This interview is being conducted on Tuesday, September 17, 2015. My name is Fran Prokop and I am at the home of Walter Lee Jackson. Mr. Jackson was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1942 and is a veteran of WWII. Mr. Jackson learned of the Veterans History Project through me and he has kindly consented to participate in the National Archives Veterans History Project. Here is his story:

Mr. Jackson, when and where were you born?

Richmond, Indiana – August 10, 1924.

What were your parents' occupations?

My parents were basically railroad people. My mother was a chef – cook at the railroad station in Richmond, Indiana. My father, he worked in the lumberyard up until 1922 when they moved to Chicago. My mother, she stopped work after five kids. My father had ill health for quite some time.

Up until the time of 16, 17 years old, off and on school, until I was 18, then I got drafted.

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

I had three sisters and three brothers – seven of us.

Were any of your brothers or sisters in the military?

One was – my youngest brother –

What branch was he in?

He went in the Army.

That was during WWII?

World War Two.

Did he come home safely or did anything happen to him?

He didn't go overseas; he stayed – I think the furthest he got was Alaska.

What did you do before entering the service?

I worked for the railroad.

Here in Chicago?

Santa Fe Railroad – in Chicago, yes.

How old were you when you went into the service?

I was 18.\

Were you drafted or did you enlist?

I was drafted.

And that was during the war?

During the war – 1942.

How long were you in – total service years?

Three years – got out in 1946.

1942 to 1946 – okay. And you got drafted into the Army, right?

Yes.

Did you have to go to downtown Chicago – how did you get in?

My local draft board was at 39th and South Park Avenue.

And what did they do – take physicals and things like that?

They took physicals and got other information.

Where did you go for training camp and early days of basic training?

I went to Camp Custer in Michigan.

How long were you there?

I was there during basic training for about a year.

One year?

One year.

After basic training you stayed there?

I stayed there for a year – extended training.

Like advanced training ?

Extended special training in chemical warfare.

I see – extended special training. How did you get to Michigan, by train?

By train.

You took a busman's holiday – by train, ha, ha.

Yes, I did.

How did you adapt to military life – the food and the barracks living – things like that?

It was – food wasn't a problem because as a kid growing up, food was kinda scarce. And I wasn't at all picky about food – as long as there was something to eat.

Right, right, so you weren't too particular.

Not too particular, no.

And how about the training – the physical regimen and stuff?

The training was very physical and we did the same training as the infantry – field tests and baptism of fire.

You had to learn how to shoot a gun, take it apart, put it back together.

Right, right and then we had what you call bivouac training.

What is that – describe that.

Bivouac is being out in the woods for at least 30 days.

Really – 30 days in a row?

Ninety days.

And you had to survive on your own!

You had to survival kit; you had C-rations for 30 days and you lived – trained on how to survive for 30 days in the woods.

Michigan gets pretty cold in the winter.

Yes, it was.

You were there during the winter?

Part of it – about one week. The rest was in Camp McCain, Mississippi for 26 weeks.

Oh, so you spent one week in Michigan –

And then the rest in Mississippi.

Why was that, do you think?

Uh, terrain – different terrain.

To experience different things.

Yes, Michigan was more or less like a dry type of terrain and Mississippi was swampy – damp, and – because overseas it would be somewhat similar to that.

Were you in the infantry?

I was in the C W S –

What does that stand for?

Chemical Warfare Service.

But you still had to take all the regular training.

We took the same; we took extra training.

Okay, so now you're through with bivouac in Mississippi – what other extended training did you have for the rest of the year. What did they do at Chemical Warfare Service?

Chemical Warfare Service – I was in the 150th Decontamination Company. Our basic purpose was, when I first went into the service, America was being threatened by Germany, as far as chemical warfare was concerned. And they had to get these chemical companies up and ready in case. Now, I went through that whole course for about a year, and as soon as I got orders to go overseas, our company was deactivated.

Why?

It was deactivated because the threat was no longer there.

So after all your training and everything, you were deactivated.

Yes, see, chemical warfare was not very popular in the beginning because nobody was gonna use chemicals. But later on, in the intensity of battle, the Germans – if they got a threat that they're losing the battle, they might get desperate and use chemicals. So we had to learn how to detect the different chemicals – mustard gas, luasite, phosgene – and all different kinds of gases.

So you had machines and things that would detect the gases?

We would but the biggest thing was our noses. You take your finger, put on the gas mask and you go into a chamber of mustard gas. And you take your finger and you run it up your gas mask (indicating) and put it up – you'd – you would feel it, you know, you'd get a whiff of it.

Wow – you'd get a whiff of it.

And it stayed for a long time because, in fact, I got exposed – I'm 60% disabled from it.

Really?

Yeah.

You were over-exposed to it.

Yeah.

Was that during your training you were exposed.

During the training. Well, you know, at the same time you had two things going on. Now the government had a government-sponsored experimental training. They had troops that had volunteered to train and they had volunteers for the experimental training to be purposely exposed so they would know how to treat them.

Did you volunteer?

No, no, I didn't volunteer. I was in a company that was decontaminated. We were a company that if you got a gas attack and everything got contaminated, we could come in, just like clean-up people.

Oh, yes.

Come in and clean up; we basically were a service. That's where the decontamination comes in; if they drop a bomb – a mustard gas bomb somewhere around in your facility, you had to be decontaminated and everything cleaned up. We were experienced and w knew how to do it. We had to mix different solutions with different gases.

Wow – okay – so you had to learn – you took the whole year learning all that stuff.

Oh, yes, yes. At the time it was very important because if the threat had followed through, then we would be in trouble.

You'd be in trouble.

But since the threat didn't go through, they deactivated the company after we learned all that.

So you had a lot of classroom training for this?

Yes, class and field training.

So where did they send you after the bivouac?

Well, after we finished that bivouac we went back to Camp McCain, Mississippi to be reoutfitted and we got – we got a whole bunch of heavy, winter clothing and we put on our expert nines together and we said, we're gonna go somewhere where it's cold. Well, where could that somewhere be? Well, Europe. Oh, boy, we're in good shape.

Then, all of a sudden, one night about two o'clock in the morning – this is about two months after we got back from camping – two o'clock in the morning – "Everybody UP! We're moving out!" And so we said well, we're not going to Europe, we're headed south – so we didn't figure we were gonna hit the South Pacific. But everybody at that time, you know, "Loose lips sink ships" – everybody knew that. So we went at that time to Vancouver –

How did you get to Vancouver, by train?

By train, and it took us three days by train to Vancouver, and stayed at Vancouver for two weeks; then we boarded a ship – H.M.S. Japarah J-A-P-A-R-A-H – it was a Belgian ship.

You said HMS, right?

HMS – his Majesty.

It was a troop ship though?

Yes, it was converted.

And where did you go?

We went to Hawaii. And we were in Hawaii for three weeks. And after Hawaii we went to a little, teeny island by the name of Tinian T-I-N-I-A-N; we stayed at Tinian for about two weeks and then we sent to Saipan – S A I P A N.

Is that Japan?

That's Japan; that's 350 miles from Tinian and 400 miles from Iwo Jima. And we – that was the first battle – small battle on Tinian – and we went in D+6.

D plus six?

D Day.

You went in after D Day?

Yeah.

So that was 1944.

Yeah, 1944.

So you went in six days after D Day. And that was on Tinian – what did you do there?

Actually nothin' – all we did was – by the time we got to Tinian, it was all over. And then we stayed there for about three days after that and then we moved on to Saipan. Saipan was a little – you know, the Navy, they bombed Saipan for four days, then the Marines went in; and eleven days after the Marines went in, we went in. Now at this particular time we had changed into a different company now. Now we are the 848th Gasoline Supply Company. So basically the Marines were cleaning out the beach area; there was still hostile fire up in the hills. And so if you had no business up there, you know, you didn't have to go up there. You wouldn't go run up there and try to kill somebody – you try and take care of yourself.

Right.

That was our orders, don't try and be no hero – if you want to come back home. Because if you see all the Congressional Medals of Honor, the men are all dead. Dead heroes.

Right; dead heroes. So the Marines had like a mop-up operation – cleaning up after the guys who were there and you came in after the Marines.

The Marines – no – they were –

They came in after they bombed the area –

Yeah, yeah.

They picked up the slack – whatever was left, they went through it.

Yeah.

Then you came in after it.

The Navy softened it up, the Marines went in and we went in behind the Marines.

Wow – okay. So how long were you there on Saipan?

On Saipan we were there for about a month, and they were gearing up for the big raid on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Did you know about it beforehand – you knew it was gonna happen?

No, we didn't know. But we – we knew that something was gonna happen. We didn't know before it happened—but in the beginning of the happening because we could see the B-29s flying over.

Because they got loaded on Tinian; that's where they put the bomb together.

Yeah –

And put it on the plane on Tinian.

Yeah, Tinian and a lot of other supplies on Saipan. And we knew that something was going on but we didn't know it was that great, until all of a sudden one morning, about nine o'clock in the morning, it got real dark. We said, oh, oh, we thought something – we thought it was gonna be a big storm – but that was that –

The Cloud?

Yeah.

No kidding –

The cloud that blacked out --

There was a mushroom cloud –

It just – all of a sudden, it seemed like it was getting dimmer and dimmer; it affected your eyesight, you know. Then we thought there was a storm. We said, oh, it's gonna rain. We hoped so because heck, it was 120 degrees –

Oh my God!

We said something don't feel right here – I mean you got a weird feeling – and then all of a sudden we seen – okay fellas, we're going to Iwo Jima. Now that was terrible; that was the worst.

So what happened – can you tell me about it?

Yeah, uh --. The Marines went in – they bombed it for seven days –

Wow.

Then out in the bay – we were anchored out in the bay – and the ship was standing for seven days watching the explosions – bombing and stuff. Then, all of a sudden, we got off the ship and into LSTs – landing barges – they said okay, fellas, as soon as – well, before that word came back that the first wave of Marines were just slaughtered because the Japanese allowed them to reach the beaches, and then after they reached the beach they closed the door on them.

Oh, yeah.

Mowed them down. And the ones that was on their way to the beach, they were in LSTs too, the Japs had pretty good gunfire. They had old guns, old stuff, that was working for them because they were up high.

They were fortified too.

Up on Mount Suribachi; and they were looking down.

Yes, an ambush.

This wave would come in and they'd annihilate this one while they got this one on the beach. So the third wave went in, and they said okay, we're gonna wait at least two days until they get – they gotta get some type of area – the doggone island was so small – you could spit on the side. So we're gonna have to clean out an area so we can land troops and survive; because they're running out of ammunition; they're running out of troops; they're running out of everything, so they finally got enough landing space – our were too near the beach to dig in. Well, if you're trying to dig a foxhole in the sand, it's almost impossible. But when you get kinda frantic, you somehow – somehow you manage.

Some kind of a pit – or a hole.

You get some kind of incentive to dig. So we, me and my buddy, we dug a – it wasn't a foxhole but it was a small depression – something to get out of the way – out of the line to protect us. So after that, there was a bunch of hills to go through, and they wanted me to do the hills and up in the mountains – and up into Mount Suribachi. Mount Suribachi has

a lot of caves and holes in it and we were led to believe that the Japanese did that. They did do it, but they did it for a purpose. That was the largest sulphur mine island in the world. Mount Suribachi – the real name of it is the Sulphur Island.

Sulphur Island, okay.

That's what Iwo Jima stands for.

I didn't know that.

These big companies they had an agreement with the Japanese government to mine the sulphur – because bombs and ammunition is made out of sulphur.

Yeah, fuses and things.

But now sulphur also does damage to your lungs and on Iwo Jima you had sulphur springs, but down underneath that sand, that sulphur on the Sulphur Island was cookin' that stuff. Mount Suribachi – it wasn't alive in the top, but the bottom is cookin'.

Oh, wow.

The water around it could be boiling --

Almost like a hot springs.

It is; it is.

Not a volcano because it didn't shoot up; but it stayed hot.

No, it wasn't active at the time. But certain parts of the island, you could look at the water and see it boiling and the temperature on the island was 130 degrees Fahrenheit –

Oh my God.

And we always said you don't have to worry about going to hell because you've already been there.

Right, right.

The conditions were so bad – there was no drinking water; you had no fresh food and the stink from the sulphur –

Oh, like rotten eggs.

like rotten eggs, yeah. And the only thing you had going for you is you didn't have no mosquitoes –

No insects, ha, ha.

But anyway I've seen – it's kind of horrible to see the Japanese, some of them that had been killed, they weren't buried deep at all – and their bodies were all around the island.

So you saw a lot of dead Japanese – Americans too?

And Americans. See, that island – one of the basic things– see, it was so small; they didn't have space or anything. They were trying to make a 4th and 5th Marine cemetery, and they had maybe 100 or 200 feet – well, that's a lot of space for a four-mile island – so they had a Fourth Marine Cemetery and they had the Fifth Marine and they had a bunch of Army people, which we were. That was really the Marines' show because we were attached to the Fourth Marines.

You were attached to the Fourth Marines.

Yeah – attachment – there were only 15 of us.

Oh, only 15 – what were you called – still the gasoline supply guys?

Fuel guys**.**

Did you have to supply them with fuel?

Yeah, we all –

Load tankers –

We offloaded the fuel from the tanker because they had no dock. We had to pump the fuel from the tankers into these 53-gallon drums.

Oh, wow!

And we had to escort these drums from the tankers to the dump by ducks – amphibious ducks; they crawl up on the beach. And take the fuel to the dump.

Did you used to drive one of those ducks?

Yeah, I drove the ducks and I offloaded – I mean – my main job – I was a crane operator in the dump, offloading the ducks, but then also I filled the 53-gallon drums from the tankers also. So we had the fuel tank – one of the fuel tanks on the island of Iwo Jima. And that was for the Marines, Seabees – did a lot of building.

So there was more than one fuel dump there?

Our fuel dump and another one, yeah.

Two fuel dumps. How long did you continue doing that?

Until the war ended.

So after August of 1945 –

Um-hmm.

I understood that Japanese were hidden there and they were still finding people in those caves later, after the war was over.

Oh, Yeah, yeah. They found – when I left there were Japanese still up in the hills. When they raised the flag and said that the island had been secured, well, I always said it was secured up to a point because when I left there was still scattered stuff, you know

People still shooting if they could manage it.

And they were pretty – you couldn't hardly capture them when they were coming off the mountain and committing suicide.

Committing suicide – well, that's how they were.

Go down in the caves, tell them to come out – they wouldn't come out, you'd shoot the flamethrower down in there – you'd hear screams and things –

Mmmm --

But you could see some of the corpses burnt – little babies and stuff, you know –

So there were civilians on the island too? You mean people who lived there – were trapped there during the war?

No, they didn't live on the island; it was not inhabited, but the men who would work there – they worked like for two weeks and they'd bring their wives and family with them.

Oh, I see.

And so when we got there, they had put the majority of them off that island because they knew the invasion was coming, but some stayed.

Yeah, some stayed behind. So you really saw a lot of combat casualties.

I saw casualties; I saw a lot of stuff going on.

You were a young man too – like 21, 22.

Twenty-two. I got married when I was 23.

Makes you grow up fast, huh?

I'll tell you, I have enough to thank the service for – in the beginning I was – I hated it so bad because I was just beginning to get established with the railroad and then I got drafted. At that time I didn't think I was ever gonna come back to that job.

Yeah.

But I was just saying how lucky could I be – that was the first job that I got –

Yeah, right.

And then, I was kind of a snotty young man; had a temper and when I went in the service I got in trouble. I got busted down from my little rank that I had.

What was the highest rank you ever achieved?

Corporal – and then we had to go down and get a member that went A.W.O.L.

During the war?

During the war.

Oh, that's bad.

Now, then they got the Sergeant – the Sergeant picked me to go with him to bring this prisoner back from Chicago. He was on 48th Street, not too far from where I lived. The Sergeant, he was a Regular Army man, and he was in Hawaii, Schofield Barracks when they bombed Pearl Harbor. So he picked me; he had confidence in me. So I got my .45; he got his .45 and we come into Chicago. I had three sisters, and we came in on the Panama Limited today, and the next day we're supposed to go back to Camp McCain, Mississippi. We were supposed to catch the train at six o'clock. The prisoner, he was fine; he wanted to see his mother before he goes back, and I said well, we could do this; we got eight hours to kill; you go an see your momma and meantime I can go see my mother too and my sisters. So he says well, I don't want my momma to see me in these handcuffs –

Oh, no.

So the fools that we were, we took them off and he went to see his mother. Well, then we said we better be going; we only got four more hours. So his mother kisses him and says take care of that little fella in the handcuffs – they got me in the handcuffs –

Ha, ha.

And I'm posing as the prisoner. Well, we get out of sight; we get a cab and we go to my house with the Sergeant and the prisoner, both, we're drinking beer and having a good time – and you know what – we missed that train! Yes, we did.

Ha, ha, ha.

So we went to the train station to try to find out some information for McCain, Mississippi – and the MP's – we got our arm bands on – MP's and we got our prisoner. And the MP stops us and says excuse me, Sergeant says can I see your papers. So the Sergeant gave his papers, he said, oh, oh, you fellas are A.W.O.L. – you were supposed to be back at Camp. And we said yeah, we missed the train, but we're not A.W.O.L. – He says, Well, now I gotta take you in. They took us back to where we picked the prisoner up and he called the Camp, and the Camp said well, put them on the next train, which was the next day.

Yeah.

And that was the first time – I was so miserable in that cell I didn't know what to do. And then –

Were you in a Chicago Police Station – where were you?

48th Street and Wabash Avenue, yeah, and the next day they escorted us to the train, put us on the train and when we got to Camp the First Sergeant came out and snatched the chevrons off the Sergeant -- Fuller was his name – and snatched mine. I didn't care about mine much because I was having a hard time anyway. I was drafted right along with a lot of guys from my neighborhood, and we were buddies and they knew me, and when I'd tell them to do something, they'd laugh, you know, as I write 'em up. Then I'm feeling bad because, you know –

Right, right.

And I brought that to the Colonel's attention; I said, I really don't want this. And he said well, maybe you might be lucky to get transferred, which later on I did, but at that particular time I'd hate to hear the Sergeant come and tell me - get the detail and go and wash that barracks out. And I'd call the guys and they'd say do what? I'd say help me wash the barracks – they'd laugh at me. So I washed the thing, the Sergeant saw me and said look, I don't want you to wash it; I want you to get them to wash it. Well, we're buddies, see? Now, if I tell them to do it and they don't do it, I write them up – or call it to the Sergeant's attention – they won't do what I say, you know, so I said no, I don't want to do that. I didn't care too much, but this Sergeant, he was from the old Army, and he cried when they did that – he had been in the Army for 27 years.

This happened before you went overseas, right?

Yes, before.

Let's go back to where you were in Iwo Jima – you were there for how long?

About eight months – because I had already been infected – with what I developed. I didn't know that I had been exposed until 8 or 9 years afterwards.

What was it you exposed to the sulphur or some other things you had –

Mustard gas.

What were the details aboard ship -- with the Belgian ship that you took – how was the crossing – was it bad?

The crossing was 31 days.

Why, did you stop someplace?

Yeah, they stopped and they took the long way around because they said that the waters were being patrolled by submarines – so they went around different ways. And they were getting information from different sources that kind of guided them across that span of water.

That was the Pacific Ocean?

Right.

When you were at sea and during battles, how did you communicate with your family and friends back home as far as mail and things like that? Did you get letters while you were out there or not?

I didn't get too many because – I got letters from my mother. Basically it was her but we would write a letter and we would address it – somewhere in the South Pacific.

Yes, right. Did they censor your mail too?

They probably did; I have no idea. But I'm sure they did. But that was the only communications; we'd write letters; you don't know when it was gonna be delivered.

Right. How long would it take for a letter from your mother to reach you?

About a month.

That's what I figured – especially during the war.

Yeah, yeah.

It's always interesting to ask that question.

They get it to you when they can, I guess. A lot of times things were so difficult, not because of what's happening right now, but just like in a battle and stuff – it's not the battle while you're there – it's after. When you look and see what stuff is done – that's when it hits you.

Emotionally how did you feel witnessing the destruction and casualties?

Witnessing it I felt okay, but afterwards – yeah.

The emotional damage it does to you.

To see what happens to people.

Did you finally get over that or did you have help with it?

I finally got over it – when I came back home I was going on the road; it kinda helped me along with that.

Now you mentioned some friends of yours – did you meet any guys that you were friendly with afterwards?

Oh, yeah, yeah.

Did you ever get in touch with them or go to any reunions afterwards?

Yeah, we had a thing where we would meet up once a month – and it was about 20 of us. And they're all dead now.

Guys from the neighborhood?

Yes; some from the neighborhood. Other ones from the neighborhood are gone, yeah. I think the last one I called and I didn't have any idea that he had passed and I asked for Jew baby – 'cuz he used to work for the Jews in Chicago, now, on Maxwell Street –

I'm familiar with it.

And he could really talk the language you know, so that's why we called him Jew baby – and the guys said well, you know, Mr. Hudson has passed. It hurt me kinda bad; it hit me kinda strange, you know, 'cuz he was much older than me – an older man and I owe a lot of my manhood to him – something like a mentor, you know, telling me stuff. I was trying to be smart, you know, a smart aleck when I went in there and he would tell me you can't beat this man's Army so bring it on and straighten up.

So that was Mr. Hudson.

Mr. Hudson, I owe a lot to him. When you see me I am a product of what he made me.

Wow, that's good; we all need somebody like that.

We do.

We sure do. So you were actually on Iwo Jima when the war ended – you said you saw the cloud – was that Iwo Jima?

Yes, Iwo Jima, 1944.

So did you ever come to any conclusion about that cloud – did you hear on the news later on what it was?

We heard the news later on but we saw some of the B-29s coming back – and they were ditching in the sea – they couldn't make it to the airfield –

Really?

And they would ditch at sea; then we had to – the navy had special boats – they'd radio to them about approximately where they would come down –

So they would pick them up –

Pick them up – yeah, because sharks were active in that warm water from mount Suribachi. You could just see them when unloading those fuel drums from the tankers in those ducks. You could only carry six of those tanks in that duck.

Six 53-gallon drums?

Yeah, and that duck is really, really rocking and you could see the sharks around. Sometimes they hit them, you know, go up the side, but I don't know – they might have been feeding maybe, I don't know. I can't say for sure. I didn't have much fear, and I look back now – I have more fear now than I did then.

Well, when you're young, you're invincible.

I guess that's right.

So now after eight months on Iwo Jima, how did you get back to the States – where did you go?

After Iwo Jima they told us that the war was over and we came back to San Francisco –

By ship?

By ship.

And how was that crossing?

Twenty-six days.

Wow!

Exactly – waiting to get back. Now they told us, okay, the only transportation we can offer you is the train. If you have the money or the means to get back by air, fine. But I took the train; I wasn't that –

So while on the ship coming back you didn't get seasick?

No.

That didn't bother you?

No.

So you took the train back home to Chicago?

Um-hmm.

How was your reception by family and friends?

Well, my family – (turn tape) – that first week I felt like going back and re-enlist. Ha, ha. But after that it was okay.

That was 1946 now.

Yes, 1946. After I got used to being home, and the people I was seeing – you know when I left I was a young man –

A young kid, really.

And when I come back now, I'm a man. I'm not used to sleeping with people – or being near people, so I was thinking how in the world – the only out was the railroad because I'd be gone – I'd leave here and go to Los Angeles; I'd be gone for two and a half days.

Did you return to your job on the railroad when you came back?

Yes, I did.

They held it for you – you had the same job.

Yes.

What was your position – your title

Well, when I left I was a waiter – dining car waiter. And then I worked my way through, head waiter, and at that particular time, Santa Fe had a kind of a strict policy – and segregation was well and alive at that time –

Oh, yeah.

A black person couldn't be no more than a waiter or a porter; they couldn't go into management, but then the government changed it and things opened up. I've seen porters – they went from porters to conductors; and porters to supervisors, you know, they go to school and train for it. So I had 25 years – well, I had 30 years and I was 47 years old –

Wow!.

AMTRAK came along and they wanted some people to kind of manage their service so they had Service Directors. – my box felt that I was suited for the job, so he vouched for me and I got the job. And after that I got so many jobs because of my boss. He liked me and we were good friends, you know – and he married John Marrch's daughter - President of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad – I worked for Fred Harvey –

The restaurant guy, you're talking about – with those restaurants all over.

Yeah, the Harvey Girls.

Yeah, I remember that.

The lady next door, right over here, Miss Burris, her mother was a Harvey Girl, and we used to – before I got drafted, they had troop trains – like in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and places like that where they had Harvey Houses. They would get us to go down and

bus the dishes sometimes for the Harvey Girls. And I told her I bet you $10 I met your mother and didn't know it.

Ha, ha, didn't know it.

And she said you probably did. She had a very interesting book that she showed me about the Harvey Girls and she said did you ever meet Mr. Harvey? I said, Met Mr. Harvey many, many times, and my neighbor was Carl (inaudible) on the railroad because he used to be Mr. Harvey's valet.

Oh, okay.

See, so and he had two sons – Daggett and Preston, and he put Daggett, a well, well known corporate lawyer. Daggett was going to Harvard Law School and he was washing dishes right beside me on the train when I started.

No kidding – ha, ha. He believed in that – having his son start – do all the jobs.

He came down and said, "put him to work" and he washed everyone of those damn dishes. Now, he's pretty good – Daggett was the same age as me, see, but he was going to Harvard and I'm just starting out. One thing about it, he wasn't high nosed; he came back when he was well established, he came down and said I'll be darn, after all these years, seeing you again Walter. I didn't know him at first –

But he knew you, huh?

And I said, "Daggett? – yeah. He said are they treating you right? They're treating me fine, I said. I'm gonna be retiring in the next three years. He couldn't believe it. He said well, what do you think you're gonna do when you retire? I said Probably nothing, because I came in when I was 17 and I'm leaving at 60 – count up – you know –

So you retired at 60 as Service Director?

Yes.

So you've been retired now for quite a while.

Yes.

Did you go on to do any other jobs of any kind?

Free jobs –

Oh, volunteer jobs.

Yes, plenty.

That keeps you busy; it keeps you young.

It does. I learn so much from that. I always like the medical field and it's just a pleasure for me to see the doctors –

Where do you go?

The VA Hospital.

At St. Joseph's – next to St. Joe?

The one they took over.

So you volunteer in the Veterans Administration Clinic?

Yeah.

I've been up there a couple of times; I'm in the medical field too. I volunteer at Adventist Hospital in Bolingbrook.

Got 6,000 hours.

Oh my God, I only got 600 hours.

I've been doing it for – I can't find my other one.

Walter has just brought out a huge glass case with all his medals and a couple of knives and sheaths – he will talk about them now.

This is the Bronze Star – they had some controversy about it, but on Iwo Jima – we were saying about the valor – if you served on there. Everyone on Iwo Jima almost had it –

The Bronze Star –

And the reason why, when I had told them about it they told me that I sent in for it but they didn't have it sent yet to really qualify for it. But also, as long as it says "Meritorious Service" –

Right meritorious service – I'm going to read from a copy of your DD214 into the record – (taking photographs of Walter's medal case) and a photo of Walter with his medal case.

Yeah, I was doing a lot of praying then.

Walter has – seven ribbons with medals attached and one of them is the Bronze Star – I'm taking photos of it and will send them in with this interview. What is the whistle on this knife – what's the story about that?

That was a drill – the knife, that was a survivor knife –

Those are yours; you didn't take them off anybody else.

No, no.

Well, you never know.

Those are mine and the whistle was when I was practicing to be a non-commissioned officer – that drill – see that chain – have to get that chain off there because I got a medical chain around my neck –

For diabetes – MedicAlert –

It's too heavy.

Besides Walter's large glass-enclosed medal case, at least two by two and a half feet, very nice case, he also has a voluntary service certificate that he has received 5,184 hours for 12 years of volunteer service at Hines VA Medical Center in Maywood, IL and the Joliet Medical Center, but it's over 6,000 hours now. Walter has been busy after his retirement.

Walter also has an article in the local Herald News about his service at the VA Hospital.

I didn't know I was so important.

Walter has copies of pictures from Iwo Jima in 1946 – on his way home after the invasion of Iwo Jima. I'm going to take photos of these pictures – and photos of Walter in his volunteer vest at the hospital.

Reading from Walter's DD 214, some of his service medals include Decontaminating Equipment Operator, Eastern Mandates, Western Pacific, two overseas service bars, American Campaign Medal, Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal with two bronze battle stars, Good Conduct Medal, World War II victory Medal and Meritorious Unit Award. Walter has all these medals in his case. Inside this glass case Walter also has a little pocket bible that he said was given to him when he was inducted; it was given to all servicemen – very interesting.

Walter will speak about his volunteer service at the VA Hospital – Silver Cross VA Hospital in Joliet, Illinois.

It is the emergency part of Silver Cross – that they took over and they are contemplating now about taking the rest of it, but we do quite a bit of business there; everything is new; it's not so convenient to get to, but once you get there you're in a nice, modern type of atmosphere, as far as the clinic is concerned.

Walter showed me a copy of an article that was in our local Herald News showing a picture of him and of the new VA facility when it opened up. The article says that it caters to about 900 veterans –

At least, per day. And it replaces the old hospital – it was a converted facility and it didn't really fit the need. Now we have plenty of room; it's nice and clean too, and just out of the way for some people.

Right.

It's out of the way for me, too, but I feel that it's worth it.

You go once a week?

Twice a week; yeah, I come in two days a week.

Thinking back now – how did your wartime experience affect your life?

My wartime experience affected by life at least 75%. It showed me how to care for other people and have interests in other things other than myself. And how to appreciate. I had good teachers in the service, when I first got drafted, we had what we call a cadre – a cadre was the regular war soldiers and they were the ones that were teaching us in our company – they were at Schofield Barracks in Hawaii at the time of December 7, and these were upright fine men that had been in the service for 15, 20, 25 years, that gave me solid experience and information. And some of that information I use today as a grown man – not only as a young boy.

Very good. So – your life lessons learned from the military.

I don't take anything for granted and always be prepared for whatever might come your way.

That's true – well, that's it, I think. If there's anything else that you want to add to this story we can certainly put it in later on – anything you can think of right now or we can wait and put it in later.

Well, I can say, I guess my wife won't mind, I always – any of this information that I got from very wise men, they were saying, in your life you'll find things that are not too good and certain things that are good. The things that are good are for keeps. The things that are not so good, if you believe in God, he won't let you have them. So I found one thing that was good for me and I intend to keep it, and I've got a good start – and that's my wife, ADELINE JACKSON, who I've had for the last 68 years!

Wow, 68 years; that's wonderful! Congratulations.

We are finished for today, and I want to thank you, Walter, for this interview and thank you for your service to our country.

Oh, thank you, very much.

This is Fran Prokop; today's date is Wednesday, September 23, 2015. I'm back at Walter Jackson's house; he has some materials to add to the interview. I have taken more photographs of his award case. I neglected to ask him if he belongs to any Veterans Organizations today. He will explain further.

Well, I belong to the American Legion and have been for the last twenty years, a life member of the American Legion and also a life member with the Verterans of Foreign Wars and also a life member with the DAV – Disabled American Veterans. I find that these organizations are very beneficial to veterans especially when they get up in age and need a lot of support; they are there for them. I'm not too active in these organizations – I'm not holding any offices or anything, I just don't have the time for that but I do have the time to support them in any way I can otherwise.

Right, what you do support is you're a volunteer with the VA so that is very important.

Well, they get $21.95 per volunteer hour.

Really?

They do, they get a credit for that; they get a subsidy for it and so you can figure that some of them have 25, 35 and 40 thousand hours – they run the facilities – especially like Hines – that's an every day job for them.

Right. Are you saying that the veterans who live at Hines and who are able, they volunteer also and they get a credit –

They do not get the credit

How does that credit thing work?

The credit comes through the VFW – Veterans of Foreign Wars – I'm sorry, not VFW – Veterans Affairs.

Oh, through the VA, okay. Now, there was something else you wanted to tell me that you believe you omitted.

Yes. On the last days of our being on Iwo Jima, we were supposed to go out to the bay – to the tankers. There were such rough seas that the ducks – the amphibious trucks – they could not handle it, so they postponed the trip. So we went back to camp. And we usually do this work at night; we go out in the bay at night, ten or 11 o'clock at night and work through the night. And the island was supposed to have been fairly well secured but it wasn't absolutely secured. It had different "hot spots" – we called them, so we

thought oh boy now we got a chance to get a good night's sleep. So I was in my bunk and the air raids went off and my buddy, he was saying, "come on Jack, let's get out. "And I said well, I'm not going anywhere. This is probably nothing; it's fake and I'm not gonna get up and put my clothes on and run out. And so he left; he said well, I can't afford to stay here' I'm gonna have to go, so he left. And about ten minutes later I saw this big light, light up, and it was one of those Japanese planes that came – I guess it came out of Tokyo – and he dropped his bomb and when I heard the big boom, and saw the big light, I got out of bed then. And they shot him down and I think that was the last activity as far as aerial combat. And I can't remember –damage sustained

That was a Japanese warplane – a fighter plane?

Yeah, Japanese –

Did they capture the pilot, do you know if he was alive?

No, he wasn't alive.

He died in the crash?

Yeah, he died in the crash. I think they shot him down and I guess the plane with the bomb continued on into the island.

Oh, I see.

It didn't do any damage to any personnel, it just –

So when was that in relationship to the time you left Iwo Jima?

It must have been maybe three months.

Okay.

They still had – I left in '46 and they still had scattered Japanese out through that small 8 by 4 mile island – up until the 50s. They had one man, he was so deep dug down into the cave, it's just been recently, 15 or 20 years ago

I know what you're saying – he had no idea that the war was over.

No, he didn't know the war was over.

How could he live, I wonder?

Well –

How did he survive?

Well, that's a mystery because the island didn't produce nothing; it didn't grow anything. And it would just stink from the volcano – but that's a question mark – how did he survive?

Well, I guess people could have been supplying him with food, you know, after the war was over.

They could have told him it was over but he didn't believe it and wanted to stay there at the time.

He was probably scared.

I think I remember reading something about that –

Right, right it was recent –

He had been there for years.

Years, now that's a story.

I'm sure that is, right. So after three months you were on your way back home. When you returned to the states where did you go?

We went to Fort Sheridan.

We didn't talk about that. So you were mustered out at Fort Sheridan .

Yes. In 1946.

All right, unless there is some other little anecdote you want to relate –

Well, I don't know too much. The only thing I can tell you about the scary part of our operation in accordance to and with fighting. Actually we didn't do any aggressive fighting, but we did fighting to protect ourselves – defensive fighting –when we come out of the hills or come out of the bunkers or things – then we would defend ourselves.

On Iwo Jima.

On Iwo Jima – but the scary part was going out into the bay at night to those tankers and offloading the fuel into those drums. The tide would go out and the tide would come in – either one would catch you either way –

Right.

It would give you a bumpy ride and a scary ride because the sharks were so – around the warm water from the volcano – you could just see them, you know. And that was the main reason we had speed boats that when the B-29s would come back from raids over Tokyo, they would ditch – when they radioed that they were ditching, the speed boats would go to their location where they would come down and grab them before the sharks did. So that was kind of a scary part, but at that time I was young, I had no fear.

Right, oh yeah.

Sometimes now, in my late age, I look back, and then I see stories of – just like yesterday at the clinic, a fella came and he was an LST operator. And we offloaded from the troop ship into the LST to land on the beach. And we got to talking about Iwo Jima – and what company was I in, and I told him 848 Fuel Supply. And he was saying well, I can't think back that far – I mean I can't either, but his LST had a cap on it – his LST his 444 – three fours. And I said you know, I should remember something like that but I couldn't remember. I wasn't thinking of numbers then.

You weren't looking for numbers.

No, I do know that we did land –

So you share a lot of experiences with the veterans who come there –

Oh, yes, we exchange experiences; they tell me things that I didn't know, especially the 4th and 5th Marines – they were the leaders of the invasion of the island.

Right.

They have a motorcycle club of the 4th Marines – 25 or 30 of them on bikes; they come in every Thursday – for me, not any type of care; they just meet me there and we talk and laugh – but them and the Seabees – I give them a lot of credit because the Seabees ae trying – everybody has got a sideline other than just fighting the enemy.

Right.

I was doing the gas at the fuel dump but also defensive, you know, and they were doing the same thing; they were trying to build a dock so we don't have to go out into the bay -- and they're fighting too. The Japanese – they come out maybe 15 or 20 at a time and just disappear – all into those caves and a lot of men got killed because they went down into the caves after them – looking for souvenirs --

Well, they finally had to get rid of all those guys except for the ones who were in the deepest.

They were so deep down – and they booby-trapped the caves, you know – yeah, they booby-trapped them so you go down looking for souvenirs – they'll put a sword where you can see it, then you think, oh, must be more, and you go in and blow up. The instructions were do not go down into those caves – and they'd preach that over the loudspeakers every day. And guys would still go down anyway. And the type of fuel that they used for flame throwers was kerosene and fuel oil, and that's what they would blast down into those caves. If they were down there you could hear them screaming loudly.

Then some they could hardly get ou – try to run out – we even had Japanese interpreters telling them to come on out, nobody's gonna harm you – take you to prison – they wouldn't come out.

They would not be taken as prisoners; that was their whole psyche; it was against their nature.

Oh, Yeah, well, that's one of the hardest things about those types of people. To them it's a glory to die.

Right, exactly.

And they figure if I get blowed up, here I am, they don't run; they have no fear of death. Whereas we do; we run from it.

Well, that's how the Arab are today – that's their culture.

That's what makes it so difficult. It's like night and day. We fear death and run from it and they glorify it and run to it.

Well, we don't welcome it; they do.

They do; they're not afraid to die.

Okay, Walter, I think we're done now. Thanks again for this last addendum to your interview and I thank you again very much for your service to our country.

Well, you're quite welcome and thank you for your support.

Walter Lee Jackson
21254 West Crimson Court
Plainfield, IL 60544
815-293-3299