

Museum of History and Holocaust Education Legacy Series

James Pack interview

Conducted by James Newberry

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Transcribed by Edith Addy

Full Transcript

Interviewer: Ok, this is James Newberry, I'm here with James Pack on Monday December 8th 2014 at the Sturgis Library at Kennesaw State University, and uh Mr. Pack could you please state your full name

Pack: James Pack no middle name

Interviewer: And when and where were you born?

James Pack: I was born in West Virginia in 1923

Interviewer: Could you describe your Childhood and your family?

James Pack: uhhm, well I was born in West Virginia but I don't remember anything there because I was so young, we moved to Pennsylvania for about maybe a year and I started school in Pennsylvania but we moved to Ohio the following year, then from first grade to all the way through high school in a little town called East Liverpool Ohio, and uhm I had uh well there was, in our family there was 6 boys and 3 girls and right now, I'm the only one left out of the family, of course thank God for that. . . . Ehm lil small town in East Liverpool Ohio was nice, nice small town I went to school, graduated from high school, and played football, track, and like I was telling you, I was inducted to the Athletic Hall of Fame not too long ago and my younger brother he was in the hall of fame down there too cause he was . . . much better football player than I was of course I was a much better track man than him. . . . [Chuckles]. My other brother a little older than me, when the war broke out he joined the navy, he spent 25 years in the navy and my other brother he was, he was in the army and he spent all his time up in the Aleutian Islands. And My brother who was in the navy it a funny thing all the time he was in the navy all that time during the war he's sittin on Staten Island New York, everybody else is going on ships or overseas, and when the Korean war broke out my younger brother, he was in the Korean war. Ehn Life in a little small town in East Liverpool it was nice, in fact I go up there at least once a year and still you know a lot of people are still, still around that I know and growing up you my dad was a minister and you know what that meant. I had to go to church every Sunday Morning Noon and Night Prayer meeting on Wednesdays, but it was uuhh. . . it was, it was nice, we didn't have any problems you know.

Interviewer: And what were your parents' names?

James Pack: My dad's name was Phillip and my mother's name was Kalie Irene Pack

Interviewer: And did your mother work?

James Pack: No, my mother never worked, no uhn uhn, no. My dad worked in the Steele millwright taught us boys a whole of things that's why when, when I grew up I don't you know, I don't call a electrician, I don't call a plumber, I don't call a carpenter, I can do all that myself, save a lot of money that way.

Interviewer: So could you describe the town of East Liverpool? What it looked like?

James Pack: uhuh it sits, it's a little small town, it sits right on the high river, and its right on the border of Pennsylvania which is about, its only about 45 miles from Pittsburg and its about 36 miles below Youngstown Ohio and right across the river is West Virginia uhh town called Chester West Virginia, and you know years ago well every spring, you know the high river before they built the dams and all that was always flooding and uhm in fact that was about 1936, 37 back in those days yea every year the high river would rise up and it was a few people that lived close to river of course they had to evacuate them but [Unclear] and the uhn Pennsylvania railroad used to run through there one time they had passing trains used to come through there and later on they quit but uh, of coursethe freight still rumbled through there.

Interviewer: And you've had a special interest in trains

Pack: Oh yea, I've always loved trains in fact I got a layout in my garage at home, yea.

Interviewer: And that started back then? Seeing the train and headed to Pittsburg? Is that correct?

Pack: Yea yea, the trains going to Pittsburg and going west they would go Steubenville, and then down near there they would branch out and go to Columbus Ohio and end up in, I didn't, I didn't live too far from the uh forgot the name of the uh the big yard Conway yard, at that time one of the big railroad yards in the country you know we didn't live too far from there I used to go up there and watch em humping cars and all that, I don't even know what that means

Interviewer: could you describe it?

Pack: well a train pushes a car up on the hill and it's called a hump and if they'll make up trains one go this way, you the car go this way and maybe another freight car will go this way like that, that what they call humping cars and they, make up trains that way I used to go up there a lot of times and sit and watch them

Interviewer: So what was the relationship interaction between blacks and whites in East Liverpool?

Pack: well we got along fine, in fact my best friend was a white fellow and uh in fact all of us well all of us we never had no problem we never had any fights with each other and uh of course you had one time I guess coming out of school well I guess some fellow was picking on me and my brother a little older than me, grabbed him and beat him up but nothing happened in fact uhh the family lived right next door, their names were the Samerson, Paul and uh, forgot the other one's name in fact Paul was in world war II and he got killed in the battle of bulge, him and I was the same age and uh a lot of families and we were always, always friendly with everybody

Interviewer: How did the depression hit your town?

Pack: terrible, uhm nobody working they had the soup kitchens uhm we were lucky that we had a plot of land where we could grow vegetables my dad had that. And he got laid off by the Steele mill during that time and uh they had a soup kitchen and everybody lined up and would go get a big pot and bring it home, it was, it was rough...[pause] Yea not a happy time and then when Roosevelt got to be president well you know then things started of course uh started changing and also you know so, in Europe Hitler was starting his stuff and so even before the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor the United States was gearing up anyway cause England needed the help and so you know they shipped a lot of stuff to England before we ever got into the war

Interviewer: so were you seeing reports of this uhh in newspapers or hearing this on the radio at that time?

Pack: in the newspapers and radios yea we didn't have TV's back then, of course you know that [Chuckles]

Interviewer: Did you go to the movies?

Pack: oh yea, in fact in that small town you wouldn't believe it, we had...we had one two, three four movies, houses in that lil small town, its only bout uhh 20,000 people in that town, and uh we used to being youngsters we didn't have any money so we used to, we used to hustle junk aluminum, brass and that stuff, and take it down to this guy [unclear] on the junk yard and uh that's how we got the money to go to the movies, and um especially on Saturdays we, we go in one movie and come out of that one and go to the across the street to another one looking at all them westerns, Hoot Gibson as a cowboy and that was before John Wayne Tim, Tim, Tim, what? I forgot his last name now and across the road was a park we used to go across there you know in the summer time to the park and uh of course you know West Virginia was segregated but we'd go over there to the park, we didn't have no trouble at that park and uhm me and my brother we used to like to ride the cycle we'd get off ,take a ride get off, go around, get back on go back up again that's the only thing we ever rode, was the cycle [pause]. Those were the good old days

Interviewer: so what year did you graduate from high school?

Pack: 1942

Interviewer: but your mother had passed away the previous year

Pack: yeah uh no she passed away that august of 1941 and uhm yea because I started my last year in September of 1941 graduated 1942.

Interviewer: and how did she encourage you

Pack: well she told me before she died she told me uhh be sure you finish school I don't want you to... don't quit school be sure you finish school I don't know why she was telling me that because I, I had no, I had never thought about quitting school, but I guess she felt it uh things were getting you know, war clouds were you know coming so I guess she figured that I would probably quit school and go to the Steele mill and work but no I hadn't any plans on doing that no I finished and graduated from high school.

Interviewer: So you graduated in 42, but what's your memory of Pearl Harbor in December 41

Pack: [clears throat] I used to work at a grocery store on the weekends and uh I had came home and I was gone take me a nap, and I took me a nap and woke up and turned the radio on and I heard the talking about dropping bombs on pearl harbor and I said Oh my goodness, and I said well I guess we going to war that was on a Sunday, and then right after that my brother Alden he, he uh he said I'm gone join the navy I said well, cause he had graduated before me and uh he joined the navy and did bout 25 years in the navy, he ended up as a chief petty officer and then my other brother he was working up in Pennsylvania he uh got drafted an in the army went to fort brag and the after war was declared they shipped him up the Aleutian islands and that's where he spent most of his time up there in ice and cold

Interviewer: after you heard about Pearl Harbor and you and war was declared did you expect that you would serve with no question or not

Pack: no I, I didn't think well I didn't think about that because uh you know my parents had passed away and my older sisters and brothers they weren't home and after I got out of high school I went to work in the Steel mill because my younger brother, my younger sister they were still going to school so and my other two brothers they were gone in the service so I had to in fact I to take care of them you know, you know financially you know working so I never thought about uhm going into the service until of course things got so heavy I was drafted in 1943 and went to the induction center up in Cleveland Ohio and the uhhm and the guy said well, what branch of service do you want to go in? I told him well me and my buddy lets, well shucks lets go in the Marine Core if we gone fight, lets join the baddest guys that's gone be fighting so the marines are where we going, so that's

how we got in the marine core. But [chuckles] after we got to North Carolina and got off that bus I said I should have stayed home [laughs]

Interviewer: Well lets go back a little bit and then we'll come back up to that, uhm you graduated and went to work in a Steel mill at that point and how long were you working there before you were drafted

Pack: well 'lets see I got out of, I graduated in June 42 and they didn't have to,.... There wasn't no problem getting hired so 42 in November 43 that's when I went in the marine core.

Interviewer: What were you doing in the Steel Mill?

Pack: At first I worked at the coke plant it a hot dirty job you know where they you know where they uh take coal and make coke out of it and uh I didn't get along with the foremen so I quit an uh then I got a job up the river up in the American bridge company and I didn't stay that long then I came back to the steel mill and I worked in the finishing mill where uh cut coils you know they you seen the steel rolled up [clears throat] just you know different diameters and that's what we use to cut, cut the bad ends off of them and that's where I stayed until I was drafted.

Interviewer: and you were drafted in 43?

Pack: yup, yea I went in 43 yup ehm hum, November 3rd when I was uhhn, uhh went in the marine core

Interviewer: so how did you hear that you're being drafted?

Pack: you got a letter [chuckles]

Interviewer: and what did it say

Pack: it says greeting from FDR, Frank Delano Roosevelt [chuckles] I don't know how it was worded but we need your services or something, I have to report to the uh you know the draft ward.

Interviewer: how did you feel when you got that letter?

Pack: oh I didn't, I felt good this one fellow he wanted to go in the service so bad every time he went there they'd turn him down because of his health but he would cry all the time but uh no I dint feel bad.

Interviewer: And what sort of test did they run at the draft ward.

Pack: uhh your heart check your heart and uh that's about all check your heart that's about all you know you go through the line check your heart and they'll say oh he he's alright let him go [chuckles]

Interviewer: so uhm, you decided to join the marine core and you were among the first African Americans to join

Pack: yea uh huh they called us the original Martha pointers uhm in fact uhm before the war you know they didn't have no blacks in the marine core. And uhh I guess Roosevelt signed uh, I forgot the number of the order back in 1941 fair employment or something like that and that open the gates for you know blacks to go in the marine core but uhm the officers [name unclear] and uhh General Holken, them fellas, they didn't want blacks in the marine core. In fact they had to build a separate base for blacks in north Carolina in Camp Lejeune for the blacks and the first recruits that went in, their the guys that you know built up the base before I got there

Interviewer: and what sort of time did they go through before building up that base?

Pack: I guess they started 1942 when they started building up that base uhm hmm because when I got there we still, had the uhh we had the we were in tents, huts they call them uhm hmm and uhm kerosene for heat and they said it didn't get cold in north Carolina but then uhm we like froze [chuckles]

Interviewer: so you, you first arrived in North Carolina in.

Pack: November

Interviewer: of 1943

Pack: yea uh hum

Interviewer: and can you describe the sort of introduction to North Carolina just general life there in southern society.

Pack: well you know when I went in uhm [stutters] well when we got to North Carolina we got off the bus and then you know these uhm sergeants would meet the bus and all these new recruits and they'll be hollering at you and you know straighten up and, and then after you know you go in you get your uhh issue your clothes, and the clothes you brought with you, you put them in the back and you had to ship them back home and then every morning you gotta get out there you know you go to shower, think bout 5 or 6 o'clock and reveille and then you go to shower, after that you go back to the barracks and get your clothes get your rifle and you hit your drill field you do that 6 days a week morning until night, and.... And every once in a while the... the officers would come around to have to have inspection and make sure your, your bunks are made up and I know you've seen movies where they, they come in and inspect and throw a coin on there and if, if, [laughs] if it [unclear] they'd ,make you do it all over again but all the white D, when I go there all the D.I.'s were black D.I.'s all the white D'I's they'd gone we still had the white officers.

Interviewer: D.I. being drill instructors

Pack: Yea drill instructors, yea.... And we had some tough drill instructors I remember Hash Mark Johnson... a lot of them they were tough on us they said they were gone make marines out of us, and they certainly did

Interviewer: and Johnson became the namesake

Pack: yea, in fact they renamed Montford Point camp, they named it camp Johnson

Interviewer: So how far was Montford Point from Lejeune?

Pack: It's right in Lejeune, its part of Lejeune yea, and uhm I think we about 8, 8 weeks uhh we had 6 weeks of training and then 2 weeks in the rifle range then after 2 weeks on the rifle range you know you got liberty but uhh then I came home for, for about 7 days but then I came back but uhh I didn't go back out on liberty in fact I, in a lil town called Jacksonville is right there I never when out but one time in Jacksonville because I grew up in Ohio and uh I knew the south was segregated and all that so I never went out cause uhh I said well there no sense in me going out there cause I'm not use to that and I don't want to hurt no one and I don't want to get hurt so I'll just stay here on the base.

Interviewer: But you did go out once

Pack: just once

Interviewer: can you describe that?

Pack: uhhm me and I think 2 or 3 other guys just went out Jacksonville just walked down the street and uhh and that was about it then come on back to the base

Interviewer: did you have interactions with white soldiers from Lejeune?

Pack: No. uhn uhn, in fact I've never seen any of em. Not until we uh, not until we got shipped out and uhh we got on the train and went up to Norfolk, Virginia and got on the big ship the U.S.S James O. Hara, went down through the panama canal and over to Hawaii

Interviewer: So how long were you in, uhm Hawaii?

Pack: I think we got there and I think we were only there about, about a month then we left there and went over to Maui and we stayed on Maui for maybe a couple of months and in the meantime we had to uhh in fact it was big ammo dump and we had to load ammo on the trucks and they took em down to the ships you know, we only stayed for about a month and then after that we got on the ship uhhh I remember the name of it USS Piers and, had no idea of where we were going you know when you get on the ship they don't tell you anything "*where we going?... I don't know*". And uh the day before, D-day comes and then they tell you well you gone hit the beaches uhh, well our first battle was Saipan and the night before I don't think anybody went to sleep that night the navy galley was always open you know drink coffee whatever and then the Chaplain would come in and everybody

wanted you know the chaplain to pray for you. And then you go up on the deck you can see the flashing lights you know from the navy guns shelling out and then next day is the day you D-day. [Pause]

Interviewer: so but can you can you tell me a little bit about life in these ships you're spending a lot of time going from Virginia through the Panama canal into the Pacific. I mean I have certain assumptions about life on a ship was it something that, did you like it did you dislike it, what was good about it, what was bad about it?

Pack: Uhh well when we left uhh Norfolk Virginia it was it was raining and storming and everything but uhm a lot of guys got sea sick but I didn't get [shrugs shoulders] you know they say well if you stop, if you don't, the best way to not get seasick is if you eat something, you know eat. I guess evidentially some of those guys didn't and some of them got seasick but I never got seasick and when we got through the Panama Canal uuhm we figured well we, maybe we can we got to the other side you know the pacific side and we said well maybe they'll let us off and walk around a little bit but uhh that didn't happen, the officers got off but we didn't, we just had to stay there and then next morning we sailed for Hawaii but uhh onboard ship well there was a lot of us uhh black marines white we didn't have no problems we played cards and things like that, talked to each other telling different stories and all that

Interviewer: so the units were uhh segregated but on a ship like that you would mix with white soldiers

Pack: oh yea, oh yea, oh yea, yea

Interviewer: was there a sense of where people were back home or was everyone just sort of in it together at that point

Pack: at that point I think all in it together you where you were from or anything like that no uh uh.

Interviewer: ok so we'll go back forward to uhm the landing at Saipan, so this would have been D-Day which corresponds to D-day in the European theater June 6th 1944

Pack: Yea everybody talking's bout D-Day, and they always thinking about D-day June the 6th and I always tell people well we had a d day and June the 15th on Saipan, so that's our D Day [chuckles]

Interviewer: What was your knowledge leading up to June 15th?

Pack: What, what do you mean?

Interviewer: Like how much did you know about the upcoming invasion there?

Pack: Nothing. [Chuckles], not a thing

Interviewer: Not until the day before

Pack: Not until the day before, we knew where we were going Saipan, we never heard of it. Of course I don't think anybody on the ship ever heard of Saipan, Saipan is in the Mariannas,uh that chain word Saipan right next.... Saipan bout a mile across the water was tennain and later on you know that's where the B29 bombers came up and south of Saipan and Tinian was Guam.

Interviewer: and these were islands that Japan had taken early in the war

Pack: oh yea, yea, ehm hum, yea

Interviewer: so uh prior to this invasion what had been your duties as a marine

Pack: you know, you know uhm, the black marines only they were only uhh depot companies and ammo companies and they had uhh [clears throat] 51st and 52nd defense battalions but uhh the 51st and 52nd they never saw action in fact, they, they sent them to the Marshall Islands after the Marshall Islands was secured but uhm cause all we did uhh depot companies and ammo companies was load these ships with supplies ammo food uhh medical supplies and all that stuff, you know , that's what that's what an ammo company, depot companies did. Of course when the invasion come you know you had to unload that stuff and you know, of course you couldn't do that until after the beach was you know secured, you know so you can come in and then some of us uuh stayed on the ship and you know to, you know unload it and then the other guys would be on the, on the beach down there you know getting the stuff and piling it up. And the later on especially on Saipan when the island was secured we, you know we built uhh of course the CB's came in and built uhm quant's and huts for you know for the supplies and then uhm we uhm built some huts of course they were for the uhh for ourselves and for the officers and I worked with some white fellows from uhhm from new York, they were electricians and uhm helped him uhhm supply electricity for the officers you know quarters cause we didn't have and..... but they had and they had you know portable generators and all that for them and uhh in fact I got along real well with these fellows in fact they said if I wanted to....."*come to New York and work with us*". Of course I didn't, I didn't do that though [chuckles]

Interviewer: so during these periods of uh waiting prior to these invasions, did you see uhm were there united service organizations coming out there providing entertainment what was, were there movies being screened

Pack: yea there was uhh, there was I don't know who they were, they came there on Saipan and they had uhm for entertainment uhh that's the only time I remember they came there that one night and uh of course a lot of times you know after uhm after the day is done we would you know, sometimes we'd play ball and uhm and uhm yea I don't know where you heard, you probably heard the name bobby Troup the guy that uhh his wife is a famous singer what's her name hmm forgot her name but in fact he was a marine anyway and uhh he, he had a band in they came over there.

Interviewer: Mr. Pack lets return to onboard ship preparing for the invasion of Saipan uhh can you describe the night before you said uhh nobody slept.uhm people were talking to chaplains, can you go into more detail on that evening

Pack: ehm if I remember right I guess uhm everything was quiet you know cause uhh as far as any activity or no one, no one was playing cards or anything like that and everybody was wondering what is was gone be like when day light come and we hit the beach and uhh most of us went up on deck and of course you couldn't you could see the [unclear] of guns from the navy shelling the Island but uhm and then some of us would go down to the galley and get some coffee and and uhm everything was quiet because uhh at that time we'd never been in combat before and we didn't know what to expect and uhh so everybody kind of uhh kind of kept you know kind of kept to themselves and kept kind of quiet cause we didnt know what was gone happen

Interviewer: what did you uhh know about the Japanese what had you been told about you know individual soldiers what did you see I the news in news reels and things, how did you feel about the Japanese at that point

Pack: well we, I guess well, all of us I know we felt well either they gone kill me or im gone kill them , but I'm gone kill them, I'm gone get to them first before they get to me cause we understood that they didn't believe in taking no prisoners so we're not gone take any either and so that's the way we all felt and we all of course, we all had our NI's and uhm I forgot how many cartages we had, I think uhh, I forgot how many we had but uhh of course we knew how, how the Japanese were as far as you know, they always talking about dying for the emperor so we'll, we just gone help you then [chuckles] [laughs]

Interviewer: So what was your view from the ship of Saipan?

Pack: uhh well when day light come we went up on deck and uhh uhm of course you know you're quite a ways away from the shore all you could see you know hills and all that and you could see the uhh navy ships uhh you know, you know, shells exploding and and then uhm and then uhh airplanes you know dropping bombs on there uh yeah, it was quite a sight to see long as you was on the ship and didn't have to get off at that time at that point of course uhm I Captain Captain Adams and his age and a few more of em I think they went in I think about the fourth wave but some of statyed on ship to uh you know unload and and I guess the first night on the beach I guess the captain, captain Zave got killed he was the first one uhh black marine to be killed in world war II but a young marine from Columbus ohio Kenneth tibbs cause I was from ohio he was from ohio we were, we were good buddies and I was sorry when I first heard he had got killed the first night on the beach

Interviewer: and when did you, when were you uhh, at what point did you uhh

Pack: go on the beach? I think we went in uhh after the ship was unloaded I think a couple days later D plus three that's when we, we got off our ship and went on the beach and, we stayed on the beach you know all the supplies from our ship and then we had to you know get them on trucks and you know ship them on up a little further into the island

Interviewer: were there still signs of destruction and uhm

Pack: oh yea, yea [stutters] around the beach oh yea cause uh in fact on white fellow we were real you know he was a really nice fellow I think they called him whitey cause he has white hair of course a young fellow though and uh he had, was on one of them amtraks as they call them and uhm of ourse he lost his life ther going in on that Amtrak and we were you know sorry to hear that he had a lot of , a lot of wreckage showing you know on the beach, it's if never, if you ever been in the mili..... well I'll put it this way, if you've ever been in the military and been in combat uhh its, its, really something you don't wanna do a lot of people think they would gung-ho and all that but uhh it's a, its a lot different when you, when you really you know get there

Interviewer: so did you take part in setting up a new camp up there in Saipan?

Pack: yea, for the, yep on up on yea uhm cause after after the island was secure you know they moved us up, up the island a little bit and uhh we set up a camp on there for, for our depot company as in any officers and, and uhm and there's uhm a white uhh group I forgot what they called them but they did uhm uhm set up camps and they were marines but uhh that's what they did and we all worked together with em some of us worked, worked with them and then some of em had to go down and uhhm to the beach and and still unload, unload the ships coming I cause after you know after our ship you know was unloaded and all that of course you know they left cause at that time you know always more ships coming in bringing in supplies and I was lucky enough to work with these electrician and I didn't have to do [laughs] go down there to the beach and unload them ships.

Interviewer: did you get tired of that sort of uhm unloaded, loading cycle every new location

Pack: uhh not really I mean I don't, I don't not really not to me ehm ehm cause we figured well its something we have to do and uhhm lets do it the quicker we can get it done and the sooner we can get this thing over and get back home.

Interviewer: How long were you in Saipan?

Pack: uhh we stayed on Saipan 43 and we left Saipan April 45 to going to Okinawa, the battle of Okinawa.

Interviewer: How was that different from the first invasion?

Pack: well it well, the good part about that, about Okinawa we didn't we didn't get there till about D plus five which is [chuckles] bout five days later after the original

ones went in I think the uhh first and the sixth marine divisions you know. You know in Saipan we was with the second and fourth marine division but on Okinawa we were with the first and sixths but D plus five is a whole lot different but they were still, still a lot of battling going on around there cause at that time you know the Japanese uh what them kamikazes? that what they call em? yeah They didn't care you know they go into ships and blow em up and all that but we were fortunate you know and the ship we went in on Okinawa I don't remember the name of that one, but we had to, we had to load that ship with uh ammo and a whole lot of stuff more ammo than anything else uhh these big uhm 155 millimeter shells I guess they bout, bout that long, bout that big around you think you could carry one of them [chuckles] yea there was a difference in Saipan and Okinawa

Interviewer: What are some of the other differences between the two? The peiod after uhh D plus five , getting set up there in Okinawa

Pack: well we went in of course we were near, near the airfield and you know unloading ships and stacking up uhm supplies and you know like uhm ammo and food and all that kind of stuff and uhm that's what we did and then uhm [garble] near the airport uhm one night the uhm Japanese a couple of Japanese planes they spotted them coming in to the airfield and uhm the sergeants said oh lets lets go get your rifles we gotta go to the airport the Japanese you know landed on the airport we gotta go down there and help them out and uhm before we got to the airport they said well ok we don't have to go any farther they, they shot em all up they killed all of em and um they didn't shoot them down from the air because they had some night fighters in the area and they didn't want to shoot our night fighters down so they just let em come on in and land on the airfield and then when they got there they , they uhm they killed them all so we didn't have to go you know to the air field and then later on after the island was secured we they moved us way up the other end of the island and uhm we set up camp here and we stayed there until um till they dropped the atomic bomb and then uhm cause, cause before that uh we were, we were all packed and ships were out there waiting on us for us to you know get on to to invade Japan and then when we, they found out they dropped the atomic bomb on everybody they said well the war is over now we can , we can go home, so we thought, so they thought well I [chuckles] I, I would at that time you know there wasn't uh anything really for us to do cause the ships was loaded and all that so we used to play ball you know and uhm I broke my ankle sliding in home plate and uhm my sisters and brothers they never believed me when I told them that but I got to I, my outfit was scheduled to go to china they weren't goig home they were going to china and told the seargeant well I gotta go to china with you guys cause im not going you know, naw you cant go with us you got a broken ankle, you cant even walk. "yea I can walk" so but you know you've been with em for bout almost two years and but uhh they wouldn't let me go with em so they took me to sick bay and then put me on the plane and ship me to Guam and I

got on and hospital ship and and end up in uhm Oakland California naval hospital and I stayed there so they said well you live on the east coast that area so we'll, you can either go to great lakes naval hospital or Philadelphia and I then I got to thinking well great lakes thats Chicago and i could catch a train and go right home so I said id go to great lakes, and that's why I ended up in great lakes naval hospital until, until I got discharged and uhm 1946 had my leg in a cast, cast up to here for hmm three months and then they put a walking cast on there and after they figured was well enough to you know that when they discharged me but I know in out in Oakland California there was uh cornel came through there anybody that wanna re enlist and of you fellows that want to re enlist whe you get ready get well. Ill sign you up right now [unclear] well uhh I told him no not me [chuckles] but uhm

Interviewer: why didn't you want to re enlist ?

Pack: I don't know, [laughs] I dnt know I figured I want to get back home and go to college and play football then I realized I cant hardly run so I cant go back to, cant do that so

Interviewer: So did you hear anymore from or about your fellow soldiers who went on to china

Pack: uhgg years later uhmm cause they, they uhh started what they called Montford Marine Association and that's where I uhm I found out you they uhh what they went to china and uhh in fact my first sergeant uh uh he was one of the officers in the Montford Marine association and they had a reunion thinks it's in Philadelphia one year and uh I met a lot of you know that I had you know been with and uhm and every year they always had a reunion and uhh Washington DC san Francisco LAall over the all over the country yea

Interviewer: So when you were discharged at great lakes did uhh what did what did you do at that point ?

Pack: after I got discharged I went home and t that time uhm they had what they call uhh 52 two weeks you could you know you could get paid for 52 weeks if you didn't go back to work and I said well that time at that time if you had a job before you know you went back to the job you had and so I said said I'm not gone sit around here for no 52 weeks so after a couple weeks I went back to the steel mill and worked and saved some money and and then I got to thinking uhh I gotta get outta this steelemil there's gotta be something better than this so me and a friend of mine we we uhh went to detroit Michigan to electrical school and uhm went went there for about a year and a half and got our diplomas and all of that and sad part about it couldn't get a job and you know electrician back in them days they made a lot of money in fact I went to uhh I thought I had a job at the uhm [unclear] cars from up there in Michigan you know and uhh the one out there and you guy and the personnel officer said go down theres a see something I forgot the guys name and seen him he'll he'll put you to work and went down

there when the guy saw me he saw my color [laughs] darn I don't got time to train nobody, I said you don't have to train me, well I don't have time go back up there and tell them that uhh I don't need, I don't need you so that's what happened with that but I did get uhh when to the civil service he's in with the city of Detroit got a job up in the water department and spent 35 years with them, not as a electrician started out as mechanical helper and moved on up and when I retired after 35 years a administrative assistant [unclear] when I retired

Interviewer: so you spent your career in Detroit

Pack: yea ehmm hmm yeah

Interviewer: and uhm can you tell me about your family

Pack: well lets see how, how can I do that how can I say that you know after the war or well, well after the war uhm of course my brother stayed in the navy and my brother in the army uh he, he went back to the steel mill and worked until he retired and my susters they all got married and and one of tem moved to new jersey well both two of em went to move to new jersey and he other one stayed in uhm in Liverppol and my other brother he was in new jersey and and since I was in Detroit and my other brother my younger brother he stayed I Liverpool for a while well after the Korean war and I told him why don't you come to Detroit and get you a better job and he came to Detroit and worked uhh and he worked for the water department until he passed away uhm uhh of course every year I used to go back to Liverpool for the 4th of July if I was off and all of us you know still living we always got together you know for that period of time

Interviewer: and you married?

Pack: oh, oh yeah [laughs]

Interviewer: just a small significant fact

Pack: yean I got married uhm forgot what year was it uhm didn't stay didn't stay married too long with that well ive been married twice and I got a divorce and after I think about 8 years before I married again and I married got married and stayed married with her unil she passed away about three years ago

Interviewer: what was her name?

Pack: uhh Annis. ANNIS

Interviewer: and uh did you have children

Pack: no children, step children ehmm

Interviewer: so uhm tell me about uhh meeting some of your fellow marines again through the Montford point marine association

Pack: uhm I guess when I first uhh saw some of them was in Philadelphia Kluaser was you know the first sergeant Klauser and I forgot the other guy's names and there were some that was from some Chicago and there were some from Pennsylvania and there were some from New York and uhm some of em I served with you know in the in the [unclear] depot company ehm hmm we always had you know had a nice time and had a banquet and everything and and uhm and talking bout the old time you know together on the islands and that's that what we did for about two or three days

Interviewer: did you serve in any leadership roles with the association?

Pack: uhhhh yea I was a uhhm what they call fiirr... in the marine core Montford Marines yea I was the uhh [unclear] in fact I help them drop the bylaws and all that for for in Montford Marine Association and uhm they always felt they were gonna get a congression charter and uhh I tried to tell them you wont do it because the Marine core league is the only congressional charter marine yo know its like the second marine division all them there uhh ass association but not congressionally chartered so I stayed stayed wth the uhh Montford Marines for, for a long time and then I the I decided Id join the marine core league which I thought was better because Montford Marine association figured if you didn't go through Montford you couldn't, you couldn't belong to to it and I told him I said well that don't make sense what happens when all those, all those montfor point marines die off what what do you got left you don't have nothing so I joined I joined the uh marine core league and I been with them for over thirty years and and with them I I worked junior vice senior vice and department [unclear] in Michigan and I served in 2 years as the department [unclear] in Michigan and uhm of course the marine core league naturally uhh its uhh about 85 percent white fellows and with uhhm in fact we don't have no problems infact I, I you know I go gto the conventions and all of that and uhm I didn't go to the last one which was in, was in home state west Virginia but I didn't go [chuckles] but before that I went up to grand rapids michigan in fact ive been everyplace with em California. Florida, everywhere , Arizona all over.

Interviewer: So how have you been recognized for your service?

Pack: how you mean that?

Interviewer: what sort of orbs, you've received the congressional gold medal

Pack: ehm hmm

Interviewer: could you show that to us

Pack: yeah [shows, medal].....congressional gold medal

Interviewer: Could you hold that up?

Pack: [holds up medal] ...hows that?

Interviewer: and tell me about the ceremony to receive this medal

Pack: it was a two days, two days uhm , two days uhm the first session uhm all the congress men were there uhh congressmen Harry Reid, Nancy Pelosi, John Boehner, and there was another one uh and there was uhh two ladies one was from uhh I think she's from north Carolina and one was from Florida, and uhm. You know they you know they had a lot of reading this and that and the other and then uhm and the next day that's when we got the medals we went to to the uhh marine barracks 8th and I street in Washington dc and that's when uhh general amlus, general Williams and uhm all the big [unclear] and had a big ceremony and the marine band and you know played and they uhh passed out these medals uhh there was uhh I was surprised that about 450 original Montford Point marines that they were getting the gold medal ehm hmm

Interviewer: and that was two years ago?

Pack: uhuh I think pretty sure it was 2 years ago yea ehm hmm

Interviewer: so where do you keep your medal?

Pack: I keep it at home and I got a case you know but I you know right right next to a cabinet you know at home and uhh a lot of uhh well not I got another uhh Marine of the year for the department of Michigan medal its its smaller than this you know but you you put that around her neck but but they uhhm I don't know where they had to made at of course I have an ideal of where they had it made but I wont say [laughs] uhh but but you vcant do that unless you go to a jeweler and have him do it, it cost you bout 300 bucks I hear [laughs] yea

Interviewer: well so Mr. Pack why did you agree to uhh speak wih me today

Pack: well when uhh what's the guy's name you was telling about the call me shucks I forgot his name [laughs]

Interviewer: Fred Martin?

Pack: Yea Fred Martin! Called me and told me uhm uhm he said some guy from uhh Kennesaw state want to talk to you, I said wanna talk to me about what [laughs] and he said well you were an original montford point marine so he wants to talk to you and said well I said ok [laughs] I said ill talk to him and he said well he gone be calling you and uhh I said don't I said how am I gone get there he said oh don't worry about that ill see that you get there and I hadn't heard from Fred since [laughs]

Interviewer: well I found Fred very helpful , uhm so, do you uhh do you think its important to share your story and reserve this

Pack: yea beca.... Yea you know uhh I was at a it wasa fellow from midway church uhh uhm called me and said that he was having something for uhh you know World

War II marines and simply said somebody had told him I was in World War II an uhh well we had a little dinner and all that and he was saying uhm he never heard of Montford point and I said well and that one, one of the reasons why I you know when you know when you called me about Montford Point I said uhm there's a lot of people never heard of Montford pint and uhm and didn't realize that uhm a lot pf black marines you know came through Montford Point and uhm in fact I was, I was at a grocery store checking out and a girl saw a cover I had on had marine on it and she said oh you was in the marines I said yea I was in the Marines uhh I said, I said I was in WWII and she said what is that? [laughs] I said that's World War II where you been?! [laughs] but uhh oh I, I [unclear] im proud that uh you know that I served in the marine core and uhm you know when I look back down cause uhm I always well of course me and everybody says you know everybody cant be a marine, only a chosen few can be marines so that's what im really proud of

Interviewer: well thank you for your service, and thank you for sharing your experience today

Pack: you're quite welcome any time