Dr. Craig Leman and David Greene Oral History Interview

September 24, 2013

Interviewed by Aaron Pylinski

Pylinski: Alright. First of all, thank you gentlemen for coming in. I know you traveled great distances to be here, so it's a pleasure to have the both of you sitting here today, and then to have some young and old marines and other veterans in the crowd as well to observe you gentlemen telling your stories of service.

My name is Aaron Pylinski. I work here at the Pritzker Military Library, and today is Tuesday, September 24th, 2013. We're going to talk about you gentlemen's stories of service, focusing mostly on the battle of Iwo Jima. To begin, I just want to talk about the fall of 1944. I know leading up to the invasion of Iwo Jima there were rumors abound as to where the Marines were going to be committed next. I just wanted to know from you gentlemen what the training was like leading up to Iwo Jima? Dr. Leman, if you would like to start?

Leman: I entered the Marine Corps through the V12 Program, which was a Navy V12 program. I enlisted in June 1942 when I was eighteen, for officers training. I was in college for the next year, then I was called up July 1st 1943 to go to Northwestern University where we took some military courses… wore a uniform, but had not been through boot camp and was essentially still in college. In December 1943, I went to Parris Island with twenty-four other V12 people. It was the only Marine Corps platoon I know of in World War II where it was split between half officer trainees and half regular enlistees-- and at that time, draftees. We went through Paris Island for the next two months of January, February of '44, and we were just mixed. The guys with me had been miners, people from the merchant marines, people that worked in factories, and people who just wanted to enlist-- they had turned 18 and wanted to enlist. We went through everything together. When I finished training, there was no room for me at Camp Quantico— for officers training. No room at New River for at that time, so I just kept on Parris Island as an assistant drill instructor.

[Laughs]

I didn't know much, but that position was sort of created for us. In May I went to Camp Lejeune waiting for an opening at Quantico— the officer's school was full— and the Marine Corps at that time decided they were running out of second lieutenants. They needed a lot of rifle platoon leaders because the casualty rate… it was so heavy at Loganville and at Saipan… in June that year they lost a tremendous number… so they started this special OCS only for rifle platoon leaders at Camp Lejeune. 400 of us were

taken out of the stream to go to Quantico, and were put in this special rifle platoon leaders. They brought back a bunch of people from Bougainville who had been fighting the Japanese in the bunker warfare at Bougainville to be our instructors, and for the next three months we trained at Camp Lejeune –out in the field mostly— just to how to assault pillboxes and that kind of thing we didn't have go pray or anything.

[Laughs]

Neither did we get the training in military etiquette or shipboard conduct.

Pylinski: Strictly combat training?

Leman: Strictly combat training, yeah. At the end of that time, we knew quite a bit about close quarter fighting, which is what we were headed for. Then I went to Camp Pendleton by train… took five days to get across the country by train. 200 of us went to camp Pendleton and half of our class went to Okinawa and half our class went to Iwo Jima. I was with the half that went to Iwo Jima. We spent about five weeks at Camp Pendleton doing field work—mostly out in the field again—and it was not jungle there.

[Laughs]

Camp Pendleton was sort of open country. Then we were sent overseas to Hawaii, and there I was assigned to the 5th Marine division. We didn't know where we were going to go really, but mostly we used our brains to figure out that probably it was going to be Iwo Jima. We could look at the map and see the kind of training we were getting: close quarter combat. So I joined the 5th division, and I was put without much experience in what's called a shore party platoon…assigned a platoon of two squads of men. Mostly they were just out of boot camp, and we were to… our duty was to go ashore on D-day fairly early and unload material from the landing craft, from the landing LCVP they called them— landing craft vehicle personnel— and the LCM –landing craft mechanized. The troops were coming in, and the immediate needs of… for ammo… there were armored bulldozers that had just-- a very small bulldozer, with armor— and these would fit into an LCM and of course there were pallets full of ammunition and rations and that kind of thing. The boats would come in against… load against the shore, drop the ramp, and we would be charging ashore and bringing this stuff in. Either it was on pallets, or we could sometimes attach a cable and if we had a bulldozer ashore reel it in and that was fine. Otherwise, we had to carry it ourselves.

Pylinski: Now Mr. Greene, you had a slightly different experience because you were an enlisted man and a radio operator, if I'm not mistaken.

Greene: Right. Totally different.

Pylinski: What was your training like?

Greene: I had graduated from high school –I'm two years younger than this gentleman here— in December of 1942. I was still 17 at the time. I became 18 on March the 8th of '43. I had

three older brothers— one was already in the Marine Corps and the other two were in the Navy. They were like 10, 7 and 3 years older than I was. The two oldest ones had enlisted and they were in the service in January of '42, almost immediately after the war started. So there was no reason for me to jump in as far as my mother was concerned. Here you are, you already got three older brothers that are involved, and I was the youngest of the four. We waited. And of course when I'm talking to kids, which I do a lot of-- 7th and 8th grade classes-- I say I got a card from the president inviting me to come and join the military. They think that's the greatest thing ever. I of course got a card form the local draft board, and then you go down to Des Moines Iowa and you get a physical, and then finally they tell you to come back at a later date. You've passed, you're warm, you got a you got a pulse: you're in the service. There were only two of us from Waterloo. Waterloo to Des Moines is about two hours' drive. Took a bus down there. So I was sworn into the Marine Corps in May 24th of 1943. Immediately we got onboard train, went to Santiago with a whole bunch of people I didn't know. I didn't know anybody in the group, about 35. Get into boot camp, and again I don't know anybody. We got a lot of guys from Utah, bunch of sheep herders and all kinds of crazy people and here I'm a naive little 18-year-old smack right out of high school. Go through boot camp… but before that, you're taking tests to see what your intelligence level is and so when we got out of boot camp they said you're going to go to radar school back in Chicago. I thought that was great. But then they found out immediately that that class had already started or wasn't ready yet, so let's go do mess duty for a month. Mess duty in the marine corps… you get extra pay… it's not like the army, you get $5 more a month. I already gotten $5 more a month because I had been extremely good marksman, but being a radio man I was not… all marines are riflemen; everybody is a rifleman, in case you have to be a rifleman. When I went through boot camp and went out to the rifle range I shot 336, which is just an excellent score. They thought they wanted to keep me there to train other people, but when I walked into the majors office and he saw this little 132 lb 5 foot 6.5 inches guy walk in who looked like I was about 12 years old probably, he said, "I'm sorry, you were a fantastic shot, but I don't think you could convince anyone to." And I said "I don't want to be here anyway, I want to go over to that radio school." So I went through radio school in Santiago –that was a couple of months' time— then in early '44, 30 of us went into a special school for radios in tanks— both amphibious and land tanks. Finally when we get through that school, we find out we're going to be in Sherman tanks. And here I am, an 18 year old kid… and when you're in a tank you have to learn everybody's job because if somebody gets wounded in there, you got to do his job. So here you are driving that 30 ton tank around, you're doing the bow gun, and you're firing the 75 weapon… I mean it was an unbelievable experience for me. It wasn't war yet, it was just plain fun. And then the next thing you know they come around, and said, "We're putting in a new push button radio. I want you to teach all of these guys in the tank how to run that thing. The minute we get through with that, you're going up the infantry, because you're needed more there than anywhere else." So that's where I ended up in the 3rd Battalion of the 26th Marines. And when we talk about the radioman's job at that time… I was radioing for Captain U.C. Castle…Cook…all in this training kind of thing. But then after we get through the training and I'm –maybe this happened in Hawaii, but while we're in the

United States, we then are going out and are getting on the American Legion, a ship that's going to take us out to do training. We're going to take San Clemente. Were you there, did you take San Clemente?

Leman: No.

Greene: Well, we took San Clemente Island at night and then we took it twice again in two other days, and of course we're living on the ship end of the craft, going ashore… we tried the night exercises, that didn't work at all. The guys in the LCVP were doing back azimuths on the… so they're going 180 degrees, they're going out in the ocean instead of the island… so decided we aren't going to do any night time invasions. Then we landed and did an invasion of the cost of California.

[Audience laughs]

And in that one we have corsairs coming down, sweeping the beaches and live fire and all this and that kind of stuff. And we didn't know it at the time, but if you read about these training, President Roosevelt was up in his car on the highway… which is just… the beach is here, you got high bluffs… watching this particular thing going on… an unbelievable thing.

Pylinski: Presidential audience.

Greene: And then immediately after that, the rest of the division went on to do other training, while the 26th Marines were called up to go on as a brigade— to go overseas before the rest of the division. So we're going… we didn't know what…where we were going or whatever, but we found out later we were doing backup for Guam. They weren't sure that they needed us or not over there. So we go sailing towards Guam, and next thing you know we're turning around going back to Hawaii. And we're offloading the ships and taking our time and waiting for the rest of the division to catch up with us. To get to the camp in Hawaii, Camp Tarawa, we were riding on a sugar cane train from Hilo up through eleven tunnels. If anybody knows about Hawaii, the coastline zigzags in and out, in and out. We're on a little narrow gauge train; we were on flat cars; we got just polls sticking up and stuff to keep us from falling off. They load us up, and we're going through these eleven tunnels with a steam engine and every time we hit a tunnel, why everybody's wetting up something to put over their mouth because all of the smoke and the cinders and whatever is coming out of the train. But we get to Tarawa, up to the camp, and we wait for the division to catchup. Now Hawaii is lava, and that was a perfect place to be training for Iwo Jima. The 28th Marines especially… they took a special place where they were doing their training-- the 28th battalion – when they hit the beach, we're going immediately go and take Suribachi. Those guys trained in that complete environment, and the rest of us trained wherever. A lot of the camp was up at about 3200 feet elevation, and the beach… we made lot of treks down the beach and back up with a 14 mile… you walked all that of course, and we're waiting now. I'm a radio man and what we did then --because they had been losing so many radio men-- we trained six men for every line company to learn how to run that new SCR 300 push button radio. I'm

stationed now basically in Battalion Headquarters, which is a couple hundred yards or half a mile behind the front lines. So we are in reserve when we're hitting the island. This guy is going ashore way ahead of me.

Pylinski: Right that's what I was going to start talking about.

Greene: Because he's the beach party. He's the guy-- like he explained-- he's going to unload these LPV. The first guys who went in there went in there on LCT— landing craft tracts— and there's eighteen guys in each one of these things going ashore. And there are 380 of these little vehicles going in wave after wave after wave, starting at 9:00 in the morning. He's going in at 11:00 in the morning, after that first wave secured the beach-- more or less— and now he's going to be unloading the LCVPs, which are a different style with a ramp on the front.

Pylinski: Dr. Leman, I was going to ask you starting off… both you gentleman have different experiences on the Island. Could you tell us about your approach to the beachhead on D-day and what your duties were once you hit the shore?

Leman: Yes, I will do that, but I would like to just mention that you've been talking about Hawaii. It was on the big Island of Hawaii, if you're familiar with that, it's the largest island, and it has volcanoes and it has two peaks that go up to 13000 feet. Camp Tarawa was in an area at 3000 feet. It's on the Parker Ranch, a huge cattle ranch—the biggest one, just about the biggest one in the world— and there were white-faced Herford cattle all over the places where we had our maneuvers. He mentioned that little train. It no longer exists, because they don't harvest sugar up there anymore. There was a lot of sugar around, but now they took that down and I'm sorry they did because it was a beautiful railroad, you know.

[Laughs]

Besides the tunnels, there were beautiful views of the coast, but it no longer exists. Yes, I joined the division… the division was formed in California at Camp Pendleton in early 1944 as a new division. They brought back at that time a lot of troops from the Pacific who had been the parachutists and the raiders and had experience all through the Solomons. They disbanded the parachute troops, of which they had a regiment of four battalions who had fought in the Solomons, and they brought back their two raider battalions –actually there were four raider battalions that were eventually formed— they disbanded them because they no longer had need for them because they wanted to take those experienced troops as cadre for the fifth division. About a quarter of the troops in the 5th division had that experience, and the rest of it sort of joined, and we learned from those guys. They were the core. And to get to Iwo we had to travel in convoy from Hawaii. A convoy goes the rate of its slowest ship, and it took us about 35 days to cross the ocean. We stopped at Eniwetok and at…

Pylinski: Saipan?

Leman: …at Saipan for a couple of days. Some of the assault troops went in LSTS, but most of the traveled on bigger ships, transports. I was on a ship that carried the first battalion 27th marines whose job it was to take Red Beach Two which closest to the first Airfield on Iwo Jima. The other outfits that hit… the 4th Division hit on four beaches on D-day, and the 5th division hit on three beaches. The left flank was Suribachi, the volcano they eluded too. And that was Green beach, and that was assaulted by the 28th.

Pylinski: Red Beach One and Two.

Leman: Red Beach 1 and 2 were the 27th. The first troops landed at 9 am. That's D-day. They actually made it by 9:02 am I think. The first wave was amphibious tractors. It had 75mm guns. They went ashore to blast anything that might be on the beach, and immediately following them were the amphibious tractors carrying the troops who dismounted and fanned out along this beach and immediately began to advance inland a shortways, long enough to establish a beachhead where the other troops could land behind them. Then they moved out in masse just in line towards the airfield. The Japanese held most of their fire till about 11:00 in the morning when General Kuribayashi gave the order to commence firing. They waited until a few thousand men got ashore, then they opened up with their artillery and their big mortars and began to bombard the beachhead hoping to kill us all on the beach. And I landed at about 11:00am, just about the time that began. I landed from an LCVP. My little platoon of thirty people was crowded into one LCVP and I discovered from watching closely over the gunnels that the ensign in charge of the LCVP was taking us into the wrong beach. We were supposed to land on Red Beach Two, and he was taking us to Red Beach One. Each beach was 500 yards wide. I had to threaten him with my pistol to make him turn around and land on Red Beach Two, the right beach. I didn't want to have my troops 500 yards from where they were supposed to be.

Pylinski: What was the atmosphere like in your landing craft? How were your men seeing this?

Leman: They were crowded in together, and we were all kind of uptight. We had had a big meal of steak and eggs at about 4:00 am, and a lot of the guys got sea sick. The floor showed an awful lot of Oranges.

[Laughs]

Greene: Your ship is three miles off shore.

Leman: We were there. We had to go over the nets and just wait, you know, circling in the ocean and it was not a heavy surf but a lot of guys did get sea sick.

Greene: A lot of diesel fumes thrown in to the action helps.

Leman: Right. Anyways, we got ashore alright, we just didn't talk much. We just sort of waited to get there. The ramp dropped, and we just went in and sort of fanned out for orders along the beach. I remember there was a big block house right at the water edge, just where I landed. There was no resistance, but that block house I'll never forget it. It was a dig

concrete block house with an embrasure, with a machine gun still sticking out of it. Right beside it there was a marine with his head half blown off. He had a flame thrower… he had been there, and he had done his job, and he had to take out this block house. It's not mentioned in any of the reports, but I'll just never forget that. And later on I'll remember it— on Red Beach Two everywhere I looked there were shell holes, little declivities, and in many of them there was a marine dead with his rifle under him, pointing towards the enemy, shot through the head. There were machine guns on that beach and they were light casualties, but they were casualties. And well, that was your answer.

Pylinski: Yes sir. Mr. Greene, now I know you were supposed to be in the reserves for the D-day invasion of Iwo Jima, but you were pushed ahead early if I'm not mistaken, correct?

Greene: Well, the original intent was these first 7000 marines, they'd get shore with those little 380 vehicles plus these 58 tanks that Mr. Leman talked about, and we were supposed to then go in the next day after everything was secure… then all the rest of the people… so they definitely wanted 7000 right away. Kuribayashi was an extremely intelligent Japanese general. He said, "I'm not going to stop these guys from coming ashore. I want them to come ashore, and just get that beach full of… crowded full of people." They knew just about what was going to happen. He was just going to rake that beach with artillery fire, and almost immediately--why we have lost about 600 plus marines dead and another 1600 wounded-- so out of that wounded, all of a sudden that 7000 people shrank rather rapidly. So they said, "Hey, we have to get people on shore right now. Can't wait 'til tomorrow." So we went in at about two, three o'clock in the afternoon. And of course all of us, the ships are out here about three miles off shore, and when you circle in and you've got ships-- I wish I could remember, they're like, anyway –control ships, there were 12 of them strung-out to make like an alignment. It's like starting a race. Everybody's going to go up to the line, and they're going to give a signal and you're all going to go in together. They were still trying to do that more or less. I went in on Red Beach One. Futatsu Rock is right between Red Beach One and Red Beach Two so they had a pretty good guidance as to where it's at. That rock's still there. When I went back a year ago it's sitting out there in the ocean. Our whole thing was just get ashore. First of all, how crazy people thought… we're going in reserve, so they said, "Well, you're with headquarters company. Let's just put all you guys… a bunch of you radio men, and all three top officers, put them all in one vehicle and we'll go ashore." They said, "Whoa, that's not going to happen now. We're getting shot at." So we flipped a coin, and Smithe goes with Colonel Trotty and I go in with Major Waters. And we hit the beach, and I know this after the fact, but Smithe gets wounded almost immediately, gets wounded again later on, and dies on the beach that evening. Trotty gets in ok. I'm going in with Waters and a few other guys. We hit the beach, and I'm loaded down with my pack on the front, my thirty pound radio on the back –you've got two canteens of water, I've got 136 rounds of ammunition, I've got food for three days because it may be three days before food ever catches up with you, I've got this carbon— so I'm a light weight and I'm probably almost carrying as much as I weigh myself. But I get off, and they say on the LCVB do not run off the front because as this craft lightens up and a wave hits the rear-end of the LCVP that ramp going to raise up and just slice your legs off. So when

you go off of the LCVP you jump off to the sides of the ramp, which means there's a little water there so you're up to your knees in water and this sand. I've got a sample of that sand that you can see after; I've got a little show and tell stuff, up there… but it… I'm slowly moving up, and like Mr. Leman is saying, there are bodies all over, but they were laying there and the ones I was seeing didn't look dead. I'm wandering through these people and knowing that I'm supposed to be heading up to catch up with the rest of my outfit and here comes Major Waters running down towards me. He was way ahead of me because he wasn't carrying anything but a light pack so he's been wounded in the hand and so he says, "I'm wounded; I'm heading to the beach; I'm going to get the hell off this island." And I said "What do you want me to do, sir?" "Just catch up with the guys and ask your sergeant what in the world he wants you to do." So I catch up with my group and I unload my radio and so forth because I'm not in service, and my Sergeant says, "Dave, why don't you run back down to the beach and help the wiremen get their wire and stuff up." 'Cause they got wires, telephone wires, and big coils, small coils telephone carts and all that kind of stuff. So I go back down to the beach and all of those men are still there, they're all dead, their bodies… you could get every ten foot in every direction there were nothing but bodies of people that had been killed with that first artillery blast. We were fortunate that we came in after that was over. But then the Japanese… between the Japanese and our pack howitzers that had come in, these 75mm guns were deciding to have a little battle. The island is not flat, it's got a big hump here in the middle. And we're up on that hump, because we want to be on the high ground so to speak. But the shells in the duel between these artillery people… I mean, you wouldn't dare stand up or you would be afraid you would get hit. You're trying to dig a foxhole, but you're digging in sand. So if you've ever seen… you yourself have undoubtedly sometime laid down in the snow and made your arms go back and forth and made a mark in the snow… we were doing almost the same thing trying to lay on your back and fish the sand out from underneath you to get depressed somewhat. Not wanting to be up in a vertical position using that little shovel that was issued to us to try to… because sand … your foxhole was this wide and this deep, so it wouldn't amount to… so that very first hour or two was sort of a hectic little thing.

Pylinski: I can imagine.

Greene: And you can… I mean you immediately learn the sound of the shells. You know whether it was a 75 or 105. You can see… you can look up and see which direction they're going for heaven's sake. It's just a… it's the same thing with mortars. 60s, 80s, 40s, you can tell every one of them what it is that's coming in on you.

Leman: There were times that first day when nobody could stand up on that beach at all, but our job was to go down to the water's edge and bring the stuff out. And the response of the Americans to these--when the Japanese opened their fire --was to call in air support. So the corsairs come down, and the Japanese wheeled some of their big guns out of caves to the north out of Carthage and Suribachi. They were out in the open where they could be hit. Cruisers came in close too. Cruisers and destroyers would just fire away at those and force the Japanese back into their holes. They would stay back for a while, and then they

would come out again and open fire again. In the interim we would go out and unload the boats, you know. We had to do it in a hurry because there was a current… the current would carry the boats away. It would come in and nose up against the beach, be held there by the raft, and the current would sweep the rear end. So if we didn't get the stuff off in a hurry, the boat would broach and just wash up on the beach because there was a fairly heavy surf. In order to keep the beach clear for boats we had to blow up the boats that broached, you know. There was no way to tow them off and get them off the land. We just blew them up into pieces, so we had to contend with, too… you know. It was really quite a scramble those first couple days. It was just awful on the beach.

Greene: Yeah, it was called… his job was beach party. But it wasn't a party. But that was what they were called.

[Leman and Greene laugh]

Pylinski: Well after the party you got to call… you were going to be coming up to the line to get a platoon, if I'm not mistaken.

Leman: When I say it was tough for us, it was tougher for all troops who had to go up against the Japanese. And they lost heavily that first day. It was not undefended. It was maybe light resistance, but it was… I would say a peculiar kind of light. Machine guns from bunkers that you could not see… it was tough. A lot of casualties that first day. I was on the beach actually for ten days, and the last six or seven days were pretty easy. We had shell fire, but not all the time, and we lost very few people to shell fire. But the troops who took it on the chin and by… just for example, I went up and joined an outfit on the tenth day, on D+10, and that outfit stated with a forty-five man platoon with seven… with a platoon leader and thirteen noncoms. It was down to twenty-two men, and only one noncom, one corporal was left. The officers and men were out in front you know, and they were the ones Japanese got first. So by the time I joined I replaced the Lieutenant who had been killed on that third day, well, tried to replace him.

[Laughs]

And the guy who had been acting platoon leader was a corporal. He was a parachutist in the Solomons and knew what he was doing, but ten of us were sent up on the tenth day from the beach to… and the 5th division as replacement platoon leaders, and two weeks later every single one of us had been shot, or had been killed or wounded. It was that ways for second lieutenants. When I joined there were only two officers left in my company, and by the end of the campaign there was only one. And you… I was in the 26th also. The 3rd battalion 26th, which I remember when you landed about 5:00 that day I was glad to see them coming.

Greene: By the night fall we had on that first night we had 30,000 men ashore.

Leman: That first night you had a rough go, didn't you.

Greene: It was a hell of a deal.

Pylinski: What was your experience going in to?

Greene: Well, my experience that first day… I seemed to be on top of the lisp with my radio sergeant, which was alright. If you had some special duty, they would say, "Hey, Dave Greene, take this… your radio and do this special thing."

Leman: You're the go-to-guy.

Greene: Yeah, the go to guy. When we left Hilo and was loading ship, for instance, that was one of my jobs… was radio communication between ship and shore as they were loading ship. Well, when we… of course loading the ship there… when we're getting off ship… of course I'm not doing that kind of thing. But while we were sitting offshore, and were intending to go in the next day, they said, "Dave, why don't you go up on topside they gave me a special radio that was in communication with the corsairs, these guys that before we landed before 9:00 were strafing the beach and dropping bombs and stuff like that." So I was listening and communicating and listening to a certain guy who seemed to be talking more than the others, and you could almost tell where he was in his circuit. He happened to get hit, and next thing you know he cried shit so that conversation was over. But beyond the first night, after we get on shore, it was dark night… I mean as dark as any night could ever possibly get and just before darkness set in it just got a little glow in the sky. Why here comes the sergeant, and says "We're sending some machine gun squads down to the beach on the far west side." Because the tide goes out and you got a wide beach over there. Where we landed there was no really no beach… pretty well it went straight down into the water. So they said they need a radio contact and I said, "You know, sergeant the minute we get over the hump here… I doubt if…" "Nobody else cares, you got to go with these guys." And so it's dark and I'm following a couple of squads of people so there's… I don't know how many… there might be 12, 15 people. As I'm talking to kids about this, I said, "Have you ever been out at night on a hike where they told you couldn't talk and couldn't say anything and the only way in this darkness that you're going to be able to know where you're going is to follow the sound of the footprint in front of you?" And you're knowing eventually you're going to pass through your own front line, and go… I mean that was a little tense moment because there was a little conversation with somebody that wanted to challenge us. And then we wandered down to the beach, into no-man's land, and we're securing that beach so the Japanese won't be able to come around during the night, which they didn't. But it was a tense night.

Pylinski: Now, as a part of the D-day invasion, there was a group of seasoned Marines that were going to be used as reserves but weren't committed. And then the younger, newer, greener marines were sent in instead. How you gentlemen feel about that?

Greene: Well, I don't know how many Marine reunions that Mr. Leman had gone too. But I had gone to many fifth marine division reunions, and a couple of Iwo Jima survivor's reunions, and that subject was always coming up because the third marine division was… there were three divisions: third, fourth, fifth. All of the 5th went in, all of the 4th, and part of the 3rd division, about 2/3rds of it as I recall came in, about 4 days later, after the flag

raising on Suribachi. Because the island is shaped like a kite or a pork chop… as it got wider, you needed more troops. So they were going to come up and fill up that void in the center. For two weeks, the rest of the division sat afloat and never came in. And "Howlin' Mad Smith" was determined we were not going to use those guys, we were going to use these replacements. Which was really part of what Mr. Leman came in on. He was in a replacement battalion, the 27th I believe. But those replacements were greenhorns and when I'm talking to kids or anybody, I said, "You know, if you have a front line of 250 people and you need a few replacements, that's okay. You can teach the guy how to work with your squad, and how to get in there, and how to do things. That's okay. But when the replacement comes to a point where there's only one or two guys… and the other umpteen don't know what in the world they're doing… they don't know how to work together, and that's how you win a war, how you fight the battle. You work as a team; you're a team as you're going forward. It isn't all gung-ho. Yeah, there's a lot of gung-ho once in a while, but it basically is working together to find out where in the world… how you're going to advance.

Pylinski: All about shoot, move, and communicate.

Greene: Yeah, exactly, that's what he was doing. He had this little walkie-talkie.

Leman: All the assault troops that made the original assault were well trained. There were replacement drafts who had the jobs… sort of jobs I described, and they were only partially trained. Many of them were just out of boot camp, and had not any advanced training on how to deal with pillboxes and machine guns and how to handle yourself when you're under fire. Those guys were just vulnerable, and they were… they were as the good guys… well, when I joined… I joined twenty-two guys and that was on March 3rd, and we were involved in a tremendous explosion five days later, and at that time we were down to eight. When I was hit they were down to eight and when I left there were just eight of the original guys. They got a lot of replacements and everybody told me the replacements were really… they didn't know how to handle things, they were vulnerable. In fact one of the PFC's, one of the three guys who made it all the way through, was put in charge. Every day he had to go out… towards the end of the campaign he had to go take out a squad full of replacements and the replacements would just get killed. They didn't know how to protect themselves, how to take advantage of cover… and the Japanese just shot them like… and he refused to go back. He told the sergeant… he said, "I'm not going back out there again in charge. I'll go out, but I'll follow you or another leader. But I'm not going to take my responsibility of getting these green guys killed." He said, "I won't do it. I'll go myself, but I'm not going to lead them." The sergeant argued with him, but he finally appointed one of the privates to be in charge, one of the other two guys. He didn't go himself. My friend followed him.

Pylinski: Well, let's switch gears for a second and talk about leadership. I know you were an officer coming out of the reserves, Mr. Green, you were an enlisted man, drafted. Dr. Leman, what were your impressions of the leadership above you? The other leaders,

other Lieutenants, and maybe even some sergeants? I know you mentioned William Hawkins, who was a sniper in Tarawa…?

Leman: He was my particular model. He was a first lieutenant who was killed on Tarawa, had been through Guadalcanal, and he… I followed his career closely, you know, he was always out in front of his men, he just didn't… everybody looked to him on Tarawa. You can read about him on Tarawa.

Pylinski: What about the leaders on Iwo Jima though when you were in a fight?

Leman: I thought the guy I replaced was just like him, you know, he was … he parachuted, he fought in the Solomons, and I never knew him, but I made friends with his best friend who was executive officer of my battalion-- the guy I served with had been together. The people I knew that I met when I… the original officers were mostly great. There were a few lemons, but mostly they were just gung-ho guys who would be out in front and do things as well as or better than their men, and their men were happy to follow them. And the same with the noncoms, there were some that were just tremendous, some… I would… I can't say enough for them.

Pylinski: Did you feel like you embodied that same leadership style when you went in to the front?

Leman: I tried to. I did the best I could. I was new, but I tried to do, and they… I'll say this, I was really pleased when they welcomed me back when I came out of the hospital and joined the outfit again. The guys that I had been with came up and threw their arms around me. And I felt pretty good about that, I was so glad to see them.

Greene: And that was back on Hawaii?

Leman: Yeah, that was back on Hawaii.

Pylinski: What about you, Mr. Greene? What were your impressions of the leadership around you? You were a radio man, so you…?

Greene: Well yeah, we had people we would say, "They should get this sergeant for desertion, because his foxhole was so deep you couldn't find him."

[All laugh]

That kind of a person, you know. Then there were guys that were… who we had our job to do, and that's what people say… what did you think of this. Well, I'm back a little ways— not that I didn't make treks up there— but when the doctor went on the frontline company H Castles company on the 3rd of March I… his radio men, all six of those guys who had learned how to do that radio, were all expired. And so I went up and radioed… so I was with Cpt. Castle, and on the 6th and then the next morning on the 7th –the doctor could tell you more about it, but from my point of view— here I was, I was a radio man, I was keeping in touch with the companies left and right and back here to the battalion and the battalions getting in contact with the regimental. So we're in a foxhole that night, the next morning we're going to push off and it just seemed like there's no resistance. Our

men are moving, we're up sort of on high ground and you go down and there's a hill in front of us, a sand hill, and as our men are going up over this sand hill all of a sudden the whole damn thing just goes up in ka-blooey. Well, I radio back and say "Hey, wow, we need all the help we can have." And people are carrying stretchers of people, taking them out of here. So I leave my radio and I go down there and I'm helping dig these guys out because there are people that are buried and he's doing the same thing. His men had been blown up, and…

Pylinski: Dr. Leman, do you remember this explosion?

Leman: I do, and it's really interesting to hear this because it's like Rashômon. Rashômon is a great Japanese movie, it's told of an episode that occurs… told by three different people who were there. The same stories told by three different people, all of whom saw something different. During that time he described when it was real quiet, the five days before, we had gone out after a big bombardment to try and attack. The idea was you bombard the Japanese and then you soften them up and you then go out and attack and they're so stunned they can't retaliate. Well, what the Japanese did was to go underground during the bombardment. Every day the same thing would happen. They'd go underground. When the shooting would stop, they would come up and they'd man their posts, and we would get up out of our holes and go forward and they'd BRRRRR with machine guns and mow us down, and we'd have to get back in our holes. This day Colonel Pollock, 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, decided we'd do an attack at dawn by surprise. So we passed the word during the night from foxhole to foxhole. We get up at dawn and we get out of our holes and it's real quiet, and we go forward through this area real quiet, and we find a sentry, a Japanese sentry, who's gone to sleep, who's supposed to warn his people. One of our guys shoots the sentry, and all around us the Japanese come out of… all around us these guys come out of their holes and we find… we're by a big cave and we have a tremendous, well, not a tremendous because there's about a dozen of us, there's only about a dozen of us. But a whole bunch of Japanese come out of their cave and they're in trenches and they're throwing grenades at us and we're throwing grenades back and they're firing at us and it's a fire fight, you know. We finally get a flame thrower up to the cave and we flame the cave and I'm there and one of the guys is a big strong guy who could throw hand grenades-- he's the only guy in the outfit big enough to throw hand grenades over the ridge of where the cave is so they roll down the other side and hit the Japanese coming at the cave. Meantime, our guys send… the Captain sends up a half-track, and we have a half-track to blast the Japanese who are coming out of the cave. We finally get it all quiet, the Japanese are all pretty much killed, the cave's empty, and all of a sudden the cave blows up. I was standing about thirty feet away, the biggest noise I ever heard in my life. I see the hill go up; I see this big column go up and it looks like a mushroom cloud and all the rocks and boulders where the cave was come down. They come down in a big rain, far beyond me. I get buried by the dirt, but the big rocks go and kill all the guys that are out in the open: the rest of my platoon, and the first platoon of the 26th. That's the explosion you saw. And it buried me! I had to… I dug myself out, and I helped pull the guys out. Those were the guys you saw.

Greene: I left my position, went down and…

Leman: That's how quiet it was.

Pylinski: So you gentlemen were probably brought together seventy years ago and didn't even realize it.

Greene: They're fussing around, but they just literally… we lost I think fifty-four people in that one blast. And the Japanese that were going to be fighting, they blew themselves up really with that same deal. We stay one more night there, and the next day…

Leman: Well, no, after that explosion we pulled the guys together and went forward 500 yards.

Greene: Oh yeah, oh yeah, but I mean… you're right.

Leman: And then we got pinned down.

Greene: Then we were pinned down

Leman: It's interesting just a few yards away different things happen.

Pylinski: How are you guys… how are you gentlemen able to assault Japanese defenses?

Leman: To do what?

Pylinski: How were you gentlemen able to assault the Japanese defenses with little or no cover and concealment?

Leman: Uh, very difficult and that's why we lost so many troops, you know. You take advantage of what cover you have. I remember the corporal who was with the company I joined was… we were talking the first couple of hours together before we got involved. Three hours after I joined the outfit we were in the front lines again, fighting, but we had time to talk a little bit and he told me about Papi Alan, who was a sergeant, who was his model, a squad leader who had just been shot through the chest the day before they evacuated. He recovered, and I was fortunate enough to have him as my platoon sergeant the rest of the war-- he got killed in Korea-- he was described as a perfect NCO. He would place his troops in a pretty safe position, then he would go out in front and go from place to place, from rock to rock, and the Japanese would shoot at him, and he'd dodge and finally every time they shot he would spot where the machine gun was… where they were hidden, you know… see the cave it came out of, see the powder, and then he would… then the people could zero in… the bazooka could hit that cave --the bazooka is a high velocity shell-- anyway, that's what you do. You just have to take cover, and do the best you can, and get close enough to… somebody has to go at the last minute and flame into the cave, and the Japanese loved to shoot flame throwers. It was tough.

Greene: It was almost like you were fighting two different wars. We're fighting one above ground, and they're fighting one below ground. You basically didn't really ever see the Japanese very often, like he said, they… when you surprised them you saw a whole

bunch of Japanese, but other than that, like he's just saying, you tried to draw their fire so you knew where they were. Otherwise, you didn't know where they were. They were sitting back there in the cave, and they might set up something that would say "I'm going to kill anyone this crosses between this small little radius of space. If you're over here, I'm not going to expose myself and shoot you. I'm going to wait; be patient." We had some of that later on, when I was trying to go up to the front. They would mark off a certain trail, and if you were on that thing you knew you were going to be shot at; you had to time yourself as to when was that next little loop or mortar shell going to come in.

Pylinski: Right, we had a conversation when you and I were talking on the phone and you spoke of an incident like that where it was you and a handful of other marines going through a certain area, and you were timing those mortar falls.

Greene: Timing, yes. We were delivering batteries up… one late, late-- almost darkness-- and the pathway… here was a big open field and this pathway's going alone one side and then makes a right angle turn and goes to a position where we're going to drop these things off. As we're coming down this pathway, the Japanese was timing it also, knowing we would get to that corner he was dropping them on the… beyond the first turn. So we were timing ourselves, and we had a flamethrower guy and several others, and most of us made it through there, but a couple of our guys got off time and the next thing you know Hanson is down, he's got a side full of shrapnel. The guy that was with him got a little bit of shrapnel, so there's four of us, and we finally get to the point where we drag Hanson up there and find a stretcher, leave our batteries there, and we're deciding how to get out of there. Well, we didn't feel like going back that same trail at all, and we had Big Old Duke Texan on the front of the stretcher he's big enough, he can handle 220 pounds, and then Schaffer and I were on the back of this stretcher and Hanson's on the stretcher. And so we said "Well here's this open field, we'll just cut across, what the heck." And it was starting to get dark and there's a guy over the other side across were starting across this field and the guys on the other side is sort of waving his arms around and we're thinking well, he's telling us this is the place to come, towards me or whatever. We get over there and he's just… he's just shaking his head. He said, "The reason that path goes around there is that that's a mine field!"

[Shocked noise from audience]

"You guys just cut across!" And for whatever reason, our feet never ever hit a one of those things.

Leman: There were lots of mines, and a lot of our guys were casualties of mines and a lot of our guys were casualties from mines. It was just something you had to accept, but basically the problem you described how to deal with that kind situation the only you can only do it by brute force, just by going dead ahead. You can't go around them, and it's always said: hit them where they ain't, you know. Military tactics are based on moving troops around in big areas where you can get people by surprise, but there's no way to get people by surprise when it's just fortified every inch.

Greene: It was almost like going back to WWI. There was a frontline… you had to be in contact with everybody, going through as sweeping… you didn't dare get way ahead of the guy next you. If you had easy going, you had to be careful because you opened up the flank so the enemy could come around and sneak in. And they were good at that. So a lot of times you would, "Oh, I would love to advance, but I can't really. I gotta be careful what I do. I may have to drop back for the night, because I got to keep the line."

Leman: And they would infiltrate at night. They were very good at that, but we fortunately had contact with ships that dropped shells, and later mortar shells, that we used as flares to illuminate the whole area at night. We go up and you hear the burst and the flare would ignite and come down slowly suspended by parachute and just illuminate the battlefield. That was good; you could spot the Japanese at night. Otherwise they would just sneak up in the dark.

Pylinski: I just want to kind of speak a little bit about the villages that were within in you guys' battle space. Dr. Leman, were you ever involved in fighting in built-up areas, or villages while you were on the front?

Leman: No, there were no civilians on Iwo. They all got sent off.

Pylinski: I know there was like… there were a few villages on the island.

Leman: Okinawa and Saipan there was a lot of that house to house. We did not have to cope with civilians and I was glad of that.

Greene: Those people had left. There were originally a couple of little small villages of people. There… at one time as I was reading something, there might have been as many as 1000 or 1100 people, but they were all gone. And the Japanese were… basically everything underground.

Pylinski: Okay, and they weren't fighting in those villages particularly.

Leman: There were no villages to fight in.

Greene: Nothing left.

Leman: There were no buildings. It was just almost denuded of vegetation. It had been bombed for seventy days straight beforehand, and then heavy bombardment by battleships and everything. There were a few stunted trees partly left standing, but mostly it was just burned out and barren.

Greene: Just gone. Wiped clean.

Pylinski: Speaking of… still talking about the battlefield and Mr. Greene, you were a radio operator. What was the indirect fire support like for you? Were you calling back for indirect fire a lot?

Greene: No, not really. That wasn't my particular job, but if somebody wanted to call back and say I want you to pass a message on to… and talk, like get ahold of the 81's… because there also were telephone lines all over the place, and that was probably the most immediate source of communication were these tiny little lines going up there. Of course within the company itself they had their own little radio system. But the Japanese had a habit of coming back and maybe sticking pins in the telephone lines and interrupting them, and telephone guys would have to go out and either find where the problem was, or lay new line and that… the telephone wire is very tiny, just two little wires that were very, very tiny that were… there would be hundred, hundreds of yards of that on a spool 'so big.' These guys would run across, get up new a line that had a little crank telephone on each end.

Leman: A major omission in my own personal training was I was not introduced before I was in combat to the little new hand-held handy-talkie radio, which is about as big as a brick and about as heavy as a brick. It has an aerial and a button you're supposed to switch. My call is connected to my company commander, and to the other platoon, and I was Howl1-- H company one. I had this little thing they told me how… they didn't tell me how to use it, they just handed it to me, and said here it is. I had to ask the corporal how to use it. You press the button and you say your message and say over, then press switch and you can hear it back, and you can't talk two ways at once. I had to get use to handling this thing; it was my job to have it in combat and I had a rifle, an 8lb rifle to carry.

Pylinski: And a brick.

Leman: And in the other hand this brick, and then I had to think and it takes time to think when you're in combat. Press the button to exchange, tell the Captain what's going on.

Greene: And he's carrying an M-1 rifle.

Leman: I wished he'd been able to tell me about this little radio. I had to figure it out.

Greene: And the radios were FM. FM radio had just been introduced, and that's where… like I say, when you're over the hump, if you're on one side of the hump and the guy you're wanting to talk to is over here, it doesn't… it's a straight line thing. It isn't like a regular radio would, that would go over the… and so there were complications with that radio on the island also because of where you were.

Pylinski: You didn't have direct line of sight; you didn't have communication.

Leman: Direct line of sight you had to have in order to be…

Greene: But it was very helpful when the hill went up. I told the captain, I said, "Please send up every stretcher, barrier you can."

[Laughs]

Leman: You got it, and I was blasting that message back. I didn't need a message when the hill went up, that was just automatic, "Hey, get on that radio and tell what's going on."

Greene: And also it happened earlier when he said, "I have a half-track, could you use a half track?" and I said, "Yes, please send it up right away!" It was very useful, you know. We were at that time in a big firefight.

Pylinski: Did you have a lot of armor support then, when you were on the line?

Greene: No, we had the army… it was strictly a marine show. Except for the army… the army had a bunch of ducks-- amphibious vehicles-- that helped us, and they had an army field hospital that I was in there for a while.

Leman: The army was going to take over after we finished up. The army wouldn't accept the battlefield until we had sprayed it several days, to try and kill all flies and bugs and…

Greene: Yeah, the island was sprayed with DDT halfway through and it killed all the flies. At that time the flies were awful because there were all these dead bodies.

Leman: Well all these dead bodies you can't imagine.

Greene: They stank like a…

Leman: My smeller does not work very good, and that was probably the best thing there ever was. 'Cause the stench from other people knowing… just to interject, when I'm talking to people about the battle, and you say well, there were 6,800 people killed, and another 19,000 wounded, well yeah, they hear big numbers like that all the time. But that happened in 36 days. So when we talk about war, if you're any good at mathematics, that means 200 marines a day basically were being killed. 600 were being wounded. Of course some days were worse than others and that's where I've copied off. Bringing to you people those after battle reports… it's just astounding. You can tell the day that the front line blew up, because we lost 149 men in that regiment that day, and the next day you only lost 76 or something like that. It's just unbelievable. But all of this is recorded as the battle progresses.

Pylinski: You gentlemen talked about night time. You were speaking about the flares, the night flares that illuminated the sky. Dr. Leman, I was curious as to what your experiences were in the evening fighting the enemy?

Leman: We always tried to… we didn't send out any parties at night, any patrols or anything. We had a pretty strict rule that nobody got out of his fox hole at night.

Pylinski: But you had night infiltrators, right? Did you have night infiltrators?

Leman: Yes, we did had night infiltrators, and we would have grenade fights with them. We always strung out wire ahead of us and put mess can that would rattle in the wire so that would give a clue if the Japanese were trying to get in. When I went in the hospital, I had a sidearm, I had a pistol, and I was asked to surrender it. I looked at the hospital tents, and I saw that they had no sentries and they didn't have any wires around it. I said no, I don't want to surrender my pistol. People come in at night. We had an argument, but anyway I kept my pistol. That night, 5 infiltrators came into the area. 4 of them got away,

one guy was shot. And I'll just mention that… in the morning when I went out and looked at his body, all of his teeth were gone. Our guys had taken them as souvenirs. It was not nice, but that happened. I saw a lot of things that were not nice, that's just one of them.

Pylinski: Mr. Greene, what were your experiences at night?

Greene: Well the doctor was wounded and off the line on the 7th of March, is that right?

Leman: Well the 7th, yeah… I was hit on the 8th.

Greene: Oh that's right, you were hit on the 8th.

Leman: The 7th was the day…

Greene: The 7th was the bad night.

Leman: Bad night.

Greene: So he was offline on the 8th of March. Now, the battle's going on until the 26th of March. Now, as the battle progressed, we had people that were infiltrating. But where we were, we're back of the front line a ways, they're infiltrating to come back to steal water and food. They're not coming back necessarily to kill you… we had guys that were… sometimes you have a fox hole that was pretty big because it was a shell hole and so there might be three or four guys in there. There were times we would have three or four guys and somebody is staying awake while the other get a rest at night. And all of a sudden there's a little shadowy figure coming around, and he's coming in, he's hoping everybody's sleeping, and he's wanting to pick up rations that might be scattered around the place. So the next thing you know, there's a little fire fight going on right there in that hole and you're shooting that Japanese. And at this point in the game you've been through so many days of blood, just unbelievable things going on, but at this point in time this Japanese's is… got his… we got c-rations now, and his shirt is full of c-ration cans. He's all bloused out, he looks twice as big as normal. And old Luther T Lestly III says, "I hope you didn't shot and kill… I hope… I'm glad you killed him, but I hope you didn't hit any of the cans and ruin them-ruin these c-rations." You know, here's this dead Japanese now sitting there in your foxhole with you and three or four other guys. At that point in time near the end of things, cooks and bakers and truck drivers and everybody else are coming up to do what I call picket duty, because the Japanese are now in this one little tiny area. I was also then picket… doing picket --you would call it-- around our own headquarters. And it was… it's extremely eerie because here are these flares, they're perfectly timed. As soon as one had just about gone out, "bonk!" here comes another one. And it's swinging, as it's swinging through the air, shadows move. And you just… here it is you get… it's up to the 20th, the 21st, the 22nd. I've only got how many days before… do I want to be the last guy killed, you know, that kind of stuff gets... Now, when I went off the front line on the 8th, you were wounded. That late evening the whole H Company was off the line. I come back off the line and the Japanese are shooting anybody at a high point, just shooting at you as you're trying to get out, other people are going to replace

you, I go back a ways beyond where anybody can get at me really, and find a hole and jump in it. The enemy is right up here. The enemy is in that direction. All of a sudden I hear a shell coming. Not coming from that direction, it's coming from this direction. "SHoooom." I'm in a hole and I can tell it's over shooting me. Then the next thing you know, in comes another one. Then the next thing you know, in comes another one. And holy cow, it's our destroyers out there, using yesterday's information for the front line, not today's.

Pylinski: Whoops.

[Audience expresses dismay]

Greene: Whoops. So, five shells came in before somebody shut them off. In other words, they run a shell in, and the guy's spotter will tell him you're on target, or you're not on target. Well, it took them five shells to determine they were shooting at us, who were back off the line. But that happened once in a while, and that's just the way war is.

Pylinski: Now, the Japanese on the island they both… they knew they weren't going to win this battle. They knew they were going to fight to the last man.

Greene: No, no, no, no. They knew they were going to lose.

Pylinski: Right, they knew they were going to take it right to the last man. Did any of you gentlemen have any experiences with prisoners of war— Japanese prisoners of war— while you were on the island?

Leman: I saw only five of them. They were all lying… so badly wounded they couldn't stand up. They were lying in a… on the ground with a big stockade of barbed wire around them, mainly to keep our troops from getting in to cut their throats.

Pylinski: Alright.

Leman: It was not a nice feeling… I just have... Clint Eastwood made some good movies about Iwo Jima, and the second one is called "Letters from Iwo," and that's looking at it from the Japanese standpoint. I saw that one five times; I recommend it to people if you ever want to get it on DVD it's… I think it's pretty realistic from what I remember.

Greene: Yeah. I went to that movie when it first came out. We were down in Florida and the interesting thing was to listen to the audience's reactions. When the movie was over, why, there were people behind us saying, "Oh, those poor Japanese, what they had to go through, and blah blah blah."
And I thought, "Oh, you know, there's no scene..." After getting out and talking— I did talk to a couple of people--- I said "You know, it was hell for the Japanese but it was hell and then some for us." When you're trying to advance on an enemy who's so dug in… in my case I was there --very fortunate to be there 36 days never injured and so forth--- but again as I mentioned before, I was ship-to-shore communicator. So Schaffer and Dave

Greene went down… my sergeant said go down the day before onto the beach, the Golden is going to come in… this ship is going to come in on the far western shore, and you will be ship-to-shore communication with Shafer on there. When the ship is there the next morning they'll come in and put you on the ship.
That night, while we're sitting there… we're sitting amongst a whole bunch of artillery shells and stuff like that hadn't been used –sort of like an ammunition dump— we hear these screams and voices and everything up in the island, and then all of a sudden, finally, you hear this battle going on. Now, the Japanese had come through the line. I mean, they snuck through the tunnel line-wise, not a Bonsai charge on the front line. They come back and they're going to get at the airman. There's 10,000 airman army people down here, with very few guards. Here's 310 Japanese coming in with spears and swords and the very few guns that were left and whatever…. slashing in there, killing people –they killed I think a hundred and some of those people— all of the Japanese are killed of course, but we are then going to the next day be leaving the island.
A quickie story— one of the guys that helped – who happens to be from Waterloo— was the first patrol that went up on the top of Suribachi and came back down and said, "Let's go up and take a flag." He didn't carry the flag, but he was part of that whole thing. He comes down, he goes through the whole battle, he gets up to the last day and he's injured –we'll say the next to the last day. So he goes back to the hospital, gets himself fixed up… he… instead of going back to his outfit he goes and jumps… he says, "Alright, to hell with it. They're going to come down here tomorrow anyway. I'll just get in a fox hole and stay here overnight." And those Japanese coming through... they killed him.

That's how crazy things get.

And the other thing I'll throw in while were talking about that particular piece… almost every reunion I ever went to it, it came up that when you're going to get aboard ship you do not take ammunition with you. The guys that were offline were down here the night before they were going to board ship to leave the island. They take their ammunition… they said they want to get rid of their ammunition now. There were men who were refusing to get rid of it, because what happens if the Japs come down? "Oh, they're never going to come back down. The fight is all the way up the other end of the island." They took away all their ammunition and here come these 310 Japanese. And then here's an officer in charge of these men who has a sidearm and he still has shells in it and so he's killing Japanese, which is fortunately helping the cause. But he's eventually injured, but he gets a medal for having killed people with ammunition he wasn't supposed to have and these other guys are getting slaughtered. They're defending themselves with bayonets and the butts of the rifles because the order was tonight you're going to get rid of that ammunition, not tomorrow morning. But then they go on to me. I go on… to me… they come out from the ship with a small craft, and pick me up to take me to the ship. I'm sure those guys were wondering, "Where in the hell has this guy been? He's the dirtiest grumpiest looking little bunch of… under that uniform which was just nothing but the greens." So they take me into the med center, strip me off… the clothes off and I jump

onto the scale and I've lost 22 lb. I'm 114lb, and that's basically the way almost everybody who had ever been in the battle per say was. They were just…

Pylinski: Emaciated.

Greene: Just emaciated. You don't take time to eat in that when you got Japanese that's shooting at you.

Pylinski: Oh yeah, absolutely.

Greene: You never changed your clothes. 36… I mean anybody you ever talk to, you talk about how many days— 37, 36 days— you never changed your clothes, never took your shoes off, never did anything but pay attention.

Pylinski: Stay alive. Dr. Leman, you were injured during the battle of Iwo Jima.

Leman: Yes, and you asked about the first shower I had.

Pylinski: Yes, I reckon we can get to that in a little bit, but I want to speak about you being injured on the battlefield and your experiences with navy corp men.

Leman: Yes, as was saying I was with this outfit and it went on down from 22 to 8 men, and my 8 men and I the next day after the big explosion were ordered to move ahead, to attack. We were in front of a new Japanese position. We had just gone 500 yards because they had evacuated that area, and had maybe only a couple of people to slow us up witch we dealt with pretty easily, you know. But then we were up against a fortified line of extremely rough country machineguns, hidden snipers, people in what they call spider traps-- a hole dug with a trap door and they just lift it up and shoot at you, and you couldn't see any sign of resistance— but were getting heavy fire. So the Captain says, "We have to keep up the pressure, move ahead." So we go, and a couple of guys get shot, and we take them back. I tell them, I said, "We can't. We're pinned down. There's no way we can move ahead." We got to keep moving ahead because if we don't, we'll open up a big flank. The other guys ahead of us will move ahead, and we just got to keep the pressure on them. So I talk it over with my men. The corporal had been killed the night before –shot through the head, actually that morning, he had just been shot just a few minutes before… I was talking to him and he was shot through the head, you know. And I tell the Captain, the other guys, I say, "There's no way we can do it, lieutenant." I say, "Well we got orders to move ahead, I'm…" I said, "I'll go first. You guys follow me if I make any progress. So I go forward about 6 or 7 feet, heading for a rock to hide behind with my rifle, I left the radio behind –that brick, I couldn't deal with it. So I hear a bang and I'm on my hands and knees and I see blood dripping on the sidewalk and I hear my guys say, "Move! You're in a fire lane, move!" And I'd been shot through the… it hit my helmet, made a big bang, and part of it went up into my scalp, the rest went out—the bullet split in half. I had the rest of it taken out a year later because it was… but anyway, I managed to crawl back to our guys together, and we didn't… we obviously couldn't move ahead so the Captain said just keep up a volume of fire and hold your ground. And the Captain said… the corp man looked at my wound, and he said, "You got to go back to the hospital." I

said, “I don’t really need to.” He said, “No, you got to go back.” So the Captain ordered me back towards the end of the day. I said, “I’ll stay until my replacement comes.” He sent up the first sergeant to be the first sergeant of the company to replace me, so I went back to the aid station and the doctor looked at it and said you have to go to the hospital ship. I was put in an ambulance— jeep ambulance to go to the hospital ship— on the jeep ambulance there were three patients. One of the guys got combat fatigue… he just sort of sits there; he can’t move. The guy on the stretcher is one of my best friends. I had seen him just the night before. A classmate, another lieutenant, had been shot through the belly and he was unconscious and he was… he died on the way. We went down to go to the ship, you know, and they told us the ship was already full –there were too many casualties that day— so we had to go to the division hospital. My friend was alive and breathing when we went down there, but dead when we came back. That wouldn’t happen nowadays. He was a really good guy. Anyway, I was in the hospital there for a week. Every day they would bleed the wound. Means they would cut the dead flesh out of it you know, and put a bandage back on. Then I got flown out to Guam. Iwo has no water supply— there was no water, no shower, on Iwo— we had just… stuff that’s necessary had to be trucked in. When I got to Guam I remember I went to a… in the hospital I went to an aid station where they had a shower. I looked in the mirror for the first time and I saw I had a black beard, and I thought geez, a black beard. And I ran my fingernails through it and all this black stuff came out and the beard was red underneath. But I was pretty filthy. But that was my first shower, and boy I really enjoyed it. I had to stand with my head sticking out so the bandage wouldn’t get wet. I couldn’t wash my hair.

Pylinski: Mr. Greene, your first shower was an awesome experience as well, right?

Greene: That was on that ship… when I got on the ship and they cleaned me up.

Leman: Wasn’t it the nicest shower you ever had?

Greene: Oh god, that was… and they actually had… you were allowed to have a helmet. Your helmet is used for everything. Take the liner out… you can have a helmet full of water, and take your shower. So you just sort of are getting wet… go ahead get yourself wet, scrub yourself with soap, which you know… and taking a salt water shower on a ship is …you could do it if you wanted to but that’s that sort of terrible thing-- soap that works with salt water isn’t the best. But anyway, here you are. You finally get a shower; you get that dirt off. It was just it was unbelievable after all that. And then I’m sitting down on the ship because I’m there a day ahead of everyone else and I get to sit down with the sailors and eat the meal and exchange conversation and have ice-cream and whatever for desert and have a coke and all that kind of stuff. And then the minute the troops come aboard the tables go up and you always eat standing up because there isn’t room for people to sit down and the ice cream is only once a week and the coke is probably for never. The only real difference is they were showing movies outside on the deck at night and… which was never happening on the way into battle, but leaving the battle they I guess decided there were no Jap submarines around or whatever. But we went from there

back to… I believe Eniwetok, then back to Hawaii to retrain for the occupation of Japan, or the battle of Japan.

Pylinski: Right, before we speak about Japan both you gentlemen mentioned high casualties on the island during the battle of Iwo Jima. Specifically, 176 navy corpsmen were killed in action, and 19 died of their wounds. What were you gentlemen's opinions and experiences with these navy corpsmen?

Leman: We had navy corpsmen with us. They did a wonderful job, I can't say enough.

Greene: Our corpsmen was killed on the island and I happened to know two other men who were— we'll call them pharmacist mates because they were off of the ships— one of the… one the Doc. is talking about is shore duty… a good a man that I met several years ago who's a navy man came ashore and was doing radio communications with… well, he wasn't doing them, but he was working with these people. But he was actually a pharmacist's mate and was wounded but stayed on the beach for 4 or 5 days.
Another friend of mine who was a pharmacist's mate on the ship, taking care of… all of the ships were taking wounded off. The ship would bring in 12-1300 men as far as… but the bunks are 6- 8 high so if you're going to take wounded off you're only going to fill the bottom 1,2 maybe third maximum. So you're only taking away 200 240 inured people. But he was taking care of those particular people. I happen to know him, he lives in the same retirement center as we do. Older guy, just fantastic people. But those people were volunteering from the ships to come ashore. He would come ashore with an LCVP to help get the people on there and help take care of them from there to the ship.
I said, "How many times… how many trips did you make?"
"Oh," he said, "I don't know. Maybe 8 or 10 trips, you know, 'cause you're only going to take a few guys— they're all on stretchers."
I said, "God all Friday. You're just heading in the battle and getting out."

Pylinski: Dr. Leman?

Leman: All of our company corpsmen were killed or wounded. They trained with us, they carried the same kind of gear that we did. Every way… their duty was anytime someone was hit they were supposed to go to that guy and dress his wound, give him a shot for pain-- whatever he needed-- and they were supposed to –if they could— drag him out. And they would do this right in the middle of a firefight. They'd get hit doing it. The corpsmen… the first time… the first night I was there… we came under heavy fire and a bunch of guys were hit. And in every case a corpsman came out… another corpsman came up from the rear to tend to one of them. He himself was shot through the elbow right by my foxhole. He came tumbling, his arm all flopping. We pulled him into the foxhole… he asked us to open his pack and give him a shot of morphine and he had to go out on a stretcher. I never saw him again. But that's just the way they were. They were just right there and they were intrepid.

Pylinski: What about chaplains? I don't see a whole lot of reporting of chaplains on the battlefield during Iwo Jima, but did you gentlemen have any experiences with military chaplains on in the battle?

Greene: You know, it's strange what you remember and what you don't remember, but I've got a letter that's one of the few that my mother did save… it isn't the letter itself but she's relating what her son had told her in this letter. And it was talking about how I had gone back in while we were in reserve off the line, and helped a chaplain set up his little altar and set a place here for guys to come and do a service and how it related to how ugly the island was but how beautiful that morning was with the sun coming up and the crowds and the sky. And I don't remember writing that to her, but I wrote… I did write that to her. And she was writing a letter which I have a copy of that she had written to other people… because there is a drastic contrast of course in… down under Suribachi we had all of these people that were buried temporarily for a few years. And so here's these fields of crosses and the gateway leading into the grave yard and so forth. We have… we had people in our battalion headquarters whose job was grave registration, I mean those people were registering every person out and every person in, and so forth and of course a dog tag went with them so that eventually when they were exhumed they would be sent where ever they wanted the body to go to and things like that and it was quite an awesome thing. And then the army was taking over. There was a man— a p-51 pilot by the name of Yellin— Y-E-L-L-I-N-- he's got a book that you've got to have in your library… and he talks about his squadron. It's 35 planes which is really ends up being 400 people and there's six squadrons of P-51's on the Island by –we keep talking about March 6th 7th and 8th— that seemed to be a breaking point. Those guys were flying in and landing their planes there to be going along with B-29's because the P-51 can't fly from Saipan— it didn't have enough gas. So those guys were going to go along with the B-29's to bomb Japan. But here they are. There's six by the time we're through fighting. There were six squadrons of planes, that's 200 and some P-51's lined up. So you can imagine how big the air field became and all these planes are all parked outside on tarmac and bombers are coming in and there's all kinds of pictures you can get off the internet… a bomber that would come in and lose control and plow through a bunch of P-51's because his brakes didn't work or the reverse engine on the plane didn't work… stuff like that. There was mayhem constantly.

Pylinski: What was your—

Leman: There were two chaplains that I remember on our ship going to Iwo and I made friends with both of them because I was able to play the piano. They had a little portable organ that folded up and had pedals you pumped like this. It's an air organ, and I asked them if they wanted to have music for their services and they did, both of them. So I played for both of their services on the couple of Sundays on the way over; I knew them. But on Iwo I saw one chaplain and that was when I went through the battalion aid station after I had been shot I just talked to him for a few minutes, he was busy taking care of other people. I think the Catholic chaplains in particular were very useful to them, a very… a good resource for the men because some of the men I knew were very devout Catholics and

they would… they all… some of them asked for last rites at times, and they were very good for confession, that sort of thing. But I didn't see them on the island, I don't know what they did.

Pylinski: Now, after you were injured and healed up you were able to re-join your men in your unit and get ready for the invasion of Japan.

Leman: Yes, I went back and there were three –I say three guys came back— plus people from the other units. I knew some of the squad leaders, and then we got a bunch of replacements and eight more guys came back form the hospital including two of the corpsmen who had been hit. But all of the key people had been pretty… except for my platoon sergeant, he came back. I hadn't known him, but I knew him by reputation and I was sure glad to see him back.

Pylinski: I bet, and you men luckily given the circumstances towards the end of the war didn't have to invade Japan, but both of you were on occupation duty and I know both of you gentlemen were like were literally in the same area at the same exact time doing almost the same duties in some shape form or fashion, Dr. Leman do you want to talk about your occupation duties for a brief moment?

Leman: Yes. We were at a place called Sasebo, it's a city of 200,000 just a little bit north of Nagasaki, which is about the same size, on Kyushu, the southern island. This had been subjected to a single B-29 raid in April of 1945-- 100 B-29's-- the city was totally destroyed. Acres and acres of land that… had been burned out with just a few chimneys and stubs of telephone polls. But the major instillations –a big ship yard, a submarine, the ways for ships under construction and the big radio towers… all the military facilities were intact. Just the city had been destroyed. I was struck by the fact that almost all the high tech 20th century equipment was for the government, almost nothing for the civilians who were still living at least in the farms. Just every little bit of land was under cultivation. Even between the roads and the fields the ditches… under cultivation… everything was being cultivated. The mountains as high as you could go—terraced. I was struck by what a poor country it was except for the military. Everything had been starved except that. I had been conditioned to dislike the Japanese intensely, and I responded after Iwo seeing so many of my friends killed and all, but soon I saw a schoolyard full of little kids, barefoot, in the early snow and I… it kind of mellowed me. I said, "Your people are just like us… I've gotta to get over this someday." And later I did get over it pretty much. My daughter even worked in Kagoshima where I was supposed to land. I figured we would have been wiped out… I figured we used up all our good luck charms on Iwo to come out of it alive.

Pylinski: What were your occupation duties or experiences like, Mr. Greene?

Greene: Well, I began… I was doing the ship-to-shore kind of stuff and our ship actually went up and docked. A lot of other ships… these guys went over the side and went ashore with LCVP's and things like that, but we had the cargo to unload and all that. So again, "Dave, you stay here while we go through the unloading." So I was with the ship at the dock for

several days, and then finally caught up with our outfit which was in the adjacent little town of Heki-- Heki is like a suburb of-- and those buildings that we were staying in were machine shops of some sort. But because of the rationing and of course the Japanese don't build anything very heavy building anyway. It was like a tall building with siding cut so thin you could see the sunlight –the glow of the sun if you— if it was shining through that thing and we had a typhoon… we had a little typhoon come through.

Leman: Little?

Greene: And the adjacent building had already collapsed- several of them from typhoons-- and of course the heaviest part of a building are the clay tile that's on the roof and they're all put up there by mud and so forth. So this building is… as the typhoon is coming in and shaking things up… it had a lot of great big square tables I don't know what they were doing… the tables were about say 4 or 5 feet square, very heavy wood and the chandeliers coming down with lights in them… are swaying in the breeze with that building swaying back and forth… so when we're camping out at night we all had our heads under the table with our bodies sticking out in case that building collapsed like the next one. And fortunately that building never did blow down. But we had a shower of sorts-- alongside of us was sort of a hill, and as it rained quite a bit there was a lot of water coming over like a waterfall. And so we were over there showering in that thing and we thought that was the greatest thing ever, showering in that rain water. Then somebody came along and said, remember where that came from it? It came from the rice field where the honey bucket had been dumping all the human feces in those fields and you guys are showering in that thing! But it was too late.

[Audience laughs]

Pylinski: Now, just to wrap things up, I've got the both of you gentlemen here and we're recording this obviously, but we've got some marines in the crowd. What advice do you have for other marine veterans and also for marines that are serving today? What advice would you give to them?

Leman: I'd like to thank the ones that are serving today. I'll just say it's a great outfit, and I'm sure glad I was able to put onto it ... for a while.

Greene: Well, it's interesting. We had a battle, we had an enemy, and everything… everyone was the enemy so you didn't have to pick and choose. But today, even going back to some of the previous things, even Okinawa where you had civilians, you're… it's still World War II. You got civilians mixed in with… and then Guam and in Saipan… the people… I had the privilege of going back to Iwo Jima a year ago and there were guys there with our group… they were going back with 10 guys and 10 students… they were going back to make a documentary, and these guys had fought— some of them on Guam some of them on Saipan and Tinian— and they were telling stories about how you had to deal with Japanese civilians killing themselves… jumping off of cliffs and jumping into the ocean because the emperor said this is the thing to do. You can't do anything about it. You went fighting the enemy but the enemy was killing itself. And we were finally able to pen them

up and put them behind barbed wire to save them from killing themselves. I mean it's just one of those crazy things that happen, but in today's world I know a lot of young marines and they're as gung-ho as we were. I said I'm glad we fought the war we fought, and I sure wouldn't want to try and fight the war you guys are fighting where you are travelling down a road and someone buries a bomb and they're waiting for you to go over it with your vehicle and it's going to blow apart so then we build a bigger vehicle, a heavier vehicle, to guard against, but the bomb is still there, we still haven't stopped them from putting those bombs in the road. It's a very different kind of fighting.

Pylinski: Dr. Leman?

Leman: One of my best friends stayed in, and I followed his career for a long time, and I just… I thought about doing it myself for a while, but it took about a month of peace time before I knew I would not get along well in the Marine Corps in civilian times. I would get into trouble with my big mouth, so I was glad I got out.

[Audience laughs]

Greene: I know a lot of peace time marines that said, "You guys went through hell." Well, I said the only thing about the peace time thing was you were there in case there was a reason to do something. The marines are immediate; they're ready to go now. The Army is ready to go after we wait around three months and build things up. I mean when you talk about the first battle, we went into over there in 1990 or whenever it was… it would be frustrating… I mean it was to me… we're going to go to war with you guys, but you got to wait three or four months.

[Audience laughs]

We're going to build up our army, get set, and then we're going to go. Right now the marines are all set. That's the difference between the Marines and the Army in the first place. We got –I don't know how many divisions we got left, maybe there's only a couple. But they are ready to go now. Their training is training every day for what they're intended to do, and they're ready to go tomorrow.

Pylinski: Well, thank you gentlemen both for being here today.

[Audience applauds]

Leman: We have reason to think we're glad were here.

Greene: We're glad we're anywhere. Thank you.

Pylinski: Absolutely, thank you again.