

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

***Nimitz Education and Research Center
Fredericksburg, Texas***

***Interview with Henry Ricci, M.D.
Medical Detachment, 132nd Infantry, Americal Division
Guadalcanal***

Interview With Henry Ricci

This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Parks and Wildlife, for the preservation of historical information related to this site.

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Mr. Ricci: My good friend Arthur Hantel, I first made his acquaintance in 1935 when we joined the Army and wound up in the same company. He managed to become a lieutenant and then finally he received a battlefield promotion of captain. One day a white flag was waved at one of the Japanese positions so Arthur, Art Hantel, with three men, this white flag went up and some Japanese appeared behind the flag. So Arthur went forward to meet these Japanese and they probably weren't maybe, I don't know, twenty-five, thirty feet apart. Suddenly the Japanese whipped out some weapons and without warning shot Hantel in the neck. He died almost instantly. Well naturally, our men returned the fire and killed all four, three or four, of the Japanese.

The fighting on Bloody Ridge was brutal. There were no quarters given, no quarters taken. We seldom ever took a prisoner, only when we were requested to do so.

Mr. Cox: Were there any incidents that you know of that you were probably hand-to-hand bayonet type?

Mr. Ricci: There were numerous incidents where we had hand-to-hand bayonet combat. And I shared a fox hole with another doctor, Lieutenant _____ ??? I'm five feet eight and _____ ??? was six feet one and weighed about two hundred pounds, and I weighed a hundred and forty-five. So we shared the same fox hole during the night. During the nighttime, nobody moved. Anything that moved got shot. It didn't make any difference whether it was, you think it was one of your own men, 'cause it might have been a Japanese. But more likely if you were moving around in the dark, it was a Japanese. So if you moved, you got shot.

The fighting was brutal. _____ ??? and I had shared the same fox hole. We would take turns sleeping, two hours at a time. And the Japanese had a nasty technique of crawling up to a fox hole and falling on top of the guy who was in the fox hole and bayonet him or stab him to death with a trench knife. So the guy was, Lieutenant _____ ??? or I, the one who was awake, would lie on our back with a trench knife in our hand pointed up and a forty-five pistol in the other. So in case they did that, they'd fall on top of bayonet and we'd have an opportunity to shoot 'em.

That's the kind of warfare we were in, and that's the kind of warfare the medical officers had to do. We did this for self-preservation. So the medical officers had to wear weapons and on occasion, if necessary, they were used.

Mr. Cox: Your marksmanship came in handy, then.

Mr. Ricci: I won't say. I won't say. But that's how we lived. It was a brutal war. No quarters were given. They take after several of our men, we could hear them screaming in the night. They were being tortured by the Japanese. And several of our men were recovered after we took the position, they were dead. But they'd been found to have slices of their legs cut off, and this is the screaming that was going on. We couldn't get to 'em, it was at nighttime. Didn't know where we were going. And they would torture them at night.

So, mercy was not a thing that was shared. And it could not be, 'cause under those conditions it had to be equal. And it was brutal warfare. I remember one time we had a Japanese that was captured and we'd been ordered to send back the captured Japanese. So I told my sergeant, I don't remember his name, I said "Sergeant, take this man back to Regiment Headquarters for interrogation." Well, he wasn't gone but a very short time. He came back and I said "Sergeant (whatever your name is, I've forgotten) where's your prisoner?" He said, "He tried to run away so I shot him." I didn't ask any questions.

Mr. Cox: I thought maybe he was gonna torture him or something.

Mr. Ricci: I didn't ask any questions. I said, "Okay, you hadda do what you hadda do."

Mr. Cox: The fact that the Japanese were cruel that way and there's things that you described as happening to some of them that were captured, Americans, what effect do you think that had on the morale of the men, if any?

Mr. Ricci: Well, it had the morale of saying I'm not gonna be taken alive, and I'm not gonna take anybody alive. I remember one time when I was up in the line I heard about this, one of our cooks, a sergeant, I don't remember his name, everybody's armed, they had to be. And the Japanese, they were starving. They were in a worse condition than we were. Somehow or other this Jap had gotten through the lines and was crawling towards the kitchen. And this sergeant happened to look up and there's this Japanese, so he just shot him. He didn't try to take him prisoner, just shot him.

Mr. Cox: No question.

Mr. Ricci: No, no, there's no question. If you ask questions, you are dead. Some shot you.

Mr. Cox: You never knew who was a Japanese or American.

Mr. Ricci: That's right. So it was a brutal, brutal warfare, the kind that, I don't know, I hope it never happens again.

Well, finally, I was evacuated because I, my regiment was taken out of combat because we had gotten past the point where we were efficient. We had, we were infected, infested with malaria. We had over three or four hundred killed or wounded, and we were no longer functional as a combat unit.

Mr. Cox: I'm gonna mention something here, a document that you showed me. It's dated 24 January 1943. Is that about the time you came out of, off of the line, or thereafter?

Mr. Ricci: Um-hum.

Mr. Cox: This is a commendation addressed to the Medical Detachment of the 132nd Infantry, Americal Division. And it is addressed to the Major Belamonte who was Commander of the 132nd Infantry Battalion and he quotes something to the effect, "I want to thank you and other medical officers and men for an outstanding job in combat. It is the greatest regret of my life that I am unable to continue with you. Good luck, and God be with you." Signed, Leroy E. Nelson, which you mentioned previously, Colonel, U.S. Army. The General Order was issued by E. B. Sebree, Brigadier General, U.S. Army, Ccommanding Americal Division.

And I won't read it all, but it's to the same medical unit and it says, "The officers and enlisted men of the Medical Detachment, 132nd Infantry, cared for and assisted in the evacuation of a total of two hundred and twenty-five wounded and eighty-four men killed in action while subjected to enemy machine gun fire, mortar and rifle fire. Evacuation made from over long distance by hand through dense jungle and intense heat." And then in turn, it's counter signed by Major Belamonte and also thanking the officers and men. I think that's an outstanding letter of commendation for what you accomplished.

Mr. Ricci: Well, I didn't do anything that my comrades didn't do. I didn't do anything they didn't do, didn't do as much.

Mr. Cox: And when you came out of action, were you moved off of Guadalcanal.

Mr. Ricci: Yeah.

Mr. Cox: Where were you moved to?

Mr. Ricci: I was moved to the Fiji Islands. We regrouped there and my malaria got worse, so after being on the Fiji Islands for about a year, regrouping and retraining and getting our weight and physical condition back into shape again, they sent me back to the United States for further malaria treatment.

Then I took a residency in ophthalmology and practiced in . . .

Mr. Cox: In ophthalmology?

Mr. Ricci: Yes. I practiced in San Angelo, Texas, from 1947 to 1964. During this time I was out of the Military. Then in 1964 I moved to California where I became Chief of the Eye Department at the Veterans Martinez California Hospital. Well, at this point I decided to go back into the Military so I signed up with the 142nd Field Artillery, 142nd Medical Hospital Unit in San Francisco. I stayed with them for about two years, then I transferred over to a Federal service, the 147th Medical Hospital, and I stayed there and completed twenty-three years more.

Mr. Cox: Where was this located?

Mr. Ricci: In San Francisco, California. During this period of time I continued my schooling, medical schooling as well as military schooling. I toured around the military camps and retired as a full colonel in 1970. Following this, I retired from the Veterans Administration in 1985. I did consulting work for several years, then I got tired of sitting around the house, so then I did medical missionary work in the Medical Department on the Marshall Islands for about four months. I would go from island to island on a small ship, small boat really, and render medical aid to the natives.

Then after that I received an invitation from the Government of Saudi Arabia to go Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and work for the Saudi Arabian Government, which I did that from 1988 'til 1999, going back a period of about, oh, it was about every two years. I put in about four years of serving in Saudi Arabia, and I finally retired from the medical practice from Saudi Arabia in December, 1999.

Since that time I've been fully retired in San Angelo, Texas, where I reside at the present time. And that's briefly my story.

Mr. Cox: When you retired, what did you do, you obviously have some hobbies and that sort of thing.

Mr. Ricci: Well, fortunately, I play golf. I'm a real lousy golfer. I play golf with guys my age and we play the kind of golf where you don't keep score, and when you hit the ball, if you want to, you tee up no matter where it is. And if we don't like where the ball is laying, we pick it up and throw it two or three feet and hit it. So that's how we play golf. We don't play golf, we don't keep score, we don't bet, we just do it for the exercise and for the friendship.

Mr. Cox: I want to ask you another, back-up a little bit, and ask you a few questions. When you were on Guadalcanal, I know you were in combat almost continuously.

Mr. Ricci: Yes, I was.

Mr. Cox: Was there any occasion that you were aware of, or came in contact with, any of the generals that were in charge, like Patch or Nimitz or Halsey or any of those people?

Mr. Ricci: No, I didn't personally come in contact, but I do want to mention our priest, I can't think of his name, Father, I can't think of his name now. He's now deceased. Before we went into combat, all of us, I'm Catholic, went to communion. We went to what they call "absolution," you say your sins, whatever they might be, to yourself and to your God, and then you receive communion in Mass. And at this Mass there were Protestants, there were Catholics, there were Muslims, religion, there was no differentiation. Everybody went to say his last piece too. In case you're not here anymore. And that's a very, very moving experience, and Father gave communion to everybody, everybody.

And so what impressed us was that in the midst of fire, we were being machine-gunned, and mortared, he would crawl out to each individual foxhole. If it's a foxhole while the fighting's going on, he'd say "How you doing, Henry, how you doing, Sal, what can I do for you."

Mr. Cox: The Father come off the island with you?

Mr. Ricci: He came off the island with us, and he stayed in the Military for twenty years. I said, "Father, what're you doing up here? You have no business here, you get killed in this place." He said, "Well, you're here, aren't you?" I said "Yeah, but I have to be. You don't have to be." He said, "I have to be."

Mr. Cox: You got back to the States. Did you ever have a contact with him?

Mr. Ricci: Oh yes, absolutely. We had meetings every three years, a reunion of the 132nd Infantry. But the last meeting was about oh, ten years ago. At that point most of the

people, most of the men of the regiment had passed on. And those who were still around, many were in wheelchairs, or some were debilitated. At the present time, of the original three thousand men, there's not more than, maybe, two hundred fifty of us left. So we don't meet anymore because it's too difficult. Our home quarters are in Chicago, Illinois and I live in Texas, some live in California, and it's too difficult physically and financially to do that. So we correspond by mail and e-mail, but the numbers are getting fewer and fewer.

Mr. Cox: Because your unit was a National Guard unit, Illinois, predominantly, they were people from that, Illinois, that were in the unit?

Mr. Ricci: When we left Chicago to go into camp, it was probably seventy-five percent Italians. It was an Italian neighborhood. The rest were Germans and Irish.

Mr. Cox: You had Italian cooks, too?

Mr. Ricci: No, we ate anything from anybody. If it stands still and it's cooked, we'd eat it. That's right.

So my experience has been one of gratitude. I'm glad that I had the opportunity to be of service to my country. But the thing is, in combat, one doesn't fight for his country, he fights for his comrade. He fights for the man next to him, because that man's life depends on you, and you depend on him. So you don't think of the flag waving, you just think "I'm gonna save my buddy, he's my buddy, and the guy on the other side is my enemy. He's a son-of-a-bitch and I'm gonna kill him."

That's how wars are fought. You fight for your comrade, you fight for your buddy. The flag is the basis of everything, but the immediate thing, protecting yourself and protecting your buddy. And you're willing to die for him. I've seen it happen many times where a man would go out and retrieve a buddy who was wounded on the field. Sometimes he'd get wounded himself. Sometimes he'd come back. Sometimes he'd get killed. But that's what men do for each other in combat.

Mr. Cox: I'm gonna ask you a question. You gave me a couple of pictures for our Archives and a copy of the Commendation. I appreciate that. This particular picture, you put on the back and it indicates that it is Lieutenant Henry Ricci. It's an aid station on Bloody Ridge, Guadalcanal, dated December the twenty-fifth, 1942. If you look at that, would you describe it.

Mr. Ricci: I've been asked to describe this picture. One has to look at it very carefully. You see an individual standing there, this is immediately after one of our major combats,

and things were quiet. I'm standing there in my aid station, this is a hole in the ground, maybe two feet deep, about four feet wide, and right behind me you see a mass of foliage. Those are log trees that have been cut down, or trees that have been cut down, and covered over by bush. We would take the men into the opening of this aid station, there's only one opening. It's the front and the back opening. We would treat them in the dark, sometimes, by flashlight or lantern, and all of our things are down there. Those white things that you see surrounding the base of the opening are used bandages and used cartridge belts. This is actually a picture immediately after combat. I hadn't shaved in over a month, those clothes have been on me for a month. And of course, like all other medical officers, we were armed.

Mr. Cox: How large was that dugout there that you had covered up?

Mr. Ricci: Oh, it went back about ten feet. About twelve feet wide, two feet deep, about ten feet in depth.

Mr. Cox: You gave some medical attention to wounded?

Mr. Ricci: Oh, that's what we had to, because we were being under machine gun fire at all times. So this protected us. This faced the back of the combat line. The combat line was maybe fifty, seventy-five yards away.

Mr. Cox: It looks like it's slightly inclined upward from where you're standing.

Mr. Ricci: Yes, that is right, that is correct. We piled logs and trees on it.

Mr. Cox: Then there's a second picture.

Mr. Ricci: This is in April 1942, after we'd come off of combat.

Mr. Cox: It's about the Lunga River, Guadalcanal?

Mr. Ricci: Lunga River, that's right.

Mr. Cox: Read and describe on the back of that, if you will please, what you've written.

Mr. Ricci: Yeah. Lunga River, site of the fierce battle wherein Sergeant Basilone won a Congressional Medal of Honor. He won it at this particular point. The Japs came over at a more shallow place and in the night time he covered for them, and this is where he won his Congressional Medal of Honor. Sergeant Basilone went on a bond drive as requested by the Military, but he also insisted on being back in combat

with his comrades. He did this , he was part of a landing party on Iwo Jima and was killed by shrapnel on that very same landing. Sergeant Basilone, Congressional Medal of Honor.

Mr. Cox: I just wanted to document this. When you came back to the States, how were you transported back to the States?

Mr. Ricci: I was transported back on a Dutch ship. Apparently I was in a very bad physical and mental condition. I was depressed, and the captain came up and one day he said "Lieutenant, I have an idea what you've been through, but we're gonna try to make it as nice for you on this ship as we can." They wre nice to all of us, not just to me. Everybody got the same treatment, whether you were a private or whether you were a major or a general. They fed us well, had all the drinks we wanted, pops and sodas, and comfortable quarters, and by the time I got to the United States from New Caledonia, it was about three weeks later, I was in much, much better condition. But I was still sent to the hospital, where I recuperated for about three months from malaria. Then I was discharged.

Mr. Cox: Now, you were married before you went in.

Mr. Ricci: I was married for a period of two months, and I didn't see my wife for three years.

Mr. Cox: Where did you first meet your wife?

Mr. Ricci: I met my wife when I was an intern in St. Paul Hospital, Dallas, she was a nurse there.

Mr. Cox: When you got back to the States, it had been an interim of . . .

Mr. Ricci: Three years.

Mr. Cox: Where did you meet her after you came back?

Mr. Ricci: When I came back she was not allowed to meet me. I was put in the hospital, at the Letterman General Hospital, where I later became a soldier there.

Mr. Cox: And that was located?

Mr. Ricci: In San Francisco.

Mr. Cox: San Francisco.

Mr. Ricci: Letterman General Hospital. I was there about two weeks, and I remember when I got back, the first or second day, they had an ice cream parlor and I went down there and I said "I'd like to have an ice cream cone, please," and he gave me an ice cream cone, and he wouldn't accept any money. I said, "Can I get another one?" He said, "Sure, all you want." I couldn't believe that I could get all the ice cream I wanted, 'cause I hadn't had an ice cream cone in three years.

Mr. Cox: This was in the hospital.

Mr. Ricci: In the hospital. He said, "Lieutenant, you can have anything you want." He said, "Anything, free of charge, any flavor." I said, "For free? All I want?" he said, "Yeah." I couldn't believe that ice cream was available.

Mr. Cox: Did you have a favorite flavor?

Mr. Ricci: Any flavor was my favorite.

Mr. Cox: Did you try 'em all?

Mr. Ricci: I trid 'em all, but my favorite was chocolate, and it still is. But I was astounded that I could have all the ice cream that I wanted.

Mr. Cox: I like chocolate too. You notice how difficult it is to get chocolate ice cream in a restaurant?

Mr. Ricci: Oh yeah, yeah. We never had ice cream overseas. Didn't have it. And every once in awhile we'd get a beer, but of course, the supply people get the beer first, and we'd get what they didn't. But they'd save a few cans for us. But I had very very few beers overseas.

Mr. Cox: When the first opportunity you had to out of the hospital, to go into town, San Francisco or wherever, do you remember that occasion?

Mr. Ricci: I do remember the occasion. My sister, remember the one I told you about that had a job forty-eight hours for sixteen dollars, well, she was promoted and she was given a choice position with the American Telephone Company when they were organizing a charter for the United Nations, the John Muir Woods. She was one of the few operators who was there to translate and transmit all the messages.

Mr. Cox: Italian-English?

Mr. Ricci: Italian-English, that's correct. So she was there and she met me. I was surprised. I had absolutely no . . .

Mr. Cox: You had no idea she . . .

Mr. Ricci: No. I told her I was gonna be landing in San Francisco and I was shocked when I found out she was there with several of her friends. She was stationed in San Francisco by coincidence. So I was in San Francisco for about two weeks. Then they sent me to Temple, Texas, to a medical hospital there, and I was there three months. And after that I was discharged. And then my wife met me in Temple, Texas. And so we got together again after three and a half years.

Mr. Cox: Do you remember the type of food you had when you first went out to dinner away from Army food?

Mr. Ricci: I remember going to a restaurant. They gave me a menu, I could have anything I wanted—meats, cold drinks, beer, anything I wanted. I just couldn't believe that.

Mr. Cox: This is a civilian resaurant.

Mr. Ricci: A civilian restaurant. I couldn't believe that.

Mr. Cox: San Francisco maybe?

Mr. Ricci: No, this ws in Temple, Texas. No, when I was in San Francisco I was too sick to leave. So I was hospitalized. But I couldn't believe I could go to a restaurant and buy anything you wanted if you had the money. And it was wonderful. I just couldn't, I'd been out of contact with what they consider normal civilian routine for so long, that it was a cultural shock to me.

Mr. Cox: What type of food did you order?

Mr. Ricci: They ordered steak, whatever there was, I had potatoes, and it was wonderful, and bread, and ice cream.

Mr. Cox: You created a question for me, because you said you were transferred from San Francisco, to Temple, Texas. How did you transport?

Mr. Ricci: That was a very interesting experieence. They transferred us by train. When we took the train from Camp Forest, Tennessee, to New York, we were crowded, jammed.

Mr. Cox: A regular troop train.

Mr. Ricci: A regular troop train. But when we took the train from San Francisco to Temple, Texas, which was a three-day, two-day ride, they gave, they sent us in comfort. We had comfortable seats that layed back, it was air conditioned, and I remember going through the desert, Needles, California, where we stopped to I guess put water in the train. Well, we got out, the temperature was one hundred twenty-five degrees. We got back in the train immediately then, I think. And I want to talk briefly about the weather in Guadalcanal.

It was absolutely horrible. The humidity was ninety, ninety-five per cent, temperature was ninety, ninety-five degrees. You perspired just standing still. Then when we got in the jungle, there was absolutely no breeze whatsoever. The trees were a hundred, hundred and fifty feet high. You could never see the sky. It was dense, dense vegetation. You could not see more than five feet in front of you. You only went through the jungle by somebody going ahead of you and hacking with a machete. And we'd have to crawl up and down hills.

I remember when we got into position, in addition to my medical equipment I was given two mortar rounds of eighty-one mm. to carry, and I carried up those slippery hills. We could only climb up by grabbing a branch and slipping and sliding and climbing to the top.

Mr. Cox: So you were probably packing eighty to a hundred pounds.

Mr. Ricci: I was packing a hundred pounds, and in the process doing that, there were leeches everywhere. When we get to the top of the hill, even on level ground, which was jungle, we'd be covered with leeches, so we went, one time I had as many as thirty and forty leeches on my body.

Mr. Cox: You kinda self-inspected each other?

Mr. Ricci: Oh yeah. Sure.

Mr. Cox: How did you remove the leech?

Mr. Ricci: We'd light a cigarette and put the hot tip to the leech. The leech would curl up and fall off. But they'd leave a bleeding place, too.

Mr. Cox: How did you control the infection from that?

Mr. Ricci: We just had some penicillin. We didn't, we didn't have enough. Just wipe them off with sulfa and wipe them off with water. But at one time I had as many as thirty or forty leeches on me. On my neck, and the other sergeant would burn them off my neck and my back, and I would do it for them.

Mr. Cox: Medicinal alcohol?

Mr. Ricci: Oh no, we didn't have that, no, we didn't have that. No. We had it, but we only used it in emergencies when a man was about to . . .

Mr. Cox: You had various types of pain killers, I'm sure.

Mr. Ricci: We had morphine.

Mr. Cox: What did you commonly use?

Mr. Ricci: Morphine. A quarter grain of morphine. We didn't check the _____ of the uniform, we didn't bother sterilizing anything. You didn't have time.

Mr. Cox: Were there occasions that perhaps, that people might have overdosed on morphine?

Mr. Ricci: It's possible. It's possible. We always left a medical tag on the wounded soldier. His name, his serial number, and "He has received morphine." And we put down the time. But of course, if the man lay there three and four hours, and the morphine was wearing off, we'd have to give him another shot.

Mr. Cox: Was he capable of doing it himself?

Mr. Ricci: No, no, these are wounded. They were, sometimes they were just moribund. But we saw to it that we gave them, we used to pack the wounds with sulfa _____ which was new at the time, and put a body, abdominal, patch on them and tag them and send them back by litter bearers. Back a thousand yards to Regimental Headquarters, and this is tough in that heat, 'cause many times the snipers would shot the litter bearers, and they'd shoot the wounded man on the litter. And they'd kill two or three in the process. 'Cause the Japanese knew that if they wounded a man, we put four men out of commission, 'cause it took four men to carry 'em. If they killed a man, that was it.

Mr. Cox: That set up an easy target.

Mr. Ricci: That set up an easy target because they were carrying a man weighing a hundred

fifty, a hundred eighty pounds, in this terrible heat, in jungles, you'd lose your way, and the snipers would pick us off from the trees. So they preferred to wound a man, and then to get the man on the litter and the litter bearers as well, at the same time.

Mr. Cox: This commendation, I'm sure that what you said sets up a question for me, because you had two hundred and twenty-five wounded and eighty-four dead. Is there an estimate you could make on how many of those wounded and killed were medics? Or litter bearers?

Mr. Ricci: I'd be a safe bet to say ten percent. Easy. 'Cause these litter bearers and these medics, they went out to get the wounded men. They went out to take care of them.

Mr. Cox: And they were not necessarily medics. They were their buddies.

Mr. Ricci: They were their buddies. But the medics had to go, but the buddies would sometimes beat 'em to it, because that was your buddy out there screaming. You went. You got him and dragged him back. So, in combat you're fighting for your buddy and for yourself. That's who you're fighting for. The flag, you don't even think about that. You're under intense machine gun, mortar fire. And you go get that man. He needs you. Maybe you need him. So you go do it, you don't question it.

Mr. Cox: You described the leeches. What other types of insects or creatures were there?

Mr. Ricci: There were snakes. There were poisonous snakes, but with all that bombardment the snakes stayed pretty well out of the way. They went in a hole. But there were bugs, huge bugs. Spiders.

Mr. Cox: Mosquitoes? Malaria?

Mr. Ricci: Oh, malaria, oh, the Anopheles flies were everywhere. They gave us atabrine, and all our skin turned yellow. And how they gave us the atabrine, they wanted to make sure that we took it, 'cause some guys didn't want to, so they said "Open your mouth," and they put it, put the atabrine on your tongue, and they'd give you a canteen and you'd swallow. They say "Stick your tongue out," and it had to be . . .

Mr. Cox: Was it bitter?

Mr. Ricci: It was terribly bitter. Terribly bitter. But we took atabrine because that was the only anti-malaria we had. And even at that we got malaria. I had malarial attacks for

about ten years after I got out of the service. Ten years! And I'm not allowed to give any transfusions because of what I'd had.

Mr. Cox: I'm gonna skip back to Temple when your wife joined you. When did, you really started a family, I'm sure.

Mr. Ricci: Yes, we did. About a year later. Yes.

I had nightmares. Many times she'd wake me up, "Henry, you're screaming." I was screaming, I was back in combat. Having nightmares recalling what happened. That went on for about a year and a half, wo years.

Mr. Cox: She understood.

Mr. Ricci: She understood. Because I was talking in my sleep and screaming and hollering "Get back! You're getting machine gunned. You're hit!" I wasn't aware of it. She told me.

Mr. Cox: Do you have children, grandchildren?

Mr. Ricci: Yes. I have grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

I loved the Military, if they would take me, I'd go back tomorrow. I would. The military's in my blood, I love it. I don't want to repeat Guadalcanal, but I feel privileged that I had the opportunity. I was told to do it, and I did it. I didn't volunteer for Guadalcanal, don't misunderstand me, but I'm glad I had the experience of being there, experienced war at its best, experienced war at its worst.

Mr. Cox: Again, where you're describing that, even though the war and the experience was a horrible one, it probably had a positive effect on your life?

Mr. Ricci: It had a positive effect. It made my life richer. It made my life a better life. Because I know what war is, I know the depravity of war, I know the horror of war, I know the glories that go with war. I know the good that men do. I know the bad that men do. And this is, you can only gather this by your life being at stake. By seeing life as extreme. Because when you're in the greatest danger, that is when you have the greatest life. 'Cause you may lose it in an instant. That's when life is at its supreme. That's when life is terribly exciting and terribly depressing and terribly uplifting. All at the same time. War is an experience of extremes. If you live through it, it's great. If you don't, then you've lived.

Mr. Cox: And your father helped you?

Mr. Ricci: And I thank my parents.

Mr. Cox: Were your parents living when you went in the service?

Mr. Ricci: Yes. My mother prayed, she said "All I prayed is for you to come back from Guadalcanal. That's all I prayed for." And it was answered, I came back.

Mr. Cox: Were they living when you came back?

Mr. Ricci: They were both living. They lived about fifteen years afterwards.

Mr. Cox: Did they live in the Chicago area?

Mr. Ricci: Chicago area all the time. I thank my parents so much because they were poor people, they were academically uneducated, but they were proud people. They worked hard. They gave me a chance to advance myself, to become a doctor, to serve in the Military, to become a colonel. All of this because of their utter, utter sacrifices. I want to say in conclusion that I thank my parents for everything. I'm not half the man my father was.

I want to contribute several remembrances, to my mother and father, in the form of a Risen Christ at St. Mary's Church in Walnut Creek, and a massive flag at Angelo State University in San Angelo, Texas.

Mr. Cox: Do you prefer to be referred to be referred to as "Doctor" or "Colonel"?

Mr. Ricci: Just call me Henry.

Mr. Cox: Henry. Okay. But because of your love for the Military I can see there's a real mixed feeling there.

Mr. Ricci: Of the two, I'd rather "Colonel."

Mr. Cox: Colonel Doctor Henry.

Mr. Ricci: This flag that I donated to the University, it's a hundred and ten foot flag, a hundred and ten foot pole, with a flag that's twenty by fifty feet, and it dominates the whole area. When they asked, I said to say "Colonol Ricci." And that's what I put first. I mean of the two titles, I prefer Colonel.

Mr. Cox: When I know of someone who is military and they love it, I think it is a respectful title. In some cases it even has a better ring than "General." 'Cause you know its lower down on the echelon.

Colonel, on behalf of the Nimitz Museum, I want to thank you today for taking the time to share your experiences with us. This will be a very good item to add to the Museum files, and especially, as I referred to you earlier, I was at the age and would have been involved in the invasion of Japan, and personally I want to salute you for what you did.

Mr. Ricci: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Cox: I appreciate it very much.

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