

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

***Center for Pacific War Studies
Fredericksburg, Texas***

***Interview with Harry E. Rinehart
U. S. Navy Supply Corps***

Interview With Harry E. Rinehart

My name is Ned Smith. I am representing the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas. I will be doing an oral history today with Harry Rinehart. We are in the Conference Room of the George Bush Gallery.

Mr. Smith: OK, Harry, where and when were you born?

Mr. Rinehart: I was born in Monessen, Pennsylvania on November the 9th, 1921. Monessen is south of Pittsburgh.

Mr. Smith: Who were your parents?

Mr. Rinehart: My parents were Harry F. Rinehart and Stella Shiarey. She was from Greensburg, Pennsylvania.

Mr. Smith: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Mr. Rinehart: I had three sisters and no brothers. I was the only boy.

Mr. Smith: Where did you go to school?

Mr. Rinehart: My Dad had multiple sclerosis, the first case in the country, and we moved to Miami. It was good to go to Miami in 1937 because we were broke, so was everybody else. I went to Miami Edison High School, and then I graduated from the University of Miami in 1943.

Mr. Smith: Did they have as good a football team then as they do now?

Mr. Rinehart: Yeah, we played Bucknell, and we played Stetson, but we were not big time footballers at that time.

Mr. Smith: Where and when did you enlist in the military?

Mr. Rinehart: I was a charter member of Sigma Chi Fraternity at the University of Miami, and we had a big dance in February, of '42, at the Biltmore Hotel. I came back, I was living at home, it was 3:30 in the morning, my Dad said "Where you been, where you been?" I said, "I went to a dance, Dad, I told you I was going." He said "Well, you got your notice to appear before the Draft Board in the morning." So that was a nice evening.

Mr. Smith: How did you end up in the Navy?

Mr. Rinehart: I got a commission when I was a junior at the University of Miami. I graduated from the Navy Supply Course in '43.

Mr. Smith: Then your Draft Board recognized that?

Mr. Rinehart: They let me off because I was going in the Navy.

Mr. Smith: After you got your commission, before you went in . . .

Mr. Rinehart: I had a probationary commission contingent on my graduating from the Supply Course.

Mr. Smith: So then you had to go to Supply School . . .

Mr. Rinehart: At Harvard.

Mr. Smith: And how long did that last?

Mr. Rinehart: It was three months.

Mr. Smith: And then where did you go?

Mr. Rinehart: I interviewed with the officer in charge, and I said "I want to go to sea." They assigned me to the *El Dorado*, which was under renovation. We spent the summer up at Newport, which is where all the ships on the East Coast had their pre-commission details, in Newport. We assembled the crew up there. When the ship was going to be commissioned, the next day we took the train from Newport down to Brooklyn.

Mr. Smith: Then you were aboard when the ship was commissioned?

Mr. Rinehart: Yes. I was the paymaster. I was very popular two days a month.

Mr. Smith: You were the most important guy aboard ship.

Mr. Rinehart: Yep, two days a month.

Mr. Smith: Did you retain that assignment all through, were you paymaster all the time, or were you supply officer, or what?

Mr. Rinehart: We had about 125 men in the Supply Department, and there were about 1200 aboard ship. We had about 200 officers. I became supply officer about a year later, so I was head of the department then.

Mr. Smith: Did you have pretty good quarters aboard ship?

Mr. Rinehart: Yes, very good.

Mr. Smith: Did you have a roommate?

Mr. Rinehart: There were four of us in a room, all officers.

Mr. Smith: Do you have any special recollections of the early period aboard ship?

Mr. Rinehart: It was a good time to get to know people, because we made our friends after we got aboard. I had some good friends there.

Mr. Smith: How about your skipper? Was he a pretty good head?

Mr. Rinehart: Jesse Wallace, he guided us through the engagements.

Mr. Smith: Was he USN, an academy boy?

Mr. Rinehart: Yes. And then we had an executive officer named Radkin, and he was a lieutenant commander, but he was a reservist.

When we were in Manila after the war, we were preparing for the invasion of Japan, and Admiral Turner was aboard. All of his staff, stewards mates, they were all Filipinos, I told Captain Wallace, I only had \$1,000 in the safe of Filipino money. He said "That'll be enough." The admiral wanted his steward mates, he said when they'd go on leave, they'd go back with all Filipino money. So I took his group and took them over to a bank in Manila and paid them off in Filipino money. The next time I went to see the admiral he said "I was mad at you the other day." I said, "What for?" He said, "Well, you only had \$1,000 in your safe to pay them. You should have had \$10,000." He was very friendly. I took care of it all.

Mr. Smith: They wanted to be paid in Filipino money and not American?

Mr. Rinehart: Because they were going back to their homes there, they were on leave. But he was a good man, he made four star admiral.

Mr. Smith: Did you ever happen to meet Nimitz?

Mr. Rinehart: No. He was aboard, he came aboard to see the admiral, but I did not see him.

Another interesting thing about the *El Dorado*, Joe Rosenthal who shot the famous picture was aboard the *El Dorado*. He went ashore that morning, and in the book written by [Bill D.] Ross, *Legacy of Valor*, he outlined how Rosenthal shot his pictures, came back to the *El Dorado*, and they developed it and sent it on to Guam.

Mr. Smith: Describe the famous picture. Some of the younger folks don't know what we're talking about.

Mr. Rinehart: That was the flag raising on Mt. Suribachi on Iwo Jima, and there was a book written about it, *Flags of Our Fathers*, tells the story about the medicine man who helped raise the flag. It's an interesting book. His dad never wanted to talk about it, he was a hero, it wasn't until he died that they found out about it.

Mr. Smith: It was an interesting group that put that flag up.

Mr. Rinehart: It was not a staged picture, it became the most famous war picture of all time.

Mr. Smith: And I think that's probably why, because it wasn't staged.

Mr. Rinehart: They made a monument of it in Washington DC now.

Mr. Smith: Well, let's go back and start from the beginning now of your tour of duty aboard the *El Dorado*. After commissioning, then where'd the ship go?

Mr. Rinehart: It went to Norfolk, then came around to San Diego where we took on Admiral Stanger. But then we went to San Francisco, the Mare Island Navy Yard. Then we went over to Hawaii, to Honolulu, and that's where Admiral Turner came on board.

Mr. Smith: Did he use that for a flagship?

Mr. Rinehart: Yes. He was commander of the Amphibious Force. When we left Pearl Harbor, a sailor jumped off the ship. He was going to swim his way back to Pearl Harbor, he didn't want to go any further. Admiral Turner had his staff aboard, including the Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal.

Mr. Smith: What was the primary mission of the *El Dorado*?

Mr. Rinehart: In the battle of North Africa, the Navy command, the general of the Army took the ship and chased after some Germans, so then they decided they'd have to replace the command. The Navy was command, but he had them work the staff of the Marines. They were going to invade ??????, and there an ?????? ship. In Okinawa they had General Buckner aboard. The theory was, they were surrounding Okinawa with 12 frigates.

Mr. Smith: Then the *El Dorado* sort of served as the command ship on Asian invasions?

Mr. Rinehart: Right, that is correct. When the command shifted from Admiral Smith to the shore, we left Okinawa. We were only supposed to be there five days, and we were there over two weeks. At Okinawa we suffered from kamikaze attacks.

Mr. Smith: Where did you go from Honolulu?

Mr. Rinehart: We went to Saipan, and then we went up to Iwo Jima.

Mr. Smith: Were you the command ship with the Saipan invasion?

Mr. Rinehart: No, that was just a stop on the way.

Mr. Smith: How about at Iwo? Were you the command ship there?

Mr. Rinehart: Yes. That's where Secretary of the Navy Forestal came aboard. He wore khakis like the rest. He was a pretty decent guy.

Mr. Smith: Did you get to meet him?

Mr. Rinehart: I did not meet him.

Mr. Smith: For the benefit of some of the younger folks, they may not know that Forestal committed suicide. Do you have any information on that?

Mr. Rinehart: He was in a Naval hospital when he did that. He jumped out—I think the pressure of unifying the armed forces was too much for him. He was a banker before. He jumped out of Walter Reed Hospital.

Mr. Smith: Any particular memory of Iwo, of the situation there? It was a pretty tough battle.

Mr. Rinehart: It was the most—of course, I was aboard—we lost our anchor, so we had to stay underway, but we were about a mile off the beach.

Mr. Smith: Was a Japanese shore cannon firing at you?

Mr. Rinehart: The history is, we bombarded that thing day and night for two weeks, but the Japs were back in those caves. To get them out they put the flame throwers in there, and we watched many of them jump off the cliffs. The fire was too much for them.

The flag raising was the real highlight of the war. It has been documented.

Then we went to Okinawa, to a staging area down on some island for half a day and came back. It was Easter Sunday when we invaded Okinawa.

Mr. Smith: How about any outstanding memory of the Okinawa invasion?

Mr. Rinehart: Just the air raids of the kamikaze. We got one shot. But usually they would go after a battleship or a cruiser. One night one got through the air of the radar picket station, and he was flying low, and the Navy went to general quarters before and before sunset, and this guy came in just before sunset, he circled the *El Dorado*, and we were

firing everything. He took the *New Mexico*, which was a battleship. Rear Adm. ???? was aboard the *New Mexico*. Our radar, we tracked all the airplanes leaving aircraft carriers to go to Japan to fight the kamikazes. It was all controlled from the *El Dorado*. General Buckner was aboard then. He had his command, and he went ashore, and he was shot by a sniper and died there on Okinawa.

Mr. Smith: Do you have any information on the casualties at Okinawa? As I understand it, the Navy forces took some pretty tough hits.

Mr. Rinehart: Yes, it's well documented, how many ships we lost there. They were hitting aircraft carriers and the bigger ships. I think they hit a hospital ship one time. It was quite an experience. In today's world you see these suicide buses running, that's what the Japanese were going with airplanes. How they trained the youngest guys to be heroes.

Mr. Smith: As you recall, the Emperor was a deity to the Japanese, and if they could die for the Emperor they were going to glory, or whatever.

Mr. Rinehart: It's a shame, the culture of the people doing that to their own people.

After Okinawa we went down to Manila, that's where we were when the war ended. We were preparing for the invasion of Japan at that time.

Mr. Smith: That was the next operation, going to be Operation Olympic, on Kyushu, the southern most Japanese home island?

Mr. Rinehart: We were destined to take General Kruger, he was to be aboard the *El Dorado*.

Mr. Smith: You were going to take him up there?

Mr. Rinehart: Yes. But then when they signed the Peace Treaty, Admiral Turner was up in the picture showing the signing on the deck when the war ended.

Mr. Smith: With all the brass you had aboard the *El Dorado*, did you ever get any early news on the bombs, on what they were going to do?

Mr. Rinehart: I think they got something.

Mr. Smith: I was in Manila in September of '45 and we knew something was in the wind, but we didn't know what it was. There was a lot of negotiation going on between the Japanese and the Allies, and the scuttlebutt was that the thing was near an end, but we didn't know how it was going to end.

Mr. Rinehart: I'm glad they dropped the bomb.

Mr. Smith: I'm with you. I think that Harry Truman bit the bullet and made the right decision when he authorized the dropping of those two bombs, there's no question.

Mr. Rinehart: They saved our lives, at any rate.

Mr. Smith: That's exactly right. Not only did they save our lives, but they saved the lives of many, many more people, both Japanese and Allies. It kinda upsets me when we have these vocal folks that are trying to change history and say, well, we shouldn't have dropped those two bombs, we could have beat them without it. Well sure, we could have beat them without it, but we would have killed many, many more people.

Mr. Rinehart: Well, Iwo Jima, I think they say there were 50 or 52 Congressional Medals of Honor, out of about 300 in all the battles, Army, Navy. Twenty-six of them were earned at Iwo Jima, so it was a bloody situation.

Mr. Smith: And Okinawa was even worse, wasn't it?

Mr. Rinehart: Yes.

Mr. Smith: Do you recall any particular friends you made aboard ship?

Mr. Rinehart: Charlie Rinell, , we became very close friends. He was best man at my wedding. He died about a year or so ago. Then Bob Kern, he was the CIC officer, and he died about a year ago.

Mr. Smith: Rinehart is German derivative? You'd have got along good with Nimitz.

Mr. Rinehart: I would have, if I'd have known him. In the Navy, you stay within the perimeter of your rank.

Mr. Smith: Do you think of any humorous incidents that happened aboard ship at any time during your cruise?

Mr. Rinehart: At Okinawa one of cooks came up, and he had tears in his eyes. I said, "What's wrong with you?" He said, "Look at this. I just got a letter from my wife, and we have a newborn son, and I haven't been home for over a year." I said, "Well, go see the chaplain."

Mr. Smith: There was an old saying in the Navy, you had to be there for the commissioning but not for the launching.

What was the compliment of the *El Dorado*?

Mr. Rinehart: About 1200. That includes the flag staff.

Mr. Smith: But when you had, for example, the generals that were . . .

Mr. Rinehart: We didn't pay the Army guys, they didn't need any money.

Mr. Smith: No, but you had them aboard when they were going on a mission. Did they have separate quarters for them, fancy quarters, or . . .

Mr. Rinehart: No.

Mr. Smith: You say you were in Manila during the signing. When did you finally get out?

Mr. Rinehart: Let me backtrack a little bit. Another good friend is Jerry Kerwin, he's here today. He and I were friends. He encouraged me to come over to this reunion today, so he's another friend I had. I was single, and I didn't get out right away when the war ended. When I did get out, I took advantage of the GI Bill. I went to school at the Harvard Business School, got my MBA. In '51 I got called back for two years at Key West at the Air Development Squadron One. I served as their supply officer for two years.

Mr. Smith: That was during Korea?

Mr. Rinehart: Yes.

Mr. Smith: And then, did you stay in the Reserve?

Mr. Rinehart: I stayed in the Reserve, and very fortunately got promoted to captain in the Supply Corps. An interesting career. I think Tom Brokaw said it best, he said, "When called on, we did our duty." I was no hero. The heroes are under the white crosses. I was not a hero, I just did my duty.

Mr. Smith: What were your feelings after the war, coming home.

Mr. Rinehart: I was at sea for two years. I had to rebuild my life. I kept in touch being in the Reserve, but it was our duty, we did it.

Mr. Smith: Were there changes that had taken place back Stateside that surprised you when you came back after being out there two years?

Mr. Rinehart: Things weren't the same. You could see the country was growing, and there was a lot more activity, housing. It was different. Of course in Miami during the war, toward the end of the war, we used to have blackouts. The top half of your headlights would have to be painted black, and if you had a meeting, you had to draw the curtains so you didn't have any lights to show the lights of Miami, because the Germans were shooting at our ships that were going up and down. But that all had changed, it was a good atmosphere. Our country treated us good.

Mr. Smith: Is there anything else you can think of that you would like to put on tape? You understand that the tape will be transcribed, it will go into the archives of the Museum for future students of World War II, so if you have any thoughts about what you'd like to tell them, any conclusion?

Mr. Rinehart: I think we did our duty and weren't heroes, we did our duty and we're glad we did it. My grandson takes an interest in World War II now, and it's interesting to see the patriotism that's going on in this country. And belief in America. I appreciate the opportunity to speak.

Mr. Smith: Well, Harry, on behalf of the Museum let me thank you for giving us this interview, and the tape will be transcribed, then a copy will be sent to you and if there are any changes that need to be made, why, you make those and then when it's corrected it'll go into the archives.

Mr. Rinehart: Thank you for the opportunity to tell my story to someone other than my grandson.

Transcribed by: Betty Paieda
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