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Samuel Etheridge
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Interviewee: Samuel Etheridge
Military Rank: Navy 3rd Medical Battalion
Interviewer: Stephen Haller Hilton Hotel - Guam
Date: July 18, 1994

--- 00:00:00 to 00:00:12- Audio Description
Samuel Etheridge is a Caucasian American man, with glasses wearing a white button-up shirt. Behind him is a floral patterned wall.

Q: My name is Stephen Haller and I'm here at the Hilton Hotel in Guam on July 18th at 9:30 am to record an oral history interview with Dr. Samuel N. Etheridge, who served in the US Navy's third medical battalion during World War II. This is interview is being made by the National Park Service, War in the Pacific National Historical Park in conjunction with Guam Cable TV have your permission to make this recording and to retain all literary and property rights deriving from it. Is that correct?

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Samuel Etheredge: That's correct.

Q: Thanks for being here today, we appreciate you taking the time to talk with us.

Samuel Etheredge: It's a pleasure and I want to think all the Guamanians for a wonderful reception. It's been terrific.

Q: For the record, could you please tell us your full name?

Samuel Etheredge: Samuel Norfleet Etheredge.

Q: And how do you spell that?

Samuel Etheredge: ETHEREDGE.

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Q: You said your unit was a Company A, 3rd Medical Battalion of the US Navy's Medical Corps, is that correct?

Samuel Etheredge: At that time of the invasion, that's correct.

Q: Now what is your data of birth and where were you born?

Samuel Etheredge: I was born in Norfolk, Virginia way back in 1914, January the 31st.

Q: So that is where you get your courtly southern accent?

Samuel Etheredge: Well, I hope so.

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Q: Did you grow up in Norfolk?

Samuel Etheredge: I grew up in Norfolk, went to school there and then to William and Mary in Norfolk and then my medical degree at the University of Virginia in 1937.

Q: When did you join the service?

Samuel Etheredge: I joined – I knew the war was coming, a lot of people didn't think so, I was positive it was. I had pretty bad allergies and didn't want to get in the Army, so I joined the Naval Reserve in the late '30s, I don't remember the exact date, I think about '38 or '39.

Q: Did you have any experiences of interest during your reserve or your initial training?

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Samuel Etheredge: Nothing in particular. I went expecting to end up on a ship, I reported for duty at the Navel Hospital, told them I was a surgeon, so they promptly put me on the orthopedic service, but that was pretty smart because I had not had that much orthopedic training. Within three months, I believe it was, I was assigned to the FMF, down in North Carolina, the Fleet Marine Force and I was in training there for just a short time in the dead of winter.

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One the coldest winters we ever had there. It got down to 6 degrees in North Carolina.

Q: What year again was that?

Samuel Etheredge: That was '42.

Q: What kind of indoctrination or service-oriented training would an in-coming medical officer get? I assume you don't go through basic training.

Samuel Etheredge: Yeah, really very little on the medical side, they assume that we were already there. We went, once we got in the Marines, we went through the – just about the same as a boot camp, almost. Not quite as rigid, but we had to crawl under barbed wire with live stuff over us and go through jungle training armed and shoot at moving targets, under supervision and so forth. Then we had training in Samoa in night combat going up over the mountain in the rain and sliding down the hill in the mud and things that we had to go through subsequently.

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Q: Was that training then at – in North Carolina?

Samuel Etheredge: Uh, very little in North Carolina. The boots were trained there, the

Marines, but we got most of ours overseas, particularly on Samoa. I was in a replacement battalion, we came across the country by train and shipped out of San Diego to Samoa and then to New Caledonia and to Guadalcanal.

Q: So was that your first assignment then overseas, was as a member of a replacement battalion and then you joined the permanent unit?

Samuel Etheredge: That's right, we made up the third Marine Division on Guadalcanal after I arrived there.

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Q: You were assigned then, attached to the 3rd Marine Division on Guadalcanal. And did you participate in any other campaigns prior to the landing on Guam?

Samuel Etheredge: Yes, I was in the Bougainville campaign, I was a battalion sergeant at that time and went in on the second wave, about five minutes after the first wave landed. And was there two months, came out on Christmas Day 1943, I guess it was. I may miss my dates a little here, but I think that – yes, I know it's correct.

Q: After Bougainville you went back to Guadalcanal? Is that correct?

Samuel Etheredge: Went back to Guadalcanal.

Q: So your battalion stayed pretty much permanently attached to the 3rd Marine Division, is that correct?

Samuel Etheredge: I stayed in the 3rd Marine Division, I changed from the 2nd Battalion as a battalion sergeant, to the A Medical Company, which is part of the 3rd Marine Medical Battalion and we were attached to the 9th Marine Regiment for Guam.

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Q: Did your unit – did you feel that your unit had a particular kind of personality or identity or how did it relate to the other units in the division?

Samuel Etheredge: Yeah, well I was much closer to the 2nd Battalion because we were right out with the men. I got to know them. We – as all doctors in our group except for what corpsman we had in the group, while I was close to the doctors, I didn't get to know the military as well, being in the hospital unit. We were really – I was right in the foxhole with the men on Bougainville. But you were a little separate when you were in the medical company.

Q: What kinds of preparations were made for the Guam campaign, can you recall? Or was there anything out of the ordinary?

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Samuel Etheredge: Yes, it was very interesting. We were trained and scheduled and had all the plans shown for the attack on Kavieng and it's been very little ever in the literature about this. Kavieng was a capital of New Ireland and it was the Western tip of New Ireland, the harbor formed by a reef that sometimes was underwater and sometimes was a little above water. We were to land on that reef on D-day and organize and go across in landing craft the second day, I think it really would have been murder. We were on the beach of Guadalcanal, the entire division had broken camp, kitchens, tents, everything on the beach. These three ships or four that we were going to take the troops aboard, were sitting right there off the beach. All of a sudden they got up, smoked, took off. We thought the whole Jap fleet was coming after it. But we found out that Nimitz and Macarthur had had a big conference that day, I think in Honolulu. Had decided to bypass Kavieng, and that was the final plan. And to go directly to the Marianas.

Q: A man named Jack Kerens wrote a book called *The Last Bonzai*, you might be interested in that, because he also talks about being prepared for an assault at Kavieng and the feeling of letdown from sort of a battle fever pitch.

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Samuel Etheredge: It was quite a change. We had to go back and completely re-set up camp, re-indoctrinate of what we were going to do and where we were going. The type of terrain we would be going on and so forth.

Q: To get ready for Guam.

Samuel Etheredge: To get ready for Guam.

Q: Now, I understand the 3rd Division spent an awful lot of time aboard ship prior to landing at Guam, did you have to stay aboard ship that whole time?

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Samuel Etheredge: I think we had the longest combat loaded thing of the war. I think it was longer than North Africa or any others. We had 55 days, as I recall, aboard ship. Now they did – we went 11 days and 11 nights going toward Saipan during the day, away from it at night. We would get to where we could see it – see the flares and so forth and then back away, back away, back away. It was towards it all night and away all day. Because we could see the flares at night. We thought we knew every wave in the Pacific. And then they took us back to Enewetak and let us go ashore and swim and get some exercise. And so we had a number of day s that we got to ashore there, which helped a great deal, because we were combat loaded, which meant we didn't have much deck space or what have you. It's a big difference.

Q: Yeah, that must have been quite a strain.

Samuel Etheredge: But it was not as bad – there were quite a few in LSTs and we really felt sorry for them. Because the LSTs were also combat loaded that long and they were I'm sure much more miserable than we were. We had it gravy compared to them.

Q: Why don't you take us back to revelry on the morning of the landing at Guam and tell us what happened to you and where you landed?

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Samuel Etheredge: It was quite an unforgettable sight. We woke up and all you could see was ships everywhere. They had been bombarding for quite a while, we heard that early, woke us up. I think the captain of our ship wanted to get out of there and get unloaded, worrying about submarines, which I don't think is any great worry, where we were. But anyhow he wanted us off that ship, there was no need of getting the hospital off of there, but anyhow he got us off early and we had to bounce around out there. The surf wasn't running high, but the chop was terrific because the destroyers and other smaller craft and even the cruisers I think, I know the destroyers were moving back and forth to put their gun power in the most advantageous places. And it just got a terrific chop. I think if we had to land in that first hour, every one of us would have crawled over that thing, because we were all so seasick. By the time the landing came around 1:00, we had pretty well thrown up all we could and were able to get off pretty easy. By the time the – the first waves went into the beach, because it was high tide.

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That is why we had to go back down to Enewetak to wait for the moon and the tides and everything to be right. They landed on the beach. By the time we came in, which was about five hours later, probably, we had to land on the reef and wade that last little bit.

Q: So you – when you refer to getting into a landing craft, this was an LCVP or a Higgins Boat?

Samuel Etheredge: Yes, LCVP.

Q: You must have had a fair amount of medical equipment, how did that get ashore?

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Samuel Etheredge: Well, quite a bit different from Bougainville, we had to carry what we

were using on Bougainville, because we were going right with the troops. On Guam we were landing as a hospital unit – my particular one was. And we had really practically nothing. I have forgotten whether I had any medical equipment on me, landing on Guam. Maybe a few syringes for pain or something. But all of our equipment was made up for surgery, for taking care of people and for other medical care, as a hospital unit. So that what equipment we had on Guam, was very minimal on our person.

Q: So how did the equipment come ashore?

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Samuel Etheredge: It came ashore, but it was removed by a Jeep and ambulance and field ambulance and so forth in bulk rather than individual, just like a hospital would. Not as a corpsman would or as a battalion surgeon would.

Q: I imagine they had better things for a doctor to be doing then carrying equipment.

Samuel Etheredge: Look out for your own neck maybe, at first.

Q: How did you manage, looking out for your own neck that day?

Samuel Etheredge: That tragedy of it was, our unit came ashore in two boats, my best friend and commanding medical officer George Butler from Bow Mont, Texas, one of the nicest guys you would ever meet, was hit as we hit the beach. He got a machine gun. I didn't see him, he was in the adjacent boat that was a few feet away, probably 50 feet away. The corpsman very properly put him right back on the LCVP to go out to the ship, because there was nothing you could do out there on the reef.

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They brought me, later on shore, his pack and the pack had a bullet hole in the back where it had gone through him and through the front of his pack, but no exit mark. I knew it had to be in there so we entered his pack and still no bullet. Then we remembered there was a

sack to put your poncho in that fitted against your back and that is where it's got to be. We reached in and there it was. In other words, it had gone through him and through three thicknesses of canvas, but didn't have enough left to go out the last. Had it hit his sternum or maybe even a rib, it might not have gone through him. 'Cause it was at a distance. We were in late and the machine guns were quite a ways away.

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But this was a terrific loss, upset the crew quite a bit because everybody loved George. They put us ashore and so go over against this little cliff, which there is a little ridge that runs down at Sand Point, you can still see it very readily. They said, there are a lot of caves there, but the Marines have been in there and cleaned every one of them out, it's perfectly safe place, a good place for your hospital company. We know you are upset about losing your commanding officer, this is a great place. Well, that was about as true as some of the other fairy tales you hear. As dusk fell, everybody has to get in. We had dug a fox hole, I would say five inches and we just had to quit, the corral and stuff, there was no way going in further, we were pooped out. We said, if they get us, they get us. So we were lying in about a five inch foxhole and all of a sudden on this cliff above us, somebody ran, jiggling, oh about five or six canteens, which were obviously empty, going to get water.

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The corpsman in a foxhole about six – eight feet just around the corner from me, challenged him, he couldn't see him and unfortunately shouldn't have tried. But he put his rifle on automatic and let go and as soon as his last shot rang out, boom! They dropped a grenade in his foxhole, which unfortunately killed him and injured one other. We lay there in this little foxhole, we could hear every once in while the rocks trickling up there, we knew they were wandering around, but you couldn't see them, it was pitch dark. Even with all the illumination they gave us. About two hours later, three Japanese came walking in, stood there, looked at us, went over and looked at some of the others, went to a big bomb crater that was ten or fifteen feet away and urinated in the bomb crater and then walked off. And to this day, we don't know what – Were they sacking off? Did they think we were dead? Were we 100% sure they were Japanese, we couldn't be, it could have been some crazy

Marines up above. You were told if you got above the line, you got shot and no one moved. But this was the weirdest night, we had to lie there the rest of the night knowing that if we did anything we would get a grenade and so in the morning, our big decision was what to do. We decided to get up, not look back and let them know we were suspicious and just walk towards the rest of the company. Which is what we did and nothing happened. Fortunately.

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Q: Well, it sounds like, under those conditions, there were no operations going on that night?

Samuel Etheredge: Well, the Marines, they had put us way back, because that was the shore. We were really right practically on the shore. And we were a hospital company, we were supposed to be in the rear. The guys were still having trouble, all up front, up against Chonito Cliff and all this. I felt so sorry about those guys going at Chanito.

Q: Well, why don't you clarify for me then, the duties of the hospital company, were you going to perform in the operations or are you sort of a way station to stabilize people and get them on board ship? How did that work?

Samuel Etheredge: There were five ABCDE Companies in the medical battalion that were to set up as individual hospitals, to take care of everything that might occur, illness or injury. They combined a B and C just inside of sand, as you go on that road toward Piti was a big field up off the left and they put those two in there and the next day, they moved us down that road towards Piti and we had our camp – they did not let us break out our gear. They forbid us to break out our gear, we didn't know what was going on. But B and C companies combined to form a hospital in a good area.

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They immediately set up showers and all, which were the big cans filled with water. They invited us to come back up there and we went up that afternoon. That night we kept

hearing small arms fire closer than it should have been. We thought it should be, by that time, a thousand, 1500 yards off. It seemed to be awfully close and we thought, what the hell is going on? They seem to be right over our heads, just up over here. Well it just went on all the night and at time was quite fierce. Right at daybreak, when you could barely see, here comes, running down the road, I don't know if it was the two together or one and then the other, and he had two fellas, both stark naked except one of them was practically wrapped in bandages, he had some bad injuries. And I ran out to him, what is going on? They said, the Japs are in the field hospital.

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Which we knew right where it was because we had just been there that afternoon. Well the colonel who was in charge of defense of the headquarters was in what was left of a house right adjacent to us. I ran over, told the sergeant, where is the colonel, he said, the colonel is asleep, he's not to be awakened. Sergeant, get out of my way. I ran up and shook the colonel who I knew pretty well -

Q: Colonel of the 9th Marines?

Samuel Etheredge: Yes, of the Headquarters Company. I should remember his name. Big guy, nice fella. I shook him, I said, Colonel, the Japs are in the field hospital. He said, impossible! He jumped, grabbed his phone and I could hear the shouting and shooting even on the phone as he got it. He just slammed the phone down, jumped in his Jeep and was up there. He told me later, he just rounded up every Marine and sailor, anybody he could find that could take a rifle and go in there and help. Now, I understand as a reporter, in this book that you mentioned, *The Last Banzai*, maybe somebody else did the same thing I did somewhere else, because I'm sure it was reported – but I know this colonel was in charge and was very upset because this was kind of his responsibility.

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Nothing he could do about it, except try to do undo it after it happened. But they killed two or three people. I know they got one more doctor. We lost three doctors. George on the

landing, one on the beach and then one on that bonzai attack. It was quite a night.

Q: What was the difference in the kind of – was there any difference in the kind of work between that field hospital was doing and your hospital was doing at the time?

Samuel Etheredge: They were doing what we were set up to do. It wasn't till; I guess a week after we landed and we finally found out why we were being held back.

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The 9th Marines were going to be sent to take Rota and we were to go to Rota to take care of them. So they wanted all our gear to be intact and not all petered out and thrown away. We had lost some good corpsman, we had to replace corpsman. As the battalions lost their corpsman, they had to be replaced in the field. And since we were not operational, it was our corpsman they were taking and they were stripping us down in corpsman, but at least they were leaving our gear intact. And so we were really just bystanders for that first week.

Q: For the first week?

Samuel Etheredge: Because of being held in reserve – I would rather be held in reserve on the ship instead of the shore, but that is where we were.

Q: You mentioned a couple other interesting –

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Samuel Etheredge: Maybe tell just one more thing about – if I might. I read about Rota later and I understood from some very good articles I read, it was possibly the most heavily defended, for its size, of anything out here, it had been imperial headquarters for a while and they had all these disappearing guns, it was only one really accessible beach and in 1500 feet, we were going to have to go up 1500 feet and to me, I didn't see any hope. So having missed Cavieng, which I didn't think was very good. And Rota I felt triply fortunate.

Those were two that I missed just by a whisper.

Q: One thing we were chatting about was interesting operation on a species different from homo sapiens?

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Samuel Etheredge: After we finally get set up, my first actual surgical patient was a war dog. Beautiful animal. His trainer brought him in, he couldn't have been any more upset that this dog being hit than if it had been his absolutely closest buddy. The dog was severely hit, but he had saved the patrol, which they did so often. The dogs would go out ahead and uncover the guy in concealment and of course the Japs shot the dog, but they shot the Jap. So they saved the boys' lives. We didn't save the dog. I gave him I think my first shot of penicillin ever. We finally got a little bit of penicillin, 10,000 units, which right now we wouldn't give to a canary, we give it in the millions of a dose units instead of 10,000 but that was all that was available at the time and I thought so much of this dog, that I did give it to him, but he didn't make it. I sent him out for an x-ray and when he came back, he was in bad shape and didn't survive. But I think he is probably one of the ones buried in the – I had two other great experiences with the war dogs, one of them at this camp where we were when the bonzai happened.

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It was a real hot day right in the middle of the day and I was taking a little shortcut to get from one place to another and I went by this bush and I didn't see the dog. His trainer had put him there because it was a little bit of shade. Fortunately he had tied him firmly, because as I walked by, the dog came at me and within less of a foot at my throat – he was right at me. They were training him to go after anybody, but the trainer wasn't there. And that same night we had on a bunch of Jap clothing, we were all soaked because of the heavy rain and there was a Jap warehouse at Piti that we had gotten a lot of Jap clothing out of, particularly the shirts, which were comfortable. I had one of those on and I was scared to death when the dogs came running around making the patrol at night, because they were trained to go after the smell of the Japanese, which is a distinct difference. But I really

admired the dogs, had a great feeling for them, they did a wonderful job and I hope to get to the cemetery.

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Q: You also mentioned two other memorable kind of injuries that you treated.

Samuel Etheredge: Yeah, the two possibly I remember the most were just real tragedies. I had seen the same damn thing happen in Samoa, where the doctors that we replaced there were just shook up because one of them had accidentally hit a Marine and paralyzed him. Got his spinal column. And we were sitting on day, it was either the day after the bonzai or the next day at that same spot and we heard that terrible thing that I would hear – WHAM! A gun going off right close by. And then a scream for corpsman and we knew what it was. One of the Marines cleaning his rifle, had gone off and it had – I don't know why they always hit the spinal column, but they did. They couldn't aim close enough and hit it, but whenever it was accidental, it always seemed to. The one on Samoa did and this one did. And this kid was badly hit, he couldn't breathe, what have you. I don't think he made it, is my recollection. I forget if we were able to get him out to that field hospital. And then the next day, they were kind of short of help and they asked some of us to come over and help and they called me and said, would you please look at this guy, he's been brought it here, he can't move anything, we can't find a darn thing wrong with him.

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And I questioned one of the fellas. They said he had been riding on the back of the Jeep ambulance and as they passed by, they thought they remembered hearing a shot and he fell off the Jeep. Well, this gave me a clue and I raised his arm up and here was this bullet wound of entry, just a tiny thing, like a .22 had gone in there. But got his spinal column. The poor kid was paralyzed. Why he couldn't talk, I really can't – I don't think he was in that degree of shock, but I never forgot the fact that here is this – unfortunately this was another Marine cleaning his rifle, as they passed by this place and it got this kid. And these were the two most significant cases that I had ever seen. I saw a lot of other different gunshot wounds, but these stood out so, because of the circumstances. Real tragedies. Bad

enough to get shot by the enemy, it's hell to get shot by your own.

Q: Did you see any activities that had to do with the liberation of native Chamorros on Guam?

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Samuel Etheredge: I was most fortunate, I don't know how I happened to be there, but I cornered a Jeep from one place to the other and I heard about this excitement up on the cliff up there and we drove up there, the driver took me up. And here was this parade. They had just been liberated. I think the 77th probably liberated them. But the Marines were there and it was a delightful school teacher there, wonderful gal, that could really tell me all the details of what had been going on and how they had been treated and all. And as we were talking, here comes an MP, Marine patrol, and they had this very lovely little girl, she was really one of the prettiest girls I saw in Guam, as a prisoner on this Jeep, bringing her out. And the Guamanians, as they brought her by were all hissing and booing and pointing at her and what have you, and the school teacher told me that she had ratted on them and they had been the reason of some of them either being shot or whipped or beaten or what have you. They had told on her, they were taking her out as a prisoner. It was quite a move. But to see them coming out of there and they were telling us how appreciative they were of being freed up, because they had been treated pretty miserably – a lot of them. A lot of them killed, I think. I can't give the details on that, but it was my understanding.

Q: Did you provide any medical treatment for any of the Chamorros?

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Samuel Etheredge: They received treatment. I think special deals had been set up for them. They didn't come in to our particular area. We were at that time up near Dededo, which was the furthest north that we could move with our hospital unit. Dededo, I think they pronounce it. But they set up and I recall seeing a big tent city near Hagatna, I think that is where they were all moved where they could be concentrated and get food and toilet facilities and all set up in one locale, to make it more feasible. I haven't seen any

subsequent pictures of that, but I'm sure that's what happened because I remember driving by and seeing just a huge tent city there, thousands of people.

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Q: So once your unit got into the act of business of treating casualties, what other experiences happened to you as the Guam campaign unfolded?

Samuel Etheredge: Of course the heavy fighting was over by the time we got set up. We didn't get a great deal of casualties. Mainly casual ones of some individual being picked off somewhere or injuries, which, always – on any landing there are going to be a number of injuries, just – I mean, physical. From missing the boat when it bobs up and down, and things like that. And trees falling that had been badly damaged from the artillery and collapsing at the wrong time. But there are always a fair number of – even on a practice landing, uh, so that we got just our share of that. I don't recall any spectacular cases of it. Because we didn't get any big volume. But now we began to get things like illnesses that pop up.

Q: If I recall correctly, the 3rd Division stayed for a while on Guam and patrolled the northern reaches of Guam for quite some time. Did you stay with the 3rd Division during that time?

Samuel Etheredge: No, the medical corps of the Navy had made it pretty much of a rule that after the doctors had been out here for two years, to send you back for further – catch up on what is going on in the medical field and so forth. So in October, we got the great news that we were going back. We didn't go as a unit. The ones of us that had been out here that long and had been in other campaigns were sent back. As I recall there were about six or eight of us out of the whole group that went and that includes some battalion surgeons as well as the hospital surgeons.

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Q: And that included you.

Samuel Etheredge: And that included me, fortunately. They flew us from here to Tinian and then across to Saipan and we had about two days there and then we flew home in a big cargo plane. We just sat on the metal benches that run along the side. But anything would have felt good then. We about froze, there didn't have proper air conditioning, but they threw us enough blankets and all and we kept – anything would have felt good then. We went to Kwajalein, either Kwajalein or Wetok and then to Johnson Island in Honolulu and then home. The Philippines was just getting underway, so they said, no flying from here to the mainland, you just wait and catch the next shift that was going, so we just had to wait. I got a ship after about four or five days into Seattle, which was fortunate for me, because that is where my wife and daughter were.

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Q: Was anything special about your last night in the combat zone or your last night on Guam?

Samuel Etheredge: Yeah, a group of us got together and said, gee, we are all going, the fellas in one of the other hospital units was not too far down the road, a mile or two, let's go over and tell him goodbye. So we got a Jeep ambulance and about five or six of us went over and said goodbye to him and on the way back, boom, right out in front of us, two Japs jump and ran right across. I was the only one on there that was still armed. But they ducked, they were more scared than we were, so they ran into the underbrush, but they – I'm sure were the couple of the ones that probably stayed here for months afterwards and even years after as one fella did.

Q: How about some of your friends? You obviously got close to some people under these kind of conditions.

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Samuel Etheredge: Yes. I already told you about George Butler who I still have just the greatest respect for and just hard to put in words because he was a one of a fella. I played

some kind of a game with him every day. We played acey-duecy or some form of cards to pass the time because there was a lot of time to pass and while you were waiting for combat, standing by to stand by, as we used to say in the Marine Corps. Then one of the most remarkable people I have ever met is Willie Hawkins who was an internist that was with us. And Willie I think must have weighed 140 pounds soaking wet. Incidentally, we all lost a lot out here, I went home weighing 129 pounds and yellow as a what have you, from all the Ativan I had taken. But Willie was something else. I first got to know about him, see him on Guadalcanal while we were still in training.

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He was indefatigable, he was always on the go and one day, he was in charge of mosquito control, which was a good job to give Willie because it is a miserable job and one with someone with his zip, was the only one who could handle it. And he took two or three of his strongest Marines he had with him and went out to an area that they were supposed to clear. Well, they came back in that night and I saw the three of them. The two Marines were all bushed and Willie was just as fresh as you would want to be. And I knew the Marines pretty well, I said, what were you all up to out there? He said, that man is crazy. He said, I was out there, it was hot as a mischief, I was hacking away at those darn weeds to get them out of the way and I heard something coming back, whoosh, whoosh, whoosh, it was Dr. Hawkins – here is this little 140 pound. And this was Willie. And here on the island, a couple of events, I mentioned before that we had gotten some Japanese clothing. We got most of it through Willie. Willie had plowed up, saw there was a warehouse up there, and went barging into the warehouse, grabbed up a bunch of Japanese clothes and came out.

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We said, gee Willie, had that place been cleared? Cleared? No, he had no thought of it. He had gone in, we had been told clearly to stay away from anything Japanese until it had been investigated because of booby-trapping. But Willie had barged right in, fearless. You couldn't call him brave, because he just didn't know what fear was. A couple days later, one of the ambulance drives came to me and said, gee Doc I hope you don't ever send me out

with him again. He said, I was supposed to go out to take him out to see a corpsman and we got out and he couldn't find the corpsman, and Dr. Hawkins just kept saying, keep going further, keep going further, keep going. He said, we finally went and I said to Dr. Hawkins, I just can't go any further, we are way out. So we turned around and came back about a half a mile and we finally spotted a Marine with a machine gun besides the road at a little cover up spot.

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We asked him where he was, he said, I'm the front lines. He said, in other words, Dr. Hawkins had taking me damn near a mile out beyond the front lines at that time. He says, I don't want to ever – this was Willie, he was just a marvelous person and as I say, he just didn't know fear. He didn't think of it, so I can't hardly call him brave. He was a marvelous person, a really unforgettable person.

Q: Did you keep up (cross conversation)

Another fella that I have written an article and fiddled with sending it in to Reader's Digest, it was my most unforgettable, it was a Navy Chief who first joined us on Noumea and then on Guadalcanal. And Paul Binder, he had been a – you never knew how much of Paul's stories to believe, because they were all so remarkable. But Paul was from a little town in Pennsylvania and he had been a golf pro. He told us he had even tried to tour once, but wasn't quite up to that, so he quit that. He had been in World War I and had been decorated by both the French and American government. Said he had quite the gear. We looked at each other, but the more he told and the more you saw him do, the more you wanted to believe him. When I first saw him, he was a little wizened. He would be a movie character, a little wizened face. Again, built about like Willie Hawkins. I don't think Paul could have possibly weighed 135-140. Skinny, bones was showing through and his face was all wrinkled. My first thought was, what in the hell is he doing out here in this combat zone? But you soon learned that boy, he was pure grit. He was the best procurer that the service ever had. If you needed anything, Paul could get it.

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I remember the Army came in with these great mosquito hammocks and mosquitoes were a hell of a problem on Guadalcanal. So the colonel tried to get him, no, he couldn't get 'em. The chief went down to the chief ambulance, came back with 40 of them, and this was just typical. He knew how to handle the supply officer and everything. When we got off the ship, we got off the beach at Bougainville to come back to Guadalcanal on Christmas night. They had told us ahead of time, that, boy, the climber and the other ships had just been down to New Zealand and Australia and were loaded with meat and we were are really gonna get a meal. I had had two prepared meals in over two months and all we could think about was a delicious meal. We got aboard and here comes one of the mess men with must have been a 15-18 pound turkey, heading for the Captain's Quarters. We said, oh boy!

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We went and sat down in the mess and Spam sandwiches. Christmas dinner. Well, we eat and back in our cabin, a rap on the door and here comes Chief Binder and he says, I got a proposition. He says, I've got a 15 pound turkey and a 10 pound canned ham, but I know they won't let me take it off the ship, but I bet you two could get it off. So we – Jim took the ham and I took the frozen turkey. And we got them ashore and we had a New Years celebration on Guadalcanal that was one to remember. But that was the Chief. There were many other things we wanted, and then one of the most unforgettable, when we were going up to Bougainville, we stopped at a couple of the little islands. We stopped at oh, the big base there – I forget the name of it now. But anyhow we stopped and the colonel went ashore there, he badly wanted a .45. We had one and they were so great for close up defense, the way that the fighting was going at that time. He was splitting to get a .45. So we stopped at this other island, the colonel told us he's going ashore, he came back just disgusted. He said, I have been to every unit on this island, there is not a .45 on the island.

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We were going to be there one more day, I said, colonel, would you give me permission to let the chief go and take just a little bit of alky? He said, sure. Chief went ashore and the next day he came back with seven, still in their oil, brand new. And this was the chief, he could

get anything. Bless his heart, he died in the front lines here, I think he got one right through the head. I think they had to send him out to the ship. I don't think he made it to the ship. He was not with me at the time, he had gone on with the battalion and I was – had been changed to the field hospital.

Q: That was on Guam?

Samuel Etheredge: That was on Guam. And my colonel that I thought so much of, was my battalion colonel on Bougainville and he's the one that had decorated me and had gotten to know very well and was very fond of and he was also hit here on Guam. Desias, Hector Desias, he was an Annapolis grad, but had chosen Marine Corps for service and was a crack attack line officer. He did a beautiful job. Very conscious of his men and all on the campaign and I think he was right up on the front when he was hit here. They had to send his aide back, his aide was so attached to him and he just cracked up after he was shot.

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I think they had to send him out. Great experience. You wouldn't do it again for a million, but you wouldn't take a million for it.

Q: Once you got stateside, did you stay in the – presumably you stayed in the service for the duration?

Samuel Etheredge: Ah, yes, they gave us a choice of where we were going. They always asked what Naval service we wanted next and I used to really drive the guy wild, I would always put in the Mississippi River when he asked me where I wanted to go. And he says, you can't do that. I said, you asked me and that is what I'm telling you. But they did give us pretty easy jobs to get back on our feet. I got the NRO and V-12 unit at the University of Washington. So I had to be there with my family and take it easy. And then I finished up at the Seattle Naval Hospital on the surgical service then.

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Q: Why don't you just tell us briefly about your subsequent career in the 50 years since the war?

Samuel Etheredge: Yes. After the war, I traveled the country, deciding by this time, I had the second one, my son Steve. And we packed everything in the car and traveled the country to decide where we wanted to stay. I almost went down to Phoenix, but I got a good offer at the VA Hospital, where they needed surgeons. The VA Hospital in Oakland, and decided to go there. I was just shy of finishing up from my surgical boards. I had been pulled into service at a bad time.

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So I needed a little more training time and that is why I finished up and I opened my office in Oakland in 1953 and did general and vascular. I was the first vascular surgeon in that area. Did general and vascular for about ten years and then went to just vascular surgery. Finished up the last time in my career, just vascular surgery.

Q: In the context of the other campaigns of World War II and your other war time experience, what did the Guam campaign mean to you in that, comparatively speaking?

Samuel Etheredge: Well, I think it was a well planned campaign. I thought there were lessons that should have been learned from Bougainville that could have helped out and made the island – what was the one that was so – right after Bougainville, it was such a heavy loss. Tarawa. I think Tarawa could have been a thousand times easier if they learned the lessons of Bougainville. We landed on Bougainville against just a reinforced company, which was probably, I don't know what the numbers were. 500? I think less than a thousand.

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They were well entranced; they had about four or five well prepared gun emplacements.

Q: Yeah, that was Cape Torokina, correct?

Samuel Etheredge: Cape Torokina. And we knew right were they were and right what should be hit and we fired the heaviest bombardment that had yet been fired and yet, out of that row of five or six gun emplacements, only one was – I'm not sure if that was completely knocked out, but only one of that bunch was knocked out and we came ashore, one just missed my boat by feet at the end of the – 75 Marine went in there and silenced that from the inside, went in the back door and probably saved my life and he got a medal of honor for that. It was well earned. But the cocksman speeded up, he waited for a wave, because he wanted to run it up on the beach and he paused and then gunned it when the wave hit and just as he did, I was face to the rear to help my corpsman get his pack on and this 75 millimeter hit right in the spot where we had been. No question it was our boat he was aiming.

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They had already gotten a couple of them. My point of what they should have done, is the bombardment should have been better. They should have not stopped until those damn things were knocked out. They could check that. The number didn't mean anything. It sounded great, but to me, ten well placements would be a lot better than several thousand all over the place. And I would think that at Tarawa, had they bombed it for six, seven days, day and night, not let them sleep, then when they went in there, it would have been entirely different. Because that was so much worse than ours. That was so much worse than here or Bougainville. Peleliu is something else, that should never have been. And strangely, the conservative is the one that wanted that, and the radical didn't want it. Halsey, I understand did not want us to go to Peleliu and Nimitz insisted that we did. And Nevitt was wonderful, I met him and there is no greater guy that ever lived than Joseph Nevitt.

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Q: How about the medical – the quality of the medical service? Did you have any critique about how that went on Guam or did you feel that that was best as could be done under the circumstances?

Samuel Etheredge: I think they did a pretty good job, we were paralyzed by this thing about Rota, so we didn't so we didn't our part, we were right in the middle of it and we were losing men, corpsman and all. We lost that doctor, really unnecessarily because we didn't contribute anything there at the first. We did later, but not at first. And we could just as well been brought in by a ship three or four days later and not risk losing the ones that we lost.

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But by and large, I think it was pretty well – I think the military was great to come in on each side of a road in and then hook up and then move across the island and then sweep. I have been a history buff and interested in it and I think that is very, very planned and very well executed. And we got a good army outfit with us. They had some troubles up in Saipan, but we had a good one with us and things went well and -

Q: Do you have any regrets or anything you might have done differently about your service career?

Samuel Etheredge: I don't think so. I'm glad I went in the Navy and I would never have selected to go into the Marines, but as I mentioned a minute ago, you wouldn't do it for a million, but you wouldn't take a million for the experience. I'm proud of having been a Marine and I don't have any regrets. I have a lot of memories, because they could pour out for hours more, but it's one of those things that – it's been 50 years and you still bring back the –

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I will tell you my little poem on Bougainville. Can I recite a poem? I wrote a poem, its now up for consideration by a poet's society.
We came from far, now here we are.
All set to start to kill
For the day is D, the hour is H

And the place is Bougainville.
Our cannon's roar and smash the shore,
And break the deathly still.
For the day is D, the hour is H
And the place is Bougainville.
Now some are young and came along
Just for this very thrill,
For the day is D, the hour is H
And the place is Bougainville.
But we are old and not so bold,
And we feel a bone deep chill.
For the day is D, the hour is H
And the place is Bougainville
Now when we come back,
There is many a Mac,
Who won't be with us still,
For the day is D, the hour is H
And the place is Bougainville
Now I will tell you matey,
If I live to be 80,
I will still remember the thrill,
When the day was D, the hour was H
And the place was Bougainville.

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Kind of gets away from Guam, but sort of -

Q: When did you write that?

Samuel Etheredge: I wrote that on – either on Bougainville or on Guadalcanal.

Q: As you were saying, it's now 50 years later and I know you – both your sons and your

grandson are here. I wonder if you have something to say to us or to them about what the legacy of World War II should be for us looking back as you can on the time.

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Samuel Etheredge: There is no question about that legacy. Stay strong. No bully ever picked on somebody he thinks can come close to handling him. And this is true, man to man and it's true nation to nation. If we stay strong, we will never be picked on. Let the peaceniks take over and say there shouldn't be war. Well, nobody wants war. Nobody wants war. But if we get weak, then that is what we can look forward to. They did it in World War I, that's why they moved. They did it in World War II, the peaceniks were marching. They knew that we wouldn't do anything. That's the only reason Hitler moved. He knew he had 'em buffaloed and people just won't believe its going to happen and they don't want it to happen, but stay strong. You don't have to bully 'em, but you just gotta stay strong enough to say, no, that they can't take you.

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And it's just like the bully on the street, he won't go after somebody that he thinks has got anywhere near a chance to handle 'em.

Q: Anything else you would like to talk about while we have a chance?

Samuel Etheredge: Could I have my family come here? I want to introduce my family that came with me. This is my son Dr. Stephen Etheredge, who is a lieutenant commander in the Navy, retired. My son, Bob Etheredge, who is a lieutenant in the Navy, retired and my grandson, Steve's son, Brian. Take your hat off Brian so they can see you. This is the Etheredge crew. There are more of 'em.

Q: Well, I see you have something to be proud of.

Samuel Etheredge: We left the girls at home.

Q: Dr. Etheredge, I really want to thank you very sincerely for the time you took to talk with us today, it was a real pleasure speaking with you.

Samuel Etheredge: It's been a pleasure being here.

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Q: Thank you sir.

Samuel Etheredge: Thank you.

[END OF SESSION]