

**THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR  
(ADMIRAL NIMITZ MUSEUM)**

**Center for Pacific War Studies**

**Fredericksburg, Texas**

**An Interview with**

**Chelly P. Mendoza**

**Baldwin, Louisiana**

**May 25, 2006**

**1<sup>st</sup> Medical Squad, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division**

**Oro Bay, New Guinea, Admiralty Islands, Leyte, Luzon**

**Liberated Prisoners at Santo Tomas**

**Seven Battle Stars, Purple Heart**

**Ambulance Driver**

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is May 25, 2006. I am interviewing Mr. Chelly P. Mendoza by telephone. His address is: 404 Main, Baldwin, Louisiana, 70514. His mailing address is: P. O. Box 492, Baldwin, Louisiana, 70514. His phone number is area code 337-923-4219. This interview is in support of the National Museum of Pacific Wars, Center for Pacific War Studies, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer

Chelly, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today and I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II. Now the first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the Nimitz Museum. When I do these in person I give them to the person to read and sign but since this is by phone, let me read this to you.

“Agreement read.” Is that okay with you?

Mr. Mendoza

So far.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, one thing we need to do also, we like to get an alternate address. Sometimes people move or whatever, so is there someone that we can reach if we can't reach you? A son or daughter or someone else?

Mr. Mendoza

I have a daughter that lives next door.

Mr. Misenhimer

That would be good. Can you give me her name and address and phone number?

Mr. Mendoza

Her name Marilyn Burgess. Her address is P. O. Box 203, Baldwin, Louisiana. She lives next door to me. Her phone number is 337-923-4907.

Mr. Misenhimer

We have had the experience sometimes that people go to a nursing home or they move or something happens and we try to reach them and we can't. So we like to have an alternative address so we can get them.

Mr. Mendoza

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is your birth date?

Mr. Mendoza

December 25, 1921.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were a Christmas present, huh?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes. (laugh) I get gypped out of a present.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Mendoza

In Jeanerette, Louisiana.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Mendoza

I had five brothers and no sisters.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were any of your brothers in World War II?

Mr. Mendoza

Two of them were. They were both in the Army. One was in the European Theater and the other; I don't believe he left the States.

Mr. Misenhimer

The one that was in the European Theater, did he come home from the war?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes. He's the oldest one and he's still living. He will be 90 this month.

Mr. Misenhimer

You grew up during the Depression. How did the Depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Mendoza

We didn't have any money but nobody suffered to go to bed at night hungry.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your father's occupation?

Mr. Mendoza

At one time he was a foreman with the Highway Department. That's about all he did all his life besides early days doing carpentry work.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was he able to keep employed during most of the Depression?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Mendoza

Franklin, Louisiana.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you finish there?

Mr. Mendoza

I finished school in 1941.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do when you graduated?

Mr. Mendoza

When I graduated I went into the shipyard at Morgan City. I stayed there about six months. Then Uncle Sam said, "I need you." I was drafted; I didn't volunteer.

Mr. Misenhimer

What date did you go into the service?

Mr. Mendoza

August 14, 1942.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do at the shipyard?

Mr. Mendoza

I was with the painters.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were they building war ships? Or what were they building?

Mr. Mendoza

Dry dock repairing ships.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of ships? Were these war ships or what?

Mr. Mendoza

Any kind. They put them in the big dry dock.

Mr. Misenhimer

And that was where?

Mr. Mendoza

Morgan City, Louisiana.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you went into the service you were drafted; you didn't have a choice?

Mr. Mendoza

That's right. (laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you sworn in at?

Mr. Mendoza

Into the service was at Camp Livingston, Louisiana.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay and that's where?

Mr. Mendoza

Near the bottom part of Louisiana.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is that near Alexandria?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes around there somewhere. Then we left Camp Livingston and went to Camp Barkley, Texas for basic training.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that basic training?

Mr. Mendoza

It wasn't too bad. The eating was bad. After that we went to Fort Bliss.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you at Camp Barkley?

Mr. Mendoza

About six months I guess, more or less.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you took your basic training there?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have the infiltration course where they shot live ammunition over you?

Mr. Mendoza

Oh yes, we went through that.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that?

Mr. Mendoza

(laugh) It wasn't too bad as long as you didn't stick your butt up.

Mr. Misenhimer

Or your head.

Mr. Mendoza

Under the barbed wire and all that stuff and through the mud holes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything in particular that you recall from basic training?

Mr. Mendoza

Being home sick.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were 20 when you went in?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Mendoza

I think I was still working at the ship yard when Pearl Harbor was hit. I don't recall exactly.

Mr. Misenhimer

I just wondered if you remembered what your reaction to it was or anything?



Mr. Mendoza

We were all shocked.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you finished basic training did you go to any kind of specialist school or anything?

Mr. Mendoza

From basic we went to Fort Bliss, Texas. We stayed there about six months to do more training, mostly medical. I was with the 1<sup>st</sup> Medical Squadron, attached to the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you travel to Fort Bliss?

Mr. Mendoza

By train.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that train trip?

Mr. Mendoza

Rough. There was nothing but GI's on it, so you know it couldn't have been too pleasant.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did it to take?

Mr. Mendoza

From Barkley to Fort Bliss, about 12 to 14 hours by train. We had to stop every so often.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got to Fort Bliss what did you live in there?

Mr. Mendoza

We had barracks; wooden barracks.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do in Fort Bliss?

Mr. Mendoza

We had more or less bivouacs. We had to go into the desert for two or three days; dig foxholes and cover up and carrying a bunch of GI's. They weren't wounded but we practiced carrying them from the front line to the field hospital; dry runs. Mostly it was all dry runs, but it was still hot.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of medical training did you get anywhere?

Mr. Mendoza

Well, I don't know how high I went but one place we were litter bearing; carrying guys off the field, carrying them to the hospitals and giving them morphine or whatever they needed; bandaging their wounds and all that. Then after we went overseas we did that for awhile and then I was promoted to ambulance driver.

Mr. Misenhimer

I'll get to that in a little bit. Let's finish up with this place.

Mr. Mendoza

I was still in El Paso.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you were there for about six months then?

Mr. Mendoza

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have a lot of marching and that sort of thing?

Mr. Mendoza

About two or three 25 mile hikes. We were attached to the Infantry, Cavalry Division and we had to follow them. (laugh) It was pretty rough. That was the hardest thing they had to do over there besides sleeping in the foxholes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you wear a Red Cross armband?

Mr. Mendoza

We did in the States. When we got overseas we pulled the damn things off. They were a perfect target. We pulled them off. We were not supposed to be carrying any ammunition either but we carried something with us; pistols or something. That was for our own protection.

Mr. Misenhimer

Right. Is there anything else that you recall from your time at Fort Bliss?

Mr. Mendoza

No, not really.

Mr. Misenhimer

You went through some sandstorms at Fort Bliss, right.

Mr. Mendoza

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is there anything else that you recall from your time at Fort Bliss?

Mr. Mendoza

When I was in Fort Bliss I never had any furloughs from the time I got into the service until I came back in 1945. We were up for leave and orders came in that night before, "All leaves are cancelled; get ready to go overseas." That knocked me off and that's a long time to be away from home, I'll tell you.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's right. When did you leave to go overseas?

Mr. Mendoza

We left for overseas, let's see; after we left Fort Bliss we went to San Francisco to board the ship. We stayed there overnight and got on the ship to go overseas. We didn't know where we were going until about two days out. We left Frisco on May 26, 1943. We were on our way for 21 days on a damn freighter, with 13,000 GI's on there. We were sleeping on plywood about three decks below the waterline. Hot. First we went to New Guinea.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of ship was this?

Mr. Mendoza

It was a freighter; a cattle boat. We had to sleep on plywood on an iron deck. It wasn't clean. People were vomiting all over the place. You had rust everywhere. Oh my god.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many bunks high was it?

Mr. Mendoza

We were sleeping on plywood on the floor.

Mr. Misenhimer

On the floor; no bunks at all?

Mr. Mendoza

No. We would use our shoes for a pillow. It was rough I'll tell you for damn sure.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was the food on that ship?

Mr. Mendoza

Hmmph. (laugh) We had beans for breakfast. You couldn't eat them. You had to hold your plate and try to keep from throwing up all over; people next to you were throwing up in your plate. My god. Going to the bathroom was the same way. It wasn't much of a ride. 21 days of that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was this an American ship, or what kind of a ship was it?

Mr. Mendoza

It was an American ship; a cattle boat I guess they called it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you cross the equator?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any kind of a ceremony when you crossed the equator?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes we had a little celebration when we crossed the equator. Davy Jones Locker. The Navy had some kind of a little celebration.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they treat you a little rough going across the equator?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes. (laugh) Pretty rough.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were some of the things they did to you?

Mr. Mendoza

You had to go through a belt line and different things. Crawl across the floor on your hands and knees. Different things.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get a certificate making you a shellback?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you land at New Guinea?

Mr. Mendoza

Oro Bay.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do there?

Mr. Mendoza

We had to clean them out. There was still fighting going on. That was our first landing.

Arrived June 1943 and were there at least three weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you still with the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes. We stayed with the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry all the way through because we were attached to them; to the Infantry, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you in a particular unit? A hospital unit or anything?

Mr. Mendoza

I was with the 1<sup>st</sup> Medical Squadron. Each landing was a different Cavalry; the 12<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, the 5<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry. Each landing was in a different Division.

Mr. Misenhimer

Those are regiments?

Mr. Mendoza

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division and those are regiments?

Mr. Mendoza

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you landed there at Oro Bay, this was the initial landing? The attack landing?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did that go?

Mr. Mendoza

It was pretty rough. It had a lot of mountains and jungles and all that stuff and it wasn't like walking down a street. It was hurry up and dig a hole and cover up before night falls.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was there quite a bit of Japanese resistance?

Mr. Mendoza

At first. We were the second wave that hit there. They had a few thousand there, but not as many because the first wave pretty well cleaned them out. But they had a few snipers that we had to get, they were hanging in coconut trees; waiting. A lot of them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were there many people wounded or killed when you made that landing?

Mr. Mendoza

On our landing; the first landing they had a few thousand killed, but we had a couple of hundred killed, I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me some things that happened while you were there.

Mr. Mendoza

I used to get a charge, following the Infantry and those cats with the flamethrowers firing into the caves. I just loved to hear them rats hollering and screaming in those damn



things. We would burn them out and when they came out we would shoot them. Our 1<sup>st</sup> Calvary Division never did take any prisoners. We were supposed to take them to the field hospital but for some reason they never did get there. (laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

Pretty rough fighting.

Mr. Mendoza

It was.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were some other things that happened there?

Mr. Mendoza

The same thing over and over again. We would travel from one little town to another. I don't remember the towns. It wasn't towns, it was little huts, rag huts and mud huts and bamboo covered huts. But like I said, I would imagine it was about three weeks we stayed on there.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were you doing? Were you a litter bearer there or what were you doing?

Mr. Mendoza

I was a litter bearer there. Hauling them from the front line; our men, not the damn Japs. The ones that couldn't walk; we had to pack them back on litters.

Mr. Misenhimer

And that was your job packing them back on the litters?

Mr. Mendoza

Right. Patch them up until they get to the field hospital.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you give blood transfusions and that sort of thing; plasma?

Mr. Mendoza

No we weren't equipped for that. Bandaged their wounds and splint their legs when they were broken and stop the bleeding; all those different things.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have sulpha powder to sprinkle on their wounds?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes. We had the white powder, sulpha. We carried that and morphine; we had that too. We would inject them with that if they were in too much pain.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was it a pretty good field hospital that they had for them there?

Mr. Mendoza

It was open, just under a tent. From there they had to haul them over by boat to the main hospital.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else happened there at Oro Bay?

Mr. Mendoza

Just about the same thing, over and over.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were there for about three weeks you think then?

Mr. Mendoza

I would think so, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then where did you go?

Mr. Mendoza

From Oro Bay we went to Brisbane, Australia. There we went to amphibious training. That's off the boat, on the boat, with a full pack down the ropes, the nets and a dry run to the beaches and back and forth for three or four weeks I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer

On Oro Bay you didn't go down those nets into the boats?

Mr. Mendoza

No. We went in landing craft troops.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you get to the landing craft from your freighter?

Mr. Mendoza

It was through the ramp on that. They were anchored about half a mile from the beach and they put us off the ramp into those boats.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you could go from a ramp into the landing craft?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes. Those boats were made in New Orleans by Higgins. That was a life saver.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you go down to Brisbane; on the same ship you came in or a different ship?

Mr. Mendoza

It was a different ship. They picked us up from New Guinea.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay and then you went down to Brisbane.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes.

How were the people in Brisbane? Were they friendly?

Mr. Mendoza

Most of them were, yes. They were glad to see the Americans because they were on the verge of the next Japanese invasion; it was going to hit Australia.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me ask another question. Back on New Guinea, did you see many of the local natives?

Mr. Mendoza

Oh my god, yes. All they had were g-strings on. (laugh) Mud huts. Dirty. They probably got diseases from that.

Mr. Misenhimer

They had the big fuzzy hair, right?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes and some of them had bones in their noses and ears pierced with rings hanging down; really wild. I had a few pictures that were taken of them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they help you carry the wounded people or anything?

Mr. Mendoza

No. They wouldn't understand what you were talking about. All they did was get in a hut

or behind trees or in caves and hide. They didn't know what the American people were. They thought we were like the Japanese I guess. The Japanese killed a bunch of them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you were in New Guinea, were you shelled by the enemy or bombed by the enemy, or what?

Mr. Mendoza

Mortar shelled yes, but it was mostly snipers down there. There wasn't any heavy artillery there it was machine guns and rifles.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about airplanes; did they bomb you or strafe you?

Mr. Mendoza

No, not in New Guinea.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else happened in Brisbane?

Mr. Mendoza

After we took the amphibious training we went back to medical schools again. Leyte Island is altogether different from New Guinea. We had to have different training on different terrains and all that stuff.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me ask you another question about New Guinea. Was there much malaria there?

Mr. Mendoza

A lot of it. A lot of malaria. It rained every day; hot; mosquitoes. I believe I got malaria there at New Guinea.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, you had malaria did you?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did they use, Atabrine?

Mr. Mendoza

Atabrine tablets; lord have mercy. I took many a pill of that. Everybody had to take that over there. Everyday you had to take an Atabrine tablet.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you went to Brisbane did you get any R&R?

Mr. Mendoza

We got a three day pass in Brisbane.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go on that?

Mr. Mendoza

We went into a small town. It was on the beach. It was a summer resort out there. We spent the day laying on the beach there; relaxing. We also visited Melbourne.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you left Brisbane, where did you go?

Mr. Mendoza

We left Brisbane and went to the Admiralty Islands.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you make a landing there?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What island was that?

Mr. Mendoza

Momote, Lombrum, Pepitalie, Aeuwei, and one is Lorengau and the next one is Russum, and the other one was Pakrambueyo. These were little towns around the Admiralty Islands that we went through.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you landed there did you go down the side of the ship on the nets into the Higgins?

Mr. Mendoza

It was on the nets. That was what we learned in Brisbane.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes you practiced that, but when you landed in the Admiralties, how did you land?

Mr. Mendoza

On the nets.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did anybody fall into the water?

Mr. Mendoza

A few. (laugh) Those packs were kind of heavy and they lost their balance and fell and that water was some rough; up and down and up and down. You had to hold on and make

sure your foot was inside the boat before you let go of the net.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, that landing craft would come up to meet you and you had to time it just right to get into it, didn't you?

Mr. Mendoza

That's right; that's exactly right, yes sir.

Mr. Misenhimer

What wave did you go in there?

Mr. Mendoza

We went in on the first wave, with the Cavalry, right. We were mixed with them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was there much Japanese resistance on the beach?

Mr. Mendoza

Quite a few got killed when we hit the beach. They were sitting on the edge there waiting for us. D-Day was February 29, 1944.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you there?

Mr. Mendoza

We left there and went to Leyte and that was on October 20<sup>th</sup>. So we stayed there from February until October.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were there on the Admiralties that length of time, what all did do there?



Mr. Mendoza

Not too much of anything. School every day.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they have a hospital or anything there?

Mr. Mendoza

They had a field hospital under a tent, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they bring wounded in from other places to there?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes. Those that were too bad off they took them into Brisbane, Australia by plane. We had an airstrip there.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your job there?

Mr. Mendoza

Ambulance driver.

Mr. Misenhimer

So that's when you got to be an ambulance driver; tell me about that.

Mr. Mendoza

I was doing both. Whenever we were first landing we had to be on litter bearing; carrying them off. Then when things calmed down, those that were bad sick, I would drive them to the next town by ambulance. That's what gave me the job of ambulance driver.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was that ambulance? Was that a Dodge, 4-wheel drive?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes it was; I don't know what make it was, but I believe a Dodge.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, I think they took what was the weapons carrier; the same type of vehicle and made ambulances out of them.

Mr. Mendoza

Yes and painted a red cross on the side of it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you do more ambulance driving or what?

Mr. Mendoza

From one place to the other when things calmed down some; when things slowed down I would drive an ambulance and bring them to the hospital. But every beach head we had to be packing them off.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did the fighting last there in the Admiralties?

Mr. Mendoza

Like I said, we got there February 29<sup>th</sup> and we got to Leyte, the next island October 20<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Misenhimer

But the fighting didn't go on all that time in the Admiralties did it?

Mr. Mendoza

No it was a couple of months, maybe.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when you went up to Leyte what kind of ship did you go on up there?

Mr. Mendoza

Another freighter. We didn't ride 21 days on that thing, probably a couple of days and had more miles on the other one, but it was still an iron deck on plywood; no cots, I'll guarantee you that. There were about 20,000 GI's on that.

Mr. Misenhimer

That would be a mess. A lot of seasickness then too?

Mr. Mendoza

Oh my, that ocean can get rough.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you landed there in Leyte on October 20<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Mendoza

Did you get a copy of this?

Mr. Misenhimer

No sir, you haven't sent me anything. You may have sent it to my other address.

Mr. Mendoza

Okay Leyte on October 20<sup>th</sup>. I'm going to tell you some of the towns that we went through. Catafan, Tacloban, San Juanico Strait, San Miguel, Carigara , Orloc Valley, Catbalogan.

Mr. Misenhimer

You all landed there on the first day of the invasion, right, October 20<sup>th</sup>?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you see MacArthur come ashore?

Mr. Mendoza

After the fight was over with, yes. (laugh) He waded in knee deep in water and just made his rounds, I don't blame him, I would get the hell away from there myself. Just about every invasion, after we had taken the island, he came and made his rounds.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you in the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav, 6<sup>th</sup> Army under Krueger?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand that the Japanese had a parachute landing at some airport there at Leyte.

Were you involved in that at all?

Mr. Mendoza

No. We were three or four miles from that. I don't know what little town it was.

Mr. Misenhimer

There was an airport not too far inland from the beach where they landed, I understand.

Mr. Mendoza

Right. I can't remember that airstrip.

Mr. Misenhimer

But you weren't there when that happened?

Mr. Mendoza

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

You had a lot of casualties there on Leyte I'm sure.

Mr. Mendoza

Quite a few. Quite a few on every island. Quite a few.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you driving an ambulance there, or still a litter bearer?

Mr. Mendoza

A litter bearer first and then after it slowed down, back to driving an ambulance.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did they have in the way of a hospital on Leyte?

Mr. Mendoza

A field hospital under a tent. One of the biggest towns; I don't know which one it was, they hauled the seriously wounded over there. It was a big hospital.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now these field hospitals, they had doctors and surgeons and all there, right?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes, it was well equipped and had good doctors.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you shelled or bombed there on Leyte?

Mr. Mendoza

A lot of artillery; not too many bombs, but a lot of artillery.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand the first kamikazes were there. Did you ever see any kamikazes at Leyte?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes we had a few. I used to love to watch the dogfights. The P-38's and the Zeroes. It was beautiful to watch. Up in the air they would lock horns and one would come down smoking. That was one of the most effective airplanes in World War II, the P-38. They maneuvered so good.

Mr. Misenhimer

You saw quite a few of the dogfights then?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes. I enjoyed that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did the Americans win most of them?

Mr. Mendoza

Just about all of them; maybe one or two got away or shot down the P-38, but 90% of them we knocked them down first.

Mr. Misenhimer

They had the battle of Leyte Gulf on the 23<sup>rd</sup>; were you anywhere around that? The Naval battle there?

Mr. Mendoza

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

I think that was further east than you where you were.

Mr. Mendoza

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you all know anything about that?

Mr. Mendoza

Not really.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's where the Japanese almost got in amongst the landing craft and things. There was a group of small carriers, Taffy One, Two and Three. If they hadn't have fought so hard and kept the Japanese out of there, they would have got in there and really played havoc with the landing.

Mr. Mendoza

That's right because, I don't know which, was it Luzon or Leyte? When we first landed there we moved in about 15,000 yards I guess and we hit a bunch of Japanese that pushed us back almost 1,000 yards towards the beach. It was a good thing we had more reinforcements coming in from the back. That was the only thing that saved us. The Japs were pushing us right back into the water we came from.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was Luzon you say?

Mr. Mendoza

It was either Luzon; I'm sure it was Luzon.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you there at Leyte?

Mr. Mendoza

We left Leyte and went to Luzon then. That was Lingayen Gulf on January 27, 1945.

Mr. Misenhimer

Lingayen Gulf was in January, right. What wave did you go in there?

Mr. Mendoza

That was the first wave there too. There were several islands there. Gapan, Baliuag and Santa Maria, Novaliches, Balara, Meriquina, Nitpolo and Santo Tomas. I was wounded in Santo Tomas and the rest of the troops kept on going. That's where most of my outfit left me; I was in the hospital then.

Mr. Misenhimer

They left you at the hospital? You weren't in the hospital itself as a patient?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes. I was wounded at Santo Tomas.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about the rescue at Santo Tomas.

Mr. Mendoza

We got there early that morning right after daybreak. It kind of settled down a little bit and there was no activity going on. We started meeting people over there; friends and giving them cigarettes and all that stuff; candy. That was in the concentration camp. We spent a lot of time with them. Then about almost dark, in late afternoon, they started throwing artillery at us at Santo Tomas. That's where I got hit. One of my friends, one of my good buddies; I was inside the building and he stayed outside and him and another friend of mine were laying against a tree. A buddy of mine was propped against the tree and they started throwing artillery. All of a sudden my buddy felt something warm running down his head and he didn't know what hit him.



Mr. Misenhimer

A piece of shrapnel?

Mr. Mendoza

My buddy that was holding him, he went berserk.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you all in foxholes there or what?

Mr. Mendoza

No, we didn't have time to dig in; they hit us so fast. The rest of them started digging holes. It lasted until early night when we finally got hold of them and knocked them back.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you got hit there also?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes that's where I got hit, in Santo Tomas.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you hit?

Mr. Mendoza

In the hand.

Mr. Misenhimer

A piece of shrapnel?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes. That's when they started throwing artillery and concrete block and everything, shrapnel. There was one guy, I was on the second floor visiting, and one guy in a wheel chair and I started pushing him back. I stayed there for a couple of weeks I guess. The

rest of my outfit left for Japan. The war ended just before they got to Japan, on the way up. We entered Manila on February 3<sup>rd</sup>. *(tape side ended)*

Mr. Misenhimer

What day were you wounded, do you have that?

Mr. Mendoza

It was on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1945.

Mr. Misenhimer

At Santo Tomas?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now Santo Tomas was a prison camp. You all released American prisoners there, right?

Mr. Mendoza

Right. It wasn't as bad as Corregidor and Bataan, because that was real prison. They were deprived and couldn't leave the place; sleeping on cots and everything else. But the Bataan March that was cruelty there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now the people that you all rescued, had they been in the Bataan Death March?

Mr. Mendoza

No. The guy I met was originally from Louisiana. He was working for the government, oil something, and that's when they got captured and put into Santo Tomas Prison Camp. They called it a prison camp. He met up with one of those girls; she was a nurse there I think and they got married. My wife sent you a copy of a letter that we received from

them when they came back to the States. They wanted to find out how we made it and if we got home alright. The two boys are still living. One is in California and the other is in Alabama.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you in the hospital with your hand?

Mr. Mendoza

A week that I remember.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you go back to the front lines then after that?

Mr. Mendoza

No. All the rest of the outfit left to go to Japan and that thing was settled before they got there. They just came on back home I guess. I was in, I'm sure it was three or four days in Santo Tomas. Then we left there, I left there to a field hospital; I'm trying to think where it was at, for about a week. Lipa I believe. It was a little town there, to a Headquarters Field Hospital

Mr. Misenhimer

The atomic bomb was dropped in August of 1945. Were you still in the Philippines when that was dropped?

Mr. Mendoza

I was back home I believe.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you come home?

Mr. Mendoza

No that's right, I came home in December of 1945. The bomb was dropped in August I believe.

Mr. Misenhimer

August 6<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Mendoza

I was still in the service.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you heard about the bomb what did you think?

Mr. Mendoza

Hallelujah brother. I wish they had more to drop on Japan, them damn rats. I still hate them with a passion. I'll die hating them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you actually see any live Japanese anywhere?

Mr. Mendoza

My god, yes. (laugh) A lot of them. A lot of them were still hanging in trees, snipers. That was a pastime; on our time off we would go down there and finish them off that were hanging in the tree that were crippled. (laugh) I got a pride and a joy in that, just like when they were coming out of those caves, burning. The way they treated our boys, burning; that was too good.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes they really were rough.

Mr. Mendoza

Especially those in the Bataan March. There was many a GI killed, that died of starvation, rough treatment, bayonet stuck in their belly.

Mr. Misenhimer

From the time the fighting was over in Luzon until the war got over, what did you do then?

Mr. Mendoza

That's been a long time.

Mr. Misenhimer

But you stayed in the Philippines, right?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes I stayed in the Philippines until everybody was coming back home I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you come back with the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav; or how did you come back?

Mr. Mendoza

With the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav right. A lot of them had been wounded and couldn't see action. Some couldn't walk but I was lucky. I came back into California. From California I went to Fort Sam Houston, Texas where I was discharged.

Mr. Misenhimer

What date were you discharged?

Mr. Mendoza

December 6, 1945. That was about 3 ½ years without a leave.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else that you recall about your time there in the Philippines or in New Guinea?

Mr. Mendoza

The Philippines was so much more civilized than New Guinea. The people there weren't civilized at all. We couldn't communicate with them at all; no way. They were always hiding. They would see the GI's coming and they would go hide somewhere. But in the Philippines they were very friendly people. A lot of them would help us kill a lot of the Japs there too because they had suffered from the soldiers. They knew the jungles and they knew everything else; the short routes. That was a big help to us, I guarantee that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me ask you a couple of questions. Did you get home with any souvenirs?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes I got a few souvenirs. I got a lot of Japanese pictures. One souvenir that I regret now is I had a bayonet from one of them, a Captain or an officer; a sword. I had it in my duffel bag and when I got off the boat it was missing. Somebody had picked it off. I regretted that. Just like that damn monkey I had in the Philippines.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about that.

Mr. Mendoza

I used to get drunk almost every night on coconut wine on our time off and he stayed in the tent with us all the time. I had him in my duffel bag getting on the boat. When I got on the boardwalk to get to the top of the ship, he stuck his head out of the damn duffel bag. An MP said, "Do you have your registration for that monkey?" I said, "No, I sure

don't." He said, "Well I'm sorry but you can't take him." That broke my heart.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long had you had the monkey?

Mr. Mendoza

About six months I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer

Quite a while.

Mr. Mendoza

Yes, he was just so friendly. He would sleep on the foot of the bed at night. We used to have a whole stalk of bananas inside the tent. That was our rest area in the Philippines. Everyday he would eat two or three bananas. Whenever we would get a six pack of beer, he would drink beer with me. He cried when he got drunk. Those were good times.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever see any USO shows anywhere?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes we saw one in the field, Bob Hope and Jerry Colonna, Frances Langford. We have a picture of them. That was about the only one we saw where we were at. They would go from one island to another.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where was that when you saw them?

Mr. Mendoza

It must have been on Luzon because those other islands weren't prepared for anything like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes. Coming off the front line if you didn't have a dime in your pocket you couldn't get a damn cup of coffee. That's why I give so much to the Red Cross every year. (laugh)  
Believe that? If you don't have a dime; now what in the hell would you be doing with change in your pocket on the front line?

Mr. Misenhimer

That's right.

Mr. Mendoza

I'll never forget that. "Do you have a dime?" "No." "Sorry."

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever have any experience with the Salvation Army?

Mr. Mendoza

That's a good outfit; the Salvation Army. I really believe in them. They will treat you like a human being.

Mr. Misenhimer

They were over there too, right?

Mr. Mendoza

We saw Bob Hope on Christmas Day, 1944 on New Guinea. (wife reading it in the background)

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you come back from Leyte to New Guinea then?



Mr. Mendoza

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Because October of 1944 was Leyte and if you were in New Guinea at the end of 1944 and the Invasion of Lingayen Gulf was in February.

Mr. Mendoza

(talking to wife) Are you sure it was in New Guinea? Now this has got me puzzled sure enough. It has the date on the back of the picture. I didn't think so but it's possible. That was after the invasion and everything else. Maybe it was a rest period.

Mr. Misenhimer

I know that some of the units did come back to New Guinea after Leyte before they went to Luzon.

Mr. Mendoza

That's probably right. It was a long time ago.

Mr. Misenhimer

You mentioned about money. Could you get paid regularly over there?

Mr. Mendoza

Oh yes. \$22 a month. Wow. I had to send half of it home. You know you could buy a lot of stuff with that. When I got out of the service we got a big bonus; \$250.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were overseas could you get your mail with any regularity?

Mr. Mendoza

Mail, not too often. We would get it maybe every two weeks. My wife said she would

write every day.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes that would put us to sleep at night, all them promises. "Oh you poor boys" and all that. The queen.

Mr. Misenhimer

She played good music I understand.

Mr. Mendoza

Yes good American music. She played a lot of that.

Mr. Misenhimer

On April 12, 1945 President Roosevelt died, do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of reaction; any reaction to that?

Mr. Mendoza

He was sadly missed.

Mr. Misenhimer

On May 8, 1945 Germany surrendered, did you all hear about that?

Mr. Mendoza

No too much. We weren't too interested in the European Theater; mostly just the Pacific.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've heard some people say they were glad to hear it because they thought they would be getting some help from Europe at that point.

Mr. Mendoza

I think we were on the verge until Truman dropped those bombs. He was a good President. He was a man with guts. He wasn't scared of anybody.

Mr. Misenhimer

When Japan surrendered on August 15 did you all have a celebration then?

Mr. Mendoza

Not really. A lot of them did, but we didn't. Like in New York they took the town over but we didn't have anything.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of the officers you had over you?

Mr. Mendoza

The officers were all great guys. Oh yeah, the Chaplain that was in there. I've been corresponding with him since 1945. Every year he sends me a Christmas card and a birthday card. We just got one from him last week. He is 88 years old and he still corresponds.

Mr. Misenhimer

What would you consider your most frightening time?

Mr. Mendoza

That was every night. I really couldn't pinpoint any one time. Lots of times on the island they would start dropping bombs and we had to hurry up and dig a hole and get down

into it like a rat. That would last three or four hours at a time and that was pretty scary then. But thank God I got through it.

Mr. Misenhimer

What medals and ribbons did you get?

Mr. Mendoza

Let me see. My wife has it written down somewhere. The Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal with four Bronze Stars and one Bronze Arrow Head. The Philippine Liberation Campaign Medal with two Bronze Stars. Good Conduct Medal. Purple Heart. Victory Ribbon. Continental Service. Foreign Service. That's what I got off the discharge paper. That's about it.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were the Bronze Stars for?

Mr. Mendoza

That was supposed to be for bravery; I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were they the same thing as Battle Stars or were they different from Battle Stars?

Mr. Mendoza

They were Battle Stars.

Mr. Misenhimer

There were what, six or seven of those?

Mr. Mendoza

Two Bronze Stars and one Bronze Arrow Head.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got home did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Mendoza

Well sort of I guess. I came back home looking for a job and all the good jobs were taken by those that didn't go into the service that should have went. They got all the good jobs but what the hell. I finally got a job working in a carbon black plant. I stayed there for 30 years and retired from that.

Mr. Misenhimer

What company was that?

Mr. Mendoza

Ashland Oil Company.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you use your 52 / 20 Club when you got out?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes. I got that. I took off a couple of months before I decided to start working. I was getting that 52 / 20.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you use your GI Bill for anything?

Mr. Mendoza

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you had any reunions?

Mr. Mendoza

Every month I get a letter from the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division; they send me a magazine every month and they show the reunions in different places but I never did make any of them.

Ardoin.

Mr. Misenhimer

Who's he?

Mr. Mendoza

He's the one that we liberated from Santo Tomas and his wife and two sons.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about him.

Mr. Mendoza

He's actually from Louisiana. He went to a job working for the government and he went overseas and they put him in Santo Tomas prison. Their son, we got a letter from him a while back that they had both died. The two sons are still living. The mother and father are both dead.

Mr. Misenhimer

But the sons were in the prison camp too?

Mr. Mendoza

Yes. They were young boys.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you all get married?

Mr. Mendoza

We got married April 22, 1943. Sixty three years ago.

*(end of interview)*

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