

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Educational and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Salvador Marcello

Date of Interview: October 7, 2005

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Interview with Mr. Salvador Marcello

Mr. Cox: Today is October 7th, 2005. We're in Katy, Texas to do interviews of veterans who served in the China-Burma-India Theater and we have the pleasure of interviewing Salvador Marcello—

Mr. Marcello: (whisper) We're in Houston.
(tape clicks off and on)

Mr. Cox: So we have the pleasure of introducing Salvador Marcello regarding his experiences during World War II. May I call you Sal?

Mr. Marcello: Yes, that's what they call me.

Mr. Cox: Sal, tell me a little bit about your background, where you were born, when you were born, where you went to school and we'll just take it from there.

Mr. Marcello: All right. I was born in DeRidder, Louisiana in November 9th, 1921. I'm going to be 83 in November the ninth. So, don't tell me I don't look like I'm 83 'cause I am. (laughter) I do feel very well for my age and luckily I'm able to get around better than some of my people that served in World War II. But other than that, you know, we are very happy to be at this age, my wife and I both are. DeRidder, Louisiana was a place where, in 1939, I began to see a lot of changes because people begin to come in town and buying up, renting everything they possibly could; they were building Fort Polk. Fort Polk was

nearest Leesville, Louisiana; it's between Leesville and DeRidder, two small towns in that part of Louisiana. They had the maneuvers out there. And the maneuvers was in the piney woods and of course, most of the people out there, when they came out there to Louisiana, they suffered from the heat (chuckle) if they were from the east and the north. And they also found they had a lot of chiggers and they didn't get around the trees because it was pine trees out there and you know, pine trees you can suffocate in the pine forest because there is no wind blowing to wave some of the good fresh air on you. But anyway, we recognized, my Dad had a grocery store and we had a thing of going to see movies on a Sunday night and he'd go put the lights on and we'd go to the movies. One night, we had a group of soldiers knocking on the door, we didn't open on Sunday. We had the blue laws in those days. That was the day we took off anyway, when we enjoyed being off that day. They were knocking, they were hungry. There were no places for them to eat. So my Dad says, "What do you want?" He said, "We're hungry. We'll buy anything you've got to eat." So they broke, got into the store, opener and everything is edible. They'll eat Vienna sausages, they took the sardines, they took the crackers, they took everything we had in the cold section, ham, cheese and all that. The next day we had send trucks to 50 miles to buy more groceries to open up again. (laughter)

Mr. Cox: They paid you for all this?

Mr. Marcello: Oh, yes, oh yes. They had money but they had no place to spend it, you know. When they had furlough, they never stayed in Leesville or DeRidder,

they'd always go to Shreveport or New Orleans. The two largest cities right near them. But that was quite an experience for us. And what we noticed most of all, we'd stand outside in front of my Dad's store and they'd be having one of these battles with wooden guns and I just wondered why they had the wooden guns. Well, later on as history goes, we were not prepared for World War II, as you well know. They got motivated to do all the—, the women even worked, you know, worked in the factories. But they had wooden guns, they had no kinds of guns at all until they got, I guess, overseas where they needed them. So, this was our first experience and touch with the service. Then I went, after I graduated from high school, I went to Loyola University in New Orleans and I was going to be a dentist so I took pre-dental, I was in pre-dentistry. After I was there a while, my father said, "They may draft you. I talked to the draft board." He says, "But you want to finish this semester, go and volunteer." 'Cause we all wanted to go to the service, we'd have felt bad if we didn't go during World War II, because I had a lot of my friends who had gone. We went over and volunteered and I almost didn't get in. The man says, "Well you have flat feet, do they bother you?" I said, "No, they don't bother me!" and I almost had to talk him into it because he says, "Well, okay, if you feel like you can walk and do things like that." Well, I ended up in the medical corps. As soon as I finished that semester at Loyola, they sent me off to Camp Beauregard, I believe, near Alexandria and they had several camps around there. It was Camp Beauregard, I believe, that's where they put us, and I'll never forget, as soon as we got there, they sent us all

through the examinations and everything, and they transported us all the way out to Abilene, Texas. And I'd never been in west Texas and we landed there about five o'clock in the afternoon and they have dust storms out there, and here's the wind blowing and the dry heat out there, you don't sweat. So we started our basic training, six weeks of basic training. We went through regular basic training there and I passed all that of course. But we never got passes to go out and Abilene was not that big of a city. And I'll never forget when we had our first pass there were a group of us that got together, we went to a steak house and bought us a big steak and when we got through eating, we all picked up our dishes. (laughter) We had the habit of picking up dishes, that's the thing; well, that was part of it. They finally started giving assignments after that, and I went from there on to Denver, Colorado. And I had an assignment there at Fitzsimons General Hospital. And I'll never forget that place because it was winter and at Fitzsimons, I got pneumonia and they put me in the hospital and in those days, they didn't have antibiotics and I was young. So they put me on forced fluids and aspirin and it wasn't too long and I was well and back on duty again. From there, they transferred me over to Cape Cod, and uh—

Mr. Cox: Cape Cod?

Mr. Marcello: Cape Cod, all the way from Denver they transferred me, which I had a good assignment out there. That was on Cape Cod and we used to go into Buzzards Bay, you know, and that was a very good assignment. We didn't stay there long but I enjoyed that part and I went back when I retired in 1985 from my

company because I wanted to go see Buzzards Bay where we used to go on occasions at night and—

Mr. Cox: Where you in training up there?

Mr. Marcello: No, I was not in training. I was with a dental unit there; there was a large dental unit. A lot of people don't realize how much care these people got in the service in dental care which is very important. The amount of dental care I got from my hometown, we came from small towns, we had a dentist or two, they might have been old fellows, you know, and if you had a toothache, they'd pull the tooth instead of filling it. But anyway, I got good dental care because I was connected with it and so did a lot of the other soldiers. They had a large number of dentists there and I worked with those people and I learned a lot, you know— (phone ringing)

Mr. Cox: Did you have a unit number?

Mr. Marcello: You know, we were there at the, we were attached as Air Force and it was the same hospital where John F. Kennedy's son was born. What was the name of it? It passes me at this time—

Mr. Cox: Bethesda?

Mr. Marcello: No, Bethesda is up in Baltimore. But this is on Cape Cod and of course, you know the Kennedy's had a summer home out there but this was, I'll have to think about this, it was one of the bases I heard about after I left there. But it was a nice hospital and it had a nice dental unit, a lot of soldiers got good care there and also while I was up in that area, I was sent to a place where, where they didn't use the dental and we got to go in and see some people that were

coming back. And they sent some of the Germans back. They had some of the German kids that were very, very young, maybe 14 or 15 years old with limbs cut off and things like that and you know, you couldn't talk to them, they were very angry, which is natural these kids are away from home and they got the best care. They would fly them back into the United States and this was the type of hospital that took a lot of these people who came wounded, whether they were enemies or the people of American soldiers. After I left that hospital, they sent me to Fort Devens; there's where I thought I was going to go to Europe and that's where I wanted to go (laughter) so they sent us back cross-country to Los Angeles and we left from there. From outside of Los Angeles and we left on a ship and they told us not to say anything to anybody about where we were going, and where we were. It was always telling go hush-hush, well, you know, after one person knew it, everybody knew it. Well anyway, I had a chance to visit, we had a two-day furlough, and I visited a cousin while I was out there and we were destined to go to India. We spent 30 days on that boat and we stopped in Australia, in Sidney, Australia after 15 days. And I'll never forget that because they let the sailors off, you know the ones that were manning the boat, and they had a big dance, the USO got on there from Australia, and there were 50 girls, ladies, from the USO and about 500 men having a dance. (laughter) It was tag down, tag all, it was more fun to watch them than it was to dance. It wasn't a dance at all. They wouldn't let us off ship, you know, so we entertained ourselves. There were a couple of guys that knew how to play the guitar and all during

the day, but after 30 days it was a little boring. Being young it didn't matter, you know, we'd watch, never being on a boat before, well I'd been on a boat trip before, a ship across to Europe. We landed in Bombay, and immediately when we landed in Bombay, they put us on a troop train. Now a troop train over there aren't like they are anyplace else. They didn't have good seats, they had these little wood seats, you know, in the middle and all these people. You could notice, the first thing you noticed the country was dirty and you'd see these people begging. They've got more people begging in that country and I imagine they're still there, the Hindus. A lot of Hindus, and they've got these sheets over their heads, you know, and they sleep that way and they'd say "bock-cheese, bock-cheese" that's "Give me something". And they'd jump, even when the train would pull out, they would do that, they would jump on the train trying to get any kind of money they could. Well, we landed over there, and we went outside of Calcutta, which is Pandaveswar and when we got there, I guess they first put us in tents until we got assigned to the right—I guess that was in Calcutta they did that, and then we got assigned to these particular places where they wanted to send us in India or wherever we were going. And when they got us assigned there, we heard some bad news; Roosevelt died, and we thought about Truman at that time and we said, "God, we'll never get back with that dummy." Turned out to be one of the best presidents we ever had.

Mr. Cox: Harry Truman?

Mr. Marcello: That's right; he's the one that brought us back when he dropped the bomb. Had not he sent that one, we'd still been over there.

Mr. Cox: Were you assigned to a medical unit over there?

Mr. Marcello: No, I was assigned to a dental unit and there was a dental unit which was two enlisted people working with two dental people.

Mr. Cox: So you didn't have a number then, like the second dental unit or anything like that?

Mr. Marcello: No, all I know is a dental unit. There was a hospital number, and the hospital was, I believe, 142. But I'll give that to you as a correction when I send it to you because that I can never remember those numbers and I never found anybody else that I served with over there. It's kind of odd, but—(laughter)

Mr. Cox: There were four of you then?

Mr. Marcello: Two dentists, I think they were both Captains because they were both general officers and we were two enlisted men. And the other fella had been there a little while before I got there and he left a little bit before I left.

Mr. Cox: Were you a dental assistant?

Mr. Marcello: A dental assistant and I got to do different things; I learned quite a bit that I thought I was going to use when I got back to be a dentist. Well, anyway, we stayed over there about a year and then we stayed there a while and they started transferring us out. I don't know whether they were closing that hospital or what, but I know some of the people went, were at an Air Force base near us in Pandaveswar. It was a hospital that serviced a lot of people from the Air Force and all those surrounding areas. We had Australian people

there and I remember we'd get out into the woods just on Sunday. And they'd try to entertain us and they'd get a truck and they'd take us through the woods and we'd see all these monkeys, they were Rhesus monkeys. And you know I worked for a pharmaceutical company that made polio vaccine and it was made out of the kidney of the Rhesus monkey. And this is where they got the kidneys from, that Rhesus monkey we saw. They also had these big long snakes and we had a guy in our unit there that, that was from Tennessee, and he was used to fooling with snakes, and he'd kill one that stretches across this room.

Mr. Cox: Which is about—

Mr. Marcello: Six or more feet, or so, or more like 12 feet, he allowed me to hold one end and he'd hold the other end and I have a picture of that one. It was quite interesting, you know, because we didn't know how to fool with snakes. But it was interesting to go out to see all these monkeys, you know, and everybody wanted a monkey, but not these. (laughter) I've heard stories afterwards how these monkeys would go into a city and take over the town. Do you remember that?

Mr. Cox: I've heard that.

Mr. Marcello: And I've kept up with things in India because we have a lot of people who have come back over here. When I went to work for my company, the pharmaceutical company, we had a lot of educated people, the educated class of India. A lot of them would get educated in England and they would come over to the United States. And I'll never forget when I was assigned as a

manager of the Cleveland district, we had a very good surgeon that came over there and he did research for us at one of the hospitals; Mount Sinai Hospital over there. But, still, there was something, I don't know. I went over there, I must have weighed around 180 pounds, I had a tendency to be kind of heavy, and when I came back I was around 130 pounds. It was a good place to go to lose weight, isn't it?

Mr. Cox: Yes it is. (chuckle)

Mr. Marcello: But, the food they served us had no taste, as you well know. It was all powdered food, we had no refrigeration. We couldn't eat any vegetables because they fertilized with human manure, their fuel was taken from the cow, you know, and as they walked along. People asked me, I said, "They worshipped the cow, they didn't kill the cow." I had a chance in Calcutta to go downstairs to see the burning ghats. It was interesting to learn some of the culture of that country but I tell you what, there was a lot of diseases, and the amebiosis was the one I was concerned about. Anytime got a bad case of amebiosis, they had to send you back because you couldn't find anything to treat it with.

Mr. Cox: What does that entail?

Mr. Marcello: That's intestinal. That comes from an intestinal organism. Very, very hard, at that time to treat, some of them would die from that. You see, that was one of the biggest fear that a lot of us had, when we went to India, was diseases, as you well know. Now we didn't get shot at or anything like that. The fellas that flew the Hump, they had a lot of risk going through the Hump. But many

of us went to the service, one in eight went to battle, we did a lot of service. Which our work was to keep the guys happy. Now we had a busy clinic. We had nurses there; they had a big nursing unit. We took care of all those personnel, we took care of other personnel and of course we had emergency. If somebody needed jaw surgery or something like that, our dental unit did it. It was an interesting stay. We'd get together; we had a few years so people would come out and put on a dance for us. They were interesting people, many of them were mixed English and Indian that stayed there. They're people come from different parts of the Australia and U.K. and it was interesting to see some of these people. I remember going to a church just before I left in Calcutta, they moved us back to Calcutta. But I thought when I went up to Karachi it was interesting, it looked like a cleaner place than it was in Calcutta. You know, the Muslims were up there, and you'd see these guys with the big turbans facing the sun and I didn't realize now with the war, the way the war is right now, how close we were to all that was going on right now, you know, so we were innocent people. I did not get into China, and some people say, "Why didn't you go to China?" and I said, "Because I wasn't in charge of my travels." (Laughter) Uncle Sam was in charge of all that. Well, we finally got ready to come back and, uh, I'll never forget that the, just before we came back, we didn't have nothing to do, sitting in the hotel in Calcutta on Chowrangee Road, which is the main street, and there was one good restaurant in that town called Furpell's. I've asked some of the other people that were over there and they remember that, it was maybe a

five-star restaurant at this time, it may still be over there, I don't know. But we went over there and we went dinner and that's where we had one of the best meals during that time. But the food was terrible. I would like to say it was an experience but it wouldn't be a place I'd like to go back to live, nor back to travel through. When we got back and got ready to come, I was waiting and one day one of the officers came by and he said, "I'm looking for Sal Marcello." I said, "That's me." and he said, "What are you doing?" and I said, "Well, I'm waiting to go home, get my orders to go home." He says, "Well, the Red Cross has asked, your parents want to know what's wrong. If you're still hurt or what." They did a lot of that. I said, "I'm fine." He said, "Why haven't you written home?" I said, "I think I've written." But we've been travelling back from Calcutta, I mean Karachi, and then moved in, we've been on the move and didn't get a chance to do a lot of writing. I guess I was wrong not to write but I said, "You can tell them that I'm fine. We're getting ready to come back." I guess they got the message at that time. Well, we got back on that boat again, (chuckle) for 30 days back and when we got to San Francisco, they had a boat out there with nice looking girls. We hadn't seen any American girls, you know, for so long, and I said, "How beautiful all those women are!" And a lot of guys that went over there married these English, some of the Indian girls and started a family. They had been over there so long, some people stayed over there a very long time I guess. Depending on what their job was at that time. When I got back, they discharged us and they were trying to get us to sign up again. Quite a few of

them did sign up again. We got people here in this basha that signed up for a longer term with them, that liked the service and had a good career with it. Well, I wanted to go back to school and I thought without an education I would never make it. I really felt that way. But when I got back, my folks met me in Houston, which is, they drove over because they had relatives, my mother's relatives live there. And I had, they discharged me from San Francisco. They sent us to El Paso for our group and we got discharged in Fort Bliss in El Paso and then they gave me a bus trip with so many dollars to go back. (laughter) And when I got there, my father and parents said, "I can't believe how much weight you lost." They thought I was sick. My father's cousin was a doctor, he had me examined when I got back but there was nothing wrong with me. It was just the fact that I didn't like the food. And then I said, "well," I went to work for an uncle when I got back for a little while, he used to own a packing house and I said, "I'm going back to college" and I went back to Loyola for a year and I applied. And I had some good friends over there that applied, and they said, "Well, you have not enough hours, we got" there was a jam of people with degrees getting in so they said, "You'd better go another year. I made my decision I would not go another year. I went back to Houston and went to work with my uncle and there was a school opening in Houston, the University of Houston, a pharmacy school. Because they needed pharmacists. So I said, "I don't know if I want to go back to school." My father said, "If you go back to school and finish I'll give you a car." Man, I thought that was great! Cars were scarce in those years.

They'd been rationing them. So I said, "Okay, I'll think about." This friend of mine who was from New Orleans had a sister living in Houston and he came by to see me. He and I had applied. He came back and he said, "Look, I'm going to LSU Medical School. Why don't you come back and go with me?" I said, "No, I'm too old. I've got to get on with my life and I gotta have a job and I want to support myself." We felt that way, you know, at that stage in life. Because we didn't know what we were going to do even though we were single. And he had his brother with him and his brother said, "Why don't you go to University of Houston, they're opening a school here." So I went out there, and I became good friends with his brother. But the other went to medical school and finished and he's deceased now, but when I got done with pharmacist school I went to work for a very good company and stayed 35 years and I met my wife. I was a pharmacist, she was a nurse, I met her while I was working for the company, we ended up with four children and here we've been married for 50 years and that's our life.

Mr. Cox: Let me ask you a question. I want to go back when you were in the dental unit over there in India – was it pretty primitive, did you have power or was it hand-operated—

Mr. Marcello: No, it was not. We had electrical units. It was a general hospital or station hospital and those units were well equipped. We were not in the field. Field units had to have the pumps, but I was never assigned to the field.

Mr. Cox: You never did work one of those—

Mr. Marcello: No, never did. I know when I came here to the basha, they all said, He was in a dental unit. I can remember out in the field. But we weren't that way. We had good dentists, these were outstanding. I better get going, I hope I haven't taken too much of your time.

Mr. Cox: You certainly haven't. Well, let me shake your hand and tell you thank you sir for your service to our country.

Mr. Marcello: Well, thank you. You know I did what they asked me to do. And we did it well. And, ah, you know, a lot of times there's a lot of service to these men to try to keep them healthy. These are the people they should never forget because I think the people from the health departments, you don't see too much about them. They may not have a gun or they may have had a gun if they were out in the field. I know my wife's had one sister who was a nurse, she was one of the first that went to Europe and she's just deceased not too long ago, and ah, she was in some bad situations. She was in one of those units that would fly in and pick up the wounded. So, we all had a job. And I think everybody did it well and we were obedient people. I didn't see that many people that was busted, that everyone's talking about. This was the sort of people that that hey, we want to do a job that they asked us to do. And we did what we were supposed to do. We came back and we were happy we went.

Mr. Cox: Nothing's worse than having a toothache,--

Mr. Marcello: People don't think of anything like dentistry, you know, but your dental health is very important. It's important; you take a person that gets to be 35 or 40

and loses their teeth, that's bad. See, I'm 83 and I still have my teeth. This helps you with your digestion and everything else. But I was going to be, I was sold on that profession, but after I got into pharmacist school, I was very happy with that profession.

Mr. Cox: And you ended up being a pharmacist.

Mr. Marcello: Yes, but I didn't want to work in a drug store. I graduated in the first class of Pharmacy, University of Houston, 1950. I accepted a position with a pharmaceutical company as a sales representative – worked in Lafayette, Louisiana and Houston, Texas – made Sales Manager in Houston – moved to Lubbock, Texas, and Cleveland, Ohio and back to Houston, Texas. I retired with the same company after 35 years of service. My education made this possible.

Mr. Cox: This concludes our interview with Sal Marcello.

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