

Part #5

MH: So everybody had diarrhea?

FO: Yeah. I'm just thinking about my wind talkers. Everybody had a case of diarrhea along the trail and when you just couldn't go any farther, you just laid down and was sick, you know what I mean? And the enemy was coming along and cutting the throats at night and we had people laying along the trail with their throats cut. Well, these two wind talkers were sitting by the trail there and you talk about Indians and things like that. I'll tell you about an Indian leader of the Marine Corps. Sometime I'll tell you that story. But these wind-talkers were sitting there you know and one of them was holding his brother who had been shot and told me: "Stay with him until they come and pick up his brother's body and take him away."

While I'm thinking about it I want to tell you about this Indian - we had several Indians in the Marine Corps. It seemed like we had more Indians around than usual. You know you take from all the states all over the United States and of course San Diego would take half of them and Paris Island would take the other half till they'd get together. But there was an Indian captain in charge of a company and when I was attached to the raiders one time I went up to see them and I got to know this Indian and he was a big tall guy. You could look at him and tell he was Indian. He seemed rather large for an Indian to me. He was a well-built man and everything and was really a favorite leader of the Marines at that time and I was with them, attached to them as their forward observer. They were out on maneuvers and he said, "You know, Indians have got to have meat," **I heard him talking to his people.** He said, "Indians, we're meat eaters. We've got to have some meat and this C-Ration just don't get it. I'm gonna have one of the guys to shoot me a dove. (He laughs.) And I'm gonna call a halt and set down and I'm gonna get me a stick and I'm gonna cook that dove and I'm going to eat the whole thing, you know. I'm just gonna get me some meat." So he did and they shot, shot, shot, finally one of the guys got a dove. He stopped the whole group. He said, "Fall out." And they crapped out. I mean they were ready for a rest. So he set there and he held that bird over that fire till it was burned to a crisp. I said, "You gonna ruin your dove holding it so close to that fire." He said, "The dove ain't important." I

said, "Well, why in the world did you have them shoot the dove. You should have had me shoot the limb out from under it and let the fall kill it." (He laughs hard.) He thought that was funny. It wouldn't have been all shot up. Hell, that old 30 caliber just about exploded its body and he didn't have much to cook. He said, "Cooking ain't important anyway." I said, "Well then, tell me what is important if you are going to eat that dove?" He said, "I'm going to eat that dove, no matter how dry and hard it gets." He said, "I'm killing time." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Don't you realize how tired my men are? If we were to have an attack right now," he said, "I'd lose almost half my men. We are dead tired. They are as tired as they can be and they've got to have some rest and the only way they're gonna get it is to call a halt and make them crap out." He said, "That dove is not the important thing."

MH: Did you want to continue about the story of the brothers? The brother who was holding the deceased brother?

FO: Oh yeah. Back to the wind talker. He just stayed there and when they came and picked the body up of his brother, why, they took them away and I went back to my company. I tried to catch up to the men that I was with. The only reason I needed to stay back as a guard because he didn't want that man's throat cut that was setting there holding his brother. That's all there was to it. Just one of those things where you get into a situation, you find all kinds of odd, odd things. I can remember one day there was a man come crawling in on his hands and knees and he had elephantitis. They took him and put him in the guard barracks where they have a barbed wire fence out in the open, like if they take a prisoner. They put him in the prisoner fence and he set there and I guarded that guy for my four hours and he was pitiful. It was just a thing that was hard to see and then the fellow that followed me guarded him and about two hours into his guard, why, I heard a shot and I went running over there and he was a block away almost. I said, "What happened?" and he said, "He ran." I thought, "Yeah, he ran. He couldn't even run in." You know there was no way he could run out. He got tired of guarding him. Combat will cause you to do odd, odd things. There's no end to the things you will do if you're in combat.

MH: So, he killed him? He killed the man with elephantitis?

FO: Yeah. He killed him. He said he ran, but there will never be anyone can make me think that he ran because he was so glad to get to our camp and they just took him prisoner, you know. He could have gotten some help, been better off. Guarding a man's a chore especially if you've been hiking a long way and you're tired and you start to doze off and you fight sleep, fight sleep, fight sleep, just to keep guard. That's a rough deal.

MH: Can you tell me about the development and the implication of radar? When that became available?

FO: You're talking about guns controlled by radar? Yeah. I remember on Bougainville the first thing that happened to us was we had an area next to a mountain pass and we tried to start a camp there at the pass. There was a [Japanese] zero that would come by every morning and strafe what chow line we had. We were hardly eating and everything, but we would stop and cook and get in line and we'd have our mess kits and this guy would come down through those mountains and strafe us and we would run to the big old trees and jump in the trees and he'd shoot the road all up and kill a couple of guys and then take off. He did that day after day and we tried to kill him with our rifles and everything, but we just didn't have any luck. Then radar - there were so many inventions during the war. They created ways to turn the ships upside down and work on them and then new airplanes and new boats and all the speed boats were turned into things for the Navy to use and everything. Kaiser-Frazer took over and built ships. Everything was going on. It was completely a different type of world. Well, they decided that they had perfected the radar control of guns. They could now be fired by radar instead of a man pulling a trigger. Then you had your contact with the moving object and it was able to set it all up and tell where your gun should be pointed so when it flew you would contact the same. At the same time that could shoot ships out at sea and they got it perfected to where they could shoot airplanes and I got to string the telephone line to the gun where they were shooting these people as they flew across the island. They set a gun up to try to get this one in particular that kept getting the chow line. Boy the next morning when he come through there, it disintegrated that plane. I mean it disintegrated and nobody ate chow because all those in line just went over and dumped there chow out in the garbage can because they scattered the pilot all over the road, all over the camp. I mean the explosion,

the ammunition that he had aboard the airplane exploded and they never did know where he went. They just dumped there biscuits in the garbage and went back to what they were doing.

MH: You were talking about inventions and the development of new technologies can you talk about the landing strip, the matting that they invented?

FO: There are bad stories in everything you talk about. That was on Bougainville. I was down on the beach and I told you about the beach. I really was goofing off is what I was doing when I found an opening that would let you go out there and stand there and see about a mile of beach. I mean it was the prettiest sight that you could ever want to see. And it just seemed like there hadn't been anybody around or anything and then I got to looking and on up the beach there was something going on so I thought I'd like to see what was going on up there. I didn't have anything to do that day. So I walked up there and I got real close to where this was and I came out of the trees on the beach. On this beach they had brought in steel matting and laid it on the sand for a mile it looked like. It was all along the beach in a pretty wide strip, and all hooked together, inter-locking and fixed up. They were making a landing strip for the fighter planes to come off the aircraft carriers and land on the island and then they could operate from the island while the Seabees were making an airport. This matting was a temporary kind of thing. They brought it in first, and boy, I was real close and a man came in and landed on that steel matting and he went about 40 or 50 feet, that's all he got and it began to buckle up in front of his airplane and more and more and more until his propeller cut into it and it tore the propeller off. Then it nosed over and just tumbled on down the thing. He of course was killed instantly and they just drug his plane off. Took the bulldozer and stretched that thing back out and called for another plane to light and put another man on there. And they didn't anchor it anyway or didn't do anything about it, just pulled it back, stretched it out with their equipment and in come another plane and when he went by me I was as far from here as the corner of the house there. I never saw a man sitting so rigid in my life and have such a tight grip as he had on that stick that he was holding. You could just tell that he was tense and he did the same thing and it tumbled and it took a half hour to clean him up, to clean the mess up and get it stretched out again and then they brought the third one in and I thought, "God, how long are they going - how many times are they going to try this. It's not working. Two is enough." But in come another one and he too was tense. You could just see when they went by, as close as they were. When they went by you could see the fear in the face which everybody will get at a certain time, at a certain position. It's just there and he tumbled too. Then

the fourth guy that came in, he went down. Just when I thought, "Oh this is it. When he makes contact it will start to peel up." They didn't have it anchored in any way and it just wasn't staying and it would buckle and scoot and get up and get the props. And he too had a tight hold on that wheel when he got down there and just about the time he made contact, he just pulled back on the stick and went RAOOOOOOOO-OOOOOMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM, like that and he did a circle and come down and landed in the ocean and got off and walked out on the wing and there were Navy personnel running around out there and a Higgins boat was one of them. It took him off that wing and they didn't put any more [airplanes] in. I think he probably saved a lot of lives that day. I don't know how long they would have run those pilots in there. An airplane and a pilot that's trained; what a costly thing that could be.

MH: Could you tell me about the mind set after WWII, what life was like and what people thought and what the popular sentiment was?

FO: Well, we moved to LA, you know like I told you. I was supposed to get a job with Bell Telephone Company from the guy that ran that school. Mr. McGooker, one of the teachers there. He said, "When you get out of the Marine Corps you come by and see me and there's a job waiting for you." I thought "I don't have any job and that seemed like a good remembrance to me and I'm going to look Mr. McGooker up." And I told Jan I'm going to take that job that he promised me out there in that school that the Marine Corps sent me to. [As it turned out, I ended up working as a carpenter while I was waiting for that job and never did get to work for Bell Telephone.]

Of course they said if you come back you could get you old job back. That's what President Roosevelt said that day he visited us out there. I said, "Hell, I didn't have no job." I quit my job to join the Marine Corps so I didn't have any job. The mind set or how people felt about a veteran is rather odd, you know. Like we go through the Vietnam era and the veterans from Vietnam were never given a fair break, I didn't think. Some veterans were given more of this or that. But you know I believe they [veterans] are looked up to better today than they were then because when they came back, I can remember.

I joined the job training session that was a law [US Congress passed job training laws, Fred was in the Carpenter's job training] and worked in LA and I went out and got my own job, you know. The government gave me a set of tools and I didn't have a car or any way to get tools to work and I had to ride a street car, which is fine. I could ride a street car but I had to take my tools and I couldn't leave my tools on the job because they would be stolen. They said, "No. You can't leave your tools here. If you do they won't be here tomorrow. That's just the way it is." I got a job working for a contracting engineer and I was lucky enough to meet a man who was the stuntman for Buffalo Bill in the movies. He was a stuntman and he was crippled up and had a crooked leg and a portion of his teeth were gone where he had ridden a horse over a cliff and didn't land right and lost a bunch of teeth. He still would limp around and smile every time he'd see you. He had a good smile for you. He told me lots and lots of stories and he had been to New Zealand and Australia with Buffalo Bill and his show and he said he was special. He got to do all the stunt work that was big money. "I got all the big money jobs." It looked like it too the way he was crippled up. He's a man that I really liked and a man that was good to me, a stranger. He had a model A Ford and a rumble seat in it and he'd come by and say, "You can just tell me what street car you're going to ride and I'll just come by and pick you up at the streetcar stop and you can put your tools in my trunk and then I'll take you to work. When I go home you've got to go home too and you catch your streetcar at the same place.

MH: Did you live in close proximity to each other?

FO: No. He lived in Hollywood and I lived at 47th and Normandy at that time and that's quite a distance. He'd go one way and I'd go the other. I'd get on a streetcar and go home when he let me out. But there never was a time that I couldn't get to a streetcar stop that he'd be going by. I'd zip on the streetcar to where he crossed the streetcar line and I'd get off and he'd pick me up. We worked it out ever time we changed jobs [work sites] and when we got on a job some of them would last three or four months. That was pretty neat. He knew where to be and I knew where to be. And Bert was good to me; Bert Rollins was good to me.

That's one of the mind sets, there were those type people and there were other type people too. I had to make a tool box to take my tools and I had a square and

my square was bigger than my tool box and I had to let the blade stick out up in the air above the handle and it was kind of risky like. So sometimes it would be so crowded that the man running the streetcar would say, "You just step on the steps and hold that box on the rack there and then he'd let me ride the steps and hang on to the streetcar till I got to work. Well, that was a day's work in itself, you know. (He laughs.) I remember one time I was on there and I finally got a seat. Enough people got off the streetcar that I got to go in and sit down and I was setting there and that woman said, "I'll be so damn glad when some of you Okies go home!" (He laughs.) I thought, "Oh, man." It just rubbed me the wrong way and I said, "Well, I could remember being down at San Diego when you were glad as hell to see us when you had that submarine sighted there and everybody was screaming and hollering, "Oh, I'm glad that the Navy is down the road and I'm glad that the Army's got this base out here and I'm glad Camp Pendleton is around. I'm glad of this and I'm glad of." I said, "Every person that was in the service was being congratulated for being here when there were troubled times. Now you want the Okies to go home." And there was a woman sitting there next to her and she said, "We came out together. We're both from Kansas. We came out in the dust storm. What's the matter with the old bitch? (He laughs.). Why is she so up-tight like that?" In the meantime we became kind of friends, that day, that woman and I. She told her off and she got off at the next stop. She didn't want to talk anymore about it and she'd made that statement and I think she wasn't really thinking when she made that statement. Maybe some of the Okies would be glad to go home.

MH: Would you tell me about when you found out about the bombing of Japan and their subsequent surrender?

FO: In the bombing of Japan, you're talking about the big bomb?

MH: Yeah.

FO: You know there was one bombing was pretty important to me, when they took the B-25 and bombed Tokyo. I thought that when you said "the bombing of Japan" it almost was equal, or I thought it was, because that was the turn of the air power and all the things and it seemed. There's a difference in fighting a war between the early stages when you don't know who is going to win and when you get the upper hand and you've got air superiority and you got an Army built up and you've got a

response from the nation as to making ships and all the things that you need to fight a war. We've lost some of that, I think. I don't like the attitude that we have today about the war. I don't like the talk that I hear about the war.

MH: About WWII or the current wars?

FO: About the current events. To me there are some serious things that are going on that I don't really care about and I don't think we should be in. I think there should be changes made. I'm glad that I'm not in WWII. (They laugh.) That's the main thing.

MH: So where were you when you found out that they had dropped the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

FO: In the hospital on Guadalcanal. And I was glad they dropped it. If you want to ask me the question, "Are you glad they dropped it?" I am glad they dropped it. I think Truman did the right thing and I think those that don't agree with me are wrong. (They laugh.) It's that simple. I watched many a man die, you know and I think he saved many a death of the American soldier by dropping the bomb. That's just the way I feel. We didn't start it but we had to end it.

MH: What was the sentiment like before WWII? I know about the isolationist trends that existed within the United States. Was that the majority?

FO: No, you get the loudest people heard the most. It's like today, Mitchell; you're hearing the loudest people today. If you are aware of the facts and really stay up with the news and keep on it, you'll know, like the Wall Street deal and all that craziness that's going on. Such crazy, crazy reasons for doing the things that are being done today. They don't make any sense to me at all. You get old veterans and you get them together, why you'll hear the talk go the other way. You can get a group of veterans that will agree with the protests. They got to work them out. They've got to take different means.

MH: Thank you for sharing your time and thank you, of course, for sharing your service.

FO: It was nice to visit with you. It's been a nice visit. I'm glad you came over.