

ORAL MEMOIRS
OF
MAXIMILLIAN R. BELL

An interview conducted on
June 13, 2015

Interviewer: Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai

Angelo State University
West Texas Collection

“War Stories: West Texans and the Experience of War, World War I to the Present”

LEGAL STATUS: The oral memoirs of Maximillian R. Bell are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on June 13, 2015.

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WONGSRICHANALAI: For the record, what is your name?

BELL: My full legal name?

WONGSRICHANALAI: Sure.

BELL: Maximillian Rogers Bell and I'm from Alpine, Texas. I go by Max but that's the legal name, so throw that out there to make it legit or whatever.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Okay, so you're from Alpine? Your family is from Alpine?

BELL: My mom is from here. My dad was an Army kid who moved around. My dad actually came to school here and that's how he met my mom many, many years ago. They stayed here and kind of the rest is history. My mom's grandparents settled here. That's how she ended up here. They came from all over. They moved around Texas. He was an oil field worker and all that. Anyways, they ended up here.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What was it like growing up in the 80s?

BELL: Well, I was born in '86. I'm 28 years old, so I was born December 12, 1986. I don't know. It wasn't terrible. I think it's better now. I think it's cause I'm an adult.

WONGSRICHANALAI: It's a beautiful place.

BELL: It is. You don't really appreciate it until you go away and then you come back and you go, "Well, that's quite a view out in the mountains and the clouds and all that." But, I don't know. I didn't think it was horrible.

WONGSRICHANALAI: It's really remarkable.

BELL: Yeah, and if nothing else it makes you appreciate your trips to the big city, going to Midland or El Paso or, you know, those places. So, anyways.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Indeed. So, when and where did you enter the armed forces?

BELL: I enlisted . . . I reported to boot camp for the Marine Corps on August 1, 2010 was when I stepped off the bus. And so, I kind of had a long process trying to get in. I thought it was going to be easier. I initially tried to enlist from Midland-Odessa. I was living in Midland-Odessa for a while and I was working there. I worked as a welder and did other stuff up there. And then I thought, well, if I want to do it I might as well do it now. It's kind of a funny story. "Well, why did you pick the Marine Corps?" So, initially I went to the Army and they wouldn't give me the time of day. All the recruiters' offices were kinda in a row there and the Air Force guys were never anywhere to be seen. I could never . . . I could never get them while they were in the office. I don't think the Navy guys were there. In the Marine Corps I had 2 guys there. There was a guy there and he said, "Come on in. You look bored. I'll talk." So you know, the rest is . . . the

rest is kinda history there I suppose. He would actually talk to me. You know, this and that, and gave me the time of day.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, you didn't have an idea of which branch you wanted to enter?

BELL: I don't know. I was kinda. . . I was kinda up in the air on it. I was open-minded I guess. And you know, I've got buddies in all 4 branches. I've got a cousin that's still in the Navy. There's guys I went to high school with in the Marines, Army, Coast Guard you know. You name it. So every branch. So wasn't really . . . It wasn't I just had to join the Marine Corps. I had to do this. I was kinda leaning towards the Air Force initially but, you know, like I said, they wouldn't even return my phone calls. So, alright he lost one there fellas. Anyways, that was basically it. I had some medical stuff that I had to get cleared and checked out. It wasn't really a big deal. If you go from Midland-Odessa, they send you up to the processing station in Amarillo. That's the military entrance processing station, whatever they call it. It's a joint you know. It's all branches. And so they wouldn't even give me an interview with the doctor or whatever. So, I went up there twice and I sat there in a room . . . fiddled my thumbs for hours. I said, "What the hell's going on here, are you going to give me an up or down vote?" Actually, a very good friend of mine, he's from Alpine, he's still in. He enlisted out at Houston and he had a contact there and they were originally from Houston. They ended up moving out here. It's kinda him and his brother. He said, "Well here's a card, try this guy." And sure enough his dad would go back and forth between Houston, so I could hitch a ride, and I went down there and I got my paperwork sorted out. I got to see a doctor and all that you know, and got a consultant with him. And they said, "Yeah, you're good" and put the rubber stamp on it and said "Be here on this date, move it on the plane and go on to San Diego." So, it was kind of a long process getting in but, oh well, makes for a good story right?

WONGSRICHANALAI: Which branch did your father serve in?

BELL: My dad wasn't . . . he didn't enlist. My uncle was in the Air Force, my mom's brother. He was in the Air Force for almost 8 years. My grandfather, he was in the Army. He was World War II, post-World War II. As well as my other grandfather. He was in the Army right at the tail end of World War II. He was involved in all of that. That's how he met my grandmother. My grandmother, she's a war bride. She was an Austrian national. So, he was in Vienna when it was a divided city. It was a divided city from '45-'55. I guess you're a history guy, so you probably know all this. He was in the constabulary. There's Allied so, his job was to, you know, keep the Russians in check. So, throw hand grenades. I wish he was still alive. He had some excellent stories concerning that. So, I guess I have a military background in my family. So, a little bit.

WONGSRICHANALAI: There was great movie. I think it was filmed in Vienna. I think it was called *The Third Man*.

Bell: Yeah, it was Orson Wells. Yeah, post-war Vienna and all that immediately after '40 . . . '46-'49. Those years, if I remember correctly.

WONGSRICHANALAI: It's a beautiful film. The destruction . . . you really get a sense of the feel for . . .

BELL: Well that's when my grandmother and great grandmother were living there. So, of course they had the city divided up, and I guess when the Soviets . . . the Russians rolled into town, they were living in an apartment or a part of town that I guess became eventually Soviet occupied. So, they packed all their junk, all their crap, and said "We're getting out of here," and left. It was probably a good thing. It was only occupied for 10 years as I understood and then I guess both sides pulled out. It was done. It wasn't like Germany where they remained split for quite some time. But, uh, so anyways.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So basic in San Diego?

BELL: Yeah, boot camp in San Diego. MCRD, San Diego. Um, was it 13 weeks? I went there August 1st and when it was all said and done it was end of October, close to Halloween because I remember you get 10 days off when you finish boot camp. They insist you take 10 days of well needed leave and vacation, and came back here for my 10 days and then back on out to Camp Pendleton for school of infantry. And then that was about a month . . . month and a half. So, 10 days in October. So . . . I could remember I was there for Thanksgiving. And then when we were done we actually graduated . . . it was December 7th, it was Pearl Harbor Day. They had a big celebration and a big . . . Well, I guess they had our graduation ceremony. They had a bunch of Pearl Harbor veterans or older veterans out there and then we graduated. They put us all in a bus and took us to the airport, and I think our flight left almost at midnight to go to Pensacola for Aviation Ordinance School. That was my MOS. So, I had . . . I don't know . . . I had probably had 4.5-5 hours to kill in downtown San Diego. Which I don't know if you've ever been, but it's a fun place. So, I went running around and ate here and had a few beers there and it was close to Christmas time. So, I went back and got on the shuttle or the little train and got back up to the airport and caught my flight with all the other guys that were going with me to Pensacola. There was a whole bunch of us for various MOSs. All the aviation related stuff in the Marine Corps goes and they have different school houses. They have the airframe mechanics and they have the power plant guys and the ordinance and the avionics and so on and so forth. So there's a big section there at Pensacola and they have Navy . . . Well, they have Navy and Marines and I think some Air Force there now. I don't know how that works but it's big. I was there for . . . I want to say close to 3 months in Pensacola. Cause I got there in December . . . January, February, March. I ended up leaving mid- to early March is when I finally got out of there cause I remember the weather started getting better. We got to Pensacola thinking, "Oh that's gonna be great, there's woman on the beach and beer." It's a beautiful beach but it gets really cold there in the winter time. I was surprised. You know, they call it Floribama and you know it wasn't snowing, but it was sleeting and raining outside. It was cold and miserable and, you know, just not a whole lot of fun. Then towards the end, as we were winding down our time came to an end, and the weather started getting better, and we'd go to the beach and this and that. And they said, "Alright, you're out of here. Time to go to North Carolina." And that's where I went to my secondary school, which is supposed to be platform specific. It was supposed to be all F-18 related and stuff. Then, went to Cherry Point, in MCS Cherry Point there in North Carolina. I was there . . . I think that school was . . . I want to say it was close to 3 months as well, overall. And then, we drew orders and I got my . . . my orders to Japan, so the outfit there. And came home, I don't know, it was probably close to 20-25 days. They gave me a big block of leave and then off to Japan. So, for . . . for 2 years there in Iwakuni. So, that was where my unit was out of.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Going back a little bit.

BELL: Okay, yeah, let's go back.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Did anyone else from Texas or West Texas go to boot camp with you?

BELL: Nobody that I knew. A lot of guys had kinda beat me to it. Cause I enlisted . . . you know, I was a little bit . . . you know, a little bit . . . I guess a little bit older. A little bit saltier and I didn't jump at it right as I was 18. It's probably good. I would have gotten in a lot of trouble, might have gotten thrown out. Nobody that enlisted with me specifically, but I mean there's guys I went to high school with and guys I remember that enlisted. Some of them are still in and some of them are out. But I mean there was a fair few. There were some guys ahead of me. There was a guy that went to the Marines in the class ahead of me, and he's actually border patrolling now. He's still . . . he's back around here. He's married and what not. And then there were . . . there were other guys that I knew. Not so much in my class, but in some of the classes behind me as well. Ahead and behind. So, you know there's a few other people trying to get out of here, I guess. [Laughs]

WONGSRICHANALAI: And then they come back.

BELL: Well, then you come back, so, you know. I couldn't . . . I asked Rusty. There's a guy I know . . . I didn't go to high school with him, he went to high school in Marathon and he's busy right now. But he enlisted in the Marines as well. His brother was actually a Marine. His brother went, so he went and stayed with his brother. His brother was a drill instructor at Parris Island, and insisted he come stay with him. Lived with him for a while and got him signed up and sent him on to boot camp. So there in South Carolina and he's out now. So he's been out for I don't know, probably . . . I don't know probably . . . it'll be . . . well we're coming up on . . . in a few months we'll hit August. So that will be officially a year I've been out . . . August 2nd. He's probably got me beat by 5-6 months on being out. So, anyways.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, in the Corps you go to basic, you go and get assigned . . . All these differences, you meet a lot of folks from around the country.

BELL: Oh, yeah! Yeah.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Did they ever talk about . . . "Well where are you from?" "What is that? West Texas?"

BELL: Well, I would always say "middle of nowhere, Texas." I had a very good friend of mine, he's from California. He's from Valencia. Everybody knows where that is. There's Six Flags Magic Mountain, everybody knows Southern California. He said, "Where are you from?" I said, "Oh, I'm from Texas." He said, "Oh, well what part?" "Oh well it's out in the middle of nowhere." I think I may have thrown an expletive in there. He said, "Well, I've never heard of it." I said, "Yeah, it's in the middle of nowhere." So, I explained to him and I drew a little map and all that and said, "Well, here's Dallas and Ft. Worth, here's Houston, here's San Antonio. Here's all of this. Here's the Panhandle, and I'm way out here." And he goes, "Whoa, you really

are out in the middle of nowhere.” It was kinda funny. As a kind of a whatever to that, there’s a lot of guys I know that are getting out. And they’re really from all over . . . all over the country. And they’re all curious about Texas and they all seem to want to move here. So, it’s kind of funny.

WONGSRICHANALAI: West Texas?

BELL: Well, just Texas in general. Not so much West Texas, but they’ve heard. “Well, what’s San Antonio like? What’s Dallas like?” I said, “Well, you know, it’s a big city.” “Oh, well do many people have oil wells in their yard.” “No they don’t have oil wells in their yard.” “Oh, do they ride horses to school?” “No they don’t ride horses to school, it’s a city.” It’s not in the middle of nowhere. I don’t even see people ride their horses to school here. I see people ride occasionally on the side of the road. But yeah, there were definitely a lot of questions and not really so much any jeering, but they were curious . . . ”Oh, does everyone have a gun there?” I said, “I don’t know if everybody has a gun, but there’s a lot of people that own guns.” So there’s just kinda, you know, kinda whatever is kinda perception, I guess. Right or wrong, it’s kinda funny. I’m always wondering what other people think about, you know, Texas or wherever you’re from. So, anyways.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, how would you define West Texas? Like is there . . . where’s the line?

BELL: Oh, that depends on who you ask.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Okay, I’m asking you.

BELL: I’ve always been told it’s the Pecos River. So, when you pass that you are in West Texas proper. And depending on who you ask . . . To me in my mind you know, the Pecos River. Midland-Odessa is kinda on the edge of it depending on who you ask. To me it’s on the . . . It’s really very subjective. It’s not Central Texas. It’s not . . . It’s obviously not the Hill Country. To me, it’s not quite West Texas. You know like I said, it’s depending on who you ask. There’s a lot of guys . . . I actually knew a friend of mind and he has family in Mason. You know, I consider that Central Texas, you know Hill Country or whatever and he said, “Well, my family lives in West Texas.” And I said, “Where?” He said, “Mason.” And I said, “That’s not West Texas.” Sorry, it’s a nice place. It’s a beautiful place, but that’s not West Texas.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, what makes West Texas West Texas? What’s . . . how do you describe it? What’s special about it?

BELL: Well, I . . . To me, mountains. People don’t . . . The guys are amazed I have some pictures that I didn’t take because I can’t take pictures to save my life. But I appreciate good photography and, you know, there’s pictures of down in the park of Mitre Peak up in Fort Davis and I showed it to them. And they went, “Holy hell, this is . . . Texas is like this?” I said, “Well, yeah, this part of Texas is. The little corner where I’m from.” “Well, what mountain is it?” “Well, it’s the tail end of the Rocky Mountains depending on who you ask. I’m not a geologist.” And so they are really surprised. They’re kinda shocked. I guess that they think it’s all flat and

dirty and there's oil wells. Which, there is a lot of places that are that way but that's not all of it. So, they're really shocked I guess. They're really surprised, so in a way. I shared a picture . . . have you ever been to Balmorhea? To the pool?

WONGSRICHANALAI: I've passed through.

BELL: You've passed through? You will have to right that wrong someday. If you like to swim. It's a big spring fed pool up there. I think they're technically in Reeves County, but they're just on the edge. And so they built a State Park there and you can . . .

WONGSRICHANALAI: We saw signs for that.

BELL: You can scuba dive in the pool. It's that big.

WONGSRICHANALAI: We saw signs for scuba equipment.

BELL: Yeah, it's 65 or almost 70 feet deep out in the middle. It's a massive spring and it runs you around. It feeds the uh . . . it feeds the farmers. You know, the agriculture. They pipe that water off and use it so there's always been people there. But I showed them a picture of that, that someone had taken, and it was a real striking photo of a guy snorkeling or scubaing. I said, "I went snorkeling here the other day." And they were all like, "Where is this?" "It's out in the middle of the desert." "I don't believe that." And then I think I found the Wikipedia link for it or whatever and you know, messaged it to him on Facebook or emailed it to him. And he went, "Oh, wow." And I said, "Come out here and I'll take you if it's in the summer time." So, I'm always looking for an excuse to go and go swim for the day.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Sounds like fun. What would you say the people are like in West Texas? Obviously, there's a collected mix but . . .

BELL: Well, I don't know.

WONGSRICHANALAI: But how are they different from folks in Houston . . . that part of the state?

BELL: I don't know. I mean I guess they're not . . . what's the right word? You know they're not um . . . I don't know. People use the word, I don't know, citified I guess. I guess they just have . . . you know people have a different mentality. They're not. . . you know, I don't know. That's a good question. I don't know how you would describe. They're different, I mean you can tell. You can tell. And depending on . . . there's a lot of people that have moved here. And me being away, it's changed and I guess people want to come out here. And it's a very desirable place and, so, you're kinda seeing the demographics change a little bit, but there's a lot of people they're kinda independent, I guess. They're kinda salty and they don't wanna . . . you know, they want to live. And you know, there's a lot of people that want to live off. They build their little ranches and little houses, and I wouldn't say they're hermits, but you know, they like to live. They're kinda, I guess, independent. I don't know. Then you have people that manage, work on ranches and that kinda stuff. And you get people from all over. You get people from Idaho and Montana.

A friend of mine, his folks moved down here. They got a . . . uh . . . He was managing a ranch somewhere in Montana. If I recall correctly, one of his uncles bought a ranch down here. And it was . . . it was probably a tax write off, something like that. He said, "I need someone to manage this ranch." So, they packed up and came down here. So, you get people. And especially here at Sul Ross, they have the whatever . . . the rodeo team and this and that. There's people in Canada that come down here to go to school, so you can kinda get this interest and mix. There's that. And then you get people that I guess just kinda want to go off the beaten path. And as far as remote places go, I guess in America, it's still fairly . . . fairly remote. I don't think that because I grew up here. You know, we have paved roads and you know, this and that. I don't have to take a boat in or fly a plane in like in some places in Alaska, but it really is in a lot of ways. So I guess that's kind of the appeal to it. It's kinda relatively unspoiled and untouched. So, anyways.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Well, what do you suppose . . . What do you think the relationship is with people of West Texas to the military? Is it supportive?

BELL: Yeah, they're generally . . . I don't want to get political but, yeah, they're generally center to right kinda people. Not affiliated with any particular party one way or the other but they're not generally speaking . . . I don't see them as anti-military. I guess you could say Texas as a whole is pretty pro-military. I mean I've been places . . . you know I had a . . . uh . . . I think I . . . No, I didn't have . . . I didn't put a Marine Corps sticker on my truck, but I think I had a shirt. It had an Eagle holding up an anchor and they were cheering me on. I'm not a hero or anything, but they were very . . . tend to be very pro-military as a whole.

WONGSRICHANALAI: But there's a history of service. Uncles and grandpas and everyone had done . . .

BELL: Well, Nimitz is from Texas.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Would you consider Fredericksburg West Texas?

BELL: No, not West Texas.

WONGSRICHANALAI: That's Hill Country.

BELL: That's Hill Country, but there's a long tradition. Eisenhower, if I remember correctly was born in Texas. He was born in North Texas and, so, there's a long tradition. And then even with A&M there's a lot of guys, a lot of Marines, a lot of officers that came into the Marine Corps as well as the Army and other branches that were Aggies. You know, a corps of cadets. So, there's definitely been a long-standing tradition across the state I guess. So, anyways.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Well, what's fascinating is that so many people were from Texas. Texas was huge. They want to join the Navy because they want to see the ocean. . .

BELL: Well, I've never . . . I've seen the ocean. You know, this is bad man. I've never been to the Texas Coast. I've been to Australia as a civilian—long story there. I've swam their beaches. I've swam in the . . . I've swam in California, Florida, Pensacola. I've been to the beach there. I

swam in the ocean there as well. I've never been to the Texas Coast. North Carolina, I've been to the beach there. I've been to the beach in Okinawa and in mainland Japan, but I've never been to the Texas Coast. So, I've never just . . . I never made it down there. So, I may have to . . .

WONGSRICHANALAI: Well, it's what? 8 hours from here?

BELL: It's about 8 hours. So, I guess growing up I was used to . . . if you wanted to go anywhere you had to drive. My grandmother lives in El Paso, so it's about a 3 1/2 hour drive there. It's 2-2 1/2 hours to Midland. Then, 8 or 9 hours to Dallas-Ft. Worth, you know, depending on how far you're going and the traffic and all that stuff. And 10 hours to Houston, so, you kinda accept. I know it's 3-4 hours to San Angelo I think. So, you kinda . . . just part of the deal. You're gonna drive quite a bit to . . . quite a ways to to get anywhere, you know, worth going. Most of the time.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Why did you enlist?

BELL: Why did I enlist? Um . . . I thought it was necessary. I thought it was . . . I thought it was what you do. That's your country. You know, that's patriotism, I guess is the word I use. I thought I should do something. Even if it was for 4 years. I thought that is just what you did. It was the way my grandfather was. That was that generation, I guess. That was just understood. That was a "you did something." I was able bodied and I could do it, so I thought I might as well do something. I could do something worthwhile and serve my country, even if it is for only 4 years. That was my perception as a kid. You did your stand. My uncle did. He joined the Air Force and for many reasons . . . for many different reasons. I think part of it was to kinda get away from here for a little while. He spent, well, I think he spent close to 3 years in Germany and you know, he got to see the world. He had a good time and served his country. He did something worthwhile. So, I guess, that's how I felt. To me it's understood. You did something. I mean, there was no pressure. My parents said "You didn't do that." My thoughts were, "That's what you do."

WONGSRICHANALAI: Any siblings?

BELL: No, I'm an only kid.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So am I.

BELL: That's whatever. I had a cousin I used to beat up on, the one that joined the Navy. He's a couple years younger than me, so when they visited, he was my little brother for a while. I could mess with him and they'd pull me apart. That was that.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So when you enlisted what was your perception of America's role in the world? What was the United States supposed to do in the world? Cause it's certainly changed.

BELL: That's a really subjective . . . that's hard to answer. I mean I guess it depends on who you ask. Well, you're asking me. In a sense, kinda impose . . . well impose might not be the right word, but, you know, provide some kind of order on a certain level. I guess that's a very

controversial thing depending on who you ask. You know, “We shouldn’t be involved here, we shouldn’t be involved there.” But if you look at American history . . . You’re a history guy . . . It’s gonna happen one way or the other on a certain level. Rightly or wrongly depending on how you feel on it. I guess, yeah, I saw us as a world power, as a force on a certain level. Of course, I . . . When I was a sophomore . . . when 9/11 happened, I was still in high school.

WONGSRICHANALAI: You were in high school?

BELL: I was in high school in 2001. I remember seeing that . . . Well everyone remembers seeing that on the TV. That was a . . . when that kicked off I thought, “There’s gonna be some stuff going on for a while.” Then of course, you know, Iraq number 2 kicked off as well. All that was going on for quite some time. That was roaring and continuing. That was kind of the heat of it between 2004-2007. Those were the dog days in Iraq. That was the nitty gritty from what I understood. That was when things were really going on.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, you were stationed in Japan?

BELL: Yeah, that was my first duty station.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What was your impression of Japan? Had you ever been there before?

BELL: No, never . . . never. It was kinda as I thought it would be. Then . . . everyone had preconceived notions about things. Especially, if you’ve never been there. It was that way in Australia especially. I thought it was all dusty outback and things and that. Then I got there and parts of it were that way but then parts of it were completely different, depending on where you went. In Japan, yeah, in a sense, it kinda met my whatever. It’s fairly crowded, but where we were at would really qualify as rural in Japan, in that area.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And where were you?

BELL: I was in Iwakuni. Iwakuni, Japan.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Where is that?

BELL: That’s 26 miles south of Hiroshima. If you look on a map, it’s in Yamaguchi Prefecture. And then the dividing line between Yamaguchi Prefecture and Hiroshima prefecture is, I think, 10 or 15 miles up the road is where the demarcation is. It’s fairly . . . I think the city of Iwakuni has close to 100,000 people. By their standards, that’s small. That’s rural. You could hike in the mountain. I discovered you could go fishing in Japan. The fishing’s pretty good. The outdoor activities are there. Which is kinda nice cause that was something I kinda enjoyed around here was different. But you could definitely go. There’s parts of Japan that are pretty rural. You can’t build there. People don’t inhabit them. Yeah, it was kinda in a way . . . you know it was interesting. The people were very nice. I wasn’t sure how they’d react to us. In Okinawa, it’s not always the same story. Okinawa is its own island. The U.S. has been there, well there’s been a military presence there since 1945. There’s a ton of Marines. There’s an entire division of Marines there. The Air Force has a giant base there. There have been incidents and stuff. There’s

people on the island that don't much care for Americans or military, but in mainland Japan, we're kinda a curiosity. People would see us and me being 6-feet tall and very fair skinned and green eyes and dark hair, I guess they had never seen anything like me before. So, it was interesting. The kids would be looking at you. You know, just naturally curious and generally very friendly. And a lot of them, you know, many of them spoke good English, so they would ask question and this and that. It was kind of an interesting experience and the farther you got away from the military instillation . . . the more of . . . I wouldn't say out of place. I guess the more of an oddity, I guess, you sort of were. People just assumed you were a college student and you were traveling and whatever. I was really interested to learn that there are many Japanese people that don't even know that that air station, that airbase exists there, and that it's an American entity. We control it. It's ours. It's our little 8-mile square of land there.

WONGSRICHANALAI: How many troops are stationed there?

BELL: You know. . .

WONGSRICHANALAI: Roughly.

BELL: Roughly? At that time . . . on base there, I would guess 15,000 total. Well, 15,000 people and that's including people's families and all that. So, you can adjust. It's not giant. There's not a lot of permanent personnel there as such. I was permanently there, but we would have people come in on rotations. And so the guys from MAG-11 or MAG-31 . . . MAG-11 is in Miramar. And then there's MAG-31. So, they would take turns. And so they would send squadrons of aircraft out to practice and they would go on what they called, "West Pack." So they would fly out . . . sometimes they would stop out in Hawaii and they would do some exercises there depending. It would change. It changes all the time. Sometimes they would go up to Alaska and they would come across, and then they would fly to Iwakuni and they would use that kinda as a base. And so they would have exercises in Thailand, Philippines, Okinawa, you name it. So, it would basically go all over the Pacific. And so these guys would come out. And so we would have rotations and they would rotate squadrons out. So, that was kinda the interesting part. They would send different crews of guys out. Then it's funny cause some guys would come out on rotations several times. Either voluntarily or because they were told to. It was interesting cause you would meet up, you would see familiar faces, you know you would see people and meet up with them and whatever. So, it was kinda interesting. The Marine Corps is very small place. They say the longer you stay in, the more . . . you know everybody knows there's only so many degrees of separation. So, chances are I could go up to someone and ask them, "Hey what outfit are you?" And, "Oh hey, did you know so and so over here?" "Oh, yeah!" So, you would know somebody. You would cross paths whether you were in boot camp with them or here or there. They were in an outfit. So, I always thought that was kinda fun.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, which unit were you with?

BELL: When I was in Japan, my unit was MALS-12. Maintenance, Aviation, Logistics Squadron 12. That's the higher level. The guys out on the line. You see the aircraft and they have an accompaniment of people that are assigned to the squadron and they do maintenance. They prep the bird and they do this and that. So they have everything that's required to keep the plane

running. And we were a higher-level maintenance entity. You know, engines break and things need to be maintained. You know, they would pull those off the aircraft and they'd send them up to us. You know, they are usually messed up really bad and we go, "We can't tough these." So, we send them off and they have even higher levels of maintenance but that's all civilian stuff. They send a bunch of stuff to Pennsylvania and, in Indiana, they have a big depot there and they rework all kinds of stuff there. So that was our . . . in a supporting role. And then they had logistics department supply and avionics and power plants, ordinance. All the armed related stuff: missile launchers, cannons, building, and delivering of munitions to the line, a flare. Anything that would be considered that, that was our . . . that fell under our scope. So, it was part that . . . Part delivering munitions and building them and part maintenance. Working on certain pieces of equipment. That was our scope.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, you'd say that the folks in Japan, the civilians . . . many didn't know the base was here?

BELL: A lot of them didn't. If they weren't from that local area, I found out later that they had no idea. Many people really had no clue that that was there.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And they were more hospitable then the people in Okinawa?

BELL: It was a general rule. Not everybody in Okinawa was bad but there were certain areas. There was a . . . many years ago in '94 and '95, there was a rape. They had two Navy guys. I'm sure you've heard about it, it was a big deal. They went on lock down. You had to check in. Everybody had to be in there service uniforms. I actually had a staff NCO that I worked for and he was there as a junior Marine. And he said, "Man it was terrible." So, they had had a string of incidents there. So, there's this unease on the island. "Hey are these guys gonna. . ." "What are the Americans gonna do, next?" It's not intentional. You get a bunch of guys in the military together, you're always gonna have idiots. And someone is gonna do something stupid. So, it's that kind "perception is reality" and it's really not. And over the years, you know, down there people are a little sore. But as a whole, the mainland is . . . very little happens. You know, they've had incidents there but it's not been really anything serious.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So, is it because they perhaps see what the United States role is there and the Okinawans aren't sure why the Americans are still there?

BELL: No, I think they know why we're there. I don't think the mainlanders, as a whole, don't understand it as much. I don't think they quite . . . and really honestly, at the end of the day, we're there because the Japanese government wants us there. Period. They want us there. We're an ally. We're a way station. You know, we're a strategic location there, and that's just the Marines. If you go up to Yokohama, there's still a U.S. Navy yard there. There's a big U.S. Navy presence there, Atsugi, Misawa Air Force Base. Those are all American entities. Sasebo, which is on the Kyushu, which is one of the smaller islands. That's a giant Navy hub. They've been there since after the war. Since '45 it's been a U.S. Navy hub and it's a big strategic, I guess is the right word. They have boats coming in and out. There's a big alliance there. That's what I always understood.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What did you catch in Japan? You went fishing.

BELL: Uh, several times. There were a couple times I didn't catch anything.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Okay.

BELL: But it was a good day. We weren't at work and it was a weekend. We took a charter boat one time.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Out in the ocean?

BELL: Out in the ocean. We caught a bunch of tuna and that was a blast. Um, some guys that I worked with . . . um, there's actually a guy . . . one of the guys was the one that was from Texas. He's from San Antonio and I ended up meeting him . . . I ran into him at Pensacola and we were . . . We were beer drinking buddies. You know, we were both from Texas and he used to have family in Junction, I think. So, we kinda . . . we kinda . . . we kinda relate. You know, he's sorta from the same part of the world. He sorta . . . he sorta understood things. We had a lot in common. And so, we would go out. And so he . . . uh . . . He went on to his other schools and I thought "well, damn I don't know . . ." His name . . . his last name was Novasad. And he's from one of those big Czech families in the Hill Country. I thought "Boy, I'll never see him again." He was a good buddy. You know, it was always a good time. He was a good guy and low and behold it's . . . uh . . . I'm in Japan and that's my first . . . uh . . . um . . . It's beginning of December, you know, and it'll be my . . . It'll be my . . . you know, my first . . . my first. . . uh. . . Christmas there and I see him. He shows up and I see him and he's hard to miss. He's a really big guy. You know, he's gotta . . . you know he's pretty distinctive looking fellow. And, you know, I looked at his name tape and I realized, "Hey that's Novasad." So, it was kinda . . . I ended up running into him . . . It was kinda . . . It was kinda of . . . It was kinda nice seeing somebody you know. So that was kinda of a common theme. Um, then we went . . . I went bass fishing. Um, bass fishing's a big deal in Japan. I didn't know that. They imported them. There's a gentlemen that imported them back in the 30s. He came to America, fished for bass in the States and thought "Boy, this is the greatest thing." He took them and now they're like a blight. So, if you catch one you got to keep them. So, we would go out on some of the rivers and it wasn't outstanding. It wasn't the best fishing I've ever had but it was good. It was enjoyable and kinda got you out. And, you know, you could some of the more scenic stuff there. Um, but I had a good time. I enjoyed it. So.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Did you travel around all Japan?

BELL: Not all of it. I didn't get as far out as I wanted to. Um, in the local area. I've been to the [unclear] Island. Um . . . uh, I tried to go to Tokyo. They would have trips . . . uh . . . You know, whatever that Welfare and Morale whatever. You know, it was real competitive. They only had so many seats and this and that. But I got to go out and see, you know, quite a bit . . . not as much as I wanted to. Um, I wanted to go to the North Island, but it's a little bit difficult to get up there. There's a lot of skiing and snowboarding and all that up there. I've been told that's a whole other world up there. But, yeah, I got to get out some. We'd go to Hiroshima quite often. So it's big. It's the closest, biggest city. Um . . . despite its reputation and all that. There's a lot of

good restaurants, night clubs. A lot of, you know, cool stuff to go see and do. It's a really big city. You know you can . . . you can go there several times and still not see everything. So.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Did they give you any language lessons before you went to Japan?

BELL: No, not at all. That's all on you. And I tried and then I realized that people in Japan there, they have mandatory English. You know, when they go to school. So, everyone has a basic understanding of English. Some . . . Some of them speak English very well, extremely well. I was shocked, so I kinda gave up on the whole . . .

WONGSRICHANALAI: You could understand some Japanese . . .

BELL: Well, I can understand . . . I could order a beer. I could say "Hey, you know, hold on a minute" or you know the basic. Or I could ask for directions, you know, stuff like that. The survival stuff. And, at that time, I had an iPhone too. So, there's an app for that . . . So, just in case. But, you know, as a whole most of them . . . most of them in Iwakuni around the area, around the base Monsoon. . . they've been dealing with Americans for many, many years. You know, since the . . . you know, the . . . the . . . the late 40s, early 50s. So, they were all used to Americans and so on and so forth. So.

WONGSRICHANALAI: You do anything interesting?

BELL: Yeah. I thought the food was outstanding. Most of it was very good.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What did you like?

BELL: Well, I mean I like sushi. Um . . . And there it's not a big deal. You know, it's kind of the fast food. You've seen the carousel, the conveyor belt. That was one of the many joys. And you could eat a lot of food and not really pay a lot of money, you know. They had . . . uh . . . they had a lot of uh . . . They had a lot of Korean people in Japan. And I don't know if they were there. . . if they were brought there as slaves or if they immigrated there or what the connection. There seemed to be quite a few communities. They had a lot of . . . a lot of . . . It was fairly cosmopolitan. You know they had an Indian restaurant and they had this. And, so, there were always good places to eat out in town. And some people didn't, you know, didn't much and some guys didn't much care to go out in town. I liked it. You know, that was my . . . that was my Friday evening. If I didn't have to stay in duty or anything, I didn't have to be on call. You know, we'd get our civilian clothes on, you know, you know, get a bunch of . . . get a bunch of Yen out and . . . uh . . . they don't usually take credit cards most places in Japan, I found that to be really interesting. Most . . . they pay in cash. You know, there's no writing of checks unless you work for a big corporation or something, so it's interesting when people carry around giant wads of cash. You know, I thought that's crazy. You might get . . . You might get killed in some places in the States if you did that but then again we're not in the States. So, we would go out and that was our Friday evening. We would go you know, we would go somewhere and 3 or 4 other guys would get together and we would go drink some beers. Whatever. We'd go out to a bar and eat. You know, several places, you know, there and there and as well as in Hiroshima. So, in the local area. So.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And, so, you were there for 2 years?

BELL: I was there for 2 years.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And then?

BELL: I got orders. I drew orders. I was actually there for 2 years . . . um, 2 weeks, and I want to say 3 days.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Very precise person?

BELL: Well, I was counting down the days. Towards the end there, it was getting a bit . . . You know, the first year and a half was good and then you go, "Well, OK, I need to see something different. I need to go on vacation." I had a grand plan to go on leave, but because of things that were going on in Korea and, you know, other things in the area, they basically said, "We're probably not going to approve your leave cause we may . . . we very well could go to war, some things could happen." And so, they kinda put the quietus on that. So, I don't know. I need . . . I need to . . . I need some leave time. I need to go back to the States, so. . . But after that I drew orders to . . . uh . . . actually back to Cherry Point. One of the outfits in Cherry Point, MALS-14 and drew orders there. And PCS did my transfer there. And I was there for the better part of a year, almost a year, and then that was my end of active service. So, I didn't . . . I didn't choose to extend or re-enlist. They weren't . . . They're at a point right now, in the Marines, where they're downsizing. So, if you want to re-enlist or extend, it's very difficult. They're not really . . . they're not really looking to keep people. So, I said, "Alright, see ya later." So, that was it. I had my paperwork and drove back here after all that. I'll say . . . I get asked this all the time. I much prefer Japan to North . . . to that part of North Carolina. Not cause I hate America, but there's . . . there was just you know, it was fun in Japan. There was always stuff to do, you were seeing something different, and that part of North Carolina is boring and there's really not a whole lot to do. You're close to Camp Lejeune. It's kind of seedy, you know, pawn shops and strip clubs. It's kinda a military town and it's just really not a whole lot of fun. You have to drive several hours any direction to go do anything, you know, fun or get away from all that. Anyways, so, that's my 10 cents there, I guess.

WONGSRICHANALAI: North Carolina barbecue vs Texas barbecue?

BELL: I hate . . . I don't think North Carolina barbecue is real barbecue. I can't stand it. Oh, I don't want to talk about that. It makes me upset. I tried it, "Oh yeah, let's try this." It's crap. This is not good. I just. you know, and I'm not. you know, I guess I'm not a . . . I wouldn't even consider myself a snob or aficionado or whatever. "It's just garbage, I'm gonna throw this away. This is just roasted pork in an oven. It's not even cooked on a pit. So, anyways.

WONGSRICHANALAI: How did, um . . . How did your service affect your family? Were they concerned about you?

BELL: Yeah, I mean they were concerned. I mean, I was in touch . . . um . . . in this modern age of email and Skype and Magic Jack and Vote A Phone and all that. So, it wasn't hard, you know. You know, I would try and try and email and Facebook and all that regularly. You know, especially, you call your mom if nothing else. If you're gonna call anybody else make sure you call your mom. Make sure she knows you're alive. But, you know, I'd email a picture. I think we went on a hiking trip. I don't have those pictures you know with me handy, but we went off and went . . . went a pretty good ways into the interior of Japan. And there's really not a whole lot up there through the middle, it's all mountains. And there's little towns, hamlets there. But it was very remote and very beautiful. A lot of pine forests and lakes and streams and kinda high out. It kinda reminded me of some places in New Mexico and Colorado and just a little bit wetter and what not. And so we went there and that was . . . uh . . . that was a really good time. So, I'd email her photos of my adventures there in Japan. So, every once in a while she would open . . . because of the time difference, she would open her mailbox in the morning at work and "Ooo, he sent me some photos" or this or that so.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Excellent.

BELL: But you know, I'm sure they missed me. But, you know, I tried to make them know, you know, let them know I was having a good time. So, I wasn't suffering too much. So.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Did you expect to face any challenges when you returned to civilian life?

BELL: Yeah, a little. I mean it's an adjustment. It always is. It's just a different lifestyle. You know, now they kinda prep you or they try and prep you when you're getting out. You go to a separations class and they go, "Okay, well this is what you're gonna expect" and, you know, "What path are you going? Are you gonna go back in the work force? Are you gonna go to college? Are you gonna do this? Are you gonna do that?" So on and so forth. So, they do make an honest effort to try and get you . . . get you acclimated as much as you can, you know, getting back into it. So, I don't . . . I was really about ready for a vacation at that point and I hadn't. So, I uh . . . I actually took 40 something days of terminal leave. That's where you go on leave and you don't check back in. You're just, you know, it expires. And . . . uh . . . so, I consider that my vacation. I drove back from North Carolina across country and . . . uh . . . that was . . . uh . . . less of an adventure than I expected. So, it went pretty smoothly. I was kinda, you know, half way expected to get stuck somewhere or whatever. And I think I made it from Jacksonville, North Carolina to Slidell, Louisiana in one full day of driving. And . . . uh . . . spent the night there and my original plan there was to stay at Gulfport and I guess all the hotels were full. It was this time of year and I couldn't get a hotel room at all. You know even in . . . I'd just say "Hey, I just need somewhere to sleep for a few hours and then I'll wake up and check out and get out of here and that's that." They said, "Oh, no we're sorry, sir. You could go to one of the casinos and pay a bunch of money for a room." "Nah, I'm not going to gamble, I just need a place to sleep." So, uh, continued on and drove in to . . . drove into Louisiana and rolled in at about 10:30-11 o'clock at night and went to this motel in Slidell and said, "I really need a room." They said, "Oh that's fine, we have a bunch of rooms. Please check in. "Here ya go." So, that was . . . that was that. So and then I got up and then made it from there . . . left there at 8 in the morning, roughly about 8-8:30 in the morning and drove across Louisiana, I think I stopped for lunch and then I

was in Central Texas in no time. And we have friends that live in San Marcos-Wimberley area and so I hadn't seen them and I decided. And they said, "Hey, well you know, stop in." And I spent almost a week there vacationing and swimming in the river and I went "Oh, okay, I guess I gotta make my way out west," so, go back home. So, it wasn't any big deal.

WONGSRICHANALAI: So after you got out, had your perceptions of the United States's role in the world changed? Did they remain the same?

BELL: Um, I don't know. I mean, I guess everything changes . . . um . . . I mean I guess you see more of our world . . . our role in the world, I guess. You could relate that back to being in Japan. You know, our alliance there. So, I guess that's something not many people, your average person, doesn't think about. Unless, you see it up close and personal. So I guess, yeah, you get a more clearer view or more up close and personal view of it and it's . . . uh . . . You . . . I guess, I understand it a little bit better. So.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What advice would you give to someone who is enlisting right now?

BELL: Uh, well I mean it wouldn't . . . I can only speak for the Marines so . . . um . . . if they were joining the Marines, I would ask them, "Do you really, really want to do it right now. It's maybe not the best time to go in." It's not horrible. Um . . . It's . . . it's . . . it's difficult to . . . uh . . . the . . . the . . . the promotions have slowed. You know, of course, in war time, you know, you have. . . you know, you lose people through attrition and, so, they're always needing people and you know you can you know you can move up. Now it's getting very difficult to get promoted. And a lot of your promotions depend on which job you occupy, your MOS. And so certain MOSs promote very quickly and some of them you know you can be in for. . . for 4-5 years and still be a junior Marine. You don't really pick up any rank and, so . . . um . . . some of the advice that was given to me by one fellow that's still in the Marines and a friend of mine who's gotten out was . . . ah, you know, "Pick your MOS. That's gonna . . . Your job is really gonna determine your experience in the Marine Corps." Whether it's a positive one. You know, it depends on what unit you go to. You know, some units are well run and some of them are not so well run. It's kinda like a corporation. In the civilian world some are great and some are eh you know, not so great. So.

WONGSRICHANALAI: And so you . . . when you got out what was your rank?

BELL: I was a corporal. I made corporal which is E-4. Uh, which is about all you could do in my MOS and, so, they get off on a tangent here. In the Marine Corps they have a whole promotion system and they're kinda in the process of changing it for if you're an enlisted. I was an enlisted guy, I wasn't an officer. Officers are a whole other . . . a whole other . . . uh . . . a whole other system. So, you come in . . . so, basically you get your first . . . your first two ranks: your private first class and your lance corporal with [unclear]. You . . . You . . . You're not . . . You know if you . . . if you're not an idiot and you don't get in trouble, you know, you're half way competent, you're going to make E-3. You know, that's just . . . That's just it. And then corporal, you know it's . . . it's a little bit competitive. And so they factor all these things. They factor in, you know, your rifle scores and your testing and this and that. And they go and it goes into this big formula and you get a score. And, so, every month a score comes out for all the MOSs that are promoted.

And so for a long time there. . . um . . . they had a big back log and they had too many people. Not enough people were getting out of the Marine Corps, and, so, basically if you were in certain MOSs, you were gonna make it to a certain level and, you know, you're gonna languish unless you got lucky and got meritoriously promoted. Which is kinda . . . it's dicey with some people. That's . . . uh . . . you know it's not a guarantee. And so with my MOS you could make corporal, you know, without trying I guess too, too hard. If you wanted to make sergeant you're probably gonna have to re-enlist and do those 4 years. When you re-enlist you get extra points and incentives and all that and I thought you know. You know and that was at a time. . . prior to that guys had come in and they had made uh they had made Sergeant in 3 1/2 years. But you know, two wars raging you know, they had been on deployments, so you move up the ladder. It's not really attrition, but experience, you know? These guys had been on multiple deployments . . . um . . . you know, they'd been, you know, you know, more. . . more . . . more live ordinance in . . . in . . . in dealing with that kinda stuff than most other people would dream of in a life time. And, so, you get that experience and, you know, there's some certain things, you know, you can only get, you know . . . a certain kinda experience you can only get by going off on a deployment. So, learning how things get done and, you know, how not to do things sometimes. So, it just wasn't a . . . wasn't a . . . wasn't a good prospect of getting promoted. So. WONGSRICHANALAI: Are . . . is there anything else you'd like to share?

BELL: Oh, nothing at the top of my head. Um, I mean I've got . . . I've got stories.

WONGSRICHANALAI: What is your most vivid experience when you were in?

BELL: Um, most vivid?

WONGSRICHANALAI: Vivid? Enjoyable?

BELL: Um, well, I mean enjoyable I don't have one particular. You know going . . . going . . . going fishing, that was a very enjoyable, you know, that was a good day, you know, you get to see a whole other . . . whole other . . . a whole other world in that part of Japan. Something that most people don't . . . don't see. Um . . . vivid . . . I'd say . . . Well, we had a train accident. Um, a fellow of mine . . . a friend of mine got shot. Uh, he survived and everything, but it was kinda one of those moments and I wasn't . . . I didn't feel traumatized, but it's kinda of a sobering moment. You thought, "Boy, he could've just died there and it was uh . . . you go to the rifle range, they do a whole . . . in the Marine Corps they do a whole thing they call it snapping. You go to these classes and they give you your basic rifle class and this and that and then they put this drum out there. And they did it in boot camp and, so, there's no live rounds and, so, everyone lies down and you kinda build your position and they have these silhouettes painted on the drum. And so you're practicing dry firing. You're practicing your technique and all that. So you're, you know, you're ready to go. You don't . . . You don't flunk the range or you know so on and so forth. And, so, your . . . uh . . . you know, you're . . . you're . . . you're . . . you're pointing your weapon in the direction of other of other Marines. And, so, it's that way in boot camp and, you know, the idea is that nobody . . . nobody is supposed to have a live round. Well, a gentleman almost across, you know . . . It was in a half moon, across a fellow Marine, somehow had a live round in his magazine. Um, nobody knows how. I believe it was accidental. It wasn't intentional and didn't check it and racked it and fired it. And we heard a pop, you know, it wasn't terribly

loud, and we thought, you know, we thought a plane had popped a tire or something and we looked around and so, two people over, he had gotten uh . . . He was getting down to lean and get in the prone position and the round hit him here and traveled up his leg and missed his femoral artery. I don't know how. Broke his femur and came out, I guess his buttock. And, so, we were real lucky one of the guys that was on range was a corpsman. The Navy . . . the Marines don't have our own medics. They use Navy medics and they get assigned to the Marines and they're corpsmen and he was a very, as I understood, a very experienced one. He'd been to Afghanistan. He'd been to Iraq. He'd treated many, many, many serious combat wounds. And he had his whole . . . he had his pack. He had . . . basically he could do surgery in the field if he really had to, if it came down to it. And, so, he was all on him, you know, immediately. And that's probably what saved his life. He put the tourniquet on his leg. He rendered aid. And he was actually able to limp in the back of the uh in the back of the ambulance and it was a big deal, you know. And everybody was a little shaken and they did their investigation. It was one of those, kinda one of those fluke things. But, in that moment, you think, you know, well, he's, you know, he's okay now, but you hear about people dying of internal bleeding, you know, he's kinda your friend and you're like "Man, I hope he doesn't die." And he ended up being okay. I still keep up with him. He's a good friend and he's . . . He's actually made a full recovery. They said he would never run again and he can outrun me. He can . . . He can run, you know, almost a 6-minute mile. You know, he lifts weights and, you know, does this and that. And he's going to . . . I think he's going to school in Michigan. University of Michigan. He's from Michigan. And you know, whatever. But I guess that would probably be my most vivid . . . Those 10-15 seconds after that all happened. So.

WONGSRICHANALAI: He's a lucky man.

BELL: He is. He's very lucky. I'm glad he's alive. I said, "I'm really glad you're alive." So, um, I'm trying to think if there's any other . . . that's probably the most vivid. I mean, there's a lot of . . . a lot of . . . a lot of . . . a lot of memories, you know, packed into two years. Especially in Japan. So, um, Okinawa! Flying into Okinawa was beautiful. Um, it's a beautiful island. It's a tropical island and, the first time we went . . . um . . . on the range, we actually flew in on a C-130. In the back of a C-130 cause they're, you know, they're too cheap to put us on whatever. And they have. . . they have military flights going all over the Pacific and, so, we flew in and, so, you can . . . they have little bubble windows. And, so, you're sitting on a bench and it's not very comfortable, and have all this . . . you have all this crap and this cargo and this and that. And I looked out and flying into Kadena Air Force Base . . . um . . . There you look at the water and it's coral reefs and tropical and it looks like just paradise. It looks beautiful and I want to go swimming there. And it's kinda neat to see it, you know, from the air. I guess it's always neat to see stuff from a plane that gives you a different perspective. So, but that was pretty, pretty vivid . . . a pretty vivid, you know, I guess memory. Flying and then stepping off the plane in Okinawa in the summer time. It's . . . uh . . . pretty, pretty miserable. It's pretty, pretty hot and muggy, you know. It gets pretty hot and humid in mainland Japan and then you go down to the . . . to the . . . to Okinawa, to those islands and it's just terrible. It sounds bad but I quit wearing deodorant down there when we were outside working. Of course, I'd shower and hygiene everyday, but there was . . . here you were working out in the jungle. Um, there was no point in wearing deodorant. It would just melt off. And you know, everybody smelled the same. Everyone smelled

terrible, so, I guess you kinda got used to it and, so, anyways that was an interesting experience down there the couple times I went down there.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Did you encounter any wildlife?

BELL: Yes, I did. Uh, giant bats in Okinawa.

WONGSRICHANALAI: In Okinawa?

BELL: An Okinawan flying fox. And it's very appropriate. They have a massive wing span.

WONGSRICHANALAI: They live in the jungle?

BELL: Yeah. It's a sub-tropical kind of a jungle island. Uh, where we were working was on the Air Force base and so getting an Air Force base, they have a big bomb dump there and it's a big strategic location. That's where they can store all that live ordinance and, so, they have different parts. The Air Force runs it as a whole, but then they have a section sectioned off to the . . . to the Navy and Marine Corps. They have a section that goes to the U.S. Army. They have a contingent of guys from the Army down there for various whatever reasons. Uh, they have it . . . they have one for the Japanese Army, for the Japanese Navy, uh . . . so on and so forth and, so, we were down there. When I was down there the second time we were uh . . . we were sending ordinance to the Philippines. We were having a group of guys go out to the Philippines, and they don't have any way of getting, you know, getting that kind of uh . . . that support. You know, there's nowhere there. We don't have a . . . I don't think we have a military base there anymore. And, so, basically they gave us a packing list of everything they were going to need, they thought they might need. So, we were basically putting it in conex boxes, and, you know, framing it up, making sure it was secure and everything. So, we were working out in the . . . out in the bomb dump. And the bomb dump is, you know, the bomb dump is . . . it's huge. It's bigger than the main side of Kadena. It's out . . . It's out, you know it's kinda like Jurassic Park, that's kind of what it reminded me of. And so, you would see those bats everywhere. I mean you would see them on, you know, out in town and other places. And you would hear the "WHOA, WHOA" you know make all kinds of noises when they were flapping their wings. There were wild pigs and wild dogs. I didn't have any run-ins with those, but they told us, they said, "Hey, you know, be careful." Of course, they didn't give us a gun or anything, you know, to whatever. They just said, "You know, keep your eyes out." But that's a . . . that's a whole other world. And that's a . . . that's an area, they still have live ordinance there, unexploded ordinance. When the U.S. invaded Okinawa that's where they came ashore, and so, um, they cleared and sited for the magazines, the bunkers and everything. And they're fairly clear. But, if you run back in the jungle, they find, you know, live land mines, and booby traps still left over from World War II and they were showing us pictures. A guy, one of the guys I worked with went back and found, you know, he found a . . . he found a mortar nest. And I guess, you know, that they had . . . uh . . . that they had uh . . . the Japanese had built. And they, you know, eventually surrendered the island when it was all . . . when it was all said and done. So, it's kind of a . . . it's kind of an interesting place. So, there's a lot of a lot of history there. It's a whole other world coming from mainland, going to Okinawa. It's a very different . . . They're not the same people. They're considered . . . um . . . part of Japan um but . . . uh . . . a friend of mine, who Cantonese . . . he

comes from a Cantonese family. He's from New York. Uh, he said they call them Oigans and they're this odd mix of people and I guess people that have washed up, you know, from the Pacific . . . from the Philippines . . . uh . . . from Taiwan, you know, over the years they would lay anchor and import in Okinawa or in those islands going from here to there, all over Asia. So, they've all kinda mixed. And they all look very different and they sound different. You know, it's a whole . . . it's a whole other interesting world. Anyways, so, amateur, amateur observations.

WONGSRICHANALAI: That's great. That's great.

BELL: So, I thought it was an interesting island. It's very Americanized in a lot of ways. Um . . . uh . . .

WONGSRICHANALAI: Businesses?

BELL: Yeah. They cater to the Americans depending on what part. There's a place called Ginawan and that's . . . it's all pretty urbanized. The whole . . . Most of the island except for the far North . . . uh, it's all kinda grown together . . . uh . . . Ginowan is close to Camp Foster in Futenma . . . MCAS Futenma which is a small air station there. And there's several . . . several, I can't even think of how many military installations . . . U.S. military installations that are on that island. And they've closed some of them and integrated. There's a ton of them. There's a naval hospital, there's all these . . . and, so, that's kinda in that downtown area. They call it downtown area, Camp Foster, Ginawan. And I was really surprised to see that they had a taco stand there. And several of them, I thought they were really good tacos.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Well, good!

BELL: Yeah. And I guess it was because of the Marines, you know, they had been there and so they had trained the Japanese people. And this guy had started with his wife, you know, probably of Hispanic origin or whatever, and they started these taco stands. And it's kinda a local thing there. They have a thing that's called "taco rice" and it's kinda this, you know, unique local whatever. And it's kinda funny being, you know, out in the middle of the Pacific and "Would you like a taco with your beer, sir?" "Yeah, haha I think so." So, I think it was kinda, kinda interesting.

WONGSRICHANALAI: It makes sense.

BELL: Yeah, it does.

WONGSRICHANALAI: There's great Korean food in El Paso.

BELL: Oh yeah, you know, well you know, it's a big mixing bowl . . . a mixing bowl, a mixing pot. So, I thought it was a . . . I just always thought it was really uh . . . I always thought it was just really uh . . . I thought it was really kinda funny and interesting. You know, they kinda cater to Americans too. You can tell there's a lot of some really . . . there's . . . uh . . . there's a . . . uh . . . there's a lot of dive bars on that island. And I've been to a few of them. Um, uh . . . Some of

them, unfortunately, and some of them, they were okay. You know, after hours we were done with work and, you know, they wanted to go out and get a few beers. And there were some dive bars I don't think I would ever set foot in again. I was afraid I was gonna get robbed or . . . They were not the classiest places, I guess. And some of them were, you know, kinda. So, but it's a whole, you know you know, probably close to 60, you know, 60 years of, you know, the American forces being there, so, it's kind of an interesting little corner of the world. So.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Very good. The Marine Corps. . . it has a very rich history.

BELL: Yeah.

WONGSRICHANALAI: You got a lot of that in the training?

BELL: Oh, yeah, they . . . The, you know, they . . . they . . . They, I guess, the right word is indoctrinate, you know. In boot camp you go to class. You know, as long. . . well as . . . well as your PT and your marching stuff. You know, you think of doing drill and all that. You spend several hours a day in class, and they talk about Marine Corps history and doctrine and this and that and so on and so forth. So, it's a very much taught, it's a very much . . . uh, you know, very much part of the uh tradition, I guess. They definitely keep that alive.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Was that the case in Okinawa and in Japan, as well, seeing as the Marines have such a . . .

BELL: Oh, yeah, oh, definitely. Anywhere there's Marines, you know, it's part of it. So, uh, I guess I could bring up the Marine Corps Ball. So, that's a big deal. All the armed services have a ball. Um, but evidently I guess the Marines are the only ones that really, really celebrate it. They're not . . . you know it's a voluntary thing. You wear your full dress blues. Um, and they have a big ceremony. Um . . . They bring out the cake and they do this and there's a lot of, like I said, there's a lot of tradition and there's a lot of history to it. It's, I think, 200 . . . We're at 240, 241 years of the Marine Corps . . . um . . . being in existence uh officially the U.S. Marine Corps. And, so, they read the . . . uh . . . They read the proclamation and then the read the commandant's message and it's a big, you know, it's a really big party. And uh, you know, some people go for the ceremony and, you know . . . It's an interesting . . . uh . . . a lot of things happen at the ball that wouldn't . . . wouldn't be allowed to happen any other time. So, there's . . . I've seen some interesting things at the ball, so, um . . . I don't know. You know, people talk about the movie, *The Hangover*, and there was a lot of parallels there. A lot of . . . a lot of partying and, you know, carrying on and, you know, that kind of stuff. So, it's a good time. It was never . . . I went to three of them. Two of them in Japan and one of them in North Carolina, and they were all fun. I think the first two in Japan I went to were better. It was a better . . . a livelier crowd, I guess, is the best way to describe it. Um, but it was a lot . . . I mean I had a lot of fun. Of course, you get several days off, so, you don't have to go into work the next day. Which is always uh . . .

WONGSRICHANALAI: They plan for that day.

BELL: Oh, they do. They definitely do. It's a holiday in the Marine Corps. It's an official holiday, so, there's a lot of people, you know, taking . . . taking Advil and Alka-Seltzer the next day trying . . . trying to recover from the night's events. So, but it was good. It was never uh . . . it was never bad. So.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Excellent. I think that's it.

BELL: That wraps it up?

WONGSRICHANALAI: Yes. I really appreciate you talking to us.

BELL: No worries.

WONGSRICHANALAI: This is great.

BELL: Tell some stories.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Yes and this is exactly what we're after.

BELL: There you go. Very well then.

WONGSRICHANALAI: Thank you very much for coming in.

BELL: Yes, certainly.