RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH LOUIS TREZZA

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Mr. Louis Trezza on February 29, 2004, in Brick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and …

Faye Bronzo: Faye Bronzo …

SI: And sitting in also is …

Jennifer Christensen: Jennifer Christensen.

SI: Mr. Trezza, thank you very much for having us here in your home today.

Louis Trezza: Not a problem.

SI: To begin with, could you tell us a little bit about your parents, beginning with your father? Was he from Dijon, France, originally?

LT: Yes.

SI: Do you know what his life was like before he came to America and why he decided to come?

LT: I have no idea. They came to America when they were very young. My mother was four, my father was six years old when he came to America and my father happened to be a mechanical and electrical genius, although he never had any education. He didn't go past the sixth grade and, most of the time, he worked as a projectionist in the movies. As a matter-of-fact, he set up the sound situation when the sound came out in the movies, originally. He set that whole thing up in the theater was just a great guy.

SI: Did they immediately settle in Jersey City?

LT: Yes, yes. His parents settled in Jersey City. They were there their entire lives.

SI: Do you have any idea why they chose Jersey City? Was it the community?

LT: I have no idea. I mean, the neighborhood we lived in was a mixture of everything and it was close to New York.

SI: Just for the record, you were born in Jersey City on what day?

LT: April 7, 1923.

SI: Could you tell us a little bit about the neighborhood you grew up in?

LT: Well, it was a very nice neighborhood. It was a mixture of everything, never any violence. It was just a great neighborhood. In fact, that neighborhood hasn't changed. Actually, it's the same today as it was way back then. We had a mixture of all kinds of religions, nationalities and

color. I mean, it was just, as far as I'm concerned, a great place to grow up. There were never any prejudices. It was just one big neighborhood where everybody got along.

SI: Many people we have interviewed talked about growing up in neighborhoods where, when you first went to school, not everyone spoke English. Did you experience anything like that?

LT: No, we never had that. My parents and everybody at that time were so intent on being Americans that, in fact, I'm a little angry today, because they wouldn't speak Italian. They spoke it only when they didn't want us to know what they were talking about and they were so intent on being Americans that they spoke English all the time.

SI: Your father was an Italian who was born in France.

LT: Yes.

SI: Were there any Italian traditions that your parents kept up?

LT: No, I don't remember anything that was special. Holidays were natural. My mother was a fantastic cook. I always kid around; I always say my mother could make shoe leather taste like filet mignon.

SI: Can you tell us a little bit about going to grade school and high school?

LT: Well, I went to grade school, naturally, a public school, and, halfway through, I wanted to play ball, baseball. They didn't have a baseball team, but St. Michael's Catholic School did. So, I switched over to St. Michael's and went there and graduated from there. Then, their high school didn't have a baseball team, so, I went back to public school, Ferris High School, all within walking distance.

SI: Sports played a big part in your life when you were younger.

LT: Only at that time, when I was real young, playing baseball, but I never carried it any farther. Once, I couldn't play in high school. In fact, I tried out for the high school team and, unfortunately the coach had a favorite player that wanted the same position that I was, a catcher. He was a catcher, and although I was much better than him, I never got to play. So, I just gave it up.

SI: You wrote down that your family is Roman Catholic. What role did the Church play in your life at that point? Would you go to church every week?

LT: Oh, yes, every Sunday and all holidays. I was an altar boy.

SI: Can you explain what kind of impact the Great Depression had on your family and your neighborhood?

LT: Well, on my family, it really didn't have an impact, because my father worked and he was, as I said, a projectionist and they got paid cash, in a cigar box, every week and he was making over a hundred dollars a week during the Depression and, at that time, it was a fortune. We were like millionaires in the neighborhood. Other kids were walking around with their knees hanging out, you know, holes in their shoes and, you know, not us. We dressed well. We ate extremely well. Yes, we fed everybody in the family, my family did. In fact, we'd sit down for dinner at night, there'd be like fifteen of us there and my parents took care of all of that while we were growing up, because no one was working. They were all trying to find jobs and my father took care of everybody's problems, as far as money was concerned, and fed them every night.

SI: Was the Depression devastating to your neighborhood?

LT: Not really, no. Like I said, everybody got along, even though they didn't make any money. They weren't starving, because there was always help, and my parents helped as much as they could.

SI: It was a real community dynamic.

LT: Yes, yes. Everyone pulled together and it didn't matter what you had, whether you're like my father [or not]; I guess he was the highest paid man in the neighborhood, but that didn't mean anything. Nobody knew how much he was making and we didn't even know how much he was making until later on in years.

SI: Since he was a projectionist, did you get to see a lot of movies?

LT: Every one that we wanted to go to see and free. I used to take all the kids in the neighborhood.

SI: Before the war, had you seen any war films like *All Quiet in the Western Front* and, if so, did that have any impact on you?

LT: None. When the war broke out, like everybody else in the neighborhood, many guys waited to be drafted, but a few of us enlisted, like I did in the Marine Corps.

FB: You said you had a lot of brothers and sisters.

LT: Well, there were five of us. I had three sisters and one brother.

FB: Was your mother born in France?

LT: No, she was born in Italy and, of course, like every woman in those days, she was a housewife.

FB: She never worked.

LT: No, never. She never worked.

FB: Did she work during the war?

LT: No. She took care of the family.

FB: Did any of your sisters work during the war?

LT: My sisters did. I don't remember what they did; well, only one was old enough, really, and I don't remember. …

Elizabeth Trezza: They worked in an egg factory.

LT: Oh, that's right. Yes, they worked at an egg factory. Whatever they did in that factory, I don't know. So, my older sister did, yes.

FB: Were your other sisters married at that time?

LT: No. My oldest sister was three years older than me.

FB: Your mom stayed home.

LT: Yes, she was just a housewife, as most women in those days [were], and very few women worked. Of course, when the war broke out, the only women in our neighborhood that worked were the young ones. My mother wasn't considered young.

FB: Did some women in the neighborhood work and the others that did not take care of the children?

LT: Yes. They either worked or they were housewives.

FB: The whole community took care of the kids during the war.

LT: Yes.

SI: Before Pearl Harbor, what did you know about the situation in Europe and the war in Europe?

LT: Nothing. We had absolutely no interest in it.

SI: I thought that, growing up in such a multi-cultural neighborhood, some people might have spoke about Mussolini or Hitler?

LT: They talked about it, but it never meant anything to us. There was no war as far as we were concerned and we were too young for it to have an impact, even though I was sixteen, in my teens. It really didn't have any effect on us and most of the people in the neighborhood didn't even talk about it.

SI: In your neighborhood, were there any New Deal programs or anything like that?

LT: There was, yes, and some of the younger guys went into that.

ET: I don't think there was a need for them in the neighborhood. There was in other parts of the city. This was a neighborhood where they did for one another and they didn't need to take anything from the government or anyone else. It was a source of pride to them to work on their own and they were all, the neighborhood was, one big family. That's what it was.

LT: Of course, there were many people there. All the houses were at least six-family houses. They weren't one-family houses and they were attached. So, there were many people there, just in the two-block radius.

SI: Did the neighborhood have a name?

ET: No, downtown.

LT: Downtown. We were part of downtown.

SI: Before the war, had you ever really traveled outside of Jersey City?

LT: To New York. When I was young, I think it was a nickel to get on the subway. I went to every stop that I could in New York and New Jersey, because it cost a nickel to go and a nickel to come back and you can go anywhere, transfers and everything.

SI: Were you in high school when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

LT: No. I was working.

SI: Before the war, where did you see yourself going in life?

LT: I didn't know yet. I was in the steel mill. I worked in a steel mill and I knew I didn't want to stay there and, before I had a chance to really decide what I wanted to do, the war broke out and that was it. One of the things I always used to think about is, "If I survive this war, what the heck am I going to do when I get out?" I really didn't know what I wanted to do.

SI: Were you in a union in the steel mill?

LT: No, that steel mill didn't have a union.

SI: It was in Jersey City.

LT: Yes, in Jersey City.

SI: Just out of curiosity, was it tied to anything like the lend-lease program or war material production?

LT: I don't think so, because what they did mostly was make spikes for the railroad and rails and stuff like that for the railroad. That was their biggest production.

SI: Had you thought about the military before Pearl Harbor?

LT: No, never gave it a thought.

SI: Where were you the day when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

LT: I was shooting pool in the neighborhood poolroom. I was the houseman, because I was one of the best pool shooters in the area and I mean everybody just threw their hands up. Everybody ran out the door. It was amazing; everybody was shocked and amazed.

SI: It sounds like it was totally out of the blue.

LT: Oh, yes, yes.

SI: Did you feel pressured at all to enlist right away?

LT: I had to think, but I didn't know what I wanted to do. I knew I was going to enlist and I decided on the Marine Corps and that was it. I went to New York and enlisted, because there wasn't any place close to me where I could enlist. I had to go to New York.

FB: Was there a reason why you chose the Marine Corps?

LT: Well, I thought they were the best and that's what I was. I wanted to be part of the best and there was no problem, except I flunked the physical. I had a little wax in my ears and they said, "Well, you have to get the wax blown out. There's a clinic down the street. For a quarter, they'll blow the wax out, and then, you come back and we'll continue the physical." So, I did. I went down, I got my ears blown out, came back and passed right through.

SI: How did your parents react to your enlistment?

LT: Well, they were very proud. Naturally, they would have wanted me to stay home, but they knew that I had to go and they were just proud people. They were behind me one hundred percent.

SI: At that point, did you realize how dangerous it would be, going into the military?

LT: Never gave it a thought. I mean, … I had no idea how it would be or what would happen. I just had to be in there and, like I said, I wanted to be with the best; that's why I became a Marine.

SI: Between Pearl Harbor and entering the Marine Corps, what changes on the home front did you see?

LT: Nothing really earth shattering or anything, you know, just [that] everybody was all *gung ho* and doing whatever they could for the war service and they knew we're going to be faced with rationing and all of that and they all were prepared. All the young men, like myself, either waited to be drafted or to be enlisted. In fact, most of them got drafted. Just two others and myself in the neighborhood enlisted, one in the Navy and another one in the Marine Corps.

SI: Had rationing been in effect before you went in?

LT: No.

SI: Do you remember any blackouts and Civil Defense drills?

LT: No. There were blackouts. Yes, that's right, there were blackouts, when I think back now, when we had to keep all the shades down at night and no lights.

SI: Was there a sense of paranoia that there might be an attack on the main land, particularly in the months right after Pearl Harbor? Do you remember any of that?

LT: No, except that everybody was nervous. Everybody was nervous and, of course, with the blackout, all the lights were out every night and everybody was very careful.

SI: Anything about saboteurs?

LT: I never heard any kind of conversation about saboteurs.

SI: Were there a number of Germans in your neighborhood?

LT: There was a little bit of everything, a little bit of everything. We had Polish, Germans, Jews, Italians, Irish, blacks, everything, just a little. There wasn't any great amount of any nationality.

SI: Did you hear of anybody being taken away?

LT: No.

SI: What was it like going from your civilian life in Jersey City to boot camp at Parris Island?

LT: Hell. Well, the first thing they tell you is what the real purpose of boot camp is, to make you forget you were ever a civilian. It was tough. You know nothing about the military, you go in there and they start screaming at you and the first thing they do, before they gave you a uniform, and, of course, everybody's got nice hair and everything or whatever when they went in, nobody recognized anyone. You went in, like, a barn. You went in one door, okay. When you came out, you had your uniform on, but you had your hair all cut off and nobody recognized

anybody. It was a whole different thing, and then, of course, reveille went at four o'clock every morning and you exercised or drilled. They drill you until eight, for breakfast. Right after breakfast, you drilled until lunch, and then, you drilled until dinner and nine o'clock was [when] everybody went to bed and you were completely exhausted and what they did to us was unbelievable. If you didn't toe the line, you got punished and a lot of the guys didn't make it, because it was so severe and, of course, their job was to make you forget you were ever a civilian and to make you think only about the Marine Corps.

ET: Tell them about the young man who sent a card home to his family saying, "They're treating me like a dog."

LT: Yes, they censored everything, okay. So, one of the recruits sent a card home to his mother that [said] they were treating him like a dog. So, of course, the drill sergeant comes out, called his name out, and said, "You think you've been treated like a dog? Well, we're going to show you how it is to be treated like a dog. Get on your hands and knees." So, he gets on his hands and his knees and he said, "Okay, run up and down the barracks." He's on his hands and knees, going up, and he said, "Somehow, you don't look like a dog." He said, "Pick up one of your shoes and put it in your mouth. Now, run up and back, and you still don't look like a dog." So, the last thing they said was, "Now, while you're running up and down, I want you to bark." So, he's running up and down and, of course, everybody is laughing like hell, okay. So, when they were finished with him, they said, "Oh, you think it's funny?" and we all were issued, … a little steel bucket to do wash or whatever and, "Okay, everybody put the buckets over your head, okay, and you scream as loud as you can under that bucket, okay, 'I'm a horse's ass from (Yamasee?) and I think a dog is funny to see,'" and, of course, they went around while this was going on and everybody's still laughing under the buckets. They'd lift them up and bring them back down on your head, you know. Of course, that was just punishment. Some kids had to run around when they were showing you how to use your rifle. If you don't hold it right, they'd send you around the whole field with the rifle over your head until you damn near dropped. Of course, I can go on and on [with] all the things they did to you. My mother was sending me packages and, of course, they'd open them up and eat whatever they wanted and give you the rest. So, I was complaining, "You ate all my food," and they said, "Oh, no, we just had to test to make sure it was all right, but we want you to go to Platoon 467 and ask for Sergeant so-and-so," okay, and I went to 467 and I couldn't find it. So, after I went trying to find that platoon, I couldn't find it, so, I came back and, of course, not knowing, … they had an outside door right into the DI's quarters. So, I just walked in. The DI looks at me and says, "Who are you?' I said, "Louis Trezza." "Oh, Louis Trezza, I thought you were General Trezza. Get outside and knock on that door." So, I go back out and I'm knocking on the door, "Can't hear you, keep knocking." So, then, I kept pounding and pounding. "Can't hear you. Now, use your head; maybe we'll hear you better." What I'm trying to do is coordinate hitting the door with my head and my foot at the same time, so [that] I'm making like I'm hitting the door, but I'm kicking it instead, okay. Finally, he said, "Okay, get in here Trezza and check in, sack out." Of course, it was late. Everybody was in their bunks already. That was only one thing. Then, they wanted to send me for a saddle for the guard mount. Of course, the guard mount was a ceremony and what the heck did I know? They said, "The guard mount," I figured it's a horse. So, I had to go all around the camp looking for the saddle. Of course, all these DIs knew … what was going on and every place I go, "Oh, you know, where is that, Platoon 767?" and then, if I go there, they send me

another place and, finally, I came back and said, "I just can't find it. Nobody has it. I can't find it." "Okay, go ahead, relax," but, you know, that went on and on and on; not only with myself, everybody got it. One time, one other thing, the shower wasn't in the barracks. It was another building. So, the whole platoon had to go in at the same time and, of course, there was no place to hang anything. So, all you took with you was your shoes and a towel, that was it. So, as we were coming in, straggling back in, the DIs are walking up and down, I don't know who said whatever it was they said, [if] they just made something up, you know, and, of course, nobody knew what the heck they were talking about. So, when the whole platoon got in, they said, "Okay, you have five seconds to own up," to whoever said what you're supposed to have said, and, of course, everybody was looking at each other, nobody said anything. So, they said, "Okay, fall out." This is February and it's cold out there and, of course, the most we have on is a towel. Some guys didn't even have that, walking up and down. We did that for about fifteen, twenty minutes and, of course, so many of the guys got sick and the DIs got a little; the next morning, getting up out of bed, some of the guys couldn't get out of the cots and they called the medics in and one or two of the guys, … they thought they had some crazy illness, you know, and had to be quarantined. So, what they did was quarantine us, which was the best thing that happened to us, because they treated us like kings, until they found out that there was nothing really wrong, all the kid has [is] a cold, and then, the roof fell in. We went back into our regular barracks and everything was hell all over again.

SI: When people could not cut it …

LT: They were discharged. Some of them just couldn't hack it. They couldn't hack the discipline or they couldn't hack it physically and they were just discharged. There were quite a few who just couldn't hack it. They went to other branches of service. Most of them went to the Navy or the Army.

SI: Do you think your DIs were deliberately trying to wash people out?

LT: Oh, yes, yes. They wanted you to be the best and they were as tough as they possibly could be and, if you couldn't hack it, they didn't want you in there as a Marine and, of course, as far as I'm concerned, it worked. You knew when you got into combat, later, that you were all in pairs, your life depended on your buddy and his on you. You never gave that a second thought.

SI: At boot camp, was it mostly just drill or did they teach you weapons training?

LT: No, mostly drill. The weapons training, … we had to learn how to fire a rifle and we went to the rifle range and all of that, but the actual training didn't happen until we got to what they call advance training. Then, we went from there to Camp Lejeune.

SI: Okay, can you tell us about your training in Camp Lejeune?

LT: That was it. We did our advance training there. A lot of the time, we had to make it physical again and you would walk. Sometimes, we'd do a thirty-mile hike in one day and you had to do it with a full pack on your back.

SI: Did they have the same level of discipline?

LT: No, no. You just had to do that. It was actual training and the physical part of the training was the hiking and stuff like that and you had to keep up and you got a break. When you went for a hike, every hour, you got a ten-minute break, but you just had to keep going and that was it and, of course, some of the guys washed out of that, too, because they couldn't hack it. … They wanted you to be absolutely perfect, as far as your physical condition was concerned. Again, you did training with a rifle, target practice and all that stuff, and they taught us whatever they knew about fighting a war and we saw movies about what the Japs did; what they did was a lot of things. One of the things that always stuck right here was, they'd show you pictures of three or four Japs coming out with their hands up and one of them had a machine gun strapped to his back, and as everybody came out to see what was going on, the guy with the machine gun would bend over and they would wipe everybody in front of them out. So, as a result of that, we were ordered never to take prisoners when we actually got into battle and we never did.

SI: Army veterans have told me that their drill instructors deliberately taught them to hate the Japanese. Was this the case in the Marines?

LT: Well, they didn't say we needed to hate them, just kill them. That's it. I mean, like I said, we were told, in fact, going into combat, we had one sheet of paper for every day about what was going on in the war, both in Europe and in the Pacific. The last thing on that page was, "If you see a Jap on the ground, pump a few rounds into the bastard. If he's dead, you won't hurt him. If he's not dead, he won't hurt you," and that was done automatically. That was part of our training.

SI: Were your instructors regular Marine Corps or were they men who had just been through the training program earlier?

LT: Oh, no, they were regular Marine Corps.

SI: Were they the stereotypical "salty Marine?"

LT: No, they were young guys, but they were trained to do that and we had very few old Marines. It was war and everybody was young.

SI: The Marine Corps is often praised as the branch of the service that most kept up its traditions and *esprit de corps*. Is this true?

LT: There's no question about it. … Even now, I have a jacket I wear and every time a Marine sees it, "Hey, *Semper Fi* mate," you know. That's still until we die. You never lose that, especially if you've gone through a war and a few battles make all the difference in the world.

SI: Before going into the war, was there anything specific that they did in training that built up that feeling or was it just the training itself?

LT: Oh, just the training itself. Like I say, they showed us, and we learned every way possible, the Japanese tactics, which helped, like I said, including that … we never took prisoners. Of course, we were always ordered; well, we won't get into the war yet, but, in battle, you never get up at night. We never moved at night. We did all our fighting in the daytime. We did it all night, too, but you never moved at night and anybody that moved was killed. So, no Marine ever got out to change his position or anything and what we used to do, the way we handled that is, before it got dark, we would set up our lines of defense, maybe as far back as we could go. … On the ends of each line were machine guns and in the center and the Japs used to *banzai* us every night. … Of course, first of all, we could smell them and they used a very sweet smelling powder or soap or whatever to clean themselves and, of course, once they got up to charge us, they would scream and holler and blow bugles and stuff like that and we'd just mow them down. If they broke through the first line of defense, we had another one and that's why the guys in the beginning we're ordered, also, "If your position is overrun, just get on your back and shoot anything that passes," and that's why we're told never to get up and leave your hole at night.

SI: Were you always being trained to fight the Japanese?

LT: Yes.

SI: It was a given.

LT: Yes. Like I say, our advance phase was in Camp Pendleton, California. … Of course, we're still training, but we were there just getting ready for our first battle and our first battle was on Roi-Namur and we were, I think, the only outfit that ever went from the States, at least in the Marine Corps, right into combat. We stopped in Hawaii, but only to regroup the convoys, but we never got off the ship. We went right from the States, right into combat.

SI: From Lejeune, you went directly into the Fourth Marine Division.

LT: Yes. … Actually, they set up the Fourth Marine Division, a part of the Fourth Marine Division, right in Lejeune. I was in the 23rd Regiment. They set up all the regiments, and then, they formed the division when we got to Camp Pendleton.

SI: Can you tell us about the process of preparing for the invasion of Roi-Namur?

LT: Well, aboard ship, okay, that's another good thing about the Marine Corps. When we went into combat, once we left the States, we couldn't contact anybody or anybody could contact you. You were given the complete details of the battle, what they were going to do, how many ships would be involved, destroyers, cruisers, battleships, aircraft, what kind of bombardments that they would do, how many bombs they will drop, the size. We knew, up until the time we hit the beach, everything that the commanding officer knew. That was on every invasion.

SI: That seems to be a major difference between the Army and the Marine Corps. Were the Marines given more responsibilities?

LT: We were given every bit of information that they had, on that island or the islands that we invaded, and that never happened until we left, where there was no more landings, except the island we were going to hit. Once we left any place where you could contact a civilian, everything came out. They'd roll out the plans and show us pictures, the islands, where they thought they would have to bomb, you know, all the emplacements and they would do that and you would see, and when we hit, they always did it three, four weeks [in advance]. Every day, they would bomb these islands until we landed.

SI: Did you have a specialty within your unit?

LT: Yes, I was a mortar man, .60-mm mortar man.

SI: Was that difficult training? Was it a new thing?

LT: Well, it wasn't new as far as the Marine Corps was concerned and it wasn't a big [weapon]. You had to carry them, [the] mortar, and each man carried a piece of it, either the base or the tube and the ammunition. You had to carry that with you. It wasn't something that you had to bring down on wheels; it was something that was portable.

SI: What was going through your mind as you were heading toward Roi-Namur? What was your state of mind?

LT: Well, we all just talked about everything, until we actually do something. We were just saying, "Well, we're going to get them, do everything we can and hope that we all would make it." There wasn't much to talk about, except we knew what we're in for and we were fortunate that Roi-Namur was a very easy battle. We lost very few men and it only lasted three days. In three days, we had taken the islands, two islands, and the reason we took them was because of the airfields and they were dangerous, as far as our people were concerned. They were too close to Pearl Harbor and we didn't want any chances of that.

FB: The plans that they gave you, is that how, most of the time, it happened?

LT: Oh, yes. Once you hit the beach, then, everything is different. Then, the commanding officers on the island ran it from there on in and you couldn't do anything until something happened. Our job was to take that island and that was it, and then, we were commanded by whoever were our commanding officers and we moved and we never stopped, until we had to.

SI: Which wave did you go in on at Roi-Namur?

LT: We were the third wave.

SI: Being a mortar man, would you be expected to go in on the first wave?

LT: Oh, yes, we're part of the company, yes. See, … one company consisted of riflemen, machine gunners and mortar men and we're all in the same company and, whenever that company moved, you moved with them and it wasn't like, because we were mortar men, we

were in the back; we were right out front. We were part of the riflemen, that squad; we did [the] same as the riflemen did.

SI: In battle, would you often have to use a rifle, also?

LT: Oh, sure, all the time, I mean, what we did mostly is, well, we bombed as much as we could and mostly at night. We're moving all the time and we keep throwing flares up. A mortar man can do that. That's the only way you can get a flare up, is with a mortar or [a piece] way back, but we were right there and … every second or third shell was a flare, so [that] we could see what was going on and it would light up the area, like almost daylight.

SI: Can you walk us through your first day of combat?

LT: Well, like I say, on Roi-Namur was easy. … In two days, we had taken both islands. They were small islands and weren't that many Japs there. So, out of twenty thousand men, we lost less than a hundred and that was it as far as Roi-Namur was concerned, but that was more or less like … a training operation. So, when we had Saipan and Tinian, that was a whole different ballgame.

SI: Did you actually get close enough to see the enemy at that point?

LT: Oh, sure.

SI: What was that confrontation like?

LT: Well, like I said, we only saw them at night, … and then, we would shoot; we saw them, we killed them and, when we set up our positions at night and they would *banzai* us, we would just wipe them out.

SI: They were doing that at Roi-Namur.

LT: Anywhere. That's how they fought. That was their method of fighting.

SI: You knew that beforehand, but did it still shock you when you saw it?

LT: You know, you're too engrossed to be shocked. You had a job to do, to stay alive, and that was it and take care of your buddy and he took care of you. That's another thing. You're always two men; we were always two men together.

SI: Of the casualties, was there anybody that you knew?

LT: Not in my company and, on Roi-Namur, we didn't lose anybody in my company. That happened later.

SI: In an operation like that, how soon after the battle do they start transforming it into something that can be used for aerial operations?

LT: Oh, yes, the engineers came in, took care of all the airports and had our planes using it immediately and we left almost immediately. The ships were there [to] pick us up and took us back to Hawaii. Our advance base was on Maui and the only problem we had coming back to Maui was, when we're going into combat, see, there weren't enough crew in the Navy, so, they used us to do mess work, work in the kitchen and do all the other stuff that, active laborers did on the ship and we stole and grabbed everything to eat. Going back, we got on the same ship, and as soon as we all got aboard, the Captain said, "Welcome aboard, 23rd Marines. You've got a little problem going home. You're going to eat nothing but beans and rice, three meals a day. You took care of everything coming; now, you're getting everything that's left with you going back." So, I mean, that was it, but that was like a joke, but they did feed us beans and rice.

FB: How long was your trip back?

LT: About six days.

SI: All this time you were crossing the ocean, were there ever any concerns about submarines?

LT: No, because we had all kinds of protection. We had minesweepers, subs and you couldn't even see them. There was, besides our main attack force, another fleet protecting us, besides the protection we already had. We had aircraft carriers, everything was there. I mean, we never gave it a thought, because we didn't see how anything, any Japanese vessel, whether it was a sub or aircraft, could get anywhere near us. Protection was that great.

SI: Were there any aerial attacks on Roi-Namur?

LT: No. Oh, yes, yes. On Roi-Namur, they did come over one night, just one night, and that was it.

SI: Did they bomb and strafe?

LT: They didn't do any damage, no. They bombed, but they didn't really do any damage. We were spread out. I mean, that's one of the things we were trained to do, also. You don't stay in bunches, unless you have no choice.

SI: Was there anything that you can only learn in combat and that you could not really be trained in?

LT: No. … Well, we learned later, because Roi-Namur happened so fast, we finished so fast, but, on the following invasions, after three days, you become automatic and you do things automatically, instinctively and automatically, and, if you don't, you're dead, but it takes about three days, sometimes four.

SI: For everyone in your unit, but also in the Fourth Marines, this was their first combat experience.

LT: Yes.

SI: Did you see anybody who just, once the shooting started, could not handle it?

LT: Not on Roi-Namur. We had guys crack up, but … that was later.

SI: Was that after very prolonged fighting?

LT: Yes.

----------END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE----------

SI: Please, continue.

LT: Later on, like I say, when we got into Iwo Jima, on the first day, on the beach, one of the guys next to me started to crack and I just smacked him around. I mean, I did; I said, "Straighten up. Get with it," and he came right out of it, but there were other guys, after they were wounded, [who] our expression was "cracked up."

SI: The guy you slapped around, was that his first invasion?

LT: No, no. It was one of the old salts; we called him an "old salt." He was with us from the beginning. It was just one of those things that, finally, caught up to him, but he was fine. He was wounded a few days later, but, after I slapped him around a little bit, and he was much bigger than I was, but it straightened him out and he thanked me and we went on.

SI: Your next operation was Saipan.

LT: Saipan, yes.

SI: How much preparation did you have?

LT: A few months, that's all, because Roi-Namur was fast and easy, so, we went, just six months later, we were in Saipan and Tinian.

FB: Did they plan the whole time, these six months?

LT: Oh, yes.

FB: Were you ever a part of the planning?

LT: No. We [would have] never done it. We were just, I can't say recruits, but we're just individuals. That was all done by the hierarchy, the generals and the colonels and the admirals, because the Navy was involved in those, too.

SI: Was Roi-Namur just a Navy-Marine operation? Was there any Army presence?

LT: No, no.

SI: In-between the invasions, were you just training and keeping up your battle readiness?

LT: Oh, yes. We were continuously training and learning whatever we could learn and, of course, that was always passed on to us. Actually, we learned mostly how to fight from the Marines from the first battle in Guadalcanal. Those Marines really took a beating. Also, what happened to the Marines on Guadalcanal is that they got a lot of diseases, which was great for us, because we never got any. We were inoculated against everything that they caught. Any disease that they possibly knew about, we were inoculated against and I don't remember anybody coming down with any kind of a disease in our outfit, but those poor guys at Guadalcanal, that was the First Marine Division, they learned, first of all, about how to fight the Japs and their tactics. That's why we learned, like, when they show these movies, these guys coming out and trying to mow us down and all that stuff. We learned all of their tricks on Guadalcanal.

SI: Did you see any examples of those tricks during your first invasion?

LT: No, no, because it was so fast. They were just running, that's it.

SI: What role did rumors play in your experience?

LT: Well, really, the only rumors we used to get were from Tokyo Rose. They would put her on the radio all the time. We were always listening to her and what we couldn't understand is how, so many times, she had information [that] … none of us had, like where we're going to invade. "We're waiting for you," and, "You're not going to make it," and all that stuff. Nobody paid much attention to it, because that was like propaganda and they didn't hide that from us anyway. They'll be over the loudspeakers all the time.

SI: It seems like you got a lot of information about what was going on in the war.

LT: Oh, yes, … like I said, every day, we got bulletins about what was happening in Europe and what was happening in the Pacific and, again, I'll tell you that last line, "See a Jap on the ground and pump a few rounds into him."

SI: Your brother was also in the Marines.

LT: Yes, but much later. He's ten years younger than I am. He was nine during the war. He didn't see any combat.

SI: Did you write home during this time, when you were overseas?

LT: Sure. I wrote home every opportunity we got, but everything was censored then, I mean, so all you could do is tell them, "Okay, everything is fine. I'll call you, write you again as soon as I can," but we couldn't tell them anything, where we were, where we were going, just let them know we were safe and that was it.

FB: You did not keep a diary.

LT: I never did. I don't know of anybody that did. They didn't want that, either.

SI: What kind of a morale boost was getting letters from home?

LT: Oh, it's great. Everybody looked forward to them and, well, I wasn't married, very few of the guys were married. They really didn't want guys like us to be married and, if you're married and have kids, they wouldn't take you into combat. You could be a Marine, but that was it and, if you're twenty-five or older, they didn't want you either. You can be in the Marines, but they don't want you in combat, because they felt that they had other things to think about and what they wanted us to do is think [about] nothing except the invasion, that's it. They didn't want you to think anything about home or kids or wife or parents or anything. That was part of the training and, if you had to think anything about that, you were a problem, because you couldn't fight like you should. Like I say, after the third or fourth day, you became automatic on everything anyway. That would stop that from happening, because you'd have to think about [your family].

SI: In-between the invasions, when you were in Hawaii, what did you do during any free time you had?

LT: Well, we didn't have much free time, really. We just kept training, had our replacements come in and just kept training and anything new we learned, we would train about that. You had to stay in shape. That was the biggest problem; not a problem, but they just made sure you didn't relax. Every day, you had to do your chores and do whatever training. They would have similar battles. They'd set everything up and you would fight again, you know, not actual [fights], but just training.

SI: What was it like to integrate replacements into the unit?

LT: It wasn't bad. … Some of them were silly, but most of them were okay. They wanted to learn as much as they could and they want to be part of the outfit, but every once in a while, you ran into a silly one. We had one kid who came in, he was acting like he was going to wipe out the whole Japanese Army with a machine gun, "I got you, I got you," you know, stupid things like that and, of course, he's one of the ones who cracked up.

SI: Can you take us through the process of the actual invasion of Saipan?

LT: Well, Saipan was very difficult, because it was a much bigger island and it was woods and everything, forest and airports. Civilians were very few, … fortunately. That was one of our breaks. We never had to worry about civilians and, when we landed, we're again in the first group and … we always had a line to go to. It was about 150 yards from the beach and we did [it] with no trouble. So, we went farther, and then, the first thing you know, we were pinned down and the guys behind us couldn't come up to us, because, when we hit the beach, they didn't shell us or anything. They didn't do that until we got to a certain point, and then, all hell

broke loose. So, we had to fall back and reorganize, then go forward again and, of course, once that happened, we were fighting all the time then, but never at night. At night, … that's where they really did the *banzai* attacks. Those bodies would just pile up and they would break through the first, sometimes first, second and third lines, and we just kept mowing them down and, after we got to a certain point, the 27th Army Division was supposed to control everything that we had taken and they didn't. We had to fight our way back and it was so bad that our artillery had to lower their guns and had set their ammunition … to explode almost instantaneously, as they fired them, because the Japs had come so close to them, because they were between us. We're way ahead and we [had] overrun so many Japs. That's what caused that. They were supposed to take care of those Japs that we overrun and they never did and, as a matter-of-fact, they lost their colors and everything and we insisted that we would never fight with the Army again after that, because they just didn't know what the hell they were doing.

SI: It is kind of a famous controversy between the two General Smiths, Holland Smith and Ralph Smith.

LT: Holland Smith was "Howling Mad" Smith. They removed that [unit]; they lost their colors, the 27th Army Division. Another big thing that happened, that we were really worried about, was, after the third day, we look out into the harbor. Now, all our supplies, ammunition, food and everything are out there on those ships. There wasn't a ship in sight. I thought, "What the hell is going on?" Of course, we found out, much, much later they used them as a decoy. That's when we almost wiped out the entire Japanese Navy. So, they pulled out and used those groups that were waiting for us after the real task force with the aircraft carriers and everything. Although they were with us, they pulled out, and then, they tracked the Japanese and it just about wiped out the Japanese Navy in that particular battle and, of course, after that battle, they came back and, you know, everything was back to normal, except the fighting. … We fought for over thirty days and we lost a lot of men. Up until that time, I guess that was the fiercest battle of the war. Then, from there, we went to Tinian. Tinian was not too bad. … We lost men, but it wasn't that bad. The fighting wasn't as fierce on Tinian.

FB: You lost men in your unit.

LT: Yes.

SI: What was that like, dealing with casualties?

LT: Well, again, it never hurt you psychologically, because you couldn't think about that. You say, "Oh, gee, poor Eddie got it," except we didn't use "Eddie," we always use last names. Nobody was ever called by his first name and you would say, "Oh, it's too bad," you know, but that was it. If you could help him, fine. If you couldn't, he got killed, that was it.

SI: What was a typical combat experience like for you, as a mortar man? You mentioned earlier lighting up an area with flares.

LT: … We'd have to set up at night, too, with our rifles and we carried a rifle, also, beside the mortar man and we were there to shoot the Japs as they approached. Again, anything at night, anything that moved, you shot.

SI: Were you being contacted by radio and told to fire at areas or did you just lay down fire?

LT: No. We just laid down an area in front of us, as far as the mortars were concerned, because we knew they were there and we just fired so many yards away and that was it and we just keep combing them back.

FB: The technologies you had, like radios …

LT: There was radio, but that was one man. He got orders from the admiral or the general on a ship. We didn't have that high tech stuff like today and nobody carried anything, except one man. All the information came and went through him.

SI: Were you ever concerned about your mortars falling short, friendly-fire, that sort of thing?

LT: Well, we had to be worried. We worry about it, sure, because, sometimes, there'd be guys in front of us. We had to make sure that we didn't drop them that close to them. Even with the aircraft, with the air war, I mean, when we call for air protection and strafing, we had these bright colored canvas things that we lay out in front of us and, when we call for an air attack or strafing, then, those planes could see where our frontlines were and it's amazing how close they can do it. They were fantastic. Of course, they were all Marines, too.

SI: How often would you call for air strikes?

LT: Well, sometimes every night or every day, so [that] they could see; not at night, because they couldn't see anything at night. First, we'd lay them out in the front, you know, in front of us, and they'd come down and strafe.

FB: They were Marine pilots.

LT: Yes.

SI: Did you ever call on the Army Air Force?

LT: Well, it wasn't the Army Air Force, it was Navy or the Marines and we insisted on Marines, because the Navy screwed up once or twice with the strafing, and then, after that, it was just Marines. I don't know if they screwed up, either. I didn't see it, but that was it. I mean, we just had Marine pilots.

SI: Again, the dirty tricks you talked about, did you see those on Saipan?

LT: Yes. Well, we never took any chances, as far as that was concerned. If the Jap came out with his hands up, we just mowed him down and, of course, we did a tremendous job with

flamethrowers, also, on the caves or anything we went into, like pillboxes, blockhouses. That was our best weapon, flamethrower, and we had a couple in each company.

SI: Did the Japanese ever change their tactics?

LT: No, only on Iwo Jima. That's the only place they did. They fought smart there.

SI: After a while, you mentioned that you went into automatic mode. After that, is there anything that shocks you?

LT: No.

SI: What about your supply situation? Were you always able to get what you needed?

LT: Yes. We never had a problem with supplies. Like I said, we worried in Saipan, because we saw all the ships disappear, but, … first of all, the first six or seven days, you don't even think about eating or anything. I mean, you're so engrossed in what you're doing, you don't give anything else a thought and you don't even sleep. You're so involved and your body, … like I say, you're doing everything automatically and the last thing you're thinking about is eating or drinking or anything.

SI: Did you ever encounter any other kinds of booby traps, like mines?

LT: No. We never had anything like that.

SI: Snipers?

LT: Snipers, we did, sure. We always had snipers, but we never had any mines.

SI: After Saipan, did you go back to Hawaii?

LT: Oh, yes. We always come back to Maui, that was our advanced base, and we would regroup, replace everybody that was either killed or wounded and train again and get ready for the next invasion, which was Iwo Jima. That was tough. We knew, before we hit the island, it's going to be very difficult, because [of] the aerial photographs they took. Like I said, we saw everything, knew all the plans and they were like three Japs on the beach looking at these planes, smiling at them. You know, they didn't run for cover and that's the first thing we figured, "Uh, oh, this is going to be a tough one," and we had no idea, really, how bad it was going to be until we got there.

SI: You mentioned, obviously, that you got a lot of information about the battle beforehand, but did you know the main reason why we took Iwo Jima? I think it was for the B-29s, so that they would have a place to land.

LT: Yes, the B-29s. We were losing them, because they couldn't get back to base. At that time, they had a base on Saipan and a lot of them couldn't make it back to Saipan. So, we needed a

place for them to land, to refuel them or repair them or whatever, then, take back off again, plus a fighter area. So, you know, we had a couple of airports there.

SI: Was that explained to you beforehand?

LT: Yes, yes, we knew why we were taking it. It was very close to Japan, also, but we knew, because while we were on; well, this happened later. I'll tell you about B-29s trying to get back to Saipan. Well, I was on the hospital ship, then, after I was wounded, and, all of a sudden, instead of zig-zagging, the ships went in straight lines and these B-29s were coming. The first thing we saw, "What the hell? Are you bombing us?" They were dropping things, all the excess weight off the planes, and, of course, then, they would land right on the ocean, right between the two lines of ships, okay, and then, of course, the ship would go over there and pick the survivors up, you know, take them off before anybody got hurt or drowned. Then, we realized why they needed Iwo.

SI: I should have asked earlier, but, on Saipan and Tinian, by the time you left, did they have the airfields running?

LT: Oh, yes. The Seabees were immediately behind us, repairing anything they needed to repair for landing. The airport was a big concern and they would take care of all of it. They were fast; they were fantastic.

SI: Were they Marines?

LT: No. It was Navy, the Navy. They were older guys. Most of them were in construction, but they were terrific. They also fought, only when they were attacked, and they were several times.

SI: You told us about the preparation for Iwo Jima. By that time, late in the war, were the recruits that were coming in draftees?

LT: Yes, they started the draft then. … Even though they were drafted, they had to go through boot camp, like everybody else did. I mean, they didn't relax any of the training for them, even though they came in later and were drafted. It didn't make any difference. They still had to pass all the tests.

SI: Did you see any difference in their performance?

LT: No. They were just like any of us. The only difference was that some of them hadn't seen combat before and they were on their way to it, but, outside of that, there was no difference.

SI: What about the invasion of Iwo Jima?

LT: Well, like I say, we knew we were in trouble and they had Mt. Suribachi there, which was one big artillery position. They had all kinds of caves and no straight out caves. All [of them] had angles and they could fire up and down the beach. They had every inch of the beach covered and, when we hit, the first three waves, there was no bombardment until the first three waves

[landed], and then, all hell broke lose. It took us three days to get off the beach and a lot of guys never did. In fact, I had a shell fall right in the hole with me and, unbelievably, none of us, there were about ten of us in that hole, that shell hole, and nobody got hurt and that was just one incident, but so many guys got killed and wounded on the beach, it was unbelievable. These, what we call LCVPs, landing craft, come in and take the guys out. It was just unbelievable the amount of people they had on. After the third day, we were able to get off the beach and, of course, there were plenty of Marines coming in behind us. We had two other divisions on that little island. It was unbelievable, sixty thousand men on eight square miles. It was just unbelievable and we crossed over the airport. We thought we were going to get help keeping the airport, because we didn't shell the airport. We wanted that in as good a shape as possible and we figured, "Well, this is it." We went across that airport; we didn't draw a shot. They were concentrating all their fire on the Navy and on the beach and they hit a couple of ships, you know. … As a matter-of-fact, the third day on Mt. Suribachi, that's when the flag went up and the first flag was small. We didn't realize what was going on at the time, but we saw the flag go up, then, it came down. We said, "Oh, my God, we lost it already? We just got up there," but, then, we saw the other flag, a much bigger flag, go up. We had no idea what was going on, but that's when that famous picture was taken and they had no idea that would be so famous, you know. It's just one of those things. There, the Japs fought smart. There were no *banzai* attacks. The whole island was tunnels and they'd be right under us and we wouldn't know it and, every night, they would come up in groups, small groups, shoot around and disappear. This one night, it just so happened that we were in a situation where, behind us, it was like a hill and we were up against it and we had a mound of dirt right in front of us, like a barrier, and we were shooting flares up and, all of a sudden, the Japs come out of nowhere. We were mowing them down, and then, they just disappeared. That's how I got hit. It was the eighth day and what we would do in the morning was, we would mop up. That morning, we were out mopping up, my two buddies and me, and I was the lead man. There was a Marine helmet bobbing around and they were great for that, too, for taking our uniforms and acting like Marines. We were pretty sure it wasn't a Marine, but we couldn't take that chance, you know. We wouldn't kill him until we were positive and, sure as hell, it was a Jap. So, he popped his grenade and he held it and we said, "Well, he's going to commit *hari-kari*," but he didn't. He held it for two seconds and out it came. My two buddies took off and I was close to it, so, I just hit the deck and, of course, I got hit. I had quite a few pieces in me and they also got hit, too, but they were running and they didn't get it that seriously. They got it in the back and their legs, but I first thought I was dead. Of course, it blew my helmet off, broke my jaws and I'm thinking to myself, I can't hear anything now, … and I'm like, "Oh, my God, I'm dead." When I saw the blood on my hands, I thought, "I'm not dead. I'm alive." So, I call for a corpsman and he wrapped me up as best as he could, you know, around my neck, my hands. My hands were wounded and he got up and I saw I could walk. So, I had got hit from the waist up and I'm walking through the command post and I'm all wrapped up in these bandages. I always called him an asshole, our commanding officer, a captain, he said, "Where the hell are you going, Trez?" I said, "I'm getting off this goddamn island. Where the hell do you think I'm going?" and I just kept walking. I went down to the beach, got on one of those LCVPs and they took me to a hospital ship. … They took care of me as much as they could there. One guy; I had to stop, because I had shrapnel in my spine and I didn't know it at the time. So, he's digging around in there and I grabbed his hand and I said, "Wait until they take x-rays." I mean, I don't know where I got that thought from, but I stopped them, because they had no facilities to do that with on these ships. Then, we went to a

hospital on Saipan, which I only stayed a day or two in, and then, from there, they sent me back to the hospital in Pearl Harbor. That's where I found out how everything was, you know, especially the shrapnel. In fact, when I was waiting to see a doctor, he's whistling and he said, "Hey, Trez, get in here." I'm sitting outside, waiting to see him, and he had real fancy equipment in those days; he's got my x-rays against the window. He said, "Look at this." He shows me the shrapnel. The vertebra is like that and the shrapnel is right in there. He said, "Why you're walking, I'll never know." He said I should just thank God. It's amazing, because I was partially paralyzed for a while, but that wore off, on the left side. I couldn't move it and I asked him about that. I said, "What's going to happen?" He said, "That's going to take care of itself. Don't worry about it."

SI: Was it like that for months?

LT: About a month, then, it just worked itself out, and then, from Pearl Harbor, they sent me to Seattle, Bremerton Navy Yard, and that was heaven. I was able to walk. As a matter-of-fact, … like I said, my jaws were broken and it's a funny story, that's why I'm telling you. They had this specialist who invented a new thing, a serum that he injected into your jawbones, and it would knit everything together. This just started to happen and he was in San Francisco or something. So, they had him come up and they're having a meeting with the staff, the nurses and doctors, and they needed me as a guinea pig, you know. So, they said, "Trezza, come up here." They had this nurse, she had some pair of boobs on her, and he said, "You know, now you have to lean on her." So, I'm leaning on her breasts as I'm hollering, "Hey, heaven." Anyway, they did, they had this thing, the shots, and they gave me one on each jawbone and it straightened it out.

FB: You were talking about when they raised the flag on the island. You did not realize that it the time, but, down the road, years later, you realized how important that picture became. How did you feel about that?

LT: Great. I was there. I saw it, you know, great, and it's probably the most famous war picture that was ever taken.

SI: You mentioned that your opinion of your CO was not that great. In general, what was your relationship like with your officers?

LT: Most of the officers were great or we could have lost most of them, too. I mean, most of our officers were killed, but he was always like in another world. Nobody paid any attention to him. You know, there's another thing about the training we had. I mean, if they tell us to do something stupid, we just didn't do it, and if they insisted, we say, "We're right behind you." So, he had no choice, either shut up or get up and move, you know, and, fortunately, we never had to do that. I mean, every once in a while, he would come up with some stupid suggestion and we just ignored them, … along with the other officers.

SI: Was he a regular Marine?

LT: No. He was a little older than us, but he wasn't in the Marine Corps before the war. That's what you mean by regular.

SI: Reservist?

LT: No. Most of the Marines, we rarely had [Reservists]. We had one colonel and he was a great guy, but we never took him into combat. He never went into combat. He was a great guy in training, but they left him at Camp Pendleton.

SI: I also wanted to talk about your relationship with officers in combat. How strictly did they keep the discipline? Could you talk to them?

LT: Oh, yes. There was nothing like being in combat; it wasn't like in training. They made a suggestion and we followed it, unless we thought it was stupid. Some of them were, "You do what I say or else," but most of them weren't and, when you're getting shot at, it's a whole different ballgame; it's not like training. This is the real thing. If you make a mistake, you're dead. So, most of our officers were excellent.

FB: Did you feel you were properly trained in training camp?

LT: Oh, yes.

FB: Often we read about how men were trained in camp and, when they actually got to the battlefront, it was nothing like what they had expected.

LT: Until you witness it, that's it. It's shocking, but, … as far as I'm concerned, we couldn't have been trained better. I mean, the training was absolute perfection. I mean, they got your body in unbelievable condition and your mind, also. So, like I said, … everything changes once you're in combat. You're on your own and everything changes and, fortunately, they did a good, an excellent job. Like I said, after three days, it becomes automatic. You become a machine and, if you don't, you're dead, simple as that. You can't stop to think about anything. I mean, I used to find myself diving in a hole and, a couple of seconds later, a shell would fall in. I never heard it, but just instinctively [dove]. The only thing that was really scary was when they dropped a couple of airplanes, because you'd hear them, and we had it on Saipan a couple of times. You hear the shells coming down and every one sounds like it's going to fall on you. You hear them whistling and that was the only thing, but, fortunately, we didn't have much of that.

SI: When you got back to civilian life, how quickly did that disappear, the constant reacting to things?

LT: … It was amazing. I mean, my reflexes were fantastic and, as a matter-of-fact, we were bowling one day, after I got out of the Marines. We all had drinks and I'm not even looking and one of my buddies there was bowling; he grabbed my drink. I said, "Put that down." He says, "You're not even looking at me." That's how my reflexes were, but, after a while, they wear off.

FB: When were you discharged?

LT: I was discharged from the hospital in 1946. I was wounded in 45; it was fifteen months I was in the hospital.

SI: Overall, did you have a pretty high opinion of the treatment you received?

LT: Oh, it was great, like I said, except that one time, when the guy … didn't know any better and he was digging around. He figured he'd fish out a piece of shrapnel; he had no idea where it was and, fortunately, thank God, I automatically, or whatever, stopped him, and then, the doctor I ran into in Pearl Harbor, he saved my life. He said, "Don't you let anybody ever touch that," and they tried every place I went. The first thing they do is set me up for an operation. Of course, I said, "How do I stop anybody?" He said, "Ask him for a written guarantee." What do I know? He said, "Nobody will ever touch you," and that's what I did. After they set me up for surgery, I'm having surgery tomorrow, I said, "I want a written guarantee that there'll be no physical defects whatsoever." "We can't do that." I said, "You can't operate," and that's how I got away with it. Of course, I had shrapnel in my hand and that I had to have therapy [for]. Each place I went, I had something different and I lucked out for a while. When I was in Seattle, waiting to come east, they had to make room for more casualties, so, they sent me to Sun Valley, Idaho. They turned that into a convalescent base for the Navy. The Navy took over and, … almost immediately after they did that, I went there and it was still just like it was always. It was a hotel. There were the porcelain pools and everything. A funny thing happened there. I just got organized, … before the weekend, and they had the thing on the bulletin board, there was going to be a big dance Saturday night. That's in the middle of nowhere, Sun Valley. So, my roommate was a guy from the Navy, a Navy sailor, and, come Saturday night, he's getting dressed up to go to the dance. I said, "Where are you going? What are you going to find? Where are you going to get girls to come here?" He said, "Come on, what the hell you're going to do, stay there? Let's go see what it's going to be like." So, he said, "What are you going to do, just lay here? Come, get dressed." So, I did. It was unbelievable. They brought busloads of college girls; from where they got them, I don't know, but there must have been 150 girls there and, of course, there was no problem. I lucked out. There was a girl I met and liked and, if I stayed there, I wouldn't be here now, because she invited me to her house. … She said, "Just ask for the (Barrett?) Ranch. Every cabbie knows where the Barrett Ranch is. Everybody knows the Barrett Ranch." At that time, it cost a half a dollar to go there. I don't know how many miles away it was and my buddy, the sailor, of course, he came, too. We get to the ranch and he dropped us off and the girls were there and said, "You're in luck, our horses just arrived." I had never gotten on a horse in my life. She said, "We'll go riding, right?" I said, "Well, I'll try anything." So, she put the saddles on and everything and we went for a ride and it was just like I was an old hand at it, perfect, and we came back and it was time for dinner and we went in the house, met her mother and, of course, the father was on his way home. He was a doctor and, also, an unbelievably wealthy man. He and two other guys … practically owned the state. So, we're sitting down and he said, "I saw you guys on the horses today. You sit a horse very well." I said, "Yes, not bad for the first time." He threw his utensils [down]. He says, "What, are you trying to insult me?" I said, "Well, what did I say?" "You're trying to tell me that's the first time you're on." I said, "Doc, I've never been on a horse before. The only time I saw horses were pulling wagons. Where I come from, we didn't ride horses, except the garbage men pulling wagons." So, he said, "Well, you did fantastic, and we sit in there, talking, and he said, "Do you like to gamble?" I said, "Yes, but I have no money." He says, "Come." So, he takes us into

town and, like, there were three buildings, each one was a gambling house, now, with a drugstore and a grocery store and something else and each one had a backroom for the gambling, like roulette and poker. So, he said to me, "You like to play poker?" "Yes, of course." We're sitting and I said, "I have no money." He said, "I didn't ask you if you had any money," put five hundred dollars in front of me and we're playing. I said, "Jeez, I can't pay you back." He said, "Don't worry about it. Let's play." In no time at all, I'm winning about three, four thousand dollars. So, I give him the elbow. I said, "Hey, Doc, I think it's time for us to quit. You're winning, I'm winning, let's wrap it up. I just have a feeling things are going to change." "Yes, you got nowhere to go. What are you going to do? Don't worry about it." So, we lost. So, the next time I come in, the next weekend, okay, of course, having dinner, she apologized, the mother apologized, you know, the war is on and they were the type, as much money as they had, they would not buy anything on the black-market. So, I had a buddy that was in the galley in the hospital. So, I said, "I need a half a dozen steaks." "Okay, Lou," well, it wasn't Lou, it was Trez, "Okay, Trez." We go there and I put these on the table for her. I said, "Here, here's a gift for you." She opened them up, she said, "I can't take that. Why, you had to buy them on the black-market." I said, "No, I bought them from the Navy hospital." She said, "How can you buy them there?" I said, "I have a friend. He sold them to me." So, here's our gift and she was, "Oh, God, thank you, thank you." They hadn't had steaks in such a long time, but they were fantastic people and I was having such a good time there and orders came in, "You're shipping out." So, they shipped me to St. Albans in Staten Island and I stayed there for a good while, until I got straightened out. It was funny; when I was getting ready for discharge, again, it was an admiral, of course, they're all Navy hospitals and there were two sailors in front of me and each one was supposed to have had a back problem and he called them all kinds of names and said, "You get back to duty. Who the hell do you think you're kidding?" So, I said, "Oh, God, what am I up against here?" So, I go in. He's got my records in front of him. He said, "What do you want?" I said, "I want to go home," and I figured the roof is going to fall in. He said, "Okay," he signs it up and said, "You go to the Brooklyn Navy Yard and you'll be out in two days, as soon as they have all the paperwork done." That was it.

FB: When were you awarded the Purple Heart?

LT: I received the Purple Heart when I was in Pearl Harbor; they gave it to me while I was in the hospital there.

SI: Did you ever consider staying in?

LT: No. I couldn't have, anyway, because of my discharge; I had received a medical discharge. I mean, in the war, I did my duty and I never gave it a thought of staying and making it a career.

SI: In combat, did you notice anything like superstitions or maybe men finding religion or anything like that?

LT: No. All our guys, … we were all pretty much the same. I mean, like I say, we became automatic and that was it. I mean, you just did everything automatically and, if you didn't, you cracked up.

SI: In terms of viewing the enemy, do you think you overestimated or underestimated them?

LT: No, we knew they were tough. I mean, we knew that and we never overestimated. We just knew they were tough. We knew that we had to kill as many as we could and we did. That's why I'm here.

SI: What about the friendships that you formed?

LT: They never cease and my best buddy, he lived down south and, unfortunately, he became an alcoholic and he died a long time ago. My closest buddy now is in Rutherford and he was an unbelievable Marine. He never got a scratch, saved so many guys. He should have got the Congressional Medal of Honor and didn't because of our jerk for a company commander. He's *gung ho*. Betty walks away when he comes in, because that's all we talk about, you know, but he's a fantastic guy and we're still very close. He's the only one that's close to me. We try to get together every year, what's left of the company, and I couldn't make the last couple for medical reasons, … but the next one will be in Chicago and we have them all over the country. We do, like I say, get together every year, what's left of us. There's always somebody we lose, because most of us are eighty or in our eighties and they just, you know, they go.

SI: You used the GI Bill for the mortgage.

LT: Oh, yes, and my first job. Well, I don't know whether that was GI [Bill] or not. I didn't know what the heck I was going to do when I got out and I went to Stevens Institute in Hoboken and they gave me aptitude tests and stuff like that. So, they suggested that I go to college and I'm thinking, now, again, as a Marine, "I'm twenty-one years old. By the time I get out of college, I'll be twenty-five. I'll be an old man." …

----------END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE----------

SI: This continues our interview with Mr. Louis Trezza on February 29, 2004, in Brick, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and Faye Bronzo and Mrs. Trezza, also, sitting in. Please, continue. You were talking about your options with the GI Bill.

LT: Yes, like I said, I went to Stevens Institute, took these aptitude tests and, of course, like I said, they suggested I go to college, but I felt, … by the time I got out of college, I'll be an old man. I met a girl, I got married and I just couldn't see it. So, I wanted to know if they had any kind of a job that I could earn and learn something at the same time. They said, "Oh, sure." So, he reads them off. All I kept saying is, "How much does that pay?" and, finally, it seemed like the best paying job was auto parts. So, I said, "Okay, I'll try that," and the deal was, I would get fifty cents an hour from the owner of wherever I went and Uncle Sam would pay me fifty cents an hour, so, I would wind up with a dollar an hour for I don't know how many months it was. So, I said, "Okay, I'll try that." Like I said, I knew nothing about auto parts and a man came around to take me, introduce me to places. First, we went to car dealers. I said, "No, … I'd rather work where I can learn about everything, not just one make of car." So, he took me to this auto parts place called M&G Auto Parts in Jersey City and they had a big machine shop and they handled everything. So, I said, "Okay, if you'll take me, I'll work here," and, of course, they

broke me in immediately, I started. I fell in like I was meant for that job and I worked there for a couple of years. I was working at the counter and I used to see the salesman come in every night with a shirt and tie on. I figured, "They're making money, a lot more than I am. So, I sat the boss down, I said, "You know, I'd like to get a shot at going outside on the road." He said, "Oh, no, you're too valuable to me inside." So, that bothered the hell out of me. I figure, "I'm never going to go anywhere." He's got two sons working there with me. Even though I'm better than his two sons, that don't matter, that's still their business. So, there's a competitor right around the corner and, at that point, I had developed a reputation and all of the mechanics knew me and so do my competitors. So, I went around there one night and … he didn't have any salesmen I told him what I wanted. He said, "Well, my father and my uncle, who own the business, they never had any luck with salesmen. You know, they always found them shacking up some place or going to the movies." I said, "Well, hey, I got a wife and a kid. I'm not about to fool around. I just want a chance at it. If I could make it, fine. If I can't, I'll just stay at the counter." He said, "Okay, when do you want to come over?" I said, "Well, I have to give the guy notice. I have to give Mayer notice and I'll let you know." So, the next day, I sit the boss down again. I said, "I've been offered another job. I'm thinking very seriously of taking it." He puts his hand out and he shakes my hand, "Good luck." He blew all the wind out of my sails. Here I am, I'm the best guy he's got and he drops me like a red hot potato, not even interested where I'm going. So, after he realized what [happened], in fact, he went in the office and the general manager is in. He was the boss, but the general manager was in there. I guess he told him what was happening, so, "What? You're crazy. What [did you] let him go for?" He comes out and he wanted to talk to me. I says, "No, I'm leaving," much [as] he did that to me. That was it. So, I said, "I'll stay here. Give me as much time as you want me to break in another guy." So, he said, "That's not necessary, wrote out a check, and handed me my pay. I picked up my check, put it in my pocket, and walked around the corner. I said, "Eddie, when can I start?" He said, "How about tomorrow morning?" So, I never lost a day. I went in and it turned out very well. I mean, I did well. As a matter-of-fact, it turned out I couldn't handle it all and I got to a point where I got five guys working under me. Then, I became the general manager and I would have been still in that business, but, unfortunately, the boss died and he had a brother who was an absolute idiot. He didn't know anything about running a business, a good machinist, but that's all he knew and the first thing he did was want to get rid of me because, he was jealous. Of course, every time we talked about the business, he never was brought [into] any kind of conversation about running the business, not doing anything. He did everything he could to get rid of me, but I wasn't about to leave until I was ready and no one in the business would pay me what I was making, because I was making a lot of money. They always say, "We'd love to have you, Lou, but we just can't afford you." My closest friend, at that time, was selling industrial real estate. He said, "Why don't you give it a shot?" I convinced him to do it, to get out of the steel mill, and he said, "Now, I'm trying to convince you to do it. What have you got to lose? Give it a shot. You can always go back selling auto parts." So, I did and I've been selling industrial real estate ever since, until I retired a few years ago.

FB: Were you married?

LT: I was married.

SI: How did you meet?

LT: At a dance. I was still in uniform. I mean, I was discharged, but still wearing my uniform and I wasn't a very good dancer. She was a fantastic dancer. So, I asked her to dance. She turned me down, but I was determined and, during the breaks, they had a Ping-Pong table there and this was at the YWCA in Jersey City and I see her playing. So, whomever she was playing with, I took the paddle out of her hand or his hand, I don't remember who the hell it was, and we started to play. I started to play with her and we got friendly and, from there, I made a date and that was it, took her out, went out for a big drink, that's an ice cream soda, in those days, and so the rest is history. We met and I don't want to go to other details.

SI: How do you think the war affected you throughout your life?

LT: You mean physically and mentally?

SI: Yes. How did it shape who you are?

LT: Well, I was a boy. They made a man out of me and, like I said, I've been very fortunate that I was never affected mentally and I have no compunction about speaking about anything that happened in the war. I've seen so much blood, seen bodies blown apart and anything else you could possibly see I saw and there's no way to understand it unless you witnessed it. Like I say, fortunately, all of that never bothered me. I had guys blown apart right next to me and I never got a scratch.

SI: There is no survivor's guilt.

LT: No. The only thing I've ever felt is, like I keep telling Betty, I said, "When your number is up, it's up. Don't even think about it." I never would think about dying. The only thing I think about is, "If I'm going to die, I want to die quick." I don't want to be a burden to anybody, but it doesn't bother me; death doesn't bother me at all. I know it's going to happen and, when it does, it does. I'm not going to worry about it or think about it.

SI: Did you always feel this way, even before the war?

LT: No. I saw too much during the war. … Like I say, I saw too many people, too many buddies get killed, wounded, and, you know, I had to carry on.

SI: What was your most vivid memory of the war years?

LT: How do you mean that? I had so many vivid memories. I mean, I could go on and on and on. I guess when I was hit, when I was wounded; I thought I was dead and I wasn't.

FB: How did World War II shape the Korean War and Vietnam for you?

LT: Those poor guys had to go there and do their jobs and that's it. I just used to get angry as hell at stupid people in the Vietnam War, what they did to those poor guys. They were over there for their country, whether it was right or wrong, getting shot up and killed and everything.

Then, these jerks here are protesting and doing everything and spitting at them when they come back. Like, I hit one guy. I mean, this soldier was passing by and he spit on him. I just went over and I let him have it and [it was] the first time I lost my temper in my life, I think, but … I just couldn't help it. It was a stupid war and I knew it was a stupid war, but that's not the guy's fault that was fighting it and to get treated like they did was disgusting.

SI: Were you ever involved in any veterans' organizations?

LT: I did, but I dropped out. I never could get myself involved. I was with the VFW and DAV. … I joined them, but I never participated, really.

SI: Since your granddaughter is here, is there anything we missed, any stories that you have always been told?

LT: Did I miss anything, Jen?

JC: [What] about the guys in the Navy buying you drinks when you went to the bar?

LT: When I was in the hospital in Seattle, okay, like I say, every weekend, anybody who could walk could go into town. So, I'm in town, I don't know, and I'm all alone and I'm not a drinker, but I'm old enough to drink and I stopped in this bar and I ordered a beer. I ordered a beer. The first thing I know, the guys [got] out ten beers in front of me, ten glasses of beer. I said, "I ordered one." He said, "Everybody in the place bought you one." They knew that any Marine there was from the hospital. There were no Marines in town, except those in the hospital and, of course, I drank whatever I could drink. Now, I get out of this damn bar and I thanked everybody and I'm staggering. Now, I want to go back to the hospital and this cab pulls up, full of sailors. Again, they were going back to the hospital. They said, "Hey, gyrene, you're going back to the hospital?" I said, "Yes," and the cab was packed, okay, and they just pulled me in, laying across their legs and we get to the hospital and everybody gets out. Then, the cabbie says, and I'm staggering there, and one of the sailors stayed back, because he was paying the bill, and then, the cabbie wanted to get paid for me. He says, "Hey, Marine, you owe me." The sailor said, "You take one cent from him and you'll never leave this place alive. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. We paid you besides that." So, that's the only time anybody ever tried to take advantage, was that one cabbie. Of course, I've been all over and everybody was unbelievably generous, no matter where we went, but that was a funny one that Jenny always remembers. What else?

JC: What about your dad playing the piano?

LT: Oh, well, my father, like I said, was unbelievable; he was a mechanical and engineering genius. He never had any kind of an education, but he also played the piano and he learned how to play the piano when he was a projectionist, in the days of the silent movies. He'd run the movie and he was the projectionist. There'd be a break. Before the break, he'd run down, while the movie was playing, he'd play the piano. He wouldn't have to stand or anything like that. He was too far back and he'd run up, change the reel and he'd come back and play the piano again and, of course, we had a piano in the house and he wanted me to learn how to play and I wasn't

interested, not at all. So, he said, "Okay," gets down in the basement, gets a sledgehammer and just tears that piano to hell. "You don't want to learn, that's it," and it wound up in the garbage. Since then, I did learn how to play. Jenny is teaching me now.

FB: You were home when the war ended.

LT: Yes. As a matter-of-fact, I was in St. Albans, not in St. Albans, I was in the Half Moon Hotel, Coney Island, waiting for discharge and the war ended and, of course, toilet paper is rolling out the windows like crazy and everybody was going nuts.

SI: Did you go up to Times Square?

LT: No, stayed right there. Well, I hadn't met Betty yet.

SI: Again, is there anything we missed?

ET: Oh, I don't think so.

SI: Is there anything else you want to put on the record?

LT: No, I don't think so.

ET: Plus that, you really enjoyed the Marine Corps, no bad memories. There were horrible things that happened, but he never dwelled on that. He always thought about the good times we had and we had a lot of fun.

LT: I mean, the liberties we used to go on before we left the States, the crazy things we used to do, I loved it, once I was in it. I still do.

SI: If there is nothing else we will conclude the interview and thank you very much for everything.

LT: My pleasure.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Reviewed by Jason Kulak 10/26/04
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 11/9/04
Reviewed by Louis Trezza 12/27/04