

Warren Noland

Army Air Corp

World War II

What is your full name and when were you born?

Mr. Noland: Warren Oswald Noland.

What is your date of birth?

Mr. Noland: December 30, 1916.

Were you born here in Dickson County?

Mr. Noland: No, I was born in White County, Indiana.

Do you have any recollections of the Great Depression?

Mr. Noland: Oh yes, I lived through it. I went to high school through it.

Did you have a job during that time?

Mr. Noland: We were on the farm. We had a job alright. We struggled along.

That is several jobs there. That is how your family got by was by operating a farm?

Mr. Noland: Yes, we were farmers; lived on the next farm down.

When you were growing up at that time did you ever have any perceptions of the problems that they were having with Germany or Japan?

Mr. Noland: I wasn't as aware of it as I should have been. I thought I was seeing the news reels and reading the magazines but I didn't realize that we were in that kind of trouble.

Did your family have a radio?

Mr. Noland: Yes, we were listening to the radio and the news reels would be at the movies.

So that is how you got most of your news was by radio? How much of that news did you get by word of mouth or newspapers?

Mr. Noland: We had the newspaper but I wasn't into it much. I didn't read it very much.

When you saw these news reels and heard it on the radio, what was your reaction?

Mr. Noland: Well I knew that we had soldiers over fighting and I wondered if it would happen to me one day. Of course I had been drafted already. I mean I had registered for the draft. I was subject to it. I was attempting to leave the farm and I had gone to Memphis and gotten a job.

What kind of job was that?

Mr. Noland: I was working in an International Harvester company's parts. It was a parts distributing warehouse. I was doing that at the time of Pearl Harbor.

So you remember hearing the news of Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Noland: Yes.

Were you working at that time?

Mr. Noland: I was working at that time and was called up for examination within just a very, very few days after the President's announcement.

So it was no great thought; you knew at that point that you were going to be in the service?

Mr. Noland: Oh yes, I knew that I would probably go to the service.

Did you enlist first?

Mr. Noland: No, I waited for the draft.

Did you have any preference about the branch of service that you would be in?

Mr. Noland: I didn't think that I had a choice. I thought I would be in the Army. But when I went for the examination, for induction rather, down at Fort Oglethorpe, they put us through all these test and I was assigned to the Army Air Corp.

So how did you do on your test? Evidently you did pretty well.

Mr. Noland: I did well enough to do that.

The Army Air Corp? You said that your induction point was at Fort Oglethorpe, is that where you went through basic training too?

Mr. Noland: I went from there to Kiesler Field in Biloxi, Mississippi.

Do you remember how long your basic training was?

Mr. Noland: It was a hurried 8 weeks.

Oh that is fast.

Mr. Noland: Then I was ready to go to a specialty school.

What kind of specialty school did you go to?

Mr. Noland: I went to the Army clerical school in Fort Logan, Colorado. We were there 8 weeks more. It might have been a little longer, I have forgotten the exact time.

Was that accelerated training as well?

Mr. Noland: Yes, it was.

That is pretty fast.

Mr. Noland: Yes.

When were you sent overseas?

Mr. Noland: Early in November of 1942.

Where did you go?

Mr. Noland: We went to New Caledonia first. We left from Camp Stoneman, California. I spent a good long while there. I spent two Christmas' in New Caledonia.

Did you ever have any contact with people back home through letters?

Mr. Noland: Yes, letters always, but occasional letters. But of course I didn't get a furlough or a weekend off or anything like that. We were right in the midst of it. We were held up from leaving California until the Battle of the Guadal Canal was finished. The Japanese stopped there.

Did you hear any news from the battle at Guadal Canal while you were at Camp Stoneman?

Mr. Noland: We didn't then know where we were going, but we found out later that that was what held us up 30 days.

I assume you went over there by ship?

Mr. Noland: Yes. We were in a convoy of about 7 ships.

What were the living conditions like while you were on ship?

Mr. Noland: I guess it was alright. It was a troop ship and we were stacked pretty high. We had two meals a day.

Just two meals?

Mr. Noland: Two meals a day and we had restrictions on when we could get out on the deck. Of course people who smoked couldn't smoke where that would show out like a light so it was completely dark at night.

Did you ever see any of the other ships close to you or were they far enough away?

Mr. Noland: They were close enough that we could see them but we didn't directly contact any of them. We watched the Navy ships circle at dawn and dusk. We watched the amphibious

planes that circled at dawn and dusk. They would land in the water and would be lifted by hoist back to their ship. It wasn't a carrier.

Was there anything to do on ship to occupy your time?

Mr. Noland: No. There were the regular duties; you had KP and cleaning and that kind of thing. I don't remember that there was any training or exercising but we had a good bit of freedom.

There on the ship?

Mr. Noland: Yes.

Do you remember how long the trip lasted?

Mr. Noland: Yes, it lasted 19 days.

Goodness gracious! You landed at New Caledonia?

Mr. Noland: Yes, New Caledonia, Noumea, which is the main city.

What were your impressions when you first got there?

Mr. Noland: I had never been on the water before. It was interesting; very interesting. Of course the first night we spent was kind of unusual. They had driven us in about 30 miles to a camp that had already been located for us; a place for us to camp. We had no tents or anything at that time. We had those two man tents. All I had was a shelter half and he had a shelter half. We set those up and dug a trench around. It rained; it rained and our little ditches didn't do a thing and so we got up and stood under a big tent where we had our barracks bags and things stored and spent the night. After that we had tents that held several men. I forget how many. I think it was eight.

Did you ever upgrade to any more kind of permanent structure?

Mr. Noland: Yes, they shipped to us at that location some huts, plywood huts, that were the same size. They were very comfortable and had a nice wood floor and had windows that closed and screens. Those were real nice. We used them the rest of the time. We weren't in the tents very long.

Did they come through that area and build an air field?

Mr. Noland: There was one built but we didn't have; it was just a landing place mostly. There wasn't any big operation at that location. I guess a good many planes were flown in because our job was to maintain those planes. We were an Air Depot group. We had a supply squadron, a Headquarters, Headquarters Squadron and a repair Squadron. I was in the supply squadron. Our job was to obtain the parts, store them and issue them. The repair squadron did overhauls. They were equipped to do major overhauls on those warplanes.

Did they do those quite often?

Mr. Noland: It was a constant thing. In the particular work that I did, I didn't see much of it. We had our warehouses located in that area. I worked directly with the supply officer. We ordered the parts and they came in. We didn't see the parts and we didn't stock them or handle them. But we did the paperwork.

So your clerical training served you well then?

Mr. Noland: Yes.

Were these planes that were landing there, were they bombers or fighters that had been; that had to make emergency landings?

Mr. Noland: Yes, they had been in combat. There were both fighter planes and the bombers; they both came in there.

What were the other daily activities? Did you ever have any contact with the other civilians there?

Mr. Noland: The native population was mixed in color. They were French people. I think that the island was a French island. The currency there was French. We were paid in American money though, of course and they wanted it. That was worth more than their money. You had to have a whole basket full of their money to buy anything.

Was it actual currency or was it script; military script?

Mr. Noland: Theirs?

What you were paid?

Mr. Noland: We were paid in dollars; real money.

You got to see those people pretty often?

Mr. Noland: We saw them occasionally.

If we happened to go to town or we could go to a restaurant or something, we would see them and be in contact with them. Of course the natives were all around; the poor. They lived in huts. That had been a penal colony at one time so there were a lot of people who had been in jail. They settled there and reproduced and there were lots of those poor people.

Those were their descendants?

Mr. Noland: Yes. The land apparently was owned by a few richer people.

Did you ever hear anything about the Japanese while you were there or that they were going to attack where you were?

Mr. Noland: We carried our rifles everywhere that we went. We took them everywhere. There weren't too many restrictions except that we couldn't wear anything shiny that might reflect. They didn't say too much about walking around.

Did you ever hear anything about what was going on say in the Philippines or how the Japanese soldiers treated American prisoners or anything of that nature?

Mr. Noland: We didn't at that island; we didn't hear much. After we moved on we got to hearing a whole lot more.

Where did you move to?

Mr. Noland: The battle changed location somewhat. Our organization was serving the 13th Air Corp, Air Force. After we moved, we thought we were going to Herlandia, New Guinea. They sent a detachment of us and we spent a month there. It was just pure mud. It rained all the time. They decided that that wasn't the place so they moved us up to a little island called Moratie in the Schouten Islands. I think I have got the wrong group but it was at Moratie and it was still held by the Japanese. We were on the edge. There was a little tiny airport that our people had made, but we could hear the shooting at night all the time at that place. We were very aware of the Japanese at that time. When we stood guard, we had to keep our backs to a tree and really be watchful because they were infiltrating at night and doing dirt. They were supposedly being held to a perimeter by the Infantry. We stayed there and were clearing land for this depot and then they decided that that was too dangerous. They moved us again to Biak. It's the one that is in the Schouten group. It was about 2 degrees north of the equator. We had been south before. We were at that location until the end of the war at Biak. We had a big headquarters there; a big building. It was rustic and all that but it was big. They had a good airport and any plane even the big new ones could land there and did come in for repair.

Now on that one island did you ever have any personal experience with the Japanese trying to infiltrate the perimeter there?

Mr. Noland: I didn't; not myself. Two of the fellows just went out looking around one time and ran into a Japanese and shot him. We all thought it was kind of awful that they did; but they shot him. Somebody went back the next day and he had been covered with a flag and they took that flag and brought it home for a souvenir. I wouldn't have wanted it, but they did.

What was your opinion of General MacArthur? I imagine you got to hear a lot about him over there.

Mr. Noland: Oh yes. We thought highly of him. Since I have been home, somebody asked me that same question of what I thought of General MacArthur. Well to me he was a hero. To a lot

of people he wasn't; but to me he was. This person gave me a tape of the last speech he made to West Point. It was a wonderful speech.

It's a great speech. I have heard that.

Mr. Noland: It was after he had been dismissed from his job in Japan.

Did any of the other men who you served with harbor any ill feelings at MacArthur for leaving the Philippines?

Mr. Noland: No, not that I know of. We didn't hear that at all.

Where were you when you got the news of the Japanese surrendering?

Mr. Noland: We were at Biak. We had been working right up to the time and immediately things changed. That particular day everybody was just like at a funeral. We thought a lot of the President too. We had a ceremony and we dressed up the best we could. Our clothes were getting kind of old and faded by then. We had a retreat ceremony on the airfield. We didn't work any to speak of and after that everything we did had to do with closing down; shipping things back and shipping people back. Our group went to Japan as part of the occupation troops. I had a brother-in-law who had joined our organization while we were still in Herlandia, New Guinea. He was a replacement so he didn't have a choice. But the rest of us, anybody who had enough points and everything could go home. Naturally, most of us chose to do that.

Sure, so you didn't do any occupation duty in Japan?

Mr. Noland: No.

How many points did you have to have?

Mr. Noland: I don't know. I don't remember.

Obviously you had more points than some of the new guys.

Mr. Noland: I could have gone twice.

Do you remember what you were doing when you heard the news that the Japanese surrendered?

Mr. Noland: No, I don't. The newsletter that we got was a legal sized sheet and the whole thing said, "Japan surrenders!" I still have that.

Is that right?

Mr. Noland: Yes.

So how long was it before you got home?

Mr. Noland: We got to leave there right away and went to Leighty in the Philippines to await a ship. We were flown. Everywhere we went over there after we got there we were flown from here to there. They flew us over to Leighty and we just camped and waited in a casual camp until they got a load for us or time for us and we came back.

When you were in the casual camp was it as the name implies; casual? Did you have any duties you had to pull?

Mr. Noland: We didn't really have any because they had native people doing the KP work and everything like that and we were just there.

Kind of hanging out on the beach?

Mr. Noland: Uh-huh! It wasn't a beach, we were on sand; it was all sand there. The natives lived all around and it was in a coconut grove. We just spent the time. It was a long 39 days to wait when we were trying to go home; 39.

I imagine it probably drove you crazy.

Mr. Noland: We started home on this personnel auxiliary which was a Navy transport ship. It broke down in Pearl Harbor and we had to change ships. I was so disgusted that I didn't even get off. I'm ashamed to say it but I didn't get off. I could have had a night; you know a night of just looking around. But I stayed on the ship. We transferred to a warship; a battleship. It was the Arkansas; the battleship Arkansas.

What did you think of that compared to the other ships you had been on?

Mr. Noland: It was strange but it was a thrill really.

A little bit more room?

Mr. Noland: It was so big. It had a wooden deck and it was old. You may have seen the one in Alabama; Mobile. It's similar to that. My bed was four flights down in one of those big gun turrets; a big round thing with beds all around it. They had people sleeping everywhere.

Did you get to go up on deck more?

Mr. Noland: Yes, we could go up. We could wonder all around on it. The whole trip home took 23 days.

It was a little bit faster then. Well no actually...

Mr. Noland: It took longer than it did for us to go over. The first ship was a merchant marine; the one we went over on but we came back on a Navy auxiliary and then on a battleship.

So you were treated quite a bit differently on a battleship than you were on the merchant marine ship?

Mr. Noland: Yes.

Was the food a lot better on a battleship?

Mr. Noland: We had good food. One interesting thing to me, at the time of the war, it was still segregated; you know blacks and whites. It happened about the end of the war that that was ended. The Navy had already done it.

Desegregated?

Mr. Noland: Yes, had already desegregated and they did it before the order came. We were segregated by rank that way on the ship. Everybody in the compartment that I was in was either a Tech Sergeant or a Master Sergeant. There was a black man above me, below me, over here, over here; any way I could reach there was a black man and that was new to me. It was alright but it was new.

It didn't bother you any though did it?

Mr. Noland: Oh no, it didn't bother me at all.

Had you ever seen any black people before you went in the service?

Mr. Noland: Oh yes, we had seen them around here. But you know we had been taught different. I had no problem with it. In fact, while we were overseas our outfit, as I said, was all white. We had a company of black people that did the ordinance work. As supply we didn't have anything to do with the fuel or the ordinance. They did that. There was a black man that I befriended. He came over every Sunday and borrowed my typewriter. He worked in an orderly room and he didn't have a typewriter. Can you imagine? I loaned him that. I thought, "It's a wonder I didn't get in trouble over it." But I never did. He always brought it back. He was a real sharp young fellow.

Did you ever keep in contact with him afterward?

Mr. Noland: No, I didn't keep in contact with him.

You said you were with a bunch of Technical Sergeants and Master Sergeants; you must have gone up in rank pretty quick.

Mr. Noland: I was a Tech Sergeant.

What is that?

Mr. Noland: You've got two up and three down. It was sixth to the top grade.

Well you went up in rank pretty quick.

Mr. Noland: I got that fairly early because of the work I was doing. I was more or less like the Secretary to the supply officer.

What was he? What was his rank?

Mr. Noland: He was a Captain.

Well it sounds like he took care of you.

Mr. Noland: He was good.

So you liked him an awful lot?

Mr. Noland: Oh yes. I thought the world of him. I had more than one; I had two.

Did you like both of them?

Mr. Noland: I liked both of them. The first one I had watched go up in rank. I had marched with him and everything as a Private and he got direct field commission. He was sharp; real sharp. He was a Major the last time I heard of him.

How long after you got home before you were discharged?

Mr. Noland: I was discharged before I came home. We landed in San Francisco just before Christmas and had Christmas there. We were there maybe a couple of weeks. Then we were separated and sent to this camp where we would be discharged. I went to Camp Chaffee, Arkansas; near Little Rock. It was just a train ride from San Francisco to Camp Chaffee.

That added a few days right there if you go by train.

Mr. Noland: I don't remember how long it took. It was faster than going out, I know that.

You caught the train out of Camp Chaffee home?

Mr. Noland: From there I took a train to Memphis. I took a bus from there to Dickson.

Was there any kind of reception for you in Dickson?

Mr. Noland: Oh no.

Nobody met you at the bus stop?

Mr. Noland: Nobody met me. I got there about 5 o'clock. I think I am telling you wrong, I believe I came on a train from Memphis. I came on a train from Memphis but I had separated at Memphis from the friend that I was traveling with. He went to Brownsville, Tennessee, and I

came to Dickson, Tennessee. I took the train to Dickson. A relative, I went to his house and he brought me home.

Did you have any trouble finding a job after you got back?

Mr. Noland: No, I thought I was going to farm. I had bought this place while I was in the service. I could have gone back to the company I was with in Memphis but I chose not to. I have often wondered if maybe I should have. I bought the place and I attempted to farm it.

So you have been farming from that point on?

Mr. Noland: I part-time farmed because I wasn't doing very well to tell you the truth. I went to work for a boat company in Dickson and worked 21 years; 21 years there and in Nashville too and then retired. I was old enough to start with my Social Security but I took a part-time job with a funeral home and worked 16 years there.

I see where Jimmy gets it from now.

Mr. Noland: Yeah!

Have I left anything out or is there anything else you would like to tell me about dealing with those experiences?

Mr. Noland: I consider that I was very fortunate not to have been placed in more danger than I was. I earned one campaign star when we were in Moratie. It was called the New Guinea Campaign. To me the rest of it was quite a good experience and travel that I wouldn't have got to do without it. It did take nearly four years. I was overseas 38 months.

Do you ever look back on those times and think, "Man, what an experience?" and being a fairly young man?

Mr. Noland: Oh yes. I think about it all the time. I wrote it up in just about what I told you. Our church was going to do something together but the person that was leading it didn't follow through with it. So we didn't do it. But I have that to give to the children.

Good! Well they would be really interested in seeing that I'm sure. Well Mr. Noland, thanks a lot for talking to me. I've enjoyed it.

Mr. Noland: I probably talked too much.

No!

(TAPE ENDS)