

Interviewer: It's the 27th of August and I'm talking with Mr. Jim Holzem a veteran of the 511th parachutes infantry.

Holzem: B Company.

Interviewer: B Company 511th parachutes infantry regiment. What year did you come into the Army?

Holzem: January first week of January 1943 and I got out three years later almost to the day.

Interviewer: And were you drafted?

Holzem: When I was 17 I enlisted in the Marine Core with my best friend and then you needed your parent's signature and my mother wouldn't sign for me. So he went and I had to wait until I got drafted. Except when I was supposed to be drafted she said okay I could join the Marines so then I went down with another group from my high school five other boys to join the Marines again. And I was so anxious to get in I was so nervous. And I was the first one in line with about 100 guys naked as a jaybird and walked up in front of the doctors for inspection. And something happened that had never happened before or after again in my life I passed out. I woke up I was looking at the ceiling so they turned me back.

Interviewer: Oh no.

Holzem: Yeah so naturally I mean clearly no one passes out just because they are being talked to. I had never seen it before in my life before or since. I guess I must have been so anxious so I waited until I got drafted. But as soon as I was drafted I volunteered for the paratroopers. The reason I did was because my friend who went in first he joined the Para Marines he became a Para Marine. That's what I had wanted to be so then I joined the paratroopers and I was one of the original ones in B Company when it was activated.

Interviewer: Is that right

Holzem: At this reunion there is three of us that are at this reunion that were original ones from B Company.

Interviewer: That's amazing truly amazing. So your initial training was

Holzem: It was little different the 11th airborne gave basic training to new recruits. And I understand when most of the time when recruits came in they went to some infantry training school.

Interviewer: Normally yes

Holzem: But we didn't do that we were trained by cadre who were brought into the 511th. Actually I went into the 511th before the 11th airborne was formed. The 11th airborne was formed about a month later or something like that. But anyway we trained at Camp McCall North Carolina.

Interviewer: Right that's where the division was activated. So they conducted your raining?

Holzem: All of our basic training was at Camp McCall.

Interviewer: All of your basic training was at Camp McCall and then you went to Benning for jump school?

Holzem: Then we went to Benning three weeks for jump school then we went back to McCall then we went to Camp Polk Louisiana. It's Fort Polk now it was Camp Polk then. And we were there for a couple of months then we went to Stowman California for a week.

Interviewer: So you went through the Louisiana maneuvers?

Holzem: Yeah we did a lot of maneuvers there snow and cold. How did you know about that?

Interviewer: I read about the maneuvers my degree is in US Military History so I did a little bit of homework.

Holzem: Yeah I remember waking up with snow all over me they get real heavy snow there. Anyway we went to Wheat California and then 28 days on a liberty ship went overseas and we went to New Guinea. And we stayed there for six months and the strangest things happened I don't know if this would interest you or not. But for six months we are mutton canned mutton.

Interviewer: I've heard of it.

Holzem: I think General Swing I think saved a lot of money for the division I don't know how the generals operate the logistics but we didn't particularly care for him. Because word got around that every day he had ice-cream and stakes flown in from Austria. So we had canned mutton morning noon and night and when they put us on this ship to go up to Leyte they were loading that canned mutton in those big cargo nets on the ship and the commander of the ship asked what's in there and they told him. He said no I won't let canned mutton on this ship. And the man with the 11th airborne said you have to my orders are to put this ship so the commander of the ship the captain of the ship said well look it's up there in that net it's on the ship isn't it said you've done your duty haven't you. The guy said yeah and then he went and took the net over the ship and dumped it all in the water. And we ate navy rations all the way up.

Interviewer: So that was an improvement.

Holzem: Oh god steaks chick.

Interviewer: This mutton came from Austria I believe?

Holzem: Yeah terrible

Interviewer: Terrible

Holzem: So anyway when I got on the ship to go up there it was real strange and the doctor could tell you more about this my I couldn't touch my elbows and I had big lumps over here. Some kind of blood poisoning or something and I went around sick on the ship and I spent the entire nine days it took us nine days to get to Leyte for some reason down there in a hospital ward with white sheets and everything and eating good food. And I still had it when the ship landed stopped at Leyte and I asked the doctor there the navy doctor what should I do and he said just go ashore with your troop outfit. So I did

went right to shore they put us on trucks and took us right up into Canada. So I went from the hospital bed right up into Canada. And we went on into Leyte then and we fought clear across the mountain I guess you know about that.

Interviewer: Yes sir and as I understand when you went into Leyte it was an amphibious assault not an air drop.

Holzem: Yeah except there was no enemy.

Interviewer: Yeah you came in a peaceful landing basically amphibian landing.

Holzem: I studied about this like hearing the story I studied about it myself and I realize those outfits that went in before the 1st Calvary and the 24th and 7th I believe. They had it pretty easy they chased those Japanese around a paved road which went all the way around the island and the Japs just went up into the hills. And then they put us out in the hills to eliminate so we really ran into more Japs than those outfit that extensively took Leyte.

Interviewer: So that your mission was to ferret the Japs out of the hills?

Holzem: Kill them I guess.

Interviewer: And how long were you on Leyte?

Holzem: Thirty days we fought for 30 days.

Interviewer: Thirty days and conditions in that 30 days continuous combat live in shell holes and.

Holzem: Well it was horrible. I think anyone that went through it we had 170 days fighting in Luzon and two combat jumps and I think any one of us would tell you we would rather go through that 170 days ten times than that 30 days one time. The 30 days in Leyte.

Interviewer: What made the experience in Leyte so

Holzem: Well if you looked at the map it is unexplored by white man so when we went out there there was nothing no road nothing I mean. So if we had a man shot or wounded which we had a lot there was real litters there was no hospital there was no real road there was no jeep there to pick him up. We had to dig a hole and bury them our self and litters were made out of ponchos with tree limbs for pulls. And the hospital there out there on the hill was ponchos laid out on the ground. If you can imagine the doctors operating on the ground on ponchos. We had a lot of wounded and a lot of bad things that happened. And we had cannibalism where some of our boys were eating by the Japs because they were out of food too. And we at one time went several days without food we couldn't get food. It was just a horrible type of fighting that's the only way I can tell you. Stinking corpses all around.

Interviewer: The whole thing involved no sanitation conditions like food or supplies.

Holzem: We all had the Japs tried to sneak in at night and anyone who got out of the fox hole was shot. Of course none of us did we had one Pilipino guy that did and he was shot. And we all had dysentery and the fox holes were water up to here and we just crapped in our pants and that's all. And in the morning

we'd take our canteen the same water boil it pour it out and another one back and forth six times until we could almost see through the water and then we'd make our coffee if we had it. It was just terrible and we were carrying we had so many wounded and being a private I was always on liter detail PFC and my clothes were solid blood from carrying people plus the dysentery.

Interviewer: Sure

Holzem: It was just miserable there were times we had to practically lay on Japs corpses when we were shooting firing. And you can imagine the smell if you're in a tight perimeter and you've got hundreds of dead Japs all around you it was just horror that's all you can say it was just horror. Not that it was any more dangerous than fighting in Luzon but it was just pure horror.

Interviewer: Just the conditions.

Holzem: There was no other way you can describe it. And there were this one gentleman who tried to take took us quite a few attempts to take it and the second one I stayed and we had three men from B Company and three men killed from E Company getting hit from the other side. And we recovered our two bodies and they recovered one and two bodies they couldn't recover and then B Company took the hill the next day and those two boys were lying up there all of the flesh cut off of them and everything was eaten even the cheeks the flesh off their face. And unfortunately I had to bury one of them and my best friend had to bury the other one and all the fox holes were stuffed with dead Japs. We would give them a heavy shelling from a navy ship I don't know where this fellow came from but there was a marine observer got out there and he radioed into the ship. And they sent shells into the hill like mad before we went up there that last day and we took they were all dead except for one Jap. But I had to go ahead and bury one it was a horrible thing to have to do it's in my memory real bad. I yanked a couple three Japs out of the foxhole and the only way I could take this fellow I had to take was by the hair it was bloody and he was just blood and guts and all the tendons and everything were cut so he stretched out about seven feet long. And I put him in a hole and buried him and Bill Hesselback did the other one and I had unfortunately two days later had to bury Bill he got killed and that was hard for me to do my best friend. So it was just plain horror. I couldn't tell how many bodies were on that hill when we took it but we had to sleep on it that night and we and this is not an exaggeration we had to pile them up one on top of the other so we had room to sleep. And I remember laying there and had five stacks of Japs on this side and five on this in various stages of decomposition and looking up at the sky through that. I would have guessed there were over a thousand but I read a report later on where someone counted 704 to give you an idea. It was just a very unhappy way to fight a war much different from Luzon.

Interviewer: There were no logistics to be captured from the enemy because they were fighting with nothing.

Holzem: They were worse off than us. And the hill we were on was called Rock Hill and this hill that the Japs were on Maloney hill there was a swell down between it and there was a dead caribou down there and every day we would go down and look at that caribou and you could see where they sliced the meat off of it at night. They were worse off than we were on food. That's why they ate those two boys.

Interviewer: When the division was finally evacuated from Leyte did they take you back to a rest area for a while?

Holzem: Yeah they took us around we went just south of Ormuk and then they took us in trucks around the roads to the south near Doulike on the east side and we had one month of R&R if you want to call it that. And then we left for they put us LCIs and took us through the China Sea up to Mendoral and we landed in Mendoral and in a day or two later we flew to the jump on Taiga Tie.

Interviewer: Wow

Holzem: Now that's a story in itself the Taiga Tie the rich jump because the history books all that I've read so far say the spinners jump was a perfect operation which it was.

Interviewer: It's giving credit for yes.

Holzem: Everything went off perfect but you can't say that about Taiga Tie. Okay we jumped three or four miles too soon at three thousand feet going 140 miles an hour with a tail wind because some major up in the lead plane got frightened or something and jumped too soon. And I had I was to jump with my machine gun bundle and I was going to be second out my platoon leader Lieutenant Miller was first and he was standing in the door and I was trying to hold on to my bundle because we had another bundle at the end of the stick and he looked at me and said their jumping he was surprised. And he stuck out he had a car beam with a wood stock and a prop less snapped that stock and it just went right off. And so he jumped and I jumped an immediately I was unconscious and because you open your shock was so bad at 140 miles an hour. And what happened was my breast strap went up and choked me up here and fortunately my feet caught my zip bag and the grommets caught and I stood in that air and I took the pressure off. I lost my car beam I had a canteen of oil for my machine gun a canteen of water everything that was loose. Everyone in the whole jump lost every weapon they had. We all landed with no weapons everything was gone and of course we were all spread out the guys were about 3 or 400 yards apart jumping. So it was really messed up but I was real real fortunate when I came down it was the softest landing I ever had in my life my shoot came down over a big clump of real tall banana trees and my feet barely touched the ground. So different from all my practice jumps.

Interviewer: They always knew it was like jumping out of a second story window.

Holzem: Anyway since I had ridden that bundle out it was only about 150 yards from me and I saw it come down in a deep gully. So I ran down there I didn't have a weapon I was anxious to get to it. Paul wanted me to tell you this I didn't think it was a great deal but he thinks it is. So I ran down there to open that because I knew we had a BAR in there we had one guy named John Blanson in our outfit and he had swiped a BAR from another outfit when we had that month off down in Leyte. See BAR was not our regular weapon but he swiped it and he asked me if I would put it in my machine gun bundle so I did. And I knew if I could get to that at least I would have a weapon. And I ran down there and I started opening unrolling that thing you know and I looked up and over this bank coming down four guys Jap shoes Jap clothes and one riffle and he had that things pointed right at my head safety off. And I was trying to get that BAR and he said please don't hurt me don't hurt me we're Philippine gorillas. So anyway I took the ammo away from them made certain that they were gorillas and believe it or not you wouldn't believe it they had a burro with them. So here I am with my machine gun 42 pound machine gun BAR and ammo and eight boxes of machine gun ammo. He wanted the M1 back I gave it back to him and I took the BAR and we loaded the burro up with ammunition these other guys and we went toward the general areas where we should have assembled. And here I come on with this burro four Phillipinos with a machine gun and a BAR and no one else in the platoon had a weapon. That was a little interesting thing.

Interviewer: That was a funny story. How long did it take for the company and the regiment to form up and become effective on Taiga Tie?

Holzem: Well I understand I think the second battalion jumped first and their jump was perfect theirs was okay. And the first battalion was the one that got fouled up we came in after them. You know we were spread out about a mile or so but we all went the general direction that we were supposed to in and we eventually found each other. Sent the night on Taiga Tie and the next morning we took off for Manila and they made the first battalion march all the way. The second battalion had trucks part of the way and the second battalion did most of the fighting where the few places they had some of the resistance on the way to Manila the second battalion took care of it. We had no fighting at all until we hit Manila and took Paranaque Bridge.

Interviewer: Would you like to talk about that? I have never talked to anyone who has been there.

Holzem: About what Paranaque.

Interviewer: Paranaque Bridge.

Holzem: Well there was something that happened that night on the Paranaque Bridge I don't know if you knew about this why you asked me this question. But it's been a point of contention for many many years. It was pitch black and A Company was there ahead of us and we pulled in there alongside of them and it was pitch black and we the B Company pulled in alongside and it was crowded with the little houses. And this road went to Paranaque the bridge this Paranaque Bridge was half knocked out but you could get a jeep over one side of it. But the Japs had set up on the other side and that's what stopped A Company or whichever company was in front of B Company because we came in behind them. Well I was very very close to the edge of A Company and close to this road and this jeep comes up and the A Company guard was posted there to stop anyone from crossing the bridge because it was black it was dark you could barely see a silhouette in the sky. And the jeep comes up and the A Company boy I heard him I wasn't further from him than that and he halted then and Joe Swing General Swing and he had two other guys there was three of them the driver General Swing and another man. And Swing said I'm General Swing you can't stop me I go wherever I want and the guy said but sir but sir and the guy said shut up and he took told the jeep to take off. And they drove out on that bridge and it opened up on him a few minutes later here's Swing and one other man the driver running back. And Swing gives everybody hell cussing everybody out for not stopping him well they did try to stop him I witnessed it I saw it. And then he makes a statement and mind you I told you three guys were in that jeep two came back. And he starts giving us a speech almost crying you killed my people because of you my best friend Colonel Schimerfang is killed he's dead. So we all assumed the Schimerfang was the third one out there and was killed. So for all these years the whole battalion all of the GIs would swear that Schimerfang was killed at that bridge. And we discussed that for many years and it turned out that we were wrong it was another man was with them and he didn't come back over the bridge he went down and joined Swing later. And so all three got out of it and Schimerfang had been killed earlier in the day somewhere else but I guess in the area where the 1st battalion was in control apparently. And that's what he was refereeing to but we didn't know that so for many many years everyone swore in the battalion that Schimerfang was killed at that bridge. And it wasn't until a later reunion until we were talking to Colonel Magellan and all we found out all of the details of what actually happened. But for many many years we all thought that Schimerfang was killed at that bridge and probably I shouldn't say it but General Swing was not well liked by the GIs at all. And it was pitch black and when he started chewing everyone out and using very

filthy language the guys went right back at him with the same language because he couldn't see it was pitch black he didn't know who was yelling and there must have been 20 or 30 guys telling him what they thought. That was not a happy situation.

Interviewer: How about that. Where did you go from there?

Holzem: Well I think I told you a little earlier you don't want me to repeat that story

Interviewer: On Oscar no but I would like to hear about the jump at Las Tonus.

Holzem: well you have the tape the other tape?

Interviewer: The tape that I gave you?

Holzem: You want me to take off from there?

Interviewer: Yeah if you could.

Holzem: Oh okay

Interviewer: From the landing which form everything I've read was a textbook operation the jump went smooth.

Holzem: Yeah when we ran into the camp we had just one pill box that wasn't knocked out by the recon platoon. I shouldn't call it a pill box it was a little tower where they had guards it wasn't a pill box. And they called up they called back for John Blanson to send BAR and he ran up and knocked it out I understand he got a Silver Star for it he knocked out that. That's the only fighting that B Company actually did and by then most of the Japs they said they killed then well actually I didn't see that many Japs killed. I think most of them ran off in the hills when it started. There were supposable 240 some Japs and they were either killed or ran off one or the other nobody counted. And of course I was just a PFC and machine gunner but I did set fire to a bunch of those barracks. John Wrangler gave me some matches and three or four other guys and he had us go burn the barracks because by now the amtracks were in and they were loading the amtracks all of the attorneys were told they could take one suitcase each. And some of them the loading was going slowly so some of them were running back to their barracks or houses or runts or whatever to get another suitcase and it was slowing the operation down. I often wondered then why we set fire to it and it wasn't until one of these reunions that John explained why he gave that order. But we went in and burned the barracks.

Interviewer: What was his explanation for burning the barracks?

Holzem: Pardon

Interviewer: What was his explanation for burning the barracks?

Holzem: That's what I'm telling you because people were running back and getting a second suitcase.

Interviewer: Oh so it was just to keep them out.

Holzem: We burned them down so they couldn't get back in.

Interviewer: Just to organize the internees so you could get loaded.

Holzem: Because there was no way of organizing them they kept running back and forth so we had to put a stop to it.

Interviewer: And you were dealing with a bunch of civilians who can't follow civilians can't follow orders.

Holzem: And then the next part that I had in it they took our platoon and put us up on that road that the supposed Jap regiment would be coming down towards us. And I had my machine gun sitting on one side of the road and the other machine gun from my platoon on the other side. And we waited and waited and waited and I could look over my shoulder it was up in the hill to the rest of the camp. And I looked over my shoulder and I watched the rest of the Amtrak loaded. It was boring really to me half hoping the Japs would come but they didn't. So no Japs came and finally they said instead of fighting our way back to the line which was 20 miles away that we could walk back to the beach where the Amtrak would be coming back from a trip across the lake. So our platoon drew the assignment of permanent withdrawal and I was actually the last man coving the last man to get on the Amtrak with John Ringer. And I had my machine gun sat down there on the beach when we got down there while everybody loaded then I put my machine gun up and I was actually the last man to jump up on the Amtrak. And didn't have any resistance at all and I walked back to the beach for about two or three miles with Frank Smith who was a reporter with the Chicago newspaper he was the only one he jumped with us. And he carried big bible all the way down took two hands all the way down. He was from Chicago as I was and I talked to him quite a bit coming down to the beach. And we went across on the Amtrak had no problem and then we land on the other side I think Monative it was called. They put us in ducks and for about a mile or two we were real low to the ground right by the rice patties so they had this road built up about 8 feet high. And this duck driver apparently had been to Manila and had been drunk the night before is what Ringer figured but we all got in that last group go in that last duck. And that guy drove and went off the side of that embankment and the duck tipped over we went all the way down 8 feet down that rice patty. And here I am with John Ringer standing on my face. You know he was I don't know if you know John Ringer but he is very mild mannered but he wasn't mild mannered then. He cussed that man out that driver out that was just drunk and driving we actually had a drunk driver. Here we went through the whole operation and almost got killed by

Interviewer: No one was hurt when the duck slid off in the rice patty?

Holzem: No one got hurt.

Interviewer: Sometimes you smell very fresh after crawling out of the rice patties.

Holzem: Except for our feelings.

Interviewer: Your pride was hurt it dropped your sanitation level down a little bit crawling around in the rice patties.

Holzem: They brought us back and we spent the night there at the prison with the attorneys. And you know you probably know most of the attorneys were priest, nuns, missionaries there also were a lot of prostitutes.

Interviewer: I wasn't aware of this.

Holzem: Oh yeah many of them were prostitutes. Apparently all the Americans that were down in the islands were picked up and put in this slave were put in this prison. So some of the boys took advantage of that that night I heard later. I wasn't that sort of a person though and I spent the whole evening talking to two little blonde girls' twins. And they were so anxious to get to California because their mother told them California was heaven. And I always loved little kids so that was how I spent that first night.

Interviewer: Had they these little girls been born in the Philippines?

Holzem: Yeah they had never been to California.

Interviewer: They were American children but they had never been to America.

Holzem: Yeah their mother had always been telling them about California so they couldn't wait to get to heaven this is California. I'll never forget that that was very enjoyable. Then the next morning the next day they took us out in the morning and we went in the same place where this 188 was supposed to be fighting the Japs to keep them from hitting us. And we had a real heavy Jap attack in the morning it was up on that hill called Acheter Hill it was a sugar can field that had been cut. And we got right back into combat the next day we had a lot of combat then. A lot than we had on that little stay that was a piece of cake. We really had no fighting other than John Lancer with the BAR.

Interviewer: So the resistance with the Japanese was minimal to nonexistent the recon platoon

Holzem: Whatever it was the recon platoon

Interviewer: They eliminated the resistance of the 349.

Holzem: And I really don't know how much they did. I would see any Japs where I went in that part of camp where I went in I had nothing to do with one end of the camp. Now there might have been a lot of dead Japs down at that end I don't know. But my own guess is that most of them ran off in the hills when we started shooting.

Interviewer: Could be so then what?

Holzem: Then what well we went on fighting. We fought towards Santatomosh and had a few engagements lost a few more men. And then they took us in trucks around what was called Shorty Ridge. I don't know if you are familiar with the map but there is a large lake called Lake Towa which is an ancient volcano. And on Taiga Tie ridge one edge which on the edge where we jumped it took us all around the west edge. And they had a bulldozer ahead of us because the hill was kind of pointed and they leveled out a road. And I'll never forget that ride I was afraid to look out of that truck because it's a half a mile straight down and they took us all the way around to the south and then we fought our way back up north. And then by then the Jap resistance in the area was just about taken care of and then we had one more battle after that and that was Mount Ma Punya. And it was the last fighting we did and the object there they pushed all the Japs in there group of hills and ridges up to a hill called 2480. And different companies led the way and when we got to the last B Company was there again. And they put

us on hill twenty well we got on hill before hill 2610 two hills before that we were on we had a bunch of ridges to go over. And the Japs were on this ridge so I set my machine gun up and was firing at the Japs I could see over there and about that time an F25 came and dropped Nippon on that ridge. As the crow flies it wasn't but about 20 yards from me. We could feel the heat from the Nippon and it just wiped out that whole ridge. So we packed up and we went down and up over that ridge and those poor Japs they were charred just like this their arms you could see that they were bodies but they were just like charcoal it was horrible. That's the only time I've seen it used. Then we went to the next ridge and it was 2610 which was about 100 and some feet higher than 2480 which was the next one. There was a deep valley between each one of these ridges. And they called in the 825 with bombs and they came right over the hill we were on and dropped them in the hill 2480. And our company was there John Ringer was NCO and pretty soon all of our noses started bleeding a concussion. Pretty soon some of the guy's ears started bleeding and then John Ringer called a halt to it on the radio he said okay it's time to go up. So we went down and then to get up the hill we had to almost pull ourselves up it was so steep. And my platoon was in the rear so I wasn't one of the first ones up but one of the other platoons was and they got there just in time. All of the Japs had gone into a cave that was on the other side and when they got up there those Japs started coming out so the guys opened fire and chased them back in. And then they got some white phosphorus grenades and threw them in. Pretty soon Japs started running out with their clothes on fire. And of course it was like a duck shoot all the guys up there facing the cave shooting them as they came out. Then they got some of them with flame throwers they started throwing flames in there and then more of them came out. Finally we had a pile of Japs about 8 feet high and about 15 or 20 feet on the ground. And they thought that that was all the Japs that were going to be there that was in the cave. And we had a bunch of new recruits that just joined us before this particular operation and they wanted souvenirs. There was one kid in my squad and I said no don't go down there don't go for souvenirs I lost my best friend in Leyte this fellow Bill Hesselback the one that had to bury the other boy that was eaten. I lost him because he went for a souvenir. I said don't do it and we had an artillery officer a spotter up there and we had some gorillas and some of the gorillas went down there and about 18 or 20 GIs all replacements none of the old timers and this captain from the artillery he went down there. Going through those bodies for souvenirs and there were Japs still in the cave and they threw out a satchel charge and it wounded 20 of them and killed the captain from the artillery and one gorilla. And wounded 20 of them and then some more Japs started running out and one Jap made it over to the pile of bodies and then some more came out and everybody started shooting. And I wasn't supposed to be shooting I was just watching. And I was holding the rifle for this kid that went down for a souvenir and this one Jap made it out and he went about 50 or 70 yards past everyone was looking at the cave because there was more coming out so I shot that Jap. That's the last shot I fired in the war but to make a long story short they finally got them all and counted I think there was 104 bodies in the cave. But it was really no combat it was like a carnival duck shoot. That's the very last combat the 511 was in.

Interviewer: Through all of your reflections, and I know it was a rare occurrence, you didn't see a single Japanese surrender?

Holzem: No never.

Interviewer: I know it was a very rare occurrence but.

Holzem: Well you know yourself the Pacific war was different from the European and it was heartless we didn't take any prisoners. Naturally when they hit you in the morning a lot of them their not all going to be dead there are wounded out there. And just somebody had to go out and just kill them like you would a dog hit by a car in the street.

Interviewer: Sure

Holzem: And of course they started sensibly you know in the war down there. But that was the way it was. We took one prisoner the day we took Maloney Hill in Leyte one Jap was alive and had two broken legs. And so they decided to keep him alive so they could interrogate him because we had a Japanese soldier there who spoke English and Japanese. So they brought him back to rock hill the next hill over we all went back to rock hill then after that first night the second night we were back there. And there B Company was right next to A Company and I was in with the B Company and I heard them call over to A Company for a guard for the night to guard this guy even though he had two broken legs. And this kid from A Company had a Tommy gun up on a tree limb and he reached for that Tommy gun and it went off and the limb hit the tree and killed him right there 30, 40 feet from me. Then of course they had to get another boy from A Company to go guard the Jap. So during the night two shots rang out and in the morning the Jap was dead. And so the officer asked this guy said why did you shoot him and he said oh he got up and tried to run away. The officers said that's understandable so that's how they took care of one prisoner. And then I did see one other Jap we had you know different companies had different perimeters and different hills and there was one place that was kind of wide open called Mahonac. And I don't recall what happens there but we went over there to get supplies one time and there was a guy a Jap soldier there working with them he was putting hand grenades around the foxholes and what not. I couldn't figure out what was going on and they said oh don't worry about him he was a Jap soldier but he was a Korean Conscript and he hated the Japanese. And he surrendered to us and he's on our side the only other Jap that I've ever saw in my life that was taken prisoner in our operation.

Interviewer: Very interesting. So after the cease of hostilities where were you when the Japanese surrendered?

Holzem: Well when we got B Company got two of this man pulling operation the last fighting I had seen so many machine guns killed my machine gun team all together three of my ammo carriers were killed. I was slightly wounded two times and my other guy was shot once. And I thought I want out of this machine gun finally because I thought we had to go up to Japan and fight.

Interviewer: Right

Holzem: So I asked to be transferred to the regimental S2 section. I had a pretty high IQ and I could do that so they put me in the S2 section. So I was in headquarters company after the fighting and at that particular time they were taking guys for R&R down to the ocean I forget what it's called Dingus or someplace down the southern part of Luzon for R&R. And I was down there when Japan surrendered. So I hitchhiked back real fast because I figured we would be gone and I got up there the 511th was all in trucks headed for Leapaherschum. And I got back to camp and they said well Holzem you don't have time to pack up you're going to be on detail here you strike the tents fold up the cots and miss out on it. And I didn't like that idea very well I always wanted to get where the action was. So I spent the night there they were still taking off in the morning so I left I just hitchhiked over to the airfield and tried to get my own airplane. Nobody would let me on a plane all of these platoons no they wouldn't let me on. And I just got my mail my aunt every week she sent me a package and it had cookies and candy and I was carrying it. And it was a B24 liberator full of reporters from the South Pacific that were going to fly up so I tried to get on that plane. And I went up and one of these reporters came to the door and I said I'd like to ride and he said no we don't have room. And oh geese I was hoping I could get in there I've got this package of goodies here I'd like to open up. He said what's in there? I said oh cookies candy and

bunch of things like that, come on in. Of course I forfeited my package I never saw anything the reporters took it. I got a ride in that B24 and I rode all the way up to Okinawa caught up with my outfit on Okinawa.

Interviewer: I've heard of the island hopping campaign but not the island hitchhiking.

Holzem: I was in that liberator waiting to take off one plane after another after another on the airstrip and all of a sudden one plane crashed at the end in front of us. And we still kept taking off and I remember when we started taking off we got over the heat of that plane and our plane went up and down the heat jumped up. Then we flew to Loaoag in Northern Luzon and spent the night there. There was some sort of army camp there and they actually had some sort of hut mans and cots and we spent the night there. And in the morning we took off and again we were in line on the airstrip and again a plane crashed at the end and we took off after it. And you can check three planes crashed on the way up to Japan. So then I caught up with my outfit in Okinawa and then I was first time I had ever seen a C154. The big four engine plane cargo plane.

Interviewer: C52 isn't it?

Holzem: 154 I don't know 130 I don't know.

Interviewer: Yeah they had the 130s before the 154s.

Holzem: But anyway we got in that we were taking off and we were running down the runway and crew chief said hold it something's wrong and it turned out only the radio wasn't working. But they stopped out plane at the end of runway so then I couldn't take off until the next day. So the next day we got on the runway and this is the gods truth another plane crashed right in front. So I flew over three planes that crashed on my way to Japan. You can check the history three planes crashed and I'd flown over each one of those I was three or four planes behind each one of those.

Interviewer: How were you received by the Japanese people? They had just surrendered the island was basically was in a mess the economy was in turmoil.

Holzem: Well were told since the 509 were the first ones in we were told we're greatly outnumbered right now and if you're walking down the sidewalk and the Jap soldiers coming toward you get off get out of the way. We can't afford to start anything we didn't have any problem everyone treated us fine the Jap soldiers when we did see them they stepped out of our way. And it wasn't two days later we had all the Jap kids yelling V or victory because they knew they would get gun and chocolates. So we had no problem.

Interviewer: So initially very well received by the Japanese no hostility by the populous. You had worked in the S2 were you aware of the Japanese defense of their homeland?

Holzem: Well then I wasn't not then I was just a GI but of course later on I studied.

Interviewer: You've read

Holzem: Yeah I did have an interesting thing happen to me there in Yokahama. Being S2 the S2 platoon leader I don't even remember his name he was told to go except the surrender of the city chief of police.

He didn't have anything to do with the army or anything but for the city chief of police. We had to go over and except his so this officer he was a lieutenant he took another GI and myself with him in the jeep and we went over there. And they received us into this room and it was in this skyscraper building downtown. Yokohama was leveled except for downtown the skyscrapers were all okay. But all of the houses were leveled but anyway we drove downtown and I think it was on the second floor a real nice big office. And this police chief was in there and he bobbed to us and he served us all tea he even gave us two GIs cups of tea. But this lieutenant he had his eye on that soda so he demanded that the chief of police give him the soda. The chief of police said no he wouldn't give it. It was the funniest thing the man didn't know what to do because he couldn't make an issue over it he would have caught hell with the division if he did. And he was very red faced and me and this other GI we looked at each other and we smirked and we laughed. He couldn't get that soda from that chief of police.

Interviewer: I'm sure it was matter of pride.

Holzem: Then another thing happened that was interesting I think it maybe boring to you. A GI found out where a Jap beer warehouse was. So we got word of it too meanwhile we had confiscated this truck and this truck had a big tarp on the back there was some Jap driving it and we had it for our S2 section. So we went over to this beer warehouse and we got 14 cases of beer cases of delicious beer. And we put it in the truck and covered it with canvas. And this Jap pulled in the warehouse he was there tabulating everyone he was mad as hell. And when we went there there was even a one start general there with his jeep loading up beer.

Interviewer: So it was no secret right.

Holzem: Okay so this Jap reported it. By now McArthur was stationed downtown and he reported it. And word came in get that beer back it was signed the S2 section get all of that beer back every bit. Well we had seen most of those guys in the jeeps so we knew where it was so we went out and got all of that beer even took it away from the general and everything. And we reported back and said sir we found every bit of that beer except for 14 cases we can't find. It was in our truck and they said you know you did a good job if that's all we lost of it that's pretty good. We were drunk for a week. And we had it right there in front of the Colonels office in the truck under the tarp.

Interviewer: Oh shame on you.

Holzem: It was good beer too.

Interviewer: You had spent over a year on the islands in terrible conditions. You can't deny a GI a beer after that. How long were you in Japan after that with the army complication?

Holzem: Let's see we went in there in September, August or September and I left there the end of January no end of December.

Interviewer: About four months five months.

Holzem: And I was at Morioka with original headquarters.

Interviewer: You didn't see any of the Japanese American relations even that early on were pretty good.

Holzem: Oh yeah one time they gave me 50 Jap trucks and 100 Japanese 50 drivers and they sent me out to a Jap armory to unload all the Jap weapons. And we loaded the 50 trucks up with samurai swords, calvary savers, car beams and riffles. Took it down the to the railroad track and we loaded five flat cars full that deep and they took it out to some ship apparently they were told to take it out to the ship and dump it. Later on I heard a lot of those things were taken down to Yokahama and Tokyo and given to GIs so I'm sure where they ended up. But we were allowed to send one souvenir home period and that's it. But I knew they could only check it once a week so every week I crated up a barrack, car beam, sword I ended up with a sword two calvary savers and a calvary car beam and I have a Nabo pistol. So I ended up with quite a few souvenirs but I got most of my souvenirs up there. The only ones I got from combat was a flag I have a band light siren that they will go like that and make a siren and a bugle. I only carried light things and I only get them when they were there to pick up I didn't risk my life getting them.

Interviewer: Sure that's very smart very intelligent. I'm curious the mindset of the one of the soldiers you had so recently been involved in just viscous combat did any of the hatred carry over to the army of occupation do you think at your level. The level of the young infantry men who had seen his buddy dying?

Holzem: No

Interviewer: Didn't hold any hostility toward the Japanese people?

Holzem: No when we were in Yokahama we spent about a week there and then we went up north. I remember I was walking around the streets just studying all those houses burned out the few Japs that were in that area had saved corrugated tin or whatever and made shelters for themselves. And into one and he invited me into his place into this little shack he had made and served me tea and he was just as nice and sweet as could be. And he had a bicycle and he insisted that I take the bicycle because I was walking. He was just insisting he was just as nice so I was riding that bicycle and I was pretty high up there. I remember the bicycle rolled out from under me and I got lots of scratches and things. No the Japs they were very friendly very friendly.

Interviewer: It seems almost strange how quickly the wounds heal between the people between the soldiers and the Japanese.

Holzem: I was very young when I went in I was 18 and I looked like I was 15 and I didn't actually shave until I got out of the army and I was 22. I was just one of them guys that didn't have much hair but I thought all these guys getting haircuts and getting shaved I'm gonna get my peach fuzz shaved. And I went in to a barber shop in Japan and it was a lady barber and she could speak a little English. I said have you been barbering long and she said no my husband was a barber and when he went off to the army I took over and learned to do it. She was shaving my neck with that razor and she said the last I heard from my husband he was in Leyte were you ever there soldier in Leyte. I said no never ever near that place.

Interviewer: Where's Leyte.

Holzem: She had no animosity she her husband never came back I'm sure. No it was amazing how and I think that war was carried on and fought by the Japanese military I don't think the people were behind it they sure didn't seem to be when we got there.

Interviewer: I'm inclined to agree personally.

Holzem: We went up to Morioka and that's where I did my occupation duty and all those people in town they were just as friendly.

Interviewer: Now when you returned in January of 46 you were mustard out you had enough points you got to get out and go home.

Holzem: Yep and I didn't join the reserves and I didn't keep my insurance.

Interviewer: Returned to Chicago?

Holzem: Yeah and college.

Interviewer: Very good.

Holzem: I went to Market University for two years lettered in track and cross country then transferred to Rash University in Houston and got two degrees in architecture. And I've been in construction all my life.

Interviewer: Is that right. Well on behalf of my university and Liberty Museum I thank you very deeply.

Holzem: I hope I didn't bore you too much.

Interviewer: Not at all not at all it was fascinating.