

National Museum of the Pacific War

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Acencion Fernandez

United States Navy, LCI-80, Pacific War, World War II

Date of Interview: February 19, 2005

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Mr. Graham: This is Eddie Graham. Today is February 19, 2005. I'm interviewing Mr. Acencion Fernandez. We're doing this recording in the Zion Lutheran Church in Fredericksburg, Texas. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War Center for War Studies for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Fernandez, tell us when and where were you born.

Mr. Fernandez: I was born in Cuero, Texas, in DeWitt County.

Mr. Graham: What year?

Mr. Fernandez: 1924, May 24.

Mr. Graham: Did you go to school there?

Mr. Fernandez: I went through the fifth grade. That's right.

Mr. Graham: Let me ask you one more question. Where were you and what were you doing December 7, 1941?

Mr. Fernandez: I was working on the farm. I got drafted when I was eighteen years old.

Mr. Graham: How did you find out about the war?

Mr. Fernandez: We heard over the radio. Everybody heard of December 7th. Roosevelt told us everything.

Mr. Graham: Why did you choose the United States Navy?

Mr. Fernandez: I didn't choose it. That was the bus that took us.

Mr. Graham: Where did you do your basic training?

Mr. Fernandez: In San Diego, California.

Mr. Graham: After you finished your basic training, what did you do then?

Mr. Fernandez: Went overseas. I took six weeks basic training. When I got out of basic

training, we went home for ten days or something like that. Came back and they shipped us to the Pacific. Wait, no! All I knew was they said, “You all aren’t going to need no winter clothes. You’re all going overseas.”

Mr. Graham: Where did you catch your ship to go overseas? San Francisco?

Mr. Fernandez: No, San Pedro, California.

Mr. Graham: Was it a transport ship?

Mr. Fernandez: Transport ship right out in the middle of the ocean.

Mr. Graham: Where did you stop first on the ship? Where did your ship go first?

Mr. Fernandez: Straight to Honolulu.

Mr. Graham: To Honolulu, Hawaii.

Mr. Fernandez: Yes.

Mr. Graham: How long did you stay there?

Mr. Fernandez: In 1943 I spent Christmas Day, our first Christmas. The ship I got on had landed in the Aleutian Islands, Solomon Islands, Guadalcanal. We were waiting for those ships. All the fresh ones were in Honolulu waiting for these ships. When they came into Honolulu, they put us on those ships. All the ones that were on that ship had enough time to get out and put on a new crew. I was one of the new crew.

Mr. Graham: What was the name of the ship?

Mr. Fernandez: LCI-80 amphibious force.

Mr. Graham: What was your first job when you went aboard that ship? What did you do when you first got aboard? What was your job?

Mr. Fernandez: There was a lot of work to do. I don’t know how to tell you.

Mr. Graham: Chipping paint?

Mr. Fernandez: Yes, everything.

Mr. Graham: Did you have a duty station where you were assigned? Did they assign you to a particular part of the ship?

Mr. Fernandez: Oh, yes. A loader on a 40- inch gun. The ships had 40s and 20s and the rocket. We had the rocket. When they brought those ships back in there, they used to land on the ramps, on Guadalcanal and everything. They took the ramps off and put the rocket on this ramp. We were working on the rocket. We had to get as close as we can to strafe the beaches so the Marines could get in.

Mr. Graham: Where was the first place that you went on the ship after you left Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Fernandez: We went to the Marshall Islands. That was the first place. There was nothing on there. We came back to Honolulu again to get ready to go to the Mariana Islands. I spent another Christmas, 1944, in Honolulu, Pearl Harbor. We got ready; we left for the Mariana Islands in April 1944, I believe. When we were in the middle of the ocean, Roosevelt died. Okay, we still went. We landed in Saipan, Tinian, and Guam. We landed in Saipan and Tinian and another bunch landed in Guam, another crew. I believe there were twelve LCIs all together that made the first landing.

Mr. Graham: That was the first landing in Saipan?

Mr. Fernandez: In the Mariana Islands. We landed in Saipan and Tinian.

Mr. Graham: Did you take tanks, men, or what ashore? What did your ship take ashore to land?

Mr. Fernandez: What do you mean?

Mr. Graham: You said you landed in the islands there at Saipan, what did you unload there?

Mr. Fernandez: The Marines were right behind us. The LSTs were unloading all the Marines, so all the Marines were right behind us. All the tanks, jeeps, and everything were right behind us. We go as far as we could so we won't get stuck. We were about a hundred feet from the island. We threw the rocket so it will strafe the beaches so the Marines can get in there. The airplanes were strafing the beaches. The battleships tried to get the big guns out of the Japanese but they were in the holes.

At Iwo Jima, the first wave went through. I say the sand was like sugar. There wasn't er
want us. They wanted the Marines. They didn't start shooting at us. We were closer than the Marine

Mr. Graham: The Japanese.

Mr. Fernandez: The Japanese, yes. We go back. We left the first bunch and go back for the next bunch coming right behind. The second bunch lands. When the Marines took enough land, they came out and the Army went in there because the Army had heavier guns. The Marines didn't have heavy guns. They didn't have machine guns.

Mr. Graham: Small arms.

Mr. Fernandez: Yes. That's the way we did the landing.

Mr. Graham: How many days did you stay there off the island?

Mr. Fernandez: The Marines were talking about when we went in there, the little island is about twenty-something—

Mr. Graham: Two miles by five.

Mr. Fernandez: A small island. They said, "We're going to take it in twenty-four hours." It took them thirty-two days. I believe it was thirty-two days. After thirty-two days, we're still there. Circle around, circle around. Waiting to soften, we used to call it "soften" the island. What do you call the last big island?

Mr. Graham: Okinawa?

Mr. Fernandez: Okinawa. We were waiting for Okinawa. We stayed there all of February until they were ready for Okinawa. We stayed there at Iwo Jima until they got ready. When they were ready to take the Marines to Okinawa, that's when we left Iwo Jima.

When we landed at Okinawa, I believe it was Easter Sunday down there when we landed the Marines. We didn't stay too long, our ships and the rest. They said as soon as the Marines went in at Okinawa, all the ones who had eighteen months overseas could come back to the States. So, I left by ship along with the rest of the men at Okinawa and they sent us to Guam so we could get a ship back to the States. We stayed in Guam three weeks, I believe, waiting for a ride to come back to the States. We already had eighteen months overseas.

Mr. Graham: What kind of ship did you come back on? A transport?

Mr. Fernandez: It was a transport, I believe, yes. We were supposed to land at San Francisco but when we were half-way the order came and we landed at Seattle, Washington. We came to Seattle.

Mr. Graham: Put you way on up the coast.

Mr. Fernandez: They kept us three days. Showered us and sprayed all the clothes, everything. For three days we didn't go anywhere. Showered everywhere from head to toe. They sprayed all the clothes we had.

Mr. Graham: To fumigate.

Mr. Fernandez: Yes, and wait for the papers because we got a thirty-day leave after you got to the States. When they got everything ready, they didn't have anything but trains and busses for the servicemen. That's what we had. We didn't have a plane like that. They didn't fly us. I left June 30th for San Antonio. Fourth of July I was in San Antonio 1945. When I got to San Antonio, it was quiet. No movement at all. From San Antonio I took a bus to Cuero, a little town I don't think you've ever heard of.

Mr. Graham: Turkey country.

Mr. Fernandez: We used to farm in a little town called Thomaston, Texas. I don't know if you've heard of it. Close to the Guadalupe River. That's where I was born and raised, at the Guadalupe River.

Mr. Graham: Good catfish.

Mr. Fernandez: We were farmers. The year I was born, there was no work in town.

Mr. Graham: After you came back home did you stay home or did you have to go back to the service again?

Mr. Fernandez: I had my ten days leave and they gave me the chance to report to Galveston or Corpus. So, I reported to Galveston at Pelican Island. I stayed about a week or two to fix all the papers. They sent me to New Orleans for special training. I stayed in New Orleans eight days and the war was over. Sixth of August, I believe it was, and the war was over. I stayed there in Louisiana at New Orleans and they shipped me back to Galveston because I was single; I wasn't married. They let out all the ones that were married and had families. They got out first. I spent six months at Galveston before I got a discharge. Then I got my discharge at Hitchcock.

Mr. Graham: Let me ask you this now. Of all your experiences overseas when you were attacking the islands, is there anything that you remember most of all? Are there some things you think about more than others that happened to you there? Is there anything that's special that you still remember?

Mr. Fernandez: Like what?

Mr. Graham: Like something that happened. The war itself, ships attacking the island, and such as that.

Mr. Fernandez: When we were at Iwo Jima, the Japanese used to bomb us every evening. Admiral Nimitz had the fleet way out. So, about six o'clock in the evening we see, you know, all the battleships and destroyers and heavy cruisers have some

anti-aircraft rounds for planes. When we saw them fire way out in the water you can see it. We said the Japanese were coming in there. When the battleships, destroyers, and cruisers opened their fire, you could see tracers. Red ones. That was tracers; that was not bullets aimed at Japanese aircraft. They stopped it there.

The only thing that I know that won the war in the Pacific, let me tell you what: All the divisions we had in the United States, had some Indians. We had some Indians on the ships. We had some Indians with the Marines. The Japanese didn't know how to speak Indian. So, the Indians seemed the best to the American people because the Japanese couldn't break that code.

Mr. Graham: Yes, Navajo Indians.

Mr. Fernandez: That's the only way, I believe, that we won the war. If the Japanese would have known where Nimitz had the ships set up, they would have bombed it all.

Mr. Graham: I'm sure that's true.

Mr. Fernandez: But they couldn't figure out how to break the Indian code for the Americans.

Mr. Graham: You have a very good story. Is there anything else you want to tell us that I haven't asked you? Can you think of anything else that you want to say?

Mr. Fernandez: I remember after we landed there at Iwo Jima, we were told that the Japanese would send six hundred planes to Iwo Jima from Okinawa. There wasn't but one plane that went through. Right between our ships and we got full of water.

Mr. Graham: Sprayed.

Mr. Fernandez: That's the only plane that I saw that went through on our crew. We used to call the Atlantic Fleet the Sixth Fleet. I don't know what they call it now. The Sixth Fleet was in the Atlantic Ocean. In the Pacific was the Seventh Fleet. Something like that.

Diana Fernandez Padilla:

Daddy, you should tell how you felt when you all landed the Marines, the first batch.

Mr. Fernandez: I didn't feel anything. I was young.

Ms. Padilla: No, but how you felt because they were killing them.

Mr. Fernandez: We felt sorry for all the Marines. They could get killed when they landed. The first round of Marines at Iwo Jima were all killed and the ocean turned red. All

I can still see when I remember is that ocean red as could be with blood. Very sad.

Ms. Padilla: The water turned red.

Mr. Fernandez: Oh, yes. The Japanese radios we used to hear on our ship, “The American planes are going to see all blood when they take Iwo Jima.” At Iwo Jima, that little bitty island, I don’t know. Nimitz wants it straight from Iwo Jima. It isn’t but a hundred and-something miles to Tokyo. It was straight. He really wanted Iwo Jima to put the B-29s in there because the B-29s were flying from Saipan bombing Tokyo. He wanted that for the B-29s. They used to come in with one motor blown up so they going to stop in there for re-fueling and emergency landing at Iwo Jima instead of Saipan. It was kind of far.

Mr. Graham: To fly to Japan. That was an important airbase.

Mr. Fernandez: Yes. That’s what I say. Why does Nimitz want that little old island? That’s what he wanted it for.

Mr. Graham: As an air field.

Mr. Fernandez: Yes, an air field.

Mr. Graham: You have a very good story. Is there anything else now?

Mr. Fernandez: When they were bombing, they had all the warships. The *Indianapolis* was bombing the hell out of Iwo Jima. After we landed at Iwo Jima, MacArthur wanted the *Indianapolis* back in the Philippines. The Japanese sunk it before it got to the Philippines.

Mr. Graham: Yes, that was a terrible thing.

You have a very interesting story. We really appreciate your telling us this. Is there anything else now?

Ms. Padilla: Do you remember anything else, Daddy?

Mr. Fernandez: I can’t remember any more.

Ms. Padilla: You were saying when you all were going to Iwo Jima that you all had to wait. The nineteenth wasn’t supposed to be day. What day was it supposed to be?

Mr. Fernandez: The seventeenth of February was supposed to be the landing at Iwo Jima. We were at Iwo Jima already. MacArthur had all the ships tied up. We had to wait until the nineteenth to land the Marines at Iwo Jima.

Mr. Graham: Yes, that kind of happens a lot in war. Things don't always go according to schedule. That's great. You saw a lot of action and some important things. I can see why you would enjoy this today.

Mr. Fernandez: Yes, I enjoyed it good.

Mr. Graham: I want to thank you on behalf of the Nimitz Museum for sharing your experiences with us. We really appreciate it.

Ms. Padilla: You're welcome.

Mr. Fernandez: I have a book.

Ms. Padilla: He has a book now. My daughter compiled for him.

Mr. Fernandez: When I was on the ship, the LCI-80 and all the bunch, I got a picture of my ship but just a piece of it. The LCI-80, you can barely see it. I wonder if I could me another one?

Ms. Padilla: Where would he get that?

Mr. Graham: It would be difficult because the War Department would have all those.

Mr. Fernandez: They made scrap out of those ships.

Mr. Graham: Oh, yes. I'm sure they have.

Mr. Fernandez: Another thing, I really liked the war ships.

Final

Bonnie Day Rush

August 17, 2011

Dublin, Texas

Tape 1370

