

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Nimitz Education and Research Center
Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With

John H. O'Leary
San Antonio, Texas

May 4, 2018

U.S. Marine Corps
1st Marine Division

Peleliu

Mr. Misenhimer:

My name is Richard Misenhimer, today is May 4, 2018. I am interviewing Mr. John Harrold O'Leary by telephone. His phone number is 210-494-4812. His address is 14415 Briarlake Street, San Antonio, Texas, 78247. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Nimitz Education and Research Center, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II. His alternate contact is his daughter, Jo Perez. This is her home and this is her phone number.

John, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today and I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II.

Mr. O'Leary:

Well I want to thank you for yours.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Thank you. Now the first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement to make sure this is okay with you.

"Agreement Read"

Is that okay with you?

Mr. O'Leary:

Yes it is.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what is your birthdate?

Mr. O'Leary:

January 29, 1926.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And where were you born?

Mr. O'Leary:

I was born in Wellsville, Missouri.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. O'Leary:

I had one brother and I had four sisters.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was your brother in World War II?

Mr. O'Leary:

He was. He was in the Navy. He joined the Navy in 1937. And he actually got out in April of 1941, went to work in the shipyard at San Pedro, California. And the day that Pearl Harbor was bombed he had visited back from the Navy and he was back in the Navy. Had two weeks to get back aboard ship. So yes, he was in the Navy shortly after Pearl Harbor. Because the ship that he was on previous to getting out was the one, a repair ship working on the *Arizona* and was tied up to the same dock. Several of his friends got killed in that bombing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what else did he do after that, do you know?

Ms. Perez (*daughter*):

What did Uncle Robert do when he joined the Navy again?

Mr. O'Leary:

He was called a ship fitter, which is a maintenance type of thing. And the ship he was on was the *USS Vestal*, which is a repair ship. After he went back in he got in an APA-197, which was the *USS Lubbock*, I believe.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now that's a troop transport?

Mr. O'Leary:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Is he still living?

Mr. O'Leary:

Oh no. No, he passed away two years ago and he was 93 when he passed away, 2015 I believe it was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh okay, that's not too long ago. You grew up during the depression, how did the depression affect you and your family?

Mr. O'Leary:

We never lacked for food. My father worked part-time in a clay mine, a couple of days a week. We had a big garden and we grew our own chickens and stuff for food. So we never missed any meals, although some of them were beans and cornbread type meal.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your father's occupation?

Mr. O'Leary:

He was a miner and a timberman, he worked in timber also.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what was your mother's and father's first names?

Mr. O'Leary:

My father's only first name was John, he didn't have a middle name, John O'Leary. My mother's first name was Ellen Pearl. Ellen, E-l-l-e-n.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. O'Leary:

I went to school in Wellsville, Missouri. We lived on a farm outside of Middletown, Missouri, I went there for a year and a half and then moved back to Wellsville. And finished up high school, the last half of 19..., oh I guess '41. I was in Wellsville when President Roosevelt gave his speech on the 8th of December. And I was in study hall and overhead had his speech on at that time. Everybody at that time was anxious to do something for the war effort. So I was not old

enough at the time. The day I became seventeen I was eligible to go in the service. I was a senior. So I had two other friends in my senior class, we decided we was gonna join up the day I was old enough. So on January the 29th, 1943 we went to St. Louis, which was about a hundred miles to the recruiting office, and we were going to join the Navy. And when we went to the Navy recruiter, they said they could not take us because they had their quota for the month, being close to the end of the month. So we walked out and across the hall Marine recruiters said they would take us. Well we didn't know what it was all about so we joined the Marines, two of us passed the physical and the third one did not pass the physical. And so on February the 8th of 1943 this other guy, my friend, and I went and we were sworn in in St. Louis. And then we had a three day trip to San Diego to boot camp.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get to go back home before you left for boot camp?

Mr. O'Leary:

I was, from the 29th to the 8th. I had to be back in St. Louis to be sworn in on the 8th of February.

Ms. Perez:

Did you come on home daddy?

Mr. O'Leary:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now I understand, go ahead. Where did you go for boot camp?

Mr. O'Leary:

San Diego, California.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And how did you travel out there?

Mr. O'Leary:

We went by train.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that train trip?

Mr. O'Leary:

It was very good. I thought that everything was great, went roundabout way, it went St. Louis up even through Omaha and Wyoming, and then down through Salt Lake City before we headed for Los Angeles. And then we had another train we took to San Diego. And there I found out I had a whole bunch of new names that I'd never heard before. We had, the Sergeant met us at the train and gave us all a cussing. So we learned that it was better to be home, but anyway we were in. We were assigned, took out to the boot camp depot. We had been assigned to a platoon, number 118. And my friend and I were both in school together, in high school, and we went through boot camp together. And the third guy that didn't pass the physical, two months later joined the Navy and he was in the Navy during the war. After boot camp, what else you need to know before

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me what all happened in boot camp, tell me all about the things that happened in boot camp.

Mr. O'Leary:

Well, you know the old saying, "You throw your hat in the air, when you come down you've got a shaved head." Which is about true because everybody got a haircut, a burr cut. And we were assigned our clothing and stuff. And they had three drill instructors, the main one was a Corporal. And we learned the rudiments of whatever you do in boot camp, you know marching and we ate good. I had no complaints about that. And the rifle range, we had Camp Matthews in San Diego. And then after we got out of boot camp, which was actually seven weeks, at that time. I had taken tests and I got assigned for schooling for aircraft mechanic school in Norman, Oklahoma. And Camp Miramar was a transfer station for Marines at that time. And so I was in Miramar about three days and we got a class together at Norman, Oklahoma, aircraft mechanic school.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Let me ask you a couple of questions. In boot camp were your drill instructors pretty tough on

you?

Mr. O'Leary:

They were very tough. Anytime of the day or night they could call you out. And we had one guy that had to show off a little bit. And he was having us get up two or three o'clock in the morning and have our field packs and everything so forth, in twenty minutes. Well and then we had to go back in and you're liable to have to go right back out again. But all in all after we finished the boot camp and the day that we graduated out of boot camp our drill instructor, a Corporal, that was so hard on us, he invited us all over to the PX for a beer with him. So he was a pretty good guy, just doing his job.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything else you recall from boot camp?

Mr. O'Leary:

Well not a whole lot. I had some celebrities, one Tyrone Power was two weeks ahead of me in a different one. I used to see him quite often. And I saw another, Glenn Ford was a couple of weeks behind me in another platoon. And I'd seen him a few times. That's the only celebrities that I recall seeing.

Ms. Perez:

Your friend that you enlisted with Daddy, was he in the same barracks with you?

Mr. O'Leary:

My friend that I joined with, he was with me all through boot camp and he ended going up to Pendleton and I went to Oklahoma to aircraft school.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about that aircraft school, what was that like?

Mr. O'Leary:

Well, we had two bases at Norman. One was a pilot training base called the North Base. And the South Base was the aircraft mechanic, sheet metal, and ordnance workers. It was very good, very. We had our regular training and we had two different shifts, a day shift and a night shift.

And we alternated every week going to school and every other weekend off. During the war we were limited to a fifty-mile radius from the base without a permit, pass. So you know our limit was around Oklahoma City and stuff. School lasted I think somewhere around, must have been July because when we finished school and went back on the train to California, I picked up a couple of watermelons that was in season. And I was pretty popular there down at the train car for awhile, everybody wanted some of the watermelon.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what did you study in that air mechanic school?

Mr. O'Leary:

Aircraft mechanic.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Which is what?

Ms. Perez:

Did you have a particular plane, did you have all the planes?

Mr. O'Leary:

It was a general mechanic type thing, we had no particular plane at that time. I went back and was stationed at El Toro, California which was a new Marine air base. And it was just in the building stage, there was only six barracks at the time. Being only a PFC I was assigned to extra details like mess duty and stuff like that. And so I inherited the mess duty for one month and then since I missed out on a couple of other things, they already had their quota filled up, like fire department. So anyway when it came along for transfer, the Sergeant Major didn't really care for me because I missed out on some of the other details. And so he volunteered me to go overseas in February. And he came out with the list one day and he said, "O'Leary, you just volunteered." I said, "Okay." And I said, "I put two of my other friends down." And I said, "They just volunteered too." So three of us got, I think it was probably February 14th, I believe it was, in '44 we went to San Diego and left, went overseas. There was about I think about two hundred of us went over on a baby aircraft carrier, the *USS Barnes*. Which was an airplane

transport ship to the South Pacific, new planes. And we ended up going to the New Hebrides Islands. So the Marines had a base up on the north end of Espiritu Santo at New Hebrides. We pulled into Palikulo Bay and we went up to the Marine base. The Army had two bomber strips there on New Hebrides, on Espiritu. And the Australians had one strip. So our base was a fighter strip and what we ended up doing was mainly, what I did was ended up putting water injection on Corsair airplanes. They came out without them and it enhanced the performance of the plane. So that's what we ended up doing. Along in, I guess it was August the 1st Marines was short of people and they took three hundred out of our service squadron of airplane people, took us aboard ship and we went up to Guadalcanal and Tulagi and we took on fuel. Went to Bougainville, took on three thousand or so Seabees for this transport ship. And we headed, didn't know where we was going until the Seabees got on. And we found out we was going to a small island by the name of Peleliu, in that Palau group. Which was the first ones that we invaded that the Japanese owned. What else Richard?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what kind of ship did you go to Guadalcanal on?

Mr. O'Leary:

It was a transport ship, I don't remember the name of it. It was a Merchant Marine ship, had a Navy gun crew. But the ship was manned by Merchant Marines. It was about oh 3500 or 4000 of us aboard.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what did you do at Peleliu?

Mr. O'Leary:

Well I got in on the invasion. We were on the east side and most of the activity took place on the west side, west coast. So you can get all kinds of information on Peleliu. It was a pretty rough battle.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what Marine division were you in?

Mr. O'Leary:

Well at that time we were with the 1st Marine Division. And they lost somewhere around 2500 people killed the first week. And they ended up with another 4000 wounded and about the first two weeks we were doing stretcher bearer and picking up dead people. It was a couple of weeks before I got reassigned back to my aircraft squadron, they had moved in by then.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you land on Peleliu the very first day or when did you land there?

Mr. O'Leary:

No, it wasn't the first day, it's probably second or third. They hit it on the 15th, was the first day. And I think it was probably 16th when we hit it on the east side. Peleliu was only two miles wide and about eight miles long.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what was your job there?

Mr. O'Leary:

I was stretcher bearer with the 1st and then I went back to aircraft mechanic.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you work on the planes there?

Mr. O'Leary:

Any kind that came in. I worked on most all of them, from P-40s up to B-24.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But that wasn't on Peleliu was it?

Mr. O'Leary:

Yeah, on Peleliu.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You worked on B-24s on Peleliu?

Mr. O'Leary:

Yes. Well, I just worked on one of them, another guy and I. A new B-24 was being flown from

the United States to the Philippines. And they had an oil leak problem and one engine was out. So another fellow and I we had the one night, we went over in Braille method and found the oil leak and repaired it. That's the only B-24 I ever saw, I worked on. I worked a B-25, I changed a cylinder on a B-25 that was stationed in the Philippines, the Army/Air Force.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now how long were you on Peleliu?

Mr. O'Leary:

From September to, I think it was probably April or May.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh that long, okay.

Mr. O'Leary:

Of course after about a month and a half, six weeks or a month and a half, the 1st Division pulled out and the 81st Army Division took over.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So then what happened?

Mr. O'Leary:

Well the Marines took twenty some prisoners. And the Army when they came in they put up loud speakers and they took, two hundred and forty or fifty came out of the caves when they heard the Army had taken over and was gonna take them prisoners instead of shooting them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So then what happened?

Mr. O'Leary:

Well not too much, I just came back waiting for a ship to come back home.

Ms. Perez:

Tell him why so many people died because of the caves.

Mr. O'Leary:

Oh yeah. Are you familiar with Peleliu history?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh yes, very much.

Mr. O'Leary:

Okay, well you know about the caves and the coral rocks and the stuff like that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well tell me about them so other people who listen to this that don't know they'll learn, so tell me about all of that.

Mr. O'Leary:

Well the 3rd and 5th had hit on the west coast. And they, the Japanese had opened up with their artillery in the caves and then they would shoot at it and then they'd go back close the steel doors on the caves. Then our guns, shells would just bounce off of them. Well anybody, they had, I guess, I don't know, you probably have pictures of all the Amtracs and Ducks (DUKW), stuff like that they put out of commission. And the people that did this in the ocean, that we never did recover, so they were reported missing in action. I don't know, like I say we lost around 2500 first week. And one platoon there had eight men left out of 235. So all the rest of them were either killed or wounded. And we had a hospital ship out in the harbor that they were busy transporting wounded out to the hospital ship.

Ms. Perez:

Tell him about that delicious water you had.

Mr. O'Leary:

Oh yeah, the water was scarce and they had Jerry cans that they sent water in. And they had not cleaned them too good, they had a little bit of fuel oil taste to our water and a little bit of paint in some of them, 55-gallon drums. Oh, but anyway wasn't too drinkable, but when that's all you got that's what you do.

Ms. Perez:

Tell him about that airplane pilot that came over and he thought it was taking too long to get him in line so you helped him out.

Mr. O'Leary:

Oh I had to be, a B-25 pilot from the Philippines came by. This was close to when I was waiting to come home in March or April. And anyway he had gone through the routine of trying to get his cylinder changed on his B-25. And they kept putting him off and not assigning him any help. So one day he asked me, he says, "Well, what do you do?" And I said, "I'm a mechanic." And he said, "What can I do?" And I told him, "Well you go through the procedure." He said, "I've already done that and nobody's helping me, would you help me?" I said, "Okay, I'll do that." So I changed the cylinder on his B-25. And he said then, "Would you fly with me?" I said, "Sure, I'll fly with you." Well I think it assured him, reassured him that I knew what I was doing. And we took the B-25 up, put it through the paces and we came down. He said, "Now," he says, "I've been to Australia and my whole bomb bay is filled with booze." Says, "Go back and get yourself a couple of bottles for helping me, I appreciate it." And so I thanked him and he was on his way back to the Philippines.

Ms. Perez:

You were everybody's best friend Dad (*laughing*).

Mr. O'Leary:

Yeah. That's one of the things. If you're familiar with Peleliu why you know "Bloody Nose Ridge."

Mr. Misenhimer:

I've heard of it, yes.

Mr. O'Leary:

And we had a pocket down between the Bloody Nose Ridge and the airport strip. And that was the shortest bomb run I think in World War II. By the time the planes took off from the strip there was only 500 feet to where they were dropping their bombs. So anyway, most of them were 500 pound bombs and didn't do too much damage. We had to go in with the infantry and flame throwers and take them out that way. We lost about, well we had 10,000 troops and 2500 killed and they had, we estimated by photographs that there was about 13,000 Japanese. I don't

know what else do you need?

Mr. Misenhimer:

I understand that Peleliu was probably the most fortified Japanese island that there was.

Mr. O'Leary:

It was. They had pillboxes and I know they had a generator station for their electricity. And they had four feet concrete walls, reinforcement. And one of our 16-inch guns on a battleship hit it with a shell and it only made a hole in it, probably ten foot in diameter. So it was pretty well fortified and they had them, the pillboxes situated where you go to one, another one would have it covered from another pillbox. And you'd get shot going that way.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I understand there were an awful lot of lot of caves on Peleliu.

Mr. O'Leary:

There was all kinds of caves. And they were so arranged and dug in the coral rock that you couldn't get to them with direct fire. They'd go downhill, zig-zag and go up somewhere or another. We had one that three different elevations, all hooked to the same cave. I understand that there was sometimes a thousand Japanese in this one cave. I never did go in the caves, I had no business in them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now you say you stayed there until April or May?

Ms. Perez:

He said, did you stay on Peleliu from April till May.

Mr. O'Leary:

I stayed there yes, to May. I was off one week, we went up to Ulithi to pick up some airplanes. Maybe after so many landings on an aircraft carrier, we get different planes because the stress on landing on a carrier with cable, hooks. And anyway I got to see my brother up in Ulithi at this camp, his ship was in there. I got to see him about, oh I guess about eight hours. So, that was the only time I was away from Peleliu.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, that was interesting.

Ms. Perez:

Tell him how you got back to the States and how much you loved Mrs. Roosevelt.

Mr. O'Leary:

Oh, that's political. I don't want to get that involved in that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you left Peleliu where did you go?

Mr. O'Leary:

Well went back to Treasure Island and then down to Miramar again. And then I got a month's vacation and then I went back to Miramar at El Centro, California. And I was at El Centro until November the 10th, Marine Corps Birthday, and that was the day I had enough points, they went by the point system. I had enough points to get discharged. So November 10th was my happy day, I got out November the 10th and went up to LA and was going to go to school. And another friend of mine got out of the Marines on November the 20th. He was from Iowa and he said, "Let's go back home for Christmas and then we'll both come back out." And we was going to go to school and go to work. He was going to Lockheed and I was already signed up with a job at Douglas, changing military planes back over to civilian use. But neither of us went back to California after that, be in the service.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now let me go back and ask you some questions. What would you consider your most frightening time?

Mr. O'Leary:

My most frightening time?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes sir.

Mr. O'Leary:

Well, I would probably would say the invasion. You got about four battleships and five or six cruisers out there a shelling and bombs, you know. Most everything was done with the five aircraft carriers we had. So it was plenty of noise. And when we came we tied off on a LST but we had to wade through water, oh probably for a quarter of a mile or more, knee deep. They threw a few shells at us out in the water. But I think they got most of the problem, they had on the west side of the island.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was the morale in your outfit?

Mr. O'Leary:

It was pretty good early, it got to the point where you

(End of side one of tape.)

(Beginning of side two of tape.)

Mr. O'Leary:

Okay, well I'm gonna backtrack a little bit. The day I was seventeen I talked my mom into signing up, because if you were under eighteen you could not volunteer without your parents' consent. I know a few of them lied about their age and I know there was one guy joined when he was twelve and another one joined when he was thirteen. But most everybody was seventeen legitimately with their parents' consent joined the services.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you had just turned seventeen, is that right when you joined?

Mr. O'Leary:

I did the day I was seventeen, I took my Marine Corps physical.

Ms. Perez:

Tell him grandma got your diploma.

Mr. O'Leary:

Well my mother, I was not there for graduation because I left in February. And my mother went to the graduation exercises at the little school and received my high school diploma there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what did you think of the officers you had over you?

Mr. O'Leary:

Some of them I think were very capable. We had some that were a little bit lacking. But those in charge were normally pretty good officers.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you think of the medics?

Mr. O'Leary:

Medics had their hands full. They were very good but they could only do so much, you know. But we'd take somebody on a stretcher and by the time we got to a jeep or something they had already died. So the medics couldn't do anything with them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. O'Leary:

I've heard her, Tokyo Rose yes. I sure have.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you think of her?

Mr. O'Leary:

Oh, we enjoyed it because it didn't do anything but increase our morale. She'd play our type of music and the good times that we were missing out on back home (*laughing*). But that's alright, we enjoyed it, it's just like some of the other women in the war. I met Rosie the Riveter here this last year. You've heard of her?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh yes, I've interviewed several of them.

Mr. O'Leary:

This one was "the" one as far as I know. She was in the service but she said that they never did hardly recognize her being in the service.

Mr. Misenhimer:

All the ladies that worked in the factories and all that, they called all of them Rosie the Riveter.

Mr. O'Leary:

She was at ..., I don't know I've got a picture on my phone. I talked to her at a dinner after our Honor Flight to Washington, D.C. last September 8th and 9th.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that Honor Flight?

Mr. O'Leary:

Out of San Antonio, it was very good, there were seventy veterans, sixty-nine men and one woman was on the flight. And we all, mandatory wheelchairs. And had to have somebody, a caretaker go with us to take care of the wheelchairs and stuff. So my granddaughter, Erin Perez went with me on the flight to Washington, D.C. We went early a Friday morning, came back late one Saturday night. And we had a bus tour to all the different memorials and stuff in Washington, D.C. The school that raised the funds for our flight had a dinner for us a couple of months after we got back and that's where I met Rosie the Riveter.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now April the 12th of 1945 President Roosevelt died, did you hear about that or where were you when you heard it?

Mr. O'Leary:

I was on Peleliu. I was on Peleliu and it was an old headquarters building that had been bombed. And I was by it when we heard the news.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And what reaction did people have when they heard it?

Mr. O'Leary:

Well, not a whole lot. We were sorry to hear it, I think it was April wasn't it?

Mr. Misenhimer:

April the 12th, right.

Mr. O'Leary:

April 12th, yeah. Yeah, I was getting ready to come home at that time. It was '45?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes sir, in '45.

Mr. O'Leary:

Yeah, I was getting ready to come home at that time. So I wasn't too interested in what was going on. I was just waiting to see if I could find a ship to come home on.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now May the 8th of '45 Germany surrendered, did y'all hear about that?

Mr. O'Leary:

We were happy about it, yes. But we thought we was going to get some help from the people over there, come in our direction. But it was over before they could get everything organized. Oh, I had some people, friends of mine in the European area that got wounded and some of them got killed. I had some of them I went to school with got killed over there. My friend that I joined the Marines with, all he did was got some shrapnel in his hand, but nothing real serious. Oh, we both lucked out pretty good, I didn't get anything. So I feel myself very fortunate and I thank the Lord for taking care of me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When Japan surrendered in August the 15th you were in the States then, right?

Mr. O'Leary:

Yes I was. I was back in El Centro, California. That was August 6th, first bomb.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, August 6th was the first bomb. When you heard that what did you think about that?

Mr. O'Leary:

I didn't think too much of it. I just said, "Oh, another bomb." You know. I didn't realize the size of it or how big it was or the capacity of it. Fact is I didn't know anything about it, atomic energy.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Nobody did.

Mr. O'Leary:

I just thought, well it's another bomb. And then they dropped another one and they surrendered. I thought, boy that's a good deal. I think President Truman had a lot of weight on his shoulder to make that decision. But I think he made the right decision and it saved a lot of lives on both sides if that had not been used.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you all heard about the surrender did you have any kind of a celebration or anything?

Mr. O'Leary:

Oh yeah. We celebrated the first one. I was stationed at El Centro and we had enlisted a few to celebrate. And then the second one, we really celebrated up in Los Angeles.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And then the day that Japan surrendered you really celebrated that day, right?

Mr. O'Leary:

Yes. I was up in LA on that one. Yeah, we celebrated it in the streets, everywhere. It was a minor New York celebration.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you got out did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. O'Leary:

No, no. No problem at all. I had a friend of mine owned a bakery and I had worked for him when I was in high school, part-time. I had worked there and so he was not too good of help and he asked me to come in and help him in the bakery. And so I helped him and I ended up with owning the bakery a couple of years later. And then I went to school for awhile, University of Illinois. So yeah I worked for him and then went to school and then I went back to Missouri and I owned the bakery and I've done all kinds of job service since.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now did you use your G.I. Bill to go to college?

Mr. O'Leary:

I did. But I could not arrange for schedule my classes because I was commuting around 75 miles every day each way. And I could not arrange my classes to do otherwise, so one semester is all the college I got. I later took some extension courses at Purdue University in Gary, Indiana because I needed them in the job I was doing as a chemist at U.S. Steel.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. O'Leary:

Got, it's a World War II blue medal and South Pacific Medal.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How many battle stars, one battle star?

Mr. O'Leary:

Just one.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You got all the regular medals I guess, right?

Mr. O'Leary:

Yes. Well you know you've got your regular Marine emblem, Rifleman, Sharpshooter, and basic medals.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You got the Combat Action Ribbon?

Mr. O'Leary:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the highest rank you got to?

Mr. O'Leary:

PFC. I was one step above Private, thanks to our Congress.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get home from World War II with any souvenirs?

Mr. O'Leary:

Very few, just none of any value.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What were some of them?

Mr. O'Leary:

I had some Japanese insignias and stuff that I had. But I didn't go in for hunting any souvenirs.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now have you had any reunions of your outfit since you've been out?

Mr. O'Leary:

No, I haven't seen, I had visited my one friend in Iowa. And I visited one friend that I was in boot camp, mech school and overseas with. That's the only ones I visited at.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever see any USO shows?

Mr. O'Leary:

Oh yes. I've seen Bing Crosby and Bob Hope at El Toro, California. And I've seen Bob Hope at New Hebrides. Ray Milland was over there also.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Those shows were good, weren't they?

Mr. O'Leary:

Very good. I think they drew a lot, a lot of guys went and enjoyed them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. O'Leary:

Nothing pleasant, I hate to say. At Peleliu, I'm sure they had trouble getting supplies, but they took our supplies to make their donuts and coffee and then if we wanted a donut or coffee we

had to pay for it. So that didn't set too well with me. The others, they furnished us coffee and donuts for nothing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, Salvation Army and those?

Mr. O'Leary:

Salvation Army, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I've heard that a lot.

Mr. O'Leary:

Have you heard that?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh yes.

Mr. O'Leary:

Okay. I'm not the only one then. But the reason I say PFC, when I went in you came out of boot camp a Private. Of course, same that you went in. And if you go to school you could make a Private 1st Class, PFC. So while I was going to school Congress passed this law that anybody can get out of boot camp with PFC. So when came time for promotions they had time in grade on me. But even though it was just a couple or three months, they were entitled to the promotion. I had one guy that had, on a crew that worked with me, and he made Corporal working with me. And then he was promoted to Sergeant, Buck Sergeant. And they gave him a crew of his own. Well he had screwed up on some of his mechanical work and a plane wrecked and they put him on my crew and he made Staff Sergeant working for me, a PFC. So thanks to Congress I did not get promoted. And I ended up a PFC and so I wasn't real happy with our Congress at that time. But I know they had to do something, so that's the way it was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now this friend that you went into the Marines with, what did he wind up doing in the Marines?

Mr. O'Leary:

He was infantry. I think he ended up in the, I guess it was Guam, Guam or Saipan, where he got some shrapnel in his hand. When he got out of the service he went to work at a brick plant there where we grew up.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you keep up with him after the war?

Mr. O'Leary:

Just occasionally. I stayed in Wellsville more or less until 1952. And I moved to Indiana and I worked up there. But then in 1971 I left Indiana and went to Del Rio, Texas visiting some friends. And I decided due to the weather and the type of snow and stuff up there and my disagreement with some of the management where I was working, I decided to quit and I moved to Del Rio in 1971. I worked in, I had a convenience store, had a couple of shoe stores, and I ran a Mobile Oil bulk plant for awhile, while I was in Del Rio.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well anything else you remember from your time in World War II?

Mr. O'Leary:

Well, I guess there's a lot of it but anyway that's the main part. I enjoyed going to Chester Nimitz's museum. And my brother, I've looked at some stuff that he had. He's got a cribbage board from the *USS Vestal* from his day on that ship was tied up with the *Arizona*. It was bombed and they pulled it around the corner on Ford Island there, tugged and beached it. And I don't know what happened after that. Next time I go to Kerrville I'm going to take that cribbage board from the *Vestal* and give it to the museum up there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh okay, good.

Mr. O'Leary:

On Peleliu they had, I guess I don't know what they've done with the cemetery. There was about, when I left they had about 3000 crosses in the cemetery. But I don't know how many, what they did with them after I left.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, I think they brought most of them back.

Mr. O'Leary:

I think they probably did. We tried to do the best we could, parts of the bodies that we had, mainly had to go with the dog tags.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well John, that's all the questions I have unless you have thought of something else.

Mr. O'Leary:

Well I don't know, would you want to talk to my daughter anymore?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well I think we've pretty well covered everything.

Mr. O'Leary:

Okay.

(End of interview.)

Transcribed by:

Gayle Misenhimer

Harlingen, Texas

August 10, 2018

Oral History by:

Richard Misenhimer

P.O. Box 3453

Alice, Texas 78333

Home: (361) 664-4071

Cell: (361) 701-5848