

Hershel Trotter Harris

Seabees

Begin interview:

Harris: Hershel Trotter Harris born March 1, 1923 in Southside, TN.

Interviewer: What branch of service did you serve in?

Harris: I was in the Navel Construction Company called Seabees.

Interviewer: Do you recall the specific unit of Seabees that you served in?

Harris: It was the 53rd Seabee battalion.

Interviewer: What were your parents' names and occupations?

Harris: My father's name was Robert Emmett Harris and my mother's name was Pearl Elizabeth Harris. They were farmers.

Interviewer: And they farmed here in Clarksville?

Harris: Montgomery County, yeah.

Interviewer: Where was their farm?

Harris: Farm?

Interviewer: Yes, sir.

Harris: Over in the 13th district.

Interviewer: What kind of crops did ya'll raise?

Harris: We didn't grow nothing then but wheat and corn and tobacco. That was the dark tobacco they did not grow no Burley in this part of the country back then. During the depression, I remember very well the best crop brought 22 cents a pound. In 1936, my dad quit farming and I was a happy little boy.

Interviewer: What kind of chores did he have you do?

Harris: Had to do it all...had to work in the field from the time you was 10 or 12 years old. When the big depression hit in 29, 30, and 31, we...me and my brother had to take the place of two big colored share croppers that used to work for dad. We worked just like grown men...in the river bottom and plowing mules. Doing all kinds of work that kids don't normally do...things kids wouldn't think about doing today.

Interviewer: At 12 years old?

Harris: Yeah and you had to walk to school about 2 and half miles one way rain or shine, so whatever. When you come in you would have to get in and tend to the coal, feed livestock, milk cows, and do all kinds of chores like that then go to the house at night and study by Kerosene lamp.

Interviewer: What school did you go to?

Harris: Went to Briarwood Elementary school and went to the 8th grade. I never did go to high school.

Interviewer: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Harris: Yeah, had two brothers and three sisters. One brother got killed before I was born in farm accident. A wagon ran over him across his stomach it was loaded pretty heavy on a gravel road. Then they didn't know about internal injuries you know, and he lived about 4 hours. He was 8 years old. My older sister was next to him, and she lived to be 80 years old. She passed away and lived in Louisville. I had a sister who was deaf that went through school through 1st grade to high school and finished high school in a deaf school in Knoxville, and she died about 4 years ago. She lived in Huntington, TN. My last sister lived here in Clarksville. She lived to be 88. She passed away a year ago this April. That leaves me the last one of my family; my brother passed away in 1977 with a heart attack. I am the youngest of the family, so I am all that is left and I have done rolled up on 82.

Interviewer: What kinds of things to you remember them doing? Was all of the chores equally shared? Or did the girls specifically do certain things?

Harris: The girls had to help on the farm just like the men...not out in fields, but they helped milk cows and stuff like that. We had a Holstein cow and a Jersey cow, a milk cow, there wasn't any beef cattle in this country back then...hardly at all. People raised a lot of pork. They would kill hogs and store it, you know, through the winter. Pork was the main meat and you tried to have enough grease to have lard for a year, you know. I know this old Holstein cow would kick you pretty bad, and I would be milking the Jersey cow, and I would get a stick to my sister's cow so that it would kick her (laughter). It is a different world there were more buggies and wagons in this country then when I was a kid than there was automobiles: very few cars. The roads was in bad shape. We didn't have very many black top roads. There wasn't near the crime that there is now. There wasn't near the population that we got now. In the summertime, the freight train coming into Clarksville from Memphis, TN in the warm weather. Hobos would be sitting up on top of it like a blackbird sitting on a line traveling across the country looking for a job. They wouldn't bother nobody; they were good people. They would come up to our house and knock on the backdoor. If mother didn't have anything else for them to eat, she would give them buttermilk and cornbread. They would want to do some chores or something for that. They would sleep in our hayloft and all over the place. We were about 400 yards up from the railroad, and for some reason or

another they left out some kind of signs out for places that were good to stop out and the ones that wasn't. They had hobo camps in different places.

Interviewer: Did they have one near your farm?

Harris: No, they was 2 miles from rail...

Interviewer: So, they would hop off the rail and come visit you guys?

Harris: They would find it, yeah.

Interviewer: I wanted to ask a question about the pork. About how many pigs did your dad have on the farm at one time?

Harris: Well, it wouldn't raise but ...he hardly ever raised over 4 or 5 or 6. You get them up to about 300 lbs. or 350 a piece and kill them and that would make enough meat to last you a year. You didn't buy nothing much all you had to buy was sugar and you had to buy salt. Raised wheat for your bread, you had corn to make the meal out of. The cows you got your butter and milk. That was just the life. People eat bacon for breakfast or smoked sausage one. We never really was short of food at all; we didn't have a lot of money. We didn't have a lot of clothes. We had clothes to wear, but money was sure scarce.

Interviewer: Now, you said that the depression affected a lot of these hobos. How did the depression affect your family, specifically? Did you guys do ok in the beginning?

Harris: Yeah, we didn't have any...they was drifters. They just drifted through here see, and we were permanent residents of this county and district and all. There would be a different group come through about every week. That was the main source of transportation. When I was growing up, I thought that was about the only source of transportation other than wagons and buggies. It was a different thing.

Interviewer: Did you...how did your family cope with the hardships? You said that your dad quit farming in 36 was that due to the depression?

Harris: Well we sold out on the farm and moved to town. The depression was beginning to be over, you know, things were looking a little better but not much. I forgot how old at that time...he lived to be 80 years old. As a teenager, I was about 15 or 16 just finished 8th grade school, so I ran my age up a couple of years and got a job with a contractor doing power line work. I just picked up power line. I had my journal and ticket when I was 19 years old. I was working down in Oklahoma on a high line job before I ever went into the service.

Interviewer: Now, you said that you worked in Alaska also... was that power line work too?

Harris: We was building a telephone line up there for Omahs Construction Company. It was wintertime and boy it was cold.

Interviewer: What was the money like?

Harris: Well, the money was 125 a week guaranteed straight salary. You got 15 dollars a week and 110 came to a beneficiary back here. Back then that was pretty big money.

Interviewer: Was that part of...was that affiliated in any way with the CCC?

Harris: Nah, straight contractor. My brother was in the CCC, but he was older that was a good outfit. I think in a way a camp like that would help now. So many kids don't learn how to do nothing and a lot of them are not disciplined growing up, and they have had everything handed to them, you know, without having to work for it. It makes a big difference when you have to work for it than to not have to work for it.

Interviewer: Yes, sir. So did you enjoy that time working on the power line in both Oklahoma and Alaska?

Harris: Oh, yeah, I enjoyed it. I liked that type of work. Something about it kind of fascinated me. When I was young, I saw some power line men working. I thought I can do that kind of work myself.

Interviewer: Describe what you do on a daily basis?

Harris: Well, in power line work?

Interviewer: Yes, sir.

Harris: You would be climbing poles, running services, working hot wires, and there was a picture of me over there when I was 80 years old.

Interviewer: Can I show it on the camera?

Harris: Yeah.

Interviewer: you want to hold that up. Let me zoom in here...hold it up just a little bit higher and I will zoom in.

Harris: Can you see it?

Interviewer: Yes, sir. I zoomed the wrong way. What were you doing at 80 years old doing this right here?

Harris: I wanted to get my picture taken.

Interviewer: But that is the kind of thing that you would do, huh?

Harris: Yeah.

Interviewer: Getting your picture taken. That is good thanks.

Harris: You got it?

Interviewer: Yes, sir.

Harris: I have had both knees replaced, and had when I done that but I am not as high as you might think I was. I went about 15 or 20 feet. My grandson, who is a computer engineer, made that picture for me. I used to climb ground to the top of a 90ft pole and not stop...just run up there like a squirrel.

Interviewer: Really.

Harris: Them days are behind me...quite a bit.

Interviewer: Where were you when Pearl Harbor happened?

Harris: Well, when Pearl Harbor got hit that weekend I was carrying my mother, my dad, and my aunt, and uncle down to Benton, KY, where they were building the Kentucky dam. My brother-in-law worked down there as a carpenter on building that dam. That afternoon, we went up on a railroad bridge and looked at the dam...that had a deal where you could go up on the railroad trestle and look right down on the construction. When we come back to the car, I turned the radio on. They announced Pearl Harbor had been hit. That was the first that I heard of it. I had a first cousin that was in the air force and my aunt it tore her all to pieces. Everybody was more patriotic during WII than any other time in this country. People buckled down and one without stuff and everything was rationed. Just different people...different class of people...a different generation. Then when we went into the service there wasn't all this money supporting service boys in the service. Your family and what the military paid you was all you got that you got any support with; otherwise, it came from your family. The military didn't put out no support for families or anything. I think that life insurance was 10,000 dollars for a soldier, sailor, or marine, or whoever got killed. There was a bunch of them that got killed down in the Pacific and in Europe too, and in Normandy.

Interviewer: How did you feel when you heard that? Did that fuel you to want to go into the service...Pearl Harbor?

Harris: Well it did in a way. I didn't want to join right then, but I had been in a Calvary here—Tennessee National Guard Calvary 109th troop K. I was in it when I was young, and my parents had to sign for me. When the war broke out and all, they mechanized that unit and put them on active duty. I was so young they had to let me out, so I went to Alaska and come back and everything. They were still up here in (Camp Forest) Tennessee, and I went overseas after I took all of the training and everything before we ever did. I wanted to get away from any part of the army. I didn't like the army. As an infantryman or didn't have the paratroopers...they had paratroopers during World War II, but they didn't have any in the south pacific. Marine core had a paratrooper unit, and they used them down in Bougainville. They dropped then in the jungle, and they hung in the trees. They decided that was the wrong thing to drop down there in the jungle, so they done away with theirs. Me and my brother both was patriotic enough that we volunteered and went when we had indefinite deferments. There were people here in Clarksville that runned to the farm and started farming and done everything to stay out of the service. A lot of them would have given a lot of money if they had my deferment. I felt like a lot of my friends

were already in the service. I felt like I wasn't a bit better than the rest of them. We all had to do our part.

Interviewer: Now how did you get a deferment? What specific thing allowed you to have a deferment?

Harris: It was because I was doing power line maintenance.

Interviewer: I see because you worked on a job that was needed. You had an indefinite—

Harris: The manager of the light department here---I had come back from Alaska, and I had my deferment that I had when I was in Alaska. I met the secretary of the draft board on the street one day, and she asked me what I was doing. I told her that I wasn't doing anything that I had just come back from up there. She said well, they are going to draft you into the army. I said not if I can help it they are not. I turned the corner and went down the street, and I met the manager of the light department. He wanted to know what I was doing, and I told him. He says come down to the office—I want to talk to you. So, I went down to the office, and he picked up the phone and called the draft board. He talked to them for about 5 minutes. They declared me essential for the duration of the war as a maintenance power line man. The trouble was they didn't say anything about putting enough money in there for you to live on, and I really had more freedom in the military than I did there. So that is the reason that I left them after a few months. I seen that it wouldn't going to get any better. They weren't going to give me a raise and it wasn't worth nothing. So I thought heck, I will just go on into the service.

Interviewer: When did you go into the service?

Harris: I went into the service May 14th 1943.

Interviewer: Where did you go to basic training?

Harris: I went to basic training in Camp Perry Virginia. 6 weeks of basic training then they transferred us from Camp Perry Virginia to Camp (Pentaltion)California.

Interviewer: What was your time at Camp Perry like? Was it...did you find it difficult or pretty easy?

Harris: It wasn't difficult for me because I was an old country boy that had it hard all my life. The one's that it was difficult to were mama's boys. They never had been away from home, and they never had to really obey anybody and take orders and stuff. That is the one's that it really hurt. It really hurt them.

Interviewer: What about the physical aspect because you had lived in the country, it wasn't too hard?

Harris: Nah, uh-huh, that was fun to me (laughter).

Interviewer: What kind of things did you learn there?

Harris: Well, I didn't learn a lot that I didn't already know when I went in to basic training. What time I was in basic over there---but all the basic that they give us was just hard training and obstacle courses and things—and guard duty with a toy rifle. I didn't like that. I thought if I am going to be on guard duty, I want a real gun. A lot of them didn't know how to---you have to take care of your own gear. You had

to do your own laundry and everything. In the Navy, they give you a duffel bag and everything you have got that you are not wearing will fit in that duffel bag belongs to you. If it is put up right—correctly. When they have inspections to be able to close that duffel bag—you are ok. But some of them couldn't do nothing. They wouldn't do everything like they were supposed to, you know. You always got that goof-around. We left out from San Diego, California. We had a full issue of marine gear and a full issue of Navy gear. We had Marine green overcoats on our gear (inaudible) and we didn't know what that meant. We went south pacific, we went from San Diego to New (Calanona). We went into a battalion as replacements. We went into the 53rd Seabees and different ones went to different places.

Interviewer: Now you were talking about San Diego...did you do training there or were you just there just to wait...

Harris: Nah, that was a big fort, you know, San Diego---I think they had a naval base there. We trained there for about 2 weeks. After we went down to (Pentaltion) we went down to Diego, and lived in some tents. At night, it is cold as a Dickens in California at night.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Harris: and we shipped out from there. I forgot exactly the date that we shipped out sometime in October.

Interviewer: Was Camp (Pentaltion)...was that a long training or was that like a couple of weeks also?

Harris: Oh nah, I stayed at Camp (Pentaltion) from about the 1st of June to October.

Interviewer: So is that where you learned you electricians trade? Is that where....

Harris: Nah, I already knew that when I went in.

Interviewer: Oh, you already knew that.

Harris: Yeah.

Interviewer: What did they teach you there?

Harris: It was all just military. Just like...

Interviewer: Digging fox holes...

Harris: Just like the marine core...like marine core boot camp. We did nothing but physical training for 30 days one time. They had me in the best shape that I have ever been in my life. I was tough.

Interviewer: A lot of walking around with a ruck sack on your back or anything like that?

Harris: No...hand to hand combat. They would give one a rifle with a bayonet on it, and the other one like a police club. You had to defend yourself and (inaudible). We had a Lieutenant Hodges that played for the Green Bay Packers was in the marine core, and he was a head instructor and all. If he caught you

goofing off, he would show you a big boulder up there on one of those little mountains there. He said with you and he would too. Everybody respected him. He was fair to everybody. He just didn't put up with no crap. We would go on 7 mile marches, you know. I was 20 years old; guys that were in their thirties and some of the guys were around 40 in the Seabees. They would drop out, and I thought well...after I got that age I kind of understand why they dropped out. There is a little difference between 20 and 35 and 40 especially if you had never done that kind of thing.

Interviewer: Right.

Harris: They put that to you. You know, the marine core back then if you could survive it—buddy you was pretty good. Now, I don't think that they got near the training that they had back then. There was discipline. They don't have the discipline. They go around looking sloppy. We couldn't go off the base without a class A uniform on. Now they go...you can come into Clarksville and they are wearing everything a lot of the times.

Interviewer: So then you went to San Diego for two weeks and then you shipped out.

Harris: Yeah.

Interviewer: Now where in there did you make this film with John Wayne.

Harris: Now that was when I was in Camp (Pedaltion) that was in about July of 43.

Interviewer: Tell us about this.

Harris: Well, they just said that they wanted about 30 or us, and they designated us to them that was our duty. That is all we done everyday. We reported down where they were making the film. We made part of it on the beach at ocean side. We went up there to a dry creek bed and put up false palm trees and everything and if they wanted a rain storm they would set up an airplane engine out there and turn water on. Then there was the awfulest storm you ever seen going on. You would never know the difference. You would think it was sure pare of a desert island or something another. We was 10 or 12 miles from the ocean, but they do so many things that are odd. Stunt man would lay up on top of a building and blow it up. He would be blown from about here to the front yard, and he would get up and walk off.

Interviewer: Really, what ...how long did that take? You said about 30 days you were part of this?

Harris: I guess we worked a better part of a month making that movie.

Interviewer: What was John Wayne...you met John Wayne obviously. What was he like?

Harris: Yeah, he was a nice gentleman. He was a nice fellow. He was John Wayne just like they showed him on tv.

Interviewer: Now this is called Fighting Seabees.

Harris: Yeah, fighting Seabees.

Interviewer: You were telling me earlier before we started filming that you didn't see this movie until you came back 2 and a half years after you had....

Harris: Yeah, went overseas let's see 28 months or so before I even got to see the movie. I come back and seen it after I was a civilian.

Interviewer: Now, did you like the movie?

Harris: Well, yeah. I knew how it was going to turn out. I remembered the whole thing.

Interviewer: Yeah—(laughter).

Harris: Yeah.

Interviewer: Now you guys did a beach landing and all of this for this movie?

Harris: Done a beach landing...done some combat...fighting and all. We had Chinese playing Jap parts. It looks like a real war movie when you watch it.

Interviewer: Was the overall experience good?

Harris: Yeah, I reckon. It was monotonous. We didn't make anything it was just an easy duty. We didn't get anything out of it.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Harris: But...

Interviewer: Now tell me about this limousine.

Harris: See they weren't using us very much, so we would set out there half a day sometimes playing cards before they would call us to use us on the set. So we decided one day that they weren't going to use us, so we wanted limousines to take us to San Diego. We rode down to San Diego and stayed a few hours and all. When we come back they was about to have a fit, so after that called us ever hour on the hour (laughter). They needn't a bunch of us while was gone, and that held up the show a little bit.

Interviewer: Now tell us....you were telling me about how they wanted you to stay back from John Wayne during the filming.

Harris: Yeah, they wanted you to stay back from the leading characters in the show, and far enough that you couldn't identify you. So when we would start on set, they would run that little camera on that track and everybody was moving...everything would be going smooth. Me and a buddy of mine we would get up behind them and the old director and holler cut and scream and cuss (laughter). We would have to do it over. Just stuff like that---if they wanted you to play a civilian, they would have a whole pile of civilian clothes out here piled up. You just get you a shirt and a pair of pants. It didn't matter what you had on you wouldn't going to be close enough to tell whether it was nice or not. We would play civilian and play military. It was interesting in a way, but it sure got to be monogamous to me.

Interviewer: So when it ended it was a good...you were happy it ended?

Harris: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: You were happy that it didn't have to be longer.

Harris: Yeah, I don't know whether...they might have done a little bit of it somewhere else other than there, but they done the biggest part of it at Camp(Pendaltion) and on the ocean side beach. Yep.

Interviewer: Now tell me about when you left. What were your feelings when you left the states? What was going through your mind?

Harris: Nothing except we are just going down to where the action was and then nothing in particular. We got out to sea un-escorted. About three days and nights, we were in a storm and it had done everything but turn the ship upside down. You see where that cruiser had that...that big wave hit it. Well, that wasn't nothing compared to what we was into for about three days and three nights. Nobody got hurt or anything, but everybody got so sick on that ship that the just couldn't hardly live. That is the sickest sickness that you could ever have—that is to be really sea sick.

Interviewer: How long was this trip? What was the ship like and how did you sleep and things of that nature?

Harris: We slept—we usually had bunks 5 layers deep down below deck...about going overseas, I guess it took us anywhere from right around three weeks to get down there. It takes...it took us 14 days to get from Guam back to Frisco at the end of the war. We stayed in Frisco 11 days before we shipped out on Treasure Island. Wait had liberty from 8:00 until 8:00 the next morning. We came from train from Frisco to Memphis, TN to the naval base down in Memphis where I got my discharge. They asked me if I wanted to stay in reserves, and I said nah I don't want to stay in reserves. Had I stayed in the reserves, I probably would have gone on to Korea.

Interviewer: Yeah

Harris: I thought well...I just got out.

Interviewer: Now when you...after this storm was it actually pretty nice on the ship?

Harris: Oh yeah, after that and every time we crossed the equator it was just as smooth as a mirror wasn't a wave nowhere. Just looked plum funny like we were sailing across a big mirror, but it can get rough when those typhoons come in. See they have typhoons in the Pacific and we have hurricanes on the east Atlantic.

Interviewer: Where did you land? After your...

Harris: Well, we went from San Diego to New Caledonia.

Interviewer: Ok.

Harris: That is a little island down there off the French, and that is where they keep all their prisoners. See they take them and put them on that island. In a little town called Nouméa is the capital of New Caledonia. It is just a small place. It has got an awful treacherous canal going in there. You have to have a pilot to take the ship in and out. It is such a narrow—where you are getting in and out. It is not too far from there to Australia or New Zealand neither one.

Interviewer: What kind of duty did they have ya'll doing there?

Harris: Usually all kinds of duties and on the ship we did not have a lot of duties on the ship though---we had a regular crew that worked the ship, you know. The rest of us was more or less like passengers going over. When we left Water Canal coming up to Guam for the invasion of Guam, we laid off shore while they was taking Saipan and Saipan was a lot longer than they thought it was going to take to take it. We stayed at sea that time for 54 days. That was the longest period that I stayed at sea on a ship. We run short of supplies, and everybody else did and we had to go down to Marshall island to resupply before we came up to Guam and went in on Guam. Saipan was a litter rougher than I thought it was going to be.

Interviewer: Now, New Caledonia is that where you linked up the 53rd?

Harris: Yeah, that is where I joined the 53rd Seabee Battalion.

Interviewer: What was your...the guys in that unit like?

Harris: Ah, that was just good sailors and good old boys like the rest of us.

Interviewer: Now, do you remember anybody specifically like a commander or anything?

Harris: Oh yeah, I remember that we had one commander by the name of Harris that was a pretty nice fellow. I remember him. I remember a lot of them, but I have forgot their names. They were nice people. They took us in as replacements and everything went real smooth.

Interviewer: Had they been fighting already and building already?

Harris: We didn't do a lot of fighting. We all had weapons. We carried carbines and had a few BARS and everything, but most of the time we done the road work and everything opening up places and let the Marines do the fighting. When the Marines got ready to take Guam our outfit give them all of our submachine guns we had and stuff. We gave them to the marine core because it was good for close quarter fighting.

Interviewer: What would you say was the closest you were to the front line combat?

Harris: About 100 yards that is pretty close.

Interviewer: Close enough to get shot.

Harris: Bullets don't slow down.

Interviewer: At 100 yards, no sir. Where was that?

Harris: The invasion of Guam and (Inaudible) Bay.

Interviewer: How did it work...what did the marines---went In first obviously.

Harris: Yeah, they went in first. Out of the ship that I was on they sent 7 tanks in, and one tank got on dry land out of the 7. They had an artillery piece camouflaged up there on the beach at that the civilians did not pick up before the invasion, and they cut loose on them tanks and knocked 6 out of 7 out. There were two snipers up on top of some coconut trees, and they were shooting small caliber guns—dropping people. Just like---Japs everywhere and marines too. It was sort of like a hornets nest. They established a pretty good beach head pretty quick.

Interviewer: So you got to watch this from the ship? Or when did you go in?

Harris: I went in one hour minus H hour. H hour is when they went in. We went 1 hour behind them.

Interviewer: So that is how many...

Harris: The first epsilon of Seabees that is not all of us. I was just one of the lucky ones that got on the first epsilon.

Interviewer: Got on the first wave then.

Harris: First wave.

Interviewer: What kind of thing did they have you do when you landed on the beach? Let me back up...let me ask what kind of—did you use a LST to get onto the beach?

Harris: No, we went in on the beach in a another landing type craft like it shows in here. Now we had our equipment in LSTS. The front of an LST will open up, and you can drive a dozer out of the front of it and everything like that. We just started doing clean-up work there and helping to bury the dead. We cut out trenches like a silo and lay them in there side by side and we put crosses up at the head of their graves and take the dog tags and collect them on the battle field. We would hand them on the cross when we run out—they would mark unknown if we didn't know which ones to put on there or who they belong to. So that is the reason that I said when the ship came back here from the South Pacific---very seldom was it the one that they thought it was that they had sent back. They just send maybe a skeleton and enough weight with it to seem like there was a body, but you would see them buried...they were just wrapped up in a poncho—covered just like you might have seen that grave in there where it had crosses on the head of it that is where all of them were.

Interviewer: How many...

Harris: We didn't lose a man on our outfit from the actual invasion. We lost 3 or 4 by different things. Snipers and all that ---things were pretty well calm. We didn't have a lot of that trouble either—not like they are having in Bagdad. They sucker punched them in Bagdad the other day.

Interviewer: Now, about how many of these trenches were there to lay the bodies in---would they dig, and about how many people would they put in each trench or was it just such a mass number that there is now way to...

Harris: Well, there weren't that many casualties just a great mass number of marines—mainly they got killed on the invasion of Guam, but we cut a long trench silo with a dozer about 4 or 5 foot deep and they would lay them in there about---space them like graves. Up here on top, they drive these stakes and they would cover them with equipment...push the dirt in on top of them. Where the stakes was they would take...some of the casualties they would just—(inaudible). Blower all to pieces. They would take what dog tags that they had and hang them on the crosses until they run out of dog tags—then they would just mark unknown. Well they didn't know which ones that they got them off of. Sometimes they just found them with the body. So that is the reason that I said that it was hit or miss with them sending your actual remains to your loved one's home or not. The japs would just pile them in sort of like planting potatoes. One place we piled in a bunch of them and later we had to build a road through there.

Interviewer: Oh, really?

Harris: And that was nice.

Interviewer: Do you think that your training prepared you for what you saw in actual combat?

Harris: Well, yeah—training helps you. It definitely helps you. The training that I had with the Marine core and all, but as it was the Marines—they was going to put us up on the front line one night in the garden at night. This marine officer made our officer take us back to the back and take care of everything back there and said we will take care of this up here. Them japs come across the rice patty at night just like---just keep coming. They would set those 50 caliber guns up just so high off the ground next morning that rice patty would be laying covered with dead japs. You would think that anybody would stop and take it up in routes you know, but they just keep coming the same route. Some of the can't shoot very straight either. They killed enough, but---it was bad business.

Interviewer: Did you ever remember firing a rifle at anybody?

Harris: Do what?

Interviewer: Did you ever fire your rifle at anybody?

Harris: No, I didn't have too.

Interviewer: The marines were....

Harris: The Marines were doing the fighting. I never shot.

Interviewer: Now when you pushed onto the beach head and the marines left, did they stay there and secure the beach head or did they send out patrols?

Harris: They just kept feeding back you see---they was just---until they took the whole territory. They would give us more clearance the further back that they got. Where just short in on the beach not far from where the ---150 yards from the beach where the cemetery was. They just kept moving them back.

Interviewer: What kind of construction did ya'll do? You build roads?

Harris: We built roads; We build new huts, fuel-oil storage tanks and everything that you can think of.

Interviewer: Then you said that you build an airway an airstrip?

Harris: I built 2 B29 strips that they are using today on the north end of Guam. They are two miles long-- a little over two miles long and a thousand yards wide—a thousand feet wide. That is where they started to fly the B29S during WII. They have used them ever since.

Interviewer: Where you there when they were flying those missions?

Harris: Yeah, right there.

Interviewer: What was that like to watch? Did you ever see a B29 come in that was?

Harris: Oh, yeah-shot up. I have seen them come in with the tank shot up so bad that it looked like when it hit the ground that it would fall over. Some of them almost would, but they would make it back. They would leave out late in the afternoon and it would be the next morning before we got back. When you go off the end of that runway it is like a big cliff out there if you don't get airborne you are going into drink. It is something else. They were using them at this time against the rock flying off of it—same field.

Interviewer: Really?

Harris: We had one field completed and we would be working on the other one, and they would come in there at night. We would work in-between the runways. We would have core pits in-between the runways. They would come in and have their lights on an set them down. Old B24's that was a tough old plane. I have seen them set down and catch on fire and there wouldn't be nothing left but the four motors laying there. It would just melt everything down.

Interviewer: Now you said—you were telling me that your work cycle was—in the Seabees, you were working 24 hours a day. Not you maybe specifically, but the unit never stopped work.

Harris: You worked two shifts like from morning to dark, from dark until midnight, and we didn't work 24 hours, but a lot of time you did, but not all of the time. You see we cleared them fields. They were in heavy timber and top soil over there is not but about 2 or 3 foot deep at the most until you hit coral. Use young boys in there running them dozers clearing them big trees and everything —luckily we didn't get

hurt, but we did do some reckless things, occasionally. They would bring hot chow out there to us at lunch time. It run real smooth; the Seabees had the best food of any outfit in the military. We managed to get that food (laughter). A friend of mine from here—his widow runs this Holiday Inn Restaurant down here. He was in the Marine core in the third division on the backside of the island, and their cots were in mud down to the cross. I found out that they was over there, and I went over there and invited him and two of his friends to come over to our place on Sunday and eat lunch—eat noon meal. We had steak every Sunday, and we had an ice-cream machine. They reminded me of three hounds that had been lost about two or three weeks—man they pigged out. All they had was that old G.I. —strictly G.I. food. Yeah, the Seabees—you can ask anybody that was ever around them much. They would make out.

Interviewer: Because you build your own facilities---you made it nice.

Harris: Yeah, one old boy in my outfit. He went out there at night were them natives had been living and all, and some of those chickens had gone sort of wild and were roosting up there in them trees—he caught him two or three hens and put them in a pen behind his tent. He was selling them eggs for a dollar a piece (laughter). Somebody is going to make a little money everywhere you go (laughter).

Interviewer: Do you know what he did when he got back to the states? He might be a millionaire.

Harris: No (laughter). Yeah, I didn't watch *60 Minutes* last but they said—there was something on there about all of that money that Saddam had that they found, and how some of it just appeared and different things. They were going to use—oh, I forgot—How much was it...they showed it on T.V. one time and it was like a couple of trailer loads of 100 dollar bills. I don't think they know exactly where it is all at now. They was going to rebuild Iraq with it.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Harris: Halliburton probably got the rest of it. See Halliburton this time—he furnished all of the meals for the military. They don't have military cooks any more over there. I know good and well we would get out a lot cheaper to run it like they used to, but it sure done a good job putting us deep in debt.

Interviewer: Yeah, I can't do anything about that sir. I want to ask you, what did you do in your free time? You would work your shift, and then you would have some other guys come on and there would be shifts 24 hours a day, but what would... like when you got off your shift—what would you normally do?

Harris: Normally, as soon as I got off the shift—we had a great big shower. I guess 30 or 40 shower heads in there and just a tent around it—around the border of it. It would be cold water. I would take me a good shower, and then I would sack out most of the time and get some rest.

Interviewer: Did you ever play cards?

Harris: Oh yea, that is all was to play cards, and nothing to spend your money for let your money ride on books with TVA-with the Navy. On the Navy, you could draw a little-draw 10 or 15 a month if you wanted to and just let it ride. So there wasn't nothing—we had a ship store there set-up. You could buy different stuff in, but didn't need much money.

Interviewer: Now what about the recreation, you said that you had a baseball team and boxing matches...

Harris: Yea, and boxing matches and softball and baseball.

Interviewer: Tell us about—you told me two funny stories about—one about the boxing and another about the...

Harris: See in (inaudible) refereed one boxing bout.

Interviewer: That is the guy that beat Dempsey—you were telling me?

Harris: Yea, and he was the Lieutenant commander in the Navy. Then when that Pro-baseball player from-what is... New Jersey -The Mets is that what it was back then?

Interviewer: Yeah, I think so.

Harris: Gene Autrey finally bought them, I think, in California. I know, Reese and Johnny Myers, and a bunch of them was playing. Of course, we thought we had a pretty good little old team. They did beat us a little bit (laughter).

Interviewer: There is a pro-team that comes over to Guam and plays.

Harris: Well, they try (inaudible) like Bob Hope did, you know.

Interviewer: Ok.

Harris: I never did see Bob Hope. He didn't come to Guam if he did I missed him. I was there from the time I went in. I stayed an Guam, I guess, I was there 18 months or 19. We had two Christmases overseas. Time went pretty fast—you just tried not to think about it a lot.

Interviewer: It seems like you worked so much that the day would just burn by.

Harris: Yea, it stayed busy. We would ... one job that I was on—I ran a boat over to cut the trail for a trenching machine or a storage tank with higher elevation on a—like a little mountain. We would leave food up there and these Japs would come in there at night and pick up that food. You would see the tracks were they had been all around it. They never tried to kill anybody—never shoot at anybody or anything. A year after the invasion was over, two of them come down to our camp from up in the mountains holding white flags and surrendered. They just realized that the war was over. The invasion was over. A lot of them up in them mountains—coral rocks

like limestone around here sort of like a honeycomb. They would hide out up there in all kinds of places. They would live where a rat couldn't live. They would live in them dug outs. All they would have is a lot of rice and a honey box. It was something else.

Interviewer: The enemy was fairly motivated then, obviously.

Harris: Yea, I remember Japs had a little old map on them sort of like a little address book you would carry. I had one of them. I don't know what in the world that I done with it. I have lost it somewhere or another, and it showed that Japan had already taken California. They had a lot of Propaganda.

Interviewer: Propaganda, huh?

Harris: Yea, Ahh yea.

Interviewer: That would fuel their motivation. That would... if you think that you have invaded the United States, you would obviously continue to fight.

Harris: Yea, oh yea.

Interviewer: Wow that is amazing.

Harris: That was the (inaudible).

Interviewer: Wow.

Harris: It was something else.

Interviewer: What did you get promoted to during your time in the service? What rank were you when you got out?

Harris: Second class (inaudible). That is about the same as a staff sergeant in the army.

Interviewer: So, did you have a crew at that point?

Harris: Nah.

Interviewer: You still just...

Harris: We didn't have...a staff sergeant didn't have a crew of men like the army has a squad—work with guys that are first class, second class, and all. We were all just running equipment and everything just like you was on a construction job.

Interviewer: So you did the same thing basically as a guy, you know, that is a E1 when you are an E6 you do the same thing.

Harris: Yeah...see we had guys with us that had worked for Pan-American Airline building air fields before WII, and older guys out of the state of Washington and Oregon and all—worked in logging woods handling equipment and everything. I started off on a small dose and worked up to the biggest one that they had. It is sort of like an apprentice program; they didn't give you one until you qualified for it.

Interviewer: What did you do before you were allowed to run a dozer?

Harris: Well, I done a little electrical work, but like I said all it was—was wiring up the whole tent—the whole company—you know. After you got it all wired up it wasn't nothing but a little maintenance. There were quite a few of us that were in the electrician trade and generator watch, you had to pull that every 8 hours—you know—I would rotate and all. Sitting there listening to that old generator hum all the time, it would put you to sleep if you weren't careful. I hated that, so I got my company commander to let me to transfer over into equipment. So, I got away from electrical trade really. That is what I had on my sleeve, but I was running equipment all of the time.

Interviewer: What...I am sorry go ahead.

Harris: They didn't...you had carpenters, you had machinist, you had diesel mechanics, you had plumbers, steam fitters, and everything that you can think of in the way of skilled labor. We had it in the Seabees. So a lot of guys learned a trade that they didn't know. In fact, I learned how to operate all kinds of equipment that I had always been interested in. We had a lot of equipment around line work before I went into the service. So, after I came back from service my brother was a building contractor here, and he bought a new dozer. The operator that he had would be off from work quite a bit, and I would fill in and run for him. The biggest trouble with being an equipment operator was weather like this you lose so much time; unless, you are on a straight salary some way or another. There are not many dozer operators that get straight salary. In the summertime when it was hot and dry, you got all of that dust and everything that is the reason I went back to the electrical trade. I was already in the electrical union—electrician union. IBW when I went in and when I came back and got back to it...because you made good money, and you didn't lose all this time in bad weather.

Interviewer: What was the union's name again?

Harris: Electrical Workers of America.

Interviewer: Ok, gotcha. What were the different types of dozers that you had? What are the names of them?

Harris: Well, you had...everything...we went in and had Chandler dozers, we had International dozers, and Caterpillar. Caterpillar was still doing and performing when all of the rest of them had laid down, so that sold me on Caterpillar equipment. It is just build better—tougher...something. It was just far superior to the others.

Interviewer: When the assigned you to do a job did you have the same dozer every day, or ...

Harris: Yeah, pretty well the same equipment all of the time. The day that President Roosevelt died—that I got work that he died—I was clearing-leveling off a place about the size of this house...like a big mound of dirt. I took that dozer and spread all of that out and leveled it down were they could build some huts on it. The come down there and brought my lunch to me that day and told me that President Roosevelt had passed away. Now that really hit me.

Interviewer: Because you had remembered his speech about a day that would live in infamy before, right?

Harris: Yeah, so I really did think a lot of President Roosevelt. I can't say that today about the one we got today.

Interviewer: It seems like a lot of people from your generation feel that way about our current president.

Harris: Yeah.

Interviewer: That is another subject. We could probably go on and on about that, but...

Harris: Don't want to say on here what I wanted to say (laughter).

Interviewer: Let's see here.... Where you impressed with the...how hard the enemy fought?

Harris: Oh yeah, they put a fight now they are not no pushovers. That wasn't, but these Iraq's are not either. People over there they sucker punched us so bad it is pitiful. Don't seem like we can slow them down. How many men we got over there, we ought to be able to quiet-en that thing down, but see it wasn't no terrorist happening until we invaded Iraq, and then they came in there from other countries to help get us out of the way. That is just normal for those people over there. They are never going to settle down, I don't think, to our type of government completely and our way of thinking. Saudi's...funny thing we didn't hear anything about them pilots being from Saudi Arabia until they hit the twin towers when we went in Afghanistan. Then we jumped on Saddam, and every one of the pilots was from Saudi Arabia trained down in Florida. All they wanted to do was learn how to handle a plane in the air. That ought to have told somebody something. They have got to sit down somewhere or another.

Interviewer: Yeah, Yeah. How about wounded personnel? Did you ever see anybody...like there was a hospital on Guam?

Harris: On Guam, during the invasion, they had a black-out a little black-out hospital on the beach—tents. It didn't have nothing like what we got this day and time, you know. That is where they would bring the wounded to operate on them the best that they could. They couldn't do near what they can do now for them. Then later they had a bigger hospital on Guam. It wasn't air conditioned or nothing. A friend of mine from here, Benny Heflen, he lost an arm. One of those suicide planes dived into his ship and he lost his left arm. I believe it was his left arm, and I found out that he was over there in the hospital. I carried him a steak dinner all the trimmings and some ice-cream a couple of times. I went into where he was and you could hardly stand there. I didn't think that he was going to make it. It just

smelled awful, but he lived. He lived quite a few years. He come back and he was a cattle trader, and he had his big truck rigged were he could operate it with one hand and everything on the tailgate and all. He was very successful in business. He and his wife didn't have any children. He died maybe 15 or 20 years ago. She died a couple-three years ago. There estate was worth 2 million, but he told us that he (drawed) quite a bit of disability from losing that one arm. He told me and another friend; he never did cash one of those checks—he just deposited them the whole time that he got them. I had some saddle horses and if I needed any hay he had a big farm—plenty of hay, and a barn up there. He said go up there and get what you need. I would always pay him for it, but he wouldn't even go with me. He just said go up there and get that hay when you need it. I would go get it, and then I would see him and pay him for his hay, but he didn't let that handicap him at all. He worked hard and saved his money. It is pitiful. We have a bunch of them crippled up right now...a bunch of them.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Harris: Bush wanted to cut the budget for the VA for the Veterans.

Interviewer: You are not a Democrat are you?

Harris: Nah (laughter).

Interviewer: I couldn't tell.

Harris: You couldn't tell. Thank goodness that I don't have a Republican in my family.

Interviewer: You know that they are going to edit this right?

Harris: Yeah, a friend of mine lives in Wyoming. He is retired from the air force. The little old town that he lives in—I can't remember the name of it-but it just had one traffic light, but he says I am the only democrat out here.

Interviewer: What about the big picture? Did you ever have a sense of this is what is happening in the Pacific. This is what they are---this is what MacArthur and all of the other generals are thinking? Did you ever get that feel, or were you just mainly just concerned with doing your job? What was on the ground where you were at?

Harris: Well, I just myself wasn't no big MacArthur man, and after he pulled that invasion deal up in (inaudible-ville) and made soft landing in and the marines are already....

End of Interview