

**A Veterans Oral History**  
**Heritage Education Commission**  
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Moorhead, MN

**Jerome Hipp**  
Narrator

**Stephanie Manesis**  
Interviewer

**June 1, 2012**

SM: It is June 1, 2012. This is Stephanie Manesis, the interviewer. I am interviewing Mr. Jerome Paul Hipp, h-i-p-p, in Breckenridge, Minnesota. All right Mr. Hipp, could you please tell me the date and the year that you were born?

**JH: September 12, 1921.**

SM: So you are going to be 91 this year?

**JH: I'll be 91, yes.**

SM: Can you tell me where were you born and raised?

**JH: I was born in Hankinson, North Dakota, and that's where I was raised.**

SM: How many children in your family?

**JH: Ten.**

SM: Where were you in the round-up?

**JH: I'm number nine.**

SM: Was it a farming family?

**JH: No, we lived in town. My dad worked on the railroad. He worked on the section for the railroad. Of course, we had three cows and a bunch of chickens and a couple of pigs right in town. In those days you had all that kind of stuff. Now days, they don't.**

SM: What did you want to do when you grew up? Did you know when you were younger?

**JH: I had no idea. I helped my brother-in-law on the farm after I graduated from high school; and of course, the President said if you get your year of service in you could quit. So I joined the North Dakota National Guard out of Wahpeton, North Dakota, in the early part of January. Then they were federalized on February 10, 1941. And from there we went to Camp Claiborne, Louisiana.**

SM: So you went and joined the National Guard in January of 1941, and tell me more about the federalization. I'm not familiar with that.

**JH: The Guards would be a state situation, you know. Of course, when they federalized it, it was under the Federal Government. We became a part of the regular U. S. Army.**

SM: Was the idea that you still had just a one-year commitment at that point?

**JH: Yes, that was Roosevelt's intention, I guess. I'm sure he probably knew more about it than I, at the time. Yes, that was it.**

SM: What were you doing for the National Guard?

**JH: I was a private, of course, at that time, a rifleman; plain old GI rookie. You trained as a rifleman. In Camp Claiborne, we trained primarily all the time. Then I was put in the 60mm mortar, the 4<sup>th</sup> Platoon of the company. I don't know what else to tell you.**

SM: Where is Camp Claiborne?

**JH: Camp Claiborne is right out of Alexandria, Louisiana. How far out I don't know, a few miles. We were training there all the time until December 7<sup>th</sup> happened. Shortly after that we went to Idaho and Montana and guarded railroad tunnels, railroad bridges, things like that, in case of sabotage, you know. I'm sure it was just a precaution.**

SM: Can you tell me more about Pearl Harbor Day; what you remember?

**JH: No, nothing other than the fact that we just disassembled everything at the camp and intended to go out to San Francisco. We didn't at the time. We went to Montana and Idaho for just a short time, but that didn't last very long, because it was real good duty. One thing I do remember of that, we ate**

**at a farmhouse and in the morning this gal had fried potatoes and bacon or ham and toast and eggs. We never ate like that in our lives, you know. So that was real good duty, but it didn't last long.**

SM: That farm where you remember the breakfasts was that in Montana or Idaho?

**JH: It was in Montana.**

SM: Where in Idaho?

**JH: Oh, I can't remember that. Our company was stationed at Sandpoint, Idaho. We over a CC camp, used to be in Sandpoint, Idaho, and our company lodged in that particular area. That was our headquarters. Then from there, we went to Idaho and Montana, different members of the company. From there we went to Fort George Wright, which would be near Spokane, Washington. To guard an airfield for a little while, and that didn't last long either, just a few days and stuff. We went from there to Fort Ord, California; got our shots for overseas deployment and then shipped out from San Francisco.**

SM: When did you ship out from San Francisco?

**JH: It would have to be the first part of 1942, in March probably. Because we went on the (USS) President Coolidge, it was an ocean liner. Our convoy was the President Coolidge and the (USS) Queen Elizabeth and the (USS) Mariposa. That was the three ships that were on our convoy. We went to Melbourne, Australia, and unloaded off onto three smaller ships because we were going to the New Caledonia. And they didn't have a harbor large enough for the Coolidge to get into, so they loaded onto three smaller ships.**

SM: In Australia?

**JH: Then we went to New Caledonia and trained there and primarily unloaded supply ships that would come in. Primarily 55-gallon drums of aviation gas were what we unloaded. You would take 15 barrels on a GI truck. You could handle those barrels of 55-gallon barrels of gasoline, we were in good shape when we left New Caledonia for Guadalcanal, I'll tell you. That was hard work, but it was good for us, I'm sure. It ended up being good for us.**

SM: Tell me more about your training in New Caledonia.

**JH:** I can say most of the time we were unloading ships is what we were doing. Very little rifle training ... we had that all previous at Claiborne in the same situation.

**SM:** How long were you in New Caledonia?

**JH:** It must have been the fore part of March, I suppose, we got into that area and we were there until we went to Guadalcanal and we landed there October 13, 1942.

**SM:** Tell me what happened when you were at Guadalcanal?

**JH:** We unloaded our ship when we got there. And we got shelled immediately from the Japanese. Artillery opened up on us. The Japanese Navy came in that night and bombarded the airfield. Luckily enough, we were on the beach and the airfield was – say we were on the beach here and we were laying here and the airfield was over here. So they were firing over towards the airfield. Luckily they didn't fire at us, because everything was over us. They bombarded that for at least two-and-half hours ... the battleships and cruisers. In fact, they did that for two or three nights in a row. They were trying to knock out the airfield.

From there on the Japanese attacked on Lunga Point. They attacked it and we went up onto the lines that were there. The Marines had lines that they had formed a perimeter around the airfield to protect the airfield. The Japanese attacked it on that particular area. And our battalion was sent into that area. I was in the 60-mm mortars and we fired a lot of shells and stuff. And it was a pretty tough time. Luckily, I didn't get killed or get hurt. That was a good deal. From there another attack happened on the Matanikau Ridge, and that's where we lost quite a few guys.

Then we left the island sometime in March. I think it was 1943. And we went to Bougainville, which is in the northern Solomons. We landed there Christmas Day; and I don't know who we relieved on the line, but we went right on the line. They had a perimeter again protecting an airfield. They didn't take the whole island at that time. They'd just take a certain area of the island and form a ring around it and would protect the airfield.

That was the main purpose of most of the island hopping, they called it. Most of the reasoning was to protect the airfields, so we could bomb different islands in different areas. We were on Bougainville, the Japanese hit the regiment next to us on the line. I think it was the 132<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, if I remember right. Our 60-mm mortars helped fire that area to help them protect in the attack and we repulsed it. And I just don't know how long we

were on Bougainville. We were on Bougainville quite a while. And from there we went to the Philippines.

SM: So you arrived on Bougainville on Christmas Day of . . . ?

JH: Christmas Day of '43. See from Guadalcanal, we went back to the New Hebrides. What was that island ... went from New Caledonia to Guadalcanal back to the Fiji Islands.

We regrouped and naturally took on more replacements because of the fellows we lost, wounded, from malaria and whatever. Then we regrouped there and trained some more. Naturally, you train all the time, wherever you go, you train. So you get more efficient with that 60-mm mortar. And from there we went to Bougainville. Then from Bougainville, we went to the Philippine Islands. We landed on Leyte and I don't remember when we landed on Leyte. It had to be sometime in '43, I suppose. I don't remember fighting with the Japanese on the Leyte. We did a little bit of it on the island of Cebu, and then we went from there landed on Negros on the islands, didn't encounter any Japanese there. We went to Mindanao as a reinforcements, but we didn't run into any Japanese there either. Apparently, we didn't have to be.

They had the point system going. For each month you were in the service, you got one point, and each month you were overseas you got two points. So if you had a hundred points, they would start rotating you back to the States. And I had over a hundred points so they started rotating us back from Leyte to the United States. And I went home on a Liberty ship. They were built by Kaiser in those days.

Anyway, we were on the high seas coming home. It took us thirty days to come home from the Philippines to San Francisco. While we were coming home, they dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima. And they dropped the second one shortly. We stopped at Pearl Harbor and took on fresh water in this boat; and then we started out for the United States. I remember the captain of the ship, he came over the PA system. He said there would be no smoking cigarettes or anything at night because, "we know the war is over but the Japanese submarines probably don't know that the war is over." So we came home. It took I think, 10 days to come from Pearl Harbor to San Francisco. And from San Francisco, they took us across to what they call Angel Island. I don't know if it's still Angel Island or what. They had fresh milk and all the fruit and everything you can possibly imagine that you could have. They kept us there a couple of days and then we went to Fort Lewis, Washington, and they discharged us. So that's my history.

SM: Mr. Hipp, can you tell me when you were in boot camp in Louisiana, do you have any memorable stories at all?

**JH: Yes, the one thing I remember. Woody Keeble was in our company. He eventually got the Congressional Medal of Honor by the way. And one of the members of Company I had gotten the mumps. And they quarantined the whole company. So some of the guys had gone from camp to town, which they weren't supposed to do and stuff. Anyway I was on KP that day and stuff. I got off KP and the sergeant of the guard came and he said, "Hipp, you got to go on guard duty because there aren't enough guys left in the camp." I said, "I just got off special duty, you know." He said, "It doesn't make any difference. You've got to go on guard duty."**

**Our camp was ... we lived in pyramidal tents and there were five guys in a tent. They were made out of wood, the tent deals. Anyway, 3rd Battalion Headquarters was like here, a row, and then our row started here. Company's row started at the tents, okay. I got stationed in the middle of the row. I don't know what time at night, probably two o'clock or whatever it happened to be, here comes Keeble and another guy from town. And they said, "Hipp, don't call the corporal of the guard or nothing because you don't want to . . ." I said, "Woody," and he looked like he was about 18 feet tall, husky Indian. Nice fella. Anyway I said, "Woody, it doesn't make any difference." I said, "They took bed check and they know who's out, so there's no sense in that." And while I was trying to discuss this with him, the sergeant of the guard came around through the tents, so I was free. That's the one thing I remember about Camp Claiborne. They made these guys everyday go to the PX and smash beer cans. They would have to come back to our company for chow, to feed. And Woody would see me and he'd shake his fist at me. That's one of things I remember about Camp Claiborne, I'll tell you that.**

SM: Because he thought you got him in trouble.

**JH: Yes, but it was just a matter of time and they let him go with no problem. And that was about it. We trained every day, went out in the fields near Camp Claiborne and stuff. Swampy area is what it was. I think they had two camps that I remember Camp Claiborne and Camp Polk, Louisiana. I think it was a good idea to place these camps in the swampy area of the country. I wasn't in love with Louisiana, I'll tell you that. And that's about it.**

SM: How well did it prepare you for your actual combat?

**JH:** Oh, the training was good. We had good noncommissioned officers. And they did a good job. We had a good captain and good lieutenants. Yes, they were nice guys. They trained us well. I can't say they didn't, yes.

**SM:** So how long were you in Australia before you went to New Caledonia?

**JH:** We were in Australia, probably over four or five days. Just time enough to unload this big ship. That President Coolidge, at that time, was the largest cargo and passenger ship in the world, I think. But that ship was so huge that they had side doors on the ship, on the sides that they opened up. So you go in the ship not from the top but from the side. So you can imagine how large it was. It was a big ship.

And the fact of the matter, we ran into quite a storm before we got to Australia, and some of the scuttlebutt was that there was a submarine chaser. They called them submarine chasers at that time. It was a small boat that could attack the submarine, I suppose if they had to. They came to take us into the harbor. The storm was so bad that they came in a day later, after we were in the harbor, so it was a pretty good storm. Our ship was big enough to take care of it. Those are things you remember.

This had to be on the Philippines. There was some Nips, some Japanese quite a ways, about 1000 yards out, and we started firing mortars on them. Some of the guys went on the upper part of the hill. Mortars are below the hill, naturally, and they went up on the top part of the hill to watch the shells landing near those Nips. Swede Madsen (sp?), one of the guys that was in our platoon; he was a squad leader of their particular group of guys. They were up in there watching the stuff. And the Japanese sneaked up with a machine gun and fired on them and hit this kid in the legs. They carried him back; and then I got his flight jacket and I wrapped it up and made a pillow out of it. And he said to me, "god dammit, Hipp," he said, "I beat rotation anyway." He'd gotten hit. That was his comment, yes.

**SM:** How badly was he wounded?

**JH:** He recovered and had a brace on his leg all his life. He's passed away now. Yes, he had a brace on his leg all his life.

Any funny stuff, well, when we were on Bougainville, I remember this. There was a kid from Hankinson by the name of Joe Bierenbaum (sp?). He was in the Seabees and they were on Bougainville, also. I found out that they were there and for some reason, we got to go back to their area and stuff. And then he asked his commanding officer if we guys could stay for supper

because the Seabees ate well. They had reefers where they could keep fresh meat and things like that. So we had a real good supper at this place.

Joe Bierenbaum, one of the officers in the medical outfit, said their jeep that he had trouble. So these guys fixed it for him so the jeep could go. This medical officer gave them two quarts of alcohol. It was medical alcohol but it was fit to drink. What the heck, you know. So he gave us one of those jugs to take along back to the company. Of course, the 4<sup>th</sup> Platoon, the 4th Platoon was lucky enough to be able to have a high ball that night.

SM: So you guys actually drank it?

JH: Oh, sure it was good. There was nothing the matter with it. Yes, I suppose it was regular alcohol ... 190 proof alcohol. But that was about it. We went to the company kitchen and got some grapefruit juice, mixed it with grapefruit juice. It was good. It did the trick. That's one thing I remember about that area.

Bob Hope came to that area to do his entertaining. We were on the lines. We had to walk down, way down to the beach area, because that's where he performed. I don't know how many hours it took to get there and how many hours it took to sit there while he did his thing. It wasn't something that we needed for morale, I can tell you that, but then it was something that they did.

SM: Was that on Bougainville?

JH: It was on Bougainville.

SM: Did you just not enjoy it that much?

JH: I suppose it was the fact you had to probably donate four hours of your time in the heat and sweat and everything else to listen to some guy try and tell you some jokes. It wasn't my cup of tea. And I'm sure it probably was a morale builder for some people.

In the Philippines, we were on some patrol – well they send you out certain areas to see if there are Japs there. We were coming back to our particular area and we went past a pineapple patch. So the guys just broke rank and went into the pineapple patch and grabbed a bunch of it. It was hot and ate it. And then the battalion came. These farmers or whomever owned this, complained to the battalion, and the battalion came back to Company I and



**we had to pay. Each guy had to throw in a few dollars, to pay for those pineapples. So it was something that you did.**

SM: You and your brother met in is it Bougainville?

**JH: It was Bougainville, yes.**

SM: How many of your brothers were in World War II?

**JH: Just this one.**

SM: And did he make it out alive?

**JH: Yes.**

SM: That's good.

**JH: He ended up in New Zealand and he ran a lumber yard for many years. They supplied lumber to whomever. It was good duty. I don't remember where they went from there. They came further up but where, I don't remember.**

SM: Tell me more about when you came to Guadalcanal. Did you know that you would be under fire immediately when you got there?

**JH: Oh, I'm sure we did. Yes, because we were unloading ships and they fired onto the beach, even while we were unloading ship – the Japanese artillery. We had no idea how strong the Japanese Navy was. I'm surprised that we even were able to reinforce that place.**

**When you read the history of how strong the Japanese Navy really was, and even the fact that they didn't expect that island to be saved. We didn't realize it was that dangerous as what you read now days. And probably it was a good thing we didn't.**

SM: What else do you remember about Guadalcanal?

**JH: It was a pretty tough situation. It was nothing good about it. I was lucky enough to not get malaria. It must have been the good Lord saved me, I guess. That's all I can say. It wasn't a good situation. It was bad.**

**I even remember one time, this Louie Debert (sp?), I'm talking about. Some of the guys had what they called lockers, steel lockers. They were just kind**

of trunks, yes. Where you kept your clothes and all that stuff, okay? He had put a blanket on this trunk and then shake dice. Louie was shaking dice one time, and so I bet a buck, or whatever it was, and I was in the game anyway. He said to me, "Hipp," he said, "Get off of me. Get off of me." "Because," he said, "you won't win." And Louie would shake the dice and he had a good way of doing it. He'd always win, you know.

SM: He'd always win?

JH: Yes, he said, "Get off of me because you can't win." That's what I remember about Louie. He was a good guy.

SM: So he was a good . . . Yes?

JH: He was a good soldier. You're darn right. And he got killed. I'm thinking he was a corporal at that time. And that was on that Matanikau, when we crossed the Matanikau River and they fired mortars. I think these guys went over this hill and there was a drop-off and stuff. And the Nips had a machine guns crossfire when they dropped off this ridge. They didn't have a fighting chance to get back up. I'm sure he was killed instantly.

SM: Was that a sad day for you when you found out that he was killed?

JH: Well, we didn't find out until later on, of course. We were in the mortars and stuff. We fired a lot of mortars that day. \_\_ (5 sec) Yeah, that's all.

SM: So what do you wish that the younger generation knew about World War II?

JH: I really don't know. The younger generation, now days, it's hard to figure out what's to be happening with the world situation. Like the situation right now in Afghanistan, these poor guys don't know who their enemy is. You know, at least we knew who our enemy was. If there was somebody up ahead of us, you knew it was enemy. These guys don't know where the enemy is, in the first place. In the second place, I shouldn't even be going into this. But in the second place, I'm not a firm believer we got any business over there. These countries have to start learning to take care of themselves. Come on. What's the point? What makes us think we can constantly keep giving these people billions and billions and billions of dollars, for what? You know, it doesn't make any sense.

SM: Mr. Hipp, any other stories around your World War II experience that you want to share?

**JH:** No, that's all I know.

SM: Thank you very much for your time today.

**JH:** You're welcome.