

# National Park Service (NPS)

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Mariana Islands Wartime Experience through Oral Histories Fellowship  
(WAPA 4170)  
Mellon Humanities Postdoctoral Fellowship Program



Clifford Davenport  
June 14, 2004

Interview conducted by Rose Manibusan  
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508 compliant version by Michael Faist

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This digitization was made possible through the National Park Service by a grant from the National Park Foundation through generous support from the Mellon Foundation.

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Interviewee: Clifford Davenport

Military Rank: 2nd JASCO/8th/10th Marines - 2nd Marine Division

Interviewer: Rose Manibusan

Hyatt Regency Hotel, Saipan

Date: June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2004

**--00:00:00 AUDIO DESCRIPTION**

Narrator: The frame opens with a closeup on Davenport, he is white, wearing a black marines ball cap, and a plaid button-up shirt. Behind him are yellow curtains, with a white diamond pattern overlay.

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**-00:00:17**

Q: The following oral history was conducted by Rose Manibusan, Chief of Interpretation at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Saipan, on 6-14-04 at 4:05. To record an oral history interview with Mr. Clifford Davenport, who served in the United States Marine Corps during World War II. This interview is being made by the National Park Service American Memorial Park. For the record, could you please state and spell your full name?

Clifford Davenport: Clifford R. Davenport. C-L-I-F-F-O-R-D, initial R, D-A-V-E-N-P-O-R-T

Q: Mr. Davenport, I understand that the National Park Service has permission to make this recording -

Clifford Davenport: Yes.

Q: - and to retain all literary and property rights from it.

Clifford Davenport: Yes.

Q: Is that correct?

Clifford Davenport: [nods head]

**-00:01:07**

Q: Please tell us where you were born and the date of your birth.

Clifford Davenport: I was born at Oquawka, Illinois, October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1922.

Q: And did you grow up there?

Clifford Davenport: Yes.

Q: And go to school there?

Clifford Davenport: Grade school and high school.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your family.

Clifford Davenport: Which one? My immediate family now or my mother and father?

Q: Let's start out with your mother and father – the names of your mother and father.

Clifford Davenport: Well, my mother's name was Maude and her maiden name, Ives, I-V-E-S. And my father's name was Emmett.

Q: And your wife?

Clifford Davenport: Well, my first wife was Lavonne, my present wife is Sylvia.

Q: And do you have children?

Clifford Davenport: I have two, a boy and a girl.

**-00:01:58**

Q: I'd like to take you back now, um, and if you could tell us where you were and what you were doing when you heard Pearl Harbor had been attacked.

Clifford Davenport: Umm... when Pearl Harbor was attacked, I was at home for the weekend and listening to the radio in Henderson County Jail, in the parlor, because my father was Sheriff and we lived in the Sheriff's quarters and the jails and the cells were up above, upstairs. I had the radio on and heard it.

Q: And how did this make you feel?

Clifford Davenport: Well, at the time I really didn't know what Pearl Harbor was.  
[Laughing]

Q: And when did you join the military service?

Clifford Davenport: I joined the Marine Corps in – December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1942.

Q: And how old were you when you joined?

Clifford Davenport: 20.

Q: And what motivated you to join?

Clifford Davenport: Well, there was three others that were going to join the Marines and one... of the guys, he jumped the gun about three weeks ahead of the other guy and I and - we went in after that. We wanted to be together and so forth.

Q: Can you please describe your basic training as if you were telling it to a young man that is joining the military today?

Clifford Davenport: Tough. [Laughs]

Well, mine - it's different now - than it was then. Back then it was three months and there

was no liberty and you could get base liberty and stay on the base if somebody would come and sign that they are responsible for you. And I don't know, it's just a tough life.

Q: What do you remember most about basic training?

Clifford Davenport: My DI. I swore I would kill him if I ever saw him overseas. I didn't like him. The DI that you know from the first day, that he is God and he better believe he is, because he will make you believe it before you get out.

Q: And would that be your drill instructor.

Clifford Davenport: My drill instructor. And as an oddity, that was the way I felt about him, I ran into him on Saipan and we turned out to be the best of buddies. He was still a corporal and I was buck sergeant. [Laughs]

Q: After basic training, where were you first assigned?

Clifford Davenport: Camp Pendleton. Well – after basic training, I stayed at the Marine base at San Diego and went through what they called Field Telephone School. Then they held the two highest out of the class, until they had enough to send to another telephone school and I was one of the two and they sent us to an Army signal school in Los Angeles. In Boyle Heights, if you know anything about Los Angeles. And we stayed in a Japanese school building, because the Japanese people had been moved off the coast. And they used to march down in the streetcar tracks to the Southern California Telephone Company, where we had civilian instructors. It was an Army signal school.

Q: Can you tell us your rank and military branch you served with?

Clifford Davenport: My rank when?

Q: Your military branch. Um...

Clifford Davenport: The military.... [pauses to think for a moment] – what for Saipan?

Because I don't -

**-00:05:41**

Q: Yes, let's take it back a little bit. You just finished your basic training and then where did you go after basic training.

Clifford Davenport: Well, I went to that telephone school at the Marine base and then I went to Los Angeles to the Army school and then we come back to the Marine base and went to Camp Pendleton. And then I was, for a while I was in the Field Signal Battalion there. Then they transferred me down to the Telephone Exch... Communication Center at Camp Pendleton and since I had worked for the Illinois Bell before I went into the service, they put me in charge of a crew, a line crew and we set poles and strung wire and a little of everything. Provided communications to the movie company when they were filming "Guadalcanal Diary" and also when they filmed "Fighting Seabees", that had Susan Hayward, if you ever heard of her.

Q: Yes.

Clifford Davenport: Yeah, she bought me a drink in Carlsbad Hotel one night. [Grinning]

Q: And then where did you go next?

Clifford Davenport: Well, I stayed there for almost a year, then they were forming the 2<sup>nd</sup> Joint Assault Signal Company at the Boat Basin, which is across the highway from Camp Pendleton's entrance. And- I was transferred to that, then the 2<sup>nd</sup> Joint Assault Signal Company, and as soon as we were trained and they were readied, we come overseas to Hawaii to the Parker Ranch, was Camp... which the Marines called "Camp Tarawa" and we joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division there.

And then when we come to Saipan, we landed at Charan Konoa and after about eight or nine days, they broke up the 2<sup>nd</sup> Joint Assault Signal Company and I went with the 8<sup>th</sup> Marines regimental headquarters and communication. Stayed with them while we went

through the rest of Saipan and secured it. Then they transferred me to 10<sup>th</sup> Marines, which was artillery and I took – had a communication section and B Battery of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 10<sup>th</sup> Marines. I had 27 guys with radio men and telephone men. I stayed with that until after it left from Sasebo, Japan to go back home. Because we up in Nagasaki as soon as they dropped the A bomb, we had to go up there.

**-00:08:19**

Q: Can I take you back to what it was like when you...

Clifford Davenport: Yeah

Q: ...before you landed on the invasion of Saipan and you were out at sea – um, what were you on? What ship were you on? What transport...

Clifford Davenport: Well, I was on what they call APA, a personnel carrier of the ship. 57 days coming from Hawaii.

Q: And what was that like, being there for 57 days?

Clifford Davenport: I played pinochle about 20 hours a day. [Laughs] Double Deck if you ever played pinochle.

Q: Do you remember the last briefing that was given to you before the invasion of Saipan?

Clifford Davenport: It was the day before we board ship, yes.

Q: Do you recall any of the words?

Clifford Davenport: Not really. Well, they had a map and they showed where we were going in on the beach and so forth and -

Q: You- you were talking about the 10<sup>th</sup> Marines, umm... can you tell us a little bit more -

Clifford Davenport: I was in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Joint Assault Signal Company then, when we landed.

Q: And what were all your duties under the Signal Company?

Clifford Davenport: Well, I was Chief of Section -

Q: I guess I'm asking you to describe it as if I was not a military person.

Clifford Davenport: We would have to set up the switchboard, string wire, we had radio Jeeps, we had telephone communications and we had to string wire- to the different – for example, when we landed at Chalan Kanoa, we were the closest 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division people to the boat dock at the Sugar Mill and the 4<sup>th</sup> Division was just on the other side. For example, I had to run, the telephone service between our switchboard and the 4<sup>th</sup> Division and he was a buddy of mine, I had been best man for him in Hollywood before coming overseas and he had worked for Michigan Bell. And then we added, communication to the various companies and the regiments and so forth. Tie everything together, so that they could talk to each other.

Q: And how well did that work?

Clifford Davenport: Good. Good. [small cough]

Q: You talked about landing on the invasion on D-Day, on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1945.

Clifford Davenport: Yep, in the afternoon.

Q: Can you share your- what that felt like?

Clifford Davenport: I was scared. But we had work to do and you get busy and do your work and hope everything turned out all right.

**-00:10:58**

Q: What was your first impression of the island?

Clifford Davenport: [Sighs} Well, I really didn't know. I don't know how to describe it, really.

Q: Was Saipan the first campaign that you had fought in?

Clifford Davenport: Yes, yes.

Q: I understand that you were also involved in the seizure of Mount Tapochau?

Clifford Davenport: The seizure of what?

Q: Mount Tapochau – were you involved in - ?

Clifford Davenport: When I was with the 8<sup>th</sup> Marines, yes.

Q: Can you share some of your experiences?

Clifford Davenport: It's the same thing. String wire and get the radios going.

Q: And, And I understand it was difficult to get up.

Clifford Davenport: It was, it was. We had a forward observer that was right on the top of Mount Tapochau and we had to go up, his phone was out of order. The forward observer calls and [unintelligible] most of the time they would use the phone to stay off the radios. And his phone wasn't working, so, the situation we were in, in combat, and I was Chief of Section, I would go and take four other guys – four of us would be security and one man would do the work. So he didn't have to keep looking in the palm, coconut trees or whatever. The Japanese had a little trick that the field wire, when they would come to it, and if it was a place where they wanted to hide or anything, they would skim the wire for

an inch or so and twist two together, that shortened the line. And that then that necessitated the guy to come out to fix it, if it was cut in two, he could just bare both ends and bring it each way with what we called a double E-8 telephone and see who answered on each end and if one end answered and the other one didn't, they just figured that it had been – something had happened the opposite way. Where, when they twisted it together, that put a short on it, so then you had to cut it out to get the twist out of it, so you could test it.

And we kept going because we weren't having any luck and it was dark, we had to go up in front of the lines to get up on top of the hill and we passed the word that night, the password was "states" and we passed the word or asked to have the word passed up the hill where we were coming up in front, where it was the best walking for us. Because you couldn't use flashlights or anything. And we got about halfway up and some clown that didn't get the word that we were coming up, started shooting. And I heard all 48 states in about 30 seconds. [Laughing] Plus a few other choice words, names for it. We got up to the forward observer, it was a guy that I knew, Lieutenant Pierce, and on the double E-8 telephone, there was two posts with screw clamps, you would stick the wire in and screw it down on. One, somebody had pulled one wire out, so they didn't have a complete circuit. All we had to do was stick it back in. But we went through that and almost got killed by our own guys because somebody didn't pay attention to what they were doing.

Q: You strung the line, you did communications, uh- were involved with any of the Navajo code talkers?

Clifford Davenport: No. [Shaking his head] Only in Camp Pendleton before we come overseas, some of them were in the barracks when I was in the Field Signal Battalion. But they had their own area, because they didn't speak English and I didn't speak Navajo. Or any of the rest of us.

Q: I understand that you said that there were codes that you used to identify yourselves and I heard that sometimes they were months of the day or sometimes states – how often did -

Clifford Davenport: Oh, passwords? They changed it every week.

Q: Every week?

Clifford Davenport: Yes, and a lot of times they would use like Lollapalooza or Loo because Japanese couldn't pronounce L's. [Laughs]

**-00:15:23**

Q: Were you involved in any of the banzai attacks in Saipan?

Clifford Davenport: No, uh uh.

Q: Can you describe any interaction you may have encountered with the local population?

Clifford Davenport: I never had too much contact with them. I used a couple – I think on two or three occasions, I saw them when they were kind of herding the natives down to the beach to wash themselves and their kids and everything and stuff.

But I did my work, that was, enough.

Q: And um, what do you remember most about the battle of Saipan?

Clifford Davenport: Oh there's several things. One was how the snipers used to shoot from the old sugar mill, until they blew it down with naval gunfire so that the snipers couldn't hide up there. Because we were all around it and they would try to pick you off. And I remember we were close to the artillery and they got into what we referred to as counter battery where- the Japanese artillery was shooting at them and our artillery was shooting at them and that is when I started smoking cigarettes. But I wouldn't have given a nickel for my life that- couple of nights. The K-rations had Fleetwoods and I asked one of the guys, I said, give me some of them Fleetwoods so I can start smoking.

Q: And then, what were your...

Clifford Davenport: [Still answering previous question] And then about the fourth or fifth night, we had a big ammo dump blow up that we were in foxholes and it [unclear] I swear, six inches off the ground and they blew up all night in different shells and every direction and everything else.

[Brief Pause]

It was fun. [Interrupting the interviewing]...And then like, going 30 days or so without a shower or a bath or anything else.

Q: And how was food and supplies?

Clifford Davenport: C-rations, K-rations. No, uh, prepared meals like they have in Iraq now or anything like that. The C-rations with the hash and stuff, if we could have any kind of a fire or anything, you would poke holes in the can and try to boil some of the grease out because it was so greasy that... [Laughs as he doesn't finish his sentence]

Q: After the Saipan battle, what-what was the next campaign that fought in?

Clifford Davenport: Well, Okinawa. And then come back from there and well – we went to Okinawa, you know and landed there the first day of April, which was April fools day, it was also Easter Sunday and they figured that the Japanese would figure that we wouldn't do anything on the religious holiday. On Easter. They got fooled.

**-00:18:34**

Q: And how was the Battle of Okinawa different than - ?

Clifford Davenport: [Interrupting] Oh I think about the same. The work...it was the same either place.

Q: I understand, well, some people I talked to, the Japanese tended to change their military tactics after the heavy loss and the fall of Saipan. Did you - ?

Clifford Davenport: Oh, I – I'm not a war expert and I know there are a lot of them around, but I had enough to do. I had my own stuff – I figured, do my own job.

[Brief Pause in Interview]

I can tell you the first USO show we had that I know of in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division, was a banjo player by the name of Eddie Peabody and our theater in the 10<sup>th</sup> Marine consisted of about ten fifty gallon barrels upside down with some planks on it, and he sat there and played the banj, and laid the junk]. Everybody appreciated it. Then a little later we had Betty Hutton, you are too young to remember her. She come to the first Battalion 10<sup>th</sup> Marine mess hall to have chow.

Q: And then after you experienced Okinawa, you mentioned earlier that –

Clifford Davenport: We come back here then to Saipan and stayed until they dropped the A bomb on Nagasaki.

Q: And then where did you go from there? After you come back. After the bomb had been dropped...

Clifford Davenport: After it came back?

Q: After the bomb had been dropped.

Clifford Davenport: Well, we went to Nagasaki. On the way up, we had what they called “darkened ship” and it was still on a zig zag course because you couldn't smoke topside with darkened ship and you had to keep the curtains drawn on all the – everything. And as soon as we got to Nagasaki, we pulled right into the harbor and we could see all of the big guns with white flags flying them and everything. We had a movie topside that night, after we had gone darkened ship all the way to Nagasaki.

[Unintelligible comment from Interviewer]

Then they took us out to Ashiya Japan, to an airfield the next day and we stayed there then. And then after we had been there I guess a week and a half, two weeks, they made the B Battery that I was in, an MP outfit and we moved back down to some Japanese barracks in Nagasaki and we cleaned up a building in downtown Nagasaki for the MP headquarters and I had sergeant of the guard every other 24 hours. We had all the geisha districts and theaters, railroad stations, restaurants -

**-00:21:38**

Q: What was the atmosphere like at that time?

Clifford Davenport: We got along good with the Japanese. We never had a bit of problems with anybody. In fact, we had sailors coming to shore, soldiers, Marines and they would get into some of the restaurants and stuff and drink too much sake and they would pass out. We actually had Japanese guys that would come to the MP headquarters and tell us and give us the location where somebody was passed out. We would go pick them up, and bring them up and tie 'em on a bunk and when they sobered up, we would call their outfit and we always asked them one question – we ask them about their personal property and if they had rings or watches or – if they had all of this stuff, like that. We couldn't ask them about money, because some drunk doesn't know how much money he spent in the first place, so you couldn't – there was never a case of anybody missing any watches or rings or anything like that So.

Q: And how long did you stay there?

Clifford Davenport: Till the 16<sup>th</sup> of December of '45. Then we went by train to – they had a deal with a point system, anybody in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had the points, could go home. The 5<sup>th</sup> Division, Marine Division, was at Sasebo, Japan and they had a bunch of – it was just a newly formed division, so they had a bunch of guys that didn't have the points, so they brought them to Nagasaki to take the – our places and we went by train to Sasebo and left from there to go back to the United States. And we got there December 24<sup>th</sup>, on Christmas Eve, we got to San Diego and they stopped the ship, just out far enough so we could see the

lights of San Diego, but we didn't think we could swim far enough [Laughing] to jump over to go to San Diego.

Q: How did that feel to be back in - ?

Clifford Davenport: Good. And next morning they pulled the ship in there and unloaded and they took us to Camp Pendleton and we had a Christmas dinner and stayed in barracks there then, until we got out.

Q: Until you got out of the service or - ?

Clifford Davenport: Yes, I got discharged at Camp Pendleton, 4<sup>th</sup> of January, '46. The guys that I had been with, wanted me to go back to Great Lakes and get discharged there, they said, you will never get a train or anything. I was discharged and I went up past the barracks where the guys were and they were still there waiting on the train. So I was gone. [Smiling]

**-00:24:26**

Q: How did you feel about the dropping of the atomic bomb?

Clifford Davenport: I was glad they did it. You didn't go to that seminar today, did you? Where they figured it would have been a million Americans killed?

Q: No, been running in and out of there.

Clifford Davenport: I know I saw a thing that – my girlfriend, which was my first wife when I got out, had cut out of the paper about a possible invasion of Kyushu under 14 Japanese divisions, waiting on three of our divisions, so – with coastal guns and everything else. We wouldn't have stood a chance.

Q: Well, it's now 60 years later since the battle for Saipan. Can you share with us why you felt it was important to return to the island?

Clifford Davenport: I wanted to see it again. See what had happened to it and so forth. I had heard it had been developed and so forth. And it's nothing like it was when I was here 60 years ago. But I found where I come ashore – it was two continental pilots were in the tour group that we have and they – I don't know what their function is, but when we went to the boat dock at the Chalan Kanoa, it was supposed to be to look at the left side where the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division had come in, but I went to the right and down a little ways just on the sand, I can't walk very far – and a couple of the guys come down there and asked me if I recognized anything. And I said yes, I said, this is where I come in. I said, there is the boat dock right there. I said, we were right here. And I said, some place around here there is a – was a bomb shelter that I took over that I was going to put a switchboard in and it hadn't even been completed. The concrete was all up on the walls and everything, but they had trees – limbs, long stuff laying across it. They hadn't got the concrete on it yet.

And one of the guys said, I think I saw that. So we walked down about 50 yards and there she was, the remains of the – and that is what they brought out. The Japanese figured it would be – near the end of '44 or before, there would be an invasion, they were still making all kinds of defenses.

**-00:27:20**

Q: If you could talk to the young people today about World War II, what would you say?

Clifford Davenport: [Shakes Head] Oh, I don't know. I really couldn't. I don't know what I would tell them.

Q: Is there anything else that you would like to add? Or share with us that I haven't asked or we haven't discussed?

Clifford Davenport: No. I really enjoyed the visit.

Q: Well, we are honored to have you back. It's been a pleasure meeting all of you. Well, we thank you for sharing your experiences with us and for helping us to preserve the history of World War II. Thank you, Mr. Davenport.

Clifford Davenport: All right. [smiling]

[END OF SESSION]

**-00:28:19**