

## Transcription: Clovis Thompson

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*Today is Monday, January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012. This morning I will be interviewing Mr. Clovis Thompson. Mr. Thompson is at his home in Abilene, Texas, and I'm in the General Land Office Building in Austin, Texas. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time today to talk to us. It's always an honor anytime we can interview a veteran and I know that you have a lot to share with us. The first question, sir, I always like to start off with is will you please just tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went in the Marine Corps.*

**Clovis Thompson:** I was raised at Paducah, Texas, which is in the north part of the state of Texas, on a 320-acre farm, with seven brothers and sisters. I graduated from a school called Valley View Rural High School in 1941, and left Paducah and went to Lubbock and started roofing with Lideck Roofing Company in 1941. I later went to the Corps.

*So you came from a large family, growing up on the farm. Had anyone in your family served in the military?*

**Clovis Thompson:** No, not before I did. I had a brother just older than I am went into the military during the war after I had gone into the military. He was drafted.

*So in 1941, December 7<sup>th</sup>, when Pearl Harbor was bombed, you were working in Lubbock?*

**Clovis Thompson:** I roofed that day for Lideck Roofing Company. I roofed the Lubbock Air Force Base in Lubbock that day, yes.

*How did you learn about the attack?*

**Clovis Thompson:** When we got off that afternoon, it was on the radio.

*Did you think at that point that you would probably be going?*

**Clovis Thompson:** No, I really didn't consider it, no. Not being a country boy as I was, we didn't realize the significance of such as that I would guess.

*How long was it then before you were in the Marine Corps? Were you drafted at some point?*

**Clovis Thompson:** No, I went to the Marine Corps in November of 1942, and really I don't have any special reason to have gone to the Corps. Well I mean to join the military, I decided I would join as the war progressed, you know, and I went to join, my brother, oldest brother, had left home and he was a manager of the PX at Sheppard Air Force Base in Wichita Falls, and I had gone to Wichita and was doing some work up there and staying with him, and I decided I would join for some reason or another, and I did. A little story behind that is the fact that I went to the courthouse there in Wichita to join, but I did not for some reason or another, I did not want to go into the Army. So I decided I'd go to the Navy. So I went to the courthouse there in Wichita and went upstairs and volunteered for the Navy, and my brother had dropped me off and was gonna pick me up later, so I kind of was setting out on the steps of the courthouse in Wichita having already signed up for the Navy that they were gonna call me later, and I saw this big

Marine sign which of course were all over the country at that time, you know, and I said well, I might not mind being in that outfit. So I went back upstairs and went into and volunteered for the Marine Corps. As I signed up for the Marine Corps, they says well, we'll call you in a couple of weeks. I said no, I want to go now, and I reached in my pocket and pulled out my Navy papers and said if you don't take me, the Navy will, and if they don't take me, the Army will. So I said I'm ready to go. The old boy looked at me a minute and he picked up the phone and called somebody and he told somebody on the phone, he says, I've got a man here off the farm drove tractors and so and so, we need him and he wants to go now. And he hung up the phone and says be here in the morning at 8 o'clock. So I was at the \_\_\_ at 8 o'clock, and they put me on a train and took me to Dallas and that's where I was sworn in.

*You were sworn in in Dallas, and then I imagine were you sent to San Diego for training?*

**Clovis Thompson:** For training that day, headed for San Diego, that's right.

*Tell us about your impressions of arriving at the Marine Corps recruit depot in San Diego.*

**Clovis Thompson:** Well that's quite interesting because we rode for a couple of days on the train and in those days, there really wasn't much the same as going on an airplane, so I got to San Diego at the depot, and Marine recruiters or representatives were there and they picked me up. We got in there about 8 o'clock in the evening. So they picked me up. Seemed like there were two or three of us that went there. They took us out to what turned out to be a recruit depot there in San Diego and we had a meal, and then they took us over to the barracks and they taught us that night how to make a bunk. So I was on the -

*But you hadn't gotten your drill instructors yet at that point, is that correct?*

**Clovis Thompson:** No, I believe maybe he did, yes. I'm probably wrong on that. I believe he did come in that night and taken over when we got out at that barrack, yes. And then he was the man that showed us how to make our bunk.

*How many recruits were there in your platoon, do you remember?*

**Clovis Thompson:** We had 30, I believe there were 9 in each squad, and we had three squads in the platoon, and then we had our leaders, so there was about 27 recruits in each platoon.

*What were your thoughts at that point? Was it what you had expected?*

**Clovis Thompson:** No, I think I already started questioning what am I doing here? So but anyhow, on that night, and I was on the upper bunk. We had lower and upper bunks in that barracks. The next morning, of course when I laid down, oh by then it was 10 o'clock or 11, and we'd been on that train, hadn't slept that well you know, and so I laid down, well I'll get a good night's sleep. Of course at 5 o'clock when that reveille went off, I jumped right straight up and hit the ceiling. So I come off of that bunk and I won't forget that soon, how those things happen to us, but anyhow that's how I started my first morning.

*Did they make you get out of the rack and line up?*

**Clovis Thompson:** Oh yes, we fell out and went to chow, and of course, and then we went over and drew our, of course we were still in civilian clothes at that time, and we went over and drew

our clothes and turned in our civilian clothes, and that was the end of civilian clothes, as most people don't know that in those days, it was against the law to wear civilian clothes if you are in the military.

*That's right. You are right. I think a lot of people have no idea about that.*

**Clovis Thompson:** Yeah, they didn't know that, and so we put our clothes in a box and shipped them home, you bet, that morning, yes. So we went out on the parade ground that day and started learning the basics of recruit.

*What do you remember about your drill instructor? Did you have just one drill instructor?*

**Clovis Thompson:** I think we had a couple. Typical drill instructor, they go with a very strong voice and they didn't mind using it. When they said something, you did it, you know, and that's the best I remember. They weren't that bad I don't guess as we look back.

*Sure. And obviously you knew that you were going to go in the war, right, and what was going on in the Pacific?*

**Clovis Thompson:** Yes, we were getting those, of course by then, by the part of '42, we were getting news right sharply, yes.

*How long did you spend in boot camp?*

**Clovis Thompson:** 6 weeks.

*6 weeks, pretty quick. And then did they send you to a school after that?*

**Clovis Thompson:** Back up just one minute for the records here, for different people. I was in the platoon beside a Tyrone Power. He was in the next platoon by the way, just for kicks, yes.

*Oh really.*

**Clovis Thompson:** Yes, I went to a boot camp in a sense with Tyrone Power.

*Would you see him?*

**Clovis Thompson:** Oh yeah, I saw him every day at every meal, oh yes. In fact, after, as we went on, I did some boxing in boot camp and I won a fight like on Saturday night, and Sunday when we were out for chow, Tyrone just said something to me and told me he saw that fight the night before and he said would you like to go with me? We got a little liberty on Sunday afternoon, if you had ventures, which his wife come out to visit him that Sunday and he took me over and introduced me to his wife on Sunday afternoon, yes.

*Wow, that's really something.*

**Clovis Thompson:** Yeah, it was.

*How did the other drill instructors and recruits treat him? Just like another - ?*

**Clovis Thompson:** Yeah, he really was. He had just come out of making some big movie and he was in good shape though, so he was better conditioned than we were, so he did a better job than us other recruits, yes.

*That's amazing though that he was there just as another Marine recruit training with ya'll and treated the same way.*

**Clovis Thompson:** Yeah, same way, yeah.

*That's great. That's a neat story. I think there's probably a lot of people today that don't remember Tyrone Power.*

**Clovis Thompson:** You may have a point. I hadn't thought of that. But anyway, I went through boot camp with Tyrone in the platoon next to me, which as we trained, we trained together let's say in the sense of the word when we all fall out. They would do their marching over there and every few minutes we'd have a rest.

*You were probably all in the same recruit training company.*

**Clovis Thompson:** Oh yes, yeah.

*You mentioned on Sundays they would give you a little bit of liberty. Did you have to stay on the recruit depot though?*

**Clovis Thompson:** Oh yes, we just could go to just around the area there. Really what it amounted to was we didn't do any marching or training on Sunday afternoon, and we had a little liberty just to move around on base, yes, just on base.

*I'm sure that was welcome.*

**Clovis Thompson:** Any relief, yes.

*Exactly. So during that time did you know what your specialty was gonna be? Did you know that you were gonna be an infantryman or radio man or anything like that?*

**Clovis Thompson:** No, none of that happened until the end of the, when we graduated from boot camp then, I volunteered for, they had a few areas that you could go, and beings I had been driving a tractor on a farm and was raised with that, I volunteered for the tank corps. So I was shipped to a place called Jack's Farm which is 8 miles north of San Diego, at that time out in the boondocks with tents is all we had and sand, and we had some light tanks out there. So they had taken a group of us out there after we graduated from recruit depot, and we started training immediately on light tanks at Jack's Farm.

*Did you live out there in tents?*

**Clovis Thompson:** Yes. We were out there again about another six weeks. They sort of had that, most of those training periods went for six weeks, yes. We went six weeks and during that period, just about the end of that six weeks period, they brought some new tanks out, and by then I had become a driver of a tank, and I drove one of the first automatic transmissions that was ever devised. They put 'em on some tanks and they brought us some tanks with automatic

transmissions for us to try 'em out. So I had one of those tanks, and I drove one of those tanks out in the sand dunes there north of San Diego. We bogged 'em down, burned up those transmissions real quick out in that sand, and we said nope, they won't do and we sent 'em back.

*That's something. How long did you end up spending there?*

**Clovis Thompson:** Six weeks. Then what they wanted to do, I was a little bit of a hot head in the sense of the word. And what they wanted to do, we was in what they called light tanks and they were going to send us back to tank training and they were going to train us in medium tanks which would be another six weeks of what not. So I was hard headed and I said no, we've already been through that. I don't want to go through that. So I pulled what most people don't do, I pulled a trick, and laid down on my bunk and I said I'm not gonna do that. And after about the second or third day, they come down, the drill instructor -

*Probably like a troop handler -*

**Clovis Thompson:** Yeah, what you want to call 'em, and a couple of Marine sentries with the M-1 rifles, and hollered Thompson, fall out. I come out of my tent and they said get your gear, pack up. I got my gear and they put me on a Jeep and we went 8 miles back into San Diego back to recruit depot, and they just come up in front of the barracks and kicked me out and said go upstairs, that's where everybody was. So I volunteered then to go with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine raider battalion.

*And so basically rather than getting you in any sort of trouble, they just took you off -*

**Clovis Thompson:** Changed units, that's right.

*How did you come to end up with the 1<sup>st</sup> raider battalion? Did they say they would take you?*

**Clovis Thompson:** No, they had on a bulletin board that they needed volunteers for replacements for the Marine raiders that had gotten TL'd or what not. They were on Guadalcanal at that time.

*Did you know what the raider battalion was?*

**Clovis Thompson:** No, the only thing I knew was that in looking at the bulletin board, it said you had to be an expert rifleman and you had to do this and that, which I qualified and I said I'll go to that. They had taken a group of us from San Diego then and we went to Camp Pendleton. At that time, Camp Pendleton was a brand new camp as we went in. It's a big bunch of land, but the only thing they had was about one big building out there. It was about halfway between San Diego and Los Angeles.

*That's right, still there.*

**Clovis Thompson:** In the boondocks out there. So we went out there and they shipped us then put us together, take us I think it's about 13 miles from the main camp out where the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine raider battalion, where they were training. And a little story that most people would hardly not believe is the fact that everything was new, everything was just building. They were building fast in those days, you know. So they put us, I went into a group of Marine raiders out there, and for the first two weeks we were out there, we trekked, washed, bathed, out of a dirt tank.

*I believe that because there was so much quick road, needed quick development of that area for the bases. It was the same way at Fort Hood and other places across the country. I don't doubt that at all.*

**Clovis Thompson:** They finally there happened to be a doctor come out there, he saw that and he threw a wild-eyed fit of course, and said my God almighty, how do you keep all these men alive? And they brought some lister bags in. Most people don't know what a lister bag is, but anyhow, it's a bag you got water in.

*Yeah, it looks like a big punching bag.*

**Clovis Thompson:** A big punching bag full of water.

*Just hang it on a tree or something like that.*

**Clovis Thompson:** Yeah. We got water that way. And then the first night you were in raiders, there in San Diego, there was a big hill, like I said we were out in the boondocks, there was a big hill and they threw us into, we put on a pack that weighed 50-70 pounds, and we went up on that hill in the sand at night, just about dark when we took off. And you had to walk from one end of this big hill to the other end and back to camp that night, you see. And if you fell out, they didn't need much to what they did is that at the end of it and I'll get to that. But anyhow, at the end of your Marine raider training, you did the same thing, but if you fell out then, you got out of Marine raiders and went back to another camp.

*So they were definitely training you but also weeding people out because it was a tough unit to be a part of.*

**Clovis Thompson:** If you were anywhere near weak, you didn't stay in there, that's right.

*What was your leadership like in the raider battalion? Did you have a sergeant instructing you?*

**Clovis Thompson:** Oh yes, we had one man, sergeant that again was a good, strong voice, that carried us all the way through, yes.

*So you had to have understood I guess at that point what the raiders were being trained to do was some of the toughest stuff in the military. You knew that it was more than just being a regular infantryman.*

**Clovis Thompson:** Of course I didn't have any idea of that, the raiders, you know. They had what they called a lieutenant by the name of Carlson established the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine raider battalions, which was similar to what you know of today as the -

*Well it's kind of like the forerunner to the Seals and also the -*

**Clovis Thompson:** Yeah, the Seals, that's what I'm trying to say. Yeah, we had to jump in the ocean underwater and all the things, yes.

*Yeah, it's very physically demanding.*

**Clovis Thompson:** Oh very definitely, and all that was done in about ankle deep sand out in San Diego. Really again, we were between San Diego and Los Angeles. But it was sand dunes up there.

*Did you have any doubts that you were going to make it through the training?*

**Clovis Thompson:** I don't think so. I was pretty hard headed I guess and figured I was a country boy and I could do about anything anybody else could do. But even though I went in the Marine Corps, I weighed 141 pounds, stood 5-foot 7-inches tall is all, is my height, so I wasn't a big man by any means. So I had to do almost double duty to stay up with those old big boys.

*Well I guess, too, if you're carrying a 50-60 pound pack as well –*

**Clovis Thompson:** Oh yes, yes.

*So going through that training, what was the hardest part of the training you found?*

**Clovis Thompson:** Those hikes, they'd follow up on us quite often and we'd have a file \_\_\_, what they would call a forced march, and they would go over to a valley let's say, a creek bed or what not, and we'd have to march maybe in half knee deep water and rocks and sand, and march for a 5-mile forced march, and that was pretty tough.

*What were the other men like in the raider battalion you were training with?*

**Clovis Thompson:** Well you know, it was surprising enough, one thing we did have, we had a lot of skis, Polish, a lot of Polish boys in the Marine Corps, and of course I suppose this interview is OK, most people did not know that there were no blacks and no women in the Marine Corps at that time.

*That's right, it wasn't integrated in terms of the whole force. Let me ask you sir, you get done, you go through the raider training, how long was that?*

**Clovis Thompson:** Six weeks.

*Another six weeks. So you completed your basic training in San Diego at the recruit depot and then you completed the raider training. What happened at that point?*

**Clovis Thompson:** They had taken us back then to San Diego recruit depot and we went aboard ship and shipped overseas almost instantly. We went to New Caledonia which is a little island that the Marine raiders had just come back off of Guadalcanal, and they were on \_\_\_\_ and I'm not sure where this is in Australia or New Zealand, but we as recruits, we went to San Diego, and the main Marine raiders that were still alive, they come back then off R&R to New Caledonia and we moved up and built a camp on Guadalcanal, and I stayed on Guadalcanal 14 months.

*Tell us a little bit about your memories of Guadalcanal.*

**Clovis Thompson:** Well, I guess you could almost use a word, they're all bad. It's heavily mosquito-infected as most people know, it's very heavy jungle, and we had to go into the jungles quite often and check out if there was any Japs still up in there, which there wasn't. A very few, but not many in there. We did not see, I went there at one time, I went 14 months without ever

seeing a white woman. People don't think about that, but you do things like that over at Guadalcanal. We did have a few, there was a few Gook villages on Guadalcanal as we trained, we trained in that heavy jungle, heavy ocean, that was very extensive training. I don't believe the Navy Seals did any more tough training than we did during those days.

*What did the veteran raiders tell you when you joined them as a new guy, as a unit? Did they have much advice for you?*

**Clovis Thompson:** I don't really remember, no. I'd say no to that. I don't remember any special, again, on Guadalcanal, you take atabrine every day, and so many of the boys turned yellow. I don't know if you remember being around atabrine. And that was malaria that we tried to avoid, yeah.

*So definitely your time in Guadalcanal was harsh conditions and the environment was rough.*

**Clovis Thompson:** Yes, my group went to New Georgia. They went to a little island called Ulithia. They went to New Georgia and they had to fight on New Georgia pretty good. Now when I say my group, I don't know, as it lucked out for me, I did not go. I had some health problems there on Guadalcanal. While we were there, a man fell across my right knee when we were training and bayonet fighting, and my right knee locked up on me and they rushed me to a hospital 26 miles down the island, and they operated on my right knee in Guadalcanal in 1943 I guess, or '44. They operated on my right knee and removed the cartilage that had torn in training on fighting at Guadalcanal, so of course I was laid up for a period of time. Later they went to Guam, this is my group, they went to Guam, and again as luck would have it, on Guadalcanal as I told you, we went into the water real often. We trained in the ocean and so and so, and the coral reefs was something bad, and I got in the Guadalcanal, well to give you, we walked to bathe and to wash our clothes, we walked about a mile and a quarter down a trail to a clear running branch out of the mountains on Guadalcanal. We did not have running water in our camp. So we had to walk down there and clean and wash our clothes and walk back. You can imagine in 100 degree weather walking a quarter of a mile and cleaning your clothes, you wondered how clean you were. But anyway, that's what we did.

*You were in the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine raider battalion, right?*

**Clovis Thompson:** It was the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine raider battalion, yes sir.

*Were you pretty much broken up into platoon-sized elements?*

**Clovis Thompson:** Oh yeah, we stayed platoon size nearly altogether, yes.

*How many men were you often with in your platoon, was it usually about 30 or so?*

**Clovis Thompson:** Yes, around 30.

*Did you have a lieutenant as your platoon commander?*

**Clovis Thompson:** Yes.

*Then probably a sergeant -*

**Clovis Thompson:** Yeah, we had a lieutenant and a sergeant, yes. That was our command, yes.

*Do you remember much about them?*

**Clovis Thompson:** No, I don't. You know, I don't really have any squawks on any of the Marines that was there, no. I don't remember much about any of those boys in command, no I sure don't.

*At some point you left Guadalcanal, right, and you eventually ended up taking part in the Battle of Okinawa, is that right?*

**Clovis Thompson:** That's right. Well, back just a minute to Guadalcanal, when they went to Guam, we had been swimming and training in the ocean, and I got coral infection in the bottom of my feet, and coral infection, those coral reefs off of Guadalcanal, that's sort of a living organism that gets into your body and it got into the bottom of my feet and I was in the hospital for a long time there on Guadalcanal, and they would take me every day and scrape the bottom of my feet off and put acid in there to kill the coral infection. So I missed New Georgia and I missed Guam on the actual invasion. Then later we went into Okinawa and I was in the original on Easter Sunday morning, 1945, we invaded Okinawa.

*And that's, as a lot of folks know, that's a very famous battle in the history of World War II. Can you share with us sir a little about what your thoughts were that day?*

**Clovis Thompson:** Well, we landed on Okinawa. We went into Okinawa and we went to Naha Air Base the first evening, and that's four or five miles inland on Okinawa, and we set up, we dug our foxholes along the runway at Naha Air Base, and as we were digging in and during that day, we had several pretty good encounters and there was where I saw my first dead Marine in battle. And it so happens this young man I remember so well, he was from New York and he had tattoos on him which was something new and foreign to us country boys as I call myself. But anyhow he got killed as we moved up on Okinawa, moved forward. Then beside Naha Air Base, just about dark as we were digging in, we call those Japanese planes One Long Johnnies, and a One Long Johnny came circling the air field and we were watching him and what in the world is going on here, and he circled the air field two or three times and pulled around, and come in and we screamed, he's fixin' to land. And we had decided it was probably an American pilot that maybe stole a Japanese plane because we knew they did some of that, and so we were screaming hold your fire, hold your fire! And he come in and landed and he landed just a little piece from my foxhole where we were digging in. And we were screaming hold your fire, hold your fire, and he come in there and landed with that One Long Johnny and set her down and we were all watching him, and he reached up and pulled that canopy back, and when he did, he stood up and we screamed Jap! And you can imagine all hell broke loose then. So we riddled that plane and the pilot and that was pretty interesting.

*Why do you think it was he landed there? You think he had gotten lost?*

**Clovis Thompson:** You know what, we never have figured that one out. We don't know why in the world. Surely, we'd been fighting there all day and surely he knew that we had occupied our Air Base. But apparently he didn't, or either he was out of gas or something, because he come in and landed and it cost his life.

*That's a very interesting story. When you made the landing at Okinawa, was it a pretty uneventful landing?*

**Clovis Thompson:** Really that's the way I remember Okinawa, yes. It was pretty uneventful, yes.

*So it wasn't until after you'd already gotten there and established -*

**Clovis Thompson:** Yeah, we got in, and we really run into some rugged territory, yes, we did. Now the Marine Corps landed beside, tied in with the Army, and they landed beside us. The Marine Corps went as we use the word "to our right," and we went into what they called the jungles. Of course we didn't, because we'd been in jungles and it wasn't very bad at Okinawa. But anyhow, we went into the northern end of Okinawa, and we went up there and secured that northern end of Okinawa pretty quick, the Marine Corps did. We came back and we were sitting on the beach, fixing to go back to, and think we were going to Guam, and we were sitting on the beach thinking we were going to get out of there, and they come in there one afternoon with a bunch of recon trucks and said pack up and load up. And we loaded in those, and that's when the Army had got in trouble on Sugar Loaf Hill, and that's the battle that many people remember, Sugar Loaf Hill. We went over, and taken over high from Sugar Loaf Hill from the Army, and we helped the Army and we secured, the Marines secured Sugar Loaf Hill, yes.

*When you were going through that, the first pretty intense fighting that you had seen I guess -*

**Clovis Thompson:** It was, yes.

*What were your thoughts at that time, or did you have any thoughts that you remember?*

**Clovis Thompson:** You know, as I look back, I really can't remember anything special, just the fact that you did everything in the world you could possibly do to stay alive and really we were fighting the elements, and the elements on Okinawa, it rained, oh my God it rained day and night, and we stayed in them damn foxholes day and night, and the Japanese we had found out were very patient, and they would lay out there all day in the sense of the word and wait until night, and they'd jump in the foxhole with you. My hole \_\_\_ in Okinawa, those hills they had, it was sort of a rolling country, and those hills is mostly was all, they were all caves they had dug in. Also they could not dig today their dead on those islands out there, so they had to bury them in the side of the hill, so they would dig into a hill, make them a grave, and they would go in there and bury their dead and then they would cover it with rocks. So that's the way those hills were covered with rock, and as we got under fire and what not, of course we would trip those rocks out of those hills and jump in them caves with those dead people, and that wasn't very pleasant either. That was a whole lot better than getting bombed out, you know.

*Sure, how long did the fighting last for you and your unit?*

**Clovis Thompson:** We actually stayed on Okinawa about three months, and I ask people every day, could you imagine staying out in the boondocks with it raining in a foxhole day and night for three months? And this was pretty rugged. This was real rugged country there.

*How did the men keep their morale up? Did you always know that you were gonna eventually be triumphant there?*

**Clovis Thompson:** You know, we never thought of anything else, so I guess the answer to that question would be yes. We never thought of anything else. Of course I don't think I have got to and I told you is I got a Silver Star there on Okinawa.

*Tell us, sir, about that because that's quite an honor.*

**Clovis Thompson:** As I said, we went to the north end and we come back and then we went into, had taken over half of the island going south, and with the Army, and off of Sugar Loaf Hill, we secured Sugar Loaf Hill and then as we'd go south, we'd run into, and as we would come up into, we'd taken that country there, as we would come up on hills, there would be a little hill out there in front of you, and that's the way we fought. We'd go from one hill to the other, and we'd take that hill over there. And of course you had an area between this hill and that hill that you had to cross was pretty rugged, so we would go from one to the other. And also we got into a situation there that the, oh somebody had called in some trouble. We were fixin' to move up one morning and as the intelligence called in cover, from the ships, they were going to throw shells and they would shell the area in front of us supposedly. Well this particular day, this morning, they put those shells right into our area as we were going and we lost a bunch of men there. So we had friendly fire I guess would be the saying. Then as we moved on, we got on this, moved on down and got on the hill there, and we had taken this hill and I had lost three lieutenants during this period of time from one hill to the other and what not, as luck would have it, I say luck would have it I was still alive, but I had lost three lieutenants. The Marine Corps moved forward all the time, and we did every noise your buddies and what not got wounded or shot or killed or what happened to them, we didn't know what happened to them because we kept moving forward. So I do not know what happened to these lieutenants, but I'd lost them. So they brought in a lieutenant named Chester D. Brown, and as we moved up, we went onto this hill, and we had lost the lieutenant, we had lost our sergeants and what not, and I was acting lieutenant for a period of time until they brought Chester in there. Then they dropped me back of course to platoon leader. You were just a leader. I was a leader. So we moved up on this hill and as we moved up there and as we were looking over, the next hill, of course there's a valley there and then the next hill is over there, well right there in front of us all of a sudden we saw a puff of smoke come out of the ground. We knew what it was. We knew it was an Nee-mortar coming out of there, and of course they knew where we were because we were pushing them back. So as we moved in on them, they had this Nee-mortar out there, and they thought they would put it right up, they knew where we were, they put it right straight almost in the air and it come back down on top of us. Well, my platoon was behind me and the lieutenant, he and I were laying up on the front of this hill looking over at the enemy in front of us, and the boys behind us of course had taken cover, and those Nee-mortars come down and they'd holler that Tommy's hit, John's dead, M.M. Stubby's got his head blowed off, Ed Dunnin is dead, and so the lieutenant, and I don't remember who said to the other one, one of them said to the other one that I think I told Brad, I said they're gonna kill us all if we don't do something. And he says what in the world are we gonna do? And we were looking over there, and I said get the machine guns up here. So he called back and got a couple of machine guns up there, and they put them and they would give cover and I told 'em I'll go down there and get a good aim in there and see if I can knock that out. And of course Brown says you're out of your ever-lovin' mind. You can't live to go down there and back. Well, we got to do something. We can't just lay here and let 'em put those shells right in our laps. So we decided we'd do that and we got those machine guns up there and opened them up and as best they could to give me protection. I went down across the opening, and when I got down there, I found a hole in the ground, and that's all it was a hole in the ground about 3 or 4 feet deep, about 3, 4 or 5 feet in circumference there, and there was nothing there. But we knew good and well that's where that smoke was coming from. So I

go down there and you don't set around and look around, you know, you get up there and you hit back. So as I got down there, I threw a grenade in there, and I come back. And in a few minutes here he come again. So I have a citation in my pocket right now that tells that I went down and I threw five grenades in this hole and come back each time, and did not knock out the enemy, and we discussed it a minute and I told Chester, I said OK, holler at the demolition man and get me three sticks of dynamite with a five-second fuse on it. Of course they looked at me and says what in the world do you think you're gonna do with that? I said well, I'm going to try to get up in his lap and I don't want it back in my lap, either. So that's what he did. He fixed me up with a dynamite charge with a fuse on it, lit it, and I took off down there and threw it in the hole, and pretty close to the time I threw that in the hole, of course it went off, and we had, I use the word a landslide, all those hills where that hole was caves, and with this dynamite charge I caved in several areas, a pretty big area, and as I was trying to get back to my position, I called the word we had a landslide, and you never saw two little old legs run so hard in your life trying to get up that hill and get out of that area. Anyhow, I did knock out the enemy and that's what I got a Silver Star for.

*Wow, that's amazing, sir. That's something to definitely be proud of for an act of heroism. Was it the lieutenant that wrote you up for that award?*

**Clovis Thompson:** Yes, Chester D. Brown and Lieutenant wrote me up for the award, and today he lives in Conroe, Texas, and we are in contact with each other by email.

*Oh, that's great. And he's a fellow Texan.*

**Clovis Thompson:** Yes.

*Well he's someone, sir, that we would love to interview, too. The next time you talk to him, let him know that we would want to interview him for our program.*

**Clovis Thompson:** That's a point, I could do that, yes.

*We would be honored to do that and that's just an amazing story for anybody that is at all familiar with World War II and the Marine Corps and combat in the Pacific, and it gives me chills hearing that story you just told. When did it sink in for you what you had done?*

**Clovis Thompson:** Our platoon went on silent.

*No, I understand, did you realize later on, was there a moment later on where you were able to kind of sit and reflect on the situation you'd just been in?*

**Clovis Thompson:** No. We didn't, when we got back to, we went on and ended taking the island on Okinawa, and when we come back they brought us back to Guam and we were on Guam for I guess in the area of a month, and the war was over. Of course that was a surprise to us. We were training at that time to go into Japan. We knew we had a real battle on our hands and we were in training on Guam to go back to Japan.

*How did you learn that the war was over? Did you learn by radio or from word of mouth?*

**Clovis Thompson:** I believe it come on, there on Guam we had, well to tell you the truth I don't know. I was up in the hills with a gook family. Down on Guam we got acquainted with those

Guamanians and what not, and I had sort of taken over a gook as we call 'em, a family there, and I was up there with them that afternoon, and the guys come looking for me and they come hollerin' and right away we can back up a little bit on the story.

*Sure.*

**Clovis Thompson:** I was known as Blackie in the Marine Corps. I got that name at a night club in San Diego at the beginning of the training, and with three or four of my buddies, we were at a night club and there were some girls there of course we were flirting with, and one of those girls looked at me and says you look like a Blackie to me. That's all we needed for all my buddies to pick up that name, you know. So I was known as Blackie. So anyhow we went on, well let me back up. As we were going south and then running into, they had pinned it down to they had areas of guns here, and a gun here, and a mortar over here, and we got a benzar charge one afternoon there. I tell you they threw Japs at us to, them Japs was coming at us with all kinds of weapons and screaming bonsai, bonsai, and of course we were layin' on the ground firin' at 'em, and as we were doing that, of course one of the men behind me screamed throw me a knife, throw me a knife. Well in the combat, I could hear him but I didn't have time, and finally I let up a little bit and looked around and one of my boys in my platoon had a Jap down over behind me, was sitting up on top of him and he had his hands around his neck, and was hollerin' throw me a knife, throw me a knife. I turned around and says what in the world are you doin'? He says my damn rifle is, well, jammed, my rifle is jammed with the mud and rain, and he says throw me a knife. So I threw him a knife, he cut the Jap's throat and got up and come on back. Then we went on south from there -

*This was at Okinawa?*

**Clovis Thompson:** This is all on Okinawa. And we went all to the south from there and we got into, got under fire, and Chester, we had a 20 millimeter gun down there, and every time we would move, he would open up on us. So Chester told me to take my squad down there and knock out that gun. Well I did. I got my squad and we got down there and we got a battle charge set on it. But they did get me, they wounded me in my right shoulder with a piece of shrapnel on that particular trip. But I was not hurt that badly. As luck would have it, as we had enough fire power and what not, that I was back far enough when it hit me in the shoulder, the piece of shrapnel had taken my dungaree jacket and my t-shirt out on, and it embedded the whole thing and cauterized, and I never did bleed, but it stayed in there. It just took the jacket and shirt and just embedded into my shoulder. Well I went back to sick bay and we had a Dr. McMurray that would not or did not, he says no, I can't take that out out here in the field. He says you'll get an infection in it. You've got to go aboard ship. And I told him, I said Dr., I got 26 damn men up here. I can't go back there. Hell, I got those boys waitin' on me. Take that damn thing out. I'm all right. And he wouldn't do it, and this wasn't smart, but I did. He said put him on a stretcher and take him out there to the hospital ship. I says Dr. McMurray, I said I'm not going aboard that damn ship. I'm going back out to fight. I said get this thing out of here. Well, me and him had a little heat. But still I reached down and pulled my .45 and laid down on the surgery, and I said take that son of a bitch out of there. I said I been killin' for three years, he said all right but I'll court marshal you. I said well, it'll be after the battle. Take it out. He did, and in those days we did not have penicillin. That was before penicillin. He filled that hole, he'd taken that piece of shrapnel out of there and pitch it up on the stomach, and poured it full of sulfur, put a piece of paper on it, I got up and went back to camp.

*Wow.*

**Clovis Thompson:** But anyway, that was sort of the end of Okinawa and we went back to Guam and spent about a month and the war was over.

*I guess your wound healed up OK?*

**Clovis Thompson:** I never did have another, didn't know it happened really. Well, as I told you, it cauterized so it never did bleed. As it went in, it was cooked so it was really nothin', it just got well, yes.

*Lucky there wasn't an infection.*

**Clovis Thompson:** That's right. I've got a nice scar up on that right shoulder and I was lucky that it didn't go deeper or further or I probably would've maybe lost an arm. But I didn't as luck would have it. So the war was over, they called, we were on Guam there and they brought a ship in there, the 26<sup>th</sup> Army was headed home, and when they got the news the war was over, they brought them in to dock there in Guam and made them unload their ship, and left the Marines that night and we went to Japan. We set about a week in Tokyo Bay waiting for them to get all the papers signed and so and so, you know, and then Sunday morning they signed there, and we went ashore and taking over in Japan. Of course we watched the boys, we could see 'em with binoculars, we were close enough and we could see the Japs on the shore there. Part of the agreement was that they would take all the bolts out of their weapons and stack 'em along the beach and take the propellers off the plane and stack them, and that's what they did. And we were sitting out there aboard ship watching them during that period of time. So we went ashore and my platoon taking over an underground telephone system. That was my first duty there in Japan.

*Were the Japanese citizens pretty scared of the Marines?*

**Clovis Thompson:** Oh, you know, I'd say no, not really. They accepted them pretty, we just, we had one little flare-up there. They had taken all of the people that worked underground there on that telephone deal that day to fall out and they lined 'em up down through there, and of course we went in fully loaded because we didn't know what we were going in to. You don't know what door you are walking into when you've been killing their sons and husbands and so and so for two years, you know, and then you are going into their territory? That was a little scary. People don't think of that but I've got news for you, that wasn't a good feeling.

*Oh I'm sure.*

**Clovis Thompson:** Going in there on their territory. But anyway we got ashore and we were standing there, of course we had an interpreter, and they were telling them we were going to take over, so and so and so and so, and there was a man sitting there right close to me, and he was, of course these people weren't in uniform, they were just civilian workers at the telephone office. And he could speak English, and he smarted off and says we done sure got you on Pearl Harbor. Well, as I said we were standing there loaded with a pistol on the hip and the M-1 rifle in their hand, and I was close enough to him, when he said that I popped him up the side of the head with the butt of my rifle, and I never had another minute's trouble the time I was in Japan.

*Yeah, I can't imagine why he would've said that. That was kind of a dumb thing for him to say.*

**Clovis Thompson:** I don't think I can use the word, he was a smart mouth, you know, and he had to get in that little bit, but anyhow he did. Then I spent three months in Japan just guarding the telephone system there to begin with and then they moved me from there. That was how we went in to Yokasuko Naval Base, as I told you, we were on Tokyo Bay. You know, Yokasuko Naval Base is, that's where we went in and they had a big base. We went in and they put me in charge of the main gate and I stood guard duty, my squad and what not, our platoon on the main gate for the rest of the time I was on, at Yokasuko Naval Base in Japan.

*So let me ask you, when were you finally awarded the Silver Star? I know it takes a while to get that written up.*

**Clovis Thompson:** That was there in Japan and we had been there probably oh I don't know, a month, six weeks. I had no idea. I never, that was one of the biggest surprises a man I guess could ever get is that I had no idea. They fell us out one Saturday morning as a group, and they awarded, there were several medals awarded that day, but anyhow, I got the Silver Star that day.

*They had a formation that day. Do you remember who pinned that on for you? Was it the lieutenant or was there another officer there?*

**Clovis Thompson:** No, I believe it was the colonel, let's see what was his name -

*The colonel of the regiment or the battalion?*

**Clovis Thompson:** This was a colonel that presented that that day.

*And you still have the medal and the citation?*

**Clovis Thompson:** Yes. Yeah, they pinned a medal on me and gave me the citation which of course I still have and still have the medal, but I've got a picture made of it with me with the citation hanging on the wall. I carry a copy of that citation with me all the time and I let people read it, and I'll tell you my wife questions me about that once in a while, and says why do I do that? And I tell her I'm educating people, because they don't know what in the devil a man did, people look at that cap that I got a Silver Star across it, but they look up at that and see that Silver Star, but they don't know, don't have any idea what it entails.

*That's right, they've probably not ever met a Silver Star recipient before.*

**Clovis Thompson:** No. But anyhow, I spent about three months in Japan and we left Japan December the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1945, aboard ship and headed home. We landed in San Diego late one evening back at recruit depot right where I left from, and I spent, that was on, we got back to Japan on December the 11<sup>th</sup>, and about each morning they would fall out all of us, tell all of us to fall out, and they would call so many names. Of course if your name was called that morning, you went into what they called separation, which takes three days, 72 hours for them to get you separated and so and so. Well they didn't call my name and they hadn't called my name on about the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December, or 21<sup>st</sup> of December, and I had already told my parents and my seven brothers and sisters I'd be home for Christmas. I thought I would. So December the 21<sup>st</sup> I put on my uniform and went over to our headquarters at that time and went in and told them I wanted to see the colonel, and I did. I stepped in and he says what can I do for you? I said call down the gate and tell them that I'm coming through, I'm going home. He looked at me and said what are you talkin' about? And of course I was a corporal, head corporal, six stripes on my

uniform, and I said I've been killin' people for three years, and I said I've got seven brothers and sister waiting for me and I'm going home. And I said I'm going through that gate and if they try to stop me I'll kill 'em. And he thought I'd lost my mind I guess, which they did, I sure had, but anyway he, what's your name, I told him, and he pulled my record and he said my God, Thompson, you got a Silver Star, Purple Heart, he says you're gonna jeopardize that? You know if you leave here we're gonna have to come get you and we're gonna lock you up. And he stood there and looked at me a minute and he said I believe you. And he thought a minute and he says, I'll tell you what I'll do with you. He said if you'll wait til the morning, if you don't do anything, I'll put you in separation in the morning. He says the quickest I can get you out of here is December the 24<sup>th</sup>. He said I can get you a discharge about 10 o'clock December 24<sup>th</sup>. And I thought about it a minute and I said well, I believe I'll agree to that. So I was discharged on December the 24<sup>th</sup>. Not many people ever get discharged on December 24<sup>th</sup>.

*Christmas Eve Day, that's great.*

**Clovis Thompson:** But I did get discharged that morning and as I tell people, me and a couple of Marines went out, left from there, went downtown and bought a 5<sup>th</sup> of whiskey and got aboard a train and headed home.

*Did you take the train all the way back? Did you go to Lubbock?*

**Clovis Thompson:** No, in fact I got off the train, I come to Abilene, accidental I rode a train on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day til they got to El Paso. We got to El Paso about 6 o'clock in the evening and in buying my ticket, they had routed me from El Paso up around, of course I was showing to be living in Paducah, so they had ridden me up through Amarillo and over to a little town called Quarta where they had a depot, the closest thing they had to Paducah. And that's the way I was doin'. I looked at that but I was not supposed to get there until the 27<sup>th</sup> of December, and I knew better because we were in El Paso and I knew I-20, a train run across here, so I went to the counter there and asked them didn't they have a train coming to Abilene? And they said yes. Says we got one gonna leave pretty quick. Says it'll be in Abilene about 8 o'clock in the morning. So I bought a ticket on that train and I come to Abilene and I got off the train here in Abilene on December the 26<sup>th</sup> about 8 o'clock in the morning. I went across the street at USO and shaved and cleaned up and caught a cab out the edge of town, and which wasn't a very big town back in 1945 you know. But anyhow a young couple picked me up, a man and woman and two children, it was a young couple who had just a couple of children, and of course as we rode from here up toward Paducah, I told 'em my story and he was interested, and I told him my story because I was in uniform and the only thing I had was a sea bag, and we got up toward Astromont where you take a fork in the road and go left to go to Lubbock and you go right to go on up through Haskell and Guthrie and Paducah, and I told 'em I'd get out there and I said let me out here and I can go on from here. And he looked over at his wife and said this man's been gone three years. Said let's take him home. So she agreed to it, and they drove me to Paducah.

*That's great. I'm sure your parents and your siblings were excited to see you.*

**Clovis Thompson:** Yeah, I had a brother waiting, and they was, I don't know how I had conversed to them, but anyhow I had a brother just older than I am. He was in the Army in fact at that time. He had come in from Colorado. He worked on, he was a Corps man as far as we're concerned, in Medical Corps in the Army, and he was waiting for me there at Paducah, and he picked me up and drove me home. And to add to a story that nobody would even think about, I was in the Marine Corps 37 months. In 37 months in the Marine Corps, I saw and talked to one

human being I had ever seen before in my life. You know it's pretty hard to comprehend that you take a 19-year-old boy, hold him for three years and he sees one person he's ever seen before in his life.

*Yeah, that's definitely a life changing experience.*

**Clovis Thompson:** Yeah, it was. It sure was. But anyhow that was quite a reunion as you can imagine.

*Yes sir.*

**Clovis Thompson:** And to further the story a little bit, after I got wounded, for some reason or another there was a woman lives in Childress that knew my family real well, raised where I was on the farm and what not, somewhere back down the road she called my mother and told my mother she was sure sorry to hear about Clovis so and so. And she says well what are you talking about? And my mother and daddy, they didn't even know I'd been wounded. And she says well, the Childress paper, says you don't know? And my mother said no, what are you talking about? She said well, the Childress paper, Irene, says that Clovis is killed in action. They had got it put in the wrong column. Instead of being wounded they actually put it in killed in action. So they thought I had gotten killed along the way, but my daddy got a hold of somebody in Washington, and they looked up my record and said no. I don't know where we were at that time. We had I guess we were either in Guam or Japan, and Washington looked up my record and they told my daddy exactly where I'd been, what I'd done, and said no, he's fine. He's wounded but not killed.

*Wow, that's an amazing story as well. I can't imagine the heartache that your parents had to go through of not knowing.*

**Clovis Thompson:** At least thinking that, yeah. After all, I was their baby boy.

*Well sir, I really appreciate you taking the time to share these memories of yours with us. You know here at the Land Office we have archives that go back to the 1600s. We have the land grant that David Crockett's widow received after he was killed at the Alamo, and we have the original Registro that Stephen F. Austin kept in his own hand of all the settlers who came to Texas. Our goal and our hope is that these interviews will be added to the archives so that hundreds of years from now people can listen to these interviews and perhaps learn something they wouldn't have otherwise known. With that in mind, is there anything you'd want to say to somebody listening to this interview long after you and I are both gone?*

**Clovis Thompson:** No, I don't think so. Just say good luck, God bless you. Just carry on. God bless America.

*Yes sir. Well sir, again we are really honored that you let us interview you. I know everyone here at the Land Office from Commissioner Patterson on down is thankful for your service to our nation and this program is just one small way of us saying thank you for your service. In a couple of weeks or so we'll be sending you copies of the interview along with a letter and certificate from the Commissioner and if you have any photographs or anything like that you'd want us to make copies of, we'd love to have those. I'd especially love to have a copy if possible of your citation. We'd love to have that as well.*

**Clovis Thompson:** I'd be glad to mail you one of those if you'd like me to.

*Yes sir. Well when I get all our stuff put together and mail it to you, I'll put my card in there as well so you will have my address.*

**Clovis Thompson:** OK, and I'll mail you one back.

*And also we would love to interview Lieutenant –*

**Clovis Thompson:** Chester D. Brown? I hadn't, I'll see if I can arrange that, I sure will.

*That would really be an honor.*

**Clovis Thompson:** It would be an honor. And I think he would, I feel like he would, he has commented through the years, he knew where I was at one time and he had commented to an employee of mine or some of my employees that he thought I was one of the greatest he'd nearly ever seen to make some of the trips that I did there on Okinawa. He thought that was quite interesting, him laying there with me running down that hill and back.

*No, they don't just give Silver Stars away.*

**Clovis Thompson:** Well most people don't realize that and that's a part of why I carry that certificate in my pocket. As I tell you, I carry that in my pocket for that reason because you see somebody with them once in a while, but you don't, in fact the man that told me about you, about Voices of America, was a Silver Star Army recipient. He's the Veterans Service Officer over at the Sweetwater right now.

*Yes sir, absolutely. I appreciate him doing that.*

**Clovis Thompson:** But I will contact Chester Brown and have him to contact you.

*That would be great. Well sir, we'll be in touch again soon.*

**Clovis Thompson:** You're welcome to call me most anytime you get ready if you want some additional information, if you want to come back to something or what not, well give me a call. You've got my number.

*Well thank you again sir.*

**Clovis Thompson:** On those tapes now, I've got several relatives that would like to have one of those CDs. How would I be able to -

*We can make extra copies. What we'll do is probably start off with making about five copies to send you on CDs and then if you need more, just let me know and we'll make more and send 'em out to you.*

**Clovis Thompson:** Thank you sir.

*Yes sir. Well again thank you and take care, and we'll talk to you again soon.*

**Clovis Thompson:** Yes sir, you want to call me, give me a call.

*Yes sir, have a good day.*

**Clovis Thompson:** Thank you.

*[End of recording]*