

Veteran: Mark A. Robinson, World War II Veteran

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Interviewers: Alex E. Jolley and Holly Jolley

Int: State your full name.

Vet: Mark Applegate Robinson.

Int: Where do you currently reside in a city and a state?

Vet: Cedar City, Utah.

Int: Is this the same area where you resided when you were drafted or when you were enlisted?

Vet: Yes. I was living in Cedar City at the time working here, but I'm actually from Parowan, Parowan, Utah.

Int: Did you enlist or were you drafted?

Vet: Well I volunteered for the Navy. They turned me down 'cause I had flat feet. A few months later they drafted me and put me in the infantry.

Int: So, did you serve in the Army?

Vet: Yes.

Int: And you were full time, right?

Vet: Right.

Int: Where was your headquarters located?

Vet: What do you mean by headquarters?

Int: Where you mainly were stationed?

Vet: Well I took my basic training in Fort Ord, California, or Camp Cook, California, sorry; and transferred later to Fort Ord to finish the training.

Int: During what years did you serve?

Vet: From '43, April of '43 'til October of '45.

Int: What was the highest rank you achieved?

Vet: PFC. Private First Class.

Int: Could you tell us some of the duties you had?

Vet: I was a scout most of the time in the jungles over in the Pacific.

Int: Were you ever decorated for your service?

Vet: No.

Int: You did receive a Purple Heart, didn't you?

Vet: I have a Purple Heart, yes.

Int: Do you mind telling us why you got that Purple Heart?

Vet: Well, I got in the way of a bullet. I got shot in the hip and it come out in my back. I have a nerve injury there that's bothered me all my life.

Int: So where were you when you were shot?

Vet: I was in the Philippine Islands when I was shot.

Int: Out scouting?

Vet: Yes.

Int: Do you remember who gave you your Purple Heart?

Vet: No I don't. It was nothing fancy. They just brought it to me in the hospital.

Int: Were there any people of your acquaintance who have become prominent historical figures?

Vet: Not that I know of.

Int: When you reflect on your military service what is the most vivid memory of your service?

Vet: Well the most vivid was the day I landed back in the States.

Int: Any other vivid ones?

Vet: Well, several things that really impressed me. When we left San Francisco to go overseas, I looked back at the Golden Gate. You get an awful funny feeling when you know you're going into combat in wartime. I looked back at that Golden Gate and thought 'That's the last thing I'll ever see of the United States, my homeland'. You just have that feeling you're not going to come back.

Int: Were there any moments of religious or spiritual experience during your service?

Vet: I had a hard time getting any religious experiences because there was no other LDS people in my outfit at all. I spent a lot of time alone. Anytime the others'd go down to, mostly Catholics, when they'd go to the Catholic parties or anything, why, I stayed in my barracks and read and studied, took care and write letters; things of that kind.

Int: Could you tell us a little of your family life while serving?

Vet: Well we wrote letters back and forth all the time. I had an older brother that was down in California in the service. He had some problems and he was discharged about the time I went into the service. Had another brother, you probably knew him, Floyd Robinson. He lived here in Cedar for years. He served on the, in the Navy on a destroyer. I kind of forget these things now it's so long. He served on a destroyer throughout the war. He went in quite a bit later than I did. I don't know when exactly. Then I had another brother that served in the States, he never left the States. He was back in Arkansas most of the time.

Int: What were your experiences of joy and sorrow during your service?

Vet: I think the greatest joy was when I was in the hospital and we were playing cards with another fellow. A nurse come in and she says, she congratulated one fellow and told him he had his ticket home, he was going home. She says, "There's someone else that's going to go home too." She says, "I'll go and look and see who it is." She come back. She says, "Mark Robinson." I think that was the biggest thrill of my life up to that point.

Int: Did you have any experiences of sorrow during your service?

Vet: Yes, quite a few. We lost a lot of our men at the time I was wounded. This come quite a bit later, clear back up in the Philippines. There was only two men left in my company that didn't either get killed or wounded. They come down to the hospital to see me, those two guys in my squad. That was quite a sorrowful thing to know that everybody had been either been wounded or killed that was in my company of 165 men.

Int: So, at the same time that you were injured?

Vet: Within an hour or two. I was the first one that got it, so I didn't see much of that. I started off as a scout. There was a mortar shell or something that landed right by one of my friends that was just a little ways from me. It knocked him down. I just kinda dropped down on my heels, looking over at him to see if he going to be able to get up. He got back up and it was about that time when I got hit. I didn't see any more of it that day.

Int: Do you remember being taken out then?

Vet: Oh yes. I remember the, in fact I walked back to the jeep and climbed onto it, but I couldn't stand up for a week or ten days after I got off the jeep. They had to carry me off. I stiffened up in a hurry.

Int: Could you describe some of your feelings of support from home?

Vet: Well, that was one of the great joys is when mail call would come around. They'd receive letters. My wife, LaFawn, she was in that nurses training in the nurses cadets corps. I got a letter from her at least once a week all the time I was over there. Sometimes they wouldn't get it for two or three weeks, but, in fact, there was two or three weeks between letters anyhow.

Int: Before she was your wife?

Vet: Yes. I met LaFawn when she was only fifteen years old and I was seventeen. We went together for about two and a half years before I entered the service.

Int: So she waited the whole time?

Vet: She waited for the two and half years, it was longer than that.

Int: Did you feel support from your country?

Vet: Yes. We had all the support, we had everything we needed over there; other than food, of course. We'd house in the jungle warfare in the Solomon Islands all the time and the food was terrible.

Int: What kinds of things did you have to eat?

Vet: Well, mostly canned C-rations. That's was the biggest thing. That and the cooks we had. I shouldn't talk about it, but the cooks could take a good piece of meat and they could ruin it. Any they cooked they ruined the biggest part of the time. I lost from 145 pounds down to 113 at the time I was wounded. It was mainly because we couldn't stand to eat the food.

Int: Did you ever serve anywhere else besides in the jungle?

Vet: Well It was mostly jungle. When we went to the Philippines we had a little more open country. When I left the Philippines at the end of the war, when I was wounded, we was stationed kind of on the back edge of a hill. We were supposed to go over and take over another hill on the other side of that little valley to go through. I just started up, or I was on top of the ridge just going over the top when I got hit. Most of the time we were in jungle type. I was, in the Philippines we did make beachheads on three different small islands there. It was pretty well jungle, heavy trees most of the time when we was on those islands.

Int: So did you camp in tents, or you were in foxholes, or?

Vet: Well, when I was in Bougainville, see we spent a full year in Bougainville, my outfit. That's this northern island in the Solomons. We had a, the Marines had established a perimeter there before we landed, before we came in there. They had a trench built; a fourteen mile trench. It come from the beach and out in a half-circle and back out to the beach. We manned that for a

year. Most of our work there was patrolling out through the rest of the island and the jungle, keep track of where the Japs were. That was our main job. There was a period of time there that myself and two other fellows for about four months, we were stationed on an outpost about 150 yards out in front of the main lines. We had one of us stand guard day and night there with a telephone. We'd have to have a telephone by both ears, one at each ear just hangin' on a peg. You didn't have phones that would ring. They're what they called sound powered. Anybody wanted to talk to you, one of these come to the company headquarters and the other one went to battalion headquarters. Any sign of problems coming in there, why we was to kind of blow in the telephone to get their attention and then whisper whatever messages we had. That's when they would do the same when they wanted to talk to us, so we had to have 'em by our ear all the time even when lightning was in the wires—got knocked off the sandbags we sat on two or three times. It was quite a deal. While I was out on that outpost, the Japanese made one big attack on our lines. Course we got the information later, but they were to use this Tarkeena(?) Trail, that's where our outpost was, guarding the trail across the little river. There was a big hill they called 260, it was 260 feet above sea level. It had a gigantic tree up right on the top of it. We had a, just about 25 men is all they could on top of that hill that manned that outpost. They had a house built right up in the top of that tree so they could look out over the island. That was the artillery headquarters so they could call for artillery, tell 'em where they was shootin', or where to shoot and all that. The Japs come in and attacked that hill. We had a real battle there for about three weeks. That was one sad time for me. Had a lieutenant that was our platoon leader that, he was . . . We were very close; really a fine fellow. We went on a patrol out there around that hill while the battle was going, and he got shot. I had to carry him back. While I was carrying him back, why, he passed away right there while I was holding on, letter carrying him. It was just a pretty sad thing. Course we had several of those things happen.

Int: Do you have any regrets about your service?

Vet: No, not really.

Int: Do you have a single most positive experience of your service?

Vet: Well, I had, when we were up in the Philippines, just before we were wounded, we had our machine gun section, heavy weapons platoon, was up on a little hill. You've seen that little hill out this side of Parowan along side of the highway. It looked a lot like that except for the foliage on it. Up on that hill, they called on a bunch of us, we was supposed to make an attack over the hill, over on the other side. We had a tank in front of us we was supposed to follow that tank around the hill. When we went part way, we had got out around the hill, they held us up there for a little while. Then they had us pull back, walk back about fifty yards. About the time we got back there about fifty yards, that hill exploded. It just blew up. The tanks, the tank that we was following, had come right back to where I'd been sitting for about a half hour. I'd been guarding a hole in back of the hill, kind of a tunnel. That tank was sittin' right where I'd been sitting, and it rolled it over about four times away from that hole. So I was real lucky there. That

night they held us back there to reorganize. By the way, when the hill blew up, it buried pretty near all of those men that were up on the hill. We all, the rest of our company, we made a dash up there onto that hill to start digging. We saved all but three men out of our heavy weapons platoon, got 'em out before they . . . One or two places I know I was digging, I dug one guy out and as quick as he got his head up out of the water he pointed down at the dirt. He was still alive enough so he could tell us. We went to digging there and got another guy out and saved his life. That night they pulled us back a little ways and they put us in guarding a place there. We, each one had a foxhole, but we were scattered out really bad. I was out in front of a little, it was kind of a bamboo hut. Along about ten o'clock, I was kind of laying down with my feet in the foxhole and just looking up, using my steel helmet for a pillow, something blew up down there. We didn't know what it was at the time. That was a pretty thing to be all alone. Nobody was close enough so I could talk to 'em or even 'em actually at night. I sat there all night and that was a pretty spooky thing. The next morning, apparently something tripped a little bomb the Japs had there for a booby trap. Something had tripped the wire somehow and exploded that bomb. That's what, it threw, stuff flew on both sides of my head, but nothing hit me. The next day they didn't know what to do with what was left of us. They took us around across a little flat. There's not supposed to be any gas, at all, used in the war. But I know a that a little mortar shell broke right by me. I went out across the flat to check it. They only way you could, somebody had to draw fire. They landed that pretty close to me. I know it was a tear gas bomb, mortar shell. I'd smelled enough tear gas in training, and I know that's what it was. It sure made my eyes, those things smart. I got through that and then I had another kid that was new in the outfit that was gonna take my place as a scout. He was with me. We went around another hill after we crossed that flat and got everybody acrossed it. We was trying to find another outfit that we was supposed to join. I went around the hill one way to see if we could find a way to get around. They turned mortars loose on us there. One shell hit down the hill just a little ways from us. There was another one that dropped just a little closer. I told this other kid, said, "Get down as low as low as you could on the ground, the next one's coming close." I actually saw that mortar shell when it hit the ground. It doesn't sound reasonable, but I actually saw it. The tail fell off as it hit the ground about ten feet from me. I got showered with gravel and stuff. This other kid, he was up the hill a little ways from me, he got a piece of shrapnel right through the fleshy part under his arm. That's the only thing that hit us. We went back and took our outfit down around the other side of the hill. I was breaking trail there as a scout. A machine gun opened up on me and I couldn't tell where the bullets was coming from. I could just see the old grass just cutting off just like it was a mowing machine, except . . . They shot about five hundred shots at me before the guys could holler at me to tell me where the bullets was coming from. I went to dive over the side of the hill and got away from it. Every time they'd shoot, it was a kind of a habit of the Japs, they'd put there gun on and they'd shoot in that direction. Then if they saw you move, why . . . If you moved some place else you'd already moved, why, they'd start shootin' there. But you could move back and forth to wherever they had just fired, if you jumped to that spot you was safe for the next blast. They shot five hundred shots at me and

didn't hit me. It was that night they, men went up to get some protection for a machine gun nest. There was a new fellow in there with a machine gun. I just went off guard and a little kid was settin' up there in the dark on the edge of the foxhole. The new kid in the machine gun nest saw him move and didn't know what it was and he opened . . . He just used his rifle, started shootin' at him. He hit him and took the end of his nose off and one bullet went through just the little bit of fleshy part of his back. He dropped back down in the foxhole. I had to doctor him up and keep him in there until morning. We got the guns stopped, they really knew where it was coming from because it was only about as far as from here to the back of the lot from us. The next, it was two days later that I got shot. So that ended the time there.

Int: So then you came home from being on convalescent leave?

Vet: That was on Cebu Island. Then they treated me in the hospital for the nerve injuries over my hips. I couldn't wear a belt. I still have trouble wearing a belt. That's the reason I wear coveralls all the time. They took me down to a southern island in the Philippines. I spent quite a bit of time down there and they sent me back up to my outfit. When I tried to put a rifle belt on I just couldn't stand it at all. So they sent me down to another hospital. They worked with me but they couldn't seem to find the problem there. I still had some shrapnel. They'd operated on me and took some of the, a bullet that hit me, hit the top of my hip bone and splattered the bullet. I still got the, every time I have X-rays, why, they ask about what hit me. They say it looks like a shotgun hit me. I've still got eight or ten pieces in there; little pieces of shell off that rifle bullet, or machine gun, whatever it was. Then they kept me in the hospital and treated me there for a little while. Then they sent me over to Leyte to the general hospital. The doctor looked at me and checked me. I never heard any more from the doctor for several days. That's when they told me that I was going home. One of the exciting things I think was on my way home and on this hospital ship. We was about half way home or something and then we heard about the atomic bomb hitting Japan. We got two or three reports and false reports, but nothing official about the war being over until we got to Seattle, Washington. I was just going down the gangplank off the ship when they, on the loudspeaker on the ship it says, "Now hear this." That was the signal on ships. 'Now hear this,' before they gave a message. It says, "The war is officially over." So I was on the gangplank coming down at that time. So I went down to the hospital there in Fort Washington and was there about four days. They loaded us on, I was just a hospital car on the railroad. It took us about four days to get down to California, Oakland, to the hospital where I was there for about three days. I asked 'em what's the chance of getting a furlough. They says, "When do you wanna go?" I says, "Now." He says, "Okay, have you got any money?" I didn't have any money. They hadn't paid me while I was in the hospital. So he says, "Well, it might be morning before we can get you any money." They give me some money and I come back to Salt Lake. The war was over then. I rode the bus into Salt Lake. LaFawn was in nurses training. I walked into the nurses home up at LDS Hospital and asked for her. About that time here she come out of the halls. They'd said to call her on the telephone. She saw me and come running over and about knocked me down. That was one of the happiest

moments of my life to see her. Then I was there for about, they got fouled up on my furlough and give me an extra ten days. I was coming back and forth between Parowan and Salt Lake for pretty near a month. So I had to go back to the service. Then I was only there just for a short time and they discharged me. I come home and married a few days later.

Int: How has your service colored your current political, social or religious views?

Vet: Well, we didn't have much thought of political views then. We had the President that was runnin' the United States and everybody was behind him. There wasn't the conflict between parties like there is now. It makes me sick the way they fight back and forth, it does me, anyhow. At that time everybody was behind what was going on with the President. It was the thing to do. Course we didn't like the idea of being over there fighting, nobody likes that, but we knew that it had to be done. The people back here, everybody went to work and took care of things. That four years, you could just look at history and see what was developed in that four years after we joined the war before the Japs gave up, it's just fantastic. We had our Navy and Air Force was just about depleted when the Japs hit Pearl Harbor. Everything we had in that four years, we'd developed the mightiest Navy and Air Force in the world. It was fantastic. Everybody back here went to work. My mother and dad, they moved to California and both got jobs in defense work down in San Francisco. They lived down there during the war; went down shortly after I went in. Course by that time they had four of their boys in the service.

Int: If you could give advice to the servicemen and women of today, what would it be?

Vet: To go and serve all they could whatever they was called to do. I think if they kept their minds on the things to do and not be squabblin' about it. They should serve their country. I would do it now if it come to that.

Int: How do you feel about the current conflict in Iraq?

Vet: Well, I have mixed feelings about it. I feel like anything that we're doing over there is protecting us here in this country. If we didn't go over there to fight 'em, they'd be over here. I look back few years to the, both Vietnam and Korea. If we hadn't stopped 'em there, this is just my idea, but the Russians were backin' 'em on everything, that if the Russians could have took over more of that kind of territory, they could come over here. I think it could still happen if we didn't fight 'em over there. I think it would wind up being over here. I hate to see our boys over there. I hate to see 'em in combat. I think you'd see a lot more problems if they weren't over there. I stood behind our President. I always kinda considered myself a Democrat, but to me, when we elect a president or officials, whether we agree with 'em or not, we should back 'em while they're in office. When their term is gone then we can vote 'em out. But that fighting against our elected officials I think is terrible. That's my honest opinion.

Int: Is there anything else you'd like to share with us?



Vet: I believe I've probably told you more than you wanted to hear. I think that'd be all.

Int: Thanks for letting me do this interview, Mr. Robinson.

Vet: Thank you.