National Park Service (NPS)

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

Wilcie A. O'Bannon
July 18, 1994

Interview conducted by Steven Hower
Transcribed by Plowshares Media
Coordinated by Dr Jennifer Craig
Reviewed by Guampedia Foundation, Inc
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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WAPA Collections
War in the Pacific NHP
135 Murray Boulevard, Suite 100
Hagåtña, GU 96910
wapa_interpretation@nps.gov

Interviewee: Wilcie A. O'Bannon
Military Rank: Marine Corps, Company Exec F Company
Interviewer: Steven Hower Hilton Hotel, Guam
Date: July 18th, 1994

---00:00:00 to 00:00:14- Audio Description
Wilcie O'Bannon is a Caucasian American man with glasses, wearing a beige and brown button-up shirt. Behind him is a beige wall and a white lamp.

Q: My name is Steven Hower and I'm here at the Hilton Hotel in Guam on July 18th at 2:45 pm to record an oral history interview with Mr. Wilcie A. O'Bannon, who served in Company F 9th Marines during World War II, particularly during Guam campaign. This interview is being made by the National Parks Service War in the Pacific National Historical Park in conjunction with KJFT television. Now, Mr. O'Bannon, I understand that the National Park Service and KJFT have your permission to make this recording and through obtaining all literary and property rights deriving from it. Is that correct?

O'Bannon: That is true, that is correct.

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Q: May I call you Obie?

O'Bannon: Please do.

Q: Thanks and I really appreciate you spending the time with us today, Obie.

O'Bannon: My pleasure.

Q: For the record, would you just spell out your full name for us?

O'Bannon: My first name is WILCIE. Middle initial is A. Last name is O'BANNON.

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Q: What is the date and place of your birth?

O'Bannon: I was born May 18th, 1920 in Red River County, Texas.

Q: Did you grow up in Texas?

O'Bannon: Uh, from early teens and we moved from the eastern part of the State of Texas, out in the panhandle of Texas, still in the State of Texas, but we did move. So I was raised in the panhandle of Texas, west of Lubbock.

Q: How did you join the service? Or when did you join the service?

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O'Bannon: I joined the service out of high school in July 1940.

Q: What made you join?

O'Bannon: The indecision, probably. I wanted to go to school and at that time, the Depression was getting over with. I went to work on a farm for a couple of months and then in July of that year, I decided I would go into the military. And went to Emerald, Texas to join the Navy. Most of the places where there is recruiting stations is always in the basement of a post office, especially in the Midwest. So we went downstairs and the first room we came to was the US Marine Corps and then Navy office was just beyond. So I turned into the Marine Corps recruiting sergeant and they got me.

Q: You were 18 at the time?

O'Bannon: No, I was 20.

Q: 20?

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O'Bannon: I got out of school rather late, I came from a family that had to do a lot of work and we missed a lot of school, so I got out of high school rather late.

Q: Did you have any experiences of interest in basic training?

O'Bannon: Oh, the usual experience that a recruit would have. You hear a different lingo, you meet people from other parts of the country that have various accents and they also have various ideas that may differ from yours. But usually the DI, the drill instructor, sergeant, organizes the whole unit and by the time you finish, after about nine weeks, you are a Marine and they are all the same.

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Q: What outfit did you get assigned to after boot camp?

O'Bannon: After boot camp, I was assigned to the 6th regiment and this was still in peace time and Pearl Harbor hadn't occurred. And the 6th regiment was dispatched to Iceland in I believe it was in July of '41.

Q: What was it like in Iceland?

O'Bannon: Well, one would think that you would have ice glaciers and so forth, but they have terrain that has trees, vegetation. The people were very cordial, friendly. There must have been eight or ten different military groups on Iceland at the time. The British Army was there, the British Air Force was there, the Canadians were there, the Dutch were there. The US Army was there, the US Marines were there, so you go on Liberty and the capitol of Reykjavik and you might see 10 or 12 different uniforms.

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Q: You were describing how you had to do your own stevedoring at that time, could you tell me that story again?

O'Bannon: When we pulled into the harbor of Reykjavik, the capital, there wasn't facilities for us to pull up to the dock and unload our vessel. Well, we had to unload our gear, the cargo nets and booms into Higgins boats. The Higgins boat was a landing craft that they used at that particular time. And our equipment was taken ashore an unloaded on the beach from the Higgins boats.

Q: These didn't have ramps at the time?

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O'Bannon: Oh no, you had to muscle everything by hand out of the floor of the boat.

Q: After Iceland, what happened to your outfit?

O'Bannon: Pearl Harbor occurred December 7th, 1941 and by February the 5th, our unit was back in the States and of course the government was trying to assemble and organize a fighting force. People were coming into the Army, the Marine Corps, the Navy, real fast and our 6th regiment was broken up and me along with numerous other members of the group, we were assigned to the 9th regiment, which was a new regiment being formed and officially became a part of the 3rd Marine division.

Q: So you traveled cross country and the 9th regiment was being formed where?

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O'Bannon: The 9th regiment was formed in San Diego area. I believe the 21st was one of the other regiments that made up the division along with the 3rd regiment. The division did not get together as a division until we all ended up in Guadalcanal.

Q: Before you went overseas, not only were some changes taking place in your unit, but

there was some changes in your personal life too. Is that right?

O'Bannon: Yeah, I got married. I got married in June 19th, 1942. My wife and I had a small apartment in San Diego and I had advanced in rank to sergeant at that time and of course, sergeant wasn't allowed any kind of housing or anything like that at that time. We lived in an apartment in San Diego and this was about five and a half months before I went overseas to the Pacific.

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Q: As I understand it, you were a mustang officer who rose through the ranks. When and how did you earned…were you commissioned?

O'Bannon: The unit that I was assigned to, coming out of the 6th, I went into the 9th regiment, first battalion, B Company and I had a company commander by the name of Captain Bone. Captain Bone recommended that I got to OCS school out there on the West Coast. A place called Greens Farm near Camp Elliot. And who will be able to be a candidate for an OCS class at that time. I think the Marine Corps was requesting at least two, two and a half years of service and to be at least the rank of the corporal. I wasn't sure that I wanted to enter such a venture, but after talking it over with my new bride, I decided that I would accept the challenge and go to OCS school and become a second lieutenant, which I did.

Q: What assignment did you fall into after you were commissioned?

O'Bannon: After I was commissioned, we went aboard ship and went to New Zealand and I was assigned to G Company, 2nd Battalion, 9th. Fraser West was my CO.

Q: What kind of experiences did you have in New Zealand? What met you there and what was your camp like?

O'Bannon: New Zealand was a beautiful country, very friendly people. Most of the New Zealanders, men of my age, were in the military and they had already gone to South Africa

and we were billeted in their military camps that they had vacated. And they built comfortable quarters for men as well as officers, so we had quite a nice experience in New Zealand. Some of the best chow, I guess we had – my experience with the service, was in New Zealand.

Q: You told me it wasn't all just good chow and comfortable billets.

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O'Bannon: We went through hard training, we had overnight problems, we had 75-80 mile hikes, a lot of physical drills, physical exercise in the morning area. Challenging, yes, to say the least.

Q: How long were you in New Zealand?

O'Bannon: We arrived in New Zealand the latter part of February and then we went up to Guadalcanal in July. So we had about – well, from February to July in New Zealand. We had a little activity in Guadalcanal, in as much as we did some patrolling, I don't think we met any resistance, but we did experience – Washing Machine Charlie would come over a couple times a week and wake us up with fragmentary bombs and we would have to kind of get out of the tents, and fall into foxholes to escape injury. But it kept us on our toes.

Q: You said the searchlights at Henderson field would light up?

O'Bannon: Yeah, most of the time, Henderson Field had strong search lights, they would keep the airplane in view and then you could observe the Ack-Ack-Far so it was kind of to show, for we people that were there, that were billeting the coconut grove, to watch Washing Machine Charlie go over. Occasionally he would slip in at lower altitude and drop some bombs on our camp area.

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Q: You also mentioned at one point, you had a chance, everything wasn't all training, I

guess you got into a basketball game with -

O'Bannon: Yeah, to keep the troops happy, you have to give them a variation of life. Along with the serious training and various of chows, you sometimes have to develop recreational exercise. So we played basketball, we played volleyball, we played even 100 yard dash, relay runs and what have you. Basketball was one of my favorite games we played and we had a company commander at that time by the name of Louis H. Wilson who later became comrade by Marine Corps, by golly. And Lou and I were playing basketball one day and a ball came off the backboard and rolled across the hard surface and Lou stopped to pick it up and he and I both were running and when he stopped, I tripped over his left ankle and fell on my left hip and – it wasn't injured at that time, but later on it gave me problems.

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In fact in 1969, I had to have back surgery.

Q: But it didn't slow you down enough so that you were able to drop out of the Bougainville campaign?

O'Bannon: Oh no, no, I was able to maintain the physical ability to do that.

Q: You were the Executive Officer?

O'Bannon: I was Exec of Fox Company and Captain Wilson, captain at that time was CO.

Q: And you went into the Bougainville campaign, can you see a little about your experiences?

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O'Bannon: Bougainville was an experience. It rained almost every day. Some of the thickest jungle that I had ever seen in the Pacific. And the purpose of the Bougainville operation probably was to establish a beach head – secure an area for an airfield to be

developed, which we did. And our actual combat was minimized there, however, very hazardous because of the jungle. If you go on patrol, you had no knowledge of where – who you might run into or where because of the thick jungle. The trails were overgrown and we had to make our own, more or less by chopping through with the machete through the vines and what have you. You are subject to ambush.

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Our unit didn't suffer any great amount of casualties. I was a platoon leader at the time, still in C Company with Fraser West, of course.

Q: After Bougainville, you went back into camp for Guadalcanal and began to train for the campaign to follow.

O'Bannon: We – some of the companies that had lost men in Bougainville, they again, brought us back up to strength with recruits. Again, we went into training exercises to prepare for future operations. And you really don't know where you are going to go until maybe a few days before you take off, but our rigid training we had in Guadalcanal following Bougainville, was preparing us for the possibility of two or three different places. One of them was Guam of course, which we later did participate in. But we kept quite busy at Guadalcanal, again with their athletics and movies and our training schedule of course.

Q: At the Guam campaign, do I have this right, you were in F Company?

O'Bannon: Yes, following the Bougainville campaign, I was transferred from G Company, where I was a platoon leader, to F Company as company exec.

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Q: Without responsibility for a platoon and you worked directly with Captain Wilson?

O'Bannon: Right, you are the Company Commander's right hand, you might say.

Q: So, what did you do as the executive?

O'Bannon: Duties would be to follow the command of the company commander first, whatever his wishes might be. In combat or in training, you would take charge of a certain element of the command post. You had personnel and a CP, first sergeant. You've got communications people, you've got corpsman, medical staff and so forth and so you kind of oversee that that particular group of people function properly and you are always at the right elbow of the company commander. Supply. You have to take care of the supply to keep the unit on it's feet or on it's belly, whichever the case may be.

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Q: What kind of personal weapon would you carry?

O'Bannon: You carried a carbine at that time.

Q: You are getting ready of the Guam campaign, how did that go? You loaded up and headed for Guam and - ?

O'Bannon: Yeah, we loaded our ship in Guadalcanal and our first responsibility; I believe they held our division in reserve, what they called "floating reserve" for the operation at Saipan. I think initially they felt that we would probably be able to go ahead with what our assignment would be in a very short period of time, but the resistance on Saipan was a little bit stiffer than the intelligence had reported, so we stayed aboard ship, in floating reserve until the situation subsided some and we weren't required to land in Saipan and assist in that campaign, so then they had scheduled us to land on Guam.

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And we did that after about 51 or 52 days being aboard ship.

Q: That must have been really hard, the conditions were quiet crowded I imagine.

O'Bannon: Quite crowded and your morale, a little bit, seems to deteriorate some. But then the training at one, or the Marines get in boot camp, keeps everyone strong enough and there weren't too many conflicts aboard ship between men. We did get off on time at Enewetak for about a half a day to play ball and exercise. But aboard ship you have opportunity to do a little physical drill to keep people physical fit and so forth. And you have training programs to keep you mentally alert and you go over tactics with them, weapons, responsibilities.

Q: Do you recall the name of the ship that you were on?

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O'Bannon: I think we were on the same ship that we had used one or two different occasions, I believe it was one of the President lines, uh – Jackson – the Jackson, I believe was our vessel that we were on.

Q: President Jackson.

O'Bannon: President Jackson.

Q: Why don't you take us back to, you say was 51 days at sea. Why don't you take us back to the morning. I guess you had Reveley

O'Bannon: Oh, the landing, the Guam landing?

Q: Sure, why don't we start about getting to the Guam landing and take me back to the Reveley.

O'Bannon: You know, aboard ship and you have Reveley, the sailor – I don't know what they call him, maybe boats mate, has a whistle and he gets up at the microphone and throughout the PA system on the ship, this is blared in every troop compartments – well, that is the first thing you hear to get the troops up is that whistle that the Navy puts on over the PA system. So this gets everybody up. And you are advised as to what time you

will go to chow and the men line up and go to chow of course.

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After chow there is probably time to do personal hygiene and so forth and brush teeth, what have you. And there is always that certain amount of joshing going on between the troops. You know, you're either Mac or Joe, whichever in the Marine Corps and the Navy guys are Joe and the Marines are Mac.

Q: Did you get a special meal?

O'Bannon: I don't recall that we did, I don't recall that we got a special meal. If it was on a Wednesday morning, we probably got beans, but I think that is a standard breakfast for the Navy aboard ship is beans for breakfast.

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Q: So you are ready to go.

O'Bannon: Ready to go. I think the craft that we went in was the newer type, one that has the bow – you lift the bow down and you charge right out of the front of the vessel.

Q: I wanted to ask you about that. So this is what they would call an LCVP?

O'Bannon: Yes. Landing vehicle personnel – whatever you call it?

Q: Yeah, landing craft vehicle personnel. Now did that take you right to the reef or did you transfer into an amph track, track vehicle?

O'Bannon: No, the troops that were in the amtracks were – came right off of the ship, landing net, into those. And then they paddled themselves through the water, propelled through the water, till they got to the coral reef and then they climbed right over the coral reef to get the troops right into the beach.

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Q: So you hit the reef in an LCVP and waded in? I should ask you what wave you were in? How did that work?

O'Bannon: I think we were in the second wave. Our regiment consisted of three battalion of troops and I believe the first battalion was in the first wave, our second battalion was in the second wave, so we landed in the second wave on – I'm not sure, Blue Beach, I believe, I something like that.

Q: On the right flank? Near Asan Point. Were you taking any fire from the point at that time? Had it been suppressed?

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O'Bannon: As I recall, our unit going ashore didn't receive any small arms fire. You could see splashes of water as a result of artillery, or coastal defense guns, firing in the beach area. But we were – fortunately the vehicle that I was in, none came near us. Some of the amtracks were hit and probably casualties occurred. I can't tell you how many and so forth, but we were fortunate to get clear into the beach with no problem.

Q: What kind of orders did you give as you hit the beach and how did you get into line?

O'Bannon: Well, the plan is laid out aboard ship so that everyone knows what they are supposed to do. So usually the platoon leaders has a platoon that consists probably of 55-60 men and they are instructed to advance forward and then scatter out in a skirmish line and take cover naturally if you are receiving enemy fire.

Q: So what are you doing at this time? Personally?

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O'Bannon: What I'm doing at this time, along with probably praying, is checking around to see is everyone is on their feet and ready to go. That you have the right attitude about landing. I give instructions to communication people – runners, telephone people, so forth. As you leave the vessel, you might give a few hand signals – you go that way, I will go this way and so forth.

Q: What happened to your outfit once you got into line?

O'Bannon: We advanced, really with not any enemy resistance because we were actually the second wave in and our responsibility was just to advance in and take cover and should the attacking force, which was the 1st Battalion, if they needed any assistance, then the battalion commander would give the order for our unit to advance further, and contact the enemy. But we did later on in the day have to do that.

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Because the battalion – the resistance they met, we were committed.

Q: So where were you committed and how did that contact occur?

O'Bannon: We were committed to pass through that battalion, I believe and just continue on. The combat maps we had were – there were lines drawn, indicating an objective and the first day we reached our objective and dug in for the night.

Q: How did the night go?

O'Bannon: Well, fair. There is a little story I could tell, it has to do with our company commander, Captain Wilson. He and I took a position in a gully and he suggest that I take the first watch and he would rest. So probably along about midnight, laying on my back and watching the stars and observing the flares that the Navy ships would fire, occasionally, I looked up and a silhouette.

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And I could see two Japanese soldiers and as the flare would go off, these guys would just freeze and they were about, oh, six to ten feet apart. And they were just on the lip of this ravine that we were in. And I thought, well, what am I going to do? The Captain is asleep, but I gotta wake him up, but he might make a noise, and then we both would be subject to either grenade or what have you. I decided I should wake him. So I put my hand over his mouth and nudged him, woke him up and said, look up there, Captain, and he said, oh my gosh! He said, you take the one in the front and I will get the one in the back. And we were both getting ready to fire our weapons and some of the men right adjacent to our foxhole, fired their M-1 rifles and the Japanese disappeared, run across the top of the hill through our company and I think they escaped completely. But that was kind of a hair-raising experience.

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You don't know whether the enemy is going to drop a grenade on you or what.

Q: You were describing an incident of the first night – why don't you pick up the story?

O'Bannon: We had no other incidents that occurred since those two enemy soldiers had passed by so close. The night went very well. No activity on the front line. Our CP were – Captain Wilson and I were – of course you are only 10-15 yards from where the defensive line is. So the night went very well, very quiet. The only thing about the men is officers were suffering dehydration because we had – we had run out of water prior to landing, we all had two canteens, but the temperature was quite hot and you use a lot of energy, a lot of moisture out of your body, so everybody is pretty thirsty. So the next morning we had people with swollen lips, swollen tongues. I suffered it myself in that regard. The next morning we went into attack and advanced further. In fact we went through an area of coconut trees and most of them were green of course. Some fall on the ground. I got a couple myself, broke them open and drank the coconut juice. Kind of satisfied our thirst and it was heaven sent to have that much liquid to partake of.

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Q: I understand that sometime during that day, you were pulled out of line and redeployed? Is that correct?

O'Bannon: I'm not sure what time of day it was, it seemed like a long mid-afternoon or the second day, yes, we had gotten to the objective I think and another unit probably took over our position, I'm not sure just who it was. And we were pulled back to the rear and redeployed over on the left flank of the battalion.

Q: Did you get together and march in a column along the beach to the left flank?

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O'Bannon: Not just along the beach, but near the vicinity of the beach. Behind the troops that were in a defensive position. And then went clear to the left flank of the battalion and awaited further orders coming from our battalion commander. We didn't know what his plans were, but we found out shortly that we would be in the attack, to give assistance to that sector of resistance.

Q: This being late in the afternoon, were you able to get in line that evening or did you stay ready to be deployed?

O'Bannon: We were deployed in the afternoon, as I recall. Probably later than we should have been, because as the battle progressed, darkness over took the fighting force and actually was hindering our advance and in some cases we were unable to supply ammunition or even evacuate our wounded as darkness caught us. But we ran into stiff resistance and this was coming from Fonte Ridge. We were getting ready to go on up the ridge and control the high ground.

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Q: You told me a story about capturing some sake bottles – am I plugging this in at the right time, or was this something I should remind you to talk about later?

O'Bannon: I remember telling you the story, but the incident did not occur that day, it was a couple days later. But the story goes, this – our forward troops did run on a cache of Japanese sake. And of course being Marines, they have to take charge of this and so forth. And at a later date as the company moved, these Marines decided they would take some of the sake along with them. But rather than hide it in their bedrolls or carry it in their hands or hide it some place, they tied it on the outside of their back. On their backs. Well, this was only asking for trouble, because the battalion commander got into position with his field glasses and got to looking at the troops that were going through the boondocks there and he said to his exec, who was Major Glass. Major, what is that I see reflecting down there off of those troops? The Major says, Colonel, I think it's glass. Well, anyway, he – didn't take him long to find out that our men carrying about a quart of sake on their back and so he gave the orders to break the bottles. I suspect most of them did, but some probably didn't.

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Q: Well, that is a good story, I'm sorry we got it out of order. Let's pick up the story about deploying over the left flank. We were looking at the maps and as I understand, if I recall correctly, you went up the outside or the left flank of what we are calling Chorito Ridge and up to the high ground, below the Fonte Plateau. Is that correct?

O'Bannon: Yes, in this particular situation, it was kind of a standard thing and a pack like this, your higher echelon people, people who make decisions and this regard, I'm speaking now, battalion commander, they will use ask for supporting fire. You will either get it through artillery or naval gun fire. So in this particular case, Colonel Cushman, our battalion commander had requested artillery fire to precede our attack up the ridge.

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I don't recall how long the fire was going to occur, but usually they will fire several – X number of rounds or they will fire for a particular length of time. I think in this case they did fire probably for ten minutes and then his orders are always given to the company

commanders to alert them as to what is going to occur and he tells them on a certain time on their watch and they all synchronize their watches so that everybody jumps off on the prescribed time. Well, this took place and one sector of our line, over on the left, the men had to advance from their position, which, they were heading in the brush, but they had to advance across an open field. Kind of a small meadow. I would say the size of a maybe 60 acre field and it was pretty hair raising when you have to cross an open field like that and you know that you are facing enemy fire from higher ground – machine gun and larger – mortars and so forth. But I was in that section on that side and we were successful in getting across the open ground and advance as directed.

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Q: This was very late in day?

O'Bannon: Yes, probably 6:00 – 5:30, 6:00. Because darkness hit us sometime after 7:00.

Q: And on the other side of this open ground, what greeted you? When the darkness came on and there you were, what kind of terrain were you in and what were you facing?

O'Bannon: Well, at that time I didn't realize that the terrain was as rugged as it was, or as steep, but on viewing the same area, yesterday when I visited, from the top of the hill, Nimits Hill and looking down, it's considerably steeper than I had remembered. But possibly the adrenaline is flowing real good and you are able to advance at a greater rate of speed up steep ground, more faster than you think you can. Or better. But the rifleman and the machine gun guys, the guys that have the automatic weapons, they performed magnificently and were able to advance to a point and hold the ground, probably as far as the colonel thought we would go. We made extremely tough defense. They were well prepared, well dug in and bunkers and machine guns, riflemen, in the back I'm sure there were mortars.

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And in cases like that, if the enemy has the high ground, you are certainly at a

disadvantage.

Q: Did you see the enemy at any point?

O'Bannon: I myself, being an exec of the company commander, you are not really up there in front with him and sometimes the company commander will be out in front. In this particular case, Lou Wilson was out in front and of course, as I say, my responsibility of moving the command post and keeping the personnel organized and making sure that the supplies got to the front, the ammunition and what have you, I myself did not see the enemy or experience any of the fire being directed at me personally.

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Q: For people who are trying to grasp what this was like, 50 years later, describe what the command post, under conditions like this, consisted of. Who was there with you and what a command post -

O'Bannon: At a command post you would have myself, first sergeant of the company, I had a runner, the first sergeant had a runner. That is an enlisted man that can take messages and be dispatched at various times. You had medical people, communications people. I would say the command post might consist of as many as ten people.

Q: Did you have radio communications and wire – talk about methods of communication.

O'Bannon: You know, you have about three different ways you can communicate with people. You got radio and you got the runner and you got the telephone. I can't recall us having the telephone people stringing out the telephone cable or not. Possibly they did. But the command post usually has a radio to be in communication with the company commander in this case. Yes.

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Q: And the company commander, the radio would go back up to a higher echelon, or would

the radio also function to the various platoon commanders?

O'Bannon: Yeah, the radio could function on the same circuit. It had the same channel to his platoon leaders. To his command post and even back to the battalion.

Q: Typically this command post would really just be in a hole in the ground that you dug. Is that right?

O'Bannon: Command post could be any – you could occupy an enemy emplacement. If you could route him out of it, you could occupy that as a command post, which is probably most beneficial because if it's a bunker, it's pretty well built and it makes a good command post. It could be a shell hole.

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It could be in the brush behind trees, but in this particular case, we were in a shell hole, right adjacent to a ravine.

Q: Darkness came on, how well were you equipped that night to meet what?

O'Bannon: I personally myself didn't know exactly the condition of the front line. I knew we were scattered pretty thin and I myself didn't know that we had – the left flank was exposed. We weren't in contact with anyone on the left flank at all, as I remember. And our front line was rather thin of personnel. We suffered considerable casualties. I know this because that is where the casualties, a lot of them filtered through the command post, because we had some corpsman there and in fact, the casualties that we did collect, darkness caught up and we weren't able to take some of them back to the battalion aid station because darkness caught us. So a lot of those casualties – I say a lot of them, some of those casualties were laying right out on top of the ground, did not have any shell hole or foxhole to be placed in.

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Q: Was that the night, you mentioned, I think you said you remember a sad and lonely feeling that night.

O'Bannon: One of the casualties had a severe wound and I, not acquainted or I don't know exactly where he was wounded, possibly somewhere in the stomach, because he was experiencing severe pain and he was certainly letting us know about it. Midnight or so, excruciating screams, moaning – Captain Wilson asked the corpsman if he could visit the man and administer morphine.

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And the corpsman remarked, he said, Captain, I have given him a double dose already. The Captain said, give him another dose. So he did. He quieted down, but the next morning the man was deceased. But it was an eerie feeling, you know you hear that.

Q: Was this the night – I know that, of course I think a lot of people are aware that Captain Wilson earned the medal of honor holding off a large Japanese Banzai assault, I guess it was the night of the 25th, 26th – you must have some pretty vivid memories of that. Can you describe it?

O'Bannon: You know, bonzai charge, I think most Marines, they weren't combat experienced and the Japanese later on in the Pacific theater, they discontinued that. I think they probably found out it wasn't paying off for them. But through the Guam campaign, we experienced bonzai charges like they did in Guadalcanal, like they did in Saipan and so forth. But in this case, cases like that, usually your junior offices would fill themselves with liquor and sake and maybe their senior NCOs would do the same thing and they would rally their troops and get the troops to follow them and that is how they would charge a bonzai charge.

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In this case, they charged our CP several times during the night from this ravine that I mentioned earlier.

Q: This is the same night that this poor wounded man was screaming?

O'Bannon: In fact, some of the wounded people were between the shell hole, where the Captain was and a ravine and as the bonzai charge would proceed up that gully, or over the embankment, the wounded people were exposed, you might say, more than anyone else. So I'm sure that some of the wounded people were wounded again as a result of not being able to get them back to the battalion aid station.

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But I think – I can't recall or – the number of bonzai charges that our CP experienced that night, but I'm sure it was four or five. By daylight, we were – [interruption]

Q: Were you able to witness Captain Wilson in action that night?

O'Bannon: Not really. I did witness his action in late evening before dark. We were receiving fire from pillboxes and I think the Captain evidently had discovered and thought probably we needed something to give aid to our attack, so he asked for tanks. He moved around quite a bit, he didn't stay in one spot very long. I think he was wounded and exposing himself, probably mid-afternoon or maybe late afternoon. He got the machine gun fire I think, or small arms fire and got wounded in the lower part of his body. Around his legs some place. Not a severe wound, but he was wounded. I think he moved around so much that he offered such a small target – that is why he was successful.

Q: Were those tanks able to reach you that night?

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O'Bannon: They were late getting there. They got there prior to dark. In fact, one of the tanks had – I don't know whether he got out of position, but he came by where I was and at that time I wasn't in the CP, I was out towards the front, checked to see if they needed ammunition and so forth and on my returning back to CP, I heard some noise and I ran over

to some fallen logs and here was our gunnery sergeant – we called him Pee Wee, Pee Wee Crummel and he was a gunnery sergeant, been in the Marine Corps 14, 16 years. Small man of stature. Only weighed probably 140 pounds. He was an old man; he was about 28 or 30 years old. But Pee Wee had been hit with machine gun fire in both legs. He was down and couldn't walk. So I picked him up, I was on my way back to the battalion aid station or battalion CP with him and here come the tank rumbling up and so I laid Pee Wee down, went to the back of the tank, pulled the phone of the recessed phone compartment and talked to the tank commander. He asked me if I could show him the target, which I did. Put the phone back in the phone compartment, went around to pick up Pee Wee.

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The tank had pulled right up next to Pee Wee and Pee Wee was laying in front of the tank, so when I got ready to pick him up and carrying him back to CP, the gunner in the tank, he let go of a couple rounds of 75 millimeter and he jarred Pee Wee and me both, we got pretty well jarred up by the muzzle blast. That was an experience that I didn't enjoy too much, but I got Pee Wee back to the medical station pretty good.

Q: So these tanks, in spite of this hilly terrain, got close enough to lay some direct fire on the ridge?

O'Bannon: They did, they did.

Q: And they stayed with you that night?

O'Bannon: I'm not sure. I can't remember if they did or not. I don't remember them coming back by the CP, but possible they did. Because I think there were two more over further to the right.

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Captain West had gone to bring those tanks up. Got 'em after Captain Wilson had requested the tanks to come up. Captain West brought 'em up. His company was in

reserve and Captain West, he and Captain Wilson had met and bumped heads up near the front line from coming behind some revetment or a rock or something, and each had their runner with them, but I think that time, they decided that West would go down and guide the tanks up, which he did.

Q: You described pretty vividly, when we were chatting before, the Japanese coming over, holding the high ground and coming over the high ground that night and how hard it was to -

O'Bannon: Oh, the bonzai charging and so forth?

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Q: Yeah.

O'Bannon: Yeah, they choose a place to their advantage really, where they could maneuver and get into a depression. I'm not sure it was a ravine, but it was a depression in the ground. And you could hear them talking. And prior to them charging over the top of the ravine, and you couldn't tell whether it was four men or six men or twelve or what have you, but they charged up over the top of that gully, towards our CP. Of course they met a sheet of fire, everybody could hear them talking, so most of the people that had weapons, that were physically fit, of course the wounded didn't contribute anything to that, but Wilson, me, Captain West was with us at that time, and the CP.

Q: So your outfit took quite a beating and yet you had to stay in the line and go ahead and capture the Fonte Plateau – did you stay in the line after?

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O'Bannon: Yes, next morning, we continued the attack and was successful enough to drive the enemy from the high ground and by the next night, I think we still had some high ground to take, but I remember we set up a CP further on up the ridge, but still not at the top, because in the next day is when we actually took the high ground, including Bundschu

Hill.

Q: When did you finally believe from this grind of every day and every night in front line combat?

O'Bannon: Well, I think the commanding officers, they realized that the human body can only endure so much, but you can be surprised at home much the human body can endure. But usually that kind of operation and that kind of training you are fighting in, about three days, men need a rest. So I think when we got to high ground on the third day, we were pulled back in reserve behind the lines and took a rest.

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Q: After the capture of the high ground and the Fonte Plateau. I'm curious, what is your professional assessment of the Japanese soldiers as an opponents?

O'Bannon: He was a trained fighting unit, I would say. Well, discipline to some extent. I think probably he relied on his leaders than he did his companion, his fighting buddy, so to speak, but they were seasoned troops. I mean, they had their – they had the elite group as well as their average fighting man, but overall they were fighting machines. Very stubborn. One could look at a Japanese solder and in some respect, you would say he was stupid and in other respect you would have to admire him. Well, some of them knew that when they went into combat, they weren't going to come out. They were going to meet death. And I'm not so sure that some of the American people, American man would be willing to sacrifice that much. Although our men did sacrifice.

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Q: I recall you also said that during the campaign, you saw some evidence of the barbaric nature of the Japanese treatment of civilians – is that true?

O'Bannon: I think we can – you know, in time of combat, the enemy can be pretty barbaric and I experienced later on in the Guam campaign, as we moved across the island, you

would meet some of the Chamorro, some of the local people and you had to admire those people because they were under oppression, severe oppression during the better than two years the Japanese was in charge of the island. And some of these people endured considerable amount of physical punishment. Short rations too, I'm sure. And I would say that, I'm guessing that those Chamorros that were caught giving information or leading toward the invaders and so forth, or our operation, they were taken care of. In fact on one occasion as we advance across the island, I came upon a large naval gun shell hole.

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It had three or four Chamorros in the hole, in the bottom of the crater with their hands tied behind them and they were beheaded. So the Japanese people inflicted horrible acts on some of the Chamorros.

Q: You saw a considerable amount of combat, obviously in Bougainville and Guam and you also served in Iwo Jima. How would you place the campaign in Guam in terms of the battlefield experiences and what you learned and how it fit in, in terms of the development of combat during the war?

O'Bannon: I think the Guam campaign, in my opinion, went well with our people. The intelligence that we had, prior to the operations, was good. Our training was appropriate and it was certainly adequate. You always – I'm sure that our echelon critiqued the battle after it was over with and bat around pros and cons of what could have been done or what didn't happen or what they should have done. But this is the way you learn. As far as I'm concerned, I think Guam campaign went off as planned. I think we had the minimum amount of casualties for what we faced. I think we paid too high a price for it because human life is worth more than real estate.

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Q: From a company's perspective, were there any lessons that you learned, any sort of modification in your company tactics? Or did you pretty much carry on the same way at Iwo Jima?

O'Bannon: You know, manuals are written to be guidelines and you have manuals for operating small arms, you have manuals for infantry tactics, you got manuals for tank operations or artillery operations. But Guam operations, as a second lieutenant, I probably wouldn't be able to make a judgment on the overall operation, but I think probably I wouldn't be able to contribute anything in a positive nature to improve the operation. I think the operation went off good.
Q: Fair enough.

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Q: Well, it's 50 years after Guam now.

O'Bannon: That's a long time, 50 years.

Q: I imagine it's sort of surprisingly fast, I'm not quite 50 years old, but it's surprising how fast I got to be 40. I wonder, from the perspective now, that you have on those times, this is your first time back, isn't that correct?

O'Bannon: Yes, this is my first trip back to Guam. 50 years since I was here.

Q: So you are back here 50 years later. What, from the perspective of those 50 years, do your experiences in World War II mean to you and what is it like for you to come back?

O'Bannon: Well, it is certainly different to the extent that now I can see a beautiful island. The vegetation has returned. Here before, the preparation for the invasion of Guam was so severe that a lot of the vegetation was killed because of naval gun fire and ammunitions.

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So, from a perspective of, comparing today to 50 years ago, I will choose today. The people are cordial every where we go. The two days so far that I have been here, we met wonderful people. You get a hug. Everyone says, you know, welcome back.

Q: What do you think the war should mean to us now? What do you think we should remember?

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O'Bannon: Do everything to avoid it. Political wise as well as social. It's hard to remember people over a number of years, but I think about them every once in a while. [small cut]

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I didn't see all of the museum this morning. I understand that some of the equipment is out of there now and they have sorted it upstairs because I had heard that there was a map contributed by one of my platoon leaders that I had on Iwo Jima and he was a platoon leader for Captain Wilson. Lieutenant Eddie and I think he is a resident of Guam. I understand he had supplied a map, which we call an operational map, that he carried with him during the combat at Guam here and he had presented his map to the society over there. It wasn't on display today, but we were told that they had stored some of the material upstairs waiting for room to display more, so Eddie's map will be displayed again, somewhere over there.

Q: It may be that there is more material than they can possibly exhibit and they like to try to rotate things from time to time.

O'Bannon: Is there anything else you would like to say before we wrap this tape up?

Q: No, I hope I have contributed something. It's a joy to be here. I'm looking forward to the next three or four days. And I'm looking forward to going back home.

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O'Bannon: Well, Mr. O'Bannon, I think you contributed something 50 years ago and also contributed something today. I want to thank you very much for the time you have taken to

be with us today, it was a pleasure speaking with you.

Q: You are quite welcome.

[END OF SESSION]