

Manuel R. “Marty” Martinez

October 24, 2018

Interviewed by Leah Cohen

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[STARTS 0:2:41]

Cohen: So today is October 24th, 2018, and my name is Leah Cohen...

Martinez: Can you hear me?

Mestas: Uh-huh.

Cohen: Is that good? On behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum & Library, I have the pleasure of conducting a phone interview with a retired platoon sergeant, Manuel R. Martinez, of the 4th Division, 24th Marines, 3rd...

Martinez: No, no, no. 25th.

Cohen: 25th, oh, excuse me. 25th Marines.

Martinez: 25th, yeah.

Cohen: 3rd battalion, K Company. Mr. Martinez saw combat in not one but four campaigns in the Pacific during World War II.

Martinez: Yes.

Cohen: The Kwajalein Atoll and Roi-Namur.

Martinez: Yes.

Cohen: Saipan... [connection interference]

Martinez: Yes.

Cohen: Oh. Saipan, Tinian, and Iwo Jima. But let's talk a little bit about your background. Then we'll talk mostly about your enlistment and service.

Martinez: Okay.

Cohen: [speaking at the same time) And at the end, we'll look a little bit at your life post-war.

Martinez: Okay.

Cohen: So, where and when were you born?

Martinez: I was born in September the 20th, 1922.

Cohen: And where were you born?

Martinez: I was born in northeastern New Mexico, a little place they call Moses, New Mexico. It's in the very corner of the northeastern of the state.

Cohen: And what was it like in Moses, New Mexico?

Martinez: Yeah, yeah which?

Cohen: What was it like?

Martinez: It...it was a post office and had a little store and my dad and my mother owned it too. But then we also had a farm and done some ranching and had some sheep. And then we done a lot of farming also. We used to do a lot of farming. In fact, I would do a lot of farming and when I was only about eleven or twelve years old, I was already out there [laughs] and doing some of the farming, you know, with the cultivators, you know, all that, yeah.

Cohen: What were some of your responsibilities on the farm when you were about eleven years old?

Martinez: Well, I was having to take care of the sheep. We had sheep, but we used to have some dogs that would take in the sheep up there. We didn't stay up there herding, we just had them out there in the pastures, and then in the evening when the dogs would bring them in to the corral. But then I also take care of some cows. And there's my... chores, was to go bring the cows in the evening, you know, bring them in to milk them, and then milk them again in the morning. [laughs] And make sure I feed all the animals in the house, I mean, in the farm. But that was what I started with, you know, because then we went to school out there in the country, which was used to be this little country school. The teacher would teach everything from the primary up to the eighth grade, just the one teacher. And we went to the eighth grade there up there and the school was called Pacheco School. It was about almost a mile away from where we lived. Me and my sister used to have to walk over there to school and during the school time, and we had to walk over there [laughs] to school. Stay there all day and then come back home in the evening, you know. Take our lunch with us. Yeah. That was my growing up, like that.

Cohen: How many sisters did you have?

Martinez: Yeah, I have an older sister. She's still living. Christmas Day she'll be ninety-nine years old, and then of course, I was just ninety-five. And I had a younger sister seven years younger than me, she passed away about... ten years ago. Yeah, my sister—younger. But I got a lot of nephews and nieces. In fact, I have one of my nephews here with me now, he came over to help me do an interview. Yeah. Like I said, he'd been with the schools and retired from the schools. He's a principal and superintendent of some the schools here in Roswell [New Mexico] now. I'm in Roswell now, and that's way down here in the southern part of the state. Yeah, yeah.

Cohen: [speaking at the same time] Cool. Did you go to the same school when you were in high school too?

Martinez: Yes. I went to a country school and high school, and then by that time, a school bus would come by then at my dad's place there for the little post office. 'Cause the post office called Moses. And the bus would come by, it would pick some of the students there in Oklahoma, and they would come in and they would go to a school, which was from the ninth up to eleventh, out there in the country. And we went in a school bus and all the communities around there were there. But then, after the eleventh, then I had to go to finish school in Clayton, and I had to go there. And at that time, I had to go over there, and I stayed with a...rented a little room there and stayed in the town and during the... school days, and then I'd go home in weekends. And that's how my school was there. And then after high school—I worked that one summer before going to school—and we worked up there and harvested in Oklahoma. There's a lot of wheat harvests out there in the harvest. And then I came down here to Roswell to work with this part of the airbase here in Roswell. Worked all summer. Then I went back and went to the university in Las Vegas. Las Vegas, New Mexico. And it's called [New Mexico] Highlands University. But I just went there the one first semester and didn't have enough money to go [laughs] a second semester. So they had a little...

Cohen: [speaking at the same time] Was it—?

Martinez: Pardon?

Cohen: Was it hard to grow up during the Depression? In terms of...

Martinez: Well, you know, I guess it was harder on the older folks than us, you know? Of course, we didn't have everything we needed but we had our farm and had our stuff and all the neighbors, they would just help each other, you know? The best we could. But I don't think, we were...Like I said, we didn't have everything we wanted, but we weren't what

you'd call poor. ([laughs] You know? Not poor. We didn't have a lot of things, but, I mean, we had everything we needed ourselves.

Cohen: Yeah. Yeah, like you're self-sufficient.

Martinez: [speaking at the same time] But we provided, you know, help each other best we could. But I do remember that time and I guess it was harder on the older folks, you know? To us, it was just the natural thing, you know, just to live without a lot of stuff. Yeah.

Cohen: Yeah, and it sounds like it was a nice community.

Martinez: Yeah, it was, and the community where I went to school and all that was called Puertecito [New Mexico]. Puerta, that means like the...

Mestas: [softly] Little door.

Martinez: Kind of like a community, and it was called Pueretecito because that was the beginning of some of the breaks, they call them the canyons there. And that's before you got into the deep canyons there at Moses, New Mexico. You know, and there's the communities were because there were a lot of springs and stuff, you know. 'Course, we had a windmill then, you know, for water, but a lot of people down the canyon they didn't have windmills, they had springs! And course there was a lot of water... But also, with all that came a big Depression. I mean, had a real drought, bad drought that whole part of the Oklahoma and eastern New Mexico, you know?

Cohen: [softly] That's right, that's right.

Martinez: Yeah. But I remember—'cause we were pretty close after the, like I say, Oklahoma. But I remember, you know, lot of them people leaving. Leaving there in Oklahoma. They had had their farms there, they left, you know? We knew a lot of their families. I kinda grew up knowing some of their children. Yeah.

Cohen: That had to leave, yeah...

Martinez: [softly] Yeah, yeah.

Cohen: Did you grow up speaking Spanish and English and other languages?

Martinez: No. Actually, I needed to learn the English language 'cause I was about six years old when we started school. They would bring... English-speaking teachers there and that's how we learned, you know? But our first language was Spanish. But then we picked it up right away 'cause that's what the teacher was. In fact, they made us talk English, you know, so we could learn it, yeah...But we learned it pretty quick. Everybody around

there, by the time they got through with the first grade or whatever, why, they already know it. We were pretty fluent in English, everybody—all the younger people.

Cohen: Isn't it amazing how quickly children can pick up languages?

Martinez: Oh, yeah, yeah. If you wanna pick it up, you can pick it up pretty quick. Oh, yeah. You can. Yeah.

Cohen: Did you continue to speak Spanish with your parents?

Martinez: Yes, yeah. They were fluent in both English and Spanish 'cause they had gone to school. My mother's family they were Montoyas, my daddy's family, Martinez'es. But they had migrated from around Española [New Mexico] and some of the area there was first populated by the Spaniards, you know. But they migrated down into Oklahoma, before it even became a state or territory. And they were there. And that's how my dad and my mother—they would learn English when they were just going to school there.

Cohen: Oh, my goodness.

Martinez: Yeah, they learned it right away 'cause they had school there too, you know. My dad only went to the fourth grade... No, my mother went to the fourth, my daddy went to the third grade. But yet, you know, as they got older, they taught to themselves more. And my dad and mother both learned enough to be able to run the post office and run the store. [laughs]

Cohen: [laughs] Right, right.

Martinez: Yeah.

Cohen: [speaking at the same time] They needed a lot of skills, yeah.

Martinez: Yeah, yeah, yeah, they just taught themselves, you know? Yeah.

Cohen: Wow. Wow.

Martinez: That's kinda my story of growing up. [laughs]

Cohen: [Laughs] So, let's just say, did you and your family or your friends talk about the rise of Hitler and Nazi Germany? Like, were you aware of these things in the thirties? In the 1930s?

Martinez: Was I able to what?

Cohen: Oh, were you aware of the rise of Nazi Germany and—?

Martinez: Oh, yes. You know, by that time we were able to remember them. In fact, I remember by that time I was in high school. And I remember because I had gone into the town near Clayton to finish, and then that's where I started with the plumbing business...I started helping a plumbing company there in Clayton. And I can remember...he was older than me and we were going out to the country from town. He said, "You know what? Germany started a war in Europe. And you know what?" He said, "It won't be long," he said, "before we'll in that war ourselves." He said. So he was already talking about it.

Cohen: Wow.

Martinez: You know? Yeah. And he had gone to high school and then he was older than me. And he had that to bother him, you know, he said, "You know?" He says, ""Cause went there before." He said, "And it's gonna be again." Said, "We'll be going again." Yeah.

Cohen: So your friend who's plumbing with you sounds—

Martinez: Yeah.

Cohen: —very astute, very smart.

Martinez: Yeah, he was. He was that kind of a—In fact, as he got older, he ended up in England and he was sat down over Germany. But he was able to come back. They were shot down, he was a gunner, tail gunner in the B-17, and he never said too much about it. But he got shot down over France or somewhere, but he made it back. He came back. In fact, we worked together again in later years, yeah.

Cohen: Right.

Martinez: Yeah. And then I remember well when the... Japanese, you know, attacked Pearl Harbor.

Cohen: I was just about to ask you—

Martinez: Yeah.

Cohen: —if you remember, like, hearing about it and learning about it at the time?

Martinez: Yeah, but you know what? We were not too familiar with that. We were more familiar what was going into Germany, and when that happened, we actually, didn't think much about Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. To us, you know, that was a foreign country, land. We didn't think much about it! When they said the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, we didn't know what that was for a for a little while, you know? Because we weren't familiar with it. But I remember it, I remember well, exactly I remember it very well, yeah, when it

happened. You know? But like I said, 'course it came all of a sudden too, you know, and so nobody had even thought about it, is all. 'course all they were thinking at the time was about Germany, you know? Yeah.

Cohen: Right, right. But I noticed on the questionnaire that you decided to enlist in the military. So, what made you want to enlist?

Martinez: Well, I guess it was [laughs] when everybody's getting enlisted, you know? And you think, Well, I might as well go, you know? 'Cause I knew I was gonna be called 'cause they were drafting, you know?

Cohen: Yeah.

Martinez: So, I'm there at Highland University and I didn't have a way to keep going to school, so I thought, Well... And everybody else is going and there was three of us that were pretty close there in the school and we said, "Well, let's go ahead and go in." And two of them—my friends there, "Well, we're going to go in the [U.S.] Navy." And I said, "Well, I'm not going in the Navy." I said, "I'm going in the [U.S.] Marine Corps." [Cohen and Martinez laugh] Why I decided—like I said later, "Big mistake." [Cohen and Martinez laugh] Yeah. But anyway, I went home, and I told them, I said, "I'm enlisted in Marine Corps." And they said, "Why?" I said, "Well, everybody else is going." I said, "I'm gonna be called. I might as well go 'head and go in." I says 'cause at that time, you know, everybody was going, and I did just the thing to do! Yeah, and...

Cohen: [speaking at the same time] What appealed to you at the time about the Marine Corps? Like, did it seem more heroic?

Martinez: [speaking at the same time] I really don't know why. I really don't know just why. I thought that that's what I wanted to do because a lotta of people have asked me and then they say, "Well, you had maybe seen one of them John Wayne movies." And I said, [Cohen and Martinez laugh] "Well, maybe so. I don't know," I said. But anyway, I had my two friends, they say, "No, into the Navy." And then we were real good friends and in fact, we were friends later on after we all got back, you know? And remained friends forever after that. And that's where I ended up. In fact, there was three of us from Clayton that went into the Marine Corps. When I went up to Santa Fe [New Mexico] to—that's where we had to go to get sworn in and they took a bus load of us there from Clayton, and three of us from Clayton decided to go into Marine Corps and we picked up [laughs] an Indian from Pojoaque [New Mexico]. That's one of the reservations there, north of Santa Fe. So, there was four of us that left together from New Mexico.

Cohen: Wow.

Martinez: And then we were only ones from this part of the country 'cause the 4th Marine was formed up there in Camp Lejeune and then they came around the canal and came to Camp Pendleton [California].

Cohen: Yeah, yeah. Like I was reading that the 4th Marine Division was activated on August 16th, 1943.

Martinez: [softly] Yeah...I already went. 'Cause I was already in San Diego [California]. We went to a big camp in San Diego, and when I got through boot camp, that's where I went over to Camp Pendleton to join the 4th Marine that had just gotten here from Port Lejeune.

Cohen: Oh, okay, can I just recount: so after you're enlisted and after in Santa Fe, do you first go to Camp Pendleton or do you first go to San Diego?

Martinez: No, I went to San Diego first for boot camp.

Cohen: I see.

Martinez: That's where we did the training, there in San Diego. And that's where the Marine Corps base is in San Diego, and that's where the Naval base was, too, right next to each other.

Cohen: Oh, okay.

Martinez: Yeah. So my two friends were over there in the Navy going through boot camp when I was going through boot camp too in San Diego. And we got together there, you know, before we got through boot camp. But anyway, from there I went to Camp Pendleton. That's where I joined the 4th Marines, yeah.

Cohen: Oh, okay. So, what was basic training like? Like, what was a typical day of basic training like?

Martinez: Well, it... was kind of hard as far as...The training, to me, that wasn't bad, but it was just the living conditions. 'Cause we were set up a tent camp there. We didn't stay in the main base of Camp Pendleton where they had barracks and all of that. We stayed up in—they call it Camp Onofre, Las Pulgas Canyon, and... We stayed in tents. No shower, cold showers. And we had to eat standing up, we didn't have a mess hall. They had long tables. We had to eat standing up. We didn't have a mess hall. And there was a—I think was four or five—no, there was... four to a tent, I think. And then we had one shower. You had to go take a cold shower. And then we'd go training. To me that was not that hard—training—I was used to hard work, you know? To me, I didn't mind it at all! It was just the conditions when you came into camp. [Cohen laughs] You know? And that was harder for me than the training itself. We done a lot of training. I mean, it was Navy. A

lotta walking and a lotta stuff like that. Had to go and march, sometimes... a quick march, too, you know? Not regular, but a quick march, sometimes for so long. It was kinda hard that way, but I didn't mind it at all, the boot camp—the training I didn't mind. And yeah.

Cohen: Were the conditions simple in San Diego, as well? Like for example, did you stay in tents—

Martinez: No, yeah.

Cohen: —in San Diego or is that just in Camp Pendleton?

Martinez: No. In San Diego, we stayed in the barracks, boot camp. Boot camp, we stayed in barracks and we got a lot training right there. We got a lotta close-order drills and stuff like that, yeah. And from there, we went to the rifle range and that's where we shot at the rifle range. And then after the rifle range, then they sent us up to Camp Pendleton. And there -- we stayed in barracks, you know, and it was up at the Camp Pendleton where it was kind rough [laughs] you know?

Cohen: Yeah!

Martinez: Yeah. And then we stayed like that all the time until we left the States. You know, the States, yeah. And, you know, I think about it... [connection interference] Just thinking about it now, nineteen years left after I was there and that Las Pulgas Canyon, they finally got rid of 'em, put some barracks. And my son ended up there 'cause he went into the Navy, my son. In the Navy and became a Navy corpsman. He was a corpsman, and the Marines, you know, they have to have a Navy corpsman with them. So, when he got through boot camp, they send him up there where I had been there nineteen years before in the same place. [laughs] And—

Cohen: [speaking at the same time] So, at Camp Pendleton?

Martinez: Yeah, at Camp Pendleton. So, I wrote and told him—'cause we didn't have phones then like we do now where you can talk to each other (laughs) you know. (Cohen laughs) I wrote him and told him, I said, "Whatever you do—" my son, we call him Marty, also like me. I said, "Marty, whatever you do," I said, "Get aboard ship. Get outta being there with Marines." I said, "And get aboard ship in the Navy." So he put in for that and they sent him to Vietnam at the time on a destroyer. So he ended up in a destroyer up there on the gulf there out in Vietnam. [laughs] Yeah, yeah.

Cohen: Wow.

Martinez: Yeah.

Cohen: [speaking at the same time] So, it sounds like Camp Pendleton was still a mess nineteen years later when your son—

Martinez: [speaking at the same time] Yeah.

Cohen: —was in the Navy too? (laughs)

Martinez: Yeah, but by that time they had barracks (laughs) and they called them Quonset huts is what they called them, you know, and that.

Cohen: [speaking at the same time] Yes, yes, I know what you mean.

Martinez: Yeah, yeah. That's what they had then. But (laughs) he was there. But he didn't stay there very long 'cause I told him, I said, "Be sure put in to get aboard ship." And he did and he was able to get, you know, sent to aboard ship. Yeah. I don't know how he done, it but he did it. (laughs)

Cohen: It's a good thing you had your experience that you could give him some good advice.

Martinez: Yeah. Absolutely. I called him and said they go through—I mean, they were really something, those corpsmen we had. They were really something, you know. I had to give them a lotta credit them guys, you know. They sure were.

Cohen: You know, I was wondering, did you train as a scout at Camp Pendleton?

Martinez: Yeah. I was going to tell you when I started before about when we joined 'em. See, we went from New Mexico—we joined 'em then—and we were only ones in our company that were from this part of the States—of United States, here in New Mexico.

Cohen: Wow.

Martinez: Yeah, so when we got there and started forming the whole thing, they said they made a discovery. "You can be a scout." And that Indian from Pojoaque, they said, "Yeah, yeah, make you a scout." That's when they made us scouts, you know. And... thinking ahead some, I think that's what saved me one time there in Saipan, for being a scout. They let me go by. You know? The Japanese were setting up a machine gun and they let me go by up this trail. And then when the company started coming up, that's when they opened up on them. Yeah, yeah. So being a scout and way ahead up there saved me that time. Yeah.

Cohen: What is the main responsibility of a scout?

Martinez: Well, you gotta go way ahead before, you know, the company, before that. They usually send two, you know, but at that time, he just sent me by myself up that trail. And... the sergeant, first sergeant there, told me, he said, "Go ahead and go on up." He said, "And check it out." He said. So I kept going and I know I can't hear nothing. I got almost up to the top when I heard the shooting. And they were shooting the company down behind me as were starting going up the trail. Yeah, yeah. So I knew it. It was one time when I was saved, you know, by [laughs] being a scout, being up there. Yeah. But you know, I don't know... That's what it was all the time I was in Saipan. And then the Indian—we kinda lost contact with him, I did. Like I said, it was three of us from Clayton. But went through boot camp and they separated us. One of them went to the 3rd Marines, and me and George stayed in together. And we were together all the time. Even when we were overseas and all that, we were together. And he got wounded there in Saipan... came back, and then he got wounded again in Iwo Jima. And I didn't see him again. And the other Marine that was in the 3rd, he got killed in Guam. And then in Saipan, when we got through, we were—'cause I had lost contact with an Indian boy. His name was Dale Tafoya. And as we were marching out, we came by where the cemetery was already. All the... little crosses set up, you know, with their names? And as I came by on the way there, I saw his name there where he was there and had been killed there in Saipan. Yeah. So I was the only one of all...

Cohen: Of the four.

Martinez: All of the four of us, I was the only one that never got a scratch. Well, I got scratched. [Cohen and Martinez laugh] I mean I didn't get hit, did I?

Cohen: [laughs] Yeah. Oh, my goodness.

Martinez: Yeah. It's how it happens sometimes, you know?

Cohen: I know, it's hard to explain. I know.

Martinez: It's how things go, you know? It's just how it goes. And I don't know a lot of people—because I always had been... believe in, you know, in prayer. That helps a lot.

Cohen: That helps a lot, I agree. I agree.

Martinez: I don't know, we were talking one time and said, "Well, you didn't think." I said, "Yeah, I did. I did pray..." Some of the family, I said, "I did." I said, "I did. Everybody does." I said, "Probably not everybody but most everybody, I think, 'cause you're going in, you know?" I'm going in too and I think I'm going make a landing. You're going in, you say, you never think about it and you know just think of what's going to happen. And 'cause

everybody thinks, “Well, you know, I don’t know if I’ll make it back or not.” But I tell ‘em, I said, I know my mother is not here—at home, doing the same for me, you know?”

Cohen: That she’s praying for you, too. Yeah.

Martinez: Yeah, you gotta have faith. You know, you gotta have faith or something. You never lose it, you know.

Cohen: No, no.

Martinez: Yeah, no.

Cohen: [speaking at the same time] That maybe helps give one strength, you know?

Martinez: It’s very comforting. You have it, you know.

Cohen: Very comforting. Yeah.

Martinez: [speaking at the same] That’s where you decide... you know, you say, “Well, leave it up to the Lord.” He decides. You know, all up to him. Whatever you do is up to him, whatever happens, you know.

Cohen: Yeah, we can’t control everything, you know?

Martinez: Yeah, yeah.

Cohen: It’s the one above. You know?

Martinez: Yeah. Like I tell ‘em to this day, I say, “Why should I worry?” I say, “ You know, me? Why should I worry about what’s going to happen and all that? It’s gonna happen no matter what. I’m not gonna worry about it.” Yeah, yeah.

Cohen: So, is it okay if we go back to, so to speak, Camp Pendleton: when did you sail from there, or rather, when did you sail from San Diego toward the Pacific?

Martinez: When I -- what again?

Cohen: When did you sail? Like when did your ship go from San Diego toward the Pacific?

Martinez: [pause] Yeah.

Mestas: [in background] When did you leave Camp Pendleton, on a hship?

Martinez: Oh. [Mestas talking too] Yeah, when we first left, we left, I think, was the first of the year in 1944. I think was in January. I've got the dates and that shows when we shipped out. And either one right there.

Cohen: And do you remember what it was like on the ship?

Martinez: Hey, hand me that big book. Yeah, Louis, the big book. Yeah, yeah, right there.

Mestas: We have the chronology of the entire 4th Marine Division, step by step. So to answer your question--excuse me—he sailed from San Diego, California... on... January 13th, 1944.

Cohen: Oh, okay. Thank you.

Mestas: And he arrived and disembarked at Kwajalein?

Martinez: Kwajalein Atoll. Kwajalein Atoll, yeah, yeah.

Mestas: Kwajalein.

Martinez: Yeah.

Mestas: Atoll on January 31st, 1944. So, they were at sea about twenty days.

Martinez: Yeah, yeah. That's where we went. Took quite a while 'cause we went by Hawaii on the way over there, I remember. And then we didn't disembark there, we just went by. And went all the way up to Kwajalein. And the little island where we landed was called Roi-Namur.

Cohen: Were you seasick on the trip going to Kwajalein?

Martinez: [speaking at the same time] You know, I never got seasick, never did. I mean, aboard ship, I'm always in different ships, you know? And all the time I was in there at different times, but I never got seasick.

Cohen: That's good.

Martinez: Yeah, never did. And one time, we got real sick—I think Thanksgiving Day 'cause we had to change the times 'cause we're in the international date line. And I think it was Thanksgiving. I remember that very well. And we had a turkey and then I put it up, I guess, to name 'em. And then next day, we had turkey again and a lot of the... people got ptomaine poisoning Yeah. [Cohen and Martinez laugh] Yeah. But in the Navy, I was very lucky I didn't, you know, 'cause I just I had a cast-iron stomach, I guess. [Cohen and

Martinez laugh] But a lot of 'em sure got sick, but I never got seasick on any time that wasn't aboard ship.

Cohen: Was there any ceremony when you crossed the international date line?

Martinez: Yes. Uh-huh, yeah, we did. Several times when we had to cross—when we left Hawaii going up... to Guam and all of that, we passed the international date line. Yeah. It would be one day here and then the next day it'd be the same day, yeah. Yeah.

Cohen: Yeah. And what were the conditions like on the boat and what type of boat was it?

Martinez: Well, it was down in the hull, and then half of them ships, they didn't have no air conditioner, you know? So during the day, we kinda stayed up top most of the time. And then at night, lot of us slept up top on the top. We'd just take our little poncho and just go up there and sleep up on the deck, you know, outside at night. Yeah, 'cause it was too hot down in the deck, you know? But to me it wasn't too bad 'cause... the sleeping conditions were kind of bad because they just stayed on racks. You know, the racks were on the wall and at night we'd let 'em down. The racks, they were one on top of each other on the bulkhead. And at night, we'd take the strap and let... the bed down, made a little bed. You just stow one on top of the other, you know? And it wasn't that bad, you know. Of course, there was nowhere to take a shower! And yeah, the showers—if you wanted to take a shower there was some saltwater, and then we wouldn't have no fresh water to take showers on, is all.

Cohen: Was there fresh drinking water?

Martinez: Well, they had good fresh water to drink but not to bathe, you know. Yeah. And it was always good aboard ship, you know? We never had much trouble, and nothing I can remember, you know, having any-- When we left Iwo Jima, I remember that that we got pretty cold, and I had a... This I remember, I had a Japanese bayonet and it got kinda cold and the Navy—we got aboard the ship and there were the sailors and it got cold and I went down in there where their ship was. And said, "Hey!" Said, "I would like to buy one of your guys' sweater or coat or something." And... I said, "Ain't got the money but I got a sword." And they all jump: "We got one!" [Cohen and Martinez laugh] But this one got... 'cause I told him, he said, "I got a sweater." 'Cause we didn't have no socks, you know, we had the same ones where we had there for almost twenty-some days. And I said, "Well, yeah, I got socks." He said, "I got a sweater and a cap, a knit cap, got that." Then of course, he said, "I'll give you that for the bayonet." I says, "Okay!" [Cohen and Martinez laugh]

Cohen: But how did you get a hold of the bayonet to begin with?

Martinez: Well... Yeah, well he was there, you know, when we come across them dead Marines—I mean, them dead Japanese, you know. During the time that we were there... in Iwo [Jima], never did pick up nothing. Every time there were dead Marines, oh, I never touched ‘em, you know? I mean, I would move ‘em around or whatever, you know. But I mean I never went through their pockets or, you know, what else looking for stuff, whatever.

Cohen: Yeah, I know. I know what you mean.

Martinez: I would move ‘em out of my way or stack ‘em or whatever, you know? But... And... Until the last day, the last day when we made the last push down, they told me that if I took my company up through that... heck, we used to call it “The Meat Grinder.” He says if I took ‘em down that canyon to the beach, there ships would be waiting for us to pick us up. So, I told ‘em, “Yeah!” I said, “We’re gonna make it down there.” So... I knew where I had...[a sword, as a result of shooting the Japanese soldier with a bazooka]. Blew up and he was in the hole, besides, the Japanese that were in the cave, “Well, okay I didn’t go in that cave...he shot at me.” But anyway... I picked up a Japanese sword that he had [on him]. A samurai sword and a bayonet, and he had a... pistol, I’m guessing, he had gotten from the Marines, a .45 [caliber]. I guess he had gone there at night or something. He had gotten one of our .45s. That’s the only one I had or something on the last day. And I had that sword—that samurai sword—I had it in my home there at home when I come back... And my sea bag. And then that store and the post office, I tell you, he got caught fire and everything burnt down. Yeah.

Cohen: Oh.

Martinez: So...

Cohen: So that was that.

Martinez: Yeah, but there’s another story there. (both laughs) Yeah, yeah.

Cohen: [speaking at the same time] Well, do you want to describe what it was like when you came with your ship to the Kwajalein Atoll? Like where you were involved in the invasion on the islands near Roi and Namur?

Martinez: Yeah, yeah.

Cohen: What happened at that point, like...?

Martinez: Yeah, that was, you know, the first...

Mestas: [in the background] Campaign.

Martinez: Campaign or something that we did. I mean, we didn't know much about 'em. And the islands are flat, you know. I think the highest above sea is seven foot. That Kwajalein, you know. When the tide is down, they walked from one island to another. But anyway, we went into and we got off of the ship into those Higgins boats, you know? And of course, these ships and all that were firing into the island, you know. And then as we got closer, they quit firing into it, you know. And we went in... and... we weren't getting no fire from there, you know? From the island...

Cohen: [speaking at the same time] You mean from the Japanese?

Martinez: No, no fire from the Japanese at all! There was no fire that we were getting but we were going in, and all of us, that was our first campaign, you know? 'Cause, you know, we don't know what you're going into. But we went in and landed and right away we scattered into the island. But no, we didn't see nothing of them. But on the island next to where we landed, the other island, there was a little airbase there. And we could see a big block house—they called it a block house, you know, kind of a cement building. And there they started firing into it, you know? But one thing I can remember, and I think now, later on, as we were there, they said, "Hey!" Said, "There's some troops coming across, Japanese coming across." And they started using machine gun fire, you know, on them 'til... I don't know where them... 'Cause we couldn't see, but just as they're trying to swim towards us... So they started using the machine gun on them. And now I think... and later on... on history, I think what it was... I think was one of them 'cause Japanese left, you know. And I think what this was, they were workers that they had there. And that's why we think later on that I think what they were doing, they were trying to swim toward us, and our troops thinking that were, you know, Japanese. They fought all them, you know. And just things like that just happened, you know.

Cohen: Oh, okay, that they thought it was Japanese snipers, but it might have been, like, American... workers, or...

Martinez: Workers. And in fact, later on they said... later on they talked about, "Oh, they're Koreans." They said, "They're Koreans. They're not Japanese, they're Koreans." And I don't know where they got that, you know. I remember them talking about it, you know? But nobody ever said for sure that that's what it was. But in my mind now, I think that's what there was, you know? But they never did come across to us or nothing, we never did see 'em again. Yeah. And then, yeah.

Cohen: What kind of ammunition did you have at the time? Like, what were you given in terms of rifles or ammunition?

Martinez: Oh, we had?

Cohen: Oh.

Mestas: [In background] What kinda rifle and ammunition did you have? That they give you? What kinda rifle?

Martinez: Oh, we had M1s [Garand rifles], you know? Had M1s, yeah. (connection interference) 'Cause we all had M1s, but then each squad had what's called a BAR [M1918 Browning Automatic Rifle] man, and he had a BAR, which has twenty rounds on it. But our M1s only had eight rounds on them. 'Cause we all carried our cartridge belt with magazines on them too, you know. But the M1s is what we had. Most all except with the BAR man. And then we had a... bazooka man that went with one of the squads. And later on, not in Kwaj-- in Saipan and Iwo Jima, they had flamethrower guys. They had a flamethrower with them. Yeah, yeah, yeah. They had later on—we didn't have 'em at first. Yeah. I don't remember ever having the bazooka there in Kwajalein at all. Yeah. But later on, we did have a bazooka man, yeah. Yeah.

Cohen: After the invasion, what did you need to do on the Kwajalein Atoll? Like, in other words...here's...

Martinez: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, that... we stayed... Well, most of the unit that left, and they left the company there and the same little island that we landed on. And... we stayed for quite a few days there, I think, about twenty days or more that we stayed there. And when we're done, we went down on these—used to call alligators [alligator-class landing ships], you know? They would go in the water then onto the land, you know? They called 'em alligator boats.

Cohen: [speaking at the same time] Oh. Oh, the boats, okay.

Martinez: Yeah. So we got in there and it took a couple of the squads, it took down and we went down to the next islands down below 'cause there were people that said there were natives there. So we went. We stayed about two days down there. We went to one and stayed overnight and went in the island. And there were the natives there. And when we pulled in, we didn't know what was going to find, you know? But we went in and got out—alligator can climb up on the land—and we got out and all them people came out there, you know, to meet us. Men and women and not very many children—some younger ones. They came up and they were just out there, you know, and just happy. And it's nice to see somebody 'cause they were out there, not scared! They met us and we got we got... 'cause they told us before we landed, they said, "Don't try doing nothing because I think they're just natives, you know?" But we were trying to see if there was any Japanese among them, you know? And so we waded in and we went through the

island, looking 'round. Didn't never see any Japanese but the natives were there. And the men, I mean the natives...

Cohen: And the natives were happy to see the Americans.

Martinez: Oh, yeah. They were happy to see Americans and, you know, like we always are. Guys started giving 'em, you know, K-rations and stuff like that and they didn't know what they were [laughs] you know. [Cohen laughs] Yeah. And... But it was something to see somebody like that that they had no idea what was going on, you know? What goes on in the outside world. And I often think about them people there, you know. They had survived years after year without a whole lotta, you know, modern stuff! But we stayed two days and then came back to the island where we had landed. And then what happened is we caught dysentery over there. Yeah, 'cause the flies were so bad, I mean, they would just get into your mess kit. You couldn't shoo 'em away, you just had to pick 'em off of your food with your fingers and get 'em outta your way. They wouldn't shoo away, you know?

Cohen: I was reading there were a lot of sanitation problems, I guess because there were so many dead and, you know, tough to bury everybody.

Martinez: Yeah, that's what it was, one of those things, you know, that I remember. And then, I guess that's why we stayed there 'cause I remember that we had dysentery. I guess we all went through that. But we stayed quite a few days before they let us come back to Maui, you know? And they finally brought us back. But I never suffered from any, like, dysentery myself. And none of 'em—they did this. They know you have it, you know, 'cause they would check. They would check you and would say, "Oh you got it." You know? I didn't suffer anything from being there at all, you know?

Cohen: Yeah, it sounds like you have like a healthy constitution. [Martinez had heard, "appetite"]

Martinez: I think that's what it was, you know?...Never had been particular about what I eat, you know, I eat whatever, you know. [Cohen laughs] Never said, "I can't eat this, I can't eat that", you know? We was growing up that way. I mean, you didn't put it in your plate unless you're gonna eat it. You know? You didn't put it on there, in your plate. You just put what you're gonna eat but you didn't have no leftover. And I mean, growing up that's the way we were. Everybody was brought that way up there that I know of. And I mean, you wouldn't throw food away, throw food you know, or left--, or drop it, or whatever; you took care of it. And one of the worst things was she's growing up, never throw a piece of bread to anybody. You know? Bread was sacred and is to this day,,.you just don't throw it, you know.

Cohen: Yeah, that you really value it.

Martinez: Yeah, you just have that bread, you said, “No, don’t throw them.” You know, just like the Indians, you hear, in New Mexico. I kinda grew up close to them near Taos and all that. But you know, you better not throw water to an Indian. You don’t throw water to one man, that really upsets ‘em. [laughs]

Cohen: That’s interesting.

Martinez: I know. You just grow up with different things, you know, that you do. Yeah

Cohen: So, at times maybe we’re trying to get back to that again... you know? So... how was the time when you went back to Maui? Like, what was the training like when you went back after the Battle of Kwajalein?

Martinez: Yeah, it was just training there on a... kind of a jungle-like country, you know, to where we were at in Maui. The camp was right there in the middle of all that forest and stuff like that. And we’d take some long hikes, there in places there, you know, to different places there in Maui. It was kind of hard training there ‘cause... we’d go through... problems, you know. Up there, you know? And stay overnight too, away from the camp, too, but... we were kinda used to that from being where we were staying Camp Pendleton, I mean. Had tents, you know, and cold showers and all that. So I mean we were used to it. It was no big deal, you know? But at least the part of it was little bit better, the conditions. But the training was still hard. I mean... nobody ever messed around. But we also had good recreation. We formed basketball teams, we had baseball teams. We’d gone and done that too. Competed against each other. But ‘nother thing we had there: they didn’t serve alcohol, they didn’t send alcohol to the troops. They would sell you beer—one can—and if you wanted another can, you had to stand in line again. If you wanted another one. But I never was a drinker and never had been. But the officers, they could get [hard] liquor. And I remember the liquor was called Shaveys Black Label [made in Chicago]. [Martinez and Cohen laugh] The officers would get... I think it was... a pint or a quart. It was a quart. But the men, they would get beer but no liquor, you know? But... it didn’t bother me that much, you know, as far as beer ‘cause I was never much of a beer drinker. But we did train pretty good, had good training, you know. And...

Cohen: [speaking at the same time] Did you... enjoy the recreation like the baseball and the other sports?

Martinez: Oh, yeah. We had baseball and we had basketball. Football we didn't have, but we had a basketball teams and then we had a lot of baseball, you know? And... You're gonna excuse me for just a minute?

Cohen: Sure, sure.

Martinez: My nephew can talk to you a little bit. I need to go to the bathroom. Just a second.

Cohen: Oh, sure.

Martinez: Just a moment. I'll be right back.

[58:50 - 1:01:50: Martinez away from conversation]

Mestas: Would you like some dates?

Cohen: Oh, you know, I think I have the same book. I don't know why I asked that question.

Mestas: Okay, okay.

Cohen: I think I was trying to get back into the chronology. But is the book you have **The 4th Marine edition of World War II** that's from the History Museum's Division headquarters in—?

Mestas: [speaking at the same time] Yes.

Cohen: Oh, it's really helpful, eh? It's really...

Mestas: You know, I wanted to go back to his high school.

Cohen: Okay.

Mestas: If you don't mind.

Cohen: No, no, thank you.

Mestas: Again, he attended elementary school and then went to Seneca [New Mexico] for up until the 11th grade and then he had to go into Clayton and that was twenty-four miles from his home. That's why he had to rent a place to go to high school. But what he forgot to tell you is after the 11th grade, he went to work for two years. He, actually, physically had to go to work because my grandfather got very sick [ringtone in background] and in order to make it, he actually had to go to work. So, after two years, he went back to high school.

Cohen: Wow. So, he was very determined to—

Mestas: Yeah.

Cohen: —continue his studies.

Mestas: So, he was determined to graduate. Plus, he played football back then at Clayton High School. Clayton, New Mexico is where he graduated from. And again, the community still exists there. [coughs] But...

Cohen: Was Clayton the biggest town of that part of New Mexico that was close to Moses?

Mestas: Yes... Yes. And at that time, it was probably 3,500 people. About 2,000 now, it just really declined.

Cohen: It's declined, huh. And what did your uncle work at during those ten years between the 11th grade and 12th grade?

Mestas: Those two years—those two years he helped build dams... Actually, they would build dams at that part of soil conservation program at the time. So, he worked very hard building dams. Actually, with horses and... you know... the equipment they used at that time.

Cohen: Wow. So... he was no city slicker. I mean, I could see why the training would be less arduous...

Martinez: [speaking at the same time] Okay. I'm back.

Cohen: [speaking at the same time] Oh hello. Your nephew was telling me that you worked two years after 11th grade before 12th grade and it was a lot of building roads that involved work with horse. I think it sounds like very physically difficult work, so I could understand why for you being in the Army or being in the Marines and doing training was not overwhelming.

Martinez: [laughs] Yeah, it wasn't. No, it wasn't. No, it wasn't [Cohen and Martinez laugh]

Mestas: I told her that you worked two years before you went back to high school.

Martinez: Oh yeah. Yeah.

Mestas: And you were building dams.

Martinez: Oh yeah, yeah, I did. Yeah. In fact, I was twenty years old when I graduated. Yeah, 'cause stayed two years off, you know? And yeah. Actually... come all that training, [laughs] even that training, it was kind of like a vacation for me. [Cohen and Martinez laugh]

Cohen: When you were working on the dams, were you part of the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps]? I forget what it stands for.

Martinez: Yeah. No, you know in fact, I was just telling my nephew, his dad went to the CC camps. But I tried to go to the CCC camps, and when I got there took all the other boys and I was left there. And I said, "Well, I'm gonna join too." He told me, "Well, how old are you?" I said, "I'm seventeen." He said, "Well, you go back to school." And I said, "No, I can't go back to school." I said, "My dad's sick and he can't work, can't do nothing." I said, "I need to... go work." 'Cause they would give that. The CC camps—they sent home, I think, was thirty dollars and they would keep, I think, twelve dollars. That's what it was, I think, something like that. And that's why I wanted to go in, you know. But they wouldn't take me. [Cohen and Martinez laugh] I was too young. So I had to go back. And then what happened is when I went to work there, the building dams, you know. All by myself! I had four horses... I had to first plow with the plow. I had to plow the land and then come with a fresh scrapper with four horses and pick up the land and walk it up, you know, to the dam, and dump it, and come back and get another load. I done that all day long. Yeah. I would stop at noon, you know, and feed the horses and water 'em and have lunch. And then I hitch up again. And... by that time... I was old enough, you know, and strong enough that I could be there myself. You know, yeah. But anyhow we finally made it through, you know. There was no big deal, yeah.

Cohen: So, this was a regular job? You're saying it wasn't part of the CC camps? But it was a...

Martinez: No.

Cohen: It was a difficult but regular job kind of thing?

Martinez: Yeah. Yeah, while I was there at home, we were doing this for this rancher. And this rancher had a big ranch there next to ours. And I was working on doing that on his land and they would pay him so much... they would go and estimate dirt yardage soil conservation would go out there and measure it and they would pay him so many cubic feet of dirt that were in that dam. That's how they would pay him and then he would pay me. He'd pay my dad, yeah.

Cohen: I see.

Martinez: That's how it was. It was a job working, more or less, for this rancher, you know? This rancher.

Cohen: This neighbor.

Martinez: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It was the neighbor. And we ran lot of cattle with his together, you know, and I used to take care of the cattle—that's when I was doing all that cowboying—oh, so besides doing that. [Cohen laughs] We had to do the branding and all that stuff; you know? And so it was always working every day and 'cause my dad, he was down with—it was arthritis. He couldn't hardly walk at all! His knees were swollen up. He couldn't even walk. And of course, my mother would help me a lot. She used to help me quite a bit, too. And... But, yeah, no, we made it without any problem, you know? We were happy, I mean, that was the thing about it. And we had the neighbors, and everybody was always happy. We never had no problem at all. Helping each other the best we could, you know? Yeah.

Cohen: Yeah, it... sounds good. Yeah. So before you left, I think we were talking about training at Maui—

Martinez: Yeah.

Cohen: —after the first battle. And one thing I was reading—and maybe you read it too—was that they wanted to do things better. Like, they wanted to learn from mistakes that they had made on Roi-Namur. For example, they wanted to have better assault techniques on the pillboxes where the Japanese gunners were. So I wondered did you experience that directly, where they said, "Okay, we want to improve such and such, so let's practice such and such, doing it this way?"

Martinez: Yeah. Yeah. I think I can understand what you're telling me.

Cohen: I guess, like, I'm wondering when you were training again, do you remember learning something that they wanted the troops to improve upon?

Martinez: Yeah, yeah. I think I understand what you're talking—yeah. I think it was. To us, I think it was a different kind of a training, you know? We had... at Roi-Namur in them islands, we didn't have any caves or nothing like that. You know? And so we had to... even in Saipan, we had to... not as much as we later had on Iwo Jima, but they had some in... on the ones before. They... what I'm trying to say: it was not us trying to go into them caves because there were none. The Japanese were, more or less, just... and...

Mestas: [In background] Dug in. Dug in.

Martinez: Yeah. They were dug in in there, you know. But like in Saipan, they weren't really dug in, they would be out there in the open just like we were. Yeah. But we had to train for that. And that was kind of a different training... and... but... as far as a assault...they were not dug in like in Iwo. I guess it was kind of almost the same. I don't know, what I'm

trying to say is we had to change the way you trained, I'd think, after that. Yeah. But it wasn't... we would go out even when we were training... I remember going out on... rubber boats, you know, because that's what we landed in Tinian, we landed on rubber boats from the big ship. 'Cause we went from Saipan to Tinian—it was real close. You could see Tinian from Saipan. But we went aboard ship and then landed at night on rubber boats. You know, and... But that changed all that, the way they landed there because... at Tinian, they had a beach on one side of island and then where we landed it had some cliffs, not that high. But they didn't know. [beeping noise] They thought that we were gonna land where the beaches run. But we didn't. We landed there where they had to go up some small cliffs. And we used ropes, you know, to get up on there. And there were real thick forests—as we pulled up into the Tinian—it was a thick forest there, I remember that. And so we went as far as we could and then dug there for the night. They say, "Dig in for the night." And we did. And then we could hear 'em that night, that's when they came back from where they were expecting us, over there where the beach was. So, they came from over there to meet us at that night. They were at the forests and that's where they had that banzai attack on us that night, yeah.

Cohen: [speaking at the same time] Yeah. So what was it like, the banzai attack?

Martinez: Yeah. And that night, that was one of the worst times, too, I ever had. You were just waiting for them and you could hear 'em coming, you know, you see they're coming and the movement and the talking and all that. And then they were coming; I think what it was, you know, I guess it had kinda got kinda high too, you know, and shocked your whatever, you know. 'Cause we could hear 'em talking and hollering. They say, you know, "Don't fire nothing." And I said, "Can you see 'em?" "Don't try a thing. Don't do nothing." You know, we just laid there.

Cohen: So your commands were to stay put where you were dug in?

Martinez: Yeah, I tell you, we just stayed put where we dug in. And they were so thick you couldn't really see that far in front of you, you know? And then they stayed up there a while and yeah, we could 'em hear all that talking and hollering and all that. 'Til finally they just hollered, you know, and came in through you. And 'course we all had bayonets on the guns. 'Cause they got so close, you know, you fire fine and you just go to bayonet. Everybody carried a stiletto, a knife, you know, and it was hand-to-hand after that. Just right on top of you. And the machine guns, they just fired 'til they just got over him too. I knew two of the boys on the machine gun there. Oh, I still remember one of 'em was an Italian guy, Falzone [?], big guy. Big guy. He was a rough guy, Italian. And 'course, finally, after they went through and there was quite a [???] later, you could just hear people moaning or dying or crying or whatever, you know? Anyway, next morning, there

were Japanese piled everywhere in front of us and 'course some dead Marines, too. But I went by this... machine gun 'cause it was that close to me. And Falzone [?] was there and him and his crew had been killed, but he still had... a cartridge belt wrapped around his hand like he was using that, you know? To fend them off, you know. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And he was a big guy. Oh, it was a terrible night, that night. But that was the only one there and that was that it there in Saipan, Saipan. After that, there was not much going on... I mean, that ain't in Saipan, that was in Tinian.

Cohen: At Tinian.

Martinez: [speaking at the same time] At Tinian.

Cohen: At Tinian. So at that point, you had been promoted from, right, sergeant to first sergeant?

Martinez: Yeah. I think I was a sergeant then. Yeah, I think I was, yeah, yeah, a sergeant then, yeah, 'cause I become platoon sergeant after we landed in Iwo [Jima], yeah.

Cohen: You know, just to maybe, like, come finish up, I do remember that you got a medal I believe for Tinian. Right? Oh, no, no, it wasn't Tinian, it was for Saipan.

Martinez: Saipan, yeah. Saipan.

Cohen: Saipan. So maybe do we wanna just go back a little bit. Before the Battle of Tinian was the Invasion of Saipan. Is that right? So what was your experience of that, like, what kind of boat and where did you land on the island and so on?

Martinez: Well, in Saipan, 'cause we were on a troop ship and we came off of the ropes on the side, you know, where they throw the ropes over the side and you came off the ropes into the [LCVP] Higgins boats, where they just jumped the front end of it, you know? And... we came off of there and headed for Saipan. And... the place where we landed was called Shuran Canova [1:16:00 name of landing beach, unclear??], and they had been shelled. And we thought, "Well, they shelled 'em quite a bit." But as we're going in, they had some reefs, you know?... 'Course I remember going in and one of the boats hit a reef and it just hung there on the reef. Just couldn't go back or couldn't go forward, you know.

Cohen: Oh, stuck there.

Martinez: The troops were just the same. Had 'em all moving around, ours went on through. And some of theirs did but I remember that one got hung up there. And we went in and 'cause that there, that was the first time whatever, you know, I was under fire. And we

went in. What I can remember: I knew this one guy; he was from the Bronx—I used to know his name—he was a good friend of mine. And as we went in, they was dropping some mortars on us. And we never had that before. We didn't know, we didn't have experiment with that. So we just tried to—you couldn't dig yourself in, you just hit the ground, you know? And they could go anywhere so you just had to move in just to keep going. And I remember as I went by, he was laying there, and he had his arm blown away. But they had given us—everybody had a little shot of that morphine on them, you know, that we carried. And he told me as I went by, he said, "Marty, give me a hand!" "I'm here," I said. So I took out my little morphine that I had and I gave him a little shot of it. I told him, I says, "They'll come pick you. They'll come and meet you here." So I moved on, and I moved on.

Cohen: You had no choice!

Martinez: And no choice but to move on. But I tell him. I don't know if I ever told you this story. But after we moved in, there was a railroad right there that came out and we used to call that Sugar Cane Stop. As I went by, me and this BAR [Browning Automatic Rifle] man, his name was Habersky. We're walking side by side and we came across this little—it was kinda like a little dugout, real small little dugout. And there was kind of a canvas in front of it. And as we went by, I said, "Oh." And he lowered his BAR to shoot, you know. And I looked down and I see the canvas move a little bit. And I told him, I said, "Habersky, don't shoot." He said, "Well, there's something there." I said, "Well, it's alright." I said, "Just wait a minute, wait a minute." 'Cause we had bayonets on our guns as we land. And I got to one side and I took the bayonet and I moved the canvas little bit. And the little boys' little eyes, I could see them. And so I mentioned them to come out. And two little boys—they were about, I would say, maybe three or four, something like that—and a little old lady with them. Very little lady, I know she was dressed all in black. And she came out looking and then her boys—they were just, you know, big eyes just looking at her. And I mentioned to 'em to come out and they came out. And the poor little old lady, she was just bowing down, you know, bow down. I said, "No." And I motioned to her towards the beach, you know. But if I hadn't stopped him, he was gonna shoot them two little boys.

Cohen: Yeah, 'cause you didn't know if it was a Japanese soldier or if it was a civilian.

Martinez: Yeah. Yeah. I don't know. Something told me. I don't know what. It's just something said I... I saw the movement out of the canvas and that's when I heard him load up his gun, he was gonna shoot it. And I said, "Habersky, don't shoot." And he said, "Yeah!" I said, "No, wait!" And that's when I moved, I mean, with my gun and I could see the little eyes. And I don't know to this this day if they're still living or whatever happened. Never

did know any more, yeah. Yeah. But the poor little old lady. And I mentioned to go back, I hope that they did, you know, got hold of 'em. But that happened and then later, you know, too as the day ended, towards the end as we went on the island before we secured it, that's when we were going, and we saw this around the cove. There was kind of a cove there on that part of the island. There's no place to land boats in there. It was real rough water there coming against that cove on the north side of the island. And as we came around, we could see the Japanese on the other side of the cove. And see some people there. We didn't know what it was, just see people. So we weren't shooting, we just kind of looked over there. And this man had a kind of a white robe, you know? In over there, and then they started jumping into the ocean.

Cohen: Oh, they were, like, committing suicide.

Martinez: Suicide, yeah, they just went into the ocean, yeah. And we just sat there 'cause we couldn't get to them and they couldn't either 'cause they were on the cove, you know? It was a good three- or four-hundred yards across, yeah.

Cohen: Yeah, no, you couldn't. They couldn't cross.

Martinez: And they just jumped. They just jumped. And things like that I saw, you know, that was kind of terrible too. Yeah.

Cohen: Terrible things.

Martinez: Yeah.

Cohen: [speaking at the same time] I understand there was also a very large banzai charge on Saipan; were you... there at that particular time?

Martinez: Was I what?

Cohen: There was a banzai charge on Saipan as well as Tinian. Were you affected by the one on Saipan, too?

Martinez: Yeah, right, yeah. I didn't really understand it, dear.

Cohen: Oh. I was reading that there was a banzai on Saipan as well as Tinian.

Martinez: Bad sign?

Cohen: Banzai. B.

Martinez: Oh, no, oh banzai! Oh, I see what you're—no. No, I didn't see one there, not in Saipan. No, no. That one in Tinian was the only one I was there. Outside of that, I never

encountered another one. Never encountered another one. But just that one night, 'cause after that we never had any problems at all. Had no more problem at all on Tinian. Yeah, just that one night. Yeah. That was it.

Cohen: That was it.

Martinez: That was the end of that island, you know? Yeah.

Cohen: You know, I think you told me this before, but I don't remember the answer. I think you told me that... Which island did you have to do the flame throwing?

Martinez: That I have to what?

Cohen: Which island...?

Mestas: The flamethrower.

Martinez: Oh, yeah. That was on Iwo Jima.

Cohen: Oh, so a bit later.

Martinez: [speaking at the same time] Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, yeah that was on Iwo Jima, yeah, yeah, the flamethrower, yeah.

Cohen: Yeah.

Martinez: Yeah.

Cohen: And when you were on Saipan, were you involved in the fighting for the Aslito Airfield?

Martinez: Yeah...

Mestas: Saipan, were you involved in fighting at the airfield?

Martinez: Yeah, yeah. That's when we came up on the first day. They had a little airfield there and also a train... track there. But that field wasn't very big, that wasn't very big. But then, yeah, when we were down there, we got a lot of shelling 'cause they could shell us over there from where they were, you know. A lot of shelling with the mortars. Yeah. In fact, I didn't see any Japanese there on the first day. We just got that shelling from 'em, you know? I think it was about the second day when we finally—I was able to encounter some where we could... see them. You know? They could see us, and we could see them. Yeah. But... no, they never had any banzai after that, where they charged us all. I don't know.

Cohen: Okay. Could you see Mount Tapochau?

Martinez: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Cohen: And was their shelling coming from there, towards where you were?

Martinez: Yeah. Or no. What there was coming from the center was from where they were dug in... and the ravines, that's where there was shell from. But I think they had some [observers and maps] —what do you call them? They could overlook, you know, and it could kind of tell 'em, for their precision or what, they could tell the guns given more or less how they could shoot. They could land the shells right on the beach, you know. But they couldn't see 'em but they could see by the site in their guns, you know. And I think they had a lookout more than they had any—I don't think they had any guns that helped them that I know of up there.

Cohen: It was more of a lookout.

Martinez: Yeah, more a lookout. But they could tell them, you know, more or less give 'em the precision of where we were. Yeah, yeah.

Cohen: I see.

Martinez: Yeah.

Cohen: And how did you communicate with your troops as well as with your higher ups while in battle?

Martinez: [speaking at the same time Yeah. Actually, it was more or less worried about passing on, you know. Pass the word or yeah. Pass the word. We didn't have any—usually it was the officer who went back and they're the one that had the walkie talkies, you know? But... up in the front in the front we didn't have any, we just communicated word of mouth or... from one to the other, you know, passing the word. Pass the word, you know, to move out or do whatever, to dig in, you just pass the word more or less than anything there. But we didn't have no walkie talkies with us up there. And sometimes the... platoon sergeant, what it was, he probably was in contact with some of the officers at time. But one man to the other one, we just communicated word of mouth or signal, you know, yeah.

Cohen: Yeah, I see what you mean.

Martinez: And we would just sometimes just... we were so close to each other we could just more or less just pass the word; you know? Yeah.

Cohen: Yeah, from one to the other.

Martinez: Yeah, one to the other, right. Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah.

Cohen: So, I understand that after Tinian, you went back to Maui?

Martinez: Yes, we did. Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Cohen: So, what was going on? Like one thing that amazes me was that people still had to continue to fight. So, what was the morale like amongst you and the soldiers? Like did people feel fed up, like wanted to go back home? Did people feel like gung-ho, yeah, they're ready for whatever comes next? Like how did it work?...

Martinez: Oh. Yeah, I don't know. I guess that we just... we never... felt bad about, you know, coming home at all. I guess. Everybody felt that we just had to do what we had to do, you know, and get it done! I mean, it was great morale against everybody. I mean, I never saw anybody that wasn't you know? Oh, that day we had...one instance, maybe out of all of all that was, you know, different. But everybody that I was in contact with, I mean, they was always, you know, ready to go whenever. Oh, of course, you had... one thing that you gonna wanna go home, you know? But still, you know, you wouldn't have that desire to get away from it, you know. Not at all. [laughs] I mean, I never felt it that way, you know. Neither felt that way. Stay here until we get it done and that's it!

Cohen: Yeah, yeah, like the job isn't over yet. But yeah.

Martinez: Yeah, yeah, the job is not over, and you get it done. The quicker the better, you know? And that's it. [Cohen laughs]. Yeah.

Cohen: So what was the training like this time 'round after Tinian and Saipan?

Martinez: Yeah, it was pretty rough. I mean... it was tough, I never felt it myself, but it was tough going. They tried to really get us in condition. I mean, that was the most of anything: get your body conditioned to... do whatever needed to be done...I mean, it was training every day. And it never had a time where you just said, "Lay around" or whatever. It was always a go, go, and whatever it was, you know?

Cohen: Yeah, I know what you mean. You weren't just lying around. [laughs] You know, yeah.

Martinez: Oh, yeah. It was no relaxing at all. No relaxing at all. And I don't mean that we didn't have a day off or some time we did have some time we did have, like... it'd be maybe once a month and we'd go to the town or something like that, you know? And that way we could stay overnight or whatever. Back in Maui, there was no big deal there and place to go, you know? At that time, there was no big town there except Wailuku [Hawaii], that was a largest place, you know? And I got to know this family there in

Wailuku—he was a white man married to a native and I used to go down there to his house... and stay. Stay with them, you know, something just over night and that was it! You know. Got to know ‘em. Real nice family, yeah.

Cohen: How did you meet him?

Martinez: I met him through another man, through another boy. Yeah, he had knew him. He knew him. I got acquainted with him and he took me with him, you know, and that’s how come I got to know him, through this young man. Yeah. And... Young man, you know. And he knew him and as I come and met him... I used to know his name, but I forgot. I know he ran a lumber company there in Wailuku. And she was a Hawaiian, really jolly woman, you know. She always used to love to sing, you know? [Cohen laughs] Yeah, yeah, yeah. But what I used to do... I’d go down there... and stay with them, but then I’d go town and... When I was growing up and all of that, I didn’t know what waffles were, you know? For breakfast. And that’s where I became acquainted with waffles. [Cohen and Martinez laugh] I’d go down there to breakfast, and I had waffles at this place. [Cohen laughs] And then that’s the first time I had waffles. (Cohen and Martinez laugh) Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Cohen: Oh, it’s true, like as a young man you also get to see the world and get to...

Martinez: I know, you get to see... A lotta the things I learned, you know, going, I tell them now. I said, “Man, I always... not used to what was outside in the world, being out there and a country boy.” (laughs)

Cohen: Or, I think people, like, they know what they know. Like they knew the city where they grew up, but they didn’t know other environments and so on. You know? But I was gonna say something that I’d forgot about. Okay, we’re at Camp Maui. Oh, yeah. Oh, two questions. One question is: did you ever have leave to another part of Hawaii, or were you always in Camp Maui when you returned from the campaigns?

Martinez: We went one time—we went over to Honolulu. They flew us over there. And that’s the only time we went over there. And then... we was gonna supposed to be there, I think, two days, something like that. And they flew us over there. And then stay two days and then come back. But we got over there and they couldn’t find a plane to bring us back, so we had to stay another day. [Cohen laughs] And they put us on a boat to bring us back to Maui from Honolulu, you know, from the main island. Yeah. But that’s the only time we got outta the island there, when we were there in Maui, you know. We got to go over there. And other time was we went to a beach there in Maui, on the beach party. And [coughs] that’s when [coughs] I had become a platoon sergeant, so I was sitting there in the office and a soldier came in and he said, “You know? There’s some

women Marines coming in and we're having a party over there." Used to be a Japanese... what do you call it? A big nice place, you know.

Cohen: Like a club?

Martinez: Right. Yeah, yeah, kinda a club. It's right at the beach, real nice place, very nice home there. And he said, "We're gonna have a beach party over there." He said, "I want you to send two men from every squad." Or something like that. So I said, "Pick out some men so they can go and—going there for a beach party." So I put myself down [Cohen and Martinez laugh] one of 'em, and then my buddy and then we got some others. So, we went down there and that's the first time I had come across a women Marines. See, we didn't never had met 'em before.

Cohen: Oh, that's true!

Martinez: Yeah. Yeah, never had meet 'em before! So we got there and we had a good party. 'Course...you know. We got to drink, and you know. But I never was a drinker, I think I drank couple of beers. But we had a good time. And we went swimming, you know, and all that. We got to meet 'em, you know. But we had a good time up there. That was one of the only time, we get to go out somewhere, you know. That and the time we went to Honolulu. And at the time we went to Honolulu—and I've got pictures—we were staying at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. And we're sitting up in front. Paid two dollars to stay there overnight at the Royal Hawaiian. That's all. And... since I wasn't too much know about what's going on in the world. And these guys were staying at the hotel and had a swimming pool in the back beside the beach. And this guy: "Hey!" he says, "Johnny Weissmuller is up there... in the swimming pool!" "Johnny Weissmuller?" I said, "Who's Johnny Weissmuller?" He said, "Well, that's the..." You know, the one who was there in the forest, we used to call it? Raised in the forest... It was... Not Superman, no, gosh. You know, he was.... Oh, god. Let me ask my nephew. Hey Louis? [pause] I guess he went out. No, he was there in the... oh gosh. But anyways, an actor is what he was.

Cohen: [speaking at the same time] Yeah, yeah, some famous actor. Yeah.

Martinez: Yeah, Johnny Weissmuller. Anyway, so I say—ask him rather, "Who's Johnny Weissmuller?" Well he—oh, Tarzan, Tarzan.

Cohen: Oh, okay.

Martinez: Yeah, Tarzan. That's who he was in the movie. Yeah, he said, "Johnny Weissmuller is Tarzan." I said, "Tarzan? Yeah, I've heard of Tarzan." And so, I went up there and I didn't know who he was. The other guys knew, from New York, they knew all about that

(laughs) you know? (Cohen laughs) Like I said, I was from New Mexico; all my friends and all they were from east, you know. They knew. And I still have a friend who I talk to, lives in New Jersey, yeah.

Cohen: Oh, that you still speak to, yeah.

Martinez: Yeah, we talk to each other every now and then, yeah. We still do. And then there's another one still living, an Italian boy, Tommy Lanacio, lives next to Boston, Massachusetts. Yeah. And we keep in touch. We keep in touch, yeah. But anyway, that was a good trip at the time to Honolulu. Yeah.

Cohen: Yeah, it sounds like a nice change. Yeah, yeah. So when you were at Maui, were you aware of the preparations for the upcoming invasion?

Martinez: Yeah?

Cohen: Like were you aware that there was going to be another invasion or—and I think they said they called it, “Island X.” Do you remember—

Martinez: [speaking at the same time] Oh.

Cohen: —whether people were talking—

Martinez: [speaking at the same time] Yeah.

Cohen: —about “Island X” and wondering which island it was?

Martinez: No, I sure don't. The only one I knew, that after we came back from Iwo Jima, I know they were talking about—now they had the plans to go to Japan! And they had plans for that, you know?

Cohen: Oh, I mean, so you knew that at the time, that they were planning the invasion on Japan.

Martinez: Yeah. In fact, this friend of mine, Bill Hudson that wrote that book, he sent me the whole plans of the invasion and I have it somewhere. They said in there where we was gonna land and pretty much all the battles, you know. Yeah.

Cohen: Well, I guess I was wondering if at the time—like when you were a Marine in Camp Maui—like what did your officers tell you? Did they tell you you're gonna be invading another island? Did they tell you which island?

Martinez: No. They never would tell you what island. They would train you, they knew pretty much about the island, I guess, and they would train accordingly to what was gonna

land. But we never did know for sure 'til we got aboard ship, you know? Once we got aboard ship, they start training again; then they would tell us where going. Then they would tell us where we were headed for. But more or less, we knew, you know. Words kinda gets around, you know, and we more or less kinda knew more or less where it was gonna be. But they never would come up. But the way they trained 'em, we kinda knew more or less what kinda landing it was gonna be. But... usually not...'til we got ready to... already aboard ship and all that, then they would say, you know, where we were going. But...

Cohen: So what kind of training were you doing for the landing that was going to take place at Iwo Jima?

Martinez: Yeah. They already talking about how the beaches were. They said the beaches are different there, that we were landing they said there was nothing but ash. Kinda like ash, they said. And then just... and then it's real, real... well, you couldn't sit down in the sand, you know? 'Cause there's not like the hard beaches like we'd been before. And there was gonna be a lot of dugged in, the Japanese would be dugged in 'cause they've been digging in, you know. All this time. And so, the invasion is gonna be different. And we thought it was gonna be a just a push-over 'cause they had been shelling it, you know, for so long. And then, before we landed that day... In fact, the night before, we could see them shelling that with their ships, were shelling them, you know? From the ships with their big guns. And we could shells going over and hitting the island, you know, and it shook everything. And I thought, "Well, there'll be nothing left." You know? Yeah, there were nothing that much going on, you know? We's gonna be just a push-over. In fact, we were supposed to take that and then be in reserve for Okinawa, you know, for the 3rd Marines in Okinawa. We was gonna be reserve for them, you know. But when we landed, I mean, never did suspect... when we landed down, it was kinda quiet, you know? But the minute we touched ground and got to run, that's when it started—the shells just coming down.

Cohen: Oh, so they tried to—

Martinez: [speaking at the same time] Yeah, yeah.

Cohen: —surprise you.

Martinez: Yeah, yeah, yeah. They just wait 'til they landed. And that's when they started landing, and then... every time you kinda moved up from one bank to... farther up, where they were kinda like in banks, shells. Even from one to the other they just had their machine guns just laying there on the mortar. Had them mortars where they could set right into the beach, you know. Yeah. And what saved me—that I figure—when the shells coming

around me, when I knew they had to get outta there, and I tried to get the men to follow me 'cause we were on the extreme right! And I started giving 'em a call 'em and I said, "Let's move out! With me!" I said, "We gotta move outta here." But no, they just heard [Martinez made whooshing noise of shells], you know, and stayed down.

Cohen: So, they stayed on the ground.

Martinez: Stayed down on the ground and covered up!

Cohen: [speaking at the same time] But you felt that everybody should move to the extreme right.

Martinez: Yeah, yeah. I said, "Let's move out, let's move out to the right. Get outta this area" 'Cause that's where they were pounding, you know? But it saved me 'cause I took off to the right and you know, and they wouldn't come with me! And then that's what happened to the officers, you know, they were trying to get to more and they lost 'em all there, right off the bat. [i.e. They lost all the officers.]

Cohen: Oh my.

Martinez: Yeah. 'Cause they didn't move and the men, they were just kinda... 'Cause you couldn't go straight up, you know? 'Cause every time you did, then they had their mortars right on you, you know. It was bad. I mean, just shells going up and arms and legs going up in the air, you know? Yeah, it was terrible. Where I was, see I looked back and I saw this tank come where we were gonna land, and three tanks appear and the first one came and it got outta the LSM [Landing Ship Medium] and the tank, and it tried coming and just to hit land there. The track wouldn't make track! It just sat there spinning, you know, 'cause all that soft sand and then it got hit. A shell hit it. Then the other came out, went the same way, couldn't move, got hit, the third one came outta there, couldn't move, got hit. All three of 'em got hit right there.

Cohen: So the ash was really terrible. Like on one hand it didn't—

Martinez: Oh yeah!

Cohen: —have the coral reefs. Like it didn't seem to have reefs. But it just... there was no traction.

Martinez: No, no traction at all. There was no traction at all. You just tried to move, and it was just kinda like an ash, you know? And then tanks, they just sat there and just going round and round, no tracks at all and got hit right there, yeah. That was pretty bad, right off

the bat...And then they were just dug in after that. [After landing all three tanks were hit.]

Cohen: So what did you do after you went to the right, away from the bombardment?

Martinez: Yeah, yeah.

Cohen: Did you dig yourself in?

Martinez: No. I got to the sand and I think I told you that—I don't know if I told you or not.

Cohen: Maybe you did, I'm sorry.

Martinez: I told you...That I saw these guys set... the Japanese, I saw them setting up the machine gun.

Cohen: Yes!

Martinez: Okay! And I was ready to stop and was gonna shoot them and the thing wouldn't shoot, it was full of sand. [Cohen laughs] My M1 [carbine] was plum through full of sand, couldn't shoot. So I laid back 'cause you could just dig with your feet, you know, make a little hole. And I got down in there and saved my back and got on my back and took off my t-shirt that I had. I just ripped it off with my knife, took it off, and started washing... not wash, cleaning it 'cause I had to pull it apart to clean it. I pulled it apart. And then when I was there and then I looked to the beach there and that's when I saw them tanks and I was tried to get that rifle operating again. But I got it going and I went shooting but they had already gone. The Japanese were already gone, had gone back. So if I'd had my gun or any kind of a gun, I could've shot 'em and just stopped probably lot of... soldiers from getting killed. But it just it got so full of that sand from jumping from one hole to another. Yeah.

Cohen: So, this is what you were saying earlier that being a scout saved you, that you were alone going into a new territory and is that what you meant? And that because... that your gun couldn't shoot since it was full of sand, you dug yourself in and started to clean your gun, but in the meantime, the Japanese soldiers who were there left.

Martinez: Yeah, yeah. Yeah yeah yeah.

Cohen: [speaking at the same time] Is that correct? Like did I understand you right?

Martinez: Yeah that's right. They pulled back; you know. They shot and then they pulled back. But I could've shot 'em, they were right there. So... I knew I couldn't run over there without nothing, without a gun or whatever, you know. But I tried to clean it as quick as I could.

'Cause we learned all of that, to do that too 'cause we used to go through that. Try to take one apart and try to put it up together in a certain amount of time. Well you know, take it apart and put it back together as fast we can. And we used to practice that a lot... But yeah. You know, that's one of the things that happened I always think about... But like I said, I tell them, I said, "I can remember things that happened that first day and the last day, but in between, you know, it's kinda like a dream. I didn't know just what happened from one day to the next." Everything happened every day, but I cannot remember too much of it. I remember parts of it, you know.

Cohen: Well, it sounds like you remember some things very vividly.

Martinez: Pardon?

Cohen: I think you remember parts of it very well.

Martinez: Yeah. There's this last day there that I can think something about is... 'cause we had tried to go through that one last—they call it "The Meat Grinder"—through down there. But every time we come down; we couldn't see 'em! And they could just shoot us up! You know, couldn't see 'em. But what I think about it to his day days, that morning then I was supposed to make a last push. They brought some... men, you know, that'd been there to help us. And one young boy, he had just gotten there. He just came in... on a ship, you know. As the reserves come in.

Mestas: Reserve.

Martinez: Yeah, come in. And I would send him in and set up, you know, to... a different place there. I put him in and said, "You stay right here and just keep an eye on that down there." I said, "When something moves, just let me know or go ahead and shoot it, you know, it don't matter. Because we can't see 'em unless they move around." So, I went back, put 'em out there and I went back, and I was doing something else with the other men, I can't remember what at all. But then when I came back again, and he had been shot right there. He'd been shot where we were. I think to this day, he had been there but a few hours on the island and then he got shot. And I always think about that, again. Yeah, no, you feel kind of, in a way responsible, you know, but what are you gonna do? I mean, you gotta... I remember this machine gunner who tell me—I got acquainted with that machine gunner and then... Because one of his men was there and he had run across there and he got shot right there in the face as he was running, you know, just took off. And then that machine—you know what, he's calling, "Marty!" He said, "Hey, what's with you? You walk around with these guys in the open and yet my man was running, and he got hit." And I said, "You're moving around ahead, and you haven't been hit!" And I said, "Well, it's been close, but they haven't hit me." [laughs]

Cohen: Well, I mean... do you think that you were very skilled, that you were very observant, you know what I mean? Like do you think there's something about you or your training or that you were able to, like, be very aware of things maybe more than the average soldier?

Martinez: Yeah. I think that's one thing it was; you know. I think there was one thing they... 'Cause they used to tell me, I say, "I think you could smell them." [laughs] I said, "Well, I know more from hunting." We used to do a lot of hunting, you know, growing up. I said, "I guess from then, I can detect things that are different in some things, you know. Besides, I look at something and I can tell if it's something that's not natural." Because that one there—that Japanese... And I know he was the one that shot that young boy, because when we had to find him dead, I looked across and then I could see something was not right. And I went back and told this one bazooka man, I says, "Load me up that bazooka." So he loaded it for me and I came back well and I shot over there. And I figured there had been something there. I didn't go over there to look 'cause I had the other man to take down with me. So I told him, I said, "Well, follow me. Let's go on down!" So we went down and as I went by, that's when I saw this Japanese. He had been, and that's where he had that samurai sword there, the samurai sword that I got. But I knew there was something there. So like you say, just from being around it so much, you just kinda get a second sense, you know, of things. I know it saved me a lot of times. Because I saw a lot of times when... my decision just saved me, you know, on a lotta occasions. Yeah. But it goes with how... experience that you get with it too, you know, it saves you sometimes, yeah.

Cohen: Yeah... Yeah like you said, you had developed a second sense when something was not—

Martinez: Yeah. You do.

Cohen: [speaking at the same time] —normal, or I don't know if I understood all the details, but I think you're saying that in the case of the young boy who was shot, you had some sense that there was a Japanese—

Martinez: Yeah.

Cohen: —soldier around there and you went back it confirmed it.

Martinez: Yeah, yeah. I looked and I kinda figured that that was not natural, what I was looking across there, you know. Something out there that was not quite what it was supposed to be. But he had a little place where he was hiding, behind this—you know, in this little... it was not a cave, but he had some stuff in front of him that looked kinda natural,

you know? Yeah, yeah. But... yeah, that's... well... I don't know; anything else, Leah?
Leah, Leah?

Cohen: [speaking at the same time] Oh, that's okay. Yeah. Yeah, no, I'm trying to think if there's anything else... Well, out of curiosity, did you happen to see the flag raising of the Marines on top of Mount Suribachi?

Martinez: No. I never did went to the top myself. No.

Mestas: Did you see it up going up?

Martinez: Huh?

Mestas: Did you see it going up?

Martinez: Oh, yeah! No. I didn't see it when it going up. No, I didn't see it when they were raising it. I saw it right after they did, because right away... the ships started blowing their horns and shooting, you know. And so, we looked up and somebody said, "Hey, look at the flag!" And it was up. It was up. But I didn't help, they raised it up. But they raised it up and then we need to keep looking, you know. But they said they had raised one and then the other one, you know. I mean, we didn't keep just looking at it, I know we saw it up and it was there, you know. And everyone was just celebrating, you know, they were shooting up in the air [Cohen laughs] and the ships ashore were blowing their horns. And everybody was shooting up, just like that. But we didn't just keep watching it. But they said they raised one and then the other one, you know, yeah. I didn't see it going up, but it was already up when I saw it.

Cohen: You saw it, that's neat. Yeah. And out of curiosity, we at the Pritzker have a Medal of Honor that's on display of that of another Marine, not of the 4th Division but the 3rd Division, Woody Hershel Williams. I just wondered—

Martinez: [speaking at the same time] Yeah.

Cohen: —if you knew him? That's...

Martinez: No, I sure don't. No.

Cohen: Okay. Like it's hard to know everybody. Yeah.

Martinez: Yeah.

Cohen: So, are you okay? Like do you want to talk more like about the post-war? Are you tired? How are you doing?

Martinez: I'm doing okay. Yeah, yeah. I'm doing fine. Yeah. No, I'm doing fine.

Cohen: You're doing fine, okay. So maybe just to see... you mentioned on the form that you won some medals: the Bronze Star at Saipan, the Silver Stars at Iwo Jima, and two Presidential Unit citations. Do you want to talk about like why you were awarded these special medals and awards?

Martinez: Well, I really didn't... know too much about... the whole thing, particularly, you know? 'Cause sometimes... whoever is writing, there's very little bit of what they were actually was, you know? But... on the Saipan, I don't know too much about it. They wrote it up and I remember part of it, you know, and all that. But the one in Iwo... that I do know because... the way they wrote it up is a little bit different then what it actually is, you know. [Cohen laughs]. That one I know for sure because I know that one. That one, it was... as we were walking—not walking but crawling—they're fighting, the boy next to me got shot right between the eyes, and so I knew it was real close. And so, I... squeezed myself back and I went around, and I looked up—kind of a flat stone or rock or something like that was there. And then I looked up, the Japanese on the other side looked up too and we just kinda face-to-face, and then he shot his gun, but he wasn't [sighted he just shot]—you just gotta try it, you just shot, you know? And I didn't. I just... I didn't shoot, but I saw that he had gone down. So I got myself up and I could see him walking. And he went down and he squirmed down away into the cave, and that's when I went back and told, one of my men that carried the BAR. I said, "Let me have your BAR." So I got his BAR and I ...because I could see where he had gone in. And then I went in and I discovered him right there 'cause I couldn't see him but I felt, "Well he went in!" And that's when I went in there. And I didn't know how many were there, but I could see him, you know. So the minute I walked in, I just shot. And... I walked out, I didn't stay to count. I just shot and... 'cause I had twenty rounds. Shot all twenty rounds and walked out and went back. And then we moved on; I never did go back in there to see or whatever, you know. But that's a little bit different then the habit, you know...I still had my men around me and trying to get 'em... to go on down, you know, and get to the beach. Yeah. But that... in Saipan, I know more... at the time. There's so many other things that happened in Saipan that I don't know exactly... you know, for sure just how it was. It was different... like, it was little bit different, that fighting there, as to the way it was in Iwo Jima. Yeah, yeah.

Cohen: How is it different fighting in Saipan than Iwo Jima?

Martinez: Well I mean, it was more open in Saipan. I mean, they were up in the open more than in Iwo Jima.

Cohen: That's right.

Martinez: In Iwo Jima you couldn't see 'em. They were hidden down in caves or something. In Saipan, they were more or less, kinda like in the open as we were, you know. They were kinda exposed more, too, you know. So and that was the difference. And... in other words, you knew more about where it was coming from, you know? And then you could either call... for mortars, you know, to come in, or shells. A lot of that times when we getting fired from then— 'cause we had the mortars with us too, behind us—you would send word to them, you know, to shell something up in front of us. And they would do that, you know, to try to... get somebody that's up on the front. Yeah. You had to kinda work together with the machine gunners or the mortars that were behind us, yeah.

Cohen: Oh boy.

Martinez: But in that way, it was a little bit different. It was kinda more like an open fight up there in Saipan compared to where they were hidden in caves and that in Iwo. You know, yeah. Yeah. Now they would comin' up at night, too, and in Saipan... they moved some at night, but not like they did in Iwo. Lotta them would come out, I guess they would... they'd get to come out for something. And they would; at times we'd find someone would come out at night and we'd catch 'em at night with the flares 'cause they had the flares going up all the time. Even the ships had flares going up, on the island, or some of 'em wore flares, yeah. That would be on shore. They would be light all the time, you know?

Cohen: Were you also doing flame-throwing once you were on Iwo?

Martinez: Did I what?

Cohen: Were you doing flame-throwing? Like the flame-throwing for—

Mestas: Did you do any flame-throwing?

Martinez: No.

Cohen: In Iwo?

Martinez: No, no. I didn't. They had some, but I didn't order any of 'em, you know, myself. No.

Cohen: No, yeah.

Martinez: No, no. I know later... when we moved down and we finally landed to the beach... then a tank, a flamethrower tank, went by... and the guy came over and he said, he asked, "Who's Marty?" And then somebody pointed to me 'cause we were sitting there, me

and my men sitting there in the beach just waiting, you know, to get called to go to the ship. And then he said... and they pointed to me: "There's Marty." The guy said, "They said that Marty would tell us, go up there and tell us where those caves are that we're gonna use these flamethrowers on tanks." And they said, "That's Marty." And I said, "My last order, I said was when I got my men down here, I was going to the ship." I said, "That was my last order." And they didn't say nothing. I just didn't move us. I sat there. So... the tank went up and they went up that... place where we come down, the little canyon or ravine... He went up and he was using that flamethrower on them caves, you know, with the tank. But I don't know if there was anything, enemies at the time or what, you know. I didn't go up. Like I said, I told 'em, I said, "My last order was... when I brought my men down here that was, we're going aboard ship."

Cohen: Yeah, you had to stay right at that level. Yeah.

Martinez: Yeah, yeah. I just said, "That's my last order." [Cohen and Martinez laugh]

Cohen: So, when did you find out about the end of the war and—

Martinez: Yeah.

Cohen: [speaking at the same time]—V-J [Victory over Japan] Day?

Martinez: Yeah, it was... that night, we were set down there. I remember... it was on the fourteenth of August 'cause the next day was... they call that day Assumption—yeah, the Virgin Mary, Assumption.

Cohen: Oh, okay.

Martinez: [speaking at the same time] The fifteenth of August, fifteenth of August. Anyway, and we were there and all of a sudden, the guys come down and they're hollering, saying, "War's over! War is over." You know? And everybody, we went outside. And we're not supposed to keep any ammo, live ammo, you know, when we're not training. We're not supposed to have any in the camp or in with you or at all. But guys were coming up, shooting guns up in the air. [Cohen and Martinez laugh] Everybody had ammo and they were shooting up in the air and hollering and running up and down the street, you know. Yeah. Some of them were buck naked, you know. [Cohen laughs] Walking down the—'cause they'd been asleep, you know? And they woke up, and going out with just their drawers on, running up and down the street shooting. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Cohen: Mr. Martinez, where were you guys at this point?

Martinez: What was that?

Cohen: Where were you, like at the point when the guy came in and said the war's over? Were you back at camp? Were you still in Iwo Jima? [feedback]

Martinez: [speaking at the same time] Yeah, yeah, no. No, we were in camp. We were there in Maui. We were sleeping, you know. Yeah, yeah, we were sleeping and then when they woke us up hollering that the war was over. Yeah, yeah. [Cohen laughs] Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Cohen: And when did you return to mainland—

Martinez: I did.

Cohen: —United States after being in Maui?

Martinez: Finally, then?

Cohen: When did you return to the mainland of the United States? Like, when did you leave Maui, Hawaii, to go back to... the rest of the United States?

Martinez: Yeah, I left... I cannot remember the date, but we left from Maui is when we left from. Yeah. 'Cause I remember that the ship was docked right there, docked in place and we loaded it up. And... a lotta the people—some of the natives came up there, you know, and just to wave us goodbye as we pulled outta the ship. And we came back on one of them converted carriers that they had. You know? Yeah. It was a carrier—they called it a converted carrier, it was not as big as the big ones, you know. But that's what we came back to the States on, yeah. And it was very nice 'cause we could relax up on the deck, you know, play ball and all that, coming back.

Cohen: Yeah, what a difference! Yeah.

Martinez: Oh yeah! [laughs]. Coming back, yeah. [Cohen laughs.] And... we all we thought we would... we were supposed to land in San Francisco. And then we said, "Well, that's great!" 'Cause we hadn't been to San Francisco, we'd been down to San Diego and Los Angeles. We said, "Yeah! We're gonna land in San Francisco." And about two days out they said, "No, we're going back to San Diego." [Cohen and Martinez laugh] And we landed in San Diego, yeah. (laughs) And we landed in San Diego and then I went to the main camp... I stayed in main camp 'til we got separated and I stayed at the main camp, yeah.

Cohen: Did you have to stay a long time in main camp or—

Martinez: [speaking at the same time] No, no.

Cohen: —did they tell you it's time to go home or...?

Martinez: No. We didn't stay there not even a week. Not even a week. Yeah. We got separated right there, not even a week, yeah. And... when we landed, we couldn't... we're not supposed to go anywhere at all, you know, and just stay, wait there, you know. And at the camp, not supposed to go anywhere at all, you know. So we stayed there and... there was a young man, his name was Linsembol and he had gone through to SES [Senior Executive Service] from... when we... when we was in Maui, and so he had become a second lieutenant. And then he got wounded, so he came back... to Pendleton. He was all there in Pendleton when we got back. And he was kinda in charge of... kind of like the USO [United Service Organization] thing or something like that, you know. And he was there. So when we landed, he went all the way over there. And he had been my squad leader when we left the States. And so he came over there and looked for Marty and so he came over to talk to me and... 'Course everybody was trying to make phone calls home, you know? And he came over there and he said, "Marty." He said, "What do you want to do? You wanna call home?" I said, "Yeah! I'd like to call home." "C'mon!" So we got in a car—he had a car, so we got in a car—and went over there where the phones were. They had a little small place where they had the phones. I think they were about two operators or three there with phones, you know. And the guys were lined up, you know, to [Cohen laughs] make calls. So, we pulled up there, you know, and he's: "C'mon! Follow me," he says. We came in through that and he told one of them girls, yeah, he said, "Clear that phone when you're done. Marty's gonna use that." [Cohen and Martinez laugh] So I went to the head of the line with him, you know, and to call home. Yeah, yeah yeah.

Cohen: So... what was it like going back home from Camp Pendleton?

Martinez: Yeah. That was great, you know, going back home again, you know... It was something else. 'Course I knew I was gonna get married [laughs], you know, anyway. But... and... looking forward to that after I got home. But... and 'course out there, you know, my folks still were out there in the country in the same place, and all the... neighbors and—of course a lot of them were relatives— they came by. Oh, I tell you what, we just had a big celebration, getting together with them again, you know. It was great, yeah. It was really great. But... it was something else, you know? And... 'course my mother always... she was always very religious, you know. And she told the family. She said, "We gotta thank our Lord for bringing you back." So she was a... great devout, you know, of Saint Anthony and all that. My mother, she always used to have a feast day for Saint Anthony Day, which is the thirteenth of April. And...

Mestas: [in the background] It's June!

Martinez: No, no, I meant June! June. Yeah. And so, it was... even when I was growing up, she always had that feast day. She would have a feast and all the neighbors would be invited, you know, and we'd get together, you know. And so... And then she... My daddy was too, but you know, but my mother was more. And... I always had that faith, you know, from her and I instilled it into my children. And... all my kinfolks were like that, you know. My...

Cohen: Had you returned on the thirteenth of June on Saint Anthony... Day?

Martinez: [softly] Yeah.

Cohen: Like is that the day you returned home? Was Anthony Day?

Martinez: No, no. No, I returned home in... September. Yeah, I came home in September. No, that Anthony Day, that's when my mother was celebrating, you know? But no, no I came back on... April the twenty-ninth. I mean, October 29th.

Cohen: Okay, okay.

Martinez: [speaking at the same time] Yeah.

Cohen: And like did you meet your wife before you left for to Marines?

Martinez: Yes, I had met her, yeah, way before that, you know? ...About a year or two before I went into the service, yeah. We had met—she was from another community not too far from where we lived. And I never did know her people and she didn't know mine, but we had gotten together because... she came down there with her sister that was a teacher. And so that's how come we got to know each other. So I went into the service, we already knew each other, you know? When I was in the service, yeah. And so, when I come back, we had known each other for quite a—oh, a good two years I'd say by the time I came back. Yeah.

Cohen: Were you able to get any letters from her? When you were—?

Martinez: Did I what?

Cohen: Were you able to receive any letters from her?

Martinez: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. We used to get letters pretty often. By the time we didn't while we were sent into combat, you know, there was... we would get nothing there, you know? But... yeah, we would get pretty much or every two weeks or something like that we'd get a letter, you know? From somebody or we'd write something, you know. We tried to write as much as we could too, you know. And no, we used to communicate with letters

then. There was no calling home or nothing like that then, you know? [Cohen and Martinez laugh] But yeah. But we communicated a lot with letters, sure did, yeah. And the mail was always pretty good. Very good. We looked forward to that a lot. [Cohen and Martinez laugh]

Cohen: I can imagine...

Martinez: [To nephew] If you need to go somewhere, go ahead.

Cohen: So... you mentioned that you kept in touch with three other military buddies.

Martinez: Yeah.

Cohen: Were these other Marines, I think?

Martinez: Yeah... there was—there was... all three of us were from Clayton. We didn't know each other before because they were from town and I was from the country. But we became pretty close, especially with one of them because one of them got separated when we went into boot camp and the Indian boy I never saw again after boot camp. But me and George, we were together a lot. Like I said, we were together all the way up to Iwo Jima when he left a second time and got wounded a second time. He went back home, and we didn't see each other until I got back home, yeah. But... we were pretty close all that time because we were out there and even in the same tent.

Cohen: [Laughter] Then you really had to get along.

Martinez: Yeah. Being from the same hometown and being together, yeah. We were lucky that way, always together. In fact, he would, when he would know news from home then I would get news from home. Yeah. He was pretty good, yeah.

Cohen: Yeah. Are you involved in any veteran organizations?

Martinez: Well, when I came back, I became a member of the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars], and then I belong to the Marine Corps League, the Marine Corps League here in Roswell, [New Mexico]. We have a Marine Corps League here. Those are the only ones I belong to. I never did participate too much with the VFW because my wife was never too much of a... going out. She was kind of real quiet type, you know. She was that way. She got along with everybody but not into partying or going out much. I was just different, I used to like to dance a lot, and she never stopped me from dancing. If I wanted to go out and dance, she never said, "You don't". And that's why I would go to the meetings but not participate, not in the functions much for that reason.

Cohen: Yeah, I could see that, yeah.

Martinez: But that's the only ones I belong to, yeah.

Cohen: What's your definition of a citizen soldier?

Martinez: Well... let's see... I don't know how to explain this. I know there's an obligation that we have. I mean, we have... like out there is the citizens yeah, you were free, but still [phone starts ringing] I mean, we gotta work for it. I mean, it doesn't come just by, "Yeah I am, I am this, I am that." I mean, you gotta put some kind of effort or something work for that, you know. And that's what I always entailed on my children; you know. I said, "You don't get things just handed to you just because you're here." I said, "You gotta earn it, you know. Be sure that you do something, you know, to better it. Better it in any way you can. And as a citizen, we have an obligation to keep it that way." And uniforms, see both of my sons, one of them was in the Navy and then... [Mestas speaking in background] Yeah, yeah. And then another one, I said... my other son was in the Army. And I said, "Even though you're in a different outfit, we're still fighting for the same thing!"

Cohen: Yeah, the goal is the same thing. That's true.

Martinez: Oh, absolutely. But I always figured on that, I mean. And another thing I learned... you better not forget where you come from, you know. I said, "All of us together, be proud of where you come from and..." What is it? "Respect it, you know, and be able to say well... I have some devotion but be respectful about it." You know, yeah.

Cohen: Did you have any daughters as well as sons?

Martinez: Yeah, I did have a daughter. I had a daughter and two sons. My daughter was the older one and... she passed away when she was only twenty-two years old. And she was a nurse and... passed away when she's twenty-two, and... then I had a son, the one that was in the Navy, and then... he became a nurse, too. And then when he was fifty-seven, he passed away too with the cancer. So I just have the one boy left. now. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I have a grandson and a grand-daughter, and I have two little great-grand-little-daughters now. Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Cohen: [speaking at the same time] Oh, wow. Wow, wow. That's wonderful.

Martinez: [speaking at the same time] Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Real nice, they're very nice, yeah. Very nice family, yeah.

Cohen: Sounds very nice. How do you think that the service... helped you... for your civilian life? Or did it help prepare you for your civilian life?

Martinez: Well, I think I was... pretty much... when I came back—‘course now they call it post-traumatic syndrome [post-traumatic stress disorder] or something like that, you know—when I came back, there was that but nobody knew about it, you know?

Cohen: No.

Martinez: And I had to work at it, you know? There was something there, I knew, but I just thought, “Well, I’m gonna just work it myself and go to work and forget all about it.” And that’s what I’ve done. I just cured myself. I got myself involved into the plumbing business. And the men that I had, you know, that had the company I have now, he told me, he said, “Just forget about it!” And I said, “You’ve got all this work.” So I done big work, we done big, big, big jobs: schools, hospitals, and stuff like that. So I just got involved with that and I prepared myself for civilian life that way! You know? If I’d have just kind of just given up, I probably would be in pretty bad shape, but I didn’t give up. I told him, “Well, I’ve got a responsibility, you know, now with my family and I’m gonna get myself away from that and set my mind and then just... put my work over, you know? And raising the family above everything else, you know?” Yeah.

Cohen: So you found by dedicating yourself to work and to your family—

Martinez: Yes, absolutely.

Cohen: —you... in time got over the PTSD?

Martinez: Absolutely, absolutely I did.

Cohen: [speaking at the same time] Wow. Wow, wow.

Martinez: I think I put my wife through some... when I got married, I know I did. I mean not intentionally, you know, but I knew there was something there.

Cohen: Yeah, whatever it was, yeah.

Martinez: [speaking at the same time] And my mom and my dad they knew! And in fact, I went to the Amarillo VA [U.S. Department of Veteran’s Affairs] hospital in Amarillo from Clayton, and... no, they didn’t know what it was, you know? Then I went to the one in Albuquerque, [New Mexico], and I stayed three days. And no, they didn’t know what’s going on, so I went home. And I said, “There’s something wrong somewhere, but I’m gonna forget about it and I’m gonna take care of my family and I’m gonna go to work and yeah, yeah, put all that behind.” It took me some time. Took me some time. But I did! I did all, yeah. I just worked it, all by myself. And my wife helped me a lot, though. She was a... great woman. And yeah, we were married... sixty-two years together.

Cohen: [speaking at the same time] Oh my goodness, that's...

Martinez: And... she helped me a lot and no, I got over it myself, you know, like that to being... being able to function, you know, yeah.

Cohen: She sounds like a very loving wife.

Martinez: Yeah, yeah, I've had a good life. I've had a good life, I enjoyed what I wanted to do. [clears throat] I used to do a lotta hunting, lotta fishing, and all that. And I was able to do it, you know, besides my work. Yeah, yeah.

Cohen: Wow. Is there anything that you want younger generations to learn from your experiences?

Martinez: Well, I wish that there's—first of all, that you gotta have that faith, you know? Believe in something. I don't... you believe but believe faithfully about something, something. And... 'cause like I believe, you know, there's only one... that watches over all and that's God Almighty. And I said, "And I'm faithful to what I am." And try to be the best you can—that's all you can do! I mean, don't try to... be over everybody but just do the best you can do! And if you fall, do your fall, turn it, and try to race it again, you know? I mean, we all have our faults, you know, and we try to live with 'em or do whatever, you know. And we're not perfect, that's for sure. But... we're doing the best we can and that's what I try to instill in my children. Always told them that. I said, "And be respectful to everybody. Don't ever feel like, you know, that you're better off than they are or that you're a better man or whatever, woman or whatever." I said, "You just... be yourself and... that way...you know, you'll be to be happy in life. That's the main thing. To live a happy life." You know?

Cohen: Well, these are words to live by! So is there anything you'd like to talk about that we did not talk about?

Martinez: Well, I believe I said everything we got, we got everything pretty well covered. Yeah, that was pretty well covered, everything.

Cohen: [laughs] We covered a lot, too. And is there anything your nephew would like to add or are we...?

Martinez: Well, I think he had to leave. His wife, she gets off now, I guess she called him so he had to leave.

Cohen: [laughs] Okay.

Martinez: No, he's real good, he helps me a lot, too, yeah. My son does too but he works at the university... and... he does maintenance over at the university, here—Eastern New Mexico University here in Roswell. And he told me, he said, "I just can't get away." I said he's got something there, he couldn't get away, yeah. But... no, that's pretty much been everything covered... Lee, everything. Leah, I said Lee but it's Leah. [laughs]

Cohen: Oh, that's okay, that's okay. But to really, on behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum & Library, I thank you for your time and for your interview and also really for your extraordinary, courageous service to the United States and for democracy, defending democracy.

Martinez: Yeah, yeah.

Cohen: Yeah.

Martinez: Absolutely.

[ENDS 2:27:53]