

National Museum of the Pacific War

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Salvatore Rascati

U.S.S. Eldorado

Date of Interview: September 17, 2003

This is Frank Turkowski conducting an oral history interview with Mr. Salvatore Rascati on September 17th, 2003. Mr. Rascati is here for the dedication of a plaque for the U.S.S. Eldorado. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War center for war studies to preserve historical information related to World War II. Mr. Rascati, thank you for relating your experiences and your thoughts about World War II with us. To begin may I ask where and when you were born?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: I was born in New Haven, CT on May 12th, 1925.

Mr. Turkowski: And your parents names'?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: My father's name was Frank Rascati and my mother's name was Catherine Rascati.

Mr. T: Where were they born?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: My father was born in Italy. He was only two months old when he came to this country with his mother. And my mother was born in Italy.

Mr. Turkowski: Near what town?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: She came from a small town near Naples.

Mr. Turkowski: Your father also?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: My father also.

Mr. Turkowski: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: Yes. I have two brothers and two sisters.

Mr. Turkowski: And what were their names?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: My brother Robert, sister Mary, younger brother Aldo, and younger sister Connie.

Mr. Turkowski: Where did you get your education?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: I went to school in New Haven, CT, grammar school and High School. After I got out of the Navy I took advantage of the G.I. Bill and I went to the University of Connecticut where I got a degree in electrical engineering in 1951.

Mr. Turkowski: So you chose the Navy. Why did you choose that branch of the service?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: Well, I was born and raised right on the shore in New Haven and I always was in boats when I was young, growing up. We lived right on the shore and I always had a liking for the Navy.

Mr. Turkowski: Do you remember what date you joined the Navy?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: Yes. It was August of 1943. I don't remember the exact date.

Mr. Turkowski: Where did you enter the service?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: In New Haven and then we were sent to Sampson, New York for boot camp.

Mr. Turkowski: Was that a pretty good sized boot camp.

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: Yes it was. It was right on the shores of Lake Seneca in the northern part of New York state.

Mr. Turkowski: Where you assigned to any special group right at the beginning?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: Well, we went through the normal six weeks of boot camp that they had during the war and then I was sent to electrical school, which was a four month course, and that was also at Sampson. Then from there I was assigned to a motion picture technician school which was in Brooklyn, New York.

Mr. Turkowski: What was your rate when you left the Navy?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: I was an Electrician's Mate, second class.

Mr. Turkowski: Did you have any special duties or assignments on the ship.

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: Yes I did. I had, in addition to taking care of all the batteries and standing my regular watches in the engine room, I also was one of the movie operators. We would run movies for the enlisted men and for the officers. In the Navy, at that time, if you had gone to motion picture technician school, then you were required to run the movies.

Mr. Turkowski: When did you board the ship?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: We boarded the ship in August of 1944 in Brooklyn, New York.

Mr. Turkowski: And where was it when you boarded?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: It was in Todd shipyard.

Mr. Turkowski: In showing movies, was it hard to get movies once you got out to sea?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: The ship was assigned three movies and if we were at sea for more than three days then we would have to repeat them. Then when we got to an anchorage where there were ships we would exchange movies, or if we got to a military base, Army or Navy, we could go ashore and exchange movies there.

Mr. Turkowski: When you left the states, where did the ship go then?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: We left Frisco and we went to Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Turkowski: How long did you stay there?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: We were there for about a couple of months, then we went to

Eniwetok. Then Guam. And from there we went and joined the operation for Iwo Jima. At that time Vice Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner and his staff came aboard the ship.

Mr. Turkowski: So did you see any action in those places?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: We got to Iwo Jima with the landing force. It was just a small island, and treeless. No harbor. We anchored about a mile off shore from where the beachhead was. We did get some bombing attacks at night and we took a lot of casualties on board of the Marines who were fighting on shore. We had two doctors on our ship and they helped take care of the wounded. Even though they had a hospital ship we did take a lot of casualties on the Eldorado.

Mr. Turkowski: So it was a flag ship for Admiral Turner when they invaded the islands.

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: Yes. We were there right from D-Day. The Navy had the big battle wagons and the aircraft carriers and they had bombed Iwo Jima for some time before we got there.

Mr. Turkowski: How did everything turn out on Iwo Jima?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: Well, I never got to land right on Iwo. Like I said my spare time job was to run the movies for the crew and the officers, and about every two or three days I would go out on one of the boats and trade movies with the different ships.

Mr. Turkowski: After they took the island did the ship move on?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: Yes. We were there for about four or five weeks. One of the things that we did see was when they raised the flag. The famous picture that everyone knows about on Iwo. The picture was the second time that the flag was

raised, as everybody knows, and that picture later became famous. We had a photographic lab on the ship, and I believe it was developed on our ship.

Mr. Turkowski: That's interesting.

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: When the crew saw the flag raised everybody that was up and about went up on the bridge and looked at it with glasses. We were about a mile or so off shore.

Mr. Turkowski: Did the Eldorado itself launch any small boats?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: Oh yeah. They went ashore.

Mr. Turkowski: I mean for the invasion. Did they send any Marines over?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: Yeah. We had a detachment of Marines on board that were attached to the Admiral and I think that some of them went ashore. Like I say, A lot of them went ashore to get casualties and bring them back because we had two doctors on board.

Mr. Turkowski: From there where did the ship go?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: We went back to Guam and after recuperating a bit there we also went by Saipan. We didn't go ashore at Saipan. By this time it was around April of '45 and we joined the operation for Okinawa. The Admiral, of course, was in charge of that operation as he was at Iwo. When we hit the beachhead at Okinawa it was relatively peaceful. The Japanese had evidently not expected us to land there. We had General Buckner on board who headed the tenth Army. He went ashore and was killed a few days later. We also had Ernie Pyle, the journalist, on our ship. And he was

killed on a small island near Okinawa by a Japanese sniper. Of course we also had at one time the secretary of the Navy Forrestal on board at Iwo Jima. Admiral Nimitz also came aboard at various times.

Mr. Turkowski: Do you remember how large the crew was?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: I believe from ship's company there was about 700. Then when the Admiral came aboard with his flag, his staff brought about 300 including a detachment of Marines.

Mr. Turkowski: What was Okinawa like.

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: Okinawa, that was an Army operation. I always remember when we landed they used a lot of these Army amphibious vehicles and it was a little rough. Some of them had trouble taking on water. And I remember the Army guys evidently wanted to lighten their loads and we saw a lot of gas masks floating. That was one of the things I remember.

Mr. Turkowski: As an electrician's mate was it rough keeping those batteries up and those little boats going?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: Oh yeah. That's right. I was constantly charging the batteries that the boat crews were taking down to the battery shop. I had a small battery shop and I would put them on the racks and charge 'em and they would come and get 'em. I kept swapping them.

Mr. Turkowski: You had a Admiral's gig aboard?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: Yes. We also took care of that one.

Mr. Turkowski: Where were you when the war ended.

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: When the war ended we were in Manila. We had gone to Manila after the Okinawa operation and they began to assemble ships there for the coming operation for Japan. They were going to invade Japan, I guess. We were there for about a month or so and we had heard that they had dropped the atomic bomb on Japan. Of course everybody was happy then 'cause we knew that maybe the war would be over. Up to that time we had no hopes ever of going back, you know. We were out there for a year and a half and we didn't know when ever we were going to get back.

Mr. Turkowski: I understand that you had, I guess you were talking about the end of the war.

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: Up to the time that they dropped the bomb we knew we were going to invade Japan sometime in November, but this was in August. And after we were they for three or four weeks we heard that the bomb, they didn't refer to it as an atomic bomb in those days, they just said it was a big bomb, and then the Japanese surrendered a few days later. Then we came back to Pearl Harbor and eventually came back to San Fransisco.

Mr. Turkowski: I understand you had some Japanese prisoners aboard the ship for a while. Do you remember them?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: I never saw them myself because the admiral had his own staff. I never got to see them.

Mr. Turkowski: Where you involved with any of the radar or the guns or anything like that, the gun control? As far as the electrical part of that.

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: No my job was in the electric shop and we had an emergency generator there and as soon as we went on general quarters we had to start the generator, and that thing was running constantly while you were on GQ.

Mr. Turkowski: Who was the Captain of the ship at that time?

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: At that time our Captain was Captain Wallace. He was the original Captain. Then later on we got another Captain whose name was Tischner.

Mr. Turkowski: Do you remember when Captain Tischner came aboard.

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: I think he came aboard after the Okinawa operation.

Mr. Turkowski: Well, we thank you very much for contributing to the history of the Pacific War and this has been a special interview for me because I was on the same ship ten years later and I thank you again for the museum and for myself as well.

Mr. Salvatore Rascati: Thank you.

Tape 929

Transcribed by

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