

National Museum of the Pacific War

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Dr. William Calhoun

(World War II– 503rd Parachute Regimental Combat Team)

Date of Interview: February 26, 2004

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This is Ed Metzler and today is February 26, 2004. I'm interviewing Mr. William (Bill) Calhoun. This interview is taking place in Fredericksburg at the Nimitz Museum. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Parks and Wildlife for the preservation of historical information related to this site.

Mr. Metzler: Let me start out, Bill, by thanking you for spending the time to relate to us your experiences during the Pacific War. Why don't I get you to start out by stating when and where you were born, a little about your family, and then we'll take it from there.

Dr. Calhoun: I was born in Columbia, Mississippi. In growing up, we moved around the country a lot all the way from Maryland to Texas.

Mr. Metzler: Now when were you born?

Dr. Calhoun: March 12, 1922. I spent the majority of my life though in Texas. I had a sister two years younger than I am. I had one brother eleven years younger than I am and I had another brother seventeen years younger than I am. They're all still living except my mother and father have passed away. I first moved to Texas when I was five years old. Then I moved away for a couple of years, no, a few more than that, then I moved back to Texas and I've been here ever since. Here.

Mr. Metzler: Where did you go to high school then? Where were you when you were in high school?

Dr. Calhoun: The first high school I was in was Mexia. The second was Corsicana. The third was Waco. And I graduated from De Leon High School.

Mr. Metzler: You did move around.

Dr. Calhoun: Sure did.

Mr. Metzler: My goodness. So how did you come to be in the armed forces?

Dr. Calhoun: When I graduated from high school, there was not much going on. We didn't have the money to go to college or anything like that, so I joined the Army. I

worked a little while as a wildcatter in the Comanche County area drilling for oil. That was hit and miss because those people didn't really have the funds to have very long operations. And so by the time 1940 ended, I had decided I was going to join the Army. I went to Barksdale Field, Louisiana, and joined there at the recruiting office. I was eighteen years old. I joined the Air Corps there and I didn't do any checking before I joined. Historically, the Third Attack Wing had always been at Barksdale Field. I wanted to be a pilot or a gunner. After I joined, the recruiting sergeant told me that the Third Attack Wing had been moved to Langley Field, Virginia. (laughs) Anyhow, I had been in the National Guard as a teenager. At sixteen years old I joined the National Guard. So I knew most of the drills and things like that, so they didn't really put me through that.

Three weeks after I joined the Army they sent me off to a technical school, aircraft armament school. My choice was armament school and they gave me my choice in Denver, Colorado. I graduated from armament school. I fared pretty good in there, in Air Corps, but I wasn't happy. You see, I transferred from the 6th air base squad also at Barksdale. When I got back there expecting to be moved to a tactical outfit, they had a bombardier training school there and they said they'd move me over there. Well, that wasn't really—we had a little bit of armament work, some practice bombs, but anybody could do that. There were four of us there that were pretty dissatisfied. And we had come through, at Lowery, the armament school, we were the first class that ever had B-26s with the Bendix power turret. The Bendix power turret replaced the old ball and socket mounts. Gunners had had ball and socket mounts and thirty caliber morale guns we called them. (laughs)

Mr. Metzler: Morale guns. (laughs)

Dr. Calhoun: Yes. The B-26 Marauder was sophisticated with twin fifties, you know.

Mr. Metzler: Was that the B-26 that was called the “widow-maker”?

Dr. Calhoun: That's right.

Mr. Metzler: With the short wings?

Dr. Calhoun: Yes, the “flying prostitute” was another name—no visible means of support. (laughs) Anyhow, they had one there and four of us that were qualified with those turrets. So when this series of war alerts, you know we were very much on alert twice that fall, in fact, we were on alert when Pearl Harbor struck. In fact, we relaxed—more than ten percent of our people could now leave the field at one time. When you were on war alert they couldn't. And class A passes, you had to get them on an individual basis. But anyhow, that's beside the point. We were there and December 7, I came off guard, the whole squadron

was on guard, they took a squadron at a time on the base security. I came off guard at two o'clock that afternoon. I didn't believe hardly what they were telling us at first when they told us about Pearl Harbor. Went to eat dinner and the radios were on in the mess hall. And sure enough, it happened. At five-thirty they released us—had a company formation. They declared day passes back on the board. Go to town and enjoy yourself and wear your civilian clothes because it'll be a long time before you wear them again. And that was true. We sent them home the next day.

I did not intend to spend the war at a Gulf Coast Training Command post, so all four of us volunteered for everything we could. Paratroop training was new, so we were quickly accepted.

But anyhow, the way I ended up in the paratroopers. We four were pretty well dissatisfied. Now we had good ratings. We all had 2nd AM ratings, Air Mechanics ratings. We drew, even as privates, as much as a staff sergeant, seventy-two dollars a month. And that was a big—

Mr. Metzler: Real money back then.

Dr. Calhoun: Yes, big money. But it wasn't that. It was the fact that we weren't doing what we were supposed to. Well anyhow, they moved the bombardier school to New Mexico but kept us there. On the eighth, the day after war was declared, the Third Attack Group now it was came through there with brand new B-26s. The whole wing. The Great Silver Fleet they were known as when they went to Henderson Field because they never even had time to paint them. They were silver. And anyhow, the minute they landed, this group commander came wanting to know if anybody had been through that Bendix power turret school. He found the four of us and he got up there and he said, "Get your stuff down here right now," he said, "You're going to war with us." And he said, "I'm going to the base commander and get the transfer approved." So we did. But the base commander refused to transfer us. (laughs) So they left out but he told us, his parting words were, "Stay loose men. I'm gonna get you."

Anyhow, two or three weeks elapsed and one night they woke us up. Put us on a train, only we were heading east. We got to Columbus, Mississippi, which was strictly a brand new twin-engine air base. And they had no use for our armor at all. By then I had a 1st AM rating getting a tech sergeant's pay and I had a crew under me that were mechanics and I didn't know what they were doing. But we were disgusted so we started putting out for everything that came along including parachute school. Parachute school was right there and had first priority and we were gone—it didn't matter—just two or three weeks. Went to Ft. Benning. Went to parachute school. I came out as a private. I had been a corporal but when I came out of the air corps, I came out

a private and got assigned to Company B of the 502nd Parachute Infantry. In three months, I was sent to OCS. Went through infantry there at Ft. Benning. I came out and I was in the pool there for a while and then sent up to North Carolina where I was shipped around and then I was sent overseas and joined the 503. The funniest thing about it: two of the four of us had been put in B Company when we graduated from jump school. And right after “Ca”–, my name in the alphabet, they had taken us and put us in the 502 as fillers and took the others and put them in the 504 which became a unit of the 82nd Airborne. Anyhow, when I got there, there were two old buddies right there. They served in the 503. They had gone to A Co. 504. A Company was later sent to join the 2nd Battalion 502 to replace C Company, 501 Battalion who did not go with the 503rd.

We went through Milne Bay and Port Moresby. The 503 was in transition. You see, the First Marine Division was going to land at Cape Gloucester and so they were going to jump ahead of them. Well, Tokyo Rose said they had a warm welcome. The 503 went overseas in December; got to Australia in December of ‘42. So they had been in northern Australia at Cairns for some time. This eighteen hundred man-regiment guarded the entire north part of Australia. Tokyo Rose used to mention us quite a bit. She said this is where–well, in other words they knew that we were going to jump. And sure enough, they photographed the area through there real well and the Japanese had planted staves, spears in the ground.

Mr. Metzler: Really?

Dr. Calhoun: Yeah. They called our mission off. It’s always bad to be prepared for a mission and get it called off. It’s bad on morale. But anyhow, we finally got to the 503 which was still at Port Moresby. They had made the September 4th –before that they had made the first parachute jump in the Pacific there at Nadzab in the Markham Valley.

Mr. Metzler: Nadzab?

Dr. Calhoun: N-a-d-z-a-b.

Mr. Metzler: Is that in New Guinea?

Dr. Calhoun: Yes, it’s in the Markham Valley. And as they were coming up the coast, the Australians were, we jumped inland. The coast juts out there and we jumped inland and blocked the trail going up this valley. Or they did; I wasn’t with them then. But anyhow, I got overseas in late ‘43 and I joined them. I was assistant platoon leader. In parachutes they had assistant platoon leaders then. Later, with the shortage, we seldom ever had assistants. But I was the first platoon assistant platoon leader.

Shortly thereafter, the Second Battalion was the original 501st Parachute Battalion that was formed in '40 from the test platoon. I was in what had been B Company of the 501. B Company became F Company Second Battalion 503. So, I was in amongst a bunch of old guys at Panama. Those guys, some of them went overseas in 1940. Down in the Canal Zone and were there when the war started. The ship that was carrying the rest forming the regiment—see the 503 was the first regiment with two battalions and they sent one battalion to Europe. And they had one battalion. Then they turned around and took basically the 502 Battalion, which part of them became the 502 Regiment, moved them up there and then they had two battalions again, First and Third they called it. I don't know why they were skipping numbers but they did. Then they came to Panama and picked up the 501 and that was the Second Battalion. So, I was a newcomer in amongst a bunch of veterans.

Mr. Metzler: A bunch of old veterans.

Dr. Calhoun: Yeah, they looked down on everybody else that weren't pioneers, you know. See, I only got in there in May '42. I wasn't the assistant platoon leader for over a month, I guess, before the platoon leader was transferred back to the rear base in Australia. I became platoon leader of the first platoon. I joined them at that date, January 4, 1944, was the day I joined the regiment.

Mr. Metzler: The beginning of '44.

Dr. Calhoun: Yes, the very beginning of '44, I still served longer with F Company than any other officer. I stayed with F Company for the duration. I had the first platoon in New Guinea. We were supposed to jump on Biak. They'd already had Cape Gloucester cancelled. We (?) chutes from Oro Bay down there, Dobodura airbase and with chutes packed, they said go to Hollandia and stage there for the jump. Well, after three or four days, they turned our chutes in and stayed there and then they sent us over to Noemfoor which was in the Shoten Islands right by it.

Mr. Metzler: How is that spelled?

Dr. Calhoun: S-h-o-t-e-n, Shoten.

Mr. Metzler: Okay, and you said where was the place that you went to?

Dr. Calhoun: Well, Hollandia was on the New Guinea mainland. It was a big base. We went around Wewak. The Japanese had sent most of their combat troops down and they had a hundred thousand and something men at Wewak. We went around that a hundred miles almost and took their big supply base at Hollandia, almost unopposed. We saw some patrol action there back toward Wewak, but we didn't see any real action. There was a little shooting going on

but Hollandia was pretty quiet.

Mr. Metzler: So you jumped into there, is that right?

Dr. Calhoun: No, we were flown up there and landed. We only had two bases operating, big bases. We flew into there and they moved us down by Sixth Army Headquarters and across the bay. We patrolled south toward Wewak but like I said, we didn't hit anything. A few of our people in our unit were guarding food dumps that had a little shooting going on. Some Japanese were hiding in the jungles trying to get the food. Some had fled to the hills. But Hollandia didn't amount to anything. Then the First and Third Battalions jumped on Noemfoor two days in a row. The Second was going to jump the third day in a row. But it was a useless jump because they jumped from behind the 158th Infantry that had already landed and started the beach head. They jumped on an airfield there the Japanese had constructed. There was a lot of equipment, graders and things, you know. In the first place, they jumped on a coral strip of land which is bone-breaking. And then some of them hit the equipment and everything else. It was kind of a disaster. A great number of casualties, so they called us off.

They sent us to Biak; flew us to Biak. Put us on LCIs and took us to Noemfoor. Then we had the dirtiest, filthiest campaign we were ever in. Six weeks on that little old coral island. See, the Japanese were coming in by night and bringing troops into Noemfoor and by night taking them across to Biak where the two infantry divisions were fighting. So, that's the reason we took Noemfoor, to stop that, to cut off that supply. Anyhow, we spent six weeks on this coral island. There was no water on it inland so you had to bring your water in in most places and all your rations and everything. It was those little coral mountains, little hills. You know, if you fall on coral, you're going to get cut. In that dirty, filthy rain forest that we were in, if a man got cut, we sent him back while he could walk.

Mr. Metzler: Because of infections and such?

Dr. Calhoun: Yeah, because in two or three days he was going to be running high temperature with blood poisoning. If one got a cut, we'd send them right on back. Anyhow, we got through that and the last day of that campaign the Japanese had the day before, the reason it was the last day, they had gathered their forces together on the south shore down there and they came across a broad beach there and I believe it was our First Battalion, it may have been the Third, but I believe it was the First Battalion, just slaughtered them. They were wide open and just had a big banzai. And they wiped that force out but there were still some scattered around back there so that night after dark, there was a trail junction up there, two or three miles up there, so they ordered me to take my platoon and get to that trail junction and drop that trail junction. Well, there was sound power went all the way up there. It was sound power wire like this

little black line here—the telephone wire. It was just pouring rain and the way we could stay in line was walk with that sound power wire in our hand. You could hardly see the man in front of you.

Mr. Metzler: So you used that as a guide.

Dr. Calhoun: Yes, to guide us. So we climbed a hill and we thought well, this is that hill. This is that hill there right below us where the trails cross. What you do is on that hill you're commanding that trail junction. We had to just take each man and just feel in that pouring rain and put them in position on that place. We had left in such a hurry we left without anything to eat, no rations, no nothing. We didn't even have ponchos.

Mr. Metzler: My gosh.

Dr. Calhoun: We were just dripping wet and all you could hear was teeth chattering. But anyhow, the next morning we woke up and there was a big hill looking up at us. We had gone up on a side of the hills. We had not gotten to the hill. But we went right on up the hill and went down in this valley to the trail junction. I left a squad up on this ridge to command that valley, that trail junction. We got down there and I had put the squad up there and I had my platoon sergeant with us and the brush was very heavy on that ridge. The sides were just pretty clear but right on top of the crown of that ridge it was very heavy brush. So I told my platoon sergeant, "Let's go down this way a little bit and see if this clears out any." We were just pushing through brush and just parting vines and all this stuff and just in extremely dense brush. We got maybe fifty yards from where my squad was and I was just stepping through the hole I'd made in the brush when "Bam" and something hit me right here. I felt like something pushed me here. I thought my right leg exploded, the calf, you know. What it had done, it had nicked the sciatic nerves.

Mr. Metzler: Oh, my gosh. So you were taking rifle fire?

Dr. Calhoun: It was a rifle and it was so close in that heavy brush that I felt the heat on the back of my hand from the muzzle. I guess it saved my life because in that heavy brush he couldn't raise his rifle any higher.

Mr. Metzler: So, he was in the brush right there.

Dr. Calhoun: Yeah. I was carrying a Thompson sub-machine gun and I turned with that Thompson to him. He pulled his bolt back and I saw him then. Just as I turned, all these bullets came right by my eyebrows. Moving my head saved my life, you know, turning fast.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah.

Dr. Calhoun: So I thought, golly, there's more than one. My platoon sergeant was behind me and so after dispatching this man that shot me, I crawled out down through the brush. I couldn't move my right leg. In a little bit, I'd gotten clear. There was a big rock there and I got behind the big rock and I said, "Todd, you all right?" And he said, "Well, where are you?" He said, "Who's shooting?"

Mr. Metzler: And who is Todd?

Dr. Calhoun: My platoon sergeant.

Mr. Metzler: Okay.

Dr. Calhoun: He was back there just behind me and he didn't know a thing.

Mr. Metzler: He didn't even know what had happened then.

Dr. Calhoun: Well, he knew the shooting started right in front of him.

Mr. Metzler: He didn't know you were hit.

Dr. Calhoun: I said, "I'm going to get on down." I said, "You go right back to Beardsley." That was the squad we came to see. I just literally had to roll and drag that leg back down there. I thought I could walk but I couldn't and they put me on a litter and carried me on back to the sea coast there. And the thing about it was there were four Japs there. There was a patrol from the First Battalion coming up the other side. These other three Japs that were alive went out in that clearing on the other side to get away from there and ran right into this patrol. This patrol, of course, heard the firing. They killed the three of them. So, there were four of them there. I knew there were two, that's all I knew.

Anyhow, I was there in the hospital and all. I was trying to walk in this thing and I was using posts that they used to put litters on. Those were our beds in that little old medical company. They had a bad storm and stayed there five days and I was getting to where I could walk. They sent me out to the 71st Evac Hospital at the north end. Three of us were supposed to go to Hollandia. And I told this major, I said, "I don't want to go to Hollandia." He said, "Well, you've got to go to Hollandia for evaluation." I said, "I don't want to go." He said, "I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to keep you here. You're going to have to stay here a couple of weeks anyhow and I'm going see how you're doing there. But by golly, if you're not doing pretty good, you're going back." I was really working at it and I got back to where I could swing that leg and walk. And so he sent me back to duty when it healed. It hit the bone, that ilium bone.

I wanted to get back in my platoon. I got back in the platoon and we went on to Leyte where we had a side show to all that bombing and all out in the harbor there.

Mr. Metzler: Right.

Dr. Calhoun: Dulag and all in there, you know. That was just a big side show. We got strafed a few times. The Japanese, we were right on the beach, and they'd come down across there strafing but we never got bombed right there. We had foxholes. We didn't feel like we were in any great danger. But there were just a lot of air raids. They were desperate to knock that beachhead out..

Then we went to Mindoro and landed there on the thirteenth of December and I saw my first kamikaze plane.

Mr. Metzler: Here is a map showing Mindoro.

Dr. Calhoun: Okay. See we came across here and I don't know whether you ever heard about it down here but see this island right here? The island of Palawan.

Mr. Metzler: The island next to Mindoro, east.

Dr. Calhoun: We came straight into that island, just as straight as we could come. In other words, it seemed that that's where we were coming into; that's where we're going to attack. The Japanese had two hundred and something American prisoners there building an airstrip. They put them in caves and poured gasoline in and burned them alive.

Mr. Metzler: Oh, my.

Dr. Calhoun: We didn't know that until later after the war. We went in and landed with no opposition, us and the 19th Infantry Combat Team. By the way, at Negros after the operation was over, we had become a combat team really. A field artillery battalion and an engineer company and got up to three thousand men. See, a parachute infantry regiment was only eighteen hundred men instead of thirty-five like the infantry. Our combat team was three thousand men instead of the fifty-five hundred infantry. But anyhow, we landed there at Mindoro and we had 343 raids in nineteen days that they counted as separate raids when they had the all-clear. The Japanese were trying to bomb us off of there. They knew we were building two airstrips there. In fact, on what they called Elmore or the San Jose strip by the river where they could get gravel, they had planes flying off there in three days. They had a seven thousand engineer construction brigade come in there with us.

Mr. Metzler: Now where is San Jose, right here at the south of Mindoro?

Dr. Calhoun: Yes, that's San Jose. Actually, it's five miles inland. There's a railroad track. We landed there and the 19th landed down here, a little further down the beach. We occupied it, I'd say, we didn't take it. The Japanese went to the hills. The only unit that really had any fighting on Mindoro was B Company that went up here to Paluan (town in northern Mindoro—not the island).

Mr. Metzler: Went up to?

Dr. Calhoun: A little place called Paluan up here on the north end. The Japanese had a radio out there and they needed that knocked out so they wouldn't know what we were doing down there. They went up there and knocked that out.

Mr. Metzler: So, that's on the north coast of Mindoro.

Dr. Calhoun: Yes. And that was the only one that really had some fighting. But we had all the air raids. We had a giant air show is what it amounted to. At first, my platoon was across the San Jose Green Beach Road going where we came in down there. Saint Augustine was this little village there. They really fortified that position. The engineers put down double apron barbed wire fences and everything. We had a big bunker there with heavy stuff in it at the road because they expected a counterattack. They knew there was a fleet running around out here in the China Sea and it had four transports with it. They knew that much. They were expecting them to make a sortie in there and make a landing because the Japanese were desperate to get those airfields out of there. On the 26th we became the first troops to be shelled by Japanese Naval forces after Guadalcanal.

Mr. Metzler: The 26th of—

Dr. Calhoun: December. We landed on the 13th.

Mr. Metzler: Which year is this now?

Dr. Calhoun: This is '44.

Mr. Metzler: '44. We're in late '44.

Dr. Calhoun: Late '44. They shelled us for twenty-something minutes. They had the range exactly. The azimuth was across just over here. We heard the shells. We heard the cruiser shells. We heard (?). And everything was right across the river from us.

Mr. Metzler: Oh, good. That's good. (laughs)

Dr. Calhoun: A Navy privateer, that was flying courier back and forth from Leyte to Indochina coming back that afternoon, he passed that fleet. He came in and landed, made an emergency landing there at our air field there and told them what he saw out there. We had a reconnaissance squadron there of B-25s, RB 25s they called them, reconnaissance bombers. They had just made a run that way, swept that area. They said, “No, there’s nobody out there.” He said, “Well, will you load me with bombs?” He said, “I’m gonna bomb them.” You know, on the return trip. They loaded those bombs but after he was so persistent, they decided they better check that out a little bit. So they sent, I don’t remember, ten or twelve B-25s with him and went back. Well, they hit the fleet out there coming in. They knew they were going to be there in a matter of hours, sometime after dark. So then they bombed that fleet and they came back in—just in a continuous circle.

Our position down there where my platoon was, was right next to the west end of that field and we knew pretty well what was going on. The squadron commander was gone when that group went out. But he had come back in and found out what was going on. He got everybody else ready and when they came back in, they came back in and they had jettisoned the bombs. Some of their Air Corps people were telling us that the CO got really mad over there at that airfield when that squadron— He asked, “Why?” And they said, “The ack-ack was so heavy we couldn’t penetrate it.” He told them to turn those planes around. They loaded them with bombs and they took the whole squadron back out there. The ack-ack wasn’t too heavy. They started hitting them. They were in fighter range then. They started hitting them with the P-47s and the P-38s. Those planes would come in and they’d run just as long as they could on gasoline, that’s how fast they were going, and they wouldn’t refuel until they just had to, but just get the bombs on there. They circled, just coming, and coming, and coming. But the Japs got in range and shelled us. Just before they started shelling, the Army Air Corps all left and went to Leyte. They were getting into firing range. So, there we were. That was the quietest night I ever heard in my life until suddenly the shells started. After all the airplanes were gone, we really felt like we were deserted. The Seventh Fleet was supposed to be protecting us. There had been a sighting up here—it was a decoy. They had run a few destroyers up here and the Seventh Fleet took off to get them. They thought it was that Indian Ocean Fleet. Our Seventh Fleet with all their biggest flattops and everything was gone. We were alone.

Mr. Metzler: So you were naked.

Dr. Calhoun: We had no naval air support. That was the 26th and some of the Seventh Fleet had gone back to Leyte for Christmas and was still ashore back there. They had to gather them up.

The rest of the time there, they sent my platoon up to guard Task Force Headquarters and then before it was over, I got another platoon and our mortar platoon. I had three platoons up there to guard it. I found out how the better half lived. I found out where the fresh meat and the beer and everything went. (laughs) We never saw it. We had a colonel that was a commander. And you would notice that all these refrigeration trucks and all those things at base headquarters, when it turned to base headquarters, and all the beer and everything stacked up, but you never saw any. When you've got a major general commanding a division there, he's going to see that his troops get it. A colonel is not able to see to anything. (laughs) You're low man on the totem pole. That's the reason they called us "Panama Jones and His Three Thousand Thieves" (laughs) We did a lot of "requisitioning."

Mr. Metzler: "Requisitioning?"

Dr. Calhoun: That's the only way we could get in on it. We still have a banner "Panama Jones and His Three Thousand Thieves." Just before—is my time all right?

Mr. Metzler: You're fine.

Dr. Calhoun: Just before we went to—we got alerted for a mission. I never did understand what it was. It was some radio base up there around Manila. We thought the Second Battalion was—they thought we were going to jump there. You have to read (?) now to even find out anything about it. Suddenly that got quiet and in a few days we didn't hear anything. Then suddenly a rumor came out that we were going to jump on a very important place in our history. Then a rumor came along—Corregidor.

Mr. Metzler: Go ahead.

Dr. Calhoun: Back at that time, the Japanese had made a great deal of taking our island fortress away from us. They had taken our greatest fortress.

Mr. Metzler: Corregidor was already famous.

Dr. Calhoun: It was famous, yes. It was our Rock of Gibraltar, what they compared to the British. Nobody can stay when they're unsupported, supplies, and men, and everything else. They held out till May after the war started. And really, in the outfit, I'm sure there were people sweating, but everybody really just felt lucky. We were going to get to jump on Corregidor. It was an unbelievable honor.

Mr. Metzler: Yes.

Dr. Calhoun: We had a good feeling. I mean morale was sky-high. On the morning of the 16th of February, the Third Battalion went first and jumped at 8:30. Then the

Second left. The Second Battalion, my battalion, jumped at 12:30. The First Battalion was going to jump the next day, the next morning. When they got up there, you know, the jump fields are awfully short, A and B fields. We didn't call them drop zones in those days or landing zones. We just called them fields—the jump field. We jumped on them.

When the planes, the C-47s, came in to pick us up, we knew they were getting fire because you could see holes in the airplanes where they'd been tattooed with machine gun fire. We left and went up there and probably thirty minutes before we jumped, we switched from V-formation into two long single files because we were jumping on two fields. I thought the briefing was poor for the jump. In the first place, the tent that we were briefed in that had the sand table in it, the sides were down and dirt piled on them where it couldn't blow up. In that heat out there in that open plain, you can imagine what it was like inside all buttoned up in the tent, with all the people that needed to be in there, a squad tent and our sand table was little, but anyhow.

You see, Corregidor—we knew every inch of it. Our topographical maps, everything was there. They gave us maps. Each platoon leader and higher above got a map. If you look over there, (*indicates map*) you see that Corregidor map with the photographs on one side of the map and the map on the other.

Mr. Metzler: That were laid out this morning.

Dr. Calhoun: Yes. The only difference between that and the maps we got, the maps we got had predesignated numbers (Wheeler Battery # 7). Everything had a number on the south end. On the north end, everything had a letter. James Battery, I don't remember the number of it because I didn't operate up there, but it was like maybe, say, "C."

The Navy had those maps. You know, the Navy was more accurate than the Army. The Navy figured their corrections in feet. The Army figured their corrections in yards. When you were getting support from ships, you just felt like they were going to lay it right there. We just had more confidence in the Navy for supporting fire.

Mr. Metzler: What time of day did you jump onto Corregidor?

Dr. Calhoun: At noon. As I said, we were in two lines coming in. Suddenly, we see these cruisers down there and in a minute, here are these destroyers down there. Really, they kind of had it ringed around. It wasn't really a ring; it was more of a half-circle. They were covering that whole zone from Bottomside up to Topside. They really had it covered. The beaches down there where the infantry was going to land after we got established on Topside, the 34th

Infantry sent a reinforced battalion of a thousand men in there, so we had a force of four thousand men. Supposedly against 820 Japanese. Only thing about it, General Krueger was commander of the Sixth Army and ordinarily the old officers did not approve of changes, like Billy Mitchell or paratroopers, anything like that. Krueger was an exception. He probably had as good an idea on the use of paratroopers as anybody in the Army.

Mr. Metzler: So he was willing to accept this new tool.

Dr. Calhoun: Right off, his first statement to his staff was, “We’re going to take Corregidor and we’re not going to have a Tarawa. We’re going to take it by getting right in the middle of them and I’m going to use parachutists.” Then he wanted our colonel and wanted everybody else to give him recommendations. There wasn’t but one suitable site, the middle of Topside, but he allowed them. Strange to say, even our colonel said, “Well, the only good landing place is Kindley Field.” That’s way down on the Monkey Point, the tail of Monkey Point. There’s a little Cub landing field down there. But it is a little open zone. Gen. Krueger said, “Well, what do you want to do that for?” and he said, “Then you’ve got to fight over Malinta Hill; take Malinta and then start and go up Topside.” He said, “I said a parachute operation. You’re not talking about a parachute operation.” So Gen. Krueger himself chose Topside.

There are a lot of people that lay claim to this but now Colonel Tolson, who was formerly in our outfit, was the Sixth Army Airborne advisor and he was in on the middle of that and that’s his story. That Krueger himself picked Topside and said he was going to jump right in the middle of them. All their communications center there, their headquarters there, and everything.

Mr. Metzler: Why bother doing a parachute jump? You’re going to jump on top of them.

Dr. Calhoun: That’s right. He seemed to be, according to Tolson, the only one that really—

Mr. Metzler: Got it.

Dr. Calhoun: —got it. Thank goodness we jumped there. It would have been a Tarawa had we come in. They were prepared for it. There were something over 6500 Japanese marines out there. There were a few sailors. The *Musashi*, that super battleship, sister ship to the *Yamato*, when it was sunk over in Leyte they got 500 survivors and put them all out on Corregidor. The Jap commander, Navy Captain Itagaki, had considered a parachute attack but ruled it out as impossible.

Mr. Metzler: So there were some sailors off the *Musashi*.

Dr. Calhoun: The *Musashi*.

Mr. Metzler: A super battleship.

Dr. Calhoun: Yes, the super. And in one aspect, it was just slightly bigger, I think. I don't remember what, some little measurement. But they were just about sister ships.

Mr. Metzler: Eighteen-inch guns?

Dr. Calhoun: Yes. They had some crew members out there. They were what the Japanese called naval forces out there. And special land fighting naval forces. That's what they called their marines, that we called Tiger Marines. That belt over there, that curved belt with a tiger on it. They all wore that with the tiger. That little stitch on each button.

As we came in that day, I was talking about the warships being there, the first thing I thought of—I was sitting by the door and the men were all sitting on the seat and I was sitting by the door and looking under the wing and I saw these cliffs come out after we saw the warships. We could hear all this gunfire going on then. With these ships out there, I thought of an old western where the Indians were going around the wagon train.

Mr. Metzler: Circle the wagons.

Dr. Calhoun: Yes, circle the wagons. We saw the cliffs coming up. We were flying into a twenty-five knot an hour wind. Straight into it. It was blowing us back. We had a little field so we couldn't jump more than eight men at a time. They had adjusted and adjusted and they had finally got us down to— When I got on the plane, the pilot asked me, he said, "I'm going to let you call this altitude." He said, "We'll just go in between 350 and 400 feet. Do you want me to go in at 400?" I said, "No, go in at 350." I sat by the door and I had a rivet there. Keeping my head against the side of the plane in that rivet so I was looking straight down. We came in over Beltline Road which was right on the edge of Topside there, came in right by the old officers' club and swimming pool and where the old pitch and putt golf course they had. Came right over that. When we passed Beltline Road, we had two bundles we had to push out first and then the first eight men go. Then another bundle and then the third one. I led the third group out. Didn't have a bundle and didn't have to worry about that. You better be nine seconds before you went. Otherwise with the wind, you'd be facing the cliffs and the sea.

The road was very plainly marked. It was cut in there just as it drops off down into Crockett Ravine. The others jumped over there. They were on the parade ground. Ours, if you miss it, you were down in Crockett Ravine or the

sea. Theirs if they miss it, they were in the clearance or in the ocean. And blowing into that wind. I'll probably never in my lifetime have that kind of experience. You're wishing that this wasn't laid on me. You've got twenty-three men in that airplane. I've got to get them on that jump field and I've got to keep my cool.

Mr. Metzler: Right.

Dr. Calhoun: You want to count fast. You make your self "one-thousand, two-thousand, three-thousand." I still think that's one of the hardest fights I ever had in my life to make yourself keep it down.

Mr. Metzler: Do you dream about that at night?

Dr. Calhoun: I have. I have had many dreams. I've awakened wet with sweat. I still every now and then will have a recall of something.

My platoon sergeant was standing in his door. I had him in the first stick. Just as we were coming in close and I could see the road coming up, "Wham!" something hit the plane and I could see daylight at the top of the airplane where something about as big as a grapefruit had knocked a hole in the plane. I think it was a 40 mm that didn't explode.

Mr. Metzler: So the plane was ventilated.

Dr. Calhoun: It was ventilated. We could hear these rifle and machine gun rounds hitting the plane. Sitting by that door, I didn't like it at all. I got Todd out and his stick. Then the next stick and our third squad leader, Chris Johnson with his stick. Got them out and I was sure relieved when we made that second turn and we just had one more turn to come. Because every time we were getting hit.

Mr. Metzler: So, how many passes did you have to make?

Dr. Calhoun: Three.

Mr. Metzler: Three passes.

Dr. Calhoun: The company commander's plane was in front of me. I had already seen the left engine flame out. They didn't make the third pass. They couldn't. They went back to Mindoro with that engine feathered, the engine pouring out black smoke.

Mr. Metzler: And without all of the guys having jumped.

Dr. Calhoun: They kept the last eight men in there and headed in a straight line to Mindoro..

And those are the guys that get all the credit. Because if you ever look at Corregidor jumps you'll always see these eight men ready to jump in that C-47. They didn't jump. The pictures are probably the most publicized of the operation.

Mr. Metzler: They were those that didn't jump.

Dr. Calhoun: When they got back to Mindoro the photographers made pictures of them all ready to go. They even got moving pictures of them. They transposed it because here they are in the door ready to jump. Then suddenly all these people are going. Well, that's a different film where they spliced it. (laughs) That was our first sergeant and six of my men. We had some Army photographers that jumped with us on their first jump. Led by a lieutenant named Williams. One fellow named Pete Yatnick that was the eighth man on that stick that didn't jump in the company headquarters plane. In my plane those were all my men, Bartlett and some of these. McDonald was in the bunch that didn't jump. Bartlett was in my plane and jumped with me.

Going down, boy, that chute opened. I had to go out head first which is a very poor thing to do. You're supposed to go out in kind of the fetal position with your head down. Be sure and get the head down because you don't want to get it knocked down.

Mr. Metzler: Yes, you don't really want to hit any of the plane.

Dr. Calhoun: No. When I said standing in the door, they jammed up too close and it caught me looking back. I couldn't get turned around straight; my chute's caught back here behind the men so I just had to make a sideways— I saw my feet up in the air in the sky and I knew I was in a very poor position. I thought I don't know what's going to happen jumping that low. But it opened fine. Boy, it's just like standing in the door of an express train and watching the terrain come. Watch that ground going past under you. Man, that wind was moving you. But it didn't move you long because down you went and landed.

I landed right by the swimming pool in a big shell crater. I was carrying an M-1. I never did carry a carbine. I didn't like a carbine, what the officer was supposed to carry. I carried an M-1 with a stock up against my shoulder back here and down by my right side and the belly band of that chute around it. You jump and all you got to do is pull that belly band and you could do that before you landed and you had your rifle. That's the way we ordinarily did most rifle jumps. We had a pack to put them in but you had to assemble it. Nobody wanted to jump with a disassembled gun. So, I landed in that thing and hit. You know Corregidor's real rocky and when I hit in that crater, I hit a big rock in the side of it right on that gun.

Mr. Metzler: Ouch.

Dr. Calhoun: It really dazed me for a minute and the wind was blowing like thunder. I was barely conscious of that chute trying to drag me out but I was too deep down in there. A couple of guys from D Company got down in there and I really came to while they were trying to get me out of that chute and get that chute pulled down and get me out of it. I got my rifle off and I had two pieces with the sling holding them together. It had broken that stock completely in two where it hit that rock. I had the stock in one hand and the barrel in the other. (laughs)

Mr. Metzler: You had a splintered rifle.

Dr. Calhoun: Yes, but it wasn't hard to get a weapon. We had a lot of casualties on the jump so I picked up another M-1 in a hurry.

Mr. Metzler: The casualties on the jump, were they from ground fire?

Dr. Calhoun: We had some from ground fire. Not many, we jumped so low and it was so fast and you were moving so fast. I heard the cracking. You know, when bullets get pretty close to you it starts cracking like a sharp "crack". Rattle your eardrums. I heard the cracking from machine gun fire and I was looking up and I saw these holes appear in that chute up there. But they missed me and they hit the chute. Then I'm down in that crater.

Mr. Metzler: So the crater was right by the swimming pool at the old officers' club on top of Corregidor.

Dr. Calhoun: Yes. In fact, we had one of our deaths, a fellow's chute didn't open fully and he hit in the swimming pool. It was concrete. A lot of them hit craters. That wasn't the worst thing. Our worst casualties came from that tree stubble. All the bombs and shells had cut off the trees and left stakes sticking up several feet. We had a lot of people pierced by those stakes. The other thing, a lot landed in concrete. I didn't land in concrete. But some of them, particularly on A field, landed in concrete rubble. Some of that reinforcing steel was one-inch steel rebar sticking up like spears. We had some men get speared and killed—

Mr. Metzler: Oh, dear.

Dr. Calhoun: Our casualties were pretty heavy, the jump casualties, although they expected it. Krueger said, they had put out that argument there was going to be a terrible number of casualties and he said, "Well, it's not going to be anything like if we don't. We're doing this to save lives."

I got out and got to the assembly area. I thought my ribs were all broken. I didn't breathe good for a couple of weeks but I don't guess it broke any.

Mr. Metzler: Just bruised you, I guess.

Dr. Calhoun: Yeah. We assembled and we went down. The senior officers' row there, what they call the senior officers' row, mostly senior officers in the coast artillery are two-story homes. In fact, about all the officers' homes on there were two-story masonry homes. It's the south-most of the officers' rows. The end of it goes out pretty near Wheeler Battery. That's Building 28-D. I got to know that building pretty well. We went there and down the street in front of it and went on down. See, I was missing four men that were in that plane that didn't jump. So I was four men light in my platoon, all out of my first squad. We got down there and we were drawing fire from that area out there known as the Battery Boston area. The old B Battery of the over three-inch anti-aircraft artillery. It was all pock-marked with holes and debris. A lot of those craters had Japanese in them. They were firing at us over those guns. So, the company commander told me to take a squad and clear that. I said, "I'll just take the whole platoon. I'm light already." He said, "Okay."

We were sweeping. Before that, as soon as we got there, I walked out by that. I was looking and Wheeler Battery was right out there, not very far. So I walked to the corner and the railroad came down and went in behind Wheeler Battery. You could see the length. Those batteries were a hundred yards long. Those twin gun, twelve-inch. Disappearing guns. And I walked behind that battery and looked and I saw a guy coming and it was our S-3. He had walked the length behind it. He was coming to meet me.

We had an artillery doctor named Spicer. He was laying there dead near where I was stood and he had an EMT tag on. You know, that the medics use on the wounded—Emergency Medical Treatment Tag. It was filled out. He was dead and I looked at the EMT tag and it said "gunshot wound right chest" and prognosis "death." He wrote his own EMT tag out.

Mr. Metzler: Isn't that something.

Dr. Calhoun: That was one of the instances that happened that you remember.

Mr. Metzler: Isn't that something.

Dr. Calhoun: Spicer actually wrote his own EMT tag.

Mr. Metzler: Wrote his own EMT tag.

Dr. Calhoun: He sure did. Sure enough, he had this hole right in his chest here, you know. Brownie, our S-3, he walked behind that whole battery and came back and he said, "Well, there's nobody in this thing." So, we walked back to the 28-D building. Then this company commander had sent me out to clean it out.

Sweeping across there, we had automatic fire support and we were using our mortars and we had a direct fire 60-mm mortar. It had a hammer and a trigger on it. You could put it down against a rock and aim it and fire it. And we hadn't practiced that a lot. We took that thing and it was doing yeoman's service.

When we got near the end of Wheeler Battery, there was a big old gully there and it rises up high and it was just looking down on us. I thought, "Well, if somebody occupies that place, we're in a bad place." So I told the assistant squad leader of the first platoon, a boy named Freihoff, to take the other four men, the rest of that first squad I had, and go up there and go around that gully and go up there and get up there where you could cover us. Then we were moving on, clearing the area. A boy named Thomas was one of those four men. Well, here he came running and he said one of the boys is dead. He said Freihoff and Huff are trapped in that battery. He said, "The only reason I wasn't, I was far enough back that when they opened fire on them that I got back out." So, I just pulled the platoon back. We moved over to Wheeler Battery to try to get them out.

And dad gum, I'm telling you, everything in the world went wrong. We got a flame thrower up there. There were berms behind the battery. There's a dirt berm there and we were up on that berm and behind it there were craters there, shell craters. The battery was right over here and a big tower, the control station of the battery. And here's the floor of this gun platform, the east gun platform, #2 platform for a 12-inch gun. We were about on a level with it. They were in a building right up straight across over here. This is all concrete. These are magazines and all, you know.

Mr. Metzler: Right, right.

Dr. Calhoun: [They had] gotten into that. But they couldn't come out the door because there was a machine gun sitting over there at the tower firing directly at them. So, I got the flame thrower ready to get that machine gun. Flame thrower wouldn't operate! It had gotten damaged in the jump. So, then it was getting dark. The bazooka wasn't doing anything. We fired it at that heavy concrete and it was just making little spots on it really. It wasn't doing anything. It got dark. Thomas, this boy that came and got us, had been killed. Some Japanese in a spider or fox hole behind him shot him in the head. My platoon saw it—he was showing us where those two boys were trapped. And boy, suddenly he was hit in the head and falls down to the bottom. He was killed right then. And Handlon, this other boy. So, I'd lost two men now already. So, I said, "Well, we got one smoke grenade, rifle smoke grenade. We're going to fire it." I hollered at them and told them, "When that smoke goes up, you all run for it. And jump off that platform and hit the ground running." I said, "We're going to create all the disturbance we can." They fired that dad

gum grenade—nothing happened. The boy forgot to pull the arming pin. I tell you, that was just baffling. Everything was going wrong. Anyhow, I had a boy named McCarter and we had an old fire-worn staff sergeant that had gone on leave and had just got back to us. He had gotten thirty days leave. Had them and they both worked down in front of that berm after it got dark and they were real close to that tower. They got that machine gun's attention. It was firing at them. And there was a dead trooper laying there and they got his carbine when they ran out of ammunition. They were firing and creating a great commotion. So Huff and Freihoff ran out and got back to us. We got out of there, you know, and moved back to 28-D and went into a perimeter defense.

By noon the next day, we jumped with six officers in the company. One of them was dead. Miller and Flash had received severe wounds. In fact, they sent them home. What we'd done, we'd lost every officer except the company commander and myself. The exec officer on the jump had gotten hurt.

Mr. Metzler: A lot of injuries.

Dr. Calhoun: The company commander, Lt. Campbell, and I were the four officers left with the company. Our mortar platoon leader, Clinton Miller, was still active. That was it. Then we spent the second night out there. The third platoon, our third platoon, was supposed to take Wheeler Battery. They were going to fight. What always griped me about that, we had fighters on standby at Mindoro and on call. We were using napalm. When they said they wanted to attack it, I said, "You're crazy. Suicide." One napalm bomb would blow the heck out of things because Friehoff and Huff said there wasn't anything but those big canisters of black powder in those rooms.

Lt. Campbell and a demolitions officer from regimental headquarters both raised up at the same time and were looking and both were killed just like that. Shots to the head. The platoon sergeant just lost his cool and he just turned around and ran for 28-D back where company headquarters were in that building. When he did, the whole platoon left. The company commander was beside himself. He turned around to me and he said, "Get that third platoon back out there and get ready to attack." I was getting tired of the war about that time. (laughs)

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, I'll bet.

Dr. Calhoun: In the meantime, "Sleepy" Miller was hit in the thigh by a machine gun burst that ended his military career.

I took them back out there and got them in place. They had lost people. D

Company hadn't had any action. So, we were sitting there waiting and they kept saying they were going to put the artillery on it and I kept telling them, "You can't put artillery on that." That artillery was sitting on the parade ground. They can't get enough arc in that short space. They're going to go to sea. They said they were going to put artillery and smoke. You can't do it. So anyhow, it was kind of exasperating. But anyhow, they're going to do it and you can go when the smoke comes. I knew where the smoke was going to be—down the cliffs at the edge of the sea. We were ready. I got orders suddenly that they were sending Gifford out there with the first platoon of D Company. They hadn't had any casualties. And said for me to pull the third platoon over to the left and give any support I could and let Gifford come through. By taking smoke grenades, they just threw smoke grenades and they managed to get up on top, you know where a battery comes up the dirt faces the sea and all this concrete. It's two stories high and all that concrete comes down. They got up on that, up the concrete stairways and up on that and they were up there and the Japs down here. And the Japs were fully alerted so they couldn't come back. So anyhow, dark came.

Smoke got to coming out of there. We could see just before dark little whiffs of smoke coming out of Wheeler. Around black powder and smoke that's—

Mr. Metzler: Trouble.

Dr. Calhoun: —trouble. It was about one in the morning and the ground started trembling. We heard this grating noise like air kind of, only it was more grating, being sucked in. A huge noise. Suddenly boy, this flame shot out of the back of that battery a hundred yards across there. It's an enormous amount of flame. I bet it was two or three hundred feet in the air. It lit up the countryside there. It burned out. Boy, we were worried about Gifford and his platoon. What in the world did they do? When that grating started, they just took off running down the steps running. He said they were trying to outrun the Japs. The Japs were running alongside of them.

Mr. Metzler: Running right in front of them.

Dr. Calhoun: Yes. They got out of there. They had had casualties taking it. One man broke his leg coming off there, falling down and broke his leg. That battery, about ten minutes after it burned the first time, that same thing started again. It did that again. The next morning was fairly quiet. We had jumped with two canteens of water on Corregidor. There was no water to be had out there. It was going to have to be brought from over across the northern channel there in tanks. The next morning we got half a canteen cup of water on the second day. And that was our water. We were pretty thirsty.

Then I got orders to take my platoon out to Smith Battery. That's those two

twelve-inch guns that sat out on the pads out there. The long-range guns. They could elevate them higher and they'd get longer range. That was the two longest range guns. Smith was the one nearest the sea. We went by Battery Hearn and on down to Smith. I still wonder why they sent us to Smith because we just got there good and had knocked out a 50-caliber machine gun. Lucky we didn't get hurt there. Didn't lose a man. That was all the resistance that we hit there. Wasn't another thing. But still it was eerie out there. We were out of radio contact, those SCR-536s, you know, were undependable. We were out there alone, unsupported and everything. One under-strength platoon. (laughs) Suddenly a runner came from company and said, "Pull back." The company commander said pull back to the next battery." So we went back up Sunset Ridge to Battery Hearn which was formerly #2 of the Smith brothers. Said, "You're going to receive reinforcements. They're there waiting." And said, "Put them in position."

This road that went down to Grubbs Battery, it was a ten-inch battery out there. Ten-inch gun. The railroad tracks and everything came down this valley between us and Way Hill and Way Ridge and Sunset Ridge. We're looking down at it and the sides are real steep every where except the rear. Go back right to the very rear back there and it sloped. The railroad tunnel came in back there and came in underneath. These magazines were huge and they were very high. I got back there and the company commander had sent a lot more ammunition out there. He didn't believe the 850 figure that they had pronounced. We had at least half again as much as a base supply of ammunition. Had about twice as much of mortar supply. We had a machine gun section. Had two squads from the second platoon and the two conventional mortars from the mortar platoon. I had about eighty men.

Then they had the rest of them over there on Way Hill and they were in the woods where it rises over. Ours was just like this table top. Like I said, the vegetation had been mowed out. Put them in position. They sent me two lieutenants out there. Borrowed one from D Company and I knew him and put the machine guns covering that up there on that side firing enfilade and fire down that road with my first squad. This other officer had just got overseas and I didn't know him. They had assigned him to F Company that day cause we were down two officers. We got in position and I said, "Lee," that was him, I said, "This ain't what we want." He said, "I don't believe it is either." I said, "If they hit us, there's going to be people that get behind us and are going to come up that thing." This back side was a gentle slope; easy to ascend. That front was so steep they had to have concrete stairs going up it down to the gun, that pad. This side over here, the side toward Cheney Ravine had a huge crater which made it impossible. You had to get around it and then it was real steep. And the same way going down into this valley. That's the valley we named Maggot Valley.

About ten o'clock that night we were getting star shells, illuminating flares. The Navy was firing those things. Five-inch illuminating flares from those destroyers. Just at random. What bothered a lot of us and it really bothered me sitting out there was the fact that every spot—Hearn, the little road junction down there where it came out in Grubbs and joined Belt Line, all those had numbers, predesignated numbers. The Navy knew exactly where you were. You tell them point 22— But in New Guinea we always closed our radios at dark. We opened them at dawn. We got orders to close our radio nets just the same as if in dense jungle. And all the Navy was sitting out there. In other words, we just shut out our support. I never did understand why. Somebody wasn't thinking. But we shut down the radio nets at dark and opened them at dawn.

By ten o'clock, almost on the hour, twenty-two hundred hours, we hear all this racket. Pretty soon a flare goes off and here's a column of Japs marching up that road and railroad in a column of fours. Beatingest thing you ever saw. We knew there were hundreds of them, battalion size. The mortars had already zeroed in. They would fire and their rounds were hitting square in the middle of those columns. You would just see them crumple. They'd close up ranks. Those machine guns were just cutting swaths through them. And then the first squad over there with three BARs and all the rifles were just creating havoc. They just kept coming right on down. Then every time it would get dark course we'd have to wait for another shell. We couldn't ask for a star shell. Like I said, I believe it was Point 22 coming around where that road junction. If we could have been in control of the Navy, there wouldn't have been a living soul there in a few minutes because when we saw them coming around Point 22, if they'd laid in those destroyer and cruiser guns on that, man, that would have been just a big massacre. We knew some during the dark was getting past us. What I had done after I decided I didn't like my defense, I left the first squad over there with the machine gun but I took the third squad and pressed them around two sides of that thing. They were scattered out. I knew they were going to come up those steps and two men could cover those steps. Then I took my second squad and I took the two squads from second platoon and put them all on the back. We really had that back covered.

Mr. Metzler: How many days were you then on Corregidor?

Dr. Calhoun: That was the third night.

Mr. Metzler: Okay.

Dr. Calhoun: It was the night of 18th, 19th. That was the only night that the Japanese made a sustained effort to retake Topside.

Mr. Metzler: I see.

Dr. Calhoun: They had these troops down there. A lot of them were staying down there in this long railroad tunnel that led into Smith magazine. Then a lot of them were staying over there—you go down Grubbs Ravine and there was a huge tunnel back in there that we didn't know about until years later. We thought it was two caves but it went back in there a hundred yards and near about that far across and back out and two openings. That's where the water was. There was water in there coming out of a pipe they had driven in the wall. They had put a concrete trough in there. There was a trough full of water all the time that was flowing out of this pipe. That night we heard them behind us. They were chanting and yelling. Well, sure enough, here they came. It was only because we had a lot of firepower amassed back there that we stopped them. Then they pulled back and then about maybe in an hour or so, they start this chanting again and in about fifteen or twenty minutes here they come again. With all our ammunition, we were about out. We were firing into that road and everything. In fact, I had them fix bayonets. If we run out of ammunition—

Mr. Metzler: That's all that's left.

Dr. Calhoun: That's all that's left and I told them, "You know where the rest of the company is. Try to get through and get across there to the company." They were over there—it's about three hundred yards separating us across there to the top of Way Hill. I said, "That's all we can do." McCarter, Lloyd G. McCarter, had gone down. When he found out there was some getting through—

Mr. Metzler: Is he the one that got the Congressional Medal of Honor?

Dr. Calhoun: Yes, uh huh. McCarter loved a firefight better than anybody. I've been right behind him a number of times down in New Guinea and all. You run into Japs and McCarter, he's laughing. He's having a big time. He was a little short, fat, stocky guy that fired that Thompson laid over one of those big heavy arms of his. He'd been a lumberjack, what his trade had been. Fired that thing laying sideways. He could really use it cause the Thompson wants to climb on you, you know. It climbs up and right.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, that's right.

Dr. Calhoun: Boy, he could really use that thing. He could fire shorter bursts and faster than anybody I ever saw. He took his Thompson down there and he fired with that Thompson. The trolley cars that they've got a picture of over there, he was right across from there. Then he came back when the Thompson wouldn't operate any more and got—one of my BAR men, Benard Schilli, had been hit on that back line—and got his BAR and took it down there. He ruined

it. Then he came back and got an M-1. The next morning at dawn he was still down there. I didn't even know he was down there until then. The mortar men over there knew. He'd been going around through them. Phillips, the sergeant, told me McCarter was down there. We sent a patrol down there right fast and he had been shot through the chest, a severe wound. They came back up and they brought his M-1 back up there and he was fussing. He said, "If my dad gum gun hadn't worn out, I'd of stopped them all." An M-1, if you're familiar, has got an operating rod.

Mr. Metzler: I'm not but go ahead.

Dr. Calhoun: The tip of it is hardened steel, stainless steel. It had split that operating rod. I never saw a gun, an M-1, that split the operating rod in all my experience. And I've talked to ordinance people. He had used that gun until he split the operating rod. He was practically defenseless down there and shot when we got him out. We got him back up there and put him in a shell crater up there on top. Then we were cut off. We were cut off there and we were still getting fire from the rear. So, when we opened up the radio net, our D Battery was 50-caliber machine gun, and they were back up there further up behind us a good bit further up there. Several hundred yards. And this D Battery commander, a fellow named Hoot Gibson who's still alive, said—and I never did understand how he even got on our channel—but he heard us talking and he was back up by this old NCO quarters and he said, "We're looking right down the railroad." And he said, "There's a bunch of people in that concrete railroad cut behind you." And he said, "Is that you?" (laughs) I said, "No sir, that's the remnants of that bunch that had been attacking us." He said, "Okay." And boy, those four 50s opened up. Those walls of that concrete thing were sloped, you know that revetment where the railroad went through behind us back there. They were sloped and those Japs couldn't—this was fourteen, sixteen feet tall—they couldn't get out of there. You talk about a bunch of chewed up mass of humanity. I mean, those 50-caliber—it was a—

Mr. Metzler: A turkey shoot.

Dr. Calhoun: Yeah. We estimated about forty of them left in there. That's the reason they didn't attack again. The numbers had gotten down so low. We didn't realize why they didn't. They were still making noise but they didn't attack us. Then we thought we had it whipped then they started firing again. We thought how in the world could they be doing that? All our mortar canisters, those cardboard canisters, went through all the mortar canisters and they discovered a few, I don't remember—it was two or three rounds. Burl Martin knows more about this. He was operating one. They found a few that they'd missed throwing the empties aside. We got a man killed then in the rear back there. They started firing these. They said, "There's still some in the cut." So, they fired at the cut. Well, we didn't get another round fired at us. Sent a

patrol down there and they looked in that cut and they said, "There couldn't have been anybody in there." Said, "That's just chewed up humanity in there." So anyhow, what happened, they were just on the other side of the railroad cut and there was a deep crater back there. There were twenty-something dead Japs in there. They had been a little bit wrong on their range and hit them directly. All the rounds they had left they dropped right in there.

Mr. Metzler: My goodness.

Dr. Calhoun: It was just a little bit further than they thought. And they thought they were just going disappearing down there. And the firing stopped. But anyway, they wiped out that bunch. There was somewhere near five hundred dead Japanese. We named it Maggot Valley because it was just littered, covered in dead bodies there. Some of them that got through us attacked the company on Way Hill, turned that way. They didn't have too much. And then some of them went to Topside and scared the living daylights out of them up there. You know staff is not used to having to man a rifle. (laughs) But there weren't many. Most of them were still down there in that railroad cut that D Battery got.

We went on from there. Our battalion then operated out of Topside. The 1st battalion came in the second day from Mariveles. They flew them into Mariveles and they brought them across by boat. Because we had such heavy casualties we had control of it and we had got control of the beach landing down there where the infantry could come ashore. The 3rd battalion had gotten moved far enough to control that beach down toward Middleside. So they brought them in by boat. And my four men that I had missing came with them. Not four men but my six men. We went on in and about early that afternoon we had cleared everything out. We'd killed this Jap. Got the Jap out from under the railroad cars there that had a Nambu light. We thought he was surrendering and he wasn't. He was praying. He was bowing to us and when the patrol got near him he started hitting this grenade on the ground.

Mr. Metzler: To activate it.

Dr. Calhoun: Activate it. He died there. We hadn't had a prisoner up to then. I told these guys, I sent down five men to check him out. You know, McDonald had knocked that machine gun out. I said, "One of you all is gonna get trigger-happy and want to kill him." But the regimental commander had just come out and ordered that we need prisoners. The first prisoners we get, the men that capture him are going to get a three-day R&R as soon as possible. So that made them want to take a prisoner. They came back up complaining about that dad gum so-and-so.

Mr. Metzler: There went the R&R.

Dr. Calhoun: Yes, there goes the R&R. I got orders to join the company that was moving back up behind the long barracks, coming up that way. There was an ordnance machine shop over there at the base of Way Hill. And Way Battery is right over there, those big mortars. We got pictures of them over there. Our original defenses, you know. It had eight twelve-inch mortars. The Japanese—I forget which—they had an equivalent and one of them called them inches and one of them called it—240mm I believe what it was. Anyhow, they were the same. They had said, “Move on out.” They were moving out and to join them there on the way. We tried to destroy weapons. See, we captured thirteen machine guns that night out of that group down there. We’d gone down there and gotten all them. There were three 50-calibers and some old Lewis guns, those round barrel World War I Lewis-type machine guns with the round magazine on top. Then the rest of them were Nambu lights. We had to get rid of that stuff. We couldn’t leave it laying around. So, it took us about an hour before we moved out. When I got around there to where the company was around at the base over there next to what they called the ordnance machine shop, a big concrete edifice built back into the base of that little old mountain rise in there. It was all concrete and all you see in front is concrete. The rest of it’s in the hill. It’s an ordnance machine shop. Had all these big things for picking up twelve-inch gun barrels and things. They could move that heavy stuff into that machine shop.

Mr. Metzler: Did the Japanese put all of that in there or was that supposed to be American?
Dr. Calhoun: That was ours.

Mr. Metzler: That was all ours.

Dr. Calhoun: That was ours. The Japanese had put a whole bunch of those twelve-inch shells up there in front of it and stuff. But you can always recognize that ordnance machine shop, for one thing, if you see any shells out in front. And another thing, by those loading devices. Those A-frames, big steel A-frames that they could pick up those big gun barrels and things with. When we got there, the shooting had just got over there at that place. I had already sent Lee and those two squads and all the people they had sent over there to me and just had my platoon there tearing up weapons. They’d already gone ahead and moved out with the company. When I got there, a boy named Fred Morgan—they were looking at the back of that machine shop and they had steel doors covering the windows going in that machine shop—well, there were some of them open and ol’ Fred Morgan walked over and looked in. And “Bam” he’s dead. He was shot in the head from the inside.

There was a 75mm Pack Howitzer from the battery back there sitting over—he could see directly into the back of that battery. He started firing right straight in through those open windows and into this machine shop. Our (?) mortar,

they hadn't fired any of their rounds. I think they put about fifty rounds in there. I never did know why Phillips, the mortar platoon sergeant, said, "Oh, that 75 missed every time. We were the ones that killed them." *Tape A ends and Tape B begins.* I think they both got their rounds in there. When we came up smoke was still pouring out of there. And those poor guys came out of there. Lee, this new officer they assigned to us that I was talking about just joined us the day before, he had taken twenty men and Phillips, this sergeant I was talking about the other day. After they relieved this platoon sergeant, the company commander you know, that ran, he put Phillips in charge of the platoon. Phillips was given a commission in the field over there. He and Phillips took twenty men and when they went out you couldn't fire because the bullets were ricocheting. But the Japs were so addled they were just trying to fight, from all those shells coming at the ones that were alive, concussion in there. So, they went in there with bayonets and trench knives and they killed twenty-something, I forget what, twenty-three or twenty-six Japanese in there that were hiding in there. When our men came out, they looked so funny cause they looked like the front of them was covered with carpets—with gray carpets. It was flies. I'd never seen anything like that. Things had got bloody and every place there was blood it was just a jillion flies on them.

Mr. Metzler:
Dr. Calhoun:

My goodness.
Their fatigues where the blood had spattered on them and all, there were these flies. Well see, these Japanese bodies were bloating and the flies were working. They were getting it the worst right then or getting toward the worst. So we went on up to Topside and we still hadn't had any water. We got to the long barracks on Topside and when we hit the long barracks I said, "Boy, they've got Lister bags in front. They've got water." That was the best water I ever drank in my life.

Mr. Metzler:

(?)

Dr. Calhoun:

—the Rock Regiment. We went on and from then on the rest of that operation—see, they realized that—it scared them that night—probably maybe a thousand maybe fifteen hundred Japanese controlled to make an attack. And there we were we didn't even have a regimental perimeter. We just had strong points. And we had no reserve. The ones that got to the top there was nobody but the staff and hospital people, even the walking wounded to resist those Japs that got up there. They took F Company and moved us back to the water tanks. We were the reserve then. They put us in reserve. So they had a company in reserve.

Mr. Metzler:

You deserved it, too.

Dr. Calhoun:

D Company lost more men than anybody, but they were overrun. They were

stretched out on this ridge there going to Battery Cheney. A trail came up into Battery Cheney and it had one of those, I forget what they call them, those stone houses with slits in the front for Battery Wheeler.

Mr. Metzler: On each side.

Dr. Calhoun: –on each side. Yeah, and had azimuths on the wall and slits. The mortar platoon was right there at the trail junction. The Japs came right up that trail and of all people—the rifle platoon was stretched out down there—they hit the mortar platoon and company headquarters. The ones you don't want them to hit. They didn't even realize it was going to happen until they were right in among them. The ones that got in the blockhouse most of them got saved cause the Japs couldn't get around. You had to go around to this front to enter it and they could keep them away from that. They couldn't get to them. But they did lose heaviest that night. That's one night the D Company mortar platoon lost a lot heavier than the rifle platoons. In fact, I think the first platoon was the only rifle platoon that even lost any men. They lost a couple.

To go on with it: We were in reserves so the rest of that stay there we patrolled every day. On the eighth of March they pulled us off and we went back to (?) First the 158th Infantry came in and replaced us. Then the Seabees came and replaced them.

Mr. Metzler: When they pulled you off where did you go?

Dr. Calhoun: Back to Mindoro.

Mr. Metzler: Mindoro.

Dr. Calhoun: We got back there the ninth of March. Then the seventh of April we flew out of Mindoro and flew down to Negros to make a jump. They had Alcante Airfield down there our planned area and they cancelled it. They said all the jumps were cancelled but the Second Battalion wasn't cancelled. I don't know why it is but, the biggest hardwood mill in the world was at Fabrica, that town of 20,000. That's what it was. It was an American-owned company that had this big hardwood mill. Huge thing. Railroads, everything. Everything was done by railroad, build railroads back in the forest in order to reach the timber.

On the way down there, the pilot called me up there and he told me the mills were a fire, which they weren't. They had cancelled and we were going to land at Iloilo. We got down to that postage-stamp size—those C-46s—

Mr. Metzler: C-46 now.

Dr. Calhoun: Yes, the flying coffins. Carried thirty-six men.

Mr. Metzler: The bigger ones.

Dr. Calhoun: Yeah. We got in there and got out and went across the strait and went on up. We started up Tokaido Road and that's about fourteen miles going up to the mountains on just sloping sugar cane fields. The Command General Staff School, or when I was taking the course, that airborne operation on Corregidor was their example of the classic use of paratroopers during World War II. You go jump right in the middle of them. What we say today: We came from setting the classic example, the best one, to setting the worst one. When they moved us to Negros, they attached us to the 40th Infantry Division. General Eichelberger prevailed upon General MacArthur to transfer us to his Sixth Army over Krueger's objections. MacArthur's big trouble was his ego. Eichelberger played him like a drum.

Mr. Metzler: Is that right?

Dr. Calhoun: Everything, oh General, you're the greatest. (laughs) Now MacArthur had good points. But he also had weak points.

Mr. Metzler: That's what they say.

Dr. Calhoun: I'll admit both of them. Anyhow, we got attached to Eichelberger and he used us for the attacking force. The 40th Division had two fifty-five hundred men RCTs out there with core artillery.

Mr. Metzler: RCTs?

Dr. Calhoun: Regimental Combat Team.

Mr. Metzler: Okay.

Dr. Calhoun: Core artillery that had even Long Toms, 155s.

Mr. Metzler: Big old long—

Dr. Calhoun: They even took our little old 75s and moved them over under control of the division artillery commander. Eichelberger had a nickname which we thought was relevant: Eichelbutcher. We were attacking fortified positions that the Japanese had been building since the Leyte operation in October before this April. They were looking down at us. They could see everything we were doing coming up that gradual sloping plane. They had been building those things and we had to go through fourteen miles of that to wipe out their position. First we could see the hills over here where the 40th was entrenched

with their forts. Later on, we had to look way back down there to see them because they weren't moving. We were the maneuver element. We suffered. There was no use in that. Lightly armed specialized troops and they used us for heavy infantry. We went in there. We weren't ready. We hadn't gotten back to strength after Corregidor. Went in there almost half-strength when we went in to Negros. It wasn't long on Negros before I was commanding a Company with thirty-something men. Wasn't different to commanding a platoon. F Company, you know, we didn't have anybody left. Then they pulled us out. Well, finally, got relieved. No, we went over to Murcia. Went over to Murcia, the other RCT over there and went up their right flank and cleared the mountains for them.

Then in early June they pulled us out and turned it over to the Filipinos' Army. We went back down and F Company went to a little town of 3500 people, Victorias. We operated a patrol base out of there. They were trying to keep the Japanese that were in the hills from coming down. That's the breadbasket of the Philippines, that rich agricultural area. All these sugar cane fields. They wanted those farmers to get back started planting. The Agriculture Department even sent two men over there while we were there trying to work with them to get them started. We just patrolled with these pedestal-mounted machine guns on jeeps. Then right at the beginning of July they sent us on to Fabrica where the hardwood mill was. We started going down the valleys where the Japs were further back in the mountains and seeking them out. We had them all whipped and the 40th Division left and left us out there. We were still under strength, like two thousand men. Their G-2 said it was safe; they had no organized resistance left. All of us that were patrolling knew better than that. When the war ended, over eight thousand of them marched out and surrendered.

Mr. Metzler: Goodness.

Dr. Calhoun: I mean, they were an organized army in the mountains. (laughs) We had a lieutenant colonel surrender to us. They took him and our regimental S-2 officer and took them in jeeps up around those mountains broadcasting over a loud speaker.

Mr. Metzler: That the war was over?

Dr. Calhoun: War was over. He could speak Japanese and he was telling them. They all sent emissaries out. This lieutenant general Mola, I believe is his name. Had a funny sounding name, more like one of the natives there in the Philippines. They picked out these four places I believe, counting the southern end of Negros, to surrender forces. I was in the hospital. Just before the war ended, I got sent to the hospital, a Leyte hospital. I was sick. It was month after the war was over before I got back. So I missed the surrender.

Mr. Metzler:

Oh.

Dr. Calhoun:

When I got back down there, the war had been over a month. I had 125 points and they were sending people home with 80 points.

Mr. Metzler:

How were the points calculated?

Dr. Calhoun:

You got so many points for every day you were overseas, or weeks or months, I forget exactly what it was. Got all these points for so much time there; you got so many points for were you actively engaged in combat. On Negros alone, we had actively engaged, and I'm talking about when we did not have one hot meal and when we never slept on even a cot, in other words the enemy was always there, in F Company was sixty-two days. There was a day or two when we moved out of the mountains, you know. We had sustained combat. They gave you five points for any medal, Purple Heart. I had 125 points and my bunch had all gone home. See, I had amoebic dysentery, is what it was. It takes that emitine a good while to clear that out.

When I got there, they were moving the regiment down to the south end—the battalion out of Fabrica and moving them down to Dumaguete. I got to Dumaguete and the regimental commander, Jones, had gone home. The executive officer—I got down there with orders to report to him. I got there and he said, “I got a jeep and a driver. You're going right back up by land. Back up and take command of E Company.” I said, “Colonel, I've got 125 points.” He said, “I didn't ask you how many points you've got. I said you get your gear and get in that jeep.” So, we left about nine o'clock and we got up to Fabrica at one o'clock in the morning.

Mr. Metzler:

Oh, my goodness.

Dr. Calhoun:

I commanded E Company. He said, “I'll have you relief in a few days.” He did in a month or so. It was little over a month, I think.

Mr. Metzler:

Not a few days.

Dr. Calhoun:

You know, that was getting long then. We had three stockades and that one stockade there at Fabrica, E Company was guarding that. They left them to guard that. So I was commanding E Company and that's where I finished out my war. Then I went to Leyte Island to casual camp to go home. We got put on, I think, the oldest tub they had. I came overseas on the *West Point*, the *SS America*, which was the biggest liner we built up to then. We built its sister ship later, the *SS United States*. That ship in the daytime would travel along about nineteen, twenty knots an hour. At nighttime, it would kick it up three or four knots. So we moved. That's good speed on a big ship.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah.

Dr. Calhoun: A big typhoon hit while we were coming home. Boy, we got hit hard. That ship—we thought it was coming apart. It liked to have torn the rudder off of it. So we had to come on it at real slow speed then. Then we got off San Francisco and we were looking trying to see the shore. Suddenly, we turned north. We said, “Uh oh.” They diverted us north. We got to go to Portland, Oregon. What was it, thirty-two days, I believe. We got over to New Guinea in less than two weeks on the other ship. Come home from a closer place up there and it was thirty-two days getting home. (laughs) But anyhow, got home Christmas week.

Mr. Metzler: Christmas of ‘45?

Dr. Calhoun: ‘45.

Mr. Metzler: So it was just a few months after the war was over.

Dr. Calhoun: Yeah.

Mr. Metzler: 1945.

Dr. Calhoun: I was married. My wife was with her folks and it was Christmas Eve morning before daylight when I got home. I really had a hard time making up my mind whether I was going to stay in the Army or not. I liked the Army. I always liked the Army. But I decided I’d just go—well, I got mad at Col. Lowery and I thought, “I’m going home,” you know, when he sent me back up there. So when I get home I’ll change my mind, because you can’t trust these people. We had people they’d take thirty days’ leave and go home and if you’ll stay in the Army and go home. Well, we had people that did that and they were still there.

Mr. Metzler: As you look back over all of you experiences that you had over there, what kind of impact would that leave on you? How did that change you for the rest of your life?

Dr. Calhoun: I’ll tell you one thing. I had a lot more serious outlook on life. I wasn’t a very good student in high school. I thought you went to high school to play football. Then later on I found out if you’d spend a little bit of that time learning to type some things, you’d been a lot better off. But even to this day I wish—but anyhow. When I started school I went under the GI Bill and I got my bachelor’s degree. I went on through dental school. I practiced dentistry for forty-two years. But I stayed in reserves. I was a career reservist. I had twenty-nine years and nine months of combined service. I always loved the

Army. The VA says that 30% of my disability is mental, combat-related stress.

In fact, one time they put me on Prozac. Well, me and Prozac didn't get along. I quit that stuff and I said, "I can control this myself." And I control it. When we got back from Corregidor—my only trouble is I can't talk about that now. When we got back from Corregidor, that was the worst two weeks I ever had in my life.

Mr. Metzler: I'll bet. It's hard. Well, it's a wonderful story.

Dr. Calhoun: Like I say, there's parts of it I can't talk about.

Mr. Metzler: I understand. Well, look Bill, I appreciate your time and I know it's not easy. I do appreciate it. Go ahead and shut it down.

Dr. Calhoun: We lost a lot of good men.

Mr. Metzler: You bet. I know it's not easy. Thank you. Thank you.

Final

Bonnie Day Rush
August 4, 2009
Dublin, Texas
Tape 1104 a & b