to fight. They were people that had families. They gave me the wallet of one of them. They were looking at his wallet and there was his mother, father, his wife and three children.

How do you feel?

Mr. Whitco: _____.

Of course that is the cost of it. They didn't ask to be over there either.

Mr. Whitco: Pardon?

They didn't ask to be sent over there either.

Mr. Whitco: I didn't either.

And you didn't either. You want me to turn this off for a minute?

Mr. Whitco: Okay.

(Tape was turned off briefly)

Mr. Whitco: We get into Japan and these people said, "Why did we bomb Tokyo?" We looked at them and said, "What do you mean why did we bomb Tokyo? Why did you bomb Pearl Harbor?" "What is Pearl Harbor?" They didn't know what the hell was going on. We went to the northern part of Japan. We were disarming the troops up there, not the troops but the people sticking their swords and knives off of them. Some of them turned their guns in. We put it on the ship and go dump it in the ocean. They were beautiful people. Every morning they would get up and start for the mountains up in the rice fields in the morning and in the nighttime they would come back. They would do your laundry for you. We had a family there in Akita and they wanted meat. They needed meat so we got rations. They would do the laundry for meat. How much meat do we get? So we turned around and ran out of meat. Our guys would take the label off of them and say, "Meat." Well they did one time and they didn't do laundry any more. With me I had this one family doing mine and I said, "No more meat, please, no more meat." They said, "Okay, okay." They still did my laundry. The guys just wouldn't understand why they were doing my laundry. "How come they are doing your laundry and want do mine?" I said, "Have you ever tried being honest with them?" They just looked at me. "Have you ever tried being honest with them?" I don't give them anything and tell them its meat. They were lovely people.

So let me back up a little bit. After fighting in the mountains were you in Manila also; you said you were outside Manila?

Mr. Whitco: I was outside Manila. I didn't go into Manila. I went to Clarks (?) Territory to meet some guys in Saipan and they had typhoon weather so I had to come back. I didn't see too much of Manila. We had troops that did. The 511th was there into it.

You said you were or you saw the surrender at Carigador?

Mr. Whitco: I was involved....we was right across from Carigador at a little town called Marigandi (?). That was a fight. We shot all night and I had blisters all over my hands and fist from shooting that 75. I almost lost a finger because I couldn't push it in with my fist anymore so I started slipping the shells in. They caught on the edge and I threw blood all over everybody. They would all look and ask, "Who the hell got shot?" I said, "Shut up and keep shooting!" I didn't even take a Purple Heart for it. My brother over in England got beat the hell out of him. He got shot through the back. I am going to go

home and say I think this finger here. That was points I lost. It doesn't pay to be honest in this world.

So when did you land in Japan?

Mr. Whitco: We were in Okinawa when the planes went over. They had the green crosses on it. They went over and when they came back we loaded in to civilian planes. They had civilian planes there. They told me to take my gun crew up there. I'm in the first window and he comes up and looks in the airplane. I said, "Lieutenant this isn't our airplane." He said, "What do you mean Whitco?" I said, "Its got nice seats in it." We were filthy dirty. He said, "Get in there anyway." We went in and landed in the Sugi strip. What we seen in the Sugi I tell you what, thank God for children. If he wouldn't have dropped that bomb I would have been buried over there. They had that airstrip, you could walk from one end of that airstrip underground clear across and there was nothing but machine shops, living quarters, food, medical supplies, everything.

So in other words this was Japanese preparation for the invasion.

Mr. Whitco: That's right it was. It was loaded. They had guns and ammunition. I had brought four boxes of _____ that I was going to bring home with me. We went into Akita from Tokyo. We went into Akita and we were occupying troops up there. We had a big fire up there. That is where we lost four guys. I went out a second story window in a pair of shorts in December. I busted my foot.

Was it an accidental fire?

Mr. Whitco: Yes. They had a recreation room and they had all these parachutes hanging. We had oil stove. Something happened to the oil stove. It blew up. There were five wings of barracks one way and one long one another way. I don't know what woke me up and you can verify with my wife that I don't get up unless something hits me. I wake up I can't see and I'm starting to cough. I went over to the door and opened the door and flames came in. I hollered, "You can't get out here." When I hollered that I heard a crash. The guy went straight out the damn window. I went back to the window and opened it. I put my foot over onto the ledge between the second floor. I was throwing the other foot and this guy dropped between my arms. We both went down. When we went down I hit that thing that trough on the bottom for rainwater. I don't know where the hell he went. He went one way and I went the other. I'm running down the main barracks hallway and I'm limping like hell. I thought, "Damn it what the hell did I do?" I seen a pair of jump boots so I grabbed them and put them on. They were both left footed. So now I am limping more. I came outside with nothing on and the chief comes over and says, "Are you hurt soldier?" I said, "Yea I hurt my leg." So I got in the jeep and they took me to the hospital. I'm lying on the bed, looking and thinking, "What the hell?" So I kicked the damn shoe off. The foot felt better. This doctor comes over and starts working on me and they brought this poor kid in. He was burnt. I told the doc to go look at him and that I was alright. He said, "Well what should I do?" I said, "You're a doctor aren't you?" He said, "Yea but I just got my degree." I said, "Well give him a shot of morphine." He gave him

a shot or morphine and that kid is screaming. The doctor treated my wound up and I says, "Give him another shot doc!" He gives him another shot. I could see his reactions were weakening. He gets my foot all bandaged up and said, "Should I give him another shot?" I said, "You better not, you'll kill him. I got a blanket there and a pair of Japanese slippers. The next day I am going home to Tokyo. ____ gets on the train and we ride all the way to Tokyo. It was a hundred and something miles down there. We get there and all of these guys come in to replace us. There looking at us and I said, "Buddy you are going to a hell hole up there. The Japanese are all rebelling." He was a rookie. I know what a rookie looks like because I was one. I laughed like hell. I said, "No, its okay up there." I go to the quartermaster because I need clothes. I got a pair of shorts on and no shoes and a blanket. I go in to the quartermaster and said I needed a complete outfit. He asked, "Well where is your requisition at?" I said, "Requisition; everything we owned burned up in northern Japan. I don't even have an officer with me." He said, "Well I can't do anything for you." I said, "Buddy give me a set of GI clothes, I'm an American soldier and I am entitled to it. I lost everything in the fire and you will probably hear about it tomorrow. It will be in the paper." He said, "I'm sorry!" I reached over the top of that counter and I pulled him over and I had my fist back. I was going to hit that son of a right in the mouth. Somebody grabbed my arm in the back and said, "Hold it soldier!" I looked and there was this big major. I said, "Never mind!" He said, "Sergeant give this soldier what he wants. Full dress." He said, "Sorry sir I have to have a requisition." He said, "Soldier, he was going to hit you in the mouth. I will beat the shit out of you. Now give it to him! I'm not signing for it either!" He fit me out. Everything fit to a tee. So when I came home that is all I came home with. I lost about five hundred dollars in the fire and lost a lot of good souvenirs.

What was your impression of the Japanese when you first landed there? Did you arrive in late August? It must have been September sometimes.

Mr. Whitco: About September.

What was your impression of the Japanese civilians?

Mr. Whitco: Like I said, I thought they were nice people. There was this one guy I talked to and you didn't have much to do with the civilian people because you had patrol work and you were doing this and that. They would bow to you and you didn't understand them you know. You try to lip talk and sign language. That is the only one I talked to and he didn't know nothing except why did we attack Tokyo.

Did you find anyone that spoke English?

Mr. Whitco: No.

Did you meet any resistance, did you encounter any...

Mr. Whitco: In Tokyo, no. They dropped that bomb and I didn't even get to see that. They wouldn't even let us go down there.

You mean Haroshma and Nagasaki(?)

Mr. Whitco: Yea Haroshma and Nagasaki. We were there then. After that they had taken us up north. We had gotten truckloads of private pistols, swords, everything. They gave it up willingly. One mile out of town there was an oil refinery. We blasted the shit out of it and that was it. So we came back. They wanted to keep me there. I said, "No you are not, I am going home."

How many people were in your unit when you were doing the occupation duty in northern Japan?

Mr. Whitco: We consisted of a battery. There were five guns with ten men to a gun. Then you had headquarters. Then you had reconnaissance. This was fifty something years ago. In C Battery we had ninety-six men.

Where did you stay when you were there?

Mr. Whitco: In barracks. It was like a gymnasium in a school combined. They trained in there. The floor where they did all their training was on springs. When you walked across it you got seasick.

Why was it on springs?

Mr. Whitco: I don't know. I asked if the floor was shaking. But we got used to it. I was in an earthquake in New Guinea, a tremor. We were walking down the street and everything got hazy.

How many combat jumps did you make altogether?

Mr. Whitco: Two. Two of them in Lousan and northern Lousan.

You met resistance both times right?

Mr. Whitco: No!

Well you told me they dropped you on the wrong side of the ridge and then you met resistance right?

Mr. Whitco: No, when they dropped us on the wrong side of the ridge off our jump course, the Philippino guerillas were there already. When I come down I landed and don't you know that chute landed right over the top of me. I had to cut my way out. I came out with a knife and there was this guy on a horse. When I go for my gun he says, "Hold it, hold it, I'm a friend, I'm a friend." I'm looking at him you know. Well my gun is strapped to me. I had the knife underneath it and I was going to cut the strap. He says, "Hold it, hold it, I am here to help you."

He said it in English of course!

Mr. Whitco: Yes, he said it in English. He had the drop on me and I didn't have a prayer. I couldn't have thrown a knife into him. They were real nice. We took our guns and put them together. We got them all assembled. You moved a short distance and another damn ridge came up. We kept taking them apart and by the time we got to that ridge, the Japanese could have come in and slapped our faces. We couldn't do anything. Where I went most of my fighting was on damn patrol. That is where I met most of my fighting.

They would just send you out into the jungle?

Mr. Whitco: We had officers there that were combat happy. I had more experience than most guys with basic training. I had basic training _____. Me and this ____; he was from another outfit to. We were always on patrol. We went on patrol this one time and it was getting dark. We were the head honchos; C Battery. I said to the Captain, "We better start digging in, it's getting dark and we are not supposed to be moving in the dark." He said, "Yeah Whitco I know that. I don't know what the hell the major is doing." So we finally stopped and we treated back. We seen some foxholes that the Americans or someone must have dug so we came back to them. So we're looking at the foxhole thinking how we are not getting in there because what if it was booby trapped by the Japanese. So we stick a knife in there and moved it around to make sure nothing went off. Then all hell broke loose. I said, "What the hell is going on?" There was a beautiful moon out. The Captain comes up and says, "Hey Whitco go down to headquarters battery and see what the hell is going on." I says, "Captain, _____. I run down from tree to tree hollering, "C Battery, C Battery don't shoot, C Battery." I get to one of the guys down there and I said, "What the hell is going on?" He said, "The Japanese dropped artillery on us." I said, "Where is the officer at?" I said, "Captain Hayes wants to know if you need any help down here." He says, "Hell no, we don't know what is going on ourselves." A couple of guys got shot up. We shot a couple of American Philipinos up because the Philipinos opened fire on us because they thought we were the Japanese.

So it was just mistaken identity?

Mr. Whitco: Mistaken identity. We called in for artillery and we beat the shit out of the Philipinos. That major, I don't know if he got court-martialed up but he wasn't a major anymore. We came back with a couple of guys shot up. One guy got his ____ shot. _____. He said I'm going home. I said, "Yes you are, you're going home." We had ambushed over there and had caught the Japanese off guard and this kid comes up there and we got reinforcement. We are all looking around wondering what the hell is going on. Bullets are flying here and there every once in awhile. He said, "I'm going home." His sister was a nun. _____ I don't think he was gone ten minutes when they were dragging him out. We start moving in and there was this Jap laying out in the middle _____. I thought I seen him move so I turned around and shot him one shot. He rose up. I emptied thirteen rounds out of my cartridge. When I came out the major says, "Who the hell has the automatic?" I looked at him and I said, "Me sir!" He said _____."

I looked at him and I said, "That's how fast I can shoot it." There I didn't feel bad. It was his life or...I probably did him a favor because he was wounded anyway. He was beaten up pretty bad. I lost all of that, a nice big sword and that little dagger is probably worth some money if I would have gotten it home. It had all pearls on it.

It got lost in the fire.

Mr. Whitco: It wasn't meant to be. I got home.

That is a very interesting philosophy though to say it wasn't meant to be.

Mr. Whitco: The funny part of it was, the Navy was stealing everything off of us. So I took this sword and took all the jewelry off of it; the mother of pearls and stuff like that. I just left a wooden _____ and had a sword in it. I wrapped that up and sent it home. When I came home my brother says, "Well where is the rest of the stuff." I said, "In the fire in Japan." It was a beautiful thing.

Have you ever been back to the Far East since World War II?

Mr. Whitco: No, but I would have liked to have gone back. They didn't have the reunions and when they started having them we weren't in the position to go. I was raising a family, I had six kids. I was in a position to go but my wife was like, "I don't know anybody." I said, "What the hell do you give a shit if you don't know anybody. It's a vacation." I fought with her and she finally agreed and she went to the first one. We had our motor home. We went to Oklahoma, Portland, Georgia, Omaha, Nebraska and Tennessee.

That concludes the interview.