

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Robert Lee

Date of Interview: September 19, 2007

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Interview in progress.

Interviewer: This is Ed Metzler and today is the 19th of September, 2007. I am interviewing Mr. Robert Lee by telephone. I'm located in Fredericksburg, Texas and he is located in Richardson, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, The Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this site. Let me start out by thanking you for spending the time today, Robert, to share your experiences with us and let's get rolling by having you introduce yourself and tell us who your parents were; how many brothers and sisters you had; things like that.

Mr. Lee: Okay, well I was born and raised in New Jersey right near the ocean. My grandfather was a commercial fisherman. I was born on July 21st, 1926 and I spent most of my early boyhood days clamming, fishing and crabbing and going out with my grandfather commercial fishing. So when the...when the war broke out...

Interviewer: Now did you have any brothers and sisters?

Mr. Lee: No, not really; I had a sister that died as an infant.

Interviewer: I see, okay.

Mr. Lee: That was...that was all that we had, so I...essentially didn't have any...that I knew of. And anyway...having been born and raised by the ocean...of course with the war on...when you got to be eighteen years old, you were drafted.

Interviewer: Yeah, where were you when...when the started for us on Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Lee: I was in high school.

Interviewer: Okay. Tell me about what you remember about that day.

Mr. Lee: Well, honestly I don't remember an awful lot.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Lee: I don't...I...I just don't recall anything that I can put a finger on.

Interviewer: Okay, but you were what...a senior or do you remember?

Mr. Lee: Oh, I...I was a...well it was...1944 when I went in service. The war had been on for awhile.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Lee: Pearl Harbor...I don't remember the exact date to be honest with you.

Interviewer: Well it was December 7th, 1941.

Mr. Lee: I couldn't remember...it was '41?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Lee: Yeah, okay, well...I don't remember an awful lot about that. Of course they...they announced it and we heard about it and all that.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Lee: But...

Interviewer: But you went ahead and finished high school then, huh?

Mr. Lee: Well I...I actually didn't get to finish high school...

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Lee: ...because I had to go right into service when I turned eighteen and I still had awhile to go.

Interviewer: A ha!

Mr. Lee: So I had to get my degree later. So I went to...I immediately...soon as I got eighteen I enlisted in the Navy. And I was sent to the Naval Training Center in New York – Sampson and took my boot training there. And the next thing I knew we were put on a...a troop train...some of us...and when we got off we were in Port...we were in...Camp Endicott, Davisville, Rhode Island. And there was a...they had a band there playing, “You’re the Seabees of the Navy!” (laughter) So I...that’s the first I even heard about the Seabees! (Unintelligible).

Interviewer: You didn’t even know what Seabees were at that time!

Mr. Lee: No, I didn’t. In fact I heard later that they were supposed to be volunteer because they were often the ones that had to go in first.

Interviewer: Yeah, that’s right! They got shot at a lot!

Mr. Lee: And fortunately I didn’t have that experience.

Interviewer: Well that’s good!

Mr. Lee: Anyway I...

Interviewer: So you volunteered for Seabees, you just didn’t know it?!

Mr. Lee: That’s right! (laughter) I don’t remember...

Interviewer: You don’t remember doing that, huh?

Mr. Lee: ...(unintelligible) but I...I got there.

Interviewer: Well that's good, okay.

Mr. Lee: And I went through that training and then we got on another train. This time we went clear across the United States to Port Hueneme, California.

Interviewer: Well what was Seabee training like? I mean, what'd they do...put you on bulldozers or what?

Mr. Lee: No, it...it was mostly physical; getting your body in good shape and that stuff.

Interviewer: Okay, okay, so they just basically...

Mr. Lee: I learned to drive those things after I got on Guam.

Interviewer: Oh, on the job training, huh! (laughter)

Mr. Lee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Oh gosh!

Mr. Lee: No, it was mostly...physical.

Interviewer: Okay, so they just getting you in shape.

Mr. Lee: Right.

Interviewer: Okay, well did you do any fire arm training or anything like that?

Mr. Lee: Minimum.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Lee: Anyway, we got on the...put me on another train; this time we get to Port Hueneme, California. And there I went through Marine combat training.

Interviewer: That sounds pretty serious!

Mr. Lee: Well it was pretty strenuous. They had us out...I can remember...in the...in the hot sun. The guy that was in charge of us...was a very, very strenuous...he...he really put us through the...the grinder...I guess was the

word. At the time I couldn't stand the man, but looking back now he was preparing us and he was doing his job.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Lee: I didn't quite look at it that way because I thought he was doing really...we had men actually collapse doing pushups. I...I remember one fellow he...he just finally said, "I can't do it." And they...they took him away and I think they gave him a discharge.

Interviewer: My gosh!

Mr. Lee: Anyway, I got through all that and the next thing I had...was taken to Pearl...to Pearl Harbor...when...of course...there was still ships sunk there; you could see them. And I was loaded on a troop ship.

Interviewer: So when you went to...to Pearl Harbor this was just on a troop ship of some sort?

Mr. Lee: No, no, we went...by train, we went to Pearl Harbor.

Interviewer: Well it's going to be hard to do because Pearl Harbor is in Hawaii.

Mr. Lee: Oh, I'm sorry!

Interviewer: You went...you got to...west coast by train...

Mr. Lee: Yeah.

Interviewer: ...and then when they shipped you to Pearl Harbor, they just put you on some nondescript troop...troop ship or something, right?

Mr. Lee: Right.

Interviewer: Okay, so how long were you in Pearl?

Mr. Lee: Not very long.

Interviewer: But you could still see damage, is that right?

Mr. Lee: Oh yeah, yeah!

Interviewer: My gosh! So...so I figure by '40...so this is still what...late '44 that you're there, huh?

Mr. Lee: Right, right.

Interviewer: You would have thought they'd of had that cleaned up by then!

Mr. Lee: No, there was...still...you could still see ships sunk there in the harbor.

Interviewer: Yeah. Where were you stationed while you were there or were you just...?

Mr. Lee: Well they didn't...they put us right on the ship when we got there.

Interviewer: Okay. And this was...this was the troop ship that you were telling me about when I asked...

Mr. Lee: Yes, right.

Interviewer: Alright.

Mr. Lee: And it...it was loaded shoulder to shoulder with men.

Interviewer: Gosh! So not a lot of room on there, huh?

Mr. Lee: No, there wasn't much room.

Interviewer: And so that wasn't all that pleasant a trip then that you took on that ship?

Mr. Lee: Well I...I didn't mind it. The...the only tough part was so many men got sea sick.

Interviewer: Yeah, did you?

Mr. Lee: No, I...I was...being more raised in the ocean...I...I didn't...bother me at all

Interviewer: That's right, that's right because you'd been doing all the fishing and everything.

Mr. Lee: That's right. So I didn't have that problem but...

Interviewer: You already had your sea legs!

Mr. Lee: A lot of the men did...they...they didn't do well at all. It takes two or three days to get your sea legs like you say.

Interviewer: Right, right.

Mr. Lee: Anyway, the...the next thing I remember we left Pearl Harbor and we picked up a convoy. I don't know how many ships were in it, but it...everywhere you could see there were ships.

Interviewer: It was a big one then; almost a task for then, huh?

Mr. Lee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. And at this time did you know where you were headed?

Mr. Lee: No, I was just going to say that I...I had no idea where we were going at all. They didn't tell us. And then as I mentioned before to you, one night I was down in the mess hall getting a cup of coffee and they had a radio down there and surprisingly it was...we were allowed to hear it. And Tokyo Rose came on and she said, "Tonight's program is for the benefit of the boys on the USS Wakefield," which was my ship!

Interviewer: That was the one you were on?

Mr. Lee: Right, and she named the company commanders by name; she said that...she told us that we were to the Mariana Islands.

Interviewer: You found out from Tokyo Rose where you were going!

Mr. Lee: I found out from Tokyo Rose!

Interviewer: Isn't that incredible!?!

Mr. Lee: Yeah! And...and she said, "You are being followed by a Japanese sub and...and your ship will be sunk before you reach the Marianas Islands."

Interviewer: My gosh!

Mr. Lee: Well the next day was Sunday and we had open deck church services and I never saw so many men turn out for church!

Interviewer: It's amazing how that faith was rekindled, huh?

Mr. Lee: And I can still remember standing there and looking up at the antennae which was turning and every time it stopped they all looked over the side for the torpedo wake! (laughter) Well obviously it didn't happen!

Interviewer: Thank goodness! But don't you think...

Mr. Lee: So the next thing...

Interviewer: But don't you wonder how she finds out...I mean, they must have had a pretty good network of spies!

Mr. Lee: Oh they sure...yes...they do...she knew everything!

Interviewer: That's amazing!

Mr. Lee: (Unintelligible) from the men right on the ship!

Interviewer: My gosh. And you know you're right. I'm surprised that they allowed radios to even tune into her because, I mean, it had the potential of being...you know, really undermining morale.

Mr. Lee: Well for some reason or another, they...they allowed it and...and we heard it!

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Lee: And that was...I...I'm as surprised, too, that they did.

Interviewer: Did you feel like it undermined the morale at...at all or scared any...any of the guys?

Mr. Lee: It didn't scare me.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Lee: For some reason I was young and foolish in those days and I don't know. I...I just...it didn't scare me at all.

Interviewer: Yeah, I'll be darned!

Mr. Lee: I think I took it for what it was worth, you know?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Lee: Anyway...sure enough we...we head to...to Guam. Of course by then I knew where we were going...thanks to Tokyo Rose.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Lee: And Guam is a volcanic island, and it's in one of the deepest parts of the ocean, but all around the island...about three hundred fifty yards off shore is a coral reef. And...and apparently they came in with these LSTs; they'd already done that by the time I got there...thank God! I...if I'd have been in the invasion I would have been something different!

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Lee: But anyway they...they got to these coral reefs and they couldn't get over them. So the men...they dropped the front down and they had to go ashore with the guns over...held over their heads.

Interviewer: Yeah, they had to wade the rest of the way in.

Mr. Lee: Yeah, it was about chest deep, at least; sometimes even deeper than that! And the...the Japanese had dug coral caves and they just shot our men down. We finally had to go in with...with blow torches and...and secure them.

Interviewer: Well did you actually talk to some of the people that had to go in on those landings?

Mr. Lee: No, I didn't. They...they...we didn't get to talk to them at all. By that time they had packed them up and gone somewhere else, I guess.

Interviewer: Yeah, they were...they found another island for them to invade.

Mr. Lee: They, well they had...they had all the...as you well know...they had all the equipment on the...Guam and the other islands for the Invasion of Japan. Now on Guam...I spent...it was extremely hot. I mean you didn't even wear underclothes.

Interviewer: Really?!

Mr. Lee: We...we took our...we made shorts out of the pants that we had and...and that was all we wore and shoes. We had sandals it was so hot.

Interviewer: Well you developed a good suntan!

Mr. Lee: Uh yeah! You...you'd be dripping wet pitching horseshoes! But the nice part about it is, it was the most fabulous coral reef you could ever imagine. It has...anything that Hawaii has to offer by a mile!

Interviewer: Really?!

Mr. Lee: I've had...I've spent most of my spare time...I had...got a face mask and a snorkel and I did a lot of that! I had Moray eels come up and look right at me...

Interviewer: No kidding!

Mr. Lee: ...and barracuda and all...everywhere you looked there was beautiful, beautiful coral!

Interviewer: I guess being an old fisherman at heart, this was really right down your alley, wasn't it?

Mr. Lee: It sure was; it was just a profusion of marine life!

Interviewer: And a little bit different than the New Jersey coast.

Mr. Lee: You bet! (laughter) Anyway, we...I've had two different very serious storms while I was there.

Interviewer: Yeah, tell me about those.

Mr. Lee: The only two buildings that had a foundation were the mess hall and the administration building. The rest of us were living in quonset huts which were just sitting on the ground practically. So when they heard the...the hurricane was coming...the real serious one...they broke us up into two groups. One went to one of the buildings and the other group went to the other, and we were there a whole week...while the storm came. But in order to hold the quonset huts down, they bull...they drove bulldozers in between them and...and run cable from one to the other.

Interviewer: My gosh!

Mr. Lee: Yeah. And like I say, we...we were there at least a week.

Interviewer: That's a long time!

Mr. Lee: Yeah. So my job was...I was in one of the warehouses and they would bring supplies in by ship and they would unload them and put them on pallets and

put them on trucks and bring them to the warehouse. And it was my resp...one of my...I was one of the men that worked there driving a finger lift to unload it and then put in...stack them in the warehouse.

Interviewer: Tell me what a finger lift is again.

Mr. Lee: Well it's...it's a...well it has two fingers that stick out; they call them fingers. They...they...

Interviewer: It's different than a forklift?

Mr. Lee: Well it...it's kind of...I guess you'd call it a forklift.

Interviewer: It's similar to that then, okay.

Mr. Lee: The...the equipment was on pallets...what they called pallets...

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Lee: ...and you drove the forklift...we call them finger lifts...and...and raised it up and backed off and then put it down where you're going to unload it. Then you go back and get another one till it was unloaded. So that's basically what I did while I was there. And the...I remember then the next thing that came...I...I was sleeping at night in quonset hut...it so happened that I was...my bunk was one of the first ones in as you go in. And I guess it was about two or three o'clock in the morning I heard sirens going and...and some guy came in and brought a broom down at the foot of my bed...and I jumped up and they said, "The war's over!" And they opened up the beer garden and we had a big celebration!

Interviewer: Right in the middle of the night?!

Mr. Lee: Yeah, right in the middle of the night!

Interviewer: No kidding?!

Mr. Lee: Yep, they opened up the beer garden and we had a great time!

Interviewer: Tell me about this beer garden...now.

Mr. Lee: Well what we...we called the beer garden; they...they did allow us to have beer and of course it was rationed...naturally.

Interviewer: That's good!

Mr. Lee: And so they...that's what they did, they opened up the beer garden and we...we had a celebration!

Interviewer: Well, and...and a good time was had by all, huh?!

Mr. Lee: Well nobody slept through that because the sirens were going and the horns were blowing and it was a great celebration! It would have been terrible if we had...had to go in the invasion.

Interviewer: Oh, I agree. We would have lots hundreds of thousands.

Mr. Lee: It's a shame they had to drop the atomic bomb. But there's one really important things that I wanted to mention...is that I have...in fact I have it in my hand right now...it's a picture that...that they dropped on...in Japan showing a B-29 Liberator with the bombs coming out the bottom and it mentions here in Japanese the cities that were going to be bombed and it told them to evacuate. And...

Interviewer: So this is like a leaflet or something that we dropped ahead of time?

Mr. Lee: It was (unintelligible)...B-29...the bombers dropped on these cities and told them that they should evacuate. Of course they didn't say it was an atomic bomb.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Lee: Anyway they did warn them, and on the back it said that we...it's translated into English...it said that "we are not at war with the Japanese people, we are at war with your leaders." So they...they gave us a warning, you know. They gave them a warning...like they did to us in Pearl Harbor, you know?

Interviewer: Yeah, right, right.

Mr. Lee: I'm being facetious!

Interviewer: Yeah, I know you are! (laughter)

Mr. Lee: Well you know, it's amazing how...

Interviewer: How did you get that leaflet? Where did you...where did you get it?

Mr. Lee: It was given to me on Guam.

Interviewer: I'll be darned.

Mr. Lee: I'll be glad to send you a copy of it.

Interviewer: Well that would be neat!

Mr. Lee: It's amazing I...I...every time I get an opportunity I pass these out because it's amazing how few people know that we did that.

Interviewer: Yeah, no, you're right. I think you're right. In fact I think we did it for more than just the atomic bombs we dropped; we did it for a lot of the...you know...all the firebombing and the, you know, conventional bomb as well.

Mr. Lee: Right.

Interviewer: And I think that even fewer people know that. But I guess the reality is, and we kind of all knew this, is that they would ignore it. But at least we tried, huh?

Mr. Lee: Well that would have been a tough battle if we had to go in because they...they were determined to fight to the last person.

Interviewer: Yeah. When...do you remember approximately when in '44 or '45 that you landed on Guam...just?

Mr. Lee: Well it was...must have been late '44, I would say.

Interviewer: Okay, okay.

Mr. Lee: Maybe early '45.

Interviewer: Yeah. And so you had about oh, seven or eight months before the war was over.

Mr. Lee: Yes.

Interviewer: Now you stayed on, did you not after the war for awhile?

Mr. Lee: No, I...I wanted to get out as soon as possible.

Interviewer: I understand that!

Mr. Lee: They put us on a...on a troop ship and here we...we had no clothing for cool weather because we had gotten rid of all that clothing, and I can remember how cold it was aboard that ship...particularly at night. And we came...unfortunately; we went clear around and came up through Panama Canal.

Interviewer: Oh my gosh!

Mr. Lee: And up the east coast to Long Island. Or...actually they...they docked in New York City.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Lee: And...it wasn't too long as I was very sick. In fact there were so many that were. And to top that off, they rationed the food and we didn't get very much to eat.

Interviewer: Really?! That surprises me!

Mr. Lee: It is surprising...I...you know if you got a...spoonful of what they were serving, you were lucky!

Interviewer: Really?!

Mr. Lee: So, in addition to being cold, we weren't fed very well.

Interviewer: So what kind of sickness did you get?

Mr. Lee: Well, I ended up with pneumonia.

Interviewer: My gosh!

Mr. Lee: Going to sick bay was a waste of time because there were so many men sick. They just gave you an aspirin and kick you back out. So I...I was trying to stick it out until I could get off the ship and get discharged. Anyway when...when we docked in...in New York harbor, I was told they sent three hundred and fifty off our ship to St. Elmo's (sp?) Hospital, Long Island.

Interviewer: My gosh!

Mr. Lee: The ambulances were all lined up in New York City.

Interviewer: My goodness!

Mr. Lee: And I...I deliberately didn't get involved in that because I wanted to get out.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Lee: I...I didn't know at that point I had viral pneumonia.

Interviewer: Okay, you just know you didn't feel good?

Mr. Lee: But then...the...the crowning blow was...they'd been unloading the ship...the troops all day long, and later in the evening...it was probably around three or four or five o'clock...they said the Seabees are going to have to stay on and clean up the ship!

Interviewer: Oh man!

Mr. Lee: I said, "Hey, come on now!" I went down to sick bay and I had 103, 104 temperature,...

Interviewer: Whoa!

Mr. Lee: ...and they said, "Go pack your bags and wait down by the gangplank; we'll send an ambulance from St. Elmo's Hospital to pick you up because the other ones had already gone."

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Lee: Well two hours later I was still standing in the cold and waiting for an ambulance to come.

Interviewer: Oh my gosh!

Mr. Lee: And it finally did with the sirens blaring; and they put me on a stretcher. I wanted to walk down but they insisted that I get on the stretcher. They put me in the back of an ambulance and went through the streets of New York with the sirens going; got out on Long Island and they pulled in a hamburger stand! And the driv...and I'm here...I'm starving...and the driver and the helper got hamburgers.

Interviewer: But they didn't offer you one?

Mr. Lee: No.

Interviewer: They thought you were too sick, I guess!

Mr. Lee: So I...I finally got to St. Elmo's Hospital and got into bed and got to a phone to...my...my folks lives in New Jersey...not too far away. And of course they knew I was coming home but they didn't know that I ended up in the hospital, so I had to tell them. And the next day they drove out to see me, and they had no record of me coming in. So they had to go from room to room till they found me. So anyway I got better and they didn't do anything; I just...just stayed there. And finally, oh it was about two months I guess, they didn't have my records!

Interviewer: Oh my gosh!

Mr. Lee: And finally I...I got somebody sympathetic with me, and they...I found out they were aboard ship being decommissioned with the ship.

Interviewer: Oh my goodness!

Mr. Lee: So they...they finally got my records and I got discharged!

Interviewer: But it...but it wasn't easy, was it?!

Mr. Lee: No it wasn't easy! So basically that...that's my story and...

Interviewer: My goodness! Well let me...let me go back to when you were on Guam. Now...did...did you have problems with insects there and did, you know, I've heard so many stories about malaria and dingy fever and all those things. Was that a problem there?

Mr. Lee: No, not to my...there were insects but they...they weren't that annoying, no.

Interviewer: Really?!

Mr. Lee: We...we had no contact at all with the natives.

Interviewer: Really?!

Mr. Lee: No, we...we weren't allowed to have any contact with them. They lived in a different part of the island.

Interviewer: And...

Mr. Lee: We...we never even got to talk to one of them.

Interviewer: And you never got any liberty and were allowed to go into one of their towns or anything like...?

Mr. Lee: They didn't have any towns!

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Lee: It...it was all just jungle!

Interviewer: Yeah, okay.

Mr. Lee: If they had a town, I...I never saw it!

Interviewer: Yeah. (laughter)

Mr. Lee: I never saw any buildings.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Lee: They...they were living pretty primitive.

Interviewer: Right. Were there...were there any remnants of the Japanese forces still up in the jungles?

Mr. Lee: No.

Interviewer: Okay, so they had pretty well cleaned Guam out then, huh?

Mr. Lee: I...I did get to see the coral caves where they were in...when...during the invasion.

Interviewer: What do those look like?

Mr. Lee: Well they...they had dug these caves right out of the coral. They were big enough for, you know, a person to be in them and...and work a...a machine gun probably.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Lee: And...and they really could give our men a hard time I'll tell you...they...till we finally got in and got rid of them.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Lee: But it was...I pity those men that went in on that invasion; it must have been (unintelligible)!

Interviewer: Yep, it was...

Mr. Lee: I was told that there was bodies all over the place.

Interviewer: Yeah, it wasn't pretty I'm sure.

Mr. Lee: No. I didn't get to see that, thank God!

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Lee: But I was told that it was...it was pretty bad.

Interviewer: What was the food like when you were there on Guam...they feed you guys right or what?

Mr. Lee: Oh yeah, the...the food was okay; mess hall food, but there was plenty of it.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Lee: We didn't go hungry.

Interviewer: Yeah, and what about your commanding officers? I mean were those people that you respected or were they just tough on you or...tell me more about them.

Mr. Lee: Well actually I...I had hardly any contact with them at all. They just turned me loose at the warehouse and I had to report there every day.

Interviewer: And you knew what your job was and you did it.

Mr. Lee: Yeah, they'd come around once in awhile to check on things, but I didn't have much contact with them at all.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. And what about communications back with your family in the States...did you write letters...did you get letters?

Mr. Lee: Oh yeah, yeah, I wrote them, I think, every day.

Interviewer: Every day!

Mr. Lee: Uh-hum.

Interviewer: That's commitment! And I guess they all got censored in the usual manner and everything...probably?

Mr. Lee: Far...far as I know, they weren't censoring them.

Interviewer: Really?!

Mr. Lee: No, I...I never heard if they were. I think they would have told me if they got to them, you know, opened up.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Lee: But no, I...I don't think they were censoring them at all. No, I'm pretty sure they weren't.

Interviewer: Well I know that the Seabees and lots of other groups of guys that were over there in the Pacific had a lot of...kind of comical things happen to them, you know, funny, funny recollections; do you have any of those where you just kind of laugh out loud...just like you just did when you think back?

Mr. Lee: I wasn't going to even mention that, but since you bring it up, yes I did.

Interviewer: Well tell me a few of those.

Mr. Lee: When I was in Port Hueneme, California, I...I mention it to you because the...the CPO that was in charge of us was...his name was Rothchild. I'll never forget it! We called him "Lubber Lips, Rothchild!" And he did have big lips! (laughter) And he was one of the meanest men you could imagine!

Interviewer: Really?!

Mr. Lee: When it came time to...we did get liberty passes while we were there and I got to go into...oh, heck there goes my memory!...where the...where the...the...the entertainers sign the concrete and...

Interviewer: Oh yeah, the Grauman's Chinese Theatre, or whatever you call it?

Mr. Lee: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Lee: Yeah, I got to...I got to go in...but he used to hide so that we couldn't find him to sign the liberty passes and we had a pretty rough bunch of guys in the Seabees there. A lot of them were from Brooklyn. (laughter) And...and word got out that if...if he ever showed his face above deck, he was going overboard!

Interviewer: Hmm!

Mr. Lee: And to...I never saw that man above deck!

Interviewer: Well...

Mr. Lee: I think they would've done it!

Interviewer: And what was this guy's name again?

Mr. Lee: Well, I just remembered his last name was Rothchild.

Interviewer: Rothchild, okay.

Mr. Lee: We called him “Lubber Lips, Rothchild.”

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Lee: ...because he had big lips.

Interviewer: Right, right.

Mr. Lee: But he...he was actually mean, I’ll tell you! And anyway in California...Port...Port Hueneme...it was kind of an open base. The mess hall was in one building and...and you could walk from one to the other because of the nice climate. And I was...one time one of my jobs was dishing out food for breakfast...and my job was...putting out ladles of milk. And I kept noticing a black...particles floating on top of the milk. When I got to the bottom, it was my pipe!

Interviewer: Your pipe? How did that happen?

Mr. Lee: Well in those days I smoked a corn cob pipe and it must have fallen into this...into the milk. (laughter) I didn’t let anybody know about it, I’ll tell you!

Interviewer: Well yeah, keep that one under your belt!

Mr. Lee: So when I was working there, Lubber Lips Rothchild came in...he says in a very loud voice that made me jump straight up in the air...he says, “Lee, go into the scullery; there’s only two men there and there should be three. Go...go help them out!” Well I left my...where I was dishing out the milk and I strolled...on purpose...I picked up a newspaper on the way and I walked in the scullery and sat on a bench...reading the newspaper. Next thing I know

this Rothchild came in and saw me there and he hollered so loud I ripped the whole newspaper in half!

Interviewer: Oh my gosh!

Mr. Lee: And he said...sent the other two guys home...let them go and...and he stayed with me, I'll give him credit for that. I had to do the whole job by myself!

Interviewer: Oh gosh!

Mr. Lee: And at the end of the...when we got finished he...we're standing out...out in front of the mess hall and he's got a clipboard and he's poking me in the stomach...giving me the what for...for what I was doing...what I had done.

Interviewer: Yeah, my gosh. Well, so when you came back to the States and you finally got well and you saw your family again what...what did you do then...you...?

Mr. Lee: Well I...I...immed...I had enough...even though I didn't actually graduate from high school, I had enough credits that they gave me...what you call a war diploma; they did that during the war...'cause I was just a short way from having finished my high school.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Lee: So, thanks for the G.I. Bill. My folks didn't have any money, so I would've never got to go to college. And of course with the help of the G.I. Bill I did, but, you know in those days the colleges filled up very fast!

Interviewer: I'll bet they did.

Mr. Lee: And it was...I...I went two years in a junior college before I could get into the University of Maryland. And I got in there as Physics major.

Interviewer: Oh yeah, you were telling me about that earlier.

Mr. Lee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. Well that's interesting. Well as you look back on that whole experience in the Pacific, did...do you feel like that really changed you as a person? I mean, you went over there as a young kid and came back...

Mr. Lee: Well I...I never got grow up a normal teenager.

Interviewer: Right.

Mr. Lee: I...I was married my second year of college and had a child. And while I was going to college...in order to support my wife and child I had three jobs...

Interviewer: Good gracious!

Mr. Lee: ...in addition to going to...full time to college.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Lee: I drove a local bus; I drove a school bus and I worked in the gas station every night.

Interviewer: You sound...you were busy!

Mr. Lee: Going to college was not easy for me.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. Well, what else can we talk about on...on reliving those experiences?

Mr. Lee: Well I think I've told you just about everything I can think of.

Interviewer: Did you stay in touch with any of the people that you got to know when you were in the Seabees?

Mr. Lee: Oh, it's funny that you should mention that. I...that...that skipped my mind for awhile. Yeah, while I was on Guam...I...'course I found a fellow that had

the same last name as I do. His name was Carl Lee, and so we got to be great friends and he also lived in New Jersey.

Interviewer: My gosh!

Mr. Lee: Although he lives in South Jersey. And he had another friend on the island who lived near him; he was in the...in the Marines, so the three of us were great friends while we were on Guam and after we got out. They actually came and lived in my home in New Jersey when they went...they started to go to college but they didn't finish. So I got to see them; I...I would go down South Jersey and hunt with them and fish with them and so forth.

Interviewer: So did you stay in touch with them through all the years?

Mr. Lee: Well Carl Lee, unfortunately, was killed. He was...we...he...he did a lot of hunting for birds and like that...pheasant and quail. And he was loading...he had dogs...and he was loading them in the back of the car and somebody hit him...and killed him.

Interviewer: Oh my gosh!

Mr. Lee: And he was only about, oh let's see...in his twenties.

Interviewer: Oh dear!

Mr. Lee: The other...Jim English, the other fellow, he's still alive...so (unintelligible) in contact with him.

Interviewer: Well that's good. Have you ever been to any of the Seabee reunions that they have all around the country?

Mr. Lee: No, I...I have never been to one.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Lee: No.

Interviewer: Well, okay. Alright, well let's see, what else comes to mind while we've got you on the phone here?

Mr. Lee: I really can't think...I think you've hit just about everything.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay, well good. Well why don't I end the tape recording right here...

Mr. Lee: Okay.

Interviewer: ...and thank you for spending the time and thank you for what you did for our country. We appreciate that (unintelligible)...

Mr. Lee: Well you're welcome. If you want (cough), excuse me, I...I'll mail you one of these flyers.

Interviewer: Okay, hold the line; I'm going to quit the tape and then we'll talk about that, okay?

Mr. Lee: Okay.

(end of interview)

FINAL copy
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