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Robert Ferris
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Interviewee: Robert Ferris

Military Rank: Captain, Marine Air Group 21

Interviewer: Chuck McManus

Hilton Hotel, Guam

Date: July 23, 1994

--00:00:01 AUDIO DESCRIPTION

Narrator: The frame opens with a closeup on Ferris. He is white, with big bushy eyebrows, and is wearing a white button-up shirt. Behind him, is a palm frond, and tropical flower pattern on the wall.

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Q: Mr. Ferris, I understand that the National Park Service has your permission to make this recording and to retain all literary and property rights deriving from that. Is that correct?

Robert Ferris: That's correct.

Q: For the record, sir, would you please tell us your full name.

Robert Ferris: Uh-my name is Robert-David-Ferris.

Q: How do you spell your last name?

Robert Ferris: It's F-E-R-R-I-S.

Q: What unit were you in during the Guam campaign?

Robert Ferris: I was part of Marine Air Group 21, which was based at uh-Agana. That was a coral airstrip at that time. Uh-I was in squadrons VMR-252 and VMR-353.

Q: What does VMR stand for?

Robert Ferris: That means it's a transport...

Q. [Interrupting] Ok.

Robert Ferris: ... At that time.

Q: V is heavier than air?

Robert Ferris: Right.

Q: M is Marine and R is Transport?

Robert Ferris: Right.

Q: Okay. And what was your job in-in those organizations?

Robert Ferris: Uh-I was a Crew Chief and a Flight Engineer on R-5C's and R-5D's.

Q: R5C's are the Curtiss Commando?

Robert Ferris: Curtiss Commandos and the, ah, these are the Ds are the C-54's.

Q: Okay. [Brief Pause] Commonly known as the Commando and the Skymaster was it?

Robert Ferris: Right. [Nods]

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Q: What's your...place of birth and your date of birth?

Robert Ferris: I was born in Milford [off camera cough], Connecticut, April 5th, 1926. Our chief claim to fame in Milford is that it was founded in 1639, and... [raises eyebrows] we're still there.

Q: A long, long, long time ago. Did you grow up there?

Robert Ferris: Yes. I grew up in Milford, Connecticut, and um-I later moved to Waterbury, Connecticut, and to uh-Stratford, Connecticut.

Q: Oh, you stayed in the same area for a bunch of your young life?

Robert Ferris: Yes, I'm, ah, I guess I'm typical of most of the, uh-Marines that I met on this trip that, by and large we're all from small towns - and we-had never traveled more than 200 miles from home up until the time that we joined the Marine Corps. [smiles]

Q: Where did you spend most of your time in school—which of those towns?

Robert Ferris: I was, I graduated from the University, School in Bridgeport, Connecticut, which is a college preparatory, prep school. Then I-joined the Marine Corps, and uh-went through, uh-Paris Island. And from there I went to uh-Camp Lejeune, North Carolina-and then I had the opportunity to transfer into Marine Aviation. [smacks mouth] And from there I went to uh-Cherry Point, North Carolina, to uh-Bogue Field, North Carolina, for [off camera cough] additional training. And then went to Miramar, California. And then from Miramar, California, we-set sail...not knowing for sure where we were going, but we finally ended up at Guam and the Marianas.

Q: We're going to take a giant leap back and cover some territory associated with that uh-itinerary you just set out.

Robert Ferris: Allright.

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Q: Uh-when did you join the service?

Robert Ferris: Uh-April of 1943.

Q: How old were you?

Robert Ferris: Seventeen.

Q: Anything associated, any remarkable...event associated with your enlistment in terms of personalities that you ran into, how they treated you, how long it was before you got sworn in and left home?

Robert Ferris: I think one of the thi- most significant things that, that ah-the football, ah-hero at that time was Frankie Sinkwich from Notre Dame, and being a football hero we expected, you know, he's really going to tear things up. But unfortunately, Sinkwich had bad knees and had to take a medical discharge and never made it through boot camp.
[Laughing]

Q: Was he-was he in your unit in boot camp?

Robert Ferris: No. He wasn't. He wasn't in my unit.

But um-I think the significant thing was the, ah, the cross section of-young men from all over the country and which, we in turn, became a team type of unit. And if there's anything that I gained during those years was to, ah-remind myself that uh-we are a, ah, melting pot of individuals. But at that time what motivated us- is that the country was in danger and we all wanted to-do our best.

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Q: Do you remember the most significant person in your entire life up to that very moment, your DI?

Robert Ferris: I, um, I remember they were very, very demanding [smiling] and, but at this time [closes eyes]—I do remember. His name is Corporal Schowell.

[Laughter from both]

Fifty years kind of makes it a little different in how sharp your memory is, but I do- I do recall him.

Q: Did he have a swagger stick with a 30 caliber casing on the end of it?

Robert Ferris: Yes, as a matter of fact he did.

Q: And did he use it?

Robert Ferris: No, he didn't. I—one of the real striking things, I thought about it is that, ah obviously they had real strong verbal abuse and, ah-and I und-under-understood that because basically the Marine Corps is interested if you're-going to break and be weak they want to find it out in training not when you get committed to the battlefield. And, um-I, I'm, I took the attitude like, ah, thousands ahead of me, that they went through boot camp and they did all of these things and there's no reason-why I can't do it. And, ah-so I did what was expected of me and I, I never really had any particular problems. But it did seem, the observation, that I made, that the ones, ah, like Sinkwich, and we had a couple others that looked like tackles for the Green Bay Packers, physically couldn't get over all of the obstacles and things that we had to do, where if you were agile and a little lighter weight you could do all those things.

Q: Do you remember-do you remember your DI as a leader symbol or a father symbol?

Or none of those?

Robert Ferris: I think he was both. I-I really think that he was both. Um, he certainly, um, brought in a good platoon. I remember our eh-marksmanship record was 97 percent of us, ah-qualified as sharpshooters with a rifle.

Q: That's excellent. That's a high ratio.

Robert Ferris: It is a high ratio. That—I recently, going through my papers, I found that photograph and you’re, again, you’re reminded of these things as you go through pictures of, ah-things that have taken place in the past.

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Q: How long were you at Paris Island?

Robert Ferris: Yeah I went through Paris Island and, um- Camp Lejeune. I will-I wi-I will relate this to you, which is an interesting story, but at that time we concentrated on hand-to-hand combat because we didn’t have all the sophisticated weapons that we had and we concentrated on bayonet-training and Judo and so forth and uh-I quali-qualified as an expert with a bayonet and by accident I broke the bayonet off running the obstacle course. And this impressed the Drill Instructor that I was able to do that. But it was, it was really a fluke that it broke off.

Q: How did it—just precisely how did it break off?

Robert Ferris: Well we, at that time you had a time limit in which you had to go through all of these various obstacles, and one of obstacles was a dummy attached to a tree. So I went ahead and I thrust at the tree with all my weight and I couldn’t pull it out, so I kept moving. And as I moved around the bayonet broke off. But I went through the rest of the whole obstacle course, doing what I was supposed to do within the time limit. And, ah- at the end of thee-the run, the DI said, “what happened to you?” I said well I hit that tree so fast that it broke off. And-I- if I related this story to him now it might upset him [Laughter from both] but 50 years later I don’t-I don’t think it would.

Q: You didn’t get disciplined, for mistreating your armament, did you?

Robert Ferris: No. I really didn’t, indee...

Q: If you'd done the same thing with your rifle I'm sure that they would've made you sleep on a couple of bolts, I'm sure.

Robert Ferris: [Laughs.] That, that's right. The-the main, the main thing is-is that we, we had these, ah-the battles of, ah, Tarawa and these other things going on which, ah, did develop into close combat, and actually the Marine Corps is interested in how, how good is your aim- and how agile are you when you engage the enemy.

Q: Okay, now this took place at Lejeune or Paris Island?

Robert Ferris: Ah-this took place at Paris Island.

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Q: Okay. Now you moved on to Lejeune. What kind of training did you get there?

Robert Ferris: I went to, ah- communications school, at ah- Camp Lejeune, North Carolina and then, again, from uh-Camp Lejeune then I went on to Cherry Point.

Q: What was your purpose in going to Cherry Point?

Robert Ferris: Um-I- ah- was trained in Marine Aviation and my MOS was 747L.

Q: Which was plane captain?

Robert Ferris: Yeah.

Q: What talents did you have that put you into- a plane captain slot, beside breaking off bayonets in trees?

Robert Ferris: Well, I would say basically I was always interested in, ah-really in aircraft and my-my cousin was already in the Marine Corps and that's what he was. And, um-he

had, ah, returned from Guadalcanal. That was probably, um-a force that made me decide well, I like him. Um-he volunteered, he didn't want to be drafted so he volunteered for the Marine Corps and so you had a lot of people like that that wanted to, ah, make that choice.

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Q: Was he a plane Captain, too?

Robert Ferris: Yes. He was also a gunner.

Q: Uh-huh.

Robert Ferris: At that time you were—Guadalcanal you wore a lot of hats, really, that, ah-you were gunners, plane captains, ah-support personnel, riflemen. Whatever it took. Ah-I think one of the interesting things, um, looking back is that, ah, Bob Galer, who, um-is a friend of mine, we live close to each other, was the first Marine aviator to get the Congressional Medal of Honor, during World War II, and went spend a lot of time conversing together now, and he was that MAG-21 on, um-Pearl Harbor. He was there Pearl Harbor Day and it's-it's really staggering, but in the raid that every one of MAG-21's airplanes were destroyed. And of course, the... they-they fought as riflemen and you look back at it now and it took us six months to get enough aircraft and get back into, ah-action at that time. And that's why most, Marines looking back are always concerned of being ready, because we weren't ready and we had some real tough times back then. And I would say probably in the Marine Corps you always get the feedback of the younger generation talking to the older generation because Bob Galer is 80 years old at this time. I'm 68, and at the same time I have two godsons that are Marines, that are in their early 20's and so we really have three generations that are passing on the lessons that we have learned.

And so, um-I take all of those things that I had learned and the-the Marine Corps had helped me in my um-business life and things that I did after that to realize freedom has a price and we've always been willing to pay it. And I hope we never... move from that position.

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Q: If we can keep the Corps going I don't think we ever will. How long were you at Paris Island?

Robert Ferris: [Clears throat] Let's see. I left- I left Paris Island in, um-September, and then I went to Camp Lejeune.

Q: Okay. And at Camp Lejeune...

Robert Ferris: And then at Camp Lejeune...

Q: What did you do there? What was Camp Lejeune's role in your career?

Robert Ferris: Oh, Camp Lejeune was advanced uh-military, advanced infantry type of training in which we did everything.

Q: And then Cherry Point [Unintelligible -- Cross-talk]—

Robert Ferris: And then Cherry Point, North Carolina.

Q: And then after Cherry Point?

Robert Ferris: I went to Miramar, California.

Q: By train?

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Robert Ferris: Yes. [Laughs] We did go by train.

Q: Troop train?

Robert Ferris: Went by troop train. I think it served well in the Civil War, you know, it had

pot bellied stoves in it [Laughs.]

Q: And you were probably glad to get to southern California. Now at Miramar, did you do more training with the Marine Air Group?

Robert Ferris: Basically I-I thought well, this, California duty would be real great and I had talked to those that had been there and they said, oh-we've been here six months. We've been, and so I thought, well this is really great. And my cousin's wife lived in Santa Ana but actually, and I-we rode by train and I visited-she worked for the Chamber of Commerce, visited with her for that weekend. So we had liberty from Friday until Sunday and then we were restricted to the base and I went aboard ship like three o'clock in the morning out of San Diego. So it-it was a very short week—

Q: So much for your long tour at Miramar.

Robert Ferris: Yes, my long tour at Miramar was-was very rapid.

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Q: Ok, now what ship did you leave on?

Robert Ferris: It was the Admiral uh-CF Hughes which they claim was the former luxury liner Manhattan.

Q: Okay.

Robert Ferris: But there were 5,000 of us on the ship.

Q: All MAG-21?

Robert Ferris: Ah-it was a, combination of all... varied types of Marines, really. We realized, we didn't know where we were-we had no idea where we were going. Ah- we did stop in, ah-the harbor in Hawaii. We were there for, for three days and, um-did a lot of

speculation but we never really knew where we were going. And, ah, so we finally, um-took about a 14-day zigzag trip across the Pacific and then Guam is where we finally ended up.

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Q: When you left the West Coast did you go alone or were you in a convoy?

Robert Ferris: We,-we were in, we were in a convoy when we left the West Coast.

Q: Did you recognize- you remember whether there were any aircraft carriers in the convoy?

Robert Ferris: No. I-I really... I really don't recall that.

Q: Ok. How were the conditions aboard ship? You said it was a converted luxury liner.

Robert Ferris: Well, eh... with 5,000 troops on a ship, um- I happened to be C-deck forward, which is as far forward as you can get, as far as down as you can get. And, ah-our main problem was to get a breath of fresh air and so we-and obviously you can't all be on the top deck at the same time, but it was difficult to, ah-get a breath of fresh air because at that time we didn't have all the air conditioning and the comforts that we have on a ship at this time. But, um-we were all very young and very flexible. And again, we were-at that time we were all unified and we wanted to get the war over in a hurry, and we felt that we were a factor in doing that. I mean that-those were the feelings and the emotions.

Q: So you had high morale?

Robert Ferris: We did have high morale. We did have high morale.

Q: Now the three days you spent in the harbor at Honolulu they didn't allow you off the ship?

Robert Ferris: No. No.

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Q: You said 16 days to Guam? Zigzag course?

Robert Ferris: Four-well, it was fourteen.

Q: Fourteen days into Guam, a zigzag course. Didn't stop anywhere?

Robert Ferris: No. Well we were, you know, we were all trying to speculate on where we were going and, um- so I, again, I'm reflecting back over 50 years and so if you think of the tremendous logistics that had to be brought about, then you could understand why you had all of these various ships coming from other parts of the Pacific. And you had to schedule the arrival time so that you could accommodate them. As an interesting observation, it happened to be on my plane here, there were two Navy fellows, which today's vernacular would be Seals, but these were underwater demolition guys. And so, you know, they told me, um-that that was their job to do away with the underwater obstacles, blow 'em up. And I said, okay, well, after you blew them up what'd you do? They said, we left and went back aboard ship and went away, and so these fellows never really did get on land. This was their first visit. And I-I wanted to spend some more time with them since I go there but I-I-I haven't seen them since then.

[Laughter from both]

But, I thought that was a little interesting observation that here these, these fellows did all these things and, ah, they just wanted to let me know that, you know, they had done that before the Marines arrived.

Q: I understand there was a sign down on the Asan Beach that said: Welcome Marines, courtesy of the UDT's. [Laughter]

Robert Ferris: Probably—probably so, and these fellows were two of them. And, um, I will share a little humor with you and I, I told these two fellows, ah, since they were sitting

across the aisle, I told them while I was going back to the men's room and so forth and if I wasn't back in 20 minutes to send out a search team [laughter from both.]

Q: You had to establish a good friendship with them.

Robert Ferris: Yes. I, they were really great fellows. And, ah-but they probably stayed at a different hotel and then there were so many of us, so, for the other events it was hard to get to see all of them.

Q: That's too bad. And when did you arrive on Guam?

Robert Ferris: I arrived in November of 1944.

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Q: November of 1944. Okay. Was the island pretty much secure by that time?

Robert Ferris: Eh-the island at that time was pretty much secure. Agana, of course, was devastated and, um-the airstrip that, ah-we were on was a coral, airstrip where, um-well kind of the airport is now. And, ah...I figured out from pictures that I had taken then versus what I took when I came back for the 40th anniversary of the end of World War II, it seemed about like the middle airstrip and our tent area was about where the air terminal is at the present time.

Q: [Clears throat] How many runways back then? Just one?

Robert Ferris: Just one.

Q: How long, do you remember?

Robert Ferris: Ah, it was about, ah-2800 feet long as I remember at that time.

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Q: Now as a Marine Air Group, what equipment did your group have assigned to it?

Robert Ferris: Well in the very beginning we had um-TVM's, we had Corsairs, we had C46's and C54's. But then there was a turning point in the air war in which there were no more air assaults against Guam and so then we concentrated on the, ah-transport capacity to support the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Marine Divisions because, by that time, the B29 air assaults were taken directly to Japan. But when, um-MAG-21 was at Orote before we moved to Agana it was all Corsairs so the role was changing insofar as Marine Air was concerned.

Q: You weren't at Orote at all?

Robert Ferris: No.

Q: Okay. They were all established at Agana when you got there?

Robert Ferris: Right.

Q: As a plane captain did you fly any of the sorties?

Robert Ferris: Yes. We flew, ah- air support for, um-the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Marine Divisions. We had, ah-squadrons on Saipan and on Tinian.

Q: MAG-21's?

Robert Ferris: MAG-21. And um- I think the, the most significant thing, again, just like now, the lines between the, the 20th Air Force at Harmon Field and we were all up on the, ah-plateau at Agana there, our chief method of, ah-operation was survival, so we all worked together in providing, ah-people, along with the Seabees, we did have, A, B, C, D which is the Advanced Base Construction Depot, and so with-with the Air Force, the Marines, and the Seabees we were able to improve our living conditions.

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And um... it's interesting. I ask this question about water. Water was in very short supply and we used to catch it, rainwater, in 55-gallon drums to, ah, have drinking water, but then if we needed to take a bath we'd get some salt water, so we'd go down to Tumon Bay and um-again, uh-we worked with the Seabees, improved our way of life with providing food, because generally our food was rationed and so forth. And, ah-so it was the teamwork of working together of all branches that, ah-enabled us to do the things that we did. And so again we were sitting here on Guam after Iwo Jima and Okinawa considering what's the next step, what we were going to do, and that was the invasion of Japan. And so with the B29 activity, ah-taking the brunt of the attack of the enemy, then we were concerned with our support activities for the, um-3rd, 4th, and 5th Marine Divisions. And, um-it was kind of a sigh of relief when finally the atom bomb was dropped because we... were constantly brainstorming, you know, how far are we going to have to uh-carry this? And we were prepared to, to invade Japan and I think that we did have quite a decision maker... when Roosevelt died and President Truman took over that, ah-he had to make some decisions and he had to make them rather rapidly and he made the evaluation of, you know, how many casualties would we take if we invaded Japan and how long would the war last?

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Well it was, at that time, it was estimated we'd take a million casualties and the war would last another year. And then he had asked his advisors how many Japanese would we lose if we dropped the atom bomb? And at that time the estimate was around 50 or 60 thousand. So he made the deci—he made the decision and, ah-so we all had a sigh of relief that, ah-that did happen, but it's obvious that even after the first bomb was dropped they weren't ready to quit. So we dropped a second one and, ah-finally they decided that was it.

Q: Now we're going to take a giant leap back in time here because you've approached it and then eased away from it twice.

Robert Ferris: Okay.

Q: I'd like to hear some personal experiences that you had in improving your quality of life. You said rainwater in 55-gallon drums and when you came down to take a bath it was in

salt water here at Tumon Bay. How, I'm sure there are some other exploits where you liberated some sort of product that made things more comfortable for you, or traded or swapped or exchanged. Can you think of any of those?

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Robert Ferris: Oh yes. There-there are really hundreds of them but I think one of the unique—I've always said that Seabees are better businessmen than Marines.

Q: Good choice.

Robert Ferris: And they are. They're very skilled. And so they were [coughs] building our runways and so forth and so naturally we would have the tires would blow out and I would give the Seabees the inner tubes that were shot and they would cut them into 2-inch strips and they would build bed frames out of 2 by 4's, and they would stretch the rubber inner tubes across the 2 by 4's and then weave them across and they would sell them back to us as beds for \$6.00. Now that's good business. [Laughs.] And it was much more comfortable than a cot. And so those were the types of things ah-we had adequate transportation in MAG-21 and so forth and so, um-with our friends in the 20th Air Force and the Seabees we were able to get, uh- fresh eggs and butter, and bacon and things of that nature. We, in turn, would give them the parachute, ah-silk and so forth and they would decorate their tents and so forth. And so it was kind of a barter/cooperation type of thing to, ah-to survive. Money was rather useless at that particular time and, ah-American ingenuity, whatever, is what enabled us to survive in difficult times.

And I-that's the thing that really strikes me the most is, ah-the tremendous development that has taken place since then. And I have, ah-often wondered, you know, where all of these squadron members that we had here and the one that I developed the most relationship with was with my Commanding Officer who, um-I didn't see him again, ah-since the end of World War II is Colonel Sam Moore. And, ah-I had an opportunity to visit with him several times, um-after that initial meeting. And as we met the first time we reminisced about the various things that we did, and Colonel Moore had a real excellent philosophy of life. And he said that, ah-the reason that we won World War II was the fact

that every private, every corporal, every sergeant, every man did his individual job at the right time and we won.

And he said we all couldn't be a Nimitz. We all couldn't be a MacArthur and ah, we all couldn't be a General Vandergrift. But we did have superb leadership and we were all unified of one mind. And then we were all of the same mind, too, that all the real heroes are the ones that are still here.

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Q: You got here three months after the invasion.

Robert Ferris: Uh-huh.

Q: At the time the island wasn't considered to be absolutely secure. In some places, as a matter of fact, people were forbidden to go as a result.

Robert Ferris: That's right.

Q: Did you have any intimate personal contact with any of the stragglers?

Robert Ferris: No, not really. I am aware of the fact that obviously, um-we um-had guards on every airplane and every revetment and we knew the Japanese came out at night and so forth and foraged around but, um-we never personally came in contact with them. But we always thought that-they might come out with a grenade or something and throw it into an airplane. So, ah-as far as MAG-21 is concerned, we had a guard in the revetment every ev-every evening for them. I do recall, even after the war was over on up through Christmas there were like 24 servicemen were, were killed between the end of the war and Christmas. And so we knew they were around but we never personally came in contact with them. And, but, again I-I apply the same thing in civilian life with social conditions as we find them now. If people think you're a pushover they're going to take advantage of you in that situation.

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Q: What did you do for recreation while you were here on Guam?

Robert Ferris: Pretty much our rec-recreation was softball, volleyball, and went swimming in Tumon Bay. And of course, there was absolutely nothing in the way of buildings other there were bunkers along Tumon Bay, but we always remember the water was really crystal clear. We were all very careful not to go off the reef because the coral can be rather rough. I do-I will share this with you which I thought was interesting in that naturally sunburn was always a real problem. And, um, we had kind of an unofficial deal. If you got sunburned bad enough where you weren't fit for duty it was a court martial offense. Whether they'd actually do that or not I don't know, but uh-one thing I always learned in the Marine Corps, even from early training that, ah, you- you stay healthy and in good condition. That a sick Marine is useless. You can't do anything with him. And I think that's true today, that you need a healthy, strong group of Armed Forces and-and it's our strength that gives us our freedom. And I think the events of these days, you're just reminded of the price we paid.

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Q: Did you have any contact with the local population here, or were you restricted from that?

Robert Ferris: Well, I did visit with, ah-Seus [Phonetic] Castro and his family, and the Perez family. I think that I-at the 40th anniversary of the end of World-when I was here, that it was a real, ah-exciting, warm time. I'll probably see him again later on this afternoon, but ah-the kindness of the, ah-Chamorro people is overwhelming. We've always-I made the comment, you know, there's some sort of a love affair going on between Chamorro's and Marines. [Laughs.]

Q: [Laughs.] Did you meet them back in 1944 when you were here?

Robert Ferris: No, I didn't. I did not have an opportunity to meet them.

Q: Okay. Or anyone else in the, ah-local population while you were in the Marine Corps here?

Robert Ferris: No. We were [clears throat], we were more or less busy all of the, all of the time getting ready for the next operation and, of course, obviously we had, you know, thousands of Marines coming back from Iwo Jima and Okinawa that, ah-had been wounded and needed care for, and so we were kind of concentrating on that. We-we really didn't have that much time to mingle with the local, ah-population.

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Q: Did you get off island? As plane captain, did you get up to Saipan, Tinian, and [Unintelligible Cross-talk]?

Robert Ferris: Oh-yes. We [Unintelligible Cross-talk]—Saipan, Tinian, to the Philippines, and, ah-again, it was helpful to get to know the local population and the circumstances of we had to contend with and I-I look at, obviously, this was the headquarters of CINCPAC, which was Admiral Nimitz, it was the headquarters of the 4th Marine Air Wing. It was the headquarters of the 20th Air Force. And again, it was the melding of all of these various specialties that the various forces had to offer and we had a unified plan, which was to defeat Japan. That's what all of our efforts were concentrated on. And then, in reviewing the things of, ah, D-Day was the same thing. That everybody was concerned with defeating Hitler because really you had two despots getting control of people. I think, you know, even, ah, as Marines, um-we weren't at war with the Japanese people but we were at war with the military clique that had gained control of them. And ah-we have that same problem today really that we do have these despots and so forth.

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But I think, you know, Guam has progressed, ah-to a real fine, ah, democratic sort of government and I-one of the interesting things that the Ben Blaz, you know, became a Marine and he was one of our commencement speakers at the Marine Military Academy which I concentrate on as education. And um-I talked to him after his commencement exercises and so then he mentioned that he was a slave laborer also along with Seus

[Phonetic] Castro when they were building our airstrip for the Japanese, before we took it away from them. And, ah, again, he said I'm a product of the, the American system. That, ah, I took advantage of the opportunities that were presented to me, and he certainly is a marvelous example of, ah-the Chamorro's that are carrying on for today. And, um-and as I look around to everything that I see here now, uh-this will be a beacon in the Pacific. And, ah, so I consider myself fortunate to, ah-to be here after 50 years. I didn't think I'd make it after 40, but I did.[Laughs] And now it's at 50. But the future lies with the, with the young people and I'm impressed with the young people as we find them today and the ceremonies aboard the Belleau Wood was, ah, very-very inspiring. And if there's any legacy, I would say that, ah-my generation wants to leave, is that um-we appreciate what freedom has brought us. This is the greatest country on earth and as long as we adhere to what our forefathers had in mind, we'll always be a strong nation.

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Q: We're going to-we've talked about a lot of the more pleasant things associated with your occupation time here on Guam. But during our oral histories there have been some unpleasant events that have been suggested might have happened.

Robert Ferris: Uh-huh.

Q: Are you aware of-have you heard of any atrocities that may have been committed by Americans against Japanese after the surrender of Guam?

Robert Ferris: I personally am not aware of any, any atrocities that were per-perpetrated against them. I would say, from things that I personally know about, I will say this. That obviously we didn't consider taking Rota worth the manpower to take Rota, so when we got Rota to surrender by dropping leaflets and so forth and the remaining Japanese were brought from Rota to Guam, I was ah-astounded how well we treated the Japanese because they were in a barbed wire compound but they lived in the same tents that we lived in. They ate the same food that we ate and we provided medical attention to them. So my personal experiences, I thought well here is the enemy in which we treated them pretty much as equals. Where I am very well aware of how they treated our prisoners of war. And

that's difficult to take. But we did, to my personal observation, to those who we brought back from Rota, that they were extended every courtesy that we could. Some of us felt, you know, they're living better than we were, but-but that was an example of how democracy works, where they have a different culture than we have. We put a very high price on life and they apparently did not.

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Q: Did MAG-21 have a part in evacuating Rota?

Robert Ferris: Yes. We supplied-Rota, we set up a 12-man military government and every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday we flew in the food and the mail and so forth. And so we still had the military government on Rota when I left. And-and again, we found the people of Rota to be, um-just like the Chamorro's, just a very loving, kind, people and so forth, and the Japanese, again, because of their Bushito background and so forth just treat people differently than what we did.

Q: Did you spend any time on Rota in the process of moving back and forth?

Robert Ferris: Just the weekly flying in and out of Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

Q: And you didn't get to leave the airplane or the airport?

Robert Ferris: No.

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Q: I'm just curious if you might have seen what Rota was like back then. Because after all, it was bypassed.

Robert Ferris: Well, mainly we used it for target practice. Really that, ah-if a plane was coming back, couldn't dispose of his bombs or whatever, we dropped it on, ah, on Rota. And, ah-so the runway was, you know, kind of filled with all kinds of bomb holes and so forth. But, ah-at any rate that, that was our supply route. And, um-I think that we set a good

example for democracy because this was very-very close to the end of the war and this was the enemy and we brought them to Guam. But, ah-again, they were housed just the way we were. They ate the same food, and we provided medical attention to us, and in inquiring around, really-the, the Japanese weren't physically, they weren't that bad off. They didn't have a lot of worms and I can understand that obviously, even here, you know, we were fighting Dengue fever and malaria and all of the other tropical things that you have to contend with. But by and large they were in fairly good physical condition.

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Q: You said you came back for the 40th anniversary and you met Captain John Butterfield up at the uh-Naval Air Station and have remained in contact with him every since?

Robert Ferris: Yes, we've been real good friends. I met John [clears throat] for the 40th anniversary of the end of World War II and we had ceremonies at NAS, Agana. I, um-didn't think I'd ever see him again and he eventually became Chief of Staff of Naval Air Forces in the Pacific, and I met him again in Dallas. And he was getting close to his retirement and Dallas was one of his places he was considering retiring and like-and I told him Dallas is a pretty good place to retire. And I talked to him several times on the telephone. He became the-Executive Director of the President's Council on Physical Fitness under President Bush and now he has moved from the Virginia area to Florida and he's working for a shipping company in Florida now. But I think John Butterfield, again, is a man that is an example of, ah-our top military people. He's a top humanitarian and he's a top American. And so as long as we have the John Butterfield's around this will be a better world.

Q: How about yourself? What did you do-when did you get out of the Corps?

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Robert Ferris: I got out of the Marine Corps in um, June of 1946. I served for four years in the Reserves at the Naval Air Station in Dallas, Texas and that, um-I became an industrial engineer and I worked for Vought Aircraft, which was the developer of the Corsair airplane. And of course, we subsequently developed the-uh-the Crusader aircraft. I was involved with the Regulus 1 and Regulus 2 missiles which were light years ahead of time. They were

recoverable missiles and, um-but I think, um-my most significant contribution was in the Saudi war we had what was known as the HARM Missile, and the Paveway missile and ATACM's. The HARM was the first missile fired in the Saudi war and I supplied with the Seeker Housing that was the forward part of the missile. The Paveway was a laser weapon that in the, um-movies where you saw the bomb going down the center of the Air Force headquarters, well that was Paveway. And then, of course, ATACM's was an anti-armament weapon used against tanks and, obviously these were classified programs but um-after all this stuff was on television and they were broadcasting and I thought well, you can't keep it a big secret. And so I, all my neighbors are remarking how all these weapons are working. And I said, well I supplied all these things. And they said, well, we often wondered what you did.

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But you never said. Well. [Chuckles.] But the thing is that all of these high-tech weapons we started on them in 1979, 1980, through those years. We went into production on them in the mid-80's and then we fired them in the 90's. So you can't produce a real high-tech performance weapon overnight. You have to constantly develop your R&D efforts because man for man, ah-we're never a match for the rest of the world but we can lead them in technological developments and so forth and so as long as we downsize our military, if we keep our R&D efforts up we will be prepared for these challenges. The concern I see is with second and third world countries are getting access to nuclear technology and things of that nature. That's-that's a concern of mine. But, um-we are working on the next generation of, ah-smart weapons, as the saying goes. Ah-I, in March I was able to go back to Camp Lejeune and participate in an amphibious exercise and do everything I did 50 years ago. And so I-I look at it-there was a little discussion about, ah, the new Corps and the old Corps and General Keyes and General Neal were involved in the Saudi war and I-they asked me what I thought. And I said, well, I've listened to every word that you've said, and I said, I don't see any difference between the new Corps and the old Corps except you have very sophisticated weapons that we did not have. You have assault boats that are far faster than what we had but the techniques and the morale of assault from the sea, ah-those are still operational deals and you were just the epitome of applying all of these principles to a very high degree and, ah-I'm just amazed at how well you executed it.

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Q: We're reaching the end of our time allotted for the interview. I understand that you took part in the opening of the Overlook up on Nimitz Hill. I understand you distinguished yourself with certain acts of aerobatics, if you will. I wonder if you'd be kind enough to tell us about those?

Robert Ferris: Well, ah, I-I wasn't involved in those specific ah...

Q: You were there.

Robert Ferris: I was there, yes. I was there. And, ah-but I, I'm, I'm just trying to overwhelmed...

Q: Didn't you and the Admiral have a-a stepping incident that attracted attention to your, your condition?

Robert Ferris: [Laughs.] Yes. Well, it was a-ah, General Churchill who is 90 years old, is on our board at the Marine Military Academy and so they wanted to take our picture together and General Churchill gracefully stepped over the chain and, ah, so as I got ready to step over I tripped over the chain and kind of took a nosedive. And so I, everybody said, are you hurt? And I said, of course I'm not hurt.

Q: Uh-huh.

Robert Ferris: I'm dusting myself off a little bit and the only thing, I guess I was embarrassed that here's this graceful man of 90 years old is showing me how you do all these things. But I-I would say General Churchill, again, at 90 years old is the epitome of a distinguished gentleman, ah-a distinguished businessman, and a distinguished educator, and we're privileged to have a man of his caliber at 90 years old still on our board at the Marine Military Academy.

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Q: That just about wraps it up. Thank you very much, Mr. Ferris, for taking the time to sit with us and review some of the things that you took part in while you were here on Guam and in World War II. I look forward to seeing you for the 75th reunion.

Robert Ferris: That would be a—

Q: Thank you.

Robert Ferris: [Laughing]—an accomplishment, it certainly would.

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[END OF INTERVIEW]