

National Park Service (NPS)

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



Howard Broberg
July 19, 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

This digital transcript contains updated pagination, formatting, and editing for accessibility and compliance with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. Interview content has not been altered.

The original digital transcript is preserved in the NPS WAPA Collections and NPGallery.

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.

The release form for this interview is on file at the NPS WAPA Collections.

WAPA Collections
War in the Pacific NHP
135 Murray Boulevard, Suite 100
Hagåtña, GU 96910
wapa_interpretation@nps.gov

Interviewee: Howard Broberg

Military Rank: 12th Marines, communications, USMC

Interviewer: Steven Hower

Hilton Hotel, Guam

Date: July 19th, 1994

**please note that this gentleman does not speak clearly at times.*

--00:00:03 AUDIO DESCRIPTION

Howard Broberg is a Caucasian-American man with glasses, wearing a blue plaid button-up shirt. He is sitting on a wicker chair, with a beige wall.

Technician: *Anytime...

--00:00:23

Q: My name is Steven Hower and I'm here at the Hilton Hotel in Guam on July 19th, 1994, at 12:30 in the afternoon, to record an oral history interview with Mr. Howard Broberg, who served in Dog Battery, 12th Marines, during World War II. This interview is being made by the National Parks Service, War in the Pacific National Historical Park in conjunction with KGFT Television. Mr. Broberg, I understand that the National Parks Service has your permission to make this recording and to retain all literary and property rights deriving from it, is that correct?

Broberg: Yeah, that's correct.

-00:01:03

Q: Well first of all, I want to thank you very much for taking the time to chat with us today.

[Unintelligible acknowledgement]

For the record, could you just spell your last name out?

Broberg: B-R-O-B-E-R-G.

Q: What is the date of birth and where were you born?

Broberg: Uh-August 29th, 1919 in suburb of Minneapolis.

Q: Did you grow up there?

Broberg: No, uh-moved up farther north, actually we pioneered; we got in there by railroad, [laughs] best we could get in there.

Q: Is that right?

Broberg: Yeah.

Q: What was the name of the town where you grew up? Or the place where you grew up...

Broberg: Where I grew up, uh-we had to move back to Minneapolis, uh-my dad died of cancer and we had to get out of there. So most of my schooling was done in Minneapolis.

Q: Did you like that north country though... that exposure to the north?

Broberg: Oh yeah, [unintelligible].

-00:02:11

Q: So you grew up outside of Minneapolis.

Broberg: Yeah.

Q: Is that where you joined the service?

Broberg: Yeah, I was working for US Steel at the time and most of my buddies were going in, I had a high draft, I could have waited quite a while. In fact, the company got mad because [laughs]- I signed up, because they already got some deferments for me.

Q: What motivated you to join?

Broberg: Well... I don't know. Half of my buddies were in, and patriotic, I think or something. I tried to get into the-the Army Air Corps, the cadet... [unintelligible thinking]

Q: Tried to get into the Air Corps?

Broberg: Yeah. [uh-huh] Well, I passed the physical... but I went down to find out how long it would be and they said, well, six months or so. [Laughs] I guess they did away with that college education deal, you know. On the way back, I stopped in the Marine Corps and signed up. I figured six months, it would [laughs] probably be a year.

Q: Did the Marines take you right away?

Broberg: Yeah.

-00:03:29

Q: Where did you do basic training?

Broberg: Uh- San Diego.

Q: Did you have any [laughs] particular experiences in basic training worth talking about?

Broberg: You mean as far as the war and stuff goes?

Q: Yea-well, how was your basic training?

Broberg: Oh! Well [laughs]- it scares ya, and you wonder why they push you so hard, but you find out right after, it's worth it.

Q: How did yo- how were you selected for an artillery regiment?

Broberg: Uh-I don't know. I signed up to go to communications school, and I really didn't

want to get in, I tried to get into the Air Corps in the Marines. Next to the last day that we got out of boot camp, they ask you if you want to take the test for wherever you want. And uh-my buddy, he says, well, let's take the communication test, he said. He don't have to be doing any KP or guard duty, so I said, well, that is baloney. And I went down there with the intention of not passing it. But when I got back up there and they called out the people who wanted to go down about the Air Corps, the GI said, "no, you had one chance, that's it." So that was it. I went to school right there at San Diego, I don't know for six to eight weeks. Communications.

-00:05:08

Q: So what kind of training was that? Familiarization with the various kinds of communication equipment?

Broberg: Yeah, I don't know, it was a lot of, uh-I thought, baloney, because we never use it. Like with [unintelligible] and with the flags, [unintelligible] come up to the ridge and send messages back. And uh-and well you had to learn electricity and stuff too, but not too much.

Most of the guys tend to fall asleep [laughs] in those schools; it was so nice and warm. If you did, you got an eraser in the head. So [hearty laughter], sSo then I got through with that, I went into the 2nd uh-Marines, it was 10th uh-Battalion, that was- that was a howitzer outfit too.

Q: Excuse me, that was 2nd Battalion 10th Marines?

Broberg: Uh-huh.

Q: Howitzer battalion, armed with what kind of weapon?

Broberg: They had the same as with the pack howitzers, 75. Well, then they split that 2nd Division into five parts, and they take one part out. I wasn't-wasn't on the list originally to go the school, they were going to form the 3rd Division, but another guy had the same, I don't know... number, you know, uh-he didn't want to go, so he turned into sick bay, so I had to go in his place.

-00:06:40

Q: When they formed five um-divisions, as you called them, did they literally have you count off? Or... it wasn't like that?

Broberg: Uhh- No, all that paperwork of what you have done- inside, and they said, you are going here, so- and you are going there.

Q: So you were shipped back east to form the 12th.

Broberg: Back to Lejeune.

Q: Camp Lejeune. Ok.

Do you feel that the 12th Marines had a particular kind of you know- personality or identity or a unit spirit, that you can put your finger on?

Broberg: Yeah. Uh-uh you know NCO really ran the place. These fellows that we got, they all came back from Iceland, they were in pretty long, you know. And it was a bunch of hell raisers, the NCOs, we-we got in trouble, but it straightened out. They were good men, but, hmm-a few drinks and they go wild.

[Brief Pause]

-00:07:50

Q: Tell us about getting overseas. If I recall, you did your outfit then get shipped across country and went to New Zealand with the, other parts of the 3rd Division, is that correct?

Broberg: Yeah, uh-well-we all went back to the West Coast and we shipped out from San Diego. And we went on the Liberty ship, run by Holland – Hollanders. We didn't get enough to eat, no exercise, poor eats. They lost 14 to 16 pounds per man on that 16 ah-16 day trip.

Q: Do you remember the name of that Liberty ship?

Broberg: Yeah, [unintelligible]

Q: [unintelligible]

Broberg: In fact, there is a story in this one book that was put out not too long ago, it's in there and the men, that is us when we went over, because Colonel Fry who was in charge.

Q: What's that story?

Broberg: Hmmm?

Q: What is that story?

-00:08:56

Broberg: Well, [laughs] I don't know if I should tell it or not, but, it's part of the [unintelligible] I can tell you that story. One of these officers here now, a buddy of mine, he took off-and went down to the mess hall to see what we got. And they really complained about it. And uh-Colonel Fry said, well we are eating all right. And they were. They ate with the-with the-with the crew. It wasn't bad. Rotten mutton. If it had been lamb, it would have been okay, but that stunk like rotten eggs. [Laughs] They got so much a mile, per head, [unintelligible] I imagine that is why they did it.

Q: Well from New Zealand, from what I understand, you went to Guadalcanal?

Broberg: Yeah. Uh-huh.

Q: Did you see action in Bougainville?

Broberg: Oh yeah. I got hit once from an artillery shell. It was just one chunk went in, you know I was lucky... We stayed there a lot longer than we supposed to. The Army was supposed to take over, but – they just weren't [laughs]– they didn't have any observers that could observe, they didn't read the maps, so we stayed at least three months longer than we

were supposed to.

Q: Was that the 12th Marines, stayed after the rest of the division?

Broberg: Well, not all of the 12th. Yeah...

Q: So in other words, the artillery units stayed after the rest of the Marines were relieved?

-00:10:41

Broberg: Yeah, yeah-but even after they took our artillery, they kept us at [unintelligible] because I don't know, they just didn't – couldn't cut the mustard I guess. I don't know what the trouble was.

Q: Why don't you describe for us and think about people that maybe don't have the military history background, describe for us the equipment you use and sort of the standard uh-duties that you had as a forward observer. If you can have a typical mission, describe it for us. What would that be like?

Broberg: The first time we went up to the front lines, the Japs had made a counter landing on us, the Navy slipped up there and they let some bars go in there, about between 600-1,000 Japs landed on the other side of us. Didn't take too long to take 'em out, but they got right up to the field hospital and shot holes through that tent and stuff like that.

Oh, uh-I could tell you a good one. I was up there about four or five days and Barnes, an officer, he said, why don't you go back to the Battery and have a hot meal. Stay a day or two and we will rotate. [Laughs] I get back there and just in time to line up for-to eat, and here comes a Jap plane, right over the top. I could hit him with a rock. But he come in from the other way and no warning at all. They fired a few rounds and took off. That night I didn't even dig in, it was kind of hard digging in anyways. And here they come. They wanted to see – they were just out looking and they dropped nine bombs and one hit right in the FDC and that is the only place that-they were undercover and everything, because they got a huge [unintelligible]-they had a good dugout. That bomb must have come right straight down and blew them 100 yards. Didn't even look like they had been hit. Just

threw 'em up in the air. And then the next night, they come back with daisy cutters, but most of the guys were dug in then, uh...

-00:13:19

Q: What is a daisy cutter?

Broberg: Well they had – they hit and just explode and the stuff goes out. Where your others, they went down. You know-and don't explode until they are down a ways.

Q: So-a fragmentation kind of thing.

Broberg: Yeah, and they did knock out one of our guns.

Q: When you are referring to the explosion at the FDC, that's fire direction center?

Broberg: Yes, fire direction center.

-00:13:46

Q: Good... Now as an observer, what kind of work were you doing and what kind of equipment are you carrying usually?

Broberg: Well, when we are up there in the front, we uh-got radio men and telephone men, but our radios, they didn't work. They were old time Navy uh-you know-portable radio. You couldn't take up the big ones, they would get you-well, you would have a hard time getting in there anyway. And uh- [brief pause]... we depended mostly on our telephone. But they would sneak in behind and cut the line and you went to fix them and they were waiting for you.

Q: Did that ever happen to you or your section?

Broberg: Yeah. One time I went out alone, I wasn't supposed to. But I wasn't in charge at that time. The next day I was, because sergeant sent me out to fix the line. Well, usually we send three men. One guy to fix the wire and two guards. But he sent me out alone and

that is the day that I just got hit. I didn't get hit that bad, but I was pretty well shook up when one hit about 25 feet in the air above me. I only got one piece of shrapnel, but it kind of shakes you up, see. So I went up there and it started to get too late, I finally found the cut and I fixed it and I started back. On Bougainville, you didn't move after dark. Because somebody is going to shoot you. They snuck through us all the time. You couldn't have a complete front line, because you had those swamps in there. Unless you got by all the swamp and – so they went through those swamps, yeah, I forgot. [Laughs]

[unintelligible conversation]

So anyway, I found a hole and I crawled in for the night and as soon as I got back to the battery or the headquarters the next morning, I was called into the office or-headquarters, and he said, do you want to take over the section? And I said, no, I don't really want to. He said, well, you have to, because we are getting rid of-well, I won't give the sergeant's name that sent me up there. So that is when I took over and I had 'em for three campaigns [unintelligible].

-00:16:47

Q: Now, just for clarification sake, were all these incidents we have been talking about have been on Bougainville campaign?

Broberg: That is Bougainville, yeah.

Q: For the Guam campaign, were you re-equipped with 105 millimeter?

Broberg: No, we still had the pack howitzers. But they were in firing I would say, by 11:00 the first morning. [unintelligible]

Q: Why don't you take us back to um-um W Day, landing day at Guam.

Broberg: Uh-hmm.

Q: What kind of-what happened to you? How did you get ashore?

-00:17:27

Broberg: Well, we went in third wave, which actually was the worst one. Because the Japs didn't know for sure where we were going to land, because, you know we had the other brigade and we had ships on the other side of the island, they were just decoys. They were guarder ships...

Well anyway, we go in and we got in Higgins Boats first, and then you had to get into amphibian tracks, because of the-well- it got too shallow, you know.

Q: Right.

Broberg: So we changed there.

Q: What were you carrying?

Broberg: Hmm?

Q: What were you carrying? A standard uh-load, or were you carrying extra communication equipment?

Broberg: We had almost 100 pounds per man. [Clears throat] Well a DR-4, that is the wire we used, with the reel it was about 80 pounds. So you carried one of them and you have another 50-60 pounds on your back, uh...

Q: So you had this reel of wire on your back...

Broberg: Yeah.

Q: ... was 80 pounds and you were trying to get from a Higgins Boat onto an amtrack.

Broberg: If you got the-you got a [unintelligible] when you lay it. If you got one them, it's pretty easy, but if you just grab a hold of a big drum like that, then the amphibian wouldn't

go all the way in. Because they were getting hit pretty bad, so they dropped us off out in there. So we lost a good share of our wire, because you are going to get rid of something or you are going to drown.

-00:19:06

Q: How far did you have to wade ashore then?

Broberg: Uh-it wasn't really that far, I would say maybe 100 yards, or more-maybe a little more.

Q: Was this amtrack the kind that you had to jump over the side again, into the corral?

Broberg: Yeah, yeah, it was the old one, yeah. So we lost equipment that way.

And Rosenthal, remember, that took the pictures? Remember that man? He was in the same; he got- he landed in the same boat as I did. He got ashore a little bit faster, but of course all he had was his camera and there was a pile of [unintelligible] on shore and he was hiding behind them, [unintelligible]. And I got up to him and I said, you know what you are laying by? He said, "no." I said, you better get out of there, because I think that's mortar shells, and they come in, what we call [unintelligible]. So he got out there then.

Q: Excuse me, I got a little... lost track. That was Joe Rosenthal you were talking to?

Broberg: Hmm?

-00:20:23

Q: That was Joe Rosenthal you were talking to?

Broberg: Yeah, yeah. I didn't-I didn't see him anymore [unintelligible].

Q: I had a chance, by the way, to meet Joe Rosenthal in San Francisco, a few years ago. And I was impressed and I asked him, are you the Joe Rosenthal who took the picture of the flag raising on Iwo Jima, and he looked at me and said, "Son I'm that Joe Rosenthal

anymore, I'm a whole lot older than I was."

Broberg: This one officer that's here with me now, he talked to Rosenthal after the war too. Anyway, when we got in and this officer who is here now, Bill Barnes, he is a [unintelligible] officer. We had to wade a small river and they laid in pretty good and he got hit right by me. He got a chunk taken out of here. So I had almost a complete medical kit with me because-we were never with our own outfit. They didn't give me [laughs] none of that brandy, they didn't give you that. But I had everything – no morphine shots either. But I had the rest of the stuff. So I dressed it for him and the next day he went out to one of the ships and they patched it up for him...

-00:22:02

Q: Where did you establish... Did you then-were your orders to move to a certain point and establish an observation post?

Broberg: Yeah, we went in – we were attached to the 21st Marines and that is who we went in with. The first night we stayed in their CP, where they stopped, that is where we put up our switchboard and stuff.

Q: Ok.

Broberg: And uh-I took the first turn on the switchboard; we were going to have two hour shifts all night. I didn't have to [unintelligible] all night long the guy was sniping at me up there, but he couldn't- just over my head all the time, I couldn't figure it out. So I stayed on all night, as long as he couldn't hit me where I was, I wasn't going to start moving around. They had pretty good night scopes you know? Ah-the next morning we had to lay lines and it had quieted down pretty good the second day. In fact-it was pretty quiet until we had that big one there.

And... what day was it now?

Q: What happened to you the time of that big banzai attack? Were you personally involved?

Broberg: In which?

Q: You referred to that big one...

Broberg: Oh yeah... oh yeah.

Q: The big banzai attack... were you personally involved in that?

Broberg: I sure was. [Laughs].

-00:23:32

Q: What happened to you?

Broberg: Well, I had a dugout just a little ahead of the [unintelligible] and trying to protect them. Woke up- I didn't wake up, because I wasn't sleeping, but I looked around and it was like 4th of July behind us. The Japs were using pyrotechnics, different colors, to try to keep the troops where they were supposed to be. So I came down out of there and we had an officer there. That is the first year we ever had an officer-with our communications. And I told him, we have to get our men out of here before it gets light, because we are on the back side, near – the front lines are up here. But the Japs are behind here. So you are in real bad shape.

Q: You were silhouetted against the wall...

Broberg: Yeah.

Q:... in other words.

Broberg: The first things the Japs did, they picked off, we had two BAR men [unintelligible] take our position there and they picked them off first. But they got them both; they shot 'em in the leg. Uh-then we seen some Jap [unintelligible] it was daylight by then and there was a tank sitting there. They come up late in the evening, there was two of them, and there were a bunch of Japs, there wasn't too many, about 20 of them. They come

through and they get on this tank and they are beating on it. They must not have had any demolition charges. And they passed right by us, but our orders were not to shoot at them, unless they came to us, because they didn't want to give our position away. Because-if you lose you [unintelligible]. So – but we were all laying down, facing this way, because we thought there was more coming and we were about shoulder to shoulder, laying down and the guy next to me, he got it. The bullet went in right in the neck here and blew up and mashed his helmet. And that officer still wouldn't give us permission to pull out of there.

So there was a sergeant by the name of Beck, he had- I'm probably stringing this out too long.

Q: No, you are doing fine... I'd like you to keep going.

-00:25:58

Broberg: Ok... anyway, he had more authority than I did, he was an older guy. So I told him, I said, we gotta get these men off of here. And he said, yeah-you are right. I don't want to lay there and get killed, you know, wouldn't do any good, [unintelligible phrase] communication at that time, because the division FDC was surrounded by Japs and they wouldn't even answer their phone. Of course we didn't have nothing ahead either, to [unintelligible] because they were out of there. [Deep breath] So... there was a dry riverbed, I suppose, or it was a washout and it wasn't too wide, it was really irregular and there was straight sides most places. So we got the-we had these two wounded guys, they were shot in the leg and they couldn't walk. So, there was a gunner sergeant, I don't know where he come from, wasn't our outfit. He was going to take the front and I would take the rear.

And there was about 20-30 of us and we were gonna go down this dry riverbed, to try to get out of there. Well, I was the last one to leave there on that side, I wanted [unintelligible]... I don't know, but they dropped five mortar shells within 20 feet of me. Every one of them. I took a nosedive into there and I didn't even know if I was hit. Anyway, I get down there and I find these two wounded guys, they left them. Oh-everyone had taken off. So I was trying to get them too. I come around the corner and here is a Jap was leaning up against a wall, but he didn't have a weapon, I could see he had a holster, and it was an officer. We were close to him and I didn't want to shoot him, because there were more Japs right up on

top there. Uh-so these two BAR men, they had a short bayonet, each one of them, kind of pulling themselves along, so I told them, give me one of those. And I let one have my rifle. And I said, if that guy goes for his gun, let him have it. So I got close to him and he just stood there, I think he was stunned or something. So I took the short bayonet and I went for his jugular and I got him. And he just grunted a little bit and kinda caved in and blood came out of his nose and his mouth. So we went on a little farther and there was another Jap. I got a shot at him at about 20 feet, but I got him.

-00:28:53

Went a little farther and I could hear them up on top, because they were only about four feet from us and it's about all the higher it was. [Deep breath] So we had to be on our knees most of the time anyway, because your head would be too high and they would pop it off. I'm sitting there, kneeling and I hear these Japs on top there, real close to me, but I'm also watching down and here comes a Jap and he's right on top of me. He's got his bayonet and he's on his knees too. But I got first shot in and I got him right smack in the head. Of course he was so close. But when he went forward, he just about got me with his bayonet, so I was pretty close. There was still a guy up – I could hear him up there and I heard him, their bayonet, I mean, their hand grenades are like a beer can, the ones they were using. And they have a little pipe on the end of them.

Well, they screw- a top off of them and then they have to hit it on something in order to start activating them. I heard him do it. So I said, I'm going to catch that pin- but he kept it, I'll bet about six seconds, he's lucky he didn't get blown. He lobbed it enough so I couldn't quite catch it, but it dropped down right behind me, and as soon as it dropped, it went off. That- that kind of put me out; I backed in the corner because I was waiting for hmm-some more to come...

-00:30:41

Q: So you come out of your stupor -

Broberg: Uh-well, it really didn't bother me that much; I really wasn't even that excited. I don't know why. [Laughs] But anyway, I see on the little ridge there, I hear some guys that are coming up from down below, to rescue. They were on the ridge and I hollered out, they

were throwing grenades down and I had these two wounded guys and me down there, I said, knock it off and shoot them. But I didn't show myself. So they wanted me to give the password. I gave the password and they still wouldn't take it. So they said, show myself, so they could see me. I hated to do that, because of the Japs, but I did stand up.

And then they [unintelligible] and they finished them off with the rifles. That's about the end of it. They finally come down and went to the medical outfit wound... and treated my wounds and stuff and then they hauled me out, down to the beach, which was a hospital kind of deal. And the doctor examined me and about the – the Solace, that is a medical ship, was there. So they loaded me on the boat and took me out, they were already pulling anchor, I was the last one to go aboard Solace. And they took us to the Marshall Islands and dropped us off there, and then a big Navy seaplane came in and picked us up and took us to Hawaii. I had a lot of holes. One corpsman – 300 holes he counted on me, [laughing] hit from head to foot. But nothing, no real big stuff, so that is what really saved me.

Q: I guess that was the end of your active duty? Was that the end of your active duty?

-00:32:54

Broberg: Yeah.

Q: Well, you have come back to Guam and it's 50 years after that time. As you probably know, the National Park Service has a uh-historical park that has preserved the battlefield site and there are exhibits and we had visitors and we try to tell the story of the battle. From your perspective, what did you think are the most important things we can tell people who are coming to visit today about the battle and about World War II?

[Brief Pause]

Broberg: Uh- I don't know. You know, I got out of it before I really seen any natives and we didn't get to talk to them, but about two days later, then they started coming out. But you know, the Japs come too, with seven battalions, through were we were and we only had two uh-companies and they were all shot up. We had made uh-a big advance the day before. The 3rd Marines on our left, they couldn't get through, that was towards Agana and it was

so rough going in there. So we-we went up – we didn't have too much trouble, really going up there. Our flanks were open. We were going to go around and try to get around these Japs and get them out because they couldn't get them from the ocean side. And then, but it didn't work out and we had a lot of casualties, when you are wide open on one side, the Japs didn't usually-usually they would move when we pulled that on them, but they didn't then. So B and C Company of the 21st Marines, they were down to about, 16-17 men a piece. And-and you come through with seven battalions, you don't have much chance. But they did bring up two tanks to help us out. And you know, a tank isn't much good at night. There, well, isn't too much more to say. Although I did see, they didn't hit one of our Navy planes, there was an anti-aircraft gun, oh about 75 yards from where we were, but we couldn't see it. That was in that rough country. It sounded like 40 millimeter going- pop, pop, pop. [Laughs] And this plane went over and it had a little bit of smoke coming out, but he headed right out to sea, he wasn't hurt too bad, I think he probably got back to his ship. And about a half an hour later, there were about a dozen planes that were uh-Hellcats and they opened [unintelligible] he didn't do any more firing.

Though we got burned by brass and stuff [laughter]... [unintelligible] they were shooting right over the top of us.

-00:36:12

Q: Well Mr. Broberg, I want to thank you very much for the time you spent with us today, you gave some pretty vivid descriptions of your accounts of the battle and I think that was really uh-gracious of you to share them with us. Thanks for being here.

Broberg: You're welcome.

-00:36:33

[END OF INTERVIEW]