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Interviewee (print) Interviewer (print)

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223 Oakland Dr, Oxford, AL 36203

on the date(s) of 3/27/95

for the oral history collection being compiled by Dr. Marshall.

Robert J. Seaman
Interviewee's signature

Address 353 E. Nassau St
East Canton, Ohio 44730
Phone 214-488-0030

Date 3-27-95

Mary Mahlendorf
Interviewer's signature

Address 223 Oakland Dr
Oxford, AL 36203
Phone 215-831-6099

Date 3-27-95

INTERVIEWEE BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Name: Robert James Seaman M/F Male

Address: 353 E. Nassau St, East Canton, Ohio 44730

Phone number(s): 216-488-0030

Approximate age or date of birth: 1-18-28 78 yr

Mother's Name: Mary Gestleberdie Seaman

Father's Name: Edward Seaman

Places lived and when: Bower Hill PA - 1922 - 28

Canton Ohio - 1928 to present

Education: Graduated McKinley High School

Religion: Baptized Catholic; joined Lutheran Church

Business, political and social memberships (past and present) _____

Present occupation: Retired

Former occupations: Newspaper writer + editor

Special Skills: _____

Major Accomplishments: _____

National Events in which interviewee has participated: World War II

Local Events in which interviewee has participated: _____

National born U.S. citizen? Yes/No

Naturalized Citizen: Yes/No Date: _____

Country from which he/she emigrated: _____

Documents, photographs, and artifacts which are in the possession of the interviewee:

Purple Heart from WWII

Individuals recommended by the interviewee who might be candidates for an oral history interview: _____

Additional information: _____

CONTENTS OF TAPE

Mr. Seaman describes the following:

1. Where he worked and when he learned of Pearl Harbor
2. How he came to enlist in the Marines and where he served before being sent to Okinawa
3. Overseas orders and advanced training locations
4. The trip overseas and stops made on the way to Okinawa
5. Description of Okinawa
6. Description of the landing
7. Description of responsibilities and encounters after landing
8. Strategy
9. Kamikaze planes
10. How much they knew about what was going on
11. What sleeping arrangements were like, and the food
12. Ernie Pyle
13. Being wounded
14. Being sent back to northern Okinawa
15. What happens after an area is secured
16. What the stress level was like
17. Japanese suicide missions and civilians
18. Medical attention when wounded
19. How the Army and Marines worked hand in hand
20. The killer typhoon
21. Leaving Okinawa and returning home
22. Comparing WWII to Vietnam
23. How he feels about going back
24. Receiving the Purple Heart

THE WORLD WAR II INVASION OF OKINAWA

**An Oral History by
ROBERT JAMES SEAMAN**

As Told To
MARY R. MAHLENDORF
March 27, 1995

BACKGROUND

Mr. Seaman was born on January 18, 1922, in the small coal mining town of Bower Hill in eastern Pennsylvania. Looking for better work opportunities, his family moved to Canton, Ohio in the late 1920s.

Mr. Seaman is the middle of three sons born to Edward S. Seaman, who was of German and Austrian ancestry, and Mary Gesteberdie Seaman who was half Scottish and half Italian.

After graduating from McKinley High School in Canton in 1940, Mr. Seaman went to work at the Canton Repository, which is the local newspaper. He worked there until his enlistment in the Marine Corps in October of 1942.

A Buck Sergeant in the 1st Marine Division, 1st Regiment, 3rd Battalion, I Company, Mr. Seaman took part in the invasion of the island of Okinawa on April 1, 1945.

Situated only 325 miles from the Japanese mainland, Okinawa was a vital communication center linking Japan and its holdings to the southwest. The largest of the surrounding islands, it was the most suitable for the development of a number of airfields and base

facilities. In addition to a small harbor, it possessed the only two substantial Japanese fleet anchorages south of Kyushu on the mainland. The capture of Okinawa meant command of the East China Sea, and a base for future operations against the Japanese homeland.

Because of its strategic importance to the United States and the Japanese, the Battle of Okinawa was one of the most important battles of the World War II, and in many ways the most difficult in the Pacific Theater. It lasted from April 1 until June 30th, and resulted in about 38,000 American casualties, and about 142,000 Japanese and Okinawan casualties. U.S. Marine Corps General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr. stated "Bad weather, defenses which employed the rugged terrain with great skill and cunning, and a well-trained, resolute defense force combined to give the enemy an advantage that was overcome only by courage, ingenuity, and endurance of the highest order".¹

¹ Okinawa: Victory in the Pacific; Nichols, 1955

ROBERT SEAMAN'S EXPERIENCE

Mr. Seaman was in a unique position for keeping pace with the rapid escalation of World War II, as he worked on a sizeable newspaper. The Canton Repository is the major newspaper that covers a population of about 375,000, and because it was before the advent of television, it was the main source of news in that area for the war.

Mr. Seaman served the first two years of his enlistment on Parris Island, South Carolina. He was instrumental in starting a base newspaper. Unfortunately, he kept no copies. \

Prior to going to Okinawa, he went to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina and Camp Pendleton, California for advanced training. He then crossed the Pacific on the USS General Ernst, a combat ready transport ship. They passed through where the international date line crosses the equator.

After advanced training in the Russell Islands, the 1st Marine Division boarded ships to Okinawa. It was on board ship that they learned of their mission -- the invasion of Okinawa. The invasion was a joint effort between the Army and the Marines.

Okinawa is approximately 60 miles long, and about 18 miles in breadth at its widest point. The strategy was to sever the island in the center so as to isolate the north and south and to overtake the airfields and bases.

At dawn, April 1, 1945, the 1st Marine Division, consisting of 1700 units, including the 3rd Battalion Mr. Seaman was in, landed on the beaches near Hogushi on the East China Sea side, just south

of Yantan airfield. (See attached map.) It was Easter Sunday.

The landing units met little resistance because the Japanese had gone inland into rugged territory. They were able to advance two to three miles on the first day of the operation, which was a surprise to everyone. Mr. Seaman was a squad leader in a rifle platoon. His unit advanced southward, which was where the island was the most populated.

Much more opposition was met as they pressed south. The hillsides of Okinawa are dotted throughout with caves and tombs of solid limestone, and these were converted to enemy strongholds and civilian shelters. They used flame throwers to flush people out of these caves, and they were often easy targets to sniper fire.

Not many civilians were encountered until they arrived deeper into the south. Women and children often were found in the caves or tombs, and were then taken to camps away from the fighting. Great precautions were taken with them because one tactic of the Japanese was to impersonate Okinawan women while wired with hand grenades; these were suicide missions much like the Kamikazes.

Mr. Seaman described combat life as very stressful. Meals were eaten out of cans, and sleep came mostly in the form of cat naps. One thing they didn't have to worry about, however, was supplies of rations or men.

The battles fought in the Pacific and the East China Sea were devastating. The Japanese had thousands of Kamikaze pilots and planes at their disposal, and they used them fervently to destroy US war ships, aircraft carriers and hospital ships. They were,

after all, fighting for their homeland.

The troops were not informed of all the details going on in the overall battle, but they knew what they were supposed to do, and knew what the basic strategy of the operation was. One piece of news that they were told, however, was the death of the beloved war correspondent Ernie Pyle. Ernie was considered a great friend to the men because he was right there with them, and he took a sniper's bullet to the head on Ie Shima, a small island to the west of Okinawa. The loss of Ernie Pyle was especially sorrowful to Mr. Seaman because of his background as a newspaper man.

Mr. Seaman was wounded in the left shoulder by shrapnel spray on May 5, 1945. He was evacuated to Guam where he received a Purple Heart medal in a ceremony. He returned to northern Okinawa about two weeks later. Here they trained for a spearhead landing on the Japanese mainland which, fortunately, never had to take place.

While the troops prepared to depart for home after the island had been secured, a tremendous typhoon hit from the East China Sea. Most personnel were set up in tents along the coast. Some, including Mr. Seaman, rode out the storm by taking refuge in one of the tombs. The next morning, their detail was to collect the dead out of the water. It was a sad twist of fate for those who survived the battle only to be killed in a storm.

Mr. Seaman left Okinawa in September, which was after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He remembers seeing the plane that carried the Japanese leaders to the signing of the treaty to

end the war.

After leaving Okinawa, they stopped in Hawaii for a brief time, then went on to San Francisco. They were greeted on the docks with parades and bands. Mr. Seaman served the remainder of his time in the service in Chicago, and was discharged from there about January 1946. He took about a six week respite, then went back to work. He returned to the Canton Repository where he met Katherine Braswell. They married in 1947, and have four children and ten grandchildren. He retired from the Repository in 1987.

Mr. Seaman stated that although the South Pacific is beautiful and he would like to see some of the islands again, he would not want to return to Okinawa. Interestingly, his oldest son is an ex-Marine and was stationed on Okinawa in the 70s; they have never discussed the battle.

AFTERWORD

This project has been an education for me not only in what I learned about the battle of Okinawa, but for what I learned of my father. I am very proud of him for having been part of such an important piece of history, and for having served his country with pride and dignity. Semper Fi, Daddy!

A

Excellent
paper
well-written
I'd like to put
it in the file
for the archive too.



View from a captured photograph)

years, but the military dominance of the Japanese envoy determined the accession of the Okinawan king. The king pledged himself

between Japan and the Ryukyuan islands in the early times, but retained a certain independence. The Japanese continued to demand tribute and supplies to the islands. In reprisal, the Ryukyuan king, and the Ryukyuan semi-independent islands, each stage of the process of Okinawan independence was restored. The powers of the imperial government were forced to relinquish their claims to the Ryukyuan system was

