

***NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR***

***Nimitz Education and Research Center  
Fredericksburg, Texas***

***Interview with  
David Richardson, Army Reporter with  
Merrill's Marauders***

## Interview With David Richardson

This is Clarence B ryk. Today is September twenty-eighth, 2002. Today we have the privilege of interviewing Mr. David Richardson who is a reporter and historical figure of great fame, and we're very pleased to have him here today. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to this site.

**Mr. Bryk:** Mr. Richardson, could you tell us where and when you were born?

**Mr. Richardson:** Yes, I was born in Maplewood, New Jersey, July 13, 1916.

**Mr. Bryk:** And your parents?

**Mr. Richardson:** My father was Percy Richardson and my mother was Elizabeth Jones Richardson.

**Mr. Bryk:** And where were they born?

**Mr. Richardson:** My father was born in Boston and my mother in East Orange, New Jersey.

**Mr. Bryk:** Did you have any siblings?

**Mr. Richardson:** Yes, I have two. My sister Betty—that's three. Three. Sister Betty and sister Priscilla and John, my brother.

**Mr. Bryk:** Where did you go to school?

**Mr. Richardson:** Well, I went to school in the Maplewood, South Orange School District, and I graduated from Colombia High School in that system.

**Mr. Bryk:** Did you go to college?

**Mr. Richardson:** Then I went on to Indiana University in Burlington, Indiana. I majored in journalism. I was editor in chief of the college paper, the *Indiana Daily Student*. I got the award at the end as the, it's the equivalent of the *cum laude* of the outstanding journalism class.

**Mr. Bryk:** When did you enter the military? What were the circumstances? How did it happen?

**Mr. Richardson:** Very soon after graduation the drafting began. I graduated in June of 1940 and I was drafted in February 1941 in Newark, New Jersey.

**Mr. Bryk:** So you didn't choose, you were selected.

**Mr. Richardson:** Well let me tell you, that's a funny story, because I went to the draft board , went to the armory in Newark, New Jersey and for the final thing, the induction, and the doctor interviewed me. He had a rubber mallet, tapped me on the knee and I kicked him in the face. I have overactive reflexes. Then he weighed me, I was underweight. There were several other things wrong with me and he said, "Mr. Richardson, you go over there and stand in that corner with those gentlemen."

So I went over in that corner and I'm standing there and a young man asked me and said, "What were you in for?" I said, "What do you mean what am I in for?" "What was your rap?" I said, "What do you mean rap?" "Jail." I said, "I wasn't in jail." And he said, "Hey fellas, this guy wasn't in jail, he has no rap." I noticed these were all big thugs. Obviously they were going to be exempted because of criminal reasons. So it scared the hell out of me.

Finally a voice came out, "Mr. Richardson, please report to desk number fourteen." So then the nice gentleman there was looking at my record. He said, "Mr. Richardson, you clearly are 4F, and you could walk out of here." He said, "I also see that you're a college man. The Army needs college men. Now if you say so, we can waive this 4F and we can make you 1A. What do you think?"

I thought quickly. I left my job the night before with the *Herald Tribune* in New York City. They had a big farewell party. I couldn't creep back to the office, you know. I didn't want to creep back failed. Also I left all my belongings with my folks. I was down to my last dime. (*Laughs*) And then I didn't want to go back in that corner with all the thugs. So I said, "Okay, I'll join up." And that's how I got into the Army. Oh—that's too much.

**Mr. Bryk:** Were you immediately chosen to go into the journalism? I mean—

**Mr. Richardson:** No, no. I was put with the National Guard outfit, the New Jersey National Guard, and sent to Virginia Beach, Virginia, in the Coast Artillery.

**Mr. Bryk:** Uh-huh.

**Mr. Richardson:** We had these 150 long toms from World War I, and so I was in Virginia Beach for about a year there in the Coast Artillery as an enlisted man.

**Mr. Bryk:** What kind of living conditions did you have?

**Mr. Richardson:** Well, it was pretty good. Virginia Beach in the summer is one of those places, a beach resort, and all of the school teachers came down there for the summer. It's very nice. But. So anyway the, uh, then I saw, oh, I then wrangled my way up to headquarters and started the camp newspaper. It was called the *OGI Gazette*. Then I heard that they were starting something called the *Yankee Army Weekly* to be a publication for troops all through the world. And they were gonna cover the war and so forth. So I pulled some strings, did what I could in various directions, and I got on the staff.

So then I reported to their headquarters at 42nd Street, New York, and because I was one of the few who said he'd go into combat, I was sent out immediately to the Pacific to head the first crew that went to the Pacific, only three of us. I was then, I'd been a corporal. I was raised to five star sergeant, that's as high as they go, because I was going to lead the group to start a publication in Australia, the *Southwest Pacific*.

So we took the troop ship. It took about a month to cross the Pacific, zigzagging from San Francisco in the summer of 1942. Zigzagging, and we finally got over there and stopped at Fij and went to Brisbane, and the three of us reported to MacArthur's Headquarters because we had orders from General Marshall. I showed the orders to the public relations people there and they looked at the orders and said, "Guys, we'd better send you up to MacArthur himself because these are from General Marshall. This is something very important."

So we had to, we were, our knees were quaking. We had to go. So there we were and marched in MacArthur's office. He said, "Did these men get their orders?" He was sitting there at this big desk with his pressed hat behind him and he took the orders and started reading. "Well these orders are the damndest orders in the world. No enlisted man, I don't think, in the history of the war had had orders like these because they said, "These men shall be given privileges. One: They shall be able to go anywhere they wish in the theater of war at their own request. Most of us men have to go \_\_\_\_\_??? At their request! Two: When back in rear areas they may be on *per diem* instead of living in the barracks. Three: They have priority to collect men from any other non-combat unit in the theater to make up the staff of the magazine. Four: They have priority on materials to print the magazine. Five: They have priority on transportation to distribute the magazine'." And it went on like this. And MacArthur read it, and he put it down and he turned us and said,

“Well men, all I can say is that you’ll have more freedom than anybody in this state of war except me.”

**Mr. Bryk:** What was your impression of him as a person?

**Mr. Richardson:** Well, very austere man. You know, he didn’t smile. He was very stern. But, our fear was, because we had heard he was an egomaniac. We’d heard he was vainglorious. That he would take this over as his personal mouthpiece. And we weren’t going to let that happen. Because this was gonna end up to be a global GI magazine and this happened to be the *Yank Down Under*, we were going to call it, the local edition. But that fear never came to pass. He never touched the magazine, he never asked for speeches of his to go in, none of his officers did. We never printed his picture in there. One year later, he gave me a Legion of Merit for making a substantial contribution to the welfare of the troops of the Southwest Pacific.

**Mr. Bryk:** Did he present it personally?

**Mr. Richardson:** No, no. At that time a Legion of Merit was very rare for an enlisted man. It was mostly for generals and colonels. So it was quite a thing. But this, at that time a Legion of Merit was very rare for an enlisted man, it was mostly for generals. So it was quite a thing.

So in that year, I had to start the magazine, but I didn’t want to be the editor. I wanted to go into combat. You may call it crazy, but I wanted to. So I went up to New Guinea where the fighting was and spent most of that year in the fighting of New Guinea. I was in the mortar battle with the 41st Infantry.

It was terrible jungle fighting. Terrible. We were fighting in the swamps, you had to take the high ground. Boy, my first taste of battle was terrifying, the sounds, the blood, and everything. It was a very rough start. It was some of the toughest jungle fighting in the war. It was even tougher than \_\_\_\_\_???

Bu anyway, when I came out, I came out a couple of months later with malaria, dysentery, yellow jaundice, all at the same time. I went to the hospital, came out of there, recovered. Then I went back to reporting and I decided when I was in battle, that out of shaking so much I couldn’t write notes. I said I’ve got to be doing something because if you’re doing something, fear isn’t as great, because you’re busy doing something else. Just sitting and watching, your mind does all sorts of terrible things.

So from then on, I tried to find a way to get in on the fighting end, even though I had to fake it and be an actor, if you will. So I went to the Air Force and said "I want to cover a bomber mission." And civilians were going on missions, civilian correspondents, but this was going, this was going out with twenty or fifty other airplanes on bombing raids and coming back and then you write a story, we saw the smoke rising as you'd run away.

Sometimes enemy fighters would get someone, but that was the thing. Everybody had done it. I said, "I want something different." So they called me one day and said, "We have something different for you." So I went out twelve miles where the bomber ship was. And in the corner of the hut there was one little group. I said, "Where are the rest of them?"

"There's one flying today. This is an armed reconnaissance. We're going out over the slot." The slot was off New Britain, a Japanese held island, and freighters from Japan were coming through there to supply Guadalcanal, which was where the main fighting was in the South Pacific, and you were to look for freighters to bomb. We had four or five hundred-pound bombs. Here's New Britain, up here, right here. We were here and we'd go up the slot, the slot right in there. Guadalcanal was right in here.

**Mr. Bryk:** Right to the east of New Britain

**Mr. Richardson:** So anyway, that was southeast. So that's what we did, we went and of course I had never been in a bomber before. I faked my way in, I said, "Sergeant, you know we don't take correspondents in things like this."

**Mr. Bryk:** What kind of a plane was it?

**Mr. Richardson:** It was a B-24, Liberator. "And they said "We can take these others on these flights because there is the extra space. We can't take you because you'd be an extra load. This is just a special flight." And I said, "Yeah, but I'm a soldier." He said, "I shoot guns." I said, "You shoot a 50 caliber machine gun?" "Sure." "I've fired one like that." So we got up in the air and I told the other guy, the other gunner, that I had never shot a gun before. He didn't blink at all. He said, "Okay, I'll show you how."

So he explained, "It's like a shooting gallery. It's tracer bullets. So you can adjust your fire. Just keep, always keep ahead of the other plane. Don't aim at it. Keep it ahead and short bursts, short bursts, short bursts." So that's about the only training I had. The windows roll out of there, no windows, open, and

you're strapped in. So with the wind rushing past you, and you had to shout at one another.

So anyway, that was it. We went over, it was a lovely day like today, some big clouds, and we're going over the sea, and he says, he called me Red, I had bright red hair. He says "Red, you know what happened the last time we went on this mission?" "No," I said, "I guess you guys have all been together a long time flying these missions." "No, it's a pick up crew." I said, "What do you mean, no?" He said, "I was in the motor pool, in the adjutant's office. We're just a pick up crew." "What are you doing in this?" "Well," he said, "we all have a wing, but we're assigned to other things, and we thought it would be fun to go out."

So a little later on this day, I said "Well, have any of you been on a mission?" And they said, "Yeah, the copilot's been on one mission." So a little later on we're eating ham sandwiches going through the clouds up there, and he said, "You know what happened the last B-24 that went up here a few weeks ago radioed back they'd saw a Jap ship and that's the last we ever heard of him." (*Laughs*) He thought it was great fun, you see?

So anyway, a little later on (the guys were sober) we saw the coast of New Britain coming up and there's fighter bases all over there, Japanese fighter bases. We started going up to the slot here and there was a big Japanese freighter. So we said, we're going in and drop two of our four bombs. And then we're going to radio so they can send more planes out. So we went around, circled around, and every circle, all of a sudden we saw these puffs in the air, ack ack, artillery fire. And all of a sudden it's like rain on the roof, you could feel pebbles on the plane.

And all of a sudden tracer bullets came from the ship. Tracers. One tracer hit, I had a picture of it. The window seal right above me in the bomber, a big hole, a 20mm shell. And you know, we were doing evasive tactics to get away from this. Then I dropped the bomb and they missed so they came around for another bomb run and just as we're turning around the other fellow says "Look," the other gunner, and there are seven Japanese planes, seven, with the big red circles on them, muddy color. And I thought, that's the end of my life, this is it. It's happened.

The pilots said, "We're going to do a evasive tactics. We'll try to get as much in and out of the clouds as possible and try to shake these guys." Well, luckily, of the seven, three turned out to be what we call Betty bombers, two

engine bombers. They obviously were coming back from a bomb run in Guadalcanal. That left four, but the four were Japanese Zeroes, the fastest, most maneuverable plane in the air at that time. They split up and went two on each wing just beyond the range. The standard thing is to come in two at once from different directions so they'd divert your fire.

Instead they only came in one at a time, which was good news, so we put all of our guns on that one. And he came in and tracers there right above us, he didn't miss. The other ones came in and he started. As soon as they started tracers I think they got a little scared. The other one went and he missed us and the third one, this left one out on my side. And all of a sudden my gun jammed. So I told the other guys, "Gun jammed." He said "I got a screwdriver," because the shell was stuck. He got on the floor holding on a screwdriver, see, found the empty shell cases, and here I was looking at this pilot and he saw that I couldn't shoot and he was coming in to look at me.

You see the goggles, the brown face, the white scarf. And obviously if we hadn't fixed that gun, we would have been dead ducks. But fortunately the guy found a screwdriver went up, pulled it out, and said, "Try the gun." I shot first and the pilot went away. Now I don't think he was afraid of me. I think what had happened is that he had run out of, he was running out of gas. They had come back from the mission. The others, they could only take one shot at us, the rest had to go, and that's what happened. So that made a hell of a story for me.

**Mr. Bryk:** You wrote that up?

**Mr. Richardson:** Yes, I wrote that up. Then that's the sort of thing I would do, and then I went out with Commander Bulkeley who's the PT boat commander who had taken MacArthur out of the Philippines, rescued him. He has a PT boat squadron based up an inlet in Morobe, in New Guinea, M-O-R-O-B-E. And they call it a squadron, PT boat squadron, and so I asked to go with him. So the bombers took care of seeing there's no shipping in the daytime. The PT boats went out at night to look for the Japanese because the Japanese tried to sneak small vessels over to resupply their troops at night.

So we took off, I forgot how many boats we had, maybe four. No, I think only two. We went looking for Japanese ships and we found some. These were not big freighters, these were little boats, but boy, we had a field day. We went in and just clobbered them. Tracer bullets sank them and fires going on and all. So that was a good story for me, too. These PTs are a different thing, you know,

they're mahogany hulled, they're fast boats, and if anybody hits you, you're gone, but you're so fast, it's hard to hit you. It made a good story.

So then I was in the Lae battle and this was the landing. We landed at a big Japanese base, L-A-E, at Lae, New Guinea and I went in on that with the amphibious engineers. I said I was gonna to do a story about them, and I never did, I must confess. In combat I was going to do other things, but I got onto shore and it seemed very quiet when we hit the beach. All of a sudden these Japanese bombers came over and started dropping bombs and boy, we headed for the jungle to hide in. And they hit one of the ships on fire, and then they sent fighters over that were strafing us in the bushes. Bullets, tracer bullets coming right in the bushes among us.

That finally ended and then I joined the Australian 7th Division, which is then going from one direction to Lae, the 9th was coming the other. They were both gonna go to Lae. So the big battle, I'd never been to the Australians before, but they are fierce fighting men. They loved bayonets.

**Mr. Bryk:** Did they wear helmets?

**Mr. Richardson:** No, no. they wear helmets.

**Mr. Bryk:** You always see pictures—

**Mr. Richardson:** No, they wore the old World War I helmets with splotches, like the British.

**Mr. Bryk:** They were pretty tough?

**Mr. Richardson:** Oh, they were tough as hell. They were crazy, you know. Some Englishmen said the average Australian is two drinks of a bar. But they are great fighting men and they called me Bluey. I had red hair, but they called me Bluey for some reason. And they drank tea all day. Ah, they were great guys. I enjoyed them. But they are not the kind of soldiers we are. Any regular army, British, American, when confronted with a Japanese strong point, would never go right in with the infantry because they'd kill too many of you. So what you do is you lay back, put in artillery, put in mortar, have it bombed, fighter planes strafe, then you've softened it up, and then go in. We figure there won't be as much resistance. The Aussies don't do that. They fix bayonets and charge. Now they have a lot of fatalities this way, but damn it, after they get this reputation among the Japanese, the Japanese see those bayonets, they get the hell out of there. *(Laughs)*

So it was a new experience for me, see, and they asked me if I wanted, see, I had a carbine and they wanted me be a rifleman for them and I said "No thank you." I didn't know anything about bayonet fighting.

So anyways, that was New Guinea. I did some other things in New Guinea and then at the end as I said MacArthur gave me the Legion of Merit for starting the magazine there and for my work up in the Slot.

Then I went to, I was transferred to China/Burma/India after a couple of months at home. In early 'forty-four I arrived in New Dehli and in my job you don't travel with any other troops. I was traveling alone. I got a call at the hotel from \_\_\_\_\_???, at headquarters. He was commander of CAC and some American, James Warner Bellah, who was a fiction writer turned soldier, and he said, "Richardson, we got the story of the war for you. Come right over."

Well, I came over there and he said, "This is a raid by special order of President Roosevelt for a dangerous and hazardous mission in Asia, and they're here now training in central India, training with the Chindits, the British special operations force, and they'll be going in with them in long range penetration into central Burma. So it's going to be a hell of a story, so do you want to do it?"

I said, "Yeah, sure." So here I had only been in India two days and I didn't even report to my office in Calcutta. I said, "Would you tell the office I'm going to go?" and they said "Okay." So I joined them. We went off by train, about a one thousand mile train trip, to Assam in eastern India, right at the border of Burma. With the Marauders We walked a hundred miles to get into Burma, it's a shakedown walk. Look, I hadn't done any walking at all. These were infantry troops. In school I'd been a distance runner. I was captain of my cross-country team, and I was a skinny kid. I wasn't a big husky robust fellow. But I think that for a young reporter seeing a chance of a hell of a good story he's gonna do things he wouldn't do otherwise. So I went in with them and then we went behind the lines.

The whole thing, using the Marauders, there's only 2,900 men, all volunteer, for this dangerous mission, and what we're doing—Stilwell had taken 'em away from the British. Big tug-of-war. He said, "Look at some of the American troops here in Burma, they should be under me." He was refused American divisions, they had to be used in the war in the Pacific. A big fight to get 'em, a big tug-of-war, he won, took us over, changed our mission to aid

his Chinese troops. These are Chinese trained in India by Stilwell to fight in Burma. He's an old China hand himself. It was Chiang Kai-shek. Chiang Kai-shek had asked him to run his army before the war and then he had a falling-out with Chiang Kai-shek so our Army appointed him theater commander for China-Burma-India. So he took them over, trained them, sent them up there.

Unfortunately, he said that Chinese troops trained by Americans can be just as good as any American outfit, and well trained, well led, and this is going to happen. It never happened. These troops were, in the first place, the leadership, top generals, were corrupt. They were beholden to Chiang Kai-shek so when Stilwell would issue an order you'd never know whether Chiang Kai-shek was countermanding the order. It was a very peculiar way to fight a war, and he had a running feud of Chiang Kai-shek, for whatever reason.

The other reason, I think, is their whole culture is different from ours and when the warlords would besiege a city they'd be willing to stay there for months or maybe years. So naturally it'd work out with a chess game, they'd work out a deal that they thought was fitting. But we're trying to fight a war and get home. So it was a clash of cultures there. So this was a problem.

And Stilwell's troops were going very slowly and they had to get through, supposedly, all the way through to Myitkyina at the end before the monsoon season in the summer. This was in February. Going down the valley, the Hukawang Valley, H-U-K-A-W-A-N-G, the Hukawang Mountain Valley, which is a broad valley—all Burma is north to south like corduroy valleys. But only one valley had the supply road the Japanese were using. So this confined them, but it meant if we could get around the flanks, do an end run around the flanks, come back behind them, and put in a road block on their only road, this forced the front to collapse because of this. This is what the Marauders did. Then the Chinese could move in faster than they were when they were just confronting the Japanese troops, so that was the battle plan, the strategy. So that's what we did.

In the end we did three road blocks and these were rough things. The Japanese finally after the third one, things went wrong, and the Chinese again, the Chinese folks are leaders in the roadblocks. See, we're a light hit and run outfit, light infantry, we had no artillery rounds, so we can only hold them for maybe a day, and then the Japanese would come in with artillery and everything. So we counted them, I mean the Japanese, we

counted on the Chinese to come in to relieve us. They were always late, always late. They were always late.

So we took some punishment when we got these road blocks. And this, finally, this roadblock, it was very long, they were very late. Furthermore Stilwell, that all was the old plan of Stilwell's, because he'd walked out of Burma with 'em before 1942 when Stilwell had some Chinese troops in there and the Japanese came in. So he was an old friend. So he picked Stilwell to be commander, the general, not only the regular army has its colonels, to be a commander instead of Hunter, who'd come over with him. Colonel Hunter, a very fine West Pointer who had been in charge of weapons inspections at Fort Benning, a much better soldier.

Merrill was a Dutch soldier. He had never had operational experience with troops. He was Military Attache in Tokyo and Manila before the war. He knew many of the Japanese generals by their first name, but he was not operational service. But nevertheless. And, he had a weak heart coming out of Bauang. His heart gave him trouble. Yet Stilwell still picked him because he was his friend. He could communicate with him and he didn't like Hunter, the other guy.

So this was going to lead to trouble itself. Anyway, so that's what . . . and Hunter was very nice, and Merrill was a very sweet man and a very compassionate man. He became a father figure for the Marauders. We liked him. He had a charisma, relaxed, pipe smoking. Hunter was a little uptight and the advantage of Merrill being this type was he became a father figure for the Marauders. You know, and because the Marauders were an orphan outfit, they were not selected for the job, they selected themselves. They were not an elite unit like the Rangers and Special Forces. They had no battle flag, no shoulder patch, no name except the 5307th Provisional Unit, a composite unit, composite is provisional, composite was their title. So they didn't go in as the Marines go in with artillery behind 'em, or some other, you know, the First Infantry or something, they didn't have any of this. But he was a father figure. This gave 'em something to go in with. So that was not at all bad. But of course he didn't have the operational experience. So that's what happened.

We went in and our first battle was a glorious success. We got high ground off this small river, a Japanese supply base on the road. The Japanese learned we were there so they started counterattacking, and they came in waves, banzai attack with flags and everything. Out of the bush, one wave then another. Well, it was like sitting ducks. We had high ground, we were

protected. We just mowed 'em down, wave after wave. These were, mind you, the 18th Division which had conquered Malaya and Singapore. The only thing we could think of against colonials, the troops from Malaya and Singapore worked, you go banzai ahead and the other guys flee. We didn't flee, we were well dug in, we were good marksmen, so we killed eight hundred of them in one day. Bodies strewn all over like the Civil War was at Gettysburg, you know how that was?

**Mr. Bryk:** So what happened to all of these bodies?

**Mr. Richardson:** Well eventually they took them away. We didn't bother. Well, I don't know what happened because I had left. We'd left. We went away. They were eventually taken away.

**Mr. Bryk:** Were there any truces or something?

**Mr. Richardson:** No, nothing.

**Mr. Bryk:** In other words, they didn't get those bodies until you moved off?

**Mr. Richardson:** Well, we didn't move off. The Chinese came in to relieve us. I guess the Chinese were forced to burn them themselves.

**Mr. Bryk:** I see.

**Mr. Richardson:** But anyway, so, of course, we were very careful if any of our own people died to see that they were buried with a proper burial. We noted it so later grave detail stations that came after the war, they brought, took the body down to the station. We marked where they were.

**Mr. Bryk:** This is something not covered. I always wondered about it.

**Mr. Richardson:** Yeah. So, and I wondered, we're far enough, remember, we're behind the lines. When we had wounded we'd take them on stretchers to an open field or a sand bar, hold the field if necessary, and Piper Cubs would come in and help out. Two-seater planes, take them out one by one. So we never left the wounded in there, they went out.

So anyway, that was the first battle and a grand success. But, there were omens of trouble later on. What had happened, the Japanese, uh, the Chinese were late, and they were late for every operation I ever saw after that. And

they exactly screwed up, yeah, screwed up one operation after another that way. Yet Stilwell stayed with them and you know, he wouldn't—and, incidentally, the problem was still that he was so obsessed with his own troops. Chinese troops. That when a communique came out came out it said Stilwell's Japanese (*transcriber's note: probably meant Chinese*) forces moved fifteen miles today and one major battle, and way back at the end of the story American troops were also involved. That's what Stilwell thought of us. He was going to make his Chinese heroes, he was gonna to do that. We were just a necessary evil. So that was the first inkling of trouble with Stilwell, that he was going to mistreat us, all along the way, and build up his army.

But anyway, in later battles, in later road blocks, the Chinese were just as late. And finally, then, it was so much trouble they were late, the Japanese came in, in force, and we had a very narrow escape just getting out of there because we were depending on the Chinese to protect us. They were not there. Furthermore, Stilwell and Merrill had a very close friendship, but this was a problem because the orders were so cryptic that even Merrill had a hard time understanding them and he was an operational man. Hunter was really running things under Merrill.

But Hunter, they were too cryptic for him, Hunter was mad as hell at this. Mad as hell. He said, "This isn't the way the Army does things." He was strictly GI. So, as he'd hoped, Merrill got the wrong message after all of them and instead of pulling, if he'd have gone further south you could get more of the Japanese to really capture them and envelop them, he pulled back and let them escape, to fight again. And so later down the road that's what happened. They were there to fight us and boy, they chased us, chased us all the way up to the east, and luckily—

**Mr. Bryk:** Physically what were you doing then when this was—

**Mr. Richardson:** I was—

**Mr. Bryk:** Were you shooting or writing?

**Mr. Richardson:** No. I was doing, I had three things. I was taking my own pictures. The reason I was taking my own pictures was that I was self-taught because I wanted to illustrate my story. You see. We had Signal Corps photographers but they were run off somewhere else. I wanted something to go with my story to illustrate them. So I took pictures. I was taking notes. I would only use a gun

if I had to, unlike the bomber plane. For self-defense and that rarely came around. In other words, , I carried a gun always.

So anyway, they chased us further east, northeast, and Stilwell got fearful if they chased us too far, they would now flank him and come in behind his forces. So he gave an order that the second battalion was to stop in a hill village called Pongan, and they could make a perimeter defense.

Now these hit and run forces are not made for static defense. They're made for hit and run. Unfortunately the tragedy of such a loss is the commanders misused them war after war after war. They misused hit and run troops in Vietnam, too, as front line troops, which they're not. They're not. You're taking very elite, trained soldiers on one mission. That's what he did.

So the Japanese came and they put an eleven-day siege out. In other words, they surrounded this little village, just pounded it with artillery, mortars, and everything, and the only way these guys survived is by airdrops, dropped in parachutes. As a matter of fact, all of our food and ammunition came by air, parachute. And they kept fighting off the Japanese. They kept coming in, banzai attacks on all sides of the perimeters, fighting over the water hole. Once they lost their water they had to parachute in some water. So anyway, that was rough, but again that was Stilwell making a judgment, which was not very good.

So we finally rescued them and the way we rescued them, and this was what Merrill did, the last thing Merrill had done. Well, Merrill had a heart attack right at the front there. He had to be flown out. He was in the hospital when he issued an order that they fly in two 75mm pack artillery weapons we could use. The Japanese had a strong point and they were just using this to pound us with artillery and what we needed, counter artillery, something to stop that. So we dropped in this pack artillery. Luckily we had some mule skinnners who'd been with the pack artillery outfit in New Guinea. They didn't know how to use these guns and within one day they were in use and that ended the siege. We pounded the hell out of the hill and the Japanese escaped. That was a long, rough siege.

So after that then, then Stilwell, by the time we'd been there for six weeks. Then Stilwell decided we could never go down that valley and make Myitkyina before the monsoons, but he found a way. Some British agent had told him, "Look. You can go through a pass in the mountain to your left, and then go down the other side and get to Myitkyina, that valley," and that's

what he did. But then he called upon the Marauders to do that. This was not a part of their regular mission. At six thousand feet high, rugged mountain slope. He said, "I know I've asked a lot of you, but I have to do it." 'Cause he knew damn well the Chinese alone wouldn't do it, but he never admitted that they were subpar troops.

So that's what happened. Two commanders, Hunter and Marrill, agreed, but I think on the condition of hearing all that stuff, like "As soon as you get there, we'll fly you out and put in the forces, then you can have a big furlough," but this was never on paper. There were no comments made on paper, ever. So, but that's what happened.

They went over the mountain and the monsoons had started. The mountain was slippery, muddy. The mules would fall off and just slide to their death. We needed mules to carry radio equipment and heavy weapons. We finally made it and got out of the mountain, went in and captured the air strip. But just to show you Stilwell to the end, our Americans were first on the air strip just to reconnoiter, but he said, "I want the Chinese to be the ones to get the credits." So we had to stand aside and let his troops come in and get the credits.

**Mr. Bryk:** But was it that important to those people?

**Mr. Richardson:** To him. To him.

**Mr. Bryk:** Why?

**Mr. Richardson:** Because he was showing Chaing Kai-shek that he could take Chinese and do this. He was always trying . . . he hated . . . he was a queer man. He hated . . . he called him peanuts, called Chaing Kai-shek that. You could read his memoirs. He was foul-mouthed. And then he hated the British and called them Limey sissies, "They can't fight worth a damn!" he said. He was just not a nice man. Whatever soldierly qualities. . . And the problem is, he was in a situation with allied troops, two other nations, which should have taken some diplomacy. Eisenhower would have been the right man and another Eisenhower because you know what Eisenhower did at (**sounds like "chasen"**) He could work with the British, the Dutch, and the French, and all this because he was a soldier diplomat. But Stilwell wasn't. Instead he was just the opposite. He antagonized people. But anyway, that was the problem we had to deal with as well as the fact that he just mistreated the orders. He just showed no, he never came around himself to say, "How are

you fellows doing? You're doing a great job. I appreciate ut." He never gave us any . . . These guys keep looking.

**Mr. Bryk:** Pardon me.

**Mr. Richardson:** Yes. So anyway—

**Mr. Bryk:** This is a local newspaper's and he would like to take a picture of you.

**Mr. Richardson:** Yeah.

**Mr. Bryk:** We have a journalist here, so he understands.

**Unknown:** Oh, great.

**Mr. Richardson:** So anyway, where were we?

**Mr. Bryk:** You were talking about Stilwell and you know about his particular personality, being an antagonistic individual.

**Mr. Richardson:** Yes. Well, let me see so I can get around to it, I think I can. So anyway, we . . . let's see, where were we?

**Mr. Bryk:** Well, he had allowed the Chinese to take the air strip while you stood aside.

**Mr. Richardson:** That's right. So, but, Stilwell was not a good man for preparation logistics. He had a headquarters full of people who were, had marched out with him. His son and son-in-law, nepotism. And it was a very bad stand. They should have been preparing for what happened after he took Myitkyina.

This is my worry, quite frankly, about Iraq and Afghanistan. Are we preparing for what happens after we get in there? We're not prepared for what happens either. You saw what happened last time in Iraq. We never got Saddam. In Afghanistan we still haven't solved things there. We keep going in, we're great at going into places, but very bad at follow-up in war. We should have taken lessons from World War II where we conquered Japan and Germany and stayed there. And made it work in each case before we got out. We're still in Germany and Japan, you see, yeah.

So anyway, that was the situation. They didn't build up a funded supply, so when we got in they could have a fly in, ammunition, reserve troops all of

what it would take to hold the air field and to advance on the city nearby. Now their intelligence was bad too. His son was G2, intelligence, and his son said, "There's only three hundred and fifty Japanese in there." There were three thousand five hundred and furthermore we slept on the ground there, you know that's what you do in combat, and could hear Japanese trucks all night coming at us, building up supplies. So thousands more were going in there, and we couldn't go in ourselves. We had, we held it, just this little force that captured the airstrip. Each Marauder, there were teams, each Marauder battalion, a Chinese battalion behind it, going in. So anyway, that's, uh, instead of really abundant supply, we'd wait on the airstrip and nothing would come in. Day after day and here the Japanese began attacking the airstrip.

And, you know, we couldn't hold it long and that's a scary situation. And then the Japanese come over and strafed us, fighter planes, staffers, bombers. So it was a very touch and go situation there. And finally Stilwell, finally, Stilwell brought in the Chinese outfit, the 150th Regiment I think, and these were sort of green soldiers. They did advance as far as into Myitkyina, the city hall I think or the railroad station, in two pincer movements, but then they met at this station, they mistook each other for Japanese and killed hundreds of their own men.

Then Stilwell got desperate. He couldn't—he didn't have any other replacements so he took engineers off the road. They were building this road from India to China. They were not combat people, threw them in and they got slaughtered by the Japanese too. Then he would get, you know, it was a desperate situation and he hated the British. "I won't have the Limeys in there." There were good Limeys in this division. He wouldn't touch it. But finally he had to agree to let the Chindits come in who were just as beat up as we because they had been behind the lines too. They fought well, but this was not going to be enough. I mean this was—and he sent in more Chinese, but they weren't enough.

So here's what, the weeks went by. By that time the Marauders were so beat up. We'd walked five hundred, six hundred miles with full packs and fighting battles in terrible conditions. We should have been flown out immediately, taken to the airstrip, but it was a ninety-day thing supposedly for behind-the-line troops. It was one hundred and twenty days by then. And Hunter was very worried because they were having to evacuate a hundred Marauders every day because of malaria, dysentery, other jungle diseases.

Our casualties were not so much from Japanese bullets, they were from disease, sixty percent, seventy percent were diseased and they were just beat up. All we'd been eating for these entire four months were K-rations, an emergency ration, meant for some fighter pilot shot down to live on for three days. Carrying a full pack and all of this expending of energy, and all you had was these K-rations for three months, four months. So it was very, we were losing teeth. I lost teeth. We were susceptible to all of these diseases. You have fatigue, you looked like—we looked like skeletons. It was very rough, and yet we were supposed to fight this battle.

And Hunter finally wrote a message to Stilwell, a very strong message, and said these people—and then sweat typhus. The Japanese had got it somewhere in some village and the American found it in the village and got it. Forty-six Americans died of sweat typhus on that airstrip. This is typhus. They didn't have an inoculation for it. It was terrible. You'd go and you'd fall asleep at night and the guy next to you, the next morning his face was black and he's dead. Some were flown out, but most of them, it was very quick.

So Hunter asked to relieve these men, they'd had enough and they can't do it. No word. So here's Stilwell trying to get everybody else in there, to get troops, non-combat troops. Finally a hundred and, finally a whole force which is \_\_\_\_\_???. Replacements came in on the ship to Bombay. They were supposed to train them before and said they flew them right over and put 'em right in Burma. And these were good fighting men, these were luckily good men and I think they made the difference in the battle. But it took seventy-one days to take the town itself, one mile from Myitkyina, two miles from Myitkyina, from the time we captured Myitkyina airstrip.

**Mr. Bryk:** How many men were lost?

**Mr. Richardson:** I don't have a figure here, but thousands of men. It was a brutal battle and the Marauders were down out of a force of twenty-nine hundred started, to two hundred at the end who could still walk. Mind you, most of them were sent back to the hospital and when they reported on the last battle August third and then were

**END OF SIDE ONE  
BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO**

**Mr. Richardson:** That started a big controversy to see if there were any missing troops. It was almost like a mutiny. It was not a mutiny. Nobody mutined, but it was the

same thing because the commander versus his troops and a great criticism of Stilwell. They would send officers home and say, "You must talk to nobody." They sent Hunter home. He refused to be the commander of the new outfit. I think they were sort of buying him off. So they sent him home with a slow boat. He never got a promotion for the rest of the twenty-five years in the Army.

**Mr. Bryk:** Stilwell had a lot of other people?

**Mr. Richardson:** Well, Stilwell was a buddy of Marshall. Stilwell landed on his feet. Stilwell was removed because he couldn't get along with Chiang Kai-shek, but you think he went home with the fleet? He wound up as head of all Army ground forces and then as head of the 10th Army based in Okinawa, he was going to be the first to invade Japan. So, because he was a pal of Marshall, the old boy network.

**Mr. Bryk:** West Pointers?

**Mr. Richardson:** Yeah. Oh, more than West Pointers, his son was a West Pointer, so they were very close.

But anyway, so the rationale, all this controversy, it was all over the press, the controversy, they were steaming, and to this day Marauders, many Marauders, hate Stilwell. One of 'em said, "If I'd had him in my sights at Myitkyina, , I'd have shot him." And in the end then this happened, they were shooting officers, you know. But anyway, what happened is finally, Levenworth put out a, Fort Levenworth, the Army's staff and command school, put out a password.

**Mr. Bryk:** Let me make sure about that.

**Mr. Richardson:** They put out a study which, of that situation, and they concluded that Stilwell had done the proper thing. He did not been leaving the Marauders in not showing them special treatment because he was Commander of Allied Combined Forces, and you could not favor one over the other, especially your own people over the others, so that he had no alternatives but to keep us in just because the British and China were in, and to show us no favoritism over them. That was the rationale.

Now the answer to that rationale was yes, but the Marauders were, a tiny force, twenty-nine hundred men, the only American ground force in Asia.

There were thousands of Chinese, thousands of British. Not all of them had been through hell like us. Some had but not all of them. And, these people, they had had the whole burden of being the only Americans in there, the strain of it. They thought promises had been betrayed, promises had been made, and they had no field promotions until the end, but Stilwell, when all of us came up, then he rushed in and gave medals. He had a pocketfull of medals. Medals, never got the papers.

And let's see, who should we give the DSC to here? Who should we give the Silver Star to? Our top soldier, Rogan Wreston, who went on to be the most decorated soldier, he was in two other wars, got a Bronze Star, the lowest medal he could get. So they said, "Well, Stilwell doesn't believe in medals." Well, what happened as soon as the supporting force came in to be with us, they were getting Distinguished Service Crosses, Silver Stars, everything else, but not the original Marauders.

He then put his son, son-in-law, in charge of the proceeding march task force, and he treated his soldiers well, but it was a little late. We never got that treatment. So you can see this bitterness continues and this is the story I'm going to tell in here. It won't please a lot of people because a lot of people still have the names, Vinegar Joe, the GI's beloved general. Well, that's not the Joe we knew.

So I think that's it. Now my own career. Of course, I can go on and on and I don't know how much you want.

**Mr. Bryk:** We're probably, I think we've hit the things that no one else knows yet about and they'd like to stay in the World War II era.

**Mr. Richardson:** No, but see this is, let me tell you. Before I was gonna—after this, I heard this American tank outfit was being formed. Are you still on here?

**Mr. Bryk:** We're still on.

**Mr. Richardson:** Fort Knox was armored. About all of Fort Knox's people wasn't on the Pacific, all Europe. But, a consignment of German tanks arrived in Calcutta. No forces to go with them. So they formed, there was a guy named Col. Rothwell Brown, he's a descendant of the Hearsts?? and Rothwell Brown organized the Chinese tank battalion. He trained the Chinese and, well, again they weren't very good and they had little tiny tanks. But anyway, so then he decided to try to get an American tanker. So he put notices on poles all over India, Who

wants to volunteer? And he got together enough Americans to train them and put them in this tank. Well, I'd heard about this so I said "That's a hell of a good story so I'm going in with them too."

So I went over to see Roswell Brown and he said, "Well, we can't take extra people." I said, "I'm a soldier." "You shoot guns?" and I said "Yeah." "You got your helmet?" "Oh sure." So he said, "Well, we'll try to find a place for you because they're so short of men." So I figured I'd be in the last tank.

Well, the morning of the battle one officer comes up to me and says, "Your name Richardson?" I said yes. "We're having to transfer you to the command tank." So now the command tank has waited for me. So there I was going to a battle in the first tank. I had never been in a tank in my life! But, luckily the gun man was a tank man. I got in the tank, and I had him show me how to shoot a machine gun and so forth. (*Laughs*) So, and then I got in the battle and we got, we, what they needed, is they needed to drive the Japanese out of a little narrow, between the river and the road, because they were holding up the whole operation and the infantry couldn't do it. So use the tanks to slog through, and that's what, we were followed by Chinese troops.

So we went in and I thought, God, boy, this is wonderful because I'm not in a foxhole, I've got all of this metal around me, feel so protected, and gee, this is the way to fight a war. No mud, at least. And it's like being in a movie theater. You look through this periscope and you feel so protected. All of a sudden you heard bullets ping off the thing, but you say, they could not get in the tank, they're just machine guns. But all of a sudden, now the commander said, "Look, gunner," he said to me, he said, "All you do, until you get a further order from me, is you fire short bursts into the brush. The Japanese are in the brush firing at us. You can't see them, that's all right. You want to keep their heads down. That's all, we want to just keep them, that way we'll get 'em."

And we get close enough to the brush so the infantry can come behind us and take over. So that's what it is. Short bursts, tracer bullets like in bombers, and you hit the brush. But of course I've never, I wondered why they wore goggles in the tank and gloves. It's because the damn hot shells come out in your face, out of the gun.

**Mr. Bryk:**

The casings?

**Mr. Richardson:** Yes, the casings come out and go clattering on the floor and your hands. So you protect yourself. You're better off protected against it.

So, and he said now "Look," all of a sudden he said, "We just spotted a flash of a Japanese anti-tank gun. So, they can go right through a tank. So look," he said, "I want you to look for an orange flame because that will be the anti-tank gun. If you see an orange flame in the bushes, put your guns on it, a short burst, and yell 'Seito.' Then we'll put our big gun, the 105 guns up top, on that, where you've placed the gun."

So, there I was, mind you, I kept blinking because I wasn't used to shooting a gun in a tank. Shell cases kept coming up. So I kept blinking and then the tank was going real fast up and down and I was looking for the damn orange flame and I was blinking. All of a sudden I saw an orange flame out of the corner of my eye. I put the gun in that direction and that's the last I remember of the battle.

So later, the next day they had a briefing. The colonel had been flying up above in a Piper cub to observe the battle. He said, "Who was the gunner in the command attack?" and I said, Oh my God, God, I probably killed some of our own troops. I said, "My name is Richardson."

"Richardson, I want to commend you," he said, "you helped and I thank you on it." He said, "We got it out of the way." And I didn't tell him my eyes were closed at the time. *(Laughs)*

So then I went on from there and jumped in. I heard the OSS behind the lines was working with guerrilla troops, local tribal people, against the Japanese and I thought that's a hell of a story. So I offered to parachute in with them. So they fly you over in a plane and they drop you one by one. And the only parachute instruction I had is, stand in the open door, put one hand on this side, and one on the other, just stand in line, and when the bell rings, the light goes on, throw out your right leg. Then when you're in the air take the embryo position and look for trees. If you see a tree, pull on the cord the other way.

So the trouble is, we're jumping at seven hundred feet. This is a low jump because the Japanese are over the hills. They could see and they'd shoot you down. You don't have much time. You have to pull on this thing, a tree and I didn't, I landed in a tree and they had to cut me out of this tree.

So I got down the night and I asked the guys, the rest of the guys, the story, my story by the way, only three or four of them were Americans. You know, I had been exempted by my draft board and didn't have to go but they said, "Well, we use college men." They said they needed radio men and I'm a radio expert, so I said, "Okay, I'd go." Another one, and he had a bad heart. Another one had flat feet, but he was a mathematician, and he said we need code clerks. So here we were, three 4-Fs, they were behind the Japanese lines.

When we go back to New York, 42nd Street, all the MPs were big strapping healthy guys. You go in the headquarters, all of the clerks were big strapping guys . And I began to realize during in the war, the closer you get the more decrepit the soldiers were.

**Mr. Bryk:** *(Laughs)*

**Mr. Richardson:** So anyways, my last mission, my last big mission, I also stayed with the Japanese—or, Chinese. I was with them a couple of weeks, the Chinese Army in one battle. Then I went down, my last battle was, I heard the Gurkhas, Gurkha paratroops, were going to make their first combat jump. They'd never jumped in combat before. So I jumped with them in the Rangoon operation, to capture Rangoon. This was a scattered jump, the whole ship wasn't just jumping at once. We were just going to drop in the rice patties, take Elephant Point at the mouth of the Rangoon River because there was a little Japanese unit in there that we'd make or break. The next day Lord Mountbatten's flotilla was gonna come down the river to catch the Rangoon. Actually, there wasn't a Jap left in Rangoon then. So we had the only fighting in Rangoon area was our Gurkhas, and the Gurkhas were the toughest fighting men in the world. They're fierce. They have a Gurkha knife, take off your neck, your head, with one slice.

So that made a good story. So that was my last mission.

**Mr. Bryk:** What do you think about when you look back now? What comes to mind? What images?

**Mr. Richardson:** Well the funny thing is, I don't think of the horrors of war that much. It may be a failing in me, maybe I've seen so much that—and also, since then, I've been in some terrible situations around the world since then. People killed , slaughtered in the streets of India, rioting and all this. So, I may be immune. I may not be able to react as other people do and this bothers me from time to time. I am not healthy. I am not—so I don't think, and I think

many of the Marauders have the same feeling. They've been through all this. You meet at their reunions and they're happy guys, and they've lived through it, and it doesn't haunt them. But some guys go through haunted, and they're haunted the rest of their life. A couple of the commanders in the war, they committed suicide later in life. And some people are just disturbed by this for the rest of their lives, but I don't have that feeling.

**Mr. Bryk:** Do you lecture a lot now?

**Mr. Richardson:** Yes, I lecture on it, this subject. I've got three talks in the next month. Mostly to veterans' groups, but there are other groups. And I lecture on other things, I lecture on ethics, under deadline pressure, I give to journalism students, which, where I take eight instances from my own career and go before the students before the students. I say, "This happened, this happened, this happened. What would you do? Come on! Tell me right now, what would you do? What would you do? You've got, you've got, you've got—give me a decision. Will you do this or this or this? Go out of the classroom!" I said. "That is journalism. That's what you're going to face and if you make the wrong judgment your career may be over."

I scare the hell out of them because they're not getting this in the classroom. I just want to be sure that— So I was in great demand with this lecture . I had a good time.

**Mr. Bryk:** Well, we just had the privilege of listening to Mr. David Richardson. I think it's probably better to have done a book rather than a short interview today. We thank him and I hope some day when someone has the privilege of listening to this tape or reading these notes, they have the full pleasure of what I've enjoyed of interviewing this great person today. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Richardson:** No, thank you!

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