

Interview with George Cordier

VR2-V-L-2007-009

Interview Date: July 20, 2007

Interviewer: Mark DePue

COPYRIGHT

The following material can be used for educational and other non-commercial purposes without the written permission of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. "Fair use" criteria of Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976 must be followed. These materials are not to be deposited in other repositories, nor used for resale or commercial purposes without the authorization from the Audio-Visual Curator at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, 112 N. 6th Street, Springfield, Illinois 62701. Telephone (217) 785-7955

DePue: Today is July 20, 2007. My name is Mark DePue. I'm here with George Cordier. I'm the Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and we're here to talk to you, George, about your experiences during World War II, as a Marine. It's not hard to figure out that you're a Marine, since you're wearing this shirt with the Marine Corps emblem and you've got a belt buckle with the Marine Corps emblem and clocks, and a door chime, and everything else with Marine Corps, so it seems to be something you're proud of, and rightfully so. George, what I'd like to do is to start with a little bit about your background. Where were you born and when were you born?

Cordier: I was born in Brackenridge, Pennsylvania, which is a little town, about twenty-eight miles up the Allegheny River from Pittsburgh. I lived there for most of my life, and then I went and started driving a bus out of Pittsburgh.

DePue: So you were also a young man then, growing up in Pennsylvania?

Cordier: Yeah.

DePue: How big was this town?

Cordier: Oh, about 3,500 or so.

DePue: What was the name of it, again?

Cordier: Well, I moved from the place I was born to a town that you go from one street to the next, you're in Tarentum. So I was in Tarentum most of my life.

DePue: What did your father do?

Cordier: He worked on the streetcars. He was on the streetcars for twenty some years. Whenever they took the streetcars out, he got me a job with the bus company.

DePue: Good connections and steady employment during the Depression years then?

Cordier: Yeah, but it didn't make much money.

DePue: I know that you got into the service in '43, I believe. Do you remember Pearl Harbor?

Cordier: Oh, yes.

DePue: What were you doing then?

Cordier: I was driving a bus in Canton, Ohio, the morning that we heard the news that they had bombed Pearl Harbor.

DePue: And what flashed through your mind when you heard that?

Cordier: "We're going to be at it." So, I just kept working until my number came up in the draft.

DePue: Well, let's go right into that, then. How did you end up in the service? And especially, how did you end being a Marine?

Cordier: Well, I was drafted and was sent for an examination for it, and I was given a choice: Army, Navy or Marines. So I figured, "Well, I'll go into the Marine Corps, because they'll be going over in the Pacific. The Army will be going over in Europe, where it's cold, and I want to go where it's warm." So that's why I chose the Marine Corps. No. That's just a joke on the side (laughs). But I had good friends that were in the Marine Corps. I was always proud of the Marine Corps and hoped that maybe one day I'd be a Marine.

DePue: How old were you when you went for your induction physical and you first appeared before the Draft Board?

Cordier: Well, let's see, about twenty-four or so.

DePue: And you were already married, were you not?

Cordier: Yes.

DePue: Where did you meet your wife?

Cordier: In Canton, Ohio.

DePue: And what was she doing at the time?

Cordier: She was working as a cashier in a restaurant there, in the bus depot where I used to eat in there, all my meals. We latched onto one another.

DePue: Was it a mutual thing, or did you decide that she was the one that you wanted to go after, first?

Cordier: Well, that was a mut.... Well, I don't know. We just went together for about three months, before we got married. And so we finally got married in three months.

DePue: You decided to get married in three months, or you got married after just three months?

Cordier: We got married after three months.

DePue: This was a pretty quick affair then.

Cordier: Yes, it was. We wanted to get married in August, but her mother said that's too soon (laughs). So we went in September.

DePue: And what was her maiden name?

Cordier: Vitavec.

DePue: I'm going to have to learn how to spell that later, I think. And that was in what year?

Cordier: 1941, September 24th, 1941.

DePue: Wow! So you were a brand-new married couple when Pearl Harbor happened.

Cordier: Yeah.

DePue: You were practically still honeymooners then?

Cordier: Yeah.

DePue: A very good reason not to jump up and volunteer right away?

Cordier: Yeah, that's for sure.

DePue: And you had a child, or a couple of children by the time you were drafted?

Cordier: One child.

DePue: And that was?

Cordier: My first one, Richard. The day that I left and went into the service was the twenty-second of September. On the twenty-fourth of September was my son's first birthday; and the twenty-fifth of.... I don't know if I got those dates right or not. But anyhow, I went one day into the service. The next day, my son's birthday; and the next day was our wedding anniversary, our second wedding anniversary. Our first—

(interruption, discussion about placement of microphone and audio quality)

DePue: So you knew when you were going over you're leaving a son; you might not be seeing him for a while.

Cordier: That's right.

DePue: And he's not going to be old enough to remember who you are.

Cordier: That's right.

DePue: Do you recall, what was Dorothy's reaction, at this stage in her life and your life; a brand-new baby and you're going off to war?

Cordier: Well, it was rough for both of us. I don't know just exactly what her feelings were, but I knew what mine were. And neither one of us wanted it, but we had to do it.

DePue: And yet you had chosen to go into the Marines?

Cordier: Yep.

DePue: Not necessarily the safest branch to go into.

Cordier: That was my choice.

DePue: And did she ever express an opinion about that?

Cordier: Not to anybody but myself.

DePue: And what was her opinion that she told you?

Cordier: Nothing (laughs). She was satisfied.

DePue: Do you recall any of the experiences you had in basic training? Where did you go?

Cordier: Oh, yes. Basic.... Good old basic training, down in Parris Island [South Carolina], down the fleabag place. The bugs, the sand, heat, what have you, and we were down there for six weeks. So finally, in six weeks, we got aboard the raft again and went back over to Beaufort. Got a train and went on a 15-day furlough. Incidentally, whenever I went into the Marine Corps, I weighed 220 pounds, and six weeks later, whenever I come out of boot camp, I was down to 165.

DePue: Wow!

Cordier: Well, you didn't have.... You had three square meals a day. You didn't have pogeys [military slang for extra food, especially sweets and snacks]. You had a lot of walking and a lot of exercising to do, and they really took you through things. Then after boot camp, I had a 15-day furlough and went back to Canton to see my wife and my baby. And then left there—I went to Camp Lejeune and went through telephone school – field telephone. Why I got into telephone; I didn't know beans about telephones. I was trying to get into the motor pool because of my experience of driving the buses, and heavy equipment, and big equipment. And I thought I'd

be a shoo-in to get into the motor.... But no, I was in field telephone. So they told us that you go through that school, telephone school, and those with the highest grades would send them to Philadelphia to do cable splicing. So my wife made arrangements to come down and visit me at there, and she got there on a Friday, and I was going to go into town to meet her. But I don't know what happened. The Major that was in charge, he froze liberty for everybody, so I couldn't get in to meet her. And she was about ready to come home. We did get her in and we graduated on that Friday. And Saturday, the next day, we were on a train headed for Camp Pendleton in California. That's the last I saw my wife then until I was discharged in '45.... Yeah, '46.

DePue: So that's almost two years from the time you shipped out from the East Coast.

Cordier: Yeah.

DePue: And at that point in time, you're probably in as good as shape as you've ever been?

Cordier: Oh, yes. I was in topnotch shape.

DePue: From Camp Pendleton, where did you head from there?

Cordier: Well, we went through more training in Camp Pendleton, and they were forming this 3rd JASCO Company, and so I was assigned to that.

DePue: You need to explain what JASCO stands for.

Cordier: JASCO, 3rd Joint Assault Signal Company. That comprises what they call "the shore party," which takes care of all the telephones for the troops wherever they're at. And then the air liaison directs the fire for the airplanes to bomb and strafe and what have you, and also for the ships in the bay or sea, where to shoot their big guns and so forth.

DePue: And 3rd means that it was part of the 3rd Marine Division?

Cordier: Yes.

DePue: That Marine Division didn't exist at the beginning of the war, did it?

Cordier: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. They were in the beginning of the war, yeah. This was just something new that was added to the 3rd Marine unit. [The 3rd Marine Division was officially activated on September 16, 1942 at Camp Elliott, San Diego, California. Cordier's unit was added well after the initial activation.]¹

DePue: At the time you joined the unit, had they already seen some action?

Cordier: The 3rd Marine Division did, yeah, on some of the other islands.

DePue: Bougainville, I believe?

¹ Third Marine Division Association web site, *Lineage and Honors*, <http://www.caltrap.org/history/Lineage.asp>.

Cordier: Yeah, I believe it was Bougainville.

DePue: And Guadalcanal?

Cordier: I am not sure. No, I don't think Guadalcanal. Guadalcanal was the 1st Division.

DePue: So you were replacements for some of the people in the Division?

Cordier: No, no. We were a division—our own group that was attached to the 3rd Marine Division. We weren't replacements for anybody.

DePue: The whole Company joined at the same time?

Cordier: Yeah, um-hm.

DePue: And the unit was formed up when you were out at Camp Pendleton?

Cordier: Yeah, um-hm.

DePue: So that was your first encounter with most of the people you would serve in the war with?

Cordier: Yes. We left San Diego on April 11 of 1944, aboard an old merchant marine ship, the [S.S.] Mormac Wren and we went unescorted across the Pacific, gliding in an "S" shape the whole way across the bay. And one day, somebody up in the crow's nest hollered "a periscope" and that ship made a great, big, round turn. There was no periscope. But anyhow, we stopped in Espiritu Santo. I don't know what for, but then we went on up to Guadalcanal.

DePue: Espiritu Santo?

Cordier: Yeah. That's in the New Hebrides.

DePue: And then you made your way over to Guadalcanal, you said?

Cordier: Yeah. And we went on up to Guadalcanal, and then we done practice maneuvers for the invasion of Guam.

DePue: So the entire Division disembarked there in Guadalcanal, and that was after the fighting was over? That was just a training area for you?

Cordier: Yeah. That was a training area for us, for the invasion of Guam.

DePue: And how long were you in Guadalcanal?

Cordier: We were there about a month, and then we boarded ship and joined the 3rd Marine Division on the way up to Saipan, to Guam. The 2nd Division was getting ready to invade Saipan whenever we left Guadalcanal. And as soon as they had it secure, we were to go in on Guam. But when we got up close to Guam, the 2nd Division was having problems on Saipan, so we turned around and went back to Eniwetok,

and sat in the bay in Eniwetok for about a month, before we returned to make the initial invasion on Guam.

DePue: And I recall you mentioning just a few minutes ago, that you were sitting in this harbor, not allowed to get off the ship?

Cordier: That's right. We weren't allowed.... We were never taken off the ship to do any exercise or anything. We'd done them aboard ship. But the sailors that were aboard the ship, they had liberties to go ashore and have their beer parties and what have you. We didn't.

DePue: So what's a Marine to do for 30 days plus on this ship, while you were sitting in a harbor?

Cordier: Well, sitting and shooting crap or playing cards, or what have you. That's about the extent of it.

DePue: Did they have calisthenics that they arranged for you?

Cordier: Oh, yes. Yes. We had to go through calisthenics a couple times a day.

DePue: A lot of boring briefings?

Cordier: Yep.

DePue: What was the nature of the briefings you were getting?

Cordier: Well, more or less about Guam. What it was like, and what the terrain was, and so forth, and try to get you familiar with it.

DePue: You mentioned Saipan. That was the fifteenth of June?

Cordier: Yeah.

DePue: And it wasn't until the twenty-first of July that you all landed on Guam. And yet, I think the scheduled date originally was June 18, just three days after Saipan?

Cordier: Yeah.

DePue: So this was seriously delayed. I know one of the reasons it was seriously delayed is because you had the battle of the Philippine Seas, otherwise know as the Marianas Turkey Shoot—

Cordier: Yep.

DePue: —that happened. Do you recall hearing about that battle?

Cordier: Actually, no. We weren't too well informed as to what was going on, outside of what was going on on board the ship.

DePue: So the Marines figured, "They don't need to know." Huh?

Cordier: (Laughs) Yeah. The least they know, the better off they are.

DePue: So for practically everybody you're with, this is going to be the first time they see combat?

Cordier: Yeah. Yeah, the ones that we were with, it was the first time they had seen combat.

DePue: What was your attitude, your frame of mind, sitting on that ship, waiting for over a month for the first time you were going to see combat?

Cordier: Mind-boggling. I didn't know what to think. I just thought, "Well, let's go and get it over with." But finally, we did.

DePue: Did you feel like you were ready?

Cordier: Well, yes and no. If I had to go, I had to go, so.... There was no turning back then.

DePue: And how about the Marines you were with, did you have confidence in them?

Cordier: Oh, yes. Yes. But a lot of my buddies were killed that day.

DePue: The day you landed?

Cordier: Yep.

DePue: Let's take you up then to the actual.... Finally, Saipan settles down a little bit. The Marianas Turkey Shoot settles down very much in the Americans' favor and you start steaming back up towards Guam?

Cordier: Yep.

DePue: Explain what that short run up to Guam and then landing was like.

Cordier: Well, we got up early in the morning, real early in the morning, and had a good breakfast. We could watch them shell on the island and what have you. Then seeing them load into the boats to go ashore. They brought my jeep up and we put it in one of the boats and took off and went to the shore. It was a little rough going, but we made it all right. But like I say, some of my good buddies that were ahead of me, even our Lieutenant, he got killed. There was another young fellow; he was from Canada. He had joined the Marine Corps and he got killed. There were three or four of them, others that got killed. And we were on the far to the left side of the beach. And we were pinned down where we were at. We could not go too far inland because of the hill. It was real hilly there.

DePue: You told me before you were a part of the third wave?

Cordier: Yeah.

DePue: Was everybody in your particular unit part of that third wave?

Cordier: No. Some were ahead of it.

DePue: And were some of those the ones who were killed early on?

Cordier: That's right. Um-hm.

DePue: So you didn't personally witness those?

Cordier: No. No, I didn't see those.

DePue: So, landing craft? The standard landing craft?

Cordier: Yes. Um-hm.

DePue: You had your jeep on that landing craft?

Cordier: Yeah. Um-hm.

DePue: So you drove right onto the beach?

Cordier: Well, they let me out a little bit from the beach, and I had to go through a little bit of water, but it wasn't all that bad.

DePue: But you were driving the jeep at the time?

Cordier: Yeah. Um-hm.

DePue: And from what I've seen on the maps, it doesn't look like much of a beachhead. There weren't that many places to drive, were there?

Cordier: No. No, there wasn't. No, there wasn't.

DePue: So describe, again, that first—when you first entered the beach and what you did after that.

Cordier: Well, whenever I first hit the beach, I tried to locate where our group was at. And they finally pointed me down the road to where they were at, and I went on down there, and I finally found them. And we were the last unit on that beach. Everything else was just hilly—hills there. There was a road there, but it wasn't very wide. The road was cut through one of the hills there, but up above us was where the Japanese had been dug in and had their mortars up there and their machine guns and rifles and so forth, up in those caves. So that's where we were tied down for.... well, for the time I was there, two and a half days. But I guess, eventually, on the night of the third day, they had...a banzai attack and then that cleared the way, that they could start going inward on the island.

DePue: Now, explain a little bit what your particular duties, once you actually get there. Your assignment is a wireman effectively.

Cordier: Yes, um-hm. We had to take care of all the wires, stringing wires to some of the companies that were set up on the beach. If there was any problems, we had to go out and find out what the problems were. And on the first night there, we were assigned to run a wire up to some Seabees that was up on one of the hills there. So my buddy and I, we took a little spool of wire and run a wire from our switchboard on up the hill. But going up there, we didn't run it on the ground; we run it up in the trees. And I climbed up one of the coconut trees there and was putting that wire up and happened to look up on the top of the hill there, and I could see right in where the Japs were at with their machine guns. Boy, it didn't take me long to get that wire up there and I got the heck out of that tree. We continued on up to where the Seabees were. And in the meantime, we passed a dead Jap laying there. It looked like some kind of an officer, all spiffed up in his uniform, and we passed him up and got up on top of the hill. There was a bunch of these Seabees up there. They had a nice thermos full of hot coffee, which we enjoyed. So, after that, we went back down to our outfit then.

DePue: You always think about how dangerous it is to be a rifleman, but it doesn't sound like it's less dangerous to be a wireman stringing it and exposing yourself to the enemy.

Cordier: That's right. So the next day, there wasn't much doing. They just kept periodically shooting their machine gun and rifles and lobbing mortars down at us. There wasn't much doing that next day. Then, on that third morning, they had reported a wire was out, so they sent my buddy and myself up to trace it down and try to repair it. And we were out cruising around there with the wire trying to find it. They were lobbing the mortars and the machine guns and so forth. Pretty soon we heard a whistle coming, and somebody yelled, "Here comes one," and it came. That's all I remember. I woke up. I was down on the beach and being loaded into another boat to take us back out to one of the ships that was docked in there, in the bay. Until this day, I still don't know what happened to my buddy. I don't know if he ever got killed, or wounded, or what happened to him. And the worst part of it is, I can't even remember what his name was, which has been bothering me ever since, trying to find out. Every once in a while, our outfit has reunions. We have one coming up here in October, down in Nashville, Tennessee. I've been trying to find out if anybody knew who he was. Nobody seemed to know. So, anyhow, they put me aboard this ship and we went down, back down to Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides and that's where I was in the hospital for about three months.

DePue: When you're being told, "Okay, there's a break in the wire. There's something going on. We've lost contact. We want you to go out there and find where the break is and get it fixed." What's going on in your mind at that time?

Cordier: Well, (laughs) "Where's it at?" Truthfully, you never think about those things. They tell you what's happening and that's your job to go out and do it, so you go out and do it. Far from what your feelings might be, whether you want to or not. That's your job to do and you've got to go out and do it to maybe protect some of the other, your buddies.

DePue: Do you think you were observed by the Japanese when you were out there working on it?

Cordier: Well, I don't know. I couldn't answer that question. Whether they were just lucky and put a mortar in the right place.

DePue: Do you recall having a chance to dive for cover when you heard that the mortar round was coming in?

Cordier: No. They just hollered, "Here it comes," and that was it.

DePue: I don't think you've talked too much about the nature of your injuries.

Cordier: Well, I was shot up here in the shoulder (George points to his upper right shoulder). It didn't bleed outside. It all bled inside of me. And I got hit down here on the stomach. After a while, in the hospital, they tapped my back and took 720 ccs of fluid out of my lungs.

DePue: So it did pierce the lungs then?

Cordier: Yeah. Um-hm.

DePue: How about intestines or anything like that?

Cordier: No. They said the one down below was all right. It didn't hurt anything.

DePue: It just hit muscle then?

Cordier: Yeah.

DePue: How long were you recovering?

Cordier: About three months.

DePue: And you were in the hospital, in a navy hospital in New Hebrides?

Cordier: Yeah, um-hm. Yeah, New Hebrides. Espiritu Santo.

DePue: Did they take good care of you there?

Cordier: Oh, yes. Very good.

DePue: Well, describe the hospital that you were in.

Cordier: Well, truthfully, I don't know too much about it because we were never outside of it. It seemed to be a fairly decent hospital. Clean, well kept, and in the shade of the palm trees and coconut trees and what have you. And I don't know what else was around because we never were out to see what was going on, on the outside.

DePue: But it was a permanent building?

Cordier: Oh, yes. It was a permanent building. It had Navy nurses there, and full-scale doctors, and so forth. A regular hospital, and they really took good care of us.

DePue: I'm sure you've heard about this afterwards, and I know Dorothy's going to be talking a little about what it was like to be contacted to find out that you were injured. But I assume that you had a chance to get some mail from home while you were there?

Cordier: Truthfully, no. The mail didn't catch up with me until I finally was sent up to Guadalcanal for reassignment.

DePue: So you went months without getting anything from home?

Cordier: Yeah, um-hm.

DePue: What was your concern about Dorothy and your brand-new baby boy?

Cordier: Well, it was bothering me. But, you know, what can you do about it? There's not a whole lot you can do about it. You just have to sit there and deal with it, and face the consequences of it and so forth.

DePue: You said you were there for approximately three months?

Cordier: Yeah.

DePue: And then released and rejoined the 3rd Marines?

Cordier: No, I didn't. I didn't rejoin them. While I was sitting on Guadalcanal there, they assigned me to the NCO [Non-Commissioned Officers] mess hall. And so I was working in the NCO mess hall, and I'd become good friends with the cook there. He was telling me that they were forming a new outfit and they wanted him to go and be a cook for them, but he didn't want to go because they wouldn't take his buddy. He said to me, "Why don't we go up and tell them you're a cook striker and see what happens?" So we did. We talked to this Warrant Officer and sure enough, I heard from them in about a week or so that I was selected to join this outfit as a cook striker and become a cook.

DePue: What's a cook striker?

Cordier: Well, that's learning to cook, that you're in training to be a cook. So we had a very nice place there. It was at the South Pacific Echelon of the Fleet Marine Force. That's a long name.

DePue: And this is on Guadalcanal?

Cordier: Yeah. They were located on Guadalcanal. The Navy had a camp there. All Quonset huts, a nice mess hall, and what have you, and we took it over. They was wanting cooks for the officers. None of the cooks wanted to cook for them, so being the low man on the totem pole, I was selected (laughs). That was a good job—believe me—it turned out to be. I got paid for doing that and I had two

busboys that took care of the dining area and so forth. Of course, the other cooks helped me with the cooking and everything. So we were down there. Then this one day, they came and took me in and they was wanting a CP personnel, a Communication Personnel, to go to Okinawa. So this Major, says, "I see you have a CP Warrant." He says, "Why don't we try to get you as a cook?" So I said, "That's all right." So they did. They gave me a physical exam and found me physically unfit for combat duty. So I got my new assignment.

DePue: You were medically disqualified because of the nature of your injuries; because the problem with the lung primarily?

Cordier: Yeah, um-hm. So then I become a permanent fixture there, with them. That eventually broke up and the Colonel that was in charge went back to Hawaii and made Brigadier General. In the meantime, I had been sent up to Guam for reassignment. So I'm sitting up there one day and they come and got me and put me on a plane and shipped me down to Manila. The old General requested me to be his personal cook.

DePue: This is a Marine General, right?

Cordier: Yes. I was cooking then for the General, two full Colonels, and two First Lieutenants, and we lived in a house in Manila. That was my duty then.

DePue: A little bit better duty than running wire on Guam.

Cordier: Yeah. That's for sure (laughs).

DePue: You've got to explain to me though, George. This is going back a little bit, but why did your buddies feel like it was a bad deal to be cooking for the officers instead of for the enlisted men?

Cordier: I don't know. They thought they would rather cook for the enlisted men than the officers. I don't know. They never did tell me. All I know is none of them wanted to cook for them. It didn't make any difference to me. So, like I say, I got paid for it, besides my regular pay. My regular pay—ten dollars a month I was getting. My wife was getting a \$50 allotment, and I was getting \$10. Sixty dollars a month we were getting while I was in the service.

DePue: What was your rank?

Cordier: PFC, at that time. So, that \$10 a month I was getting as pay, I just let it ride and took what they gave me, paid me on the month for cooking for them.

DePue: Well, I don't imagine you had too many opportunities to be spending money anyway, unless you're getting into some gambling.

Cordier: No, that's for sure. There's no place to spend it. Not down in those islands.

DePue: Did you ever get up to Okinawa then?

Cordier: No. I never did.

DePue: So you spent the last part of the war in the Philippines, in Manila?

Cordier: Yep. I was there whenever the war ended. I missed out on Iwo Jima. Our outfit was on Iwo Jima.

DePue: The 3rd Marines were?

Cordier: Yeah. I wear a cap with the Marine emblem, and it says "Guam" and "Iwo Jima." But I got those through our reunions that we have every year, and it said "Guam" and "Iwo Jima." But I was only on Guam.

DePue: How did the 3rd JASCO do at Iwo Jima?

Cordier: Well, truthfully, I don't know too much about it, but I guess they were standing in reserves, but then they had to go in. What transpired from there on out, I really don't know. There wasn't too many from the shore party that I was in that go to the reunions. The one that was a Sergeant with me, he passed away. And then there's another fellow. He was a Staff Sergeant, and after our Lieutenant got killed on Guam, he was made Lieutenant. I never see him. He's still alive, but he never comes to our reunions. So there isn't anybody that I can talk to that knows anything about who I was with and done over there.

DePue: You spent the last few months of the war then in Manila; that was several months after Manila had been liberated, I would assume?

Cordier: They were still fighting in Manila, whenever I got there. That's why I got the "Philippine Liberation" medal.

DePue: Was this the closest you got to see civilians when you got to the Philippines?

Cordier: Yep. Well, no, whenever I was down at the Marine Naval Hospital, I saw the nurses. That was it. Otherwise....

DePue: I'm thinking of the local population.

Cordier: Yeah, um-hm.

DePue: Any sense of how the Philippine people felt about the United States Army coming back?

Cordier: They were very happy about it. They were glad to see us, as far as I could see.

DePue: Did you see any civilians on Guam? I would imagine they stayed as far away from combat as possible.

Cordier: No. No. I didn't see a thing on Guam. The only thing I saw on Guam was our fellows there. In that one area, there was a bunch of dead Japs laying all over the

road, that were all puffed up. A horrible sight! But, no. From the time I left San Diego until I got into Manila, I didn't see much of any civilians.

DePue: Were you able to get back in touch with your wife then, once you got to Manila?

Cordier: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

DePue: Was there a telegraph service between Manila and the States?

Cordier: I don't know if they had telegraph or not. I just sent letters, that's all.

DePue: How long would it take to get a letter from the States?

Cordier: Several days.

DePue: But not more than a month?

Cordier: No, not more than a month. And I might say that the officers I had there in Manila and also in Guadalcanal, there was only one that I had practically no use for. He was a guy that was from a rich family from New Orleans and he had to be waited on hand and foot. Boy, he was a character. He smoked cigarettes and he had a cigarette holder. He left it someplace one time and they put the 1st Sergeant on a plane to go look for it (laughs). In Manila, we had an old fellow there that was a houseboy for us. He was a...I think he was Chinese. He was up early in the morning, and getting things ready. And just about the time he'd get all his work done, he would lay down in his bunk to take a nap. Well, the General would come home; the first thing he heard was him calling for Chan, and Chan would go up and see him. He says, "Would you mix me a drink, please?" He couldn't even mix his own damn drink. But then whenever the General left.... This, I don't know if you're going to put it in print or not (laughs).

DePue: You can decide that later on.

Cordier: He wanted me to stay there and cook. I didn't want to. And so they were starting to send the fellows home with points. You know? So I talked to this Warrant Officer that originally got me involved in this cooking business. I says, "When am I going to get to go home?" He says, "Well, the Colonel wants you to stay here and cook for him." I said, "I don't want to cook for him." He says, "Well, I know how it is." He says, "But you know," he says, "He doesn't deserve a cook." So, on hearing those words, I went to the Colonel's Aide, the 1st Lieutenant, who was his—excuse me—asshole buddy (laughs). I told him, "When am I going to get to go home?" And he says, "Oh, not until everything's squared away. You're needed here to cook for the General." I says, "You know, he doesn't warrant a cook. You know, before I stay here and cook for that son-of-a-bitch anymore, I'll spend the rest of my time in the brig." The next contingent coming home, I was with them.

DePue: Well, that's one way to get home. Huh?

Cordier: Yeah.

DePue: What time would that have been?

Cordier: That was just about, oh God, sometime in November. I forget when, after the war was over. I was back in San Francisco, over Christmas and New Year's. I told him, I says, "I've got a wife and a kid at home, that's more precious to me than you, and me staying here cooking for you."

DePue: And you got home?

Cordier: Yeah. So I got home.

DePue: You were in Manila then, during the middle part of '45. Do you recall your reaction to hearing that the war in Europe was over?

Cordier: Well, they seemed to do a lot of celebrating in downtown Manila whenever that was over. And it was a relief to know that it wasn't going on over there anymore and probably it would wind up here, which it did.

DePue: But at that time, I know the fears of the senior brass and most Americans were that the Japanese were going to fight to the bitter end – that you're going to have to invade Japan.

Cordier: Yeah. Yeah.

DePue: Did you think you'd be part of that invasion?

Cordier: No, I didn't. I never gave that a thought.

DePue: Because of your medical condition?

Cordier: Yeah. Although I can truthfully say that I'm happy that they did drop those two atomic bombs because if they hadn't, not only Japan, but this country would have lost a whole lot of good men. From what I understand, they were really stacked up in Japan, waiting for us.

DePue: When you heard about the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, did you even have any inkling that there was such a thing as an atomic bomb?

Cordier: No. No.

DePue: What was your reaction to that?

Cordier: "Where in the hell did that come from?" (Laughs)

DePue: And probably couldn't even begin to comprehend what it was.

Cordier: Yeah.

DePue: Then a couple of days later, they surrendered.

Cordier: Yeah.

DePue: And your reaction to the surrender of the Japanese?

Cordier: Happy day.

DePue: And you figured, "It's time for me to go home now. The war's over"?

Cordier: Yep. That's right.

DePue: You told me how you managed to finally get back home, in November, I think you said. What was the trip back home like?

Cordier: Well, we boarded a ship out of Subic Bay, I believe it was. We had a place there, but I think we don't have that anymore. Anyhow, we come home on the ship, and boy, was it ever rough. We were locked down. We weren't allowed to be up on topside for three days. They had what they called "a green sea." And from what I understand, a green sea is whenever the waves are coming over the boat. The days that we were allowed to go up on topside, we would go down and you'd look up. Way up above you.... Boy, it was rough. You lay in your bunk and hear them ol' cups and dishes in the galley going back and forth.

DePue: Did you manage not to get sick on the trip back?

Cordier: Well, yes, until it started going up and down, like this, and then that's what got me. Going this way, (gestures back and forth) it didn't bother me. But whenever it started [going] up and down, that brought my cookies up (laughs).

DePue: You probably weren't alone, were you?

Cordier: No. No. It was the same way going over, on that old Mormac Wren. You know, we had just our outfit, the 3rd JASCO. And we were on one deck, and below us on the lower decks was a bunch of colored Marines. You see, actually, colored Marines weren't allowed into the Marine Corps until this war started. Did you know that?

DePue: No. You're saying colored Marines. No, I wasn't aware of that.

Cordier: You weren't? No. There were no colored in the Marine Corps until World War II.

DePue: But the units were segregated, obviously?

Cordier: Oh, yes. See, they had Mofford Point, down at Camp Lejeune. That's where they started training the colored Marines. They were just more or less as stevedores, unloading ships and taking supplies and so forth. It wasn't like the Army. So eventually, they got the Marines in and permitted them to go in and do the fighting, too.

DePue: But on the ship back, they were on one berth below you?

Cordier: No, this was going over. And at chow, we all had to stand up and eat at tables. You didn't sit down. You stood up. Boy, that was enough to turn your stomach (laughs). Your guys up there getting sick.... Oh, God.

DePue: What was your reunion like once you finally got back to the United States? Do you remember getting off that ship, and what it was like at the port?

Cordier: Just the ports? Nothing there.

DePue: No celebration?

Cordier: No. We didn't have any celebrations.

DePue: And your reunion with your wife and your son?

Cordier: Well, that wasn't until after I was discharged at Great Lakes, and then took the train back to Canton, Ohio.

DePue: So she didn't come to see you at Great Lakes? She didn't come to see you out on the west coast?

Cordier: No.

DePue: How much time expired from the time you landed in California until the time you actually got back to Canton, then?

Cordier: I forget what it was. But anyhow, it was only about a week, maybe a little bit longer. But it wasn't too long. We got there just before Christmas and we left New Year's night to get back aboard the train to Great Lakes.

DePue: Can you tell me a little bit about the reunion itself?

Cordier: Well, I was happy to see her and she was happy to see me. What else could be said?

DePue: She knew you were coming?

Cordier: Oh, yes. Yes. Yes. I let her know.

DePue: She met you at the train station?

Cordier: Oh, yes. Yep. That was it.

DePue: Okay. We're going to run through a couple more quick questions. What were your feelings about the Japanese soldiers that you faced, your impression of them?

Cordier: Well, truthfully, I didn't have too many that I faced. I saw them from a distance. But from what some of the other fellows told me, you couldn't trust them. And they would rather shoot them than take them prisoners, because the Japanese

would figure out ways...they'd come, three or four together, and walk down the street, yeah, and buddy, buddy, buddy. One of them would bend over and they'd have a machine gun on his back and shoot the guys. But I don't know how true that is. That's stories that I have heard. But as far as being in close contact with them, I never was.

DePue: How about the soldiers and the NCOs that you worked with? Did you have a lot of respect for them?

Cordier: Oh, yes. I respected the soldiers. You mean the Army?

DePue: Well, the Marines that you worked with as well.

Cordier: Well, yes. I had the greatest respect for them. All of them. Anybody in the service, I have the greatest respect for.

DePue: The Army guys as well?

Cordier: Oh, yes. You know, they don't quite come up to us Marines, but I respect them.

DePue: Did you believe that the strategy that the Americans were pursuing in the South Pacific was the right one?

Cordier: Well, from what I could see and gather, I think it was. They had the right thing in mind. A whole lot better than they have over in Iraq (laughs).

(Technical conversation on the side.)

DePue: So you're finally back to the United States and you've got a chance to see your son. What were your thoughts when you saw your son after two years being separated?

Cordier: I wanted to pick him up, but he wouldn't come to me. He didn't know who I was. He thought I was some stranger. And I had that hardest problem for a while, until I finally got him to realize that I was his father.

DePue: I suspect Dorothy was doing all she could to convince him that you were a pretty swell guy?

Cordier: Yeah.

DePue: But he wasn't buying it, huh?

Cordier: No, he wasn't (laughs).

DePue: While you're overseas, a long time to be away from a very young family, did you do anything to help you get over being separated from Dorothy?

Cordier: Well, you had so many things to do that you couldn't actually think about those things, more or less. You had too many other things on your mind that had to be

done. Occasionally, I'd think about it, how nice it would be, to be back and what have you. But, it just...I knew it couldn't be, so....

DePue: Once you got back, how quickly did you get settled back into civilian life?

Cordier: Well, whenever I got back, my wife says I was too quick to wanting to go back to work. She thought maybe I should go to school. I felt that I didn't have enough schooling to warrant going to college. And besides, there was nothing like there is today, with colleges around. They were almost like Pitt and Notre Dame, and the bigger colleges. There were no small schools like there are today. And I couldn't see going to school, although they would have paid for it. What about my family life? You know, where would I have to go? And how could I get there? And what could I do? So I just figured, "Well, there's only one thing to do, go back to work." That's what I did. I went back to work.

DePue: That was doing what?

Cordier: Driving a bus.

DePue: And how long did you stay with that?

Cordier: Oh, forty-five years (laughs).

DePue: So you made a good living driving buses?

Cordier: Well, yes and no. It was awful low pay. I started out driving buses for forty-three cents an hour. It eventually got up to one dollar an hour. But, actually, what I wanted to do.... After I got out of high school, I worked for a florist and I wanted to be a floral designer. But the money there wasn't too good. I was working, driving a truck, and helping in the shop at ten dollars a week, six days a week. And so this other [job] with the buses come up. The bus company that I worked for was part of the streetcar company that my dad worked for. He got me a job with them out of Pittsburgh. So I started with them, and I went through that, and I wound up in Canton, Ohio and then Youngstown, Ohio; and then back to Canton, Ohio. And the way things was going, Greyhound took it over, and I was driving for them. But they changed things around so much. I had a run that I started in Canton at 5:00 in the morning and I was done at 1:30 in the afternoon. I'd done that for six days a week. But they changed it around. I started at 5:00 in the morning and I finished in Cleveland at around 5:00 or 6:00 in the evening. And then I came out of Cleveland till the next day, at 5:00 in the morning. I quit that and swore I'd never drive another bus. Then we come to California. I got hooked up with the buses out there; motor streetcar for the Old Pacific Electric Company and drove buses. Dorothy's mother was sick and they had problems, so we moved back to Ohio and I got hooked up with National City Lines, driving, and became a supervisor in less than a year. And then eventually I became a manager. Then I was sent up to Jackson, Michigan and I was a manager for the bus company up there. Well, the city took it over and they sent me down to Danville, so I was in Danville. I managed the bus company in Danville. The company I was working for had buses all over the country. They had them here in Springfield, and Champaign, Decatur, Danville,

and other places here in Illinois. I think they were up in DeKalb and up around them parts. Anyhow, then I got transferred back out to California again, and I became manager of a bus company in Santa Ana. We had Santa Ana and also we had the buses that went down to Newport Beach. Then the Orange County Transit District took over and I went to work for another subsidiary of ours in Anaheim, which run between Disneyland and the airport and Long Beach and Pasadena. I was in charge of all our charter operation and lost-and-found. That was the best job I ever had. I set up three Super Bowls out in California. I took 100-some buses. We hauled all the football teams around whenever they'd come out there, the baseball teams too. I got to know a lot of the football players, the coaches, and what have you. That was the best job I ever had.

DePue: How, after working all over the country, did you end up back in Springfield?

Cordier: Well, my son and daughter-in-law, after they graduated from college, got jobs here in Illinois. My son was connected with the Career Center from its inception. My daughter-in-law taught schools here in Illinois. My daughter moved back here, and she's got a job with the school. So they talked to us and says, "You know, you're out there by yourselves in California; if anything happens to you, it's so far for us to have to come. Why don't you come back here?" So we said, "Well, if you find us a good place, we might do that." It wasn't a week till we got a videotape of this house from my daughter-in-law. So here we are.

DePue: She was determined to get you back here, then.

Cordier: Yep.

DePue: Did you get involved with the Veterans Associations?

Cordier: Oh, yes. After I got back here, I did. Yes.

DePue: After you got back here to Springfield?

Cordier: Yeah, um-hm. Yeah. Paul Warner, he was one of the fellows at the Veterans here in Springfield. He was a counselor. He called me and he said he was starting up a World War II Illinois Veterans Conversation Group. And so I attended. There was three of us at the first meeting. Now we meet twice a month and we have about thirty or forty members now. During that time, the story for a World War II Illinois Veterans Memorial came up. That was in 1995. Ever since the conception of that, I've been a Director on their committee. We've got this built for the World War II Veterans.

DePue: You were involved with that from the very beginning?

Cordier: Yeah.

DePue: Planning stages even?

- Cordier: Yep. Yep. Right from the go, from the time we formed our not-for-profit organization until we got our charter and everything. We got Jeff Poss, the designer who sketched them, and the contractor, the architect that drew up the plans and everything. I'm still the director.
- DePue: When was the unveiling? 1995?
- Cordier: No. We started in '99, and we weren't incorporated until, I think it was 2000. Then we dedicated it December 7 of '05.
- DePue: That's a special day for World War II Veterans.
- Cordier: Yep.
- DePue: Just like in Washington, DC. We have the Vietnam Memorial here in Springfield first, and then the Korean Memorial.
- Cordier: Yep.
- DePue: And then finally, in reverse order, the World War II Memorial.
- Cordier: Yep. Yep.
- DePue: I bet that had to be a special day, when they actually dedicated it.
- Cordier: Yep. Everybody says, "Well, why didn't they build it sooner?" Well, you know, the State, and the city, or the federal government don't build these memorials for you. If the service people want them, they've got to go out and raise the money to do it. We were fortunate enough to get \$150,000 from the federal government and from two of the Illinois Senators and what have you. We got, oh, I forget what it was. But anyhow, it totaled a million three dollars. With that, we could get it done.
- DePue: Just a couple questions then, to close things up here, some more general kind of questions. I'm going to ask you to reflect on things. World War II. I imagine most people before Pearl Harbor thought, "The last thing the United States needs is to get involved in a war overseas. We did that in World War I and we don't want to do that again." Do you think, in reflecting back over these sixty-some years, was it worth the sacrifice that you made, that those in your generation made?
- Cordier: Well, I think it was. If we hadn't have,, we would probably be speaking Chinese or Japanese.
- DePue: No question in your mind at that time? What was the mood of the country like, in that respect, during the Second World War?
- Cordier: Well, I think they were all gung-ho. They were kind of perturbed that the Japanese would pull the trick that they did over in Pearl Harbor, and kill so many of our fellows, and so forth.

DePue: But the Japanese were at Pearl Harbor, not the Germans. And even though the Germans declared war, was there the same level of feeling against the Germans?

Cordier: Well, truthfully, as far as I'm concerned, it didn't bother me much, because Germany was doing it over there, in Europe. They weren't in this country. Japan struck us.

DePue: So you weren't as motivated about fighting in Germany?

Cordier: No.

DePue: Was that one reason that the Marines was the place for you to go?

Cordier: One of them, probably. Because Germany,.... I don't think they were bothering us too much unless they started getting after our shipping and so forth, and sinking our ships.

DePue: How did this experience change you?

Cordier: It made a man out of me.

DePue: You were 24 when you got drafted?

Cordier: Yep. But it still made a man out of me, a better man.

DePue: In what way?

Cordier: Well, in a lot of ways. My thinking. My thoughts about war. (Long pause.) I can't think of anything else. It sure changed my thoughts of everything.

DePue: Well, you mentioned your thoughts about war. How did it change your thoughts about war?

Cordier: I think it's hell. And, I don't want to get into that.

DePue: Okay. It's something to be avoided as much as possible?

Cordier: That's right.

DePue: Did it change your outlook towards politics? Towards life, in general?

Cordier: Yeah. It changes my thoughts on politics, too. And there again, I don't want to get started on that either (laughs). Because of... because of the situation that it is today. I got my thoughts. I keep them to myself, and I don't want to get involved. To me, the less said, the better, as far as I'm concerned.

DePue: Well, to change gears a little bit. How about your thoughts about family?

Cordier: Family? I'm all for it. I look after them and try to take good care of them and hope they're doing it to me, and I respect them. And I'd do anything for them.

DePue: For many of your generation, at least based on the stories I've heard, you go off to war and you're ready to come back and get serious about things like family and raising kids and getting on with your life. Was that your experience?

Cordier: Yep. Yep. Just to take care of them and do what's right.

DePue: And here's your opportunity, George. What advice would you give to this current generation, or future generations. The lessons you've learned and the advice you'd give people in the future?

Cordier: Well, to lead a good, clean life and be honest, and try to work things out rather than to get, maybe, entangled in wars or something like that. But try to just straighten things out without getting too involved.

DePue: Any final comments?

Cordier: Well, I appreciate everything that everybody is doing for the Veterans. I hope I'm around to see a lot more of what's happening.

DePue: It looks to me like you're going to be around for quite a while yet, and we'll all be better off for that. Thank you very much, George. It's been a pleasure to talk to you.

Cordier: Well, thank you. I enjoyed it.

DePue: You bet.

Audio ends