

Cobb: Before the war, and the war had already been going in Europe for two or three years with the Russians and the Germans and so forth before any New England National Guard came in. What I did as an engineer officer, I was always an engineer officer, not an infantryman or artillery man or that. And as a result of that, I was lucky, I didn't get shot at as much as some of the other ones did. But and one of the things you just mentioned that you were interested in was first, training with our units when we went first into Jacksonville and did training in that area for quite a period of time. And one of the things that I was ordered to do along with two or three other officers was to go, and this is part of the story that you referred to. We was ordered to go into Fort Belvoir Virginia which was one of the main posts in our army for engineers. I was ordered to go into there for just about a month in order to they called it a refresher type of thing to get you better acquainted. And actually stayed there at Fort Belvoir for of I guess a month or some period. And just normal training of army units at that time. And then we ordered to go from Fort Belvoir to return to where we were stationed in Florida. And during that time we were going on a ship from where we were on one of the islands that was headed toward New Jersey. All of these islands were, I can't remember the names of all of them but in the area Manilla was I spent more time in that area during the war. And I have to stop for a minute. I had the incentive to stay in the armies what I had in mind and become a regular you know as a career. And I did for a while before even the war in the Philippines. And then I refer to the Philippines so often because at that time that are was under part of it was under a navy admiral and but most of it a lot of it the main island was Doug MacArthur's outfit. In fact I saw him one time in Manilla he had been coming on part of the island going up to headquarters or something. And I saw MacArthur which was something to see. And but in particular part of it was the only thing I saw of him was his rear end going to where he was and I remember that part of it. He didn't stop to say hello to me or anything. But we did go into the area firing and so forth continued for three and a half years. And what we did was blew up bridges floating bridges, built airfield facilities and in my unit primary obligation was to help our own engineers infantry and all of that. In support we built airfields with heavy equipment and we had all kind of facilities primarily with the units. And it's hard to describe all of them I wish I had some more but I don't have it right now. But after the war in fact this is another interesting part of the war. The fighting was still going on in New Georgia, New Georgia was one of the islands that was the fierce fighting for quite a while. But anyway at one time and this goes I have to go now back to another part of this story because as part of the stuff that we did right in the Manilla area and close by was infantry our own infantry and engineers in support. But we were catching a lot of fire from Japanese people that were enclosed in what they call pill boxes. And you probably know I'm quite sure and these were Japanese pill boxes a lot of time accentually of concrete with holes where they could look and see our infantry and artillery and so forth and shoot at hem and kill them. And this was getting very bad and I was ordered to try to combat that happening because it was getting too many people was getting hit. I was, and this is another incident of my own life in the army, was I was ordered to get with an officer who was an expert in chemical warfare and ask if I could ask about six or seven soldiers were in my command to take a short period of time, get with the chemical guy and learn to use flame throwers. And so then they came in and this is one of the parts of the war that's still that things that sort of I remember as if it happened yesterday, it wasn't very pretty. But anyway we got started and we had to get close enough to where the Japanese were and then fire on them with a flame thrower. And I'm quite sure you know what a flame thrower is. Anyway so that you could squirt flame and get after people. We were doing one of those things and I was watching and I could see all of a sudden we'd see firing being produced by our own people. And I could see Japanese soldiers getting out of those, if he was still alive, getting out of those places and some of them were on fire. And I still have a feeling that that part of combat war for is almost to my mind similar to torture. But it was successful we were able to get rid of those people of the Japanese and continue. But it's part of my own and don't get the idea that I was against everything that was connected with warfare. I hate warfare personally and have for a long time. For almost all of my lifetime which is getting

close to 100 years I think if my arithmetic is right. Anyway, that was what the unit things were doing. Then as it this was connection you've heard of the Baton Peninsula it was part of those islands. And the Japanese had captured a whole bunch and just made awful things. They were prisoners for the whole war almost and they were and finally our own units were able to get the Baton soldiers released from the Baton Peninsula. And they were soldiers that had been prisoners for two or three years and they were in awful shape. Our own people finally were able to be able to release from the Japanese prison onto our side was conducted was sort of a call it a death march. But I my part of it was where the Japanese were being taken was a particular island called Cabanatuan. You may not have heard of that word before. But anyway these American prisoner they were almost skeletons from not being fed enough and all that kind of. But the prison that the Japanese had used and at one time and the place where our people were undergoing being worked on to become American civilians again and it was quite an undertaking for our people. And they had a setup where they would assign a soldier from our own outfit and each one that had been involved in any contact plus or minus with what was called the Baton death march as something. Anyway and they had an officer of our own to be present as advisers with rehabilitating our people. And they had about one guy from each one of our own and it so happened that one of the people was from the company that I had and I was one of the people that observed that's another incident in my lifetime was one that I'll never forget as long as I live. But to go on a little bit more, am I going too fast too far?

Interviewer: You're doing great.

Cobb: Anyway we had during the war particularly with the release of the prisoners and so what happened next? They were our soldiers were at the time released we were all in tents of some kind and so they said the commanding general, general who was from Lamont I can't remember his name right now I should.

Woman in the background: Wing, General Wing?

Cobb: General Wing they called him the wing delusion, this was the 43rd infantry division. The Wing victory and unfortunately soon enough after the war he was on the way back home and passed away soon after.

Woman in the background: Don't forget Dr. Leaverman.

Cobb: Pardon me hon.

Woman in the background: You remember Dr. Leaverman who was one of your best friends Leaverman.

Cobb: Yeah

Woman in the background: Okay he was in your unit too.

Cobb: Oh yeah well.

Woman in the background: But you took over his job I think didn't you? When he was being promoted and moved?

Cobb: He was a graduate nuclear engineer from John Hopkins named Joseph A Leaverman but he was not a general Joe Leaverman. And what his religion was I don't have any idea but he was a fine guy one I became acquainted with and I think may still be alive.

Woman in the background: It's been about three years since we've heard from him.

Cobb: But anyway after the war had been controlled more and we were in command the general wanted to take an old Japanese hanger for airplanes about all that was left was the steel part of it because the Philippinoes themselves with the tin they was using they evacuated the tin somewhere where they could use it. But the general wanted to do something there to provide some recreational facilities for our own troops. And the idea came up that you could use that old skeleton of a hanger that was stable made out of iron and make do something that you could make patricians and have all kind of stuff for the people. And the idea came up that one of the things that the Japanese were very adept at and still are, is take bamboo plants and strip them and make a whole pallet with striped bamboo and then they would use that to make compartments and so forth that were used for various things. And the roof the roof of those things was made of a special type of grass that you could get in the area where we were doing the work and so to do all of this, and this is another incident of particular thing, in order to do all of this stuff somebody had to do it and it took a lot of people. One of the things that we did as engineers we went out into the countryside and persuaded is a good word, some of the Philippinoe people to find all this stuff and put it together and use it for what it was intended. And that came about what I mentioned before that I had something to do with building the biggest grass shack in the whole world, that's sort of stretching it a little bit.

Woman in the background: Well you had a basketball quart didn't you?

Cobb: Huh

Woman in the background: Didn't you build a basketball quart for all your men?

Cobb: Well that was later, that was one of the other things that we did. With the war over almost over we, our guys were very adept at trading certain types of material with some other units that had some that they didn't have. Our unit we fortunately or unfortunately someway had access to alcoholic beverages. There were other units, Marine units were on this unit too, and they but they could get some beer and so forth but they weren't able to, our guys we were able to do the other thing and as a result of that we were able to trade. And we did so much trading our guys were very adept at trading but they got acquainted with some of the navy and marine guys and made a swop that our guys would get some alcoholic stuff and the marines and the navy people already had enough equipment to get electric distribution in our area that we were in. So we built we put in our unit put in electric wires light bulbs every tent had a light bulb. We also had built a basketball quart out of what they call carl material to can mine and press it down makes a pretty good tennis court. But the interesting thing to me was that my own commander was making a survey of all of the units under his command and came into our unit one evening and saw lights everywhere. And he started asking about the source of this stuff and he finally and this is the best part of this story that I'm about to tell. He was a great guy anyway even though he had been a West Pointer which I don't mean to say that that was negative. Any he asked me where all this stuff came from and I told him about it and that we had taken care of our guys had actually build a basketball quart and lighted it at night. But he talked to me for a minute he said well could you possibly get a light bulb in my tent? And I said yes sir we can do that so before the day was ended the general

had lights in his tent. And that's another thing that always stays in my memory. You may be using up all your time.

Interviewer: Well I've got a series of questions that we can fill out I've got just a little bit longer I can go. Do you remember what you were doing and where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

Cobb: Yes the details of that. As I mentioned before we were I had been at Fort Belvoir Virginia with a fire unit and we were on our way by automobile we had had going from Fort Belvoir to Jacksonville. And all of a sudden the automobile radios and all of a sudden that came to halt and said bad information we just received and it was the attack on Pearl Harbor was the incident. We were going from place and I looked at the guy in the car that I was riding with and I said buddy we are about to get into it now with this. And that was I knew just because of the communication that's the part I knew that Pearl Harbor had occurred. And I also learned more at the time I had an uncle that was married to my mother's sister who was on the island when the bombs were dropped and all of that. So that was the incident I think of the question you just mentioned. Did you know about the beginning of Pearl Harbor I guess that is accurate to the degree. There is all kind of stuff even today and the story that you are writing out probably will have some more details of some of this stuff, I know you will. So I don't know but after the war I personally had stayed and went back to school; and was able to (tape ended).