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Interview with

NORMAN MAILER

AUGUST 25, 2004

Place of Interview: Provincetown, MA

Interviewer: Glenn T. Johnston

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Norman Mailer

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Oral History Collection

Interviewee: Edward Miller

Interviewer: David F. Johnston Date: August 22, 2004

Place of Interview: Provincetown, Massachusetts (telephone)

Interviewer's note: This interview is associated with the 112th Cavalry Oral History Project of the University of North Texas Oral History Program. Mr. Miller's comments are particularly important in light of his background and the time period during which he was with the 112th Cavalry.

As a well-educated New Yorker of Jewish ancestry, Mr. Miller had grown up in one of the great cosmopolitan centers of the United States and had observed many of the elite institutions available in the Northeast. During World War II he served with a National Guard unit whose members, for the most part, didn't have been further from

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Oral History Collection

Norman Mailer

Interviewer: Glenn T. Johnston Date: August 25, 2004

Place of interview: Provincetown, Massachusetts (telephone)

[Editor's note: This interview is associated with the 112th Cavalry Oral History Project of the University of North Texas Oral History Program. Mr. Mailer's comments are particularly important in light of his background and the time period during which he was with the 112th Cavalry.

As a well-educated New Yorker of Jewish ancestry, Mr. Mailer had grown up in one of the great cosmopolitan centers of the United States and had observed many of the elite institutions available in the Northeast. During World War II he served with a National Guard unit whose members, for the most part, couldn't have been farther from his experience.

The 112th Cavalry, Texas National Guard, represented at its federal activation on November 18, 1940, the values of men raised in the agrarian, Protestant "Bible-Belt" of North and West Texas during the Depression, many of whom

had yet to complete high school. Mr. Mailer's observations illustrate the cultural intersection that occurred later in the war when the values of these Texas cavalrymen came into contact with replacements who represented the values of the cosmopolitan and ethnically diverse northern states.

Norman Kingsley Mailer was born on January 31, 1923, in Long Branch, New Jersey, to Isaac Barnett Mailer and Fanny Schneider Mailer. Born the first child and the only son, he has a younger sister Barbara. When he was four years old, his family moved to the Eastern Parkway section of Brooklyn, New York. He was raised within Brooklyn's Jewish community and attended P.S. [Public School] 161 and Boys High. In 1939, at age sixteen, he entered Harvard University.

While at the university he became interested in writing and published his first story when he was eighteen. His short story, "The Greatest Thing in the World," which he wrote for the *Harvard Advocate*, won *Story* magazine's college fiction prize for 1941. Graduating from Harvard with a degree in aeronautical engineering, Mailer was drafted in March, 1944.

Mailer's military service included basic training and field artillery training at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. In January, 1945, Mailer was assigned to the 112th Cavalry

Regimental Combat Team in the Philippines. He continued with the 112th throughout the rest of the war and was present in Tokyo Bay on September 2, 1945, when the Japanese unconditionally surrendered to the Allies.

In 1948, just before enrolling in the Sorbonne in Paris, he wrote a novel that made him world-famous: *The Naked and the Dead*, based on information he gathered during World War II. The novel, a critical and commercial success, was at the top of the *New York Times* best-seller list for eleven weeks and brought Mailer immediate recognition as one of America's most promising writers. *The Naked and the Dead* remains one of the classic novels of World War II.

Since his success at age twenty-five, when *The Naked and the Dead* became a blockbuster publication, Mailer has written ten novels, seven non-fiction narratives, eleven non-fiction books, six plays, twelve collections, five other books, and numerous short stories and articles. In addition to his books, Mailer also has written, produced, directed, and acted in four films.

Mailer's awards and honors include two Pulitzer Prizes and two National Book Awards. In addition, he has received the George Polk Award, Edward MacDowell Medal, National Arts Club Gold Medal, Rose Award, and the Emerson-Thoreau

Medal for lifetime achievement from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Mailer has been elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters and has been named a Pappas Fellow at the University of Pennsylvania.

During the recording of this audio interview there was a technical malfunction resulting in the loss of the first twenty minutes. The introductory portion of the interview has been reconstructed from the interviewer's question outline and notes created as the interview progressed. Both the interviewer and the interviewee have reviewed the transcript and agree it captures the content and flavor of the initial stage of the interview.]

Mr. Johnston: We very much appreciate the time you are giving to this project, and I want to be sure you are aware that we are recording this interview.

Mr. Mailer: That's to be expected.

Mr. Johnston: This is Glenn T. Johnston interviewing Mr. Norman Mailer for the University of North Texas Oral History Program. The interview is taking place on August 25, 2004, by telephone with Mr. Mailer, who is located in Provincetown, Massachusetts. I am interviewing Mr. Mailer in order to obtain his recollections concerning his time with the 112th Cavalry, Texas National Guard, in World War II.

Good afternoon, Mr. Mailer. Under what circumstances did you end up entering the Army?

Mailer: It was very interesting, and I don't know why I wasn't drafted earlier. I graduated from Harvard in June, 1943, and wasn't drafted until April, 1944. They were just beginning to draft married men and older young men at the time. The only reason I

can think of that I was delayed in being drafted is that they lost my draft form at the draft office.

Johnston: You were married at this time?

Mailer: Yes.

Johnston: You had graduated with a degree in aeronautical engineering from Harvard?

Mailer: Yes, but I took as few courses as were required to complete that degree. I knew I wanted to be a writer.

Johnston: Where did you undergo basic training?

Mailer: Fort Bragg, North Carolina. I was sent there and trained as part of an artillery outfit. We were trained to work in fire direction centers and to be observers. I was recently contacted by a master sergeant from there who was quite proud of the work they performed in their training. Many of the details about that time have disappeared from my memory, so you're going to have to prod me with names and places as we go along. By this time you probably know them better than I do.

Johnston: What was the transition like in going from Harvard to Fort Bragg?

Mailer: I went through three large transitions. The first was going from Brooklyn to Harvard; the second was going from Harvard to the Army; and the third was going overseas to a combat zone in the Pacific.

Johnston: You went from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to Fort Ord, California, next.

Mailer: No. We had about two weeks leave, then maybe a dozen of us traveled to Fort Ord. I think we left from Penn[sylvania] Station [New York] to go west, and we switched trains in Chicago. It was the first time we were seeing the West. It was great fun! It was cramped because we had our Army duffel bags, and there was no place to store them, so we had to ride with them at our feet. We were all curled up in our seats. But we finally got out to California, and it seems like we spent over two months at Fort Ord.

Johnston: What did you do while you were at Fort Ord?

Mailer: We were still artillery replacements--forward observers--so we trained to keep

those skills. Then we got on our ship to take us over to Leyte. I remember sailing under the Golden Gate Bridge...

Johnston: The name of the ship was the Sea Barb?

Mailer: You'd know better than I at this point. The voyage was uneventful, and we got to Leyte...

Johnston: Describe the voyage for me.

Mailer: Well, we had about 3,000 men on the ship going over. We were in bunks that were small--they couldn't have been more than eighteen inches wide--and they were stacked five high. I remember it was hot down there--very hot!

Johnston: Did you ever sleep up on the top deck?

Mailer: Yes. It was cooler. The officers were in very good quarters up on the top deck.

There was a funny cartoon that appeared in the Army newspaper that I'll tell you about. Because we were in convoy, we were very concerned about leaving a trail of floating garbage that might lead Japanese submarines to us. The solution was to collect the garbage and sink it all at one

time once a day. The garbage was collected on the aft of the ship--the poop deck. A large pile of garbage collected there, and once in a while some enlisted man would climb on top of it simply to get away from everybody. This cartoon showed the pile of garbage and the caption was: "Enlisted Men's Lounge."

Anyway, we got to Leyte, and we went ashore. The 112th Cavalry Regimental Combat Team was made up of the 112th Cavalry and the 148th Field Artillery. Being artillery replacements, we thought we were all going to go to the 148th Field Artillery. Several weeks before we arrived, however, the 148th had received a group of enlisted infantrymen as replacements. The 148th had already spent several weeks training those infantrymen to be artillerymen and wasn't going to give them up.

The 112th Cavalry needed replacements, so that's where we went. We were crestfallen because we didn't want to be in the cavalry. Many of us had never ridden a

horse, and we certainly didn't want to learn now. Well, we were told that the 112th didn't have horses anymore, that they were now infantry. So, the infantry replacements had been retrained as artillerymen, and we artillerymen found ourselves as infantry. Typical Army SNAFU!

We soon found ourselves at Luzon, Philippines, unloading at Lingayen Gulf. I believe MacArthur began the invasion of Luzon on January 12, 1945. Is that correct?

Johnston:

You left Leyte on the ^US.S. *Monrovia* on January 16, 1945, and arrived on January 27, 1945. [Editor's note: The U.S. assault on Luzon began with a landing at several beaches along Lingayen Gulf on the morning of January 9, 1945.]

Mailer:

I knew we were on board for a couple of days.

Johnston:

Can you describe that journey on the *Monrovia*?

Mailer:

The journey was uneventful, but it was the first time we had come face to face with the Texans, who were the core of the unit. They

were tough men. Many of them were bitter. Many had lost friends in the fighting, and some had lost their wives what with having spent their last two-and-a-half years in the Pacific. They were allowed to have their own personal weapons. We would watch as they would sit on the deck of the ship honing their bayonets or knives. They would sit on the deck honing their bayonets for hour after hour with a dull glaze over their eyes. They were cold, hard men.

When we got to Luzon, everything is a blur now. I ended up as a troop clerk in the regimental combat team headquarters.

Johnston: The 112th was a Texas National Guard outfit that had already served several years in the Pacific. I know that by the time you arrived at the 112th, a lot of the original men would have been rotated home, wounded, or killed in action...

Mailer: There were still a number of Texans, enlisted men and noncoms at the core of the regiment.

I'll tell you a story in order to show what they were like. On the boat, we were given the job of guarding the officers' quarters on the upper deck. As brand-new replacements, we would stand guard duty at night, and we couldn't allow anyone near the officers' quarters--no one. One night, one of the new guys was standing guard up there. He saw someone coming and told him, "Halt!" It was one of the Texans, and he said [Mr. Mailer uses a Texas drawl], "Git outa my way!" The new guy said, "You can't go in there!" The Texan took a step forward and said, "Git out of my way!" The replacement took a step back and pointed his weapon at the Texan and said, "You can't go past!" The Texan drew his revolver and pointed it at the replacement and menacingly said, "You want to dance? Let's dance!" So, we asked the new guy, "What did you do?" He said, "I let him go by. I wasn't going to get shot." That's the way they were.

Johnston:

I'm glad you mentioned the revolver. Unlike the Regular Army cavalry units, many of the

soldiers in the 112th carried .45-caliber revolvers. That was one of the distinct trademarks of that outfit. [Editor's note: Regular Army cavalrymen carried the .45-caliber M1911A1 semi-automatic pistol as a sidearm. Many of the soldiers in headquarters jobs in the 112th carried .45-caliber revolvers that were left over from World I and used by the Texas National Guard throughout the war.]

Johnston: What were your duties as Regimental Combat Team clerk?

Mailer: I wasn't very good. There were daily reports that had to be sent from Combat Team headquarters up through the chain of command. The reports had to be perfect. No mistakes. I could never get them typed perfectly. I'd work for hours in the heat of the HQ [headquarters] tent, and then "FUCK!" I'd make an error and have to start again. I spent a few weeks up in the regimental combat team headquarters, and then they figured out I wasn't going to get any better at typing their reports. So I

got sent down to "Commo" [Communications] Platoon at 112th Cavalry headquarters.

Johnston: When you were at the regimental combat team headquarters, did you have a chance to observe General Julian Cunningham, the regimental combat team commander?

Mailer: Yes, but from a distance. The "Commo" Platoon job was very interesting because it was usually safe. Our job was to go out and find where breaks in the "commo" wire had occurred. Four of us would get in a Jeep and go looking for the break in the wire. Of course, the new man would be riding on the fender of the Jeep. The Jeeps back then wouldn't fit two men in the rear seat. On a four-man patrol, the junior man would have to squat on the fender. You got to be real good at "posting" whenever the Jeep hit a pothole. We would drive a mile or two and test the wire by calling back to headquarters. If it worked we would drive another mile or so. Then if we couldn't communicate on the wire, we would narrow down the area going back and forth until we

found the actual break. The scary part was that those breaks were an ideal site for a Japanese ambush, so you had to be ready.

Johnston: Now, your weapon at this time was the M1 rifle?

Mailer: No, the carbine.

Johnston: Oh, the M1 carbine.

Mailer: Yes. I didn't see very many M1 rifles when I was over there. We used the M1 carbine. A little later we began to get the small Uzi-like submachine guns--the "grease guns" [M3 .45-caliber submachine gun].

Somewhere in there--I forget exactly when--I ended up in the hospital with yellow jaundice. You know, our skin was already yellow from the Atabrine we were taking, so it was sometimes difficult to determine if you had jaundice. I had jaundice so bad I couldn't even swing a pickaxe. There was a six-foot ant hill outside of our headquarters tent, and we were busting it up. I was so sick I couldn't even swing my pickaxe.

A buddy of mine looked at my eyes and saw that they were even more yellow than my skin, and I was sent to the medics. The medics laughed and sent me on to an Army hospital on the outskirts of Manila. We were still in the process of taking it. There was a field artillery battery stationed across the way from the hospital that would fire one round every fifteen minutes--all night. Everyone in that hospital rolled over every fifteen minutes--all night!

By the time I came back to the outfit, I had had it with the "commo" section and decided I wanted to be in I&R [Intelligence and Reconnaissance] Platoon in the 112th headquarters. It was mutually agreed on by all involved that that was probably the best place for me.

So, I became a member of I&R Platoon. We were the closest thing to infantry that troop headquarters had available. We would do patrols and report what we saw.

MacArthur had made one of his famous dashes and had sent the bulk of his army way ahead to capture Manila. The 112th was to guard his supply lines. There must have been an eighty-mile length of highway that was involved, and the 112th was stretched all across it. Different Troops would hold hilltops and observation points to the east of the main road. They would be up in the hills anywhere from five to seven to fifteen miles to the east of the highway. MacArthur had figured out that the Japanese wouldn't be able to attack through there with armor. Instead, if there was going to be an attack, it would be an infantry attack. That's what the 112th was expecting.

We traveled through all kinds of little towns there, the names of which escape me. [Editor's note: By January 17, 1945, General MacArthur was dissatisfied with General Walter Krueger's 6th Army's speed of advance. Suffering under the assumptions of two very different intelligence estimates, Krueger wanted to delay in order to build up his

forces to match the enemy's according to his intelligence estimate. The build-up would require a two- to three-week delay. General MacArthur, on the other hand, was working from an intelligence estimate that placed Japanese strength much lower and further afield than did Krueger's estimate. MacArthur had promised the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he would be in control of Manila and the Luzon Central Plain by the end of February. In addition, Clark Field had to be captured in order to support assaults by the Navy at Iwo Jima and Okinawa. MacArthur ordered a speedy advance. At the end of January, MacArthur personally visited the 1st Cavalry Division and told the commander, General Verne Mudge, to: "Go to Manila. Go around the Nips, but go to Manila. Free the internees in Santo Tomás. Take Malacanan Palace and the legislative building." According to the West Point Military History Series *The Second World War: Asia and the Pacific*, "Within 48 hours, Mudge's troopers bolted for the Philippine capital." This

rapid movement of the 1st Cavalry Division and much of the 6th Army's combat power toward Clark Field and Manila left a vacuum of combat troops to guard the Army's supply lines and rear area. The 112th Cavalry had that as their job.] Do you know any of the towns in that area?

Johnston: Well, the ones I know are Santa Maria, "Hot Corner," and Antipolo.

Mailer: No, not Antipolo. That was south of Manila and we were there much later.

Johnston: Was this when Lieutenant Horton was platoon leader?

Mailer: Yes. He was a good officer. He was from Virginia, a West Point-type guy. He was formal but not in a cold way. He just had a formal way of dealing with you--a respectful way. Lieutenant Horton and Colonel Hooper were two good officers. The only two! They began to change my opinion of officers for the better.

I'll tell you about a patrol we did with Lieutenant Horton. Someone had reported that there were a hundred Japanese

Marines [Special Naval Landing Forces] up in the hills. We were to go up in the hills on a "recon" [reconnaissance] patrol to find them. It was a small patrol, and we had some Hukbalahap guerrillas with us. We got to a point where they had made contact, and we were trying to identify where the Japanese were. So, I, along with everyone else in our squad--I think it was at the time not even a platoon--at a given moment thought I saw something in one of the bushes, and we all hit the dirt. I remember sort of looking and trying to aim my gun and see if there was something I could shoot at.

At that moment, there's [Lieutenant] Horton--about ten feet behind me--standing up in the middle of this fusillade of fire! I mean, there were a hundred guns going off in every direction. He was standing there very coolly. He said to me: "Mailer, I wouldn't fire if I were you. Some of our men may be circling around there." At the time I thought, "What is this man made of?" You know, I thought he was pretty

extraordinary! Another time we were on a patrol that we...well, I should tell you about that one separately because that's really the best of the stories I have to tell you. It had actually gotten into the *The Naked and the Dead* in a funny way. But that's down the road. I'm trying to think if there's anything I'm skipping.

Johnston: Well, I know from the records of the 112th Cavalry that "Recon" Platoon did make two big patrols in the March time period, March, 1945. One was an eight-day mission to the upper Angat River area where the idea was to get the platoon to Mount Cruz.

Mailer: That I was not on.

Johnston: Okay.

Mailer: I know I was not on it because I never was on an eight-day patrol. I must have heard an awful lot about it, and I think that may have been part of the background for *The Naked and the Dead*. Some of the men I knew would talk about having been on an eight-day patrol. But March strikes me as too early for me to have done that. I think I was

probably still in Communications Platoon at that point.

Johnston: Okay. The other one [patrol] was also in March. Those were two big patrols that were made, and I didn't know whether you were on them or not.

Mailer: The other one was how long?

Johnston: The other one was a thirty-man patrol. It was twenty-nine men from "Recon" Platoon and then a number of other men...

Mailer: It doesn't add up. I don't think we had twenty-nine men. I really don't believe we had twenty-nine men in "Recon," but I could be wrong on that because we were fragmented. Maybe we had twenty-nine altogether, and they brought us altogether. Was this a one-day deal?

Johnston: Yes, it was a one day deal.

Mailer: Then that would be the one I was on. What happened was that Colonel Hooper, who was the other truly fine officer in the outfit, I mean, truly an officer and a gentleman, just like Horton, called us in. Now, this was when we were south of Manila in the

Antipolo area. We were called in, and we all went in Jeeps from where we were. This was fairly late in the campaign, but I don't know when. I guess it was in June, possibly. It was only a month or two before the end of the war. I remember Hooper said wonderful things about us as a platoon, which we listened to in amazement! Because that wasn't our idea [of how we operated]. We were always doing our best to fuck-off! Which, parenthetically, I want to get into later.

But at any rate, we were all assembled, and he said, "We've had a report that a hundred crack Japanese Marines have infiltrated our lines. They are...", and he named the town that they were supposed to be at "...and I'm sending "Recon" out to get them because, I want to tell you, Horton, we have a high opinion of "Recon." We feel you've gone further and done more than any other outfit in the 112th." Horton said, "Well, anyway, Sir, I guess we've gone

further!" (chuckle) I still remember that response.

We set out, and we were scared. A hundred crack Japanese Marines! We were in two groups. My recollection is that there were only about fifteen of us in these two groups, maybe twenty, tops.

We started climbing a very wet, slimy, hill on a very tough trail. There was no physical danger in the climb, but it was very hard-going because the ground was absolutely wet and so bad. In the middle of it, we were full of anxiety because: "What are we going to meet at the top? Is that where those hundred crack Japanese Marines are waiting?" In the back of this line, to the rear, was all of the heavy stuff: the BARs [Browning Automatic Rifle], and that weapons squad was also carrying a mortar and a .30-caliber machine gun and stuff like that.

Somewhere, about two-thirds of the way up the hill, when we were pretty damned tired--this was no small hill; maybe it was

even, oh, I don't know, 700 or 800 feet high and hard work every step of the way-- somebody kicked over a hornets nest! Those of us who were in the front of the line were galvanized to start running up the last part of the hill. Those who were below us, who were carrying the heavy stuff, were much more tired than we were. One of them started screaming, and then they started running. They ran down the hill from the hornets, all the way down the hill, back into the valley from which we had started.

At which point--some of us were at the top--Lieutenant Horton, who had been leading us, turned and called headquarters and said, "We've run into a hornets nest, and we've been separated. Those of us who are here are proceeding on the mission." We heard later that back at headquarters the major or whoever it was that heard it said, "What the hell did Horton mean by all of that? Is he speaking of a literal or a metaphorical hornets nest?" (laughter)

Johnston:

That's great!

Mailer:

Yes, that was something that kept us laughing for a long time afterward. Anyway, we went on, and we went on, and it became another long slog--a very long slog. But we never saw any hundred crack Japanese Marines. We eventually reached the point of re-embarkation into trucks--whatever that was called, our meeting place or rendezvous with the trucks--and back we went to headquarters. It was a totally unsatisfactory mission, and the ones who had run down the hill sort of slunk back to headquarters.

But what we used to do generally is that we would go out on patrols, particularly when we were south of Manila around the Antipolo area and we were always patrolling the rear. I never remember a foray into what was considered enemy territory. It hardly existed; there were just outposts all over the place. The Japanese had outposts, we had outposts, and, as I say, we would as often go behind our outposts as in front of them in order to

sweep and make sure there was no infiltration.

But it was a joke. Very often we would get a message that the Japanese had entered a certain Filipino village. So, we would walk and walk through that tremendous tropical heat--parenthetically, I think of those guys in Iraq all of the time in terms of the heat, which is worse there than the Philippines--and at a given moment we'd get on a hill, let's say, arbitrarily, a thousand yards from the town that we were supposed to go into and explore. Our sergeant, whoever it was--we had several different sergeants at different times--would look through his field glasses and say [Mr. Mailer speaks with a Texas twang], "I can't see a Goddamned thing." He'd hand it to the next man. "Can you see anything?" The next man would look and say, "Sergeant, I don't see a fuckin' thing. I really don't." We'd all look and say, "No, Sergeant, we don't see anything." "We didn't see anything." So, he'd say, "I

don't think there's any sense going down there. It's a long climb down, and it's going to be a long climb back. I'm just going to report that there were no Japanese there." At which point we would go back and give that report to headquarters, and they'd put a red pin in the map.

So, I started thinking--I had already read *War and Peace*--and I started thinking, "Yes, it was Tolstoy who said: 'Every army moves on waves of ignorance.'" I thought, "We're sure contributing to that." (chuckle)

Johnston: I have a question for you. The 112th, as you observed, was originally a Texas National Guard outfit, and a lot of the men had already rotated back to the States by the time you hit the outfit.

Mailer: A lot of them were still there, though. It was still very much a Texas outfit.

Johnston: How were you received, as well as the guys who may have been with you who were non-Texans, who were from the Northeast? You certainly were--and others may have been--

Jewish. How were you received into the outfit?

Mailer:

Well, I never received any notions of anti-Semitism directly. I did hear about it indirectly. But that was not a big factor for me. The main thing was that we were like boys entering a new school in a different state in a different condition. We were pretty much ignored. In other words, I wouldn't even say that they were unfriendly. They hardly knew of our existence. There they had been for years, and most of them, as I say, had lost their wives, so they were bitter. A lot of them were sick--the Texans who remained. Most all of them had jungle rot of one sort or another. They spent hours painting sores with methiolate and things like that, particularly on the boat. I remember that. Everybody had digestive troubles and bowel troubles. Diarrhea was just prevalent. None of us were that strong; we weren't in great shape. The Atabrine was taking a lot out of us.

So, it wasn't that it was nasty or mean so much as it was with many of them that they just had no interest in you. A lot of them had had their old buddies go home, and they were still there. They wondered why they still were there. We were coming in, and it was just too much work to make friends. So, most of the people I had made friends with were from my original detachment. By the time I got into the 112th Cavalry itself, I don't think there were more than one or two people still left from my original training platoon. So, naturally, you became friends with other people.

For instance, my best friend in the outfit was a man named Francis Irby Gwaltney, who is now, unfortunately, dead. He, too, became an author. He wrote a war novel called *The Day the Century Ended*. We were great buddies. The only example of anti-Semitism I ever knew about was that Gwaltney, who came from Arkansas and was a great hothead--you know, he absolutely

believed in his principles and spoke out all of the time--for some reason got the idea that Jews were the nicest people on Earth. It was almost like a southern prejudice in reverse. In other words, he'd hear southerners being anti-Semitic, so, "Goddamn it! I'm going to be pro-Semitic!" So, he told me once about a conversation he had with some guy who was saying something negative about Jews. He said to him: "You can't talk that way--I'm Jewish!" The guy looked at him and said, "You ain't no fuckin' Jew." Gwaltney said [in a Southern drawl], "I am too a fuckin' Jew!" (laughter) Well, he was about as Jewish as George W. Bush, you know.

As I say, you'd hear about the anti-Semitism more than experience it directly. My name being Mailer, I don't think to most people it meant that I was Jewish. I didn't live with that as a personal problem. The personal problem I lived with was just having enough energy to do the job and be a halfway decent soldier. I wanted to be a

very good soldier, but I knew that if you had ten guys in a squad, I'd be lucky to be rated number six in terms of ability.

Johnston:

When you were over in the Philippines--you have already talked a little bit about the "Huks"--one of the things that interested me was that, when I read the history documents of the 112th, there's great mention of Filipino guerrillas helping the 112th. When I talk to the veterans, nobody ever seems to know how those guerrillas ever showed up. They just appeared one day. It strikes me that that's an odd way for an army to do things.

Mailer:

Don't forget, the "Communist Scare" came after the war, and by the people who were writing the war up a few year's later. A great deal of exaggeration got in about the Hukbalahap. Besides, the Hukbalahap were much tougher three or four years after the war than they were during the war.

I can tell you about one patrol we went on with Horton. It was the one I mentioned a little while ago where there was all of

that shooting going on on the field. Well, that's the only other really good story I still have that I do remember in detail. Again, it was another "hundred crack Japanese Marines." For some reason that number always came through: "a hundred crack Japanese Marines" (chuckle). We'd hear they were all six feet tall, etc., etc., etc. "The biggest Japanese around!" and that kind of thing. This time it was much more low key. We set out in two Jeeps. We'd heard a report that some Japanese, conceivably this hundred crack Japanese Marines, had broken through from the hills and were marauding in certain towns. So, we were sent out to find them. Horton was in one Jeep, and I don't remember if I was in his Jeep or another Jeep; but we went out in two Jeeps with eight men.

The place we were sent to was maybe thirty or forty miles from where we were based. As we got nearer and nearer, the more the numbers [of Japanese] were reduced. So, let's say, ten miles away from where

they had last been reported, what we heard was that there were about twenty Japanese soldiers that were loose. Within two or three miles of the place, it was that they had trapped four or five Japanese soldiers.

Finally, we came onto a field, and there were the Hukbalahap. We didn't even know...all we knew was that they were called "Huks." We became more sophisticated about the name later. Anyway, there they were, and they were just poor guerillas, poor kids, with guns. They were full of excitement with the guns.

We had joined them, and at a given moment, as I recall, Horton was talking to their leader when a lot of firing started. What had happened was that somebody had spotted somebody or something. So, we all hit the ground and the Hukbalahap all started firing at once. As I say, then came the moment when Horton said, "I wouldn't fire if I were you, Mailer. You might be hitting some of our men who are circling around," by which he meant the Hukbalahap.

Then the firing finally stopped, and there was one Jap that was killed. One lonely soldier left. What happened to the others, and how many there really were, we never had any idea.

But what was remarkable was that on the way out, as we were leaving in our Jeeps, we came across a carriage--I don't know what you would call it; it was like a one-horse carriage--which had two very distinguished Filipino gentlemen in it. They were both dressed up in suits--two-piece suits, but formal, with ties--and they were both laughing and in very good spirits. They waved to us to stop, and we got out [of the Jeeps] and gathered around them to see what they had to show us. They lifted up the back of the seat of the coach, and there were two Japanese heads still bloody at the neck and with a string through the ear. They were both hung from a hook. They pointed at them, and they were giggling. We sort of looked at it as kind of a one more little surrealistic scene. There were some

more of the Japanese enemy, I guess. At any rate, when I started thinking about it later, it seemed to me that war--at least in my small experience of it--had been nothing but disproportions, and this was one of them.

Johnston: When you left the Philippines, you ended up actually being in Tokyo Bay on the day that the surrender occurred on the USS Missouri.

Mailer: Yes.

Johnston: What was that like being in the bay that day?

Mailer: It was a very cloudy day, close to rain. We were not even a mile from the Missouri when the peace treaty was signed. We were all in ships in Tokyo Bay, listening to an announcer on the radio announcing it for the folks back home. It was an international hook-up as a special plum to us, to let us be in on the surrender. I remember that this announcer, who was a very smarmy guy...we didn't see him, of course. He was broadcasting probably from the Missouri, and he said, "And now, as General MacArthur

steps up to sign the surrender document, the sun breaks out over Tokyo Bay!" This was one of the largest, bare-assed lies I'd ever heard in my life because there was no sun at all! It gave me a great preparation for what the worst American media was going to be like before it was all over. The worst came maybe in the 1950s when you couldn't read an unpleasant story about a powerful person in those days. The sun was always breaking out over Tokyo Bay (chuckle).

So, that I remember, and then I also remember that when we landed--and I don't recall whether it was that day or the next day--we were in the first contingent to land. I was the only man who ended up with a wet ass (chuckle)! I stumbled getting off the launch and tumbled into the water with my pack--we were carrying heavy packs because all our stuff was in them--and landed on my butt. I sat around for the first three or four hours in Japan with wet pants. I remember thinking, "Leave it to

You, Mailer! You're the only one here with a wet ass!"

Johnston: I'm going to talk a little bit about *The Naked and the Dead* now, if that's okay with you.

Mailer: Yes.

Johnston: A lot of people have suggested that much of that book was based upon your experiences in the 112th. Others have suggested that it's really a composite of all of your experiences from Fort Bragg through Fort Ord and into the 112th. In your opinion, to what extent did your experience in the 112th...

Mailer: Well, it's hard to explain because when you write a novel--let's underline it--a novel is fiction. I wasn't trying to capture my experiences because, as you can see, they really were low key. I didn't have a heavy war. You know, we didn't have many deaths in our outfit. How many men were killed in the 112th Cavalry in the Philippines?

Johnston: Oh, gosh, I don't have that number right now. [Editor's note: According to General Walter Krueger's (Commander, U.S. 6th Army)

memoirs, there were 192 casualties in the 112th during the Luzon campaign. Of the 192 casualties there were 41 killed and 151 wounded in action. The 112th's participation in the campaign lasted from January 27, 1945, until mid-August.]

Mailer: It's a small number, I know.

Johnston: It was more wounded than it was killed.

Mailer: I know, but they weren't heavy numbers, and most of them occurred with the troops who were up on the line. At headquarters, maybe we had a man or two wounded. I don't even remember if anyone was ever killed. I do remember that, whenever we'd hear of someone in the outfit who was killed, it was a huge shock--a huge shock. It wasn't like twelve of us would go out on a patrol, and six would come back alive. It wasn't like that at all. You'd go out on patrols day after day after day, and if you paid for it, you paid for it by getting yellow jaundice or something. You paid for it by being burned out. There wasn't very heavy combat.

So, I didn't use my own personal experiences head-on for the Naked and the Dead. I had heard a great many stories about heavy combat, which the 112th had been in earlier, and those stories stayed in my mind. There was an attack across the river, if I recall. I don't remember whether it was in Arawe [New Britain] or Aitape [New Guinea].

Johnston: That would have been the Driniumor River, at Aitape.

Mailer: Well, all right. You see, that I don't recall. But what I do recall is some of the older troopers talking about it. So, a lot of it was that, and a lot of it was just made up. The island on which the patrol took place was made up completely. I probably had heard about this eight-day patrol that had been taken, and that probably started the notion in my mind of a long patrol. But there was no attempt at all [to make it autobiographical]. A few [of the experiences that fit in] well in the 112th got into the book in one way or

another-- generally in such a way that you couldn't recognize them.

The key thing, I would say, is that if I hadn't been in the 112th Cavalry, it would have been a very different book. What I did get out of it was a quite a sense not only of Texans but of southerners. While the Texans were--at the time I hit it--certainly a minority in the outfit by then, there were still a great many southerners in the outfit. So, it was a combination [of influences]. I'm one of the few people in the Northeast who knows the difference between Texans and southerners--at least then. I don't know whether its still true.

Johnston: Well, you're talking to a boy from Staten Island [New York] who's living down here now.

Mailer: You're from Staten Island?

Johnston: Yes, Staten Island born and raised.

Mailer: Well, then you've learned about Texas the hard way (chuckle).

Johnston: Yes, it's a baptism by fire down here.

Mailer: How long have you been in Texas?

Johnston:

We've been here for three years. I've learned that--much like the Army--there's the right way, the Army way, and then there's the Texas way (chuckle). But that's the way that works.

I have another question, and this is slightly different than the effect the 112th had on the novel, and you've somewhat answered this. The experiences you had in the Philippines, in watching a war going on around you, and your experiences, possibly, in Japan and Tokyo, I presume those have been a major factor in your life and how you view military actions and wars and things like that.

Mailer:

Oh, yes, no argument there--a profound effect. Somebody was once talking about Andover, somebody who had gone to Andover many years ago, somebody [who had been there] around 1920. Now, Andover is a prep school that's changed a great deal from 1920 to the present. It's almost not the same school. In 1920, it was a very tough prep school, very snooty, very cold, very much

"by the numbers." This man was talking about Andover, and he said, "It was the worst experience of my life, and the most valuable."

I felt the same way about the Army, that it was the worst experience in my life, and the most valuable. When I say, "the worst," I don't mean...I don't know how to put it. It wasn't that I suffered personal indignities. The humiliations were that I just realized that I was not a good soldier, and that took its toll on my ego. I had to learn how to do simple things. People that I'd never taken seriously before could do many simple things so much better than I could. It probably made me modest for life. When you start with a big ego and you're reduced in ego, that is always a terrible experience (chuckle).

I do think, absolutely, that those two years were the most valuable in my life in making me a better writer than I would have been without it. I probably would have been a writer anyway, but I really think I'm

better because of those two years in the Army. It gave me a great deal of balance and a great deal of healthy cynicism, I'd say, about the military.

I think the military now is actually far better than they were then. Don't forget, we had a lot of "90-Day Wonders" as officers. Even then, what you could tell is the West Point officers were clearly superior to most of the officers we had, who really didn't know what they were doing. But the thing you'd also learn was that Tolstoyan knowledge--that armies move through ignorance.

I keep going back to those red pins, which back at corps headquarters they were putting in certain villages. Red pins or blue pins or whatever they were using to say, "There are no Japanese here," when we didn't have a clue whether there were Japanese there or not, because we had never entered the village and we had given a false report. Now, this is something we did every day because we went out on patrols every

day, and we weren't about to get killed for too little. This was in a good war. This was in a war that we essentially believed in.

So, just think of when you get into a war that you don't believe in--like Vietnam and, I expect, for a great many of the soldiers in Iraq. Once you stop believing in a war, there isn't a damned thing you're going to do "by the numbers." That stayed with me, the notion that you don't have to trust Army officers and politicians religiously. You'll find a few good ones among them, and they're to be honored for their rarity. So, those lessons have sort of stayed with me.

By the way, I think I can end this with one interesting little story for you. I was speaking in Nashville [Tennessee] one night on a lecture. It was just an ordinary lecture. I had a book [that had recently come] out. At a given moment, someone stood up in the audience during the question period and said, "Mr. Mailer, it may

interest you to know that Colonel Hooper's here tonight." I said, "He is? Oh, that's terrific! He's the best officer I ever had!" It came out of me so directly and so unselfconsciously that the audience broke down and cheered and roared! I think Colonel Hooper had to stand up and wave and say hello.

Johnston: That's great!

Mailer: He was a wonderful officer, both he and Horton.

Johnston: I never got to meet him [Colonel Hooper]; he was gone before I started my research.

Mailer: He's no longer alive?

Johnston: That's correct, sir.

Mailer: That's too bad--too bad. He was a fine man. He was a wonderful gentleman when I met him. This was probably about ten or fifteen years ago. So, I guess he must have been around eighty then. [Editor's note: Colonel Philip L. Hooper was eighty-nine years old when he passed away (December 27, 1914 - February 8, 2003).]

Johnston:

Well, Mr. Mailer, I really want to thank you
very much for your time today.

Mailer:

Listen, Glenn, I've enjoyed it, and thank
you.

Johnston:

Thank you very much, and you have a good
day.

Mailer:

Okay.