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Alvin M. Josephy Jr
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Interviewee: Alvin M. Josephy Jr.
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Interviewer: Rose Manibusen, National Parks Service Guam
Date: March 11, 1986

Josephy: My name is Alvin M. Josephy Jr. I live in Greenwich, Connecticut and also in Joseph, Oregon and this is the first time I've been back to Guam since I left here in early 1945 to go to the Iwo Jima with the Third Marine Division. So it's about 41 years.

I came here with the Third Marine Division in July 1944 to retake the island from the Japanese. I was attached at the time to the Third Weapons Company of the Third Marines of the Third Marine Division. And we came up from Guadalcanal after the Bougainville Campaign in the Solomon Islands. We had maneuvers in the Marshall Islands. We originally were held in reserve to see whether we were needed at Saipan and we weren't needed at Saipan, we invaded here on July 21st in 1944. We had three regiments abreast, the Third Marines on the left flank, on the Asan Beach Head.

Q: Can we stop. [Loud music]

Josephy: Well, on the Asan Beach Head we landed three regiments abreast, the Third on the left coming in there at Adelup Point, the 21st Marines in the center and then Ninth Marines over on the right near Asan Point. Now, there was another invasion taking place simultaneously on another landing, over on the Agat Beach Head carried out by the First Marine Provisional Brigade of two Marine regiments, 22nd Marines and the Fourth Marines, assisted by the 77th Army Division. We didn't know much about that or what was going on until sometime later when we linked up with them.

However, I was a Combat Correspondent. I'd gone through boot camp at Parris Island and because I had been in journalism before World War II, I had been a newspaper man with the New York Herald Tribune and other newspaper, and also had gone on to become a Director of News and Special Events for one of the radio networks, Mutual Network in New York, I had some radio experience. So when I came out—when I finished boot camp at Parris Island I was

requisitioned by the Public Relations Department of the Marine Corps and Marine Corps Headquarters in Washington to join the Combat Correspondent Corps, which seemed to me to be, all through the war, to have no more than about 200 people in it, 200 Marines. We were brought up to Marine Corps Headquarters in Washington stationed at the Navy Yard, given a short tour of duty there learning what was needed in the way of writing stories about combat and about the Marines in certain outfits, and I am—later on a few others were also given radio recording equipment.

It was a terrible nuisance because first of all I had a—we were Marines, we had to fight, too, so we carried weapons, but we had to carry a very light-weight Hermes portable typewriter that was issued by the Marine Headquarters and paper and carbon paper and all that to write stories. And then in addition, those of us who were going to do radio broadcasts were given a kind of a tape recording machine, a big heavy thing, it's no longer made. It was a kind of an experimental machine made by Armour Research. It had an endless spool of tape in it that went around under a fixed head in which there was a needle and the needle just scratched these parallel grooves, the needle couldn't shake loose in combat. Then we had some hand microphones and wire attached to the machine and we had to talk all this stuff overseas and hang onto it and make recordings.

Now that happened—that was a rather unusual and very unique operation because it started because the Library of Congress in Washington had decided very early in the war that they would like to get recordings of our serviceman singing the songs of this war. And the story is they went first to the Army and the Navy and said, "If we give some of your people some tape recorders to take overseas will they make recordings of the men singing war songs and send them back to the Library of Congress for our archives?" The Army and Navy said, "No, sir, we're too busy fighting a war, forget it."

So then, the Library of Congress people went to the Marine Corps and offered the same deal and there was a Public Relations head of the Marine Corps named General Denig and he was a foxy little guy. He said, "Why, sure, we'll be glad to do that. Just give us a few of these tape recorders." And then when he assigned them to us he'd say, "Ah, forget this business of getting records of men singing. You get me good records of combat, men shooting and so forth

and so on, a good history of what's going on out there so that we can offer it to the networks and get them played on the networks," and that's exactly what happened.

The first machines went out with a few of the people who were down in the Solomon Islands and then I took one over to Guadalcanal and brought it up to Guam. Well, to come up to Guam with all this gear, they assigned me to the Third Weapons Company of the Third Marine Regiment so that I could put all this recording equipment, this heavy stuff, it was not only the recording machine but a 12-volt storage battery to run it and a heavy converter to convert that storage battery over to the proper power, and it was all put in the well of a halftrack in the Weapons Company and a CB was assigned to literally to crouch in that well of the halftrack and run this thing. And I was—had my 40 feet of wire and a hand microphone wrapped in a condom to keep the saltwater from hurting it. And the idea was that I was to try to record a ship to shore landing describing it as we made it.

So I made some records going up on ship from the Guadalcanal of the man and made one the night before in the hole of the transport with the men of the Weapons Company, a lot of Third Regiment men. They were singing "Bless Them All, I remember, Bless Them All," you know, the long and the short and the tall." Got a good record of that, which was later played on the networks back home. And then beginning around 6:00 in the morning, or maybe even earlier, as we got ready in our hole to get out, and we were standing on Guam at that point ready to make the invasion, I started to talk into the hand microphone and described the whole operation, as we swung up out of the hole of the transport and up over the side as this halftrack went down into a little LCVP and then men came down on the cargo nets and I went down the same way. And we got in the landing boat, went around in circles, and from one line to the next and there I am talking, talking, talking the whole way.

Finally, we made our way in. We, as I recall, were the first wave to have to wade ashore. The first three waves of the Third were carried across in amphibious tractors. They just kept right on going. They came out of the LSTs I guess and when they got to the reef, they just kept going right up to the beach. They were protected to a great extent by naval gunfire that pinned down the Japanese while they went across the reef. But we were right—we kind of saw them go past us while we were standing off the reef and then we followed them. But

when we got to the lip of the reef, our ramps went down and we had to get out. The halftrack rolled out, we got out and started to wade across the reef.

Well, at the lip of the reef we had to get out and wade and it was about—I estimate about half a mile wide—half a mile of wading from the lip of the reef to the beach, and 26 out of 32 people who got out of our boat were hit crossing the reef and for some reason I just kept talking describing everything. And after a while, mortar shells began to land among us and I could see these orange, little orange dots coming out at us from that left point, on our left, from the hills. But for some strange reason none of it seemed real and I think it was just that I was so wrapped up in just talking in a mic.

But by the time we get up on the beach, or half in the water and half on the beach, it was pretty bad. There were a lot of wounded and dead people around and we knew that the mortar—that the halftrack was drawing mortar fire. So we were ordered, somebody hollered, to get away from the halftrack and I ended that recording very abruptly. Well, the recording ran eventually for about an hour-and-a-half in total and I shot it out of the machine inside the well of the halftrack. I took everything out of that, buried it in the sand for a while, and eventually got it back out to Division Headquarters and it went back to the United States. It was played on all four American networks.

That particular halftrack that afternoon the crew managed to get it up on the road and point it toward Agana and it hit a 500-pound aerial bomb that was either being used as a landmine by the Japanese or just been dropped there and the halftrack just blew up and killed everybody with it. So that was DDay that and a few other things.

But I went on then recording and a combination of doing my job with the outfit that I was with and typing stories, writing stories and getting them off to the command ship, and they were filed. They were given to newspapermen out there or sent directly to Pearl Harbor to be released to AP, the wire services, and the various national newspapers. The recordings we just kept making all through the battle. I lay in a foxhole one night on Tawny Ridge, again with a CB who was working the thing. We had it all dug in very deep in the foxhole and that was the night the Japanese launched a banzai attack and went right over us and I kept just

kind of whispering into this hand mic what was going on.

Q: What was going on.

Josephy: Yeah. And then we took it out on ambushes and other places. I remember I was a firefight at Finegayan and described it when a man named Witek got the Congressional Medal of Honor and farther north in the ambushes of the Japanese. There were lighter moments, too. The Japanese—one morning we found a Japanese hiding in our Lyster bag and made a record of that. And a lot of what we called "Joe Blow" interviews, which meant individual members of companies that got Purple Hearts or a Bronze Star and made little interviews with them and how he got it. It would go back to his hometown radio station and his family and friends were delighted to hear them. That was pretty much all we did here. We were here until January when we went to Iwo Jima and it was just a repeat.

Q: Did you get to know any CHamoru/Chamorros here personally?

Josephy: Yes, I did. First, I didn't know anything about the Chamorros but I was with a unit, I can't remember the details, but I remember being with some people, some Marines, and coming on the first big concentration camp where many, many Chamorros had been herded by the Japanese and they were living in a deplorable way. They had had practically no food, no medicines, no doctor. A lot of them were sick and had sores and everything else. I met a lot of them there and I particularly became friends with some of the younger men who decided to join the Marines, the scouts, and joined our unit and went out in the boondocks out in the jungle. They seemed to know how to find Japanese better than we did, find the Japanese soldiers. I had hoped to meet some of them when I came back this time.

The one I knew best was Felix Wessick or Westick (ph), who died, I understand, two years ago. But I remember his sister was very badly treated by the Japanese and she died about two or three days after she was liberated, one of his sisters anyway. Then I did meet several of the veterans, Frank Cruz and what was it Ben Borihaya (ph) and a number of others.

The Chamorros had a lot of songs that they used to sing. One in particular "Sam, Sam dear

Uncle Sam, would you please come back to Guam," and we recorded that. That was played over the networks back in the United States. There was great interest in the United States then in the battle taking place here in Guam. I think liberating what had once been American territory here, I think this was the first American possession that was retaken during the war, retaken from the Japanese. Every battle previous to that it had belonged to somebody else. But as I recall, this is the first piece of American country, people loyal to the United States that had been taken back.

We did some other recording, too. We tried to get some Japanese to surrender. Up to then, very few Japanese had ever surrendered in any battle and only a few came in during the fighting and immediately after the fighting here. Quite a number of those who did surrender turned out to be Korean labor troops who were here working for the Japanese. But one or two of the Japanese who did surrender, agreed to try to help us lure others to come in. This was after the battle and many Japanese stragglers were still on the island hiding in caves around the shoreline and up in the jungle and they were starving and sick. Many of them had dysentery and other sicknesses. And those who agreed to try to talk them in went on an LCI, a landing craft, with us and we circled the island and these fellows yelled out through kind of loudspeakers, "Come on in, the Americans will treat you well and you'll get food."

Q: And that was recorded, too?

Josephy: Recorded some of that, too, yeah. Yeah. Not too many gave up but a few did. There was great distrust. And also, of course, there was a feeling that we were—that it was an honor to die for the Emperor, which kept people from surrendering.

Q: How do you feel about the Japanese today?

Josephy: Well, I have no—certainly have no bitterness about them. I have a great admiration for the Japanese on many scores today. I think they're a very likeable people and very—the young Japanese it's hard for me to relate them to the Japanese that we fought. The Japanese that we fought always seemed to be very tough, big people. Also, they were so fanatic, but there was something—their culture was so alien to ours, so different. Today, even though it's

sometimes hard for Americans to strike up a friendship and just fold with the young Japanese, they are certainly very nice, kindly people. They don't seem to—they don't have any chips on their shoulders and we don't have any on ours. So much time has gone by, two, three generations, and those who were so militaristic years ago are no longer around.

Q: How did World War II affect you?

Josephy: Affect me? Well, World War II it almost gave me two lives. I was old enough so I had really a life going before World War II. I had a family, young family, and a career and it all ended with World War II. And after World War II, I started it all over again, a whole new family, new career, a new part of the United States.

Q: What do you do now and what did you do?

Josephy: Well, before the war, I had been in the newspaper business and radio in New York City. After the war, I wrote for the moving pictures in Hollywood for about five or six years. My marriage, like that of many others, did not successfully survive the war. It was no great disaster because my ex-wife and myself remain friendly. We had a daughter and raised her but it just seemed like there was a big cutoff point. When I went back home it was a totally different world and I just started over. It's almost like looking back like two different worlds, two different lives.

Q: Well, the war in the Pacific National Park today was established to commemorate all people and all nations who participated in World War II. What would you like to see developed there at the Park?

Josephy: At the park? Well, I have very strong feelings about what I've seen so far and it may be that I don't understand the goals of the Park, but I'm very unhappy with what I've seen. I've been in Guam, in Saipan, this is my first visit back here and I have great admiration for what the Japanese have done on both islands to remind their own people, if not us, of their sacrifices and their bravery and their losses and also their desire not to have war again.

I found that I would really register a very big disappointment with my own country about how the war here in the Pacific is very badly interpreted or not interpreted at all for the American people, for what the Marines and others did here. It could be that we don't have the money, that we don't have the funding. I don't blame the Parks Service itself, or all by itself, I don't blame anybody. But I think sometime, someday there is going to have to be a big concerted effort I think with maybe the Marine Corps itself and the Divisions that fought out there, their associations, Congress, National Parks Service, Veterans organizations, others, have got to find the means, maybe step-by-step and one-by-one to really mark the battlefields here where Americans were and tell in full what happened and how it happened and not just put up a few little markers, this was where the headquarters of so-and-so and no explanation of anything.

It almost seems that on Guam the military, the United States Military, does not want American citizens to know what happened here in World War II. Now I know that's not true but they're so preoccupied with the continuing use of this island as a military base, and looking always to the future, that they don't realize how badly Guam is able to convey a story of what happened in the past. Saipan is almost entirely a Japanese memorial from one end of it to the other. There are a few American markers and yet they don't say anything, they don't explain anything. People who come here like us we've seen everything backwards and out of order. The first thing we saw was the last stand of the Japanese, General Obata, up in a grotto up there. No real understanding of what that was all about, except it looks like some kind of a peace memorial run by I don't know whether he's a Shinto or Buddhist Priest. Is he a Buddhist? See, there's no explanation for Americans. The Japanese know that but that was almost the last thing that happened.

What we need here is what the Parks Service has done in the civil war battlefields of the East, what they've done with the Indian war battles of the West where people can come here, Americans, can come and see what happened step-by-step. They can fight these battles over themselves and take pride in what went on here. But right now I think it is an absolute scandal and a lot goes—I mean there are a lot of ramifications to this.

Very few Americans come over here. It's very expensive for Americans to come to these islands. But those who do come over have—to see anything about the war have really got to

be disappointed in what they find here and it's all reflected, in my opinion, by the fact that American people themselves, as time goes on, are losing complete knowledge of the Pacific War, interesting in the Pacific War, and I really criticize whoever is responsible for it. I don't know who.

Obviously, the National Park Service has a huge list of priorities and can't find all the funding necessary for it. But they've done Custer battlefield, they've done the Big Hole battlefield in the United States and the Western states and that's what should be done out here. Not just on Guam or Saipan but on every island where the Americans fought. Every place Americans fought. When that begins to happen and get publicized, Americans will start coming out here to see what went on here. But right now the Pacific War is just fading out of memory fast. And when you get out here it does—very little is done to bring it back.

Q: Well, with time I certainly hope that changes.
Josephy: What?
Q: I said with time I certainly hope that changes.
Josephy: Well, it certainly can. The National Park Service I think knows me a little as a very ardent critic. But I like to—I really try to be constructive because years ago I wrote an article for Life magazine on how badly the Custer battlefield was administered and how badly it was done in not telling the Indian side of anything. I know that some changes resulted from that article in Life and all to the good. That's a pretty well run battlefield today. I mean, a pretty well run monument. There's no reason why the Pacific War should not come into its own as an interpreter place for Americans of future generations. Just needs dedicated people. I'd love to see some congressmen brought over here, yanked by their ears, to see how terrible it is today. It's badly done.

I know that some effort has been made, and I commend those efforts, that red marble—it's red granite I guess, that shaft up at Saipan, American Memorial Park. But it stands there all alone, silent, not a soul in sight. Kind of a seedy looking little park because it has to be kept up the way it was planned but it doesn't tell anything, doesn't say anything. It gives absolutely no interpretation of what went on there.

Here the Asan, Adelup Beach is a disgrace, an absolute disgrace how badly—how the lack of interpretation. It's a lovely, very fine little museum you've got. That's done well at one end but the building is unprepossessing. Most people must just drive by without knowing what they're missing or what's inside. Even after they've been inside it's hard for them to relate what they're seeing there with anything along the beach. You know, there are no signs on the beach that tell what happened at that beach. What happened to the units that pushed inland and tried to get up those hills. Nothing about Fonte [Plateau] Ridge. There are no directions to go up to Nimitz Hill and look down and know what you're seeing. All of those things should be done.

As far as the Parks Service is concerned, they ought to—over at Valley Forge—or not Valley Forge at Harper's Ferry, if they ever get any extra money, this is something they ought to start paying attention to. I certainly hope they can get something done before the 50th Anniversary of these battles out here.

Q: I'm sure there will be, yeah.
Josephy: Sure. I'll bet you there is nothing at Guadalcanal.
Q: Definitely, there will be something there for the 50th Anniversary.

Josephy: Yeah. Guadalcanal, Bougainville, you know, all along New Guinea, Tarawa, Saipan, Tinian, Eniwetok, They say it's unrealistic, nobody will ever go see those things but that isn't going to be true. People will go there when and if there's a reason for them to go there. All right?

Q: All right.
Josephy: Thanks.
Q: On behalf of the National Parks Service I thank you and it certainly was an honor for me to get to talk to you.
Josephy: Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]