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CENTER FOR PACIFIC WAR STUDIES
Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

PHILIP M. GRASS
U. S. ARMY
PARATROOPERS

ORAL INTERVIEW

PHILIP M. GRASS

I am Kep Johnson. I'm doing this interview at the Sunday House Inn in Fredericksburg on the 27th of February 2004, as part of the oral history project of the Admiral Nimitz Historical site. And, you, sir?

MR. GRASS: I'm Phil Grass, Philip M. Grass, I am a resident of 1100 Henrietta Lane, Lake Charles, Louisiana. I started my military career...

MR. JOHNSON: Let me back you up just for openers. Tell me about your early years. When and where were you born and who were your parents?

MR. GRASS: Okay. My father was Lucian Anthony Grass from Plaquemine, Louisiana; my mother was Minnie Ann Seeling from Beau__ville(sp?). She was German, my father was from a long line of people from the Azores that came into the Caribbean. This was a long time ago and my Dad's forbearers had to leave Santa Domingo. They went into Cuba, they were refugees there. Then they went up to Mobile and finally over to New Orleans and up the Mississippi to Plaquemine, Louisiana. They were darkies(?) and I was born in Mark, Louisiana, 5 April 1924. It's a small village in West Baton Rouge parish and part of it is not in existence now because after the '27 flood they built a levy and it took over it. But anyhow when I was very young less than two years old, I believe they said when I was 18 months old, they moved up to Alexandria. My father was a railroad clerk and he pursued that all my life that I knew except during the depression when they cut off a lot of railroad people. He worked on what eventually came to be WPA and he had enough seniority, I can remember him moving up into Arkansas and bumping up a clerk up there. Eventually when things started leveling out he was able to be at home. I was among six children, the oldest Barbara and then Kathleen, the two girls and then William Seeling gone who was with E Company 7th Marines, and then myself and then my kid brother, Lucian who is a retired colonel. I went to catholic schools. We didn't have kindergarten but we had a primer and a first grade and so on at St. Francis Xavier Academy. I went to public school two years at West Bend Grammar School, then things got well enough for me to go to Menard Memorial from sixth grade up. I dropped out of high school in '42 to enlist in the army.

MR. JOHNSON: How much high school had you finished?

MR. GRASS: I had finished really sophomore equivalent. I had one or two things that were junior but I dropped out and enlisted of course with the parent's permission.

MR. JOHNSON: Was your motivation patriotic or just to get out of high school?

MR. GRASS: Well, I believe it was a little bit of both but I had a leaning toward military. Fact is, in 1940 we had at school there several of us that wanted to have the mounted home guard. I don't know if it was just all play or not but we would go out to a gravel pit and play extended order drill trying to learn all the hand signals and everything. I was a member of the boy scouts and I had a paper route in a failed newspaper the Alexandria Times and then I had a paper route the Times Picayune. I sold papers on Saturday evening and delivered and sold on Sunday mornings. I was a sweet water chemist or a soda jerk. I worked at a 24-hour drive-in Mox's Midway(sp?) in Alexandria. It was I thought a very exciting job and I even chased bottles on an RC cola drink truck when I was young. I enjoyed, not all the time but occasionally, going fishing and things like that but I wasn't ate it up with it that I'd just keep on keep on.

Mr. JOHNSON: You've had a variety of things in your life in your growing up years. When you decided to join the service, did you pick the army for a particular reason?

MR. GRASS: Well, I knew I was color blind and I had checked with the Corps about a year before and the navy and they wouldn't have me. I'll tell you I was really pleased and admired the German army and the way they did things, parachute corps etc. I started thinking about that and it was one of the first things that I locked into when I enlisted.

MR. JOHNSON: When did you enlist?

MR. GRASS: The 2nd of July of '42.

MR. JOHNSON: Where did you go for basic training?

MR. GRASS: Camp Roberts, California. I don't know at what period but I knew I was going to Ft. Benning. I forget just exactly how early I learned this but in our whole training battalion there were groups that were headed for the paratroopers and some companies would allow them to stay together double time in at the end of the days. Some of them with a job with a 37 mm anti-tank gun with the harnesses on it and things like that. In those days they still had the human bugler and we had a colonel that was in charge of our training battalion that was a coach in one of the major schools, I can't remember right now, in California. He was a reserve officer and he was a light? colonel.

I can't remember his name but he would give us an anti-Japanese talk about once a week and I really learned a lot in that basic training. We had 13 weeks and then we went to Benning.

MR. JOHNSON: Did you get good weapons training?

MR. GRASS: Right, one of the first things they did. I had a corporal, he and an assistant, they'd blindfold each other and they'd disassemble the weapons and re-assemble them; that is, the rifle and the BAR but they didn't fool with the pistol. Fact is, we had a revolver in basic training as crew members of 37 anti-tank gun but for our service firing the only thing we did was fire the rifle, the M-1. I guess it saves time or something.

MR. JOHNSON: How long were you in California?

MR. GRASS: We were there about maybe eight or ten days before the cycle started but we left immediately after the 13 weeks were up. The first five or six days we were there we were given quite a bit of close order drill as busy work and we also policed the area, and we practiced cleaning the barracks.

MR. JOHNSON: KP duty?

MR. GRASS: Yes. I had very little KP duty during basic training. I believe I was on KP maybe twice. We went to Benning and I forget the class number but I graduated in October of '42, I jumped. The certificate I have I got in the C stage, I got hurt in my right knee and I was put back a week with new guys that I have never known before. All of my buddies that were in basic training with me moved on. I felt kind of real lonely and the company I was with had a notice on the board talking about going to mechanic school, ordnance school. They had an opening in the 507th Regiment and I had heard about the spider guys from an acquaintance of mine. So I went to the orderly room and put in for it and I was accepted. The school was in Atlanta, well, it wasn't in Atlanta, but it was Camp Connelly which is now Fort Negis, I believe, in the Southeast part of Atlanta. I had a wonderful experience there going into town almost every evening. There were about three of us on the whole coast that were paratroopers and somehow once you become or try to be a paratrooper, there's something in your head but you know proud to be allowed is what I think of and after finishing at Camp Connelly, the 507th was on maneuvers in Louisiana. They're home base was going to be Alliance Air Base

in Nebraska so my orders were cut to go to Alliance, Nebraska. I went there; when the regiment and everything closed in I was assigned to a service company where the mechanics worked. They had all the guys that had been working together and everything. They didn't have room for me, so I didn't know it was illegal but I got to be a daily KP. I lived in the hut with the cooks and I pulled KP every day. I knew something was wrong. So I went to the 1st Sgt. and told him that there's no slot here for KPs; KPs are not part of the kitchen force. He says, "Well, what do you want to do, go to a line outfit?" and I said, "Sure." And I wasn't in shape but I was assigned to D Company. They had an old cavalry lieutenant, a captain, that would announce the preparatory command instead of saying company he would say, "Troop." And everybody in the outfit in D Company, they called it "The Troop". I got there in the morning. In the afternoon we started on a hike and I was an assistant machine gunner. The gunner carries the tripod and the assistant gunner carries the receiver barrel and everything else. It was a real tough go for me on that first. We were three days out. We moved quite a bit and when we came in from that march I couldn't get out of bed that's how out of shape I was. That was the lowest I'd ever been and two of the guys that didn't know me at all, we learned who we were on this three-day march and bivouac movement. I came to be a pretty good physically fit fellow, etc. The same problem that I had being sent back a week in jump school came back and I was operated on my right knee, took cartilage out. In those days they put a cast from about seven or eight inches above the knee to half-way down the shin. I lost my picket fence. Your health profile, I believe is head, shoulder, trunk, limbs, and my right leg was not usable so I lost the one there. I forgot what it was, anyhow, I was not fit to be a combat trooper. So they sent me from Alliance back to Fort Benning and went into something like a ????. I had no problem with my right leg but the records showed that I had been operated on and everything like that. It staid in good stead and I was sent with a group of thirty-five guys to the 503rd. This is in late '43. We were sent out to Ord. and we had twenty-one days to review some of the basic training things like sublime movement under wire, and grenade handling, and watch the ship review and all kinds of stuff like that in twenty-one days. Then we shipped out and we sailed on the ???NIGHT, it was a new victory ship that was built in Seattle. They had their shakedown from Seattle down to the Bay area and we were at Camp Stoneman and we went to the

SEASNIPE aboard the transportation corps ferries that they had up in the Bay area. And it took us about fourteen days to get down to Brisbane. Being paratroopers and thirty-five of us we fit in just about the right number with the armed guards, the navy guards on the vessel. We were broke down to cruise, tubs, weapons and we pulled watches with them throughout the trip. The first day we had opportunity to fire the 20mm anti-aircraft guns, assemble, disassemble, cleaning and all that. We would stand watch in the tub. Our navy rating was on the bridge and they must have had about eight or ten, maybe more, positions. We had some power phones and we were supposed to make observations to protect the ship. I learned a lot about ships and nautical stuff from a pollywog to a shellback and things like that. We got to Australia and we went to ??? Depot at Ascott Race Track and they had a section for marines, this is in Brisbane, and the army. We stayed there I can't remember the exact length of time but it seemed like a long time. We finally got on a ship that was made originally in 1904, the CONTESTA made in Shanghai, and it was a real true banana boat. The elevation of the different holes was low enough where you had to walk with your head down. It was what they called a "furlough boat" it would go even below Brisbane or down to Adelaide or maybe even to Sydney but we only thought of it from Brisbane up to Port Moresby. Sometimes it would stop in Kearns but on the particular trip that we went up to join the regiment we went straight from Brisbane up to Port Moresby. The replacements we were the second group. The first group went to Gardenvale where the regiment was when they first came over to Australia. We stayed up in Port Moresby. I was assigned to F Company and we did marches and similar to that, not just marches but tactical deployment, etc. We were alerted pretty close to Christmas of '43 to jump on Cape Glouster, New Britain, but it was pretty good that we didn't go. The marines had it well in hand but we had been alerted several times. I can't remember what they were for but eventually we moved from Port Moresby back down to Australia in the spring of '44. We went to Camp Cable which was where the 32nd Division first used when they came over in the early part of the war. The 32nd was a barge division and they were Wisconsin Michigan people and I'd known some 'cause they were at camp Livingston near Alexander where I grew up. I got to know some of the guys but I never did meet any of them during the war over seas. We stayed in Camp Cable a very short time. I don't know whether I was a favorite of the 1st

Sgt. or not but one of my details was being a batman or an orderly for about maybe fifteen or twenty officers that was sent from the regiment to Mt. Twomba (sp?) to the Australian Jungle School. There were about five of us that were batten or orderlies. I got to know quite a bit about the Australian army there because they would go out and be doing details and everything and I got one or two old Australian soldiers that brought me up to date on how their behavior was and what a good go was and they had very interesting the sgt. mess, the officer's mess and the or's. And the or's is where we ate and they would talk about the sergeants hissing when they would talk and several other things. But Twomba was a one-pub town and before I arrived or the spring of '44 was kind of late from '42 but the beer time was separated from the Australians. The Yanks had it one time and the Aussies would keep the social disturbances down. Before the jungle school period was over we were alerted to move out. To me it seems as though we went north on the same ship that the artillery battalion that joined us. They came into Australia on a ship, and the best of my memory, the SEACAT . It was made by the same people that made the SEASNIPE, so the artillery got off the ship and we got on it. We went to Melon Bay for a look see and we continued around to Cape Sudad(sp?) and then we went into a tent area that the 1st. Cav. had used. This is near Dobadura and that was the first place we had the C46, the dual-door jump plane but we only jumped out of that as a practice but never jumped out of it again until after the war in Fort Benning. We did all of our jumping from C47s. Once in a while you would get a C53, a round door. It was a plane that was not modified to be a 47, it had removable doors where you could load jeeps and stuff. The only plane that we used was a C47 in my experience. There were several things that we did; for example, I got all kind of really good jobs. This is among the knowledgeable, I was a Bector NCO. A Bector NCO was somebody that had a five-gallon copper and bronze container on your back with a slip-slide pump that you would put petroleum products on water that might be breeding mosquitoes. So it got the rank and everything and all you had to do was go but this was in addition to normally being a rifleman. There were several other activities. We would stay in pretty good shape and we would run down to the beach in the mornings, the whole outfit, and one particular morning they had Portugese Man-O-War everywhere. Of course a lot of eager beavers would always to be ready to hit the water and I was one of them and we came out

of that incidental thing. More on the professional end, I got to be buddies with a guy by the name of Tony Cambacomus(sp?) and Tony wanted to be a first scout and he wanted to be the best first scout in the regiment. He would acquire cases of 45 ammo, 2000 round boxes. Most of the Thompson sub-machine guns didn't have a 50-round drum. They had a clip but he acquired the fifty-round drums and he and I and several others would go along the beach and he would fire at, we didn't have any beer cans at that time, different objects and he could hit anything with it. He was very good. Several others the first scouts had sub-machine guns and everybody else had rifles except the squad leader, he had a Thompson, also. Several other incidental things not anything of military prowess but I was put on KP because I visited along with a buddy of mine a navy radar station. They had good chow and he knew one of the sailors, so we went there and had a good meal and spent the night and that afternoon they alerted the outfit. I don't remember what it was for but we were for general reserve for the 6th Army and we were sort of being readied to help. I don't know whether the time thing is right or not but we were to back up the Biac? Operation where the 41st Division went. We flew from Cape Sudat? up to Hollandia and up at Hollandia we patrolled. The part of patrol I was with never did get in a fire fight or anything and then the next move was from Hollandia. In Hollandia we were issued for the first time jungle hammocks which were a real treat, I thought. We were in a Dutch coconut plantation and the trees were just far enough apart to just make those hammocks fit. There were other activities that really don't apply to the military end of it but I saw one of the monstrous Ray fish. We were on a part of the area of Hollandia that had coral base, very white. One afternoon there were a couple of us standing on the very edge of this and one of the most monstrous rays came very close to the shore but just straight ahead. It was a very exceptional thing to me that's one of the things I can remember. Going back to the business of the war, we flew from Hollandia to Viack and we were on our way to Numfor(sp?). I don't know if we had waited about two days they would have been able to land us at the strip because the 2nd Battalion didn't jump on Numfor. The 1st and 3rd did and they jumped after the 158th had already landed and there were not too many shore defenders. They pulled back but the regiment had quite a number of banged up people on that Numfor jump. We went to Numfor overnight from Biapon(sp?) LCIs that is our battalion and our company and we worked from

Number strip, it was an incomplete Japanese strip. Most of our army air force activities took place on the north edge of Numfor. Kasarni(sp?) or I can't remember it too well, but eventually we did move up there. We went out on patrol and they had Formosans or I guess now you would call them Tiawanese, but the Japanese had brought them in to help build the airstrips and they had some Javanese, some black Javanese also. We moved out and our battalion generally did work in the southern part of the island and we would move all the time almost in single file. When we would get to a garden area we might have a flank on each side but most of the time it was one behind the other going down a trail. Some significant things that I can remember from the Numfor days, we did a lot of patrolling and water was always a precious thing. At times if we had about every other guy alert you could put out a poncho between guys walking along and catch enough water, not too much. Several times this troop commander, our company commander, seemed to move every time it started raining. Instead of us just remaining off the trail and picking up water we'd keep moving anyhow. I won't mention names but among things that happened, two guys were to escort a prisoner back and they told us that they were going to get him, to send him to heaven real quick. About half way to the airstrip, we were about maybe seven or eight miles in from the air strip where we originally landed at this time, they were going to use a trench knife on him but they couldn't. So they had a carbine and they aimed it at him and turned their head and pulled the trigger. One of the members of this two-man detail lost his balance and he became an insanity person. The other one has since died. The engineer company, the C Company of 161 and the 462 Artillery Battalion joined us and brought us to a full regimental combat team. We had activities with them after the patrolling was over and there were incidental things like our regiment had 4 mess halls; a battalion mess hall for each of the line battalions, and a mess hall for the headquarters and the service company and it was not the best of TO in the organization. We eventually got our own mess hall on Mindoro but I bring that up to mention that mess hall in the 2nd Battalion burned down a couple of times. Nobody knows exactly how it happened or anything. Among interesting things that happened to me at this time, I was sent from the 3rd Squad of the 3rd Platoon to headquarters of F Company. I thought I had gotten promoted and everything like that and it wasn't until about fifteen years ago at a reunion in New Orleans that my squad leader, I liked him and

I had hosted a little luncheon meal he and I. I knew of a good place in New Orleans where we ate, and while we were dining there he said, "Grass, I've got something to tell you." I said, "Okay." He said, "I hate to admit it but I had you shanghaied from the squad."

MR. JOHNSON: Burst your bubble, huh?

MR. GRASS: Well, yes, and thinking back, I wasn't a great tactician but I had studied the manuals and all that stuff. I was always on responsible details like going to platoon headquarters to break down the rations, not C or K rations, but sometimes we'd get these B rations, and would split it up. Going back to Numfor, I had joined company headquarters and I became a runner and a wireman and also I took care of the bazooka. I knew the manual and I had used it. I had practiced with the bazooka before; never did really use it anymore after training. We went up to Mindoro from Numfor by way of Leyte and that was when we were able to see up close and almost directly personal the beginning of the kamikazes and some good dog fights while we were there. P-38s and franks and zeros also Betty bombers coming in almost on the deck after crossing the convoy, very thrilling. We were also close in to where, I forget just exactly what the time frame was, but the Japanese came in with C47 type airplanes with paratroopers to try to retake the airstrips at Leyte. One of those planes made a belly landing on the beach below us near the 11th Airborne area where they came ashore. At this time at Leyte, we came ashore behind the front. There was nobody to contest our landing. One of the things I can remember about that was a lot of rain. The first day the transport people worked real hard to get all the equipment ashore and they left when sundown came. I don't know what extent we never did have enough equipment to cause anybody more than two hours work. But anyhow the 11th Airborne had, the first time I saw the combat boot, the brogan shoe with the extension on top and the two buckles. We were able to use that government equipment a little earlier than usual but also, well, everything else was and we rehearsed mounting and dismounting or going aboard and debarking or whatever you wanted to call it. Our company was on (blank space on tape) the navy called the LCI group, this was their first action, and they had one rating on this LCI that had been in anything, and I personally resented when anything questionable happened they would run us down in the hole. It was a beautiful day we were all laying around and

you could see the destroyers and some of the major ships. At one time we saw the carriers that were escorting us around. We went down south of Leyte to Shurigori Strait the one where the battle wagons had their last battleship war or engagement and we went over into the China Sea going north to Mindoro. This is the truth; I was designated very early in my joining the power 3rd F Company to be the air ID guy. I was supposed to keep up with the wreck condition changes and we had an acronym, I forget what it was exactly, but it had to do with wing, body, tail and whatever the acronym meant you would describe it by those features. I looked up there and there were two blue franks blue, dark, dark blue flew across the whole outfit. I said "Okay, you guys get ready for getting your ass down below because they're going to start firing at them." And sure enough out on the right flank the destroyers started firing at them and the combat air patrol from the carriers came after them, too. When we pulled into the San Jose Beach and Mindoro, the cotton picking LCI didn't gun it and push it up to where you could come off in a respectable depth. Came ashore like this, I mean everything, all your weapons, stuff you had to put on top. We got ashore and I believe B Company was the only one that had any real activity on Mindoro. They went up to some village along the coast to the north. Some of the outstanding things that I can remember was the shelling by destroyers and I believe one or two light cruisers the day after Christmas. They were trying to hit the airfields. We had in the San Jose area on Mindoro two operational strips that early. It was in the dry season and the 866 Air Corps Engineers and they also had some Australian engineers, airfield engineers, and they had those fields operational real quick. Also we put up double apron fences that was where we really reinforced the title of Col. Jones or Warden Jones and his three thousand thieves. Well, our regiment was never three thousand but it was 21 or 22 hundred guys. We would require vehicles and they had grass not like kuni(?) grass but similar to it and the irrigation ditches at that time of year were dry and guys would put vehicles in the ditches and camouflage them in the area. Provost Marshall would go around in an airplane, a little L4, scouting. They would always come to our outfit first, but one day they recovered about thirteen vehicles that guys had acquired to ride back from the movies or something like that. Another thing that happened on Mindora, we acquired our first squad tents, before then we had periminal(sp?) tents where you never could get a full squad in but after Mindoro we had

the real squad tents where you could get your whole squad in. Mindoro was where we got our own mess hall and I got ready to mention this today. There was a gentleman who was a PT boat commander that gave us an orientation over at the Museum. The guy that I mentioned as the first scout, Tony, Tony went over to the PT boat area and one night he thought he stole the whole ice cream machine but he just stole one part of it. He went back the next night and stole the other part and our company was the only company that had ice cream. After the movies at night the company commander would invite the battalion commander and some of his staff over for ice cream. And things turned again because when we went to Corregidor and when we came back somebody had stolen the freezer. I hope it was the guys from the PT place getting it back. We had it relatively easy on Mindoro. When we were alerted for the jump on Corregidor a bunch of us that didn't even know anything about what the plans were, it wasn't an original thought, but we would shoot the bull about wouldn't it be great to jump on Corregidor, just speculating. Rivalry always comes into the, in my thought, the 11th Airborne, the 503rd was never a part of the 11th Airborne but before we left Cape Sudez in the Doubadou(sp?) area to go to Hollandia the 11th Airborne came into our area. We used to kid them that if you want to see a real outfit you all can go and stand by the wire and watch us mount guard and things like that. Of course, that was where they got the nickname of "flaming asshole", they have a 11 and two wings. You could change the wings to fire but anyhow I later served with that outfit. We were alerted for the jump, but before then squad leaders and assistant squad leaders, everybody got a chance to look at the relief of model that they had of Corregidor. We were briefed; F Company assembly area was the officer's swimming pool. The officer's swimming pool was near the golf course. Commanders had flown over Corregidor in B-25's laying down and looking at all the terrain and everything. In our company, I was the runner, Price was a runner, and we were in headquarters plane. There were going to be three sticks, maybe five or six guys to a stick, maybe one or two more and when Bailey, the Company Commander, Bonsai Bailey, said, "I jumped like this in the Markham Valley. My runner was in front of me. I'll have you and Price and then I'll be next." So we had been told about the jump point and everything like that and our lift the 2nd Battalion, the first one went in about eight o'clock and we came in around noon or somewhere about three or four hours after the 3rd

Battalion jump. The wind had blown a lot of guys off the topside so they increased the points of the wind. I was in the door and I know I got the command to go and I jumped and Price jumped, and nobody else followed us. That's the truth. Just as soon as my shoot opened I could hear the distinctive crack of the rifles being a little experience and I was thinking here we are Price and I. We were very low, we weren't in the air long and I came in right by an old officer's two-story quarters. They were all nothing really left of them and I was able to see the officer's swimming pool and we had no problem getting there, Price and I. I didn't have any problem getting to the assembly area but the planes, the ones that were dropping on the parade ground, made an orbit to the left and those in our lift were made an orbit to the right and to come back and drop the other sticks. The 1st Sgt. and his stick didn't make it because they had made one pass for Price and I and then they made another pass with the company commander and the people he had left in his stick and then they came around another one and they were being hit. The plane was being hit by small arms and they didn't make the last pass to drop the top kick and his squad. We assembled well and we had company headquarters in the last officer's house toward the golf course. Wheeler Battery was out there and that was one of the first things we had to take was Wheeler Battery. Some incidental things that took place; discovery of a large container of alcohol, I didn't learn about it until after everybody else had some but from the hospital area that was discovered. Later at a bunker-type op was loaded with first class crab meat, Japanese crab meat. We didn't go into that until later. We had extensive patrols. I didn't do anything significant but some of the things I can remember; one of the most respected guys, his great nephew, I believe, is here at the reunion this time, Michael was his name, and I was working with him one day I was nervous, half scared, not exhausted but very nervous. We had made a movement and it was very hot dust was dry, I blew it, whew exhaled, and I looked over and there was Michael. I said, "Man, I wonder when this is going to end." He said, "Hell, this is just what I like." I said, "Oh, no." Michael had been in Panama with the 501 and he spent time with the Indians down in Panama. They gave him shrunken heads; they would beat on the skull and break the bones up and take them out through the throat cavity and stitche it up. He had about three of those things that he had brought all the way from Panama when the regiment combined and then came over in early '43. He was in 501; they were in Panama

before Pearl Harbor. Going back to Michael, when we were backing out from Leyte going to Mendoro, about maybe three hours out, we were still in Leyte Gulf and the cotton-pickin' water was not very kind to the vessel and it was pitching and a lot of guys were getting seasick and Michael was one of them. Michael could have gone home several months before but he was a gung-ho guy. A buddy of mine, A. T. Fields, also knew Michael pretty good. Michael and several other guys were regurgitating over the side, they were laying on their bellies, and Fields tapped him on the shoulder. "Don't you wish you'd rotated?" It's amazing what you remember and think of.

MR. JOHNSON: What was the most frightening experience you ever had out there?

MR. GRASS: Moving toward Wheeler Battery. The guy ahead of me got hit and the guy behind me got killed. We had to run and move into a hole and yet it whizzed by. The jumping was no fear but another time that I was afraid we had come in on a patrol. We were waiting to find out where we were going to go in the perimeter. So we pulled up against a cement bank about that high and undid the harness and everything and I put my rifle back down there. There were some Japs about twenty-five yards away in the closed part of the magazine and they started firing. I jumped up looking for cover and I didn't have a weapon or anything and that was another time the kid next to me got knocked off. I had a couple of tight places on Negros which was, I think, the most costly operation for us. I didn't go with the outfit I was in the hospital when the outfit moved from Mendoro to Negros. When I joined the outfit the guy that had taken my place got killed while I was in the hospital, made you think. On Negros the 40th Division pulled out and they left our platoon, we had one officer that was in the mounted service and he was our platoon leader and he was a tank destroyer branch. The army had a tank destroyer branch at that time and he was the only one in mounted service so the vehicles, I forget about two or three quarter tons and about five or six jeeps. A couple of them were trailers and we were the recon outfit for the whole regiment. That was very enjoyable and I didn't think at all dangerous duty. We would go up and down the highways. We would go inland. Eventually I got to be a trusted guide when the war was coming to an end. Along the mountains in Occidental, Negros, there must have been five or six Pablos, signed Pablos. They're something like, in Louisiana we have around three or four towns that are named the same. I'm trying to remember, not Creole, but anyhow

B Company from the 1st. Battalion was going to move into the San Pablo that F Company left to go up to Fabrica in the later phase and I waited until they came in. There were several other things. Working with the railroad I got to know Carlos; he was a DCO or Filipino American and he was in charge of the rolling stock. He showed me a lot about steam engines and we'd make runs bringing troops and supplies and everything. Also, it's a rare thing but we sent a message for food and somehow the word "ham" got to be a priority whether it was in the message or not. They had planes to fly over our drop zone, we didn't jump there, where they would drop supplies and sure enough after that message we had hams coming in boxes, wooden boxes. It was almost unheard of. You always have if you have control, if you get bushwhacked or ambushed that really costs you emotionally. Another thing that I think of my last platoon leader was a young man from Virginia, and he had gone to VMI. He gave me the third volume of Lee's Lieutenants by Douglas Saupaw Freeman. He had gone up on patrol on the motor car for about six of them and a Filipino had reported a Japanese officer in this house. This was his first real activity and it was close to the war end. Instead of just waiting and firing into the house or anything like that, it was raining and he went out with his pistol to more or less challenge and the Japanese was in the shadows of the house inside the room where you couldn't see. He didn't see him and the gook got him. I'm trying to remember his name. I still have the book. Some things the fortunes of war; the 151st Infantry sent in at least a battalion to Corregidor when we were about ready to come home. Their outfit moved into an ammunition bunker area that had camouflaged some of the famous beer from Manila.

MR. JOHNSON: Sam Miguel.

MR. GRASS: Right. They got the beer and we didn't. They put armed guards on that thing.

MR. JOHNSON: Were you ever wounded?

MR. GRASS: No. The closest I got to being wounded was when the patrolling on Numfor was over, I was trying to cut the toes off of my left boot, jungle boots that were high canvas shoes, rubber shoes, and I stuck myself with the knife. I didn't know it and I wasn't trying to hurt myself but I got to go by LCM from Number strip up to near our

permanent place. The rest of the outfit had to march. Some of them claim that I did it on purpose.

MR. JOHNSON: When did you come back to the United States?

MR. GRASS: December, '45. We were left under the impression that the outfit was zeroed out. We went down to the southern part of Negros to Tumbamgetti(sp?). The people with points that were going to go home went down to this particular shipment to the 31st Division down on Mindanao. They were in the area where the Dole pineapple people were and the 167 Regiment. We became attached to them and we were down there for a long time. When I say a long time, it must have been close to two months. The war was over in August and then it was September, October, November and we got home about a week before Christmas in December. During that period of time they were having riots and everything around Manila. I'm ashamed to say it but American soldiers were wanting to go home. I never did see any of that. They had refrigerator ships, this is at Mindanao northern side. We had fresh meat, we had potatoes. It was fabulous. They were getting rid of all that refrigerated stuff, you know, that planning for a long haul. We had movies every night and it was just a wait and see.

MR. JOHNSON: Were you discharged as soon as you came back to the States?

MR. GRASS: Right, more or less. I got leave to go home and report to camp, I'm confused about Fanning and Funston.

MR. JOHNSON: That's in Alabama, I think.

MR. GRASS: Funston?

MR. JOHNSON: Yes.

MR. GRASS: Okay. Well, Camp Fanning, the one at Tyler, Texas. There's a hospital now at the location where Camp Fanning was. I went through and came back and re-enlisted in the first week of January, '46. I was assigned to Fort Benning to the jump school and I was an instructor there. I stayed on leave for about a month and a half and things had already started really closing down. They would have a jump class every other week instead of every week. I continued on in the military and got wise and went to OCS in '49, finally. Fact is, I was a 1st. lieutenant in Panama when I met my company commander Bonsai Bailey. He's a medical officer at the Gargus Hospital in Panama in the Canal Zone. He really took aback seeing me as a commissioned person. He didn't

really do this but I kid the guys saying that he ran a check on me to see if I was impersonating an officer.

MR. JOHNSON: So you made a career in the army?

MR. GRASS: Yes, I stacked arms in August of '62.

MR. JOHNSON: Did you do a tour in Korea during the war?

MR. GRASS: Yes, branch school was armor. I was going to be a Robert E. Lee Pruitt guy. You remember Jone's From Here to Eternity? I was the Robert E. Lee Pruitt finally. I was going to be a rifleman for thirty years and fortunately my attack officer in OCS said, we had a chance to have a conference, "Look, you can be infantry any time you want to just stop and dismount." Sounded good to me and he went over all my records and everything and I had high scores on the things that would be good for armor or armored cavalry, the mechanic school experience helped. I didn't know it then, so I went to Fort Knox and after branch school the army was hurting so they didn't send anybody anywhere. If I could be assigned at Fort Know, I would be assigned at Fort Knox. The 70th tank had an opening for several lieutenants at the time, and I was very fortunate. This was when things started smiling on me, I was assigned to the 70th tank, the recon platoon, and it was the best command I believe I've ever had. I had thirty-eight men that knew what they were doing. I was the 2nd Lt., my first scout was a reserve lieutenant, my car commanders one of them was an ace mechanic, I had an ex-mess sergeant, I had an mp tech sergeant, I had a parachuted 81-mortar platoon sergeant who was in command of my one 2, my 181 support squad. Manatuba, an Indian guy that was at Knox, had been slick-sleeved. He had been a non-com and he was a member of the rifle squad. We had an old half-track. We had 4 quarter tons in the scout section, 2 m24 tanks, that's the light ones that had the same tube that they designed for the B-25. The round was so slow you would have to be alert to watch it go but the HE didn't have a tracer element, the only one with the shot or the armor piercing. The man that was in command of the platoon, my second in command, Sgt. Sam Bly, got his feet wet in North Africa and was captured; he was a Creigy(sp?). The tank section leader was an instructor at field sec in Germany. It was a wonderful command. Talking about parachuting, the last jump I had was in '48 for the army. The 187 jump, this was later in the war in Korea at Suchan and Sunchan(sp?) and I was leading the task force that was connecting to them.

I flew in with our pilot along the route up to all the way around the loop. We took off early the next morning and I met up Tom Namath, the guy that had the machine gun section. He and I had been buddies before and we had last seen each other about four months before I went to OCS. He had the machine gun section guarding the road that we came in on. Then the tanks, later one of the units of the 187 was marching down the road slow and we were moving between the two files and a lot of my buddies yelled at me. They didn't believe that I was the 2nd jog, 2nd Lt. They said, "Grass, where in the hell did you get those damn tanks?" I said, "We came up from Pyoun Yang." He said, "I thought you all had air landed." In those days you'd have to have a C82 and they didn't have many of them that could lift a tank. That 24 was the lightest tank that the army had at that time, like the little honey, the M3, that's down here as the 37. Another part of my Korean service, there were two of us that were still platoon leaders in March of '51 and the old man gave us an assignment to the air section of the 1st Cav and we became ROPs. We would fly sometimes about six or seven hours a day, rarely seven, but we would go on two flights. They named Oscar F. Danner from South Carolina, he was the other platoon leader, and he got it as a ROP through the head because of the stubbornness of the green pilot. We were seasoned enough to know the dangers and everything and you would never fly along a hill where the enemy was. You always fly above them. I got to know quite a number of nice guys; of course, there were a couple of pills. I hope this kind of helps a little bit.

MR. JOHNSON: Yes. You know we transcribe these tapes; we've got a big backlog right now. They're looking for volunteers. Once they are transcribed they will do a draft copy and send it to you for editing, to add or subtract, spelling or fill in the blanks, maybe, that kind of thing. Then you return it and they clean it up and we'll send you a copy of the final. The tape and the transcribed material go into our files and we've got a big archives now. We have some competition now, the State of Texas is doing some of the same thing and the Library of Congress is doing some of the same thing. The Nimitz project is strictly related to the Pacific War, World War II in the Pacific. That's our focus and it may be the largest collection of that kind of material that there is anywhere in the country. We appreciate your time and effort and reminiscences and we'll get a printed

copy to you one of these days. You take a look at it and see if everything we're saying is right.

Transcribed October 30, 2007, by Eunice Gary.