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Jack Hester, Oral History Moment Script

Jack Hester

Courtney Crumpton

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Abigail Johnson

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Recommended Citation

Hester, Jack; Crumpton, Courtney; Folsom, Allan; and Johnson, Abigail, "Jack Hester, Oral History Moment Script" (2013-09-28). *All Oral Histories*. 87.

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Jack Hester

Interviewee: Jack Hester

Interviewer: Courtney Crumpton

Technical Support: Sarah Miller

Others Present: Gladys Hester (wife), Hester's daughter and son-in-law

Location: Hester Residence

Date Recorded: September 28th, 2013

Duration: 1:05:12

OH#: 1048

Collection: Integrating ETSU

Archive: Special Collections, Gee Library, Texas A&M University-Commerce

Script Author: Abigail Johnson (ETWMP)

Script Date: October 13, 2017

NARRATOR: On today's Oral History Moment, Jack Hester discusses his time and service as a Marine during World War II.

NARRATOR: Jack Hester was seventeen when the news of the attack on Pearl Harbor struck the United States.

HESTER: [3:17-3:24] It was a Sunday morning and I was getting ready to go to church. I don't think we went.

NARRATOR: After hearing the news, Hester felt decided to join the Marine Corps.

HESTER: [3:56-4:20] I asked my father if I could go, he told me, he just begged me not to, he says "You finish high school and then you're legal, ready to go." So about 5 and a half months, I finished high school, graduated on the 21st of May and was sworn in on the 29th of May.

NARRATOR: After basic training in San Diego, Hester received further training at a parachute school and afterwards was sent to New Caledonia, in the South Pacific, for a specific mission in Burma.

HESTER: [9:00-9:08] A Burma Road went all the way up to China, through China, to Russia, I guess. [9:30-10:00] The strategy was to have the army push the Japanese back to where the area was, back this off and push them into it. We would get aboard the planes and fly over and jump out and cut them off here. Then the army would come through and annihilate them.

NARRATOR: The Burma mission was cancelled, however, and Hester was sent to Hawaii to prepare to land on Iwo Jima. He recalls the speech of Navy Admiral Chester Nimitz given the night before Hester landed on Iwo Jima, February 18th, 1945.

HESTER: [18:00-18:35] He told us about the island and about how many caves and pills they had on it but he said every square foot of that island has had a bomb dropped on it so when you get there, they will all be dead or idled and all you have to do is run along and stick them if they're moving and if they are not moving run to the next one. Then he said, "Good hunting."

NARRATOR: Hester spent 36 days in Iwo Jima, participating in one of the bloodiest battles in marine history.

HESTER: [15:25-15:47] That was pretty rough. Our company went out a company of 205 in the company and there was four or five of us survived. [1:04:49-1:05:00] As soon as the flag went up, we knew that the 28th marines had captured Suribachi and the fire wouldn't be coming from our backs.

NARRATOR: Hester had many close encounters with death during his time on Iwo Jima.

HESTER: [1:02:31-1:03:22] A mortar come in and it caught the guy that was next to me and you just saw beside and it hit right under his chest and when it exploded, it blew him back and in fact it blew his head off. I looked around and as soon as I, I laid my head back down and covered it up and I just said a prayer. I said, "Lord, I'm ready. I'll be next and so go ahead." I just figured a bullet; another one would come in and get me. And then it dawned on me, we can't win this war if everybody lays here and gets killed. So I got up and I got out of there.

NARRATOR: Hester recalls the moment he began to sing as he carried a wounded soldier to safety.

HESTER: [55:37-55:53] Harman just dove right in on top of me. I was asleep and I woke up and here this blood was running down me and this guy was on top and I didn't know what to do. [55:58-56:03] I picked him up and carried him back about half a mile. [56:58-57:02] I felt totally secure. [57:06-57:14] The song, "What have I to dread? What have I to fear? I have peace complete with my Lord so near." [56:18-56:21] I got him on a stretcher and they carried him back.

NARRATOR: After Iwo Jima, Hester returned to Hawaii before being sent to occupy Japan after the atomic bombs were dropped in August of 1945.

HESTER: [23:47-23:52] The Japanese people surrendered and they turned in all of their weapons. [24:39-24:43] So that's what we did for the first six months, really. [25:02-25:05] They were the nicest people you ever saw. [27:05-27:10] The family that I got acquainted with, they'd invite me over for their dinner. [25:07-25:25] We was thinking, if that had been in the

U.S and our president had told us to turn in our weapons and surrender, we'd have told him to go to Hell. We will fight 'til we get through. But the Japanese surrendered and they were as nice as can be.

NARRATOR: Members of the East Texas War and Memory Project at Texas A&M University-Commerce completed this interview. Today's interview was conducted by Courtney Crumpton, edited by Abigail Johnson, and produced by “”. I'm Allan Folsom. Thank you for listening.