

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

CHARLES W. TIERNEY

This is Eddie Graham. We're at the Hilton Hotel in San Antonio, Texas, and I am interviewing Mr. Charles W. Tierney. This is September 4th, 2004, and we're doing this for the National Museum of the Pacific War. We'll just start now, Mr. Tierney, when and where were you born?

MR. TIERNEY: Born in Lima, Ohio, 28th of February, 1927.

MR. GRAHAM: Where did you go to school?

MR. TIERNEY: Graduated from high school Lima St. Gerard, catholic high school in Lima.

MR. GRAHAM: Okay. What were the names of your parents?

MR. TIERNEY: William B. Tierney and Evelyn T. Tierney.

MR. GRAHAM: Do you have any children?

MR. TIERNEY: I had eight children.

MR. GRAHAM: Wow! Where were you? What were you doing December 7th, 1941?

MR. TIERNEY: I remember it very well. I was in the Redemptorist Seminary in St. Mary's Pennsylvania and deciding whether or not I wanted to be a catholic priest. I remember the morning of December 7th it was snowing and cold and the news came on the radio of the attack.

MR. GRAHAM: Tell us what came about that you ended up in the branch of service that you chose?

MR. TIERNEY: Well, everybody at that point and time we were susceptible to draft. I was drafted and given my choice of services and I took the Marine Corps. Shortly thereafter I ended up in Parris Island where I took my basic training—boot camp.

MR. GRAHAM: How long were you in Parris Island?

MR. TIERNEY: Eleven weeks.

MR. GRAHAM: Where did you go after Parris Island?

MR. TIERNEY: I left Parris Island and went to Camp Lejuene, North Carolina. At that time they had one of my records that revealed that as a high school student working after school that I had installed radios and intercoms in tanks and armored vehicles. So therefore I had a communications tag on my record so they sent me to communications school.

MR. GRAHAM: After you finished your training there where did you go?

MR. TIERNEY: Actually, I didn't finish the training there, in the eighth week of the eleven-week course all of sudden the word came out for everybody to stand by and three days later I'm on an attack transport headed for the Pacific. The ship was an attack transport, THE USS WAKEFIELD.

MR. GRAHAM: Where did you pick up the transport?

MR. TIERNEY: At Norfolk.

MR. GRAHAM: And where did you sail to?

MR. TIERNEY: Went through the Panama Canal out to Pearl Harbor, went from there to Tsing Tao, China. I had understood we were going to Okinawa but they dropped the bomb and decided to send the 1st Marine Division to China and we ended up as replacements for the 1st Division.

MR. GRAHAM: And what were the dates when you were shipped over through the canal and everything?

MR. TIERNEY: As I recall amazingly enough we left December the 7th, 1945.

MR. GRAHAM: Tell us about your first assignment. Okinawa, did you say?

MR. TIERNEY: No, we didn't go to Okinawa. We understood we were going to Okinawa to be replacements for the 1st, but the 1st moved to China so we tailed them on into China, landed at Taku Bar in China.

MR. GRAHAM: And what was your first assignment there?

MR. TIERNEY: They put a bunch of replacements on a train; we actually traveled as ammunition car guards and we traveled through to a little town called Ching Wan Tao which is just short of the great Wall where it runs into the sea.

MR. GRAHAM: How do you spell Ching Wan Tao?

MR. TIERNEY: It's on the sheet. At that time it was the farthest north garrison in China.

MR. GRAHAM: What were some of your experiences there?

MR. TIERNEY: Well, actually they were using that essentially as a replacement depot. We stayed there a few days and then they started breaking the draft up and we went to the various units. I went to the mine area where the 2nd Battalion 7th Marines was in a perimeter defense around the mine areas at Tang Shan, Lin Sie and Shanghai Hai Wan. We pulled essentially guard details but at the same time we rode train guards out of those mines to the cities or the nearest city for us was Tientsin. So they would come at any point and time, say, okay, Tierney, you and you, grab your gear the train's leaving in an

hour, get on it. We had no officers. We had a buck sergeant and a corporal that was all of the company NCOs left after Okinawa.

MR. GRAHAM: What was your main purpose as guards and what were your duties?

MR. TIERNEY: Supposedly protect the train from pilfering but in all honesty it was to keep the communists from delaying the trains. They would block the route, they'd pull a rail up, they'd put debris on the track, and you knew the minute you hit the ground you were going to get shot at so that was pretty much of a headache. It took us right at two to three days to go a hundred miles when we first started that duty.

MR. GRAHAM: Did you have many pitched battles with the communists?

MR. TIERNEY: Never a pitched battle, it was always a sniper or two type warfare. They never really wanted to engage us head on, I don't think. They had to be better shots than they were because you were shot at a lot and never any automatic fire. Most of the time it was all sniping and, of course, this was constant. It did beat invading Japan.

MR. GRAHAM: Tell us about you were moved to another ...

MR. TIERNEY: Yeh, we rotated units, in other words I was in E Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines. In about early spring I'd say March, April we moved out of the mine area and moved into the outpost line along the Peking-Muckden Railroad and we occupied an area from Chang Li I think down to Tan Shian and that was the E Company track area of responsibility.

MR. GRAHAM: Okay, Bill, let's pick up where you were.

MR. TIERNEY: We were talking about the track area that E Company had responsibility for was common practice to rotate rifle companies between the mines at Tan Shian and the track area. We replaced G Company in place as I said in the early spring. We had

sixteen men left out of a platoon, nearest unit to us was about twenty miles away, estimated communist strength in the area was 4500, and so it was sort of one of those jobs. Now, let me describe the outpost. The outpost was a rail station that had a small bridge down about two hundred yards. We had responsibility for the small bridge and the rail area. Our wire tied in with the Nationalists Chinese and there was a rifle company of Nationalist Chinese right next to us commanded by a young guy named Captain Wu. We had no officers when we came in there so the lieutenant that was there with G Company stayed and later on became a good friend of mine, his name's John "Bo" Sims. His father was a retired brigadier general who had been chief of staff of the 1st Marine Division on Cape Gloucester. Finally I recently got to see him the first time in fifty-eight years at the reunion in Washington and we talked about old times. Compound couldn't have encompassed much more than about one hundred and fifty yards long, maybe seventy-five, eighty, yards wide. We had a triple strand of aprons of wire with trip grenades and flares. We had a four-story mud tower that had belonged to the Japanese garrison and the bottom floor was the stables and we had the Japanese officer's horse still there. The corpsman used to take the horse and ride him in the villages for sick calls. He was the only one who had guts enough to go out there without an escort.

MR. GRAHAM: Let me stop you and ask you something. What were your general standing orders when you were in this situation?

MR. TIERNEY: Protect the rail station. As you see on this map that I have here, every one of those points is a rail station and or a bridge. The only reason that we controlled north China was because we controlled the Peking-Muckden Railroad. It wasn't much in the use of fire power out there but they were at that point that they didn't know how hard

they could step on the United States at that point and time. You had Mao Tse Tung on one side and Chung Kai Shek on the other. We were trying not to show favoritism but the communists had a lot of mercenary troops in our area, the 61st communist regiment was a mercenary regiment in our area.

MR. GRAHAM: So they were just sort of pushing the envelope all they could to see if they'd get you to react.

MR. TIERNEY: Absolutely. We would leave the compound only in case of a wire repair; they would cut some of our commo wire out. We'd send an armed patrol out to restore the wire. Other than that, we had an old track recon vehicle that was fitted with rail wheels and we got up dated chow and pay and beer and whatever every two weeks. The whole time we were out there, almost three months, I never left the compound really. The compound, like I said, had a four-story mud tower and three aprons of wire, had two 60mm mortars, search lights in the tower, every man was armed with an automatic weapon, and we had, I think, maybe two light machine guns. That was the whole outpost.

MR. GRAHAM: Against 4500?

MR. TIERNEY: Yes. Really in all honesty it was pretty good duty other than the boredom.

MR. GRHAM: You feel like, in other words, they expected a large amount of communist troops just for intimidation more than anything else?

MR. TIERNEY: No, actually I think there was a move by the communists to organize a larger force and they eventually did. Then in May, I guess, maybe June, they moved through us. They were north, I guess it would be northwest, of the rail line and the rail

line ran north and south. What they wanted to do was move through us to the sea and to control the area from the sea that would give them both sides of the railroad. They finally did that in a four-day period that they moved through us and, again, like I said, and Captain Wu engaged them. He came in to see us and said you guys got to help me out with some fire support and our Lt. told him, "No way I can do that. I'll fire illumination for you." We caught some rounds coming in and I'm not terribly sure what we put out but we didn't get hit hard. We then repaired the bullet holes in our Quonset huts with wooden pegs.

MR. GRAHAM: So you say then they moved you on out and you all moved to a different location?

MR. TIERNEY: Yes, when we were relieved, I think by Fox Company who came in and relieved us, we moved back then to Peltaho Beach which was the Regimental headquarters for the 7th Marines. Of course, that was a magnificent place, a summer resort for all the legations in Peking in the summertime and it was magnificent. There was a beach and we lived exceptionally well. At that time they found out I had been to signal school in the States and I was no longer a rifleman so they put me in the commo section. All we did was just go out on wire patrols and do repair work and whatever. It truly was outstanding duty and I stayed there then until October and at that point and time they sent all the reserves home. The Regulars stayed.

MR. GRAHAM: Now this is October of 1946?

MR. TIERNEY: A point I might make, it's interesting. To be very conservative about fifty to sixty percent of the marines in north China were draftees. I didn't know that until I happened to get a copy on my promotion to pfc from a buddy about ten years ago, forty

some years later. I realized almost everybody over there was a USMCSSV, United States Marine Corps Selective Service Volunteer and that's what happened to me as I was drafted and then I volunteered. Then another guy yesterday showed me another of his orders, about eighty percent of the guys on that warrant were selected service. I was surprised at the number of draftees but they had drafted to fill up for the invasion. It was an interesting point that that many marines were drafted but we're very proud of being volunteers.

MR. GRAHAM: Okay, after October, 1946, then what happened?

MR. TIERNEY: We went home on the BRECKINRIDGE, went to San Diego did the usual thing of checking in and making sure you didn't have any contraband, this, that and whatever, put us on a troop train and went to Camp Small which is the Marine section of Great Lakes Naval Training Station and was discharged there and went back home.

MR. GRAHAM: Of all the experiences you've had over there, are there any particular ones that you still think about today?

MR. TIERNEY: Yeh, this is digressing a bit but we went back to China in '92 and I think that the thing that really impressed me the most was that the people were the same. You can have governments and you can control people, you know mass media and a whole lot of things, but when you get right down to it the basic person is very much the same and they were the same folks that we knew. In other words you never heard a China marine say he didn't like China.

MR. GRAHAM: They never lost their principles?

MR. TIERNEY: No, I enjoyed it.

MR. GRAHAM: Well, is there anything else you'd like to add that we haven't covered?

MR. TIERNEY: No, not really. Well, I did get lucky in later years, as you've heard me say, I went into the army and was commissioned and retired a full colonel. I later on had the opportunity to meet all my former battalion commanders and became fairly friendly with Gen. Hittle who was president emeritus of the Army Navy Club in D. C. We had some long, long talks and exchanged letters.. The comradeship of the people, the guys, here we are fifty-eight years later doing this.

MR. GRAHAM: Well, okay. Bill on behalf of the Nimitz Museum we want to thank you for sharing your experiences with us because we feel it will really add a lot to our library.

MR. TIERNEY: Well, I appreciate that. Thanks for the opportunity.

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