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Interview with James Leary, October 18, 2008

James Leary

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Interview Participants

Interviewee: James Leary
Interviewer: Sierra R. Green ’11, Gettysburg College

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**Description**
James Leary was interviewed on October 18, 2008, by Sierra Green about his experiences during World War II.

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Mr. James Leary served in the Pacific Theater during World War II, spending much of his time on the islands of Guam, Chichi-Jima, and Iwo Jima as a Marine Corps Corporal Engineer. Many of Mr. Leary’s stories chronicle his demolition duties on these islands. One particularly notable story that Mr. Leary shared centered on the day he was drafted. Mr. Leary and his older brother were drafted on the same day in the spring of 1941 or 1942 (he does not recall). Appearing before the draft board together, Mr. Leary and his brother were told by the draft officers that they would take only one of them. Although Mr. Leary immediately stepped forward and volunteered to serve, the draft board insisted on taking his older brother instead. Mr. Leary later chose to join the Marine Corps on his own accord.
[Mrs. Norma Leary, wife of Mr. James Leary, was present during the interview and sometimes actively contributed with her own thoughts and questions].

**Green:** [It is Saturday, October 18, 2008 and I am here in the living room of Mr. and Mrs. James Leary at 517 Liberty Street in Jamestown, Pennsylvania with Mr. Leary.] Mr. Leary would you just talk to me about where you were born and who your parents were, if you wouldn’t mind?

**Leary:** Yes, I was born September 15, 1921 between Meadville and Saegertown. It was out near the golf course, I remember that. And then we moved into Saegertown and lived there til I was about 4. Than my father got a job at the sand plant here in Jamestown, and so we moved to “Jimtown,” we call it.

**Green:** Uh huh!

**Leary:** We lived first beside the Methodist Church up on Route 322, it was a dirt road at that time, and, one time, I remember in the summer, they would oil the road and if there was potholes, why, the oil would congregate in that, and I got a new scooter and I had new overalls, for summer and then we didn’t wear shoes very often in the summer. So I got out on the, not many cars in those days to worry about, and I got out on my scooter and slipped and fell and, of course I ended up in one of those holes-

**Green:** [Laughs]

**Leary:** and I was covered with oil and my mother, she thought that was the end! But it was kinda funny because she just threw the new overalls that I had, she just threw them away. And, but I had on my right side, which was the side I fell on, I was covered with oil and it stayed on my skin all summer long and so I was quite a bit darker then than I [ever had been].

**Green:** [Laughs]. That’s a great story!
Leary: And then I went to school here and then we were all 12 years in the school across from
the Methodist Church. And I started in the first grade and I went the first two grades when we
lived there on Main Street. Then we moved down to this end of town and the town was divided
into four parts: Pokeytown was down on this end, on the south-east end of the town, Pumpkin
Center was in the center, Fiddler’s Green was in the northern part of the town, and Brooklyn was
across the bridge, across the river. And we had, a number of years later, so I was probably about
10 or so, and we each formed a baseball team in each community and we played all summer long
and we made our own fields, the kids, and we had one baseball and one bat per team-

Green: Mmhm.

Leary: and so we didn’t dare lose it. But we’d play until we’d knock the cover off and then we’d
tape it, and that was our baseball. And I was probably one of the older kids, by a year maybe
than the rest of them, and from the minute go, I was organizing something. So we played at least
at least once or twice a week, or more, and ah, but we were champs!-

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: We were good! I remember the last game we played was at our field just down the street
couple houses. We were playing Fiddler’s Green and we were ahead of them by a number of
runs and I hit one and it broke the window in the house right to my left-

Green: Oh [laughs].

Leary: Bill Church, he owned the hardware at the time and of course the ball went right through
the window, “crash!” and it landed on the dining room table-

Green: Oh!

Leary: Well all, both teams, ran!

Green: Sure!
Leary: To get out of there and we got about a half a block away and somebody said, “she has our baseball, Mrs. Church has our baseball!” [exclaims fervently] So, that stopped us, you know, so we had a short huddle and, I broke the window, so the rest of the fellas said, “you have to do the talking.” So I said, “y’all have to come back with me.” So we went back and knocked on the door and I didn’t know what to say, and I said, “Mrs. Church,” and she said, “yes,” and I said “I think you have our baseball,” and I could look right in the glass door and there it was-

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: On the table, glass all over the room!

Green: Oh no!

Leary: It was bad. [Reflects with resignation].

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: And she kinda looked at all of us and she says, “well,” she says, “you go down to the hardware,” and she called her husband, Will, and she says, “you go down and see Will at the hardware and he’ll see that, about what we do with the baseball.” So we said, “OK.” So we ran down the town, down to the hardware and straggled in there, and he said, “What’s going on today, boys?” And I said, “our baseball is in your house,” and he said “what?” And I said, “we broke your window.” [Laughter]. And he said, “oh, OK.” And so he says, “alright, line up.” We didn’t have any idea [what was going to happen next]. So he counted us off and he said, “OK, that’ll be 5 cents each.”

Green: Oh!

Leary: And he says, “I’ll put the window in and you go back and tell Bernie . . . that you can have the baseball.” So he trusted us, you know, to bring in a nickel, but we all did, in time. And
he put the window in, but that kinda ended that because we were afraid of breaking more windows.

**Green**: [Laughs]

**Leary**: So then we moved and, our team, and we played over on the back of the high school now. At that time, they were starting, the school wasn’t built, but the field was . . . . Kids played more outside. We had a lot of outside games . . . far different then what kids do today.”

**Green**: Besides these great baseball games and it seems like the rivalries that existed between the four different parts of the community, what else did you and maybe if you have any brothers or sisters, do for fun over the summer or during the school year?

**Leary**: Yeah I had, ah let’s see, Lloyd and I and Lou and John, and John by then, John was only 4 years old and . . . he usually played [in right field or second base], you usually put the smallest kid in right field--

**Green**: Uh huh.

**Leary**: Or second base. But, we always had nine or ten kids that we could count on [that] would come and it was great, some great experiences. We used to have a game we called “Run, sheep, run” and we’d just run all over time and there was another game that we played, [recording malfunction, Mr. Leary said “kick the can”].

**Green**: [Laughs]

**Leary**: And they’d have a can, and of course, just [about] anybody had an old can and set it out there and you’d kick it and then everybody would run and then whoever was goalie would go back and set the can back up and then he’s go looking for, see who he could catch.

**Green**: Oh OK. Less of a chance of having a can smash through a window than a baseball!

**Leary**: Yeah, it was a lot of fun!
Green: Yeah!

Leary: And on Saturday nights, the stores were open, and the bank was open because everyone did their business, they got paid on Saturday. Most everybody worked six days and that were working, during the depression even. The bank closed and didn’t open for a number of years afterward, but they did pay a 10% dividend about every year and I had a $1.80 in my savings and so I would get 18 cents every year for a dividend and then finally it was all paid back, and then the bank opened again . . . . One time . . . John was not in school yet, so he had been 4 or 5, and mother would send him down to get a loaf of bread or something at the store or go to the post office . . . and then they’d hand him the mail . . . . This one day he had a lot of checks from the bank . . . and the Mayor of the town . . . saw John with a hand full of mail and he said, “where are you going?” and he said, “I can’t talk to you,” he said, “I’ve got a lot of checks and I’m supposed to take this home.” And so he started up the street and the Mayor said, “Well, if you’re worried about your money, go up to my house and knock on the door and that’s where the state policemen [are] and they’ll take you home.” So, he showed John where he lived, and it was just one block up the street, so John knocked on the door and the policemen came to the door . . . and John said “I have all these checks and the man . . . said for you to see that I got home alright.”

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: So they put him in the side car of the motorcycle and brought him up, we lived two doors up from here-

Green: Oh wow!

Leary: And the motorcycle completely just drove right on to the sidewalk, right up to the porch and the noise, mother heard it and she thought something terrible had happened, so she came running out and the policemen held him and he said, “it’s alright Mrs. Leary.” And so he lifted
John out of the sidecar and he said, “he has all these checks and he was afraid he’d lose them,” and so she thanked him, but that’s how the world was then, now it’s altogether different.

**Green:** So, if you wouldn’t mind helping me, you have your brother John, which you told that great story about, could we just talk about some of your other brothers and sisters and just-

**Leary:** Yeah. Bob, my oldest brother, he was in the Second World War and he always was an automobile enthusiast. He would spend hours at the garage . . . just puttering around, carrying wrenches for the mechanics and so forth. That wasn’t my field.

**Green:** [Laughs]

**Leary:** I was the second in the family. Lloyd was third . . . Lloyd and I used to fight every time we’d meet going through the door or anything, why it was a tussle! I was smaller, he was always as big or bigger than I was. And so that was probably bait for me to even things up and so we had a lot of tussles. [Mr. Leary’s has six siblings: Bob, Lloyd, Lou, John, Tom, and Sue, information acquired after interview].

**Green:** [Laughs]

**Leary:** Lloyd was the best baseball player . . . He was in the 83rd Division and both those [Mr. Leary’s brothers] served in Europe and they were both hurt, injured on the first day of the Battle of the Bulge.

**Green:** Oh wow.

**Leary:** They had each been hurt. Bob was hurt before that and Lloyd was hurt again after that. So, they were injured twice, each. And Lloyd got the silver star and the bronze star for bravery. He was a scout, which is difficult, I mean, you’re out by yourself [inaudible] and Bob was the same way. But Bob, was going down a dike in the Netherlands, I think, and there was room for one vehicle on top of this and coming up the road was an ambulance or a truck of some kind and
he saw it was coming and so he just drove off the road and it upset and broke [and] crushed his leg . . . and then he came home and was in the hospital for months before he was discharged, many months . . . . Lou was next and he went, after he graduated in 1943, he went into the V-12 Program, [a] Naval program, and he went to [inaudible, Villanova, Dartmouth College, and Muhlenberg College, information acquired after interview]. Bob and I got our draft numbers on the same day, early [in the spring of 1941 or 1942, information acquired after interview].

Green: Oh!

Leary: And so we had to appear at the draft board the same time [Mr. Leary related here how he and his brothers were approached and asked if they were the Leary brothers]. We said, “yes.” I said, “he’s the oldest and I’m the next.” And they said, “oh, this is different.” They asked who was going first and they sent us out in the hall and we sat on a bench. Finally, they called us back in and they said, “we’re not gonna take both of you at the same time.” “Well,” I said, “I’m ready,” they said, “No, the oldest is gonna go first.” So Bob went and, in the meantime, my father had died, on my 19th birthday.

Green: Oh my gosh.

Leary: And, that was bad. I was working in Greenville at the printing office and they [the recruiting officers] thought I had a more secure job than Bob. They told us why, and [because] he was the oldest. That still didn’t satisfy me. And I said, “well, this isn’t right. He’s kinda takin’ my place and vice-versa.” And so they said, “no, you go home.” So I took 2 jobs and worked nights and all day. [I] helped with the family but then all my friends were going in the service and Lloyd went into the army, when he was younger, and that wasn’t right. Lou volunteered for the Navy program, so I said “I can’t handle that any longer . . . .” I was the smallest player in Mercer County when I was a freshman, I was four foot eight and a half, I was a midget!
Leary: And that was my mother’s height, she was four eight and a half, and that was a big day when I was taller than her! Taller than she I guess. I never got too big after that, I was thinking, [Lou] was in the Navy, and Lloyd and Bob were in the army, I’ll take the Marines, I’ll be different. So, I went to Erie and passed all the physicals, they said, “here’s a ticket to go to Buffalo and we hope you get there, you and your friend, early enough in the day to be sworn in.” [Inaudible]. They were open Saturday mornings and we aren’t open here on Saturday mornings and so [we got] to Buffalo and got there and the fella was just closing and it was 5 o’clock and he was just closing the door and he said, “well,” he says, “you fellas come back,” he says, “here’s a ticket for a hotel and food and whatever you need and see us in the morning about 9 o’clock.” So we said, “OK,” and [we went there] the next morning and the fella was sitting at the desk and he was talking to us and [he asked if we were from PA] and I said, “Yes, sir . . . .” He said, “well, there was a girl from Jamestown in my class,” he said, “you probably wouldn’t know her.” I said, “you name her and I’ll know her because I know everybody up there.”

Leary: He said, “OK, her name was Margaret Sherbondy,” and I said, “oh my heavens, she’s my English teacher!”

Leary: And so, he and I had quite a chat then. And so, about 11 o’clock he said, “look, I’ve gotta get you fellas sworn in before noon,” so he swore us in, about two minutes [on August 19, 1944, information acquired after interview]. So we caught a train and went to Philadelphia. But on the way there was a wreck on the train and, we weren’t involved in, but we had to back up and go around and we didn’t get to Philadelphia til the next morning. And then we went on to
Washington . . . . And then we come out of there and caught the train out of D.C. and it was hot that day, oh terribly hot! [We arrived at] Union Station and it was mostly soldiers on it going back to Fort Bragg and it was loaded. I mean, so many guys on there that this other friend and I that was going into the Marines, Ernie Hoffman, we had to stand and started out of the station and had steam engines and smoke, and it just rolled in and I had decent clothes on, but not long.

**Green:** Uh huh!

**Leary:** It just, everything was black. I mean, we looked really black.

**Green:** [Laughs]

**Leary:** But, we stood up until we got to where the soldiers got off at Fort Bragg. All night long, and well into the next day.

**Green:** Wow! You were standing the whole time?

**Leary:** We were still standing. So, we lost a little faith in the Army then.

**Green:** Sure!

**Leary:** You would’ve thought somebody would’ve said, “here, sit down a while,” but no one offered. And so, we got down to Yemassee, South Carolina. And the train stopped and we got off there. And that’s where you catch another train and, this is the truth, it had oil lamps on [it], that train was that old!

**Green:** Wow!

**Leary:** And it came up, engine first, but when we backed down the track from Yemassee to Paris Island, probably 50 or 60 miles, I don’t know. So, it seemed to take us all day, but it wasn’t, but it was really slow. But that really brought us back to earth.

**Green:** Sure.

**Leary:** From then on it was hard work.
Green: So-

Leary: We had 70 or 60 fellas, [it] took us two or three days before we had enough to make a platoon. We were issued all of our stuff and everything and it was a rude awakening there, I’ll tell yah that.

Green: Sure.

Leary: You were into the, what you thought, was gone right there. They really start right off.

And, ahh-

Green: Actually, before we go any further, would you mind just, ah, I want to make sure I’ve got the story right. So, you and your brother were drafted, and you went in together, and they decided that they didn’t want to take you both. So they took your older brother even though you stepped forward first-

Leary: Yeah.

Green: and then you decided later, on your own will, to join the Marine Corps.

Leary: Yeah.

Green: Correct?

Leary: Yeah.

Green: That is so fascinating! Would you mind taking some time and explaining why you chose the Marine Corps?

Leary: Well, I had brothers in the Army and Lou was younger than I. He was a sophomore or junior when he [signed up] for the Navy program, V-12, because he got to go to college. And he got his education that way. He’s smarter than we are.

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: But then ah, I guess I wanted to be different and I felt guilty-
Green: Mmhm.

Leary: Because they were going and I was still [at home] and all my friends were going or about to go, or gone. [Also], I was always smaller and I, everything was uphill to me. Even in grade school, I was the runt and I was called “Cootie”-

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: And different things. One day, this goes back to when I was maybe in the eighth grade or a freshman, it was deep in the Depression and the bank had closed and [there was] this field of potatoes up north of town and they hired this fella to get a bunch of kids, young people to get the potatoes and then they could sell it, sell the potatoes, and then they’d have a little more money.

So, I went up, and my job was to, other people would bring the bags of potatoes, 60 bushel, [rather] 60 pounds, and then I had to lift it from there up into the truck. And the truck driver, he’d move it into where he wanted it. But, by the middle of the afternoon, I couldn’t pick it up. I mean, 60 pounds.

Green: Yeah.

Leary: I probably didn’t weigh that!

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: Oh, maybe a little more, but I was pretty small. And so, he called me, “Pansy,”

Green: Oh!

Leary: “Come on Pansy, you can lift that!” Well, that irritated me and I did throw some back up on and I wasn’t gonna be defeated again, you know. But, I had that name all through high school, [though] they cut it, instead of “Pansy,” just “Pans.” “Come on Pans” and “Cootie,” cause I was so small. Then when I was a JV my freshman year, starting, and I just worked hard and the seniors, the juniors and seniors, they didn’t appreciate it. Someone younger pushing them and
before it was over, I played the full game junior varsity and then half of the varsity game and that was good training.

Green: That’s a lot, yeah.

Leary: And I was in better condition than anybody else and I made them work. And so, by the end of the season, I was playing more and more varsity. And we had a tournament, and I was the smallest player in Mercer County and [inaudible, here Mr. Leary revealed that he was the high scorer]. I mean, from then on, why, they looked with me, they didn’t have to, instead of looking down, they looked me in the eye. From then on, I had it pretty well made . . . Another kid and I, we mowed 32 lawns a week in Jimtown.

Green: Oh my gosh!

Leary: And we’d get paid, the lowest was 15 cents a lawn, and a dollar for the biggest lawn, and that’s where the fire department is now. That was a fourth of a block and it was just a push mower, no motors on them at all. And it took us three hours if you didn’t stop to mow that lawn and we got a dollar for it. But, he and I would trade, and then whoever [didn’t mow the large lawn] mowed maybe three or four more lawns right around there. Whoever mowed the big one, why they’d walk over and find the other and then we’d go on and mow some more lawns, but we mowed 32 a week, and if it rained, we had to hire other kids to catch up, but we kept the job, but we would pay them what the lawn mowing was worth.

Green: Oh OK, was this during the Great Depression then?

Leary: Yep. And ah-

Green: And this was just your own little business that you kinda just--

Leary: Yeah, yeah.
Green: Oh and did you contribute, was this for your own money or did you contribute some to your family?

Leary: Yeah. Yeah, I gave some. And, but then, I was going down on Saturday night downtown and the merchants were all open and mother would either take us down or she’d send Bob or I with the money down. And maybe it would be ten or eleven dollars for the whole week, for the family groceries.

Green: Wow!

Leary: Not today.

Green: Yeah, certainly not!

Leary: And we would pay and then the storekeeper would, it was [inaudible] McElhinny at M D Hambels, would give us a bag of candy, you remember those little pink and white, they were about so big [uses his fingers to show a circle the size of a nickel] and they were hard candy and you just put them in your mouth and suck on them, you know?

Green: Mmhm.

Leary: Mints, like. And he would put one for each of the kids in there and that was a big deal, to get a bag of candy, you know?

Green: Sure.

Leary: And then we’d take it home and, maybe they were all with me, I don’t know,

Green: [laughs]

Leary: But we’d empty it in a hurry . . . Then, the firemen . . . showed the movies from the old Opera House, it was over the VFW and over the Post Office at that time and they’d show it on the wall and they were free movies and that was good and great entertainment.

Green: Yeah!
Leary: And that was our Saturday night entertainment.

Green: That’s so great.

Leary: In 1939, there were 17 in our class, 9 boys and 8 girls [inaudible]. The principal wasn’t able to go all day, so he [Mr. Leary’s high school principal] would be in the office most of the time and he was a really nice, fair guy. And he says, “Jim,” he says, “[I want you to] teach.”

Green: Wow!

Leary: “Yeah,” he says, “I have about 10 or 11 students that want to take business arithmetic, but I am just not able to do that, [can you do it]?” And I said, “well, that’s kinda tough,” I said “they’re all my classmates or maybe juniors,” and he said “yeah, but you won’t have any trouble.” And so I come in, and we passed out the material and he says, “if you have any trouble, let me know.” And he walked out.

Green: Wow!

Leary: And once in a while, I’d go by his desk and he’d ask me how it was going and I said, “well, it seems to be going alright”-

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: “But there’s some coursework here I’m not sure what I should do,” and he said, “well, you figure it out and if it’s wrong, I’ll hear about it.” And, so it came time to give them a test. I told him, “you’re going to give the test,” and he says, “no,” he says, “you give it to them, you’ve taught them, you give them the test.” And I said, “I don’t know how to make a test out.”

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: He says, “I’ll give you three days and you turn something into me and if it isn’t right I’ll correct it and then you can correct it.” And so, I said, “you’re gonna be there,” [gestures
expectantly] and he said, “no, that’s not necessary,” [Inaudible]. “Correct them and let me know how they make out.” Life is tough, you know!

**Green:** Yeah!

**Leary:** And so I did that and the final test was the same way. He said, “no,” he said, “you taught them all this semester” he says, “you give it to them and give me the papers and let me look at them anyway.” So, I gave them the test and collected them and corrected them and I said “here’s your papers and they’re all corrected and he looked them over and he said, “that’s just fine.” He said, “I appreciate this Jim” Oh, in the mean time, my last, in May, my brother Lou got the mumps and then we were quarantined.

**Green:** Oh wow!

**Leary:** And I was the only one who hadn’t had the mumps-

**Green:** Oh my gosh.

**Leary:** Everybody else had had them the year before and so I couldn’t go to school, but I played baseball with the team and I sat out by the baseline, couldn’t sit out on the bench with the rest of them, but if we played away the coach would ask who had the mumps and so he would put all the ones [who] had the mumps in a car and I drove with them and then the ones that hadn’t, would go in another car. I played all month . . . .

**Green:** So, you were allowed to play baseball when you had the mumps, or-

**Leary:** I didn’t have them.

**Green:** When you didn’t, yeah-

**Leary:** I didn’t have them til after we were married.

**Green:** Oh OK. But you weren’t able to go to school, is that correct?

**Leary:** No, no.
Green: So, you could play baseball, but you couldn’t go to school. [Laughter] That’s interesting!

Leary: Came time for our senior test, final test, and the quarantine ran out the last day that the rest of the seniors took their test, but I couldn’t go to school that day. And he’s [the high school principal] aware of when my days are up. The principal says, “Jim, you come to school the day after everybody else,” and told me what day it was. And so I went and Mr. Lutton was our athletic coach and he taught Social Studies and I get those pretty well and so I walked in and I said, “I’m here for my test.” And I was the only one, the rest, nobody [was] there, just teachers. And I walked in and he said, “ah Jim,” he says “you don’t need to take this test.”

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: And I says, “Oh that’s great!”

Green: Sure, what a great deal!

Leary: And I walked out and went down to my Latin teacher, Caesar and that.

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: I think I had taken four years of Latin. And Charlie Morrin, he’s a gruff old man, and he’d sit on my desk, I sat in the front, and he sat on my desktop and then he’d reach over and if somebody couldn’t answer a question right then, he’d dig me in the shoulders, and I’d be down on the floor!

Green: Oh my gosh!

Leary: You know, “ouch, ouch ouch!” And some kid in the back wasn’t learning fast enough for me! [Laughter] And boy, he’d have me right on the floor, and finally the kid would say, “I don’t know it,” [or] give an answer or something and then he’d ease up.

Green: [Laughs]
Leary: And so I walked in and Charlie, I said, “Mr. Lutton,” I said, [inaudible] “I didn’t need to take any test.” He said, “Jim, you’re in the same boat here.” He says, “run along.” Then I thought the English is gonna be my downfall, so I went to her last.

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: I went into the English teacher, I’m pretty stupid, I walked in and I said, “well, everybody else said I didn’t need to take a test.” [Mr. Leary’s arms are raised].

Green: Oh ho ho!

Leary: And she says, “you sit down!” [Laughter]

Green: All the more reason for you to take the test then, huh?

Leary: [The English teacher said] “You’re not getting away with that here.” So, that’s the same one this fella in Buffalo said that I, the same teacher that he knew her.

Green: Mmhm.

Mrs. Leary: Ms. Sherbondy!

Leary: Yeah, so I sat down and I [thought], “gosh, this test seems pretty easy for me and I really get it.” And so, the next day, [we] went to school to get our reports and I walked in and class came in session and she said “I have,” the teacher said, “I have the biggest surprise ever this year on the final test.”

Green: Oh.

Leary: “The person that got the highest grade is, no one here in the class can figure out who it is.” And I’m thinking, “I’m eligible for that!” [Laughter]. And so she rambled on for a couple of, like five minutes, maybe a minute. [She talked about] how great that was and what a great person that come through with a test mark like that. And then she said, “Jim, come up here.” And I’m weak, you know.
Green: Yeah! [Laughs]

Leary: But I went up and she congratulated me and alright, she gave me an A for the whole
year, I didn’t deserve it.

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: Then the principal gave me a certificate for teaching for him. We went to Washington
[as their senior trip] and I was president of the class my senior year. We hired a bus to take us,
we all wanted to go to Washington . . .

Mrs. Leary: And what was the cost?


Green: Oh my gosh!

Leary: . . . [We] stayed in a brand new hotel and we saw the King and Queen of England. We
saw the President, [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt, and Eleanor.

Green: Oh my gosh, wow!

Leary: And this huge parade, the biggest parade they’ve ever had there. They said there was a
million people [there], and I agree with them!

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: It was just solid people. And planes, tanks, the whole works. And then we came home
and people didn’t believe us. [Laughter]

Leary: My life has just been way beyond what anyone’s should be.

Green: Oh [laughs].

Leary: And ah, this is the better half, [gestures affectionately to his wife]-

Mrs. Leary: [Laughs]
Leary: Really the better half. We have three boys, and I’ll show you their pictures, and everybody is bigger than Jim, they still are . . . . I worked in Greenville for 20 years in the printing office. And then, there a while after I came home from the service and then I went to Sharon in 1957 . . . . Then we went into the service, well before that [in the summer of 1942 or 1943, information acquired after interview] we started this, Larry Firster and I, the kids didn’t have much to do in the summers especially, and there was a lot of people [that] came up to the lake and stayed all summer and their kids would fish and then they would get tired of that and that was their day. And so we thought, “gosh, all these kids, maybe they’d be interested in playing games and stuff.” So, [sigh] every week, one day a week, mostly Saturdays I guess, we’d have, there’d be 50 kids, and they’d be from probably 6 or so up to maybe 14 or 15. The other kids, the older ones always helped us. It was just a great time. The kids learned a lot of things. We’d play softball, football, no equipment, and just good, tough and hard, play to win, and that’s how you learn. And it ended up [that] we started a Boy Scout troop from that bunch of kids and so, I’ll never forget, when I went into the Marines, why Riley Clark, he was a, kind of a commissioner or head of the Boy Scouts, he was in Boy Scouts for 50 years or so, and he lived in the Mark Twain Manor building, [that was] his home.

Green: Uh huh. Yeah.

Leary: I remember the day, I was going into the Marines and he come up and handed me a 10 dollar bill.

Green: Huh!

Leary: Ah, I went in the service and I was dressed decently, but after we left Washington, I wasn’t. I mean, we were bad, dirty. And so, we got to Paris Island [on August 19th, 1944, information acquired after interview] and we had to bundle up and send our stuff home. And the
train was most difficult and our, we had boxing there, everyday, and I’ll bet you I’m the only
guy, [the only] Marine, that went through there that didn’t get in a boxing match. I’d do
everything, they’d put the gloves on, I’d go and let them fall off.

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: There I weighed about 135 or 40 pounds and these other guys, 190 pounds-

Green: Yeah.

Leary: Oh, one blow and I’m gone!

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: And I said, “there’s no way I’m gonna go in that way.” And I used everything that I
could to keep from putting the gloves on. And they’d tie them on and something, and then it’d be
time to, I’d stall things off and so, next thing you’d go take the gloves off and go to something
else. But, I’d never have to fight them and some of them were, I mean, brutal! I mean, they were
great fighters. And, one kid in my platoon, and he was a friend of mine and that was the nearest
we got, and he probably weighed 180 pounds. I mean, he was big, and he said, “Jim, I won’t
fight you, you’re too good a friend.”

Green: Oh.

Leary: And so, boy we put the gloves on and he pretended he got hurt, his ankle or something,
and they took the gloves off and then it ended for that day. But that was, I mean, he’d, he’d had
to kill me. I mean, and he hit one kid, and the kid hit, this was on blacktop, they were boxing.

Green: Oh my gosh!

Leary: And he fell, and as long as I knew him, he had gravel in his face, you know, black! His
face, there on that side [Mr. Leary motions to the left side of his face.] And I thought, “life is too
short for that.”
Green: Sure!

Leary: But I don’t know of anyone that has ever gone through Paris Island and not boxed.

Green: And you’re the one.

Leary: Yeah, I’m different! They would’ve probably thrown me in the brig if they would’ve really put the tightening down on me. Anyway, it was mighty tough training and we’d have hand to hand [combat] and judo and I was the next to the smallest guy in the platoon and I was very fortunate. I think you had to be 5’7” and I don’t think I ever reached 5’7.” But they stretched, flattened me out so I’d reach there, you know?

Green: Uh huh.

Leary: And so I got into the Marines, but I really was too small for it. But there was one kid a little smaller than I was, and in the Marines, and I assume the Army was the same, any heavy work, they picked the smallest guys to do it. Any heavy equipment, the little guys will carry it. These big guys, 6’6,” and you couldn’t be over 6’6,” but we had a lot of guys, they were like this [Mr. Leary puts his hand up as far as he can reach], and then we were down this size [Mr. Leary lowers his hand to about the level of his chest]. But they were all decent, I mean, they never gave me any trouble. But the only time we’d lead [the Marines who were shorter, like Mr. Leary] is when they’d give us a reverse march. And then we’d be out, we’d be marching, they’d say “reverse march and turn around and go back the other way.” That’s the only time we ever led anything. [Laughter] This other kid and I, we thought that was funny, you know?

Green: Yeah!

Leary: [The Marines who were shorter, like Mr. Leary said pompously] “Oh we get to lead now!” [The taller Marines who were accustomed to leading responded] “Ah, shut up in there!”
Green: [Laughs] So, was this trip for basic training to South Carolina, was this your first time really away from home and far away?

Leary: Yeah, really. I’d been [to] boy scout camps for 3 or 4 days. But, when I was a senior, I graduated and I told my grandmother and, most of my father’s parents lived up in Cambridge Springs, and I said “I’ll come up and see you all after [I graduate].” And I was the first Leary to graduate, Bob missed a grade or so and so I graduated ahead of him . . . . And so these people all gave me presents, “first senior” and all that. But some of them were teachers, my aunts, my mother had two sisters that were teachers, but I thought they were really loading me down with that “the first Leary [to graduate from high school]” . . . [inaudible, Mr. Leary related here that his uncle] was drafted into the Navy and he had five daughters. And I don’t know of anyone other than he that had that many children and was still drafted.

Green: Uh huh.

Leary: And he went in the Navy and he was in Air-Sea Rescue when he was on a ship that only had about 25 people on it. And I saw him when I went to the Camp Pendleton and went up to see him on [a] weekend, he was near Los Angeles. [inaudible]. I went to Pearl Harbor.

Green: Wow.

Leary: But he got to Pearl Harbor before I did and I read the list of names of ships in and his number was there so I went and saw him. And then the same at Guam. I checked the list of the ships and he was doing Air-Sea Rescue that B-29s take off and they’re bombed and the petroleum, you know, gas was too much and they’d, a lot of them hit the water. They don’t tell you that back here, but they saved hundreds of lives.

Green: Huh.

Leary: There’d be 10 or 11 guys on the crew, you know?
**Green:** Uh huh.

**Leary:** And they’d bail out or hit the water and then bail out and they’d pick them up with these ships.

**Green:** Oh my gosh.

**Leary:** But, you never heard much about that.

**Green:** No, not at all.

**Leary:** So, he did a tremendous work there. I have his picture in there [Mr. Leary gestures to the scrapbooks on the table in front of him], in one of these things.

**Green:** I’d like to see it.

**Leary:** [Training] at Paris Island was difficult. And then we got to Camp Lejeune [in November of 1944, information acquired after interview], I got a ten day leave. I came home and hunted most of the time with one of the teachers and the basketball coach here. [Recording malfunction, here Mr. Leary talked about how, after Marine Corps training he] was quick with a weapon. I guess I shot everything, every rabbit and pheasant in front of him. [Laughter].

**Leary:** And he didn’t even get the gun up. He says, “I’ll never hunt with you again.” But I just naturally, I just got a lot of game and brought it home and gave it to mom and the kids and-

**Green:** Now, I’d like to know how your mom was doing at this time. I mean, she has her son who just came back from basic training in the Marine Corps and then she has three other sons that are in the Armed Forces-

**Leary:** Yeah.

**Green:** During this time, so-

**Leary:** She had a difficult time.

**Green:** Sure.
Leary: But she, her hair turned gray in that 3 or 4 years. Then my father died just prior to that, it was a real shocker. He worked on highways and they laid all the stonework out at the dam; set those big stones one at a time and he had two men on the ground and he had to tell them which way to turn it and then he’s set it in place. It took him about 3 ½ years to set all those stones. He was running a crane and slipped and hit his leg. It formed a blood clot and he died. They didn’t have any means of correcting it in those days and I suppose it was 2 weeks and he died.

Green: [She] was a very strong woman.

Leary: She would walk down to get the mail everyday and back up. And Bob didn’t write very often, my oldest brother, he didn’t write very often. And she [Mr. Leary’s mother] would pass on, she’d get a letter from one of them [her sons] and then she’d send what was good on [to] the rest of us.

Green: Ahh, yeah.

Leary: I wrote at least once a week, and I was pretty good at it, I think. Lou, John, or Bob were not as good.

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: Then we went to Camp Lejeune and it was more intense training. I was picked to go to officer’s training. We got to Camp Lejeune and we were to take these classification tests that qualified for different things. And here, the fella that was running that was the druggist’s son downtown [in Mr. Leary’s hometown of Jamestown].

Green: Oh, how about that!

Leary: I knew him well and here’s how spirited he was. He was working for a contractor in south Argentina, I think, before the war broke out. When the war started, he gave up the job and came back and joined the Marine Corps.
Green: Wow.

Leary: I mean, this is deep thinking.

Green: Yes.

Leary: And he was at Camp Lejeune and he was giving this test to all these fellas and he recognized me. And he said, “Jim!” And I said, “yeah, Clyde!” And so he says, “shh!” [Laughter]. He says, “do your test and I’ll see you later.” And so, I’d see him once in a while, not too often because they kept us pretty busy . . . . Anyway, I took the test and he said, “well, you did pretty well, Jim.” But, I didn’t know what that meant.

Green: Yeah [laughs].

Leary: And so, there was ten of us qualified. But then they sent us on a 48 hour problem out in the woods. Ah, rain! Yeah, I never saw it rain like that. And they told us to pitch, we had two man tents, you know?

Green: Mhmm.

Leary: And they assigned you where they wanted you to put the tents and I says, “with this rain, water is gonna run right down through, there’s a gully, it’s gonna fill up and we’re gonna be right in the middle of it!

Green: Uh huh.

Leary: [The commanding officers said] “that’s where you put it,” and so we did. And the middle of the night, the water came down and my rifle was laying there and it just went right over, the water. We got up, and then they called a rifle inspection and it was dark, oh probably 5 in the morning, couldn’t see anything.

Green: Mhm.
Leary: They came along with zippo lighters and that’s how they were inspecting. Well, this is, I thought, cooked up cause they couldn’t even tell what your rifles looked like. And so, that night they said, “there’ll only be four of you picked out of that ten.”

Green: Oh wow.

Leary: And I didn’t qualify because I had a dirty rifle. [Laughter].

Leary: And it was dirty. There was mud all over it, and I didn’t have time to [clean the rifle], but I was supposed to have wakened up before that and cleaned it. That’s what they told us.

Green: Oh, OK! [Sarcastically].

Leary: Well no way!

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: But anyway, that was kind of a downer. But then, later on, one of the fellas that made it, he ended up in a reconnaissance rubber boat outfit and they land behind the Japs…

[First side of tape 1 ends].

[Second Side of tape 1 begins].

Green: [This is] side 2 of the tape and Mr. Leary is going to continue-


Green: Around what time, what year is this? Just to give us some context.

Leary: ’44 and ’45.

Green: ’44 and ’45.

Leary: I went in in ’44 and a couple incidences. One was, we were coming through Texas and we stopped at Brownwood or Brownsville, Texas. To give us exercise and calisthenics. This is different.

Green: [Laughs]
Leary: And our lieutenant, nice guy, young fella, and we were out drilling right on the street and there was a car, a two door coupe, black, I remember that, and it had a hard roof on it. And we had forward march and it was three abreast, going down and I think I was in the middle, I think. And he didn’t halt us or anything. [The marines asked] “what do we do?” And they said, “keep going.” So, if I was in the middle, I don’t remember, [I] probably was. And we’re reverse march now, so the little guys are leading. And so I said, “what about that car?” They said, “it’s in the way, walk right over it.”

Green: [Laughs.]

Leary: So, there’s three of us. I was by then, stepped on the trunk, like that [Mr. Leary makes an upward motion with his hand], and then up on the roof and then down on the hood.

Green: Oh my gosh!

Leary: When, [during] the reverse march, here our lieutenant was talking to the girls and waving at them and he wasn’t paying any attention. And that’s the reason these guys said “keep going straight ahead.” I didn’t know that, and so he gave me a reverse march and I wheeled them around and came back and the three of us, down off that car and he could’ve killed us. You know?

Green: [laughs] Yeah!

Leary: I mean, he had every right to. But, then the guys, they said to him, “you were in wrong in not paying attention.” And he admitted it, then he said, “let’s get on the train before this gets any worse.” [Laughter]

Leary: So we got back on the train and we were going someplace through New Mexico or Arizona, Arizona. And it was daylight, I remember that. And the train stopped, it was just like a four corner, there was a little store there. And apparently trains had stopped there before. And
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they said, “we’ll have a short delay here,” and so they picked 4 or 5 guys [and they said] “collect money and go get some candy or whatever you want to get at that store, but get right back here.” Well, they were in the store longer than they should’ve been, [and] the train left. There were these 5 guys and with all this candy and stuff and so they hired a fella with a car, the train left them, and the fella knew about the road and the railroad and they followed us and raced us until they got ahead of the train and then stopped this car on the track and the train had to stop. It was miles of nothing and they could see the car on the track and so the train stopped and these guys got on and when they did the MPs arrested them-

Green: Oh!

Leary: And they put them in chains for AWOL. And they said that they paid this guy to get them there so that they can catch the train.

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: Then we went on to this town, it’s up in the Northern part of Arizona. I’ll think of it, not now. There was snow on the ground and this was in the evening and it wasn’t quite dark and [there were] girls, like the USO or something, and they were passing out gifts and treats, you know?

Green: Mhm.

Leary: And we had the windows up, you know, and it was refreshing and I made a smart [remark], I said, “they’re gonna run out before they get here.” I didn’t have any idea-

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: How much they had or anything. Could you believe it? They got to the window where we were and I was the first one that didn’t get a treat!

Green: Oh ho!
Leary: And the poor girls passing it out, they were in tears-

Green: Oh!

Leary: Because we didn’t get anything and the rest of them did. Then I said, “don’t think a thing about it.”

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: But the guys, they were ready to throw me out, [they said] “how did you know that?” But another thing I’d found on the train going out was a schedule, a [inaudible] and a map, [with] all these names and towns and everything on the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe railroad. And I’d gaze [at it] when no one was watching and I’d keep ahead of it and I’d say, “well we ought to be coming in to so and so in a half hour or ten minutes or so.” [His fellow marines asked him] “you traveled this road?” And I said, “oh, many times!” I’d never been on that railroad in my life! [Laughter]. [I said] “oh, many times, I just know where I am all the time!”

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: And then I’d go by that list and I’d squint down and find the next 4 or 5. [His fellow marines said] “Gosh, he really must know this.” And they never knew I had that little piece of paper with the schedule on it. Then we got to that place and they ran out of treats, that was in the evening, and then we got into California. And [it was] daylight. When I first realized where we were was Santa Anna. We had an idea we were going to Camp Pendleton. We were never sure. And so that was a huge camp. [We got there] the day after Christmas [1944, information acquired after interview]. Somebody volunteered me, this Clyde Thompson back at Camp Lejeune-

Green: Mhm.
Leary: He’d given me some, he said “there’s two men on the train [and to] make sure you all get to the same, to the proper locations.” He said, “do you want their names?” I said “no,” I said “I don’t want, nothing special Clyde,” I said, “no thanks,” I said, “I’m in this just like everybody else, I don’t want to be.” And he said, “well its up to you,” and I said “no, thank you anyway.” And he said, “that’s alright.” But I got some good duty and I’m sure, it was officer’s duty. We were KP [Kitchen Patrol] and the rest of the guys, general mess. Well, that tells it right there and I got over there and I served meals and it was much better food than what we had!

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: And then New Year’s Day came, and the fellas in the officer’s quarters, enlisted men worked there, as cooks and stuff, they said, “do you like football?” And I said “yeah,” and they said, “Well, the Rose Bowl game is tomorrow and if you leave Pendleton by 9 o’clock, you’ll get to the game in time.” [Mr. Leary said] “Oh, that’d be great!”

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: And I said, “how do I get off?” And they said, “oh, we’ll cover for you, you do breakfast and then you leave a little before 9, go get your greens on,” and I said “oh, that’s great,” and I thanked them, and you know, it was great!

Green: Mmmhm.

Leary: And so I ran over to my barracks and I couldn’t find my greens. And the rest of the guys were given leave. And I couldn’t find my greens and I went up to the officer of the day and I said, “I can’t find my greens, there’re gone.” And he says, “well, you can’t get off the base without greens.”

Green: Ah!
Leary: And here, LaForte was his name, I’ll never forget that name . . . he was in the brig more than he trained, he was just bad, you know?

Green: Mmhm.

Leary: Here he had taken my greens, but he had just gotten out of the brig, [he was] on the brig the whole training time and they caught him and he left, took my greens and I couldn’t go and they caught him a week later in Texas. And he come back and, oh my greens were [a] torn, muddy mess and I didn’t have any [greens]! Then we trained and somehow, I guess they let me go a couple times on leave with my khakis, you know?

Green: Mmhm.

Leary: But, when we went to go overseas, I was supposed to turn in greens and I said “I don’t have any, they were stolen,” and my officer says, “well, we’ll see if we can take care of it.” Nothing, I heard nothing and so they said, “fall out with your gear to turn it in.” And there I am, empty handed, I had my shoes, but that’s all.

Green: Uh huh. Huh.

Leary: And so, he pretended he checked me off. And he says, “OK, Leary,” and “next.” And then the next guy, the guy ahead of me and the guy behind me, they just dropped them [their gear] on the ground, I dropped a pair of shoes.

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: And that was it, and he says, “OK.” But I would’ve had to pay for those if [they had charged him for his missing greens]. But that was a break.

Green: Yeah!

Leary: And then we went to Pearl Harbor. And we got there and there was 6,400 I think on our ship, [it was] a brand new ship. There were so many casualties at Pearl Harbor and, I mean, we
just hit the dock and they says, “get your gear and get off.” And we were running off the front of
the ship and they were carrying wounded on the back.

**Green**: Oh my gosh!

**Leary**: That was the war, right, bang.

**Green**: Yep, yep.

**Leary**: Really trying. They hauled us away on buses over to the [inaudible] depot. We were
there a month before we got another ship to go on, and that’s when they called out and I was put
on mess duty again there. But this was general mess, they had them open a new mess hall and I
didn’t know what I was doing, but some of the guys did. They assigned me, after one day, I
worked all night, cracking eggs.

**Green**: Ha!

**Leary**: [Sighs]. In big kettles, God it was a mess! I was just doing one at a time and, [someone
told him] “Oh no, you gotta do three at a time if you can.”

**Green**: [Laughs]

**Leary**: You know how shells, half of them fall in.

**Green**: Oh yeah!

**Leary**: How can you [crack three eggs at a time without having shells fall in]? I couldn’t fathom
that. I didn’t pass that one very good and so the next day they said, “you better work in the
supply room,” and I said, “that’s better yet.” So I went in there and here the fella that was in
charge, a sergeant, was from Pittsburgh and he was a Pittsburgh Pirates fan and he and I really
hit it off.

**Green**: Uh huh.
Leary: But I think maybe there was a connection before to get me to go in there and so he said “you go watch that fella out there taking care of the checking in the food,” big bags, heavy bags, and they were carrying them in and they’d put it down here and then he had to move it over, and [I thought] “that’s stupid.” Those other guys already got it carried in, carrying put it right there. And so, he said, “do you see anything that you could speed things up here?” And I said, “yeah, a couple.” I said, “I’d let those guys carry. And he said, “yeah, you’re right.” So the next day, he said, this poor guy [that] had been running the supply room, he says, “you go out, you’re gonna work in the mess hall,” general mess, and he said, “Leary, you take this over,” and so that was the first thing and the first load in, these guys off the truck said, “oh no, we put it here and then you carry it.” And I said, “no, you carry it and put it right there.” And I said, “if you don’t believe me, go in and the sergeant will tell you the same thing, cause he told me to tell them that.” So, sure enough, I was in there and I worked there almost a month and I got to see the all-star ball players.

Green: Oh wow!

Leary: Play a game, yeah. All I had to do was get on a scow, a garbage scow, and then they brought me back. So, I saw that. [I boarded] a ship to go to Guam. That was quite a-

Green: Now, before we take your trip to Guam, how long were you at Pearl Harbor? And during what time-

Leary: A month, a month [March of 1945, information acquired after interview] before they got another ship to fill us up.

Green: And that was, you said the first time-

Leary: And I saw my uncle at Pearl Harbor.

Green: Oh, did you?
Leary: Yeah, he was in war training there, Air-Sea Rescue. And then I got to Guam and went to a transit center first until they assigned us to what outfit we were to go to and I was put on a truck to haul food to the commissary mess halls and all we had was big cans of pineapple juice.

Green: Huh!

Leary: And they hardly gave us time to even eat and so that was mostly our meal [for] the first two or three days. Drinking pineapple juice out of a big can. Then we got assigned to the outfit that we were supposed to go to. But I was taking demolition portions to the other side. Then I did real well in pop up targets at Pendleton.

Green: Oh OK.

Leary: And I really did well with those and they commended me for that. The fella in demolition, the instructor, he was a guy in the first or second division and they were all [struck with] malaria and they’d work a half a day, they couldn’t go a full day of training. They knew what the score was and, this fella with grenades and he accidentally took it apart and when you pull it [the pin], but you can always put the pin back and make it safe again and he dropped the pin and he said, “just stay still,” and I was as close to it as Norma there [a distance of about 5 feet].

Green: Oh my gosh!

Leary: Where he dropped it and then we all laid down and the thing, you do it again, probably [would’ve] been 20 guys hurt.

Green: Wow!

Leary: We just got dirt on us.

Green: Wow.
Leary: It blew over us. But that was-

Green: Yeah.

Leary: Kinda scary.

Green: Yes.

Leary: And then we jumped from there to Guam [in April of 1945, information acquired after interview] and, everywhere I went they lost my tetanus shots, oh about 10 shots and I had more shots than most people. My arm was, I got shots at Pendleton and I got shots at Pearl Harbor, and I got to Guam and they said, “well, we have no record of them” and I said, “what! You can see them!” [Mr. Leary moves to push up his shirt sleeve just as he did when he was in Guam].

Green: Yeah!

Leary: [They replied] “oh, that’s not good enough, you don’t have records.” So, I had to have all the shots again, and some extra ones, and a couple of them were bad.

Green: So, Mr. Leary, would you mind just elaborating a little bit more about what was involved in your duty, as involved in demolition?

Leary: Yeah, yeah.

Green: At Guam.

Leary: Well, we had to probe with bayonets. But, some of the fellas had detectors, but we were taught that they weren’t 100% good because the Dutch people, the Netherlands, had had these in the East Indies and the Japs had captured those and then put them in all their islands and they were plastic and made out of copper, you know?

Green: Mmhm.
Leary: And metal didn’t detect them. And we lost a lot of equipment and men from that. And then, so we just decided the bayonet was the best thing to prod, and when you hit one, you’d dig it up very carefully.

Green: Sure!

Leary: Make sure the pin was set back in and go on to the next [one]. And that was-

Mrs. Leary: Demolition was blowing things up, you were destroying fortifications.

Leary: Yeah, but we blew a lot of things up on the way, learning that. And ah-

Green: And where exactly did you receive training for your demolition duties at Guam? Was that at Pearl Harbor or Camp Pendleton?

Leary: Well, we had some at Camp Lejeune, Camp Pendleton-

Green: Oh OK.

Leary: And then got to Guam and then you were joined [to a] platoon, and I was in the 3rd Engineer Battalion and we had some excellent men there and they taught me and if they thought I was good enough, why they’d go alone. And so we were sent out to do this or that, or blow that gun up or whatever, you never knew just what you were getting into. But, one night I remember in Guam, we’d captured Guam, but there was still a lot of Japanese around the island and somebody got the message that they were gonna try to cross this river and it had grass that grew almost as high as our ceiling here [about 10 feet tall] and along the edges and in the water too. And so they sent us down there and we had to touch a man on each side so the Japanese couldn’t sneak through us.

Green: Oh.

Leary: We stood in that river all night long, I remember that.

Green: Oh my gosh.
Leary: That [was] an eye opener. And another time I was put on guard duty around the ammo dump. And that’s where you’re out in no man’s land and here were all the demolition is and explosives and then the forest is around it. You walk around that and there’s a couple guys beside you and then you meet and then you turn around and go back the other way and they turn around and go the other way. But, if you don’t meet somebody, you know somebody’s-

Green: Oh yeah.

Leary: Gone and something’s happened to them and that’s scary.

Green: Sure.

Leary: And every step you take, [you think] “I hope he’s over there.” They’re thinking the same thing, “I hope I meet so and so,” because you could be that far [Mr. Leary stretched his arms to the length of approximately 3 feet] and not see them. It was, not good.

Mrs. Leary: “Was it on Chichi-[Jima] or Iwo [Jima] that you did the most [inaudible] fortification?

Leary: I did a lot on Iwo. [There were] a lot of things to blow up that were unsafe. You know?

Green: Mmhm.

Leary: Another story-

Green: Sure.

Leary: We had a kid, he was about 6 years old and we were stationed near Yona Village [in Guam], and the Navy had built these people, natives, homes, and they were all up on posts, you know?

Green: Uh huh.

Leary: Cause [of] the water and mud and so forth. And this little boy, everyday he’d come over and run errands for us. And we called him “chick.” Every kid was a chick, [he was a] nice kid.
And he’d come to the different tents and some of the guys would have him take their wash over and then his mother would wash their clothes in the river. It saved them scrubbing. And they’d give him a penny or a nickel or something like that. Later on, years ago, we were in Gettysburg at a reunion.

Green: Oh!

Leary: And his [this little boy from Guam that Mr. Leary just mentioned] father created a soap factory. He started out collecting grease out of the mess halls.

Green: OK.

Leary: And that was how he started to make soap.

Green: Oh!

Leary: Then he got a hold of a, [it had] been repainted, a truck, maybe one of ours, who knows? All the numbers written [were taken] off of it and if it was U. S. Marines, it was painted over and then he'd come around with that and collect grease. And then he started this business, making soap. He had a soap factory. This kid [little boy from Guam that Mr. Leary above mentioned] was his son.

Green: Oh wow.

Leary: And, years later, we were at Gettysburg, at a reunion and this car pulled up and here, he was the Governor of Guam, this boy-

Green: Oh my gosh!

Leary: And he saw our sign, “3rd Marines,” and he came over …and he stepped out of the car and he says, “are you 3rd Marines?” [And we said], “yes,” and I said, “are you from Yona Village?” And he said, “Yeah!”

Green: [Laughs]
Leary: And then he went on to tell us that he was the Governor, and I said, “you, we called chick?” [And he said], “yeah, me, chick!”

Green: [laughs]

Leary: He was the Governor of Guam and he brought his whole family and stayed the whole week that we were there and traveled with us.

Green: How about that?!

Leary: Oh, it was just amazing!

Green: Yeah!

Mrs. Leary: Jim, was it Iwo Jima or Chichi that was named for the sulfur?


Green: Yes, I remember that.

Mrs. Leary: Is that what it means in their language?

Leary: [It was] terrible. You couldn’t walk, you’d sink into ash, not good. I have some pictures.

[At] Chichi, we went up there and the Japs surrendered and the war crimes started and then they brought those criminals back to Guam.

Green: Oh OK.

Mrs. Leary: Was it Kuribachi, what was that guy’s name, that awful prisoner?

Leary: Major Matoba, oh yeah, he was a real brute. I have his pictures.

Green: And you were guarding him, Major Matoba?

Leary: And we put him in a prison and it had wire on it and machine gunners, it was bad business. And so, I was in the engineers and we had to be able to do anything, you know?

Green: Yeah.
Leary: From road building to bridges and then everything beyond [and] behind. And they told us, I think there were 6 or 7 of us, and our first sergeant, he was a former first marine and he had charge of the detail and he said, “I want this building built,” and this Matoba was 6 foot 1.

Green: Oh.

Leary: Big marine.

Green: Mmhm.

Leary: Bigger than most of us. [It] ended up [that] he was considered the 3rd best judo expert in the Japanese Army. He’d been in China and he’d been in-

Green: Oh my gosh.

Leary: I mean, terrible, terrible things they did. Oh! And he was on Chichi and some of our flyers were shot down and they [members of the Japanese Army] beheaded them [American pilots] and he was one of the instigators of it. And so, they wanted to get more information from him and so I had to count for every nail that we used, that was made of plywood and the measurement for the door, the slot in the door, he could get his hand out, but not his face. They didn’t want too much air in there, you know?

Green: Mmhm.

Leary: He was 6’1,” so we made it [the holding cell] just exactly 6 foot, so he couldn’t stretch out.

Green: Oh. Uh huh.

Leary: The MPs marched him over, and there was a couple [that] came through and wanted him to go in that [the holding cell]. [And] we were just finishing up and I was right near the door and, 1st Sergeant McFale was his name, tough old guy.

Green: [Laughs]
Leary: He says, “throw him in there.”

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: This Major Matoba walked up there and we pointed “in” and he understood English better than we did.

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: [Here Mr. Leary imitated how Major Matoba shook his head “no”].

Green: Oh!

Leary: [Major Matoba’s physical response represented] “Nah.”

Green: Oh, no, he shook his head.

Leary: And so he backed into it and then he put his feet against the door opening, and then [he put] his hands [against the door]. And he wasn’t gonna go. And I was the first one there so I just put my hand on his chest and said, “go in.” Nah!

Green: Oh!

Leary: Well, when I touched him, he grabbed me like that, [by the shoulders] and threw me.

Green: Oh my gosh!

Leary: And I’m just flying through the air-

Green: [Gasps]!

Leary: And knocked the other guys down, I mean, they were as surprised, more than I was.

Green: Oh my gosh!

Leary: And he knocked them all down, but he couldn’t get away because the machine gunners would’ve, if he would’ve tried anything, they would’ve cut him down. We got him back in and squared away and then we pushed him in. That was in the middle of the morning. It was after
lunchtime and I heard this terrible screaming. [Sighs]. I said, “what’s going on? It sounds like a battle.” He’s [Major Matoba] was in there and he found a nail and he tried to-

**Green:** [Gasps].
**Leary:** Stab himself. Well, it was just superficial wounds, [he] just punched himself and they weren’t deep, but he was bleeding some. And so they called the doctor to go in and give him a shot to quiet him down. Oh, he was screaming, just [the sound of his screams were] vibrating. It was mountains all around and [it was] echoing and it was bad. [Those were] the loudest of yells I’d ever heard in my life. And he put this on and the doctor said, “no way am I going in there,” he said, “he’d kill me!” [Laughs] So the doctor wouldn’t and he screamed all afternoon, all night long and into the next day and then he’s laying down in there. He was not stretched out in any means because it wasn’t that big. The MPs, they were all 6 foot or so, they said, “well, we’ll see what the problem is,” but they wouldn’t want to fool with him a bit. They went in and he thought he was dying and then they went in and gave him a shot and he was quiet for a while. Then the doctor patched him up. [Mr. Leary wondered aloud] “how did he find that [the nail that Major Matoba used to injure himself]?” I was one of the ones that was to have counted for all the nails and if they were bent, we couldn’t use them.

**Green:** Oh, mmhm.
**Leary:** One dropped and he found it.

**Green:** Wow!

**Leary:** I was scared there for a few days, I thought, “man, they’re gonna hang me!” But then they sent all those, I think there were 8 of them, there was a Lieutenant General and a Navy Admiral they hanged. Then they sent a lot of our guys back and the prisoners was on this one ship and it hit a typhoon and they ended up 500 miles south of Guam, they couldn’t turn in
because the storm kept pushing them and, oh, it was bad . . . . Then they came back and the guys were seasick and they had these horses on there and some of them died on this ship. [Here Mr. Leary is trying to recall the nickname for this ship], They called it in early times the zoo?

**Green:** Oh I’m not sure.

**Leary:** Oh, you know, two by two they put the-

**Green:** Oh! Noah’s Ark?

**Leary:** Noah’s Ark, they called it Norah’s Ark. [Laughter].

**Green:** Oh my gosh that’s funny!

**Leary:** That ship, it was an LST [Landing Ship, Tank]. Bad shape, it was all battered and they got it back to Guam and the guys, they said they’d never forget that trip. There was probably a third of us [that] stayed there [Chichi-Jima, information acquired after interview] and some of our demolition men, there were navy teams, an officer and then the enlisted men in the Navy, that’s what made a team. There was 3 or 4 of them and they were all nice guys, they worked with us and we worked with them. We loosened stuff up, a lot of guns and stuff and mines, at first, [we had to] get rid of those. But there was a pile of duds, mortar shells didn’t go off-

**Green:** OK.

**Leary:** I mean, [there were] quite a pile of them, they were right down by the harbor and they had it fenced off, and we fenced off areas. We couldn’t blow them up because there were too many people, and so we went down, Nick Malvesti and I, and one other Navy team. We had to dig mines out of there and there was a lot of floating mines that floated in on the beach and so we just used our rifles with a tube on them and if you hit that, they’d blow up.

**Green:** Oh OK.
Leary: Well we just, rather than going down and taking a chance on our lives, we just shot them out.

Green: Target practice huh, yeah?

Leary: Finished them right there. One night [in late Spring of 1946, information acquired after interview], a lot of search lights that we blew up, [they were] big, to spot airplanes and then these guns. Nick and I were up on top of the harbor this one day and there was a 25 inch gun and we set the charge and there was a hole in the ground, like a fox hole, and so we jumped in that. It was safe and I misjudged, thinking that it blew up and everything was down and I went to crawl out and I was just like that [Mr. Leary here reached his hand up], putting my hand out on top and Nick grabbed me and pulled me back and there was a piece of shrapnel, about that big [Mr. Leary puts his hand in the shape of a fist to represent the size of the piece of shrapnel] just buried in the ground, it would have gone clear through me.

Green: Oh my gosh!

Leary: Well, I looked at him and he was white and I don’t know what I looked like-

Green: Yeah!

Leary: But he saved my life that day and I was shaky the rest of that day, I mean, that’s too close. And then we’d [inaudible] two different ships and at night, we’d go and stay on the ship and then eat breakfast and then they’d give us a sandwich for lunch and then we’d come back to [the ship] just before dark to sleep, it was a lot safer there. We did that for a couple of weeks and the infantry patrol, they’d come down on an LCI [Landing Craft Infantry] and they were walking around and if they’d find something, a cave or something they thought was booby trapped, then they’d chain it off and then we’d have to go up and get rid of it. We were there a couple weeks or more. I had to keep a record of everything I blew up-
Green: Oh really!

Leary: And I still have it.

Green: Wow!

Leary: Not all of it, I’ve lost some of the sheets. Anyway we came back to Chichi and they had a big 240mm, that’s about an 11 inch gun, and it was on a track and they’d fire it 1 time and then wheel it back in the cave and we couldn’t locate it and finally, we did. I’ve got a picture of it, I blew it up . . . . They had a cave that was copper lined and the Japs had their explosives stored in there, picric acid they used mostly. I wondered why all the Japanese had all gold teeth, and here, it [the picric acid] took the enamel off their teeth.

Green: Huh!

Leary: And I ran out, so I started to use that stuff, and at the end, I’m as yellow as that [points to an object that is the primary color yellow].

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: And my whole body and my clothing and everything. [Some of his friends said] “boy, you’re turning yellow Jim!” And I said, “yeah! Kind of different, isn’t it.”

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: But we didn’t have a dentist up there and somebody else said, “you’re having trouble,” and I said, “no, not really,” and so I blew some more stuff up and then Malvesti, he went home and [Recording malfunction, here Mr. Leary stated that he was] the only demolition man left up there.

Green: Wow. And this was on Chichi-Jima?

Leary: And there are still these, I’d taken a lot of rifles and anything that could be valuable, and I’d take it and I’d put it in the Jap’s. I had to, that was their landing craft, and then tow it out and
then sink it outside the harbor so it wouldn’t blow anybody else up. One guy was worth it, if they saved somebody else.

**Green:** Yes!

**Leary:** But this one day I had it loaded with, well, that was the day Malvesti, he outranked me, and he said “no,” he said, “I’m not touching that, that’s your job!” [Laughter]. So, I said, “OK.”

**Green:** [Laughs]

**Leary:** So, they’d taken most of the troops away by then [in April of 1946 on Chichi-Jima, information acquired after interview] and so I said, “Well I’ll take care of it” and I took one at a time of these mortar shells, I think there were 88, and one at a time, I’d take it and lay it in the bottom of the landing craft and come back, it took me all day. Very tenderly, I handled them, but [all the while] I’m thinking, “this is not good.” And so I had a landing craft of my own and got out there and set the crog in and set the charge and lit the fuse and I got back in my own landing craft, hit the throttle, [and] it’s conked out.

**Green:** Ah! Oh!

**Leary:** I’m scared, I mean-

**Green:** Sure!

**Leary:** Just an instant and I thought, “Oh, do something!” And so the only thing to do was to go back in there and pull the fuse out, get rid of it, come back and start the motor and make sure it revved up and not gonna stall. And that’s what I did. I’m shaking, you know?

**Green:** Yeah!

**Leary:** But I got the thing set and made sure that my motor was going and pulled the fuse, it was [a] time fuse and I went away and it sunk it and then I came home and I said, “no more today.”

**Green:** [Laughs]
Leary: “I’ve had it!” I was just completely exhausted. And then we, another day we hauled all of this picric acid out of the, and I had a crew of guys helping me, load it on a 6 by 6 truck, a pretty good size truck. And we were to take it up over the mountain [to] get rid of it and drive the truck into the water and sink it, the whole thing, maybe blow it up. And so we loaded it up and the guys that were gonna help me unload it, they were in a jeep behind me, quite a ways behind, and I said, “you guys stay back.” So the driver got into the truck and I got into the truck with him, we went up over the mountain very slowly, you know, and down the other side. And Japanese generals had a house there, I remember that. It was probably, oh a couple hundred yards off to the left. [It was] nice, looked like-

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: A nice place. And [we were] going over there and I said “let’s stop right here and decide how we’re gonna do this.” The driver said, “yeah, that’s a good idea.” [Laughter]. He was not happy at all we had to do this and I don’t blame him. And so we got out of the truck and we’re starting to walk back up the hill, the mountain kind of, and we were half way up and I figured there was 22 hundred pounds of explosives on it.

Green: Oh my gosh!

Leary: Well, it blew up and I remember flying in the air. I was on the left side of the road and I remember flying and I ended up on the right side of the road.

Green: Oh my gosh!

Leary: And the guy that was on the right side, he was off in the field a ways. And I landed on my back, because I remember seeing but I couldn’t talk, I was dumb. And all this stuff falling and the noise was just out of this world. And finally, I came half to and I kind of sat up and I
looked up and there were about 7 guys in that jeep, and [I thought] “oh my God, those guys in the jeep!”

It blew the top right off the jeep-

Green: Oh my gosh!

Leary: Oh, [I thought], “what a thing I’ve caused!”

Green: Oh!

Leary: Poor guy [that] was laying in the field, he wasn’t up yet and I didn’t know what to do and then I saw some stirring in the jeep and [I thought], “oh man, somebody’s alive.” So I went up and they were all alright-

Green: Oh my gosh!

Leary: But nobody could hear, it took us probably 3 days before we heard anything.

Green: Wow!

Leary: By then, my driver, he came to and we all survived.

Green: Wow!

Leary: But man, that hole was bigger than this room [approximately 12 feet by 16 feet].

Green: Wow!

Leary: We looked in the house, [there was] nothing there. And the biggest thing we found was a piece [the size of a] matchstick.

Green: Huh!

Leary: It just crumbled, I mean it just disintegrated. [Sighs].

Green: Oh my gosh!
**Leary:** In a few minutes, jeeps came and the medics [came] and everybody [came] because it shook the whole island. And they came over the top and saw that big hole and then they saw us, you know?

**Green:** Yeah!

**Leary:** And then they came down and they led us away, back to the camp. But I know it was 3 days before I could hear anybody. Then I blew up the gun that was over the harbor and in the meantime we’d built a, for the 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines, and I have a picture of it, a marker we made [that said] “the engineers can do anything.”

**Green:** [Laughs]

**Leary:** [We] made it a little fence around it, metal, they dedicated it this one day and the commanding officer told us [that] there would be no names put in it, [that] this was the 1st Battalion, the whole 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines and this would be simple and we’ll put the activities, the sheets typed on that and that would be put in a can and they’ll seal it. These was all engineers, cause they were sealing the can and I helped build the thing . . . . So I’m thinking, “the seven of us [those who had built the marker] had better get our names on that.”

**Green:** [laughs]

**Leary:** So, and I told the rest of them [about his preceding thought], and [they said] “how’re you gonna do it?” I said, “I haven’t figured it out yet.”

**Green:** [laughs]

**Leary:** So they each signed their name to it. And I put it in my dungaree coat pocket and so they figured out that the speaker, I think he was maybe a Colonel, I can’t remember now. But he handed this, his message and so on, two or three fellas spoke. And they’d hand this down and [then] the guy here handed it to me and I put it in this can, folded it up and stuck it in that can
and, boy, that’s the right place, there. So, everyone is watching the speaker and I just reach in my pocket and stuck it in the can with their names on it and the rest of them didn’t know it, they didn’t even see it. Then, [I] sealed it up, the can, [it was made of] metal. It’s sealed and [Mr. Leary’s fellow engineers asked him] “did you get our names in there?” And I said, “yeah! It’s in there.”

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: The poor officers, they never knew it was in there and I never told them, they didn’t need to know.

Green: [Laughs] Yeah!

Leary: If they ever dig that up, our 7 names will be in there-

Green: Wow.

Leary: And we were the ones that built it.

Green: Which island was this on?

Leary: On Chichi-Jima.

Green: On Chichi-Jima.

Leary: That was just before we left.

Green: OK and when was this?

Leary: Huh?

Green: When was this?

Leary: Oh, this was probably May or June of ’46, 1946.

Green: Oh wow. OK, wow.

Leary: And then I blew this big gun, oh it was a big one and they were gonna put up a bigger one, they said it was gonna be a 20 inch gun they were building in Japan and they had shaved the
mountain, the stone off and made it smooth, so they could drag it up there and they were using their heads. Oh that big one [would have been] bigger than anything we ever had. But they didn’t get it there yet. But they wanted the big gun, it was probably a 14 inch gun up there, it was in the cave and the road went right through the mountain and they dug it and then to get up there, they had wooden steps, it was way up in there . . . . But I’m thinking, “the day I blow it up, I’ll get down alright, but I have to go back up and inspect it.” To make sure it’s blown up. But I didn’t do it that day anyway. I set the charge and I overcharged it apparently, cause it blew up and it took all the stairs and all the wood-

**Green:** Oh my gosh!

**Leary:** And just cleaned it out of there. Then I went over that evening and they said, “the Colonel wants to see you” and [I said] “Oh-

**Green:** Oh, yeah.

**Leary:** That’s not good.” Scary. The MPs, when I went back to our area, they let me in and said, “the Colonel wants you to come as soon as you get back.” [I said] “oh boy,” they said “yeah, oh boy.” [Laughter]. So I went over and I’m thinking, “what happened, has to be this gun or something to do with that.” But I’d told them that I said, “I can’t guarantee this won’t break some windows in this building . . . . There’s nothing for it to stop the blast, it’s gonna go straight and it’s gonna go over, these buildings are right in line, it’s gonna blow them up. It’s gonna do some damage.” So I’m thinking, “maybe it’s the windows,” and I’m thinking, “what I’m gonna say?”

**Green:** Mmhm.

**Leary:** I get over there and the Colonel, he’s rickety, always walked around with a stick in his hand, he said, “Leary,” he says, “what are you gonna do for the next couple of weeks?” I looked
back and saw all these windows down and I said, “I’ll probably be replacing windows.” And he said, “you’re right.”

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: And he was real good about it. It took me a couple of weeks to put all those windows back, I don’t know where they got the glass, but they did.

Green: Yeah.

Leary: He said “did you overcharge it?” And I said, “I think a little bit.” And he said, “I think so too.” [Laughter] He was really decent with me. A lot of the guys had gone home [by this time, April of 1946, information acquired after interview] and they wanted this radio station that President [George H. W.] Bush, first President Bush, bombed, but he didn’t knock it out. And he was shot down there and picked up by one of our subs.

Green: Oh wow!

Leary: 2 miles off the island [of Chichi-Jima, information acquired after interview]. That was our job, originally, [to] blow that up. And every day I was up there, I’d try to think, “how am I gonna do this [and] so forth?” So it came down to zero time and so I was running out of explosives and so I had a patrol out ahead of me and one of the guys came back and said, “hey Leary, there’s a whole cave full of drums.” I said, “what’s in the drums?” And they said, “I don’t know.” [Laughter]. And so I ran up and opened it and smelled it and it was alcohol and I said, “that’ll do it.” There must have been 35 or 40 drums in there.

Green: Wow.

Leary: And I said, “that’ll do it,” and he said “what do you mean?” And I said, “it’ll do it, just start rolling.” I said, “go.” And so they started rolling them in and I think I only rolled one drum in, so I started opening the bung up and letting them [run out] and I’m standing in alcohol.
Green: [Laughs]

Mrs. Leary: Or was it liquor? What do you mean, alcohol or rubbing alcohol?

Leary: Alcohol. It was the other kind.

Mrs. Leary: Real alcohol. Real alcohol and rubbing alcohol. [Laughs].

Leary: Yeah. Anyway, it was explosive anyways.

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: So I got all the guys that help me, I put them in the cave, where we came out of and on the way out, I’m trying to think, “how am I going to do this and not get blown up?” And there were overalls or something hanging, there was about 30 chairs there that they used to phone, that operators used to call the messages back to Japan.

Green: Oh, OK.

Leary: It was an information center, so I just dragged that and they were overalls or something, a big pile of it. I dragged them through the alcohol and went as far outside as I could go and I said “quit,” right there and I said, “well, this is it, Jim.” I reached, I had a ronso lighter in my pocket and I pick it out and opened it and lit it, threw it, and took off!

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: [Mr. Leary attempts to simulate the explosion with his hands].

Green: Oh my gosh.

Leary: Oh, it burnt for 4 days-

Green: Wow!

Leary: It was some fire.

Mrs. Leary: Listen you two, its 5:30, I’ve gotta feed my diabetic [son] by 6. Now, are you home yet from the war?
Leary: No, not quite.

Mrs. Leary: Well, let’s get you home because you taught Sunday school, you were a councilman, a school board member . . . oh yeah, it goes on and on. It really does. . . We were married in ’48.

Leary: February 7th, 1948. We have 3 sons . . .

[Mr. and Mrs. Leary go on to talk about their children; Tim, Matt, and Nate].

Green: Mr. Leary, would you mind going through the experience of the end of the war for you and how you went from overseas to back here, on the homefront?

Leary: Well, yeah I got here in the States and went to Camp Lejeune and this Clyde Thompson that I-

Green: Mmhm.

Leary: Before I went out, I came back in and I flew home. There were seven of us, seven marines. And we were nearing, I watched the coastline [and] knew about where we were, and the pilot called back and calls my name out and he says, “Leary,” he says, “are you familiar with Camp Lejeune?” And I said “yes” and how about out to the airport?” And I said, “yeah, I was stationed out there.” He said, “fine,” he says, “I’ll tell you what, I’m gonna drop [you] down there and I’ll call ahead and they’ll have a jeep or somebody pick you up.” I said, “fine.” He said, “no sense in you going to Cherry Point and then getting a bus back to Camp Lejeune.” I said, “that’s fine.” So he dropped me off and the plane took off and I’m standing there and pretty soon a jeep come down the runway and it was pretty empty by then, out there. He says, “are you Leary?” and I said, “yeah, I’m the only guy here.”

Green: [Laughs]
Leary: So he says, “hop in.” He took me over and then Clyde’s office was on the second floor of the building and [they] told me what headquarters building. So I went in and it was a Saturday afternoon and, nobody around, I mean, it was a lot different. And so I says, “where do I go?” And they said, “the second floor.” And I went and there was a door open about 3 or 4 inches and the rest of them were all closed. I tapped on it and [someone said] “come in.” I went in and all I saw was the soles of his shoes, he had his feet on his desk and he opened them up like that [here Mr. Leary placed his hands side by side and then fanned them open] and here it was, this Cylde Thompson.

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: Sitting there [and he said], “[I’ve] been waiting for you Jim, where you been?” Then he says, “you’re too late to do anything today and its Saturday anyway, so let’s go out for dinner.”

Green: Oh!

Leary: So he took me out for dinner. Then I left there on the next Thursday on a bus and then came into D. C., Union Station.

Green: Mr. Leary, I have one final question for you, would you mind reliving the moment when you found out that you were going to be able to come back home?

Leary: Oh, well I was waiting for that-

Green: Sure!

Leary: For a while. I’d seen a lot of guys come home before I did. All my brothers, they all beat me out.

Green: Oh did they?

Leary: Yeah, and they were writing me letters [about] how nice it is back here-

Green: Oh!
Leary: And I said, “yeah.”

Mrs. Leary: They were driving your car and wearing your clothes. [Laughter].

Leary: Yeah, right! And I had a big Oldsmobile, eight, straight eight, that was a big thing.

Green: Wow and when exactly did you return home?

Leary: It was after Labor Day because I was in Labor Day in Hawaii, Honolulu. And so it would have been around the 12th or 15th of September, it was right around my birthday, because it’s the 15th of September, but I don’t remember the exact date. I came into Greenville on the bus and the bus driver usually went up [Route] 18 and he says, “where do you live?” And I said, “Jamestown.” He asked these other people, “do you mind if I go through Jamestown?”

Green: Oh!

Leary: He took me right up to my house.

Green: Sure.

Leary: Dropped [me off at] midnight and my family was all waiting for me.

Green: Oh, yeah.

Leary: Yeah, it was different.

Mrs. Leary: [laughs]

Green: And this is 1946, is that correct?

Leary: ’46, September of ’46.

Green: So you were abroad well after VJ Day.

Leary: But then on Saturday morning, my boss called me and wondered when I was coming to work.

Green: Oh my gosh! [Laughter]

Leary: So that really, I mean that really [inaudible].
Mrs. Leary: No vacation.

Leary: I says, “I don’t think I can make it Monday,” but I went on Tuesday. I didn’t have much vacation.

Mrs. Leary: [Laughs]

Green: So you were abroad Mr. Leary, well after VJ Day then?

Mr. Leary: What’s that?

Green: I said, you were abroad well after VJ Day then?

Leary: Well, yeah. A year –

Mrs. Leary: Yeah.

Leary: and a half.

Green: Wow.

Mrs. Leary: Yeah, quite a while because, yeah OK, you had to [recording malfunction].

Leary: I came back to Guam and I was there from probably June until September, 1st of September, thereabouts . . . [Recording malfunction].

Green: Mr. Leary, would you mind just talking about your trip with your 3 brothers to the World War II Memorial in Washington, D. C.?

Leary: That’s another 6 hours. [Laughter]

Mrs. Leary: We don’t have time [in joking voice], it was great . . . .

Leary: Our trip to D.C. to see the memorial was probably one of the highlights of my life. It was just out of this world and I’d been turned down, couldn’t ever get a 25 passenger [bus], I got 23 one time. Just, the fates weren’t there. So they always sent my money back and one day Nate [his son] must have sensed I wasn’t in the best, and he said, “don’t worry,” and I said, “oh I’m not worried about anything, no use in worrying about it.” Here, he had been planning this thing
[the trip to the World War II Memorial] for months-

**Green:** Oh!

**Leary:** Then he says, “well, we’re gonna take a little trip.” There were 14 of us, we rented a van . . . they had cold drinks and food and everything.

**Green:** Wow!

**Leary:** Then they had two [people] serving us, we never had to get up or anything.

**Green:** [Laughs]

**Leary:** Lou, and John and I, the three brothers in the middle of the van and then youngsters, 17 on up, were behind us and in front of us . . . They took us to the Pentagon, we had to be there at 2:45 [p.m.]. And I was concerned about making it in time, so we got there [recording malfunction, we had] a bus there and took us everywhere we wanted to go . . . just unbelievable . . . It was a great time. Then we went through the Army-Navy Club and the host there took us, [it was] 4 stories, it was a fabulous place. He said that they have a library, [he said] “we have things here that the congressional library would like but they’re not gonna get it.” [Laughter]. And I says, “I can understand that! [It’s] a good place, right here.”

**Green:** [Laughs]

**Leary:** We got to chatting and he showed me a plaque that had the past presidents of the Army Navy Club. And I looked down and I said, “General Urston, he was my commanding officer,” he said, “you’re kidding!” And I said, “no, no.”

**Green:** How about that!

**Leary:** [Mr. Leary said] “3rd Marine Division” and he said, “yeah.” And then I looked above about a half a dozen guys and [saw the name] “Colonel Hoganboom.” I said, “he was my commanding officer in the engineers [battalion],” he says, “you’re kidding!” And I said “no.” He
[Colonel Hoganboom] was there about 2 months and he was a real brainy guy, bright young guy and they moved him up to Assistant Commander. He was second in command in the division . . . Then he [the man from the Army Navy Club] took us through all the rooms there and then we had a steak that night, no charge.

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: I couldn’t spend any money. They put two youngsters in between each of us, we’d reach for ours wallet and they’d slam them shut. But it was just a fantastic [trip]. I have all kinds of pictures and a lot of stuff that just no one else has.

Green: And if you wouldn’t mind, I’d love to see them! Thank you so much Mr. Leary for taking this time and sharing your memories with me and I am really excited-

Leary: They were mostly good memories, but there were some times when it wasn’t.

Mrs. Leary: Well, there have to be some rotten ones like that unfortunately.

Leary: Oh yeah, and I would draw, overseas, we got, I think, $4 extra a month.

Green: Uh huh.

Leary: So, I’d draw $5 one month and $10 the next month. I didn’t have anything to spend it on, otherwise shaving cream maybe-

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: If I got a chance to shave. Well, [I also spent money on] pop, or whatever.

Mrs. Leary: Well, your mother got an allotment for each of you, didn’t she?

Leary: What’s that?

Mrs. Leary: Your mother got an allotment-

Leary: Yeah.

Mrs. Leary: A payment for each of you the whole time?
Leary: But I played a lot, when we had a chance, softball, football, and basketball. And the engineers, they were all athletes, I mean, outstanding! We were playing battalions, that’d be a thousand guys at least-

Green: Wow.

Leary: And we would beat them.

[Second side of tape 1 ends].

[First side of tape 2 begins].

Leary: We were playing softball and this very good friend of mine, the best friend I had in the Marines, I told him before the game, I told him before the game, “this is gonna be a tight game, so, we’re gonna win it though.” He said, “yeah, this would be the one to win.” And I said, “if you get on 3rd base, and I’m coming up to bat,” I said, “I’m gonna bunt it and I’ll flash when I’m gonna bunt and you take off.” He said, “OK.” I gave him the sign I was gonna lay it down and the 3rd baseman, he’d taken a step back, behind the baseline and I watched him, that was all I needed. Laid it down, he crossed the plate, and that was it. That was $25 for us each. But he never got over that, he said, “you took a lot of nerve.” I said, “no, all I had to do was lay it down and you beat the throw.” Then football, this was on Chichi, the field was, oh terrible, glass and metal and everything, with no way of cleaning it up. And that’s where we played. It was kind of an exaggerated touch football. We had this, [inaudible] was his name, he played for TCU, Texas Christian [University], and he was an all-American before he came into the Marines. Big guy, I mean he was a great guy, he was tough! He says, “Jim,” he says, “you play offense,” he says, “I don’t like to play offense, I like to play defense and knock somebody down!” [Mr. Leary said] “that’s fine with me!”

Green: [Laughs] Uh huh!
Leary: Minute we lost the ball or something, why he’d go in, and if we got the ball, I’d run in. He just loved to smash guys down . . . ! Angelo Bertelli, he was our 3rd Marine Division Athletic Officer and was an all-American from Notre Dame-

Green: Wow!

Leary: At one of the reunions we had at Paris Island, they made him honorary officer of the day and he was sitting in the chair in front of me and it was a nice ceremony and he went to stand up and I said, “Angelo,” I said, “man, you aren’t near as big as you used to be,” and he says, “you aren’t either!” [Laughter]. His legs were bowed, I was taller than he was!

Green: That’s funny!

Leary: But he was a nice guy. Lot of times, I’d draw $5 one month and $10, [like] I was telling you and we had this one guy, a friend of ours, he gambled, I mean, just the minute he got paid he’d blow it or he’d have a lot of money, one or the other. Invariably, here I am, drawing $5 and the next day he’d [ask], “Jim,” he says, “do you have a dollar I could borrow?” And I said, “yeah.”

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: But he always paid it back, he always paid it back, one or two dollars, whatever. So, I’d lend him money, [but Mr. Leary said] “don’t gamble with me!”

Green: [Recording malfunction. Here I begin to thank Mr. Leary once again for his time, but he still wanted to share some more stories]

Leary: I wanted to tell you, one time-

Green: Oh sure! Yeah!

Leary: We had a mail call, this was the 22nd of December, and it had to be in ’45.

Green: Uh huh.
Leary: Yeah, and, or ’44. Anyway, I got a letter from my mother the first day of the Battle of the Bulge, it was December 16th. And both Bob and Lloyd got hurt on those days, on that day. And she sent me a letter and said they’d both been injured but she didn’t have any other particulars. And I didn’t have any mail from then until sometime in April.

Green: Oh my gosh!

Leary: I was writing every month, or week or so, but I was getting no mail. And it was in April, I remember that, and we were all out and this good friend Al said, “Jim,” he said, “did you get any mail today?” and I said, “no.” But he set this up and our officer was behind him kind of, they were on they were on their [inaudible] he said, “when was it, that you last got them?” And I said, “it was the 22nd of December, the one before Christmas.” And our officer said, “did I hear you right?” And I said, “what’s that?” And he says, “you said you haven’t had any mail since December 22nd.” And I said, “yeah, that’s right.” He grabbed my dungaree jacket and he says, “boy, we’re gonna go over to the Red Cross then.” So he marched me over there and said, “this man needs his mail and he hasn’t had any since before Christmas and I want you to get through to his mother or somebody. Jim,” he says, “you have no duty til you hear. Nobody, nothing. Don’t listen to anybody.” I said, “well thank you.” He says, “I’ll see you later.” They said, “sit down.” I said, “I’d just like to get through [to] my mother and find my 2 brothers, [they] were hurt back in December and I haven’t had any mail since then.” And they said, “oh that’s terrible, so we’ll get that straightened out.” So they called and it was about 11 o’clock the next morning and they came running over and called my name out and [I said] “right here.” So, I went over and they said, “sit down.” And the runner, I said [to him] “what was the message?” And he said “I can’t tell you.”

Green: Oh!
Leary: [And I thought] “this is not good.”

Green: Yeah!

Leary: And so, then I went over and they said, “sit down Jim.” And I said, “OK, this is the worst yet.” And they said, “oh no, no, don’t sweat it.” And I said, “well, I’m a little concerned.” Oh! Here she is, down, down! [Here Mr. Leary’s dog enters the living room and a small chase after her ensued]. That [the dog coming in] was a stopper.

Green: [Laughs]

Leary: So, they called my mother [and] the call came from Greenville, through the Red Cross I guess it was. And they said, “do you have a son James in the 3rd Marines?” She said “yes” and apparently she gasped, you know?-

Green: Oh! Uh huh!

Leary: But she had some other calls, [but the operator said] “Oh no no no, Mrs. Leary, it’s alright!”

Green: Oh!

Leary: “He just wants some information.” And she said, “oh OK.” I got the word [that] they were both back in action and Lloyd was hurt again after that.

Green: Mr. Leary, during the war, did you have a lot of anxiety about worrying about your brothers and how they were doing, or were you able to focus on your job pretty well?

Leary: Well yeah, you had to. I mean, yeah, there was always concern.

Green: Sure.

Leary: And mother sent me the newspaper quite often and I kept up that way. Everybody knew where I was, and they’d stop at Guam and I saw a lot of local guys going or coming. I got to see them that way. [I was able to] send a message home to mom [through these local guys].
Green: Yeah.

Leary: [Recording malfunction]. But I saw the [USS] Franklin, it came into Guam and it was all burned out. The [USS] Pittsburgh, [it was a] cruiser, the whole front end of it lost its whole bow in a storm. And I went through a tornado in Paris Island. I was on mess duty that day and all I did all day was run a squeegee and push the water out. Then I came out that night at midnight, I was there long hours. They got another bunch of guys to come in and do the same. And I forgot about the landing off the back of the mess hall and I stepped off there and went out, clear under water, it was that deep. The whole island was that way. They had walkways and then there were little wires and then posts, [that served as] guides, when you could see them! But I couldn’t see them, I bet I fell down 30 times getting back to my barracks. I was really a mess! They moved everybody up to the 2nd story. So, instead of 30 guys, there were 60 of them upstairs. That was only a couple of days, [then] they cleaned it up. Then I had a storm on Guam. This is hard to believe, but it was the truth. I was in a Quonset hut, down by the harbor then. This was not long before, because that was when I was going to the dentist every other day-

Green: Oh OK, for your-

Leary: because of my teeth.

Green: Uh huh.

Leary: The picric acid had taken all the enamel off my teeth . . . . In the Quonset hut, when the storm was the worst, there was water that deep [approximately 4 inches to 6 inches] under the roof, blowing under the roof-

Green: Wow!

Leary: And it was blowing that hard that it didn’t fall down, it just followed the contour of the roof underneath. But when the storm winds slowed down a little, then it started [to fall] and
that’s when we got wet. But it was amazing, and just terrific! It blew all the tents on Guam, [they] just disappeared in the ocean. I’ll bet you never had that back home.

**Green:** Yeah!

**Leary:** It took them a while to get enough tents back up. Then they told us to dig a foxhole and [makes a sound that signifies the futility of digging a foxhole]

**Green:** [Laughs]

**Leary:** And, 15 minutes after it started to rain they were full. Then, the last three weeks I was on Guam, I had charge of the big generators and I had no idea [what to do with them]. [Those around him said] “you’re the engineer, you’re supposed to know this.”

**Green:** [Laughs]

**Leary:** And they put me in charge of all those big generators, diesel motors, and they were as big as this room [approximately 12 feet by 16 feet]. And they ran 24 hours a day, all you did was just add fuel to them. And it furnished power to all the hospitals and everything there. They gave me crews to work [for me] and then the guys would stay and make sure [the generators] were getting fuel and so forth. But one night, I was sleeping right near those and one motor sounded funny and I saw that something was wrong and I dashed over and here, the guys before me forgot to put any fuel in it and it ran out. And it was just coughing on its last and I tried to catch it, but I didn’t. I had to do 3 things with 2 hands at the same time.

**Green:** Uh huh!

**Leary:** And I slipped and I hit the manifold and it cooked my hand.

**Green:** Oh!

**Leary:** Then they had to tape my thumb. Oh it was really cooked! They bound it up and they said, “We’re not sure that you’ll ever be able to use your thumb.” And a couple of weeks or
whatever it was and they bound it again and he come in with a knife and cut it, opened it right up and you’d never know it today.

Green: Huh!

Leary: They had some great doctors and dentists. But, I went to a dentist for 30 days, every other day, and I started at the lowest and ended up with the commander of the fleet dental clinic there in Guam and he was the best dentist I was ever to.

Green: Huh!

Leary: Nice guy. I kept going [thinking] “this is not good.” He told me just truthfully what he was doing and everything and he said, “the next time you come in, I’ve got a couple of questions or plans I’ve got for you.” I said, “OK.” So, I’m thinking, “what plans he got? Pull them all or what?” So I walked in and I said, “OK, what’s the first thing?” Then he said, “well, the first thing is” he said, “I’ll guarantee you to do the best possible work I can, if you want to stay here.” I said, “what’s the second one?” And he says, “well, you usually go home and get your own dentist and everything will be paid.” He says, “I know what you’re gonna say.” I said, “I [would] really appreciate it [if you did it]. You’re the best dentist I’ve ever been to.

[Here Mr and Mrs. Leary discuss how the dog came in and slightly interrupted the interview].

Leary: I lost them all [his teeth].

Green: Thank you so much for taking the time to do this and I look forward to looking at your pictures! Thank you again!