

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Arthur Rees

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Interview in progress.

Eddie Graham: I'm interviewing Mr. Arthur Rees today. This interview is in support of the Center of the Pacific War Studies, archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, of the preservations of historical information related to this site. Okay, Arthur, tell us when and where were you born?

Mr. Rees: I was born in Des Moines, Iowa, 1919.

Eddie Graham: Okay, and what was the name of your parents?

Mr. Rees: Dave and Ethyl Rees...was the name of my parents.

Eddie Graham: Okay, and where did you go to school?

Mr. Rees: (Unintelligible) High School in Des Moines, Iowa.

Eddie Graham: Okay, and tell me how did you end up becoming a Marine, is that correct?

Mr. Rees: (Unintelligible).

Eddie Graham: You in the Marines?

Mr. Rees: Yeah. I was down in Texas at the time, down in south Texas and well I was working in construction and different jobs down there. (Unintelligible) getting the news reports; seen it all coming and I met a former Marine down there and (chuckle) he was too old to go back in, but he kind of persuaded me to join. I went in...well, I came home then first to visit my parents because I

knew I was going to join. So I went back to Texas and joined the Marines in (unintelligible) in Houston, Texas.

Eddie Graham: Let me ask you this then – where were you and what were you doing December 7th, 1941?

Mr. Rees: In...I was already in the Marine Corps; I joined the Marine Corps in October and I just...just graduated from boot camp and I was in San Diego at the time of December the 7th.

Eddie Graham: Where were you at...what...what were you doing?

Mr. Rees: I just got out of boot camp.

Eddie Graham: But I mean...when you heard the news, what were you doing?

Mr. Rees: Well, I'm just in the barracks; I didn't...wasn't really doing anything...only exercise...what Marines do (laughter).

Eddie Graham: Alright.

Mr. Rees: And...

Eddie Graham: Where'd you do your boot camp?

Mr. Rees: Pardon?

Eddie Graham: Where did you do your boot camp?

Mr. Rees: In San Diego.

Eddie Graham: San Diego. And was it...what...how long was it...six or eight weeks or...?

Mr. Rees: I think it was about...I think it was eight weeks, I believe.

Eddie Graham: Okay, and what was your...what was your first assignment?

Mr. Rees: Well, right out of boot camp...(unintelligible) I was about the only one in the platoon, and right out of boot camp they made a Drill Instructor. So I went to

Drill and (unintelligible) there assigning them different jobs and duties and...I brought two, maybe...maybe three platoons through boot camp. I got tired of that and wanted to get and get overseas, so I requested to get in another outfit and I got transferred to Combat Engineers.

Eddie Graham: Where was your first job?

Mr. Rees: Pardon?

Eddie Graham: After you got into...Engineers, where was your first...your assignment?

Mr. Rees: Overseas you mean?

Eddie Graham: Yeah.

Mr. Rees: Well, we went to (unintelligible). We left San Diego and went to Guadalcanal; we were in on the tail-end of the fighting there and we started working on the airport there; I was a...I was a crane operator. Took the first (unintelligible) out to form the...one big airstrip there on Guadalcanal, and we worked there until we were transferred to the...I went to Guam after Guadalcanal, and on D-Day on Guam there...I was running the crane transferring supplies from boats to tracks.

Eddie Graham: Uh, you have to long...work pretty long hours then or...?

Mr. Rees: No, we worked about four...four hours at a time.

Eddie Graham: Did you have any resistance (unintelligible words) Japanese positions cleared out?

Mr. Rees: Have what?

Eddie Graham: (Unintelligible) you...you didn't have any problems with the Japanese because they'd been cleared out?

Mr. Rees: Oh yeah, they gave us a lot of problems (chuckle).

Eddie Graham: Oh, they did?

Mr. Rees: Yeah, but they was fighting mainly on the other end while we were up on the (unintelligible) which...(unintelligible) where we started constructing the...the airstrip there at (unintelligible) Field, so...

Eddie Graham: Did you sleep in tents at that time?

Mr. Rees: Yeah, we slept in tents out in the boondocks.

Eddie Graham: Your food was pretty...

Mr. Rees: No, the night raids.

Eddie Graham: Oh they did? You had problems with raids?

Mr. Rees: Oh yeah, they made night raids and...air...air bombers...strafing during day time hours...(unintelligible).

Eddie Graham: Did you lose many people that...?

Mr. Rees: No, we didn't there no, (unintelligible words) not there...not till we got to Guam (unintelligible words). When we went on Iwo Jima, well we lost some there.

Eddie Graham: On Iwo Jima what were really doing...possibly there?

Mr. Rees: What we were doing...on Iwo Jima?

Eddie Graham: Yeah.

Mr. Rees: Well, we (unintelligible words); we dug out Japs; dug out some caves (unintelligible words) dug in...in caves and (unintelligible). Filled those caves, you know, and they'd come out there and that...take and (unintelligible words).

Eddie Graham: Well now, let me back up a little bit. You say...you still, in other words, you found...you actually were in some combat?

Mr. Rees: Oh yes.

Eddie Graham: Okay, so...

Mr. Rees: I wasn't in no...any front lines, but we were in on the tail-end like moving supplies and...and (unintelligible words) and construction and we were getting mostly shelling and stuff like that...(unintelligible words).

Eddie Graham: And at (unintelligible words) you still were getting pretty good supplies of food; stuff like that?

Mr. Rees: (Unintelligible words).

Eddie Graham: You got...most the time, you did get good food?

Mr. Rees: Yeah.

Eddie Graham: Okay.

Mr. Rees: C-rations; they wasn't bad when you got used to it (laughter). There was a lot of chocolate in it; I'm a chocolate (unintelligible)...(group laughter).

Eddie Graham: 'Cause I was going to ask you about that later on. Uh, after Iwo Jima, where'd you go?

Mr. Rees: After Iwo Jima, I went back to Guam and...stayed there till...till I got...I got...got to come home after I went back to Guam, I think, the first...towards the end of the war. I was in over four years and about...nearly three years overseas out in the South Pacific area...(unintelligible) island. Of course we stopped at other islands when we was going in between, so...campaigns...the Marshalls and some of those others.

Eddie Graham: Did you ever have any...every now and then...they'd let you have an...R&R...between battles (unintelligible) between the islands?

Mr. Rees: We...we didn't go any place; we had a little R&R and I don't want to talk about that because my daughter's here (group laughter).

Some Person: You got laid.

Eddie Graham: (Cough).

Mr. Rees: R&R...R&R amounted to was an extra bottle of beer or something like that (chuckle).

Eddie Graham: Okay, did...after the war went along, did your equipment change any...I mean, did they have any particular...new equipment for you?

Mr. Rees: Well, we...we just had...mostly the equipment we went overseas with, but on...on Guam it got beat up some and we had to replace some of it there. And I got the Bronze Star on Guam there (unintelligible)...

Eddie Graham: Okay.

Mr. Rees: ...(unintelligible)...doing what I was supposed to do.

Eddie Graham: Which was what?

Mr. Rees: Hum?

Eddie Graham: Which was what?

Mr. Rees: Mainly go in the crane and under fire out there transferring supplies from...boat to trucks.

Eddie Graham: Are you saying you never had to handle a rifle or anything?

Mr. Rees: Oh yeah, I had a rifle; I was gun captain on fifties and gun captain on a thirty bullet (unintelligible). So they set up and...the gun did...one time on...on Guam and...for counter-offensive and stuff like that.

Eddie Graham: 'Cause (unintelligible) hadn't actually gone...crossed the line into enemy territory or...

Mr. Rees: No, I never did that, too.

Eddie Graham: Well, you did something pretty good to get a Bronze Star though.

Mr. Rees: Well, like I say...just doing what I had to do (chuckle) out there. And there was nowhere to go; we were out there on Guam...we was off of a...a reef right out and then it drops off there; no boats, so no one could come into the reef...the edge of the reef. And there was a (unintelligible) crane (unintelligible) sitting there on the edge of the reef lifting supplies...these (unintelligible words) off of the...I can't think of...LCIs and over into the trucks and the trucks would take them on into land, but we had nowhere to go...just sit out there on a crane and take what come, but the...(pause)...I never got hit; I got hit in the foot once with shrapnel but that's all...that's really all the damage I got.

Eddie Graham: But...after Guam, what happened? You know you said you...went to Iwo Jima and then you came back to Guam; what happened then there?

Mr. Rees: Well, I...I don't...I don't remember what we really did after Iwo Jima. That was in...I was only twelve days on Iwo Jima and went back to Guam and then we just...let's see...in March...it was in March we was back on Guam in April...May, June, July...then we got August...

Eddie Graham: What year?

Mr. Rees: Let's see, it was '45...

Eddie Graham: Well the war ended about then.

Mr. Rees: ...I know the atomic bomb dropped; I'd just gotten home when they dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

Eddie Graham: So you...you didn't get any wounds or anything like that? 'Cause I asked you...you...you said that...you said that you got a wound in the foot or something?

Mr. Rees: Oh, it didn't penetrate; I got hit in the foot...that's when I got hit in the foot (unintelligible words)...place I got (unintelligible).

Eddie Graham: Purple Heart?

Mr. Rees: Hm?

Eddie Graham: So you got a Purple Heart?

Mr. Rees: No.

Eddie Graham: You didn't?

Mr. Rees: No, the bullet penetrated...in (unintelligible words)...just had on the boot; didn't go through the boot (laughter).

Eddie Graham: (Unintelligible sentence.) Okay. Of all the things that you...at the time that you were in the Pacific, is there anything today that you think about more than anything else...from your experiences?

Mr. Rees: Well, I don't know; they all come to mind, I guess.

Eddie Graham: Is that because of (unintelligible words)?

Mr. Rees: Hm?

Eddie Graham: No, it's nothing special...comes to mind?

Mr. Rees: Well, like I say, it all...it all comes back to you. I mean it's something you never forget...that's for sure. (Unintelligible words) the whole thing.

Eddie Graham: Well of all the people you met during that time, enlisted or...or officers, are there any particular people that they had their...because of their personalities...that you still think about them or talk to...or (unintelligible words) now and then?

Mr. Rees: I can't understand you.

Eddie Graham: If you...is there any particular people that you serviced with...do you still, I mean, do you still...do you still think about them or is there somebody that sticks out in your mind because of their personality or their character?

Mr. Rees: Well, I don't know how to answer that because...you think of all the guys you were there with and saw those that died and (unintelligible).

Eddie Graham: So (unintelligible words) we're supposed to find...ask...ask you about...(unintelligible) have you thought of it, but...do you remember getting much chocolate, cookies or candy or gum or things like that?

Mr. Rees: (Laughter) Yeah, well that was in the...in the C-rations there; there was always chocolate there...that was one good thing (laughter) about them. But after the...(unintelligible words) Seabees came in there why we...they had good food...the Navy. We went over there and ate a lot down in their chow lines. We...but by then I was...oh, I might have been a night guard then; I was still just a Sergeant, but later on I made Staff. And like I say, they had pretty good

food; like I say we snuck in their lines over there...had that good fresh food from the States.

Eddie Graham: And...and what...what island was this that you said the Seabees came in on?

Mr. Rees: On Guadalcanal.

Eddie Graham: Guadalcanal.

Mr. Rees: Yeah.

Eddie Graham: So by then they were completely, I mean they really...more working on the island a lot more?

Mr. Rees: On this (unintelligible) this airstrip that they...Carnegie (sp?) airstrip...we started it initially before they were in there and then they...they come in and we worked with them on their...making the airstrip there.

Eddie Graham: Okay, (unintelligible)...Guam, Iwo Jima and where else was it now that you...?

Mr. Rees: Guadalcanal, Iwo...and then (unintelligible) the Marshalls and we were just bypassing through the Marshall on the way to other islands.

Eddie Graham: Okay. Alright, now let's kind of think about once again...you have a little...

Mr. Rees: I can't remember if it was between Guam and Iwo Jima or between Guadalcanal, yeah it was Guadalcanal and Guam where we had...we stopped in the Marshalls and had sort of an R&R there where we...go ashore on one island, a little atoll there; fool around there; exercise and swim to keep in shape, and (unintelligible words).

Eddie Graham: Now I'm going to see if...(unintelligible words) you...you...where were you at when you ended up your career in the Pacific we're talking about?

Mr. Rees: Well I was in Guam...on Guam then...

Eddie Graham: Alright.

Mr. Rees: ...the night before I come back to the States.

Eddie Graham: Now did you come back because of points or...?

Mr. Rees: That's where our headquarters were. When we went to Iwo Jima, the...the whole battalion didn't go...just us operators; equipment operators when...when I say equipment and do what we had to do. We were supposed to have worked on the airstrip there. Like I say, I was only there twelve days and then we...and I left. I never landed D-Day on Iwo Jima or I probably wouldn't have been here, but I went in two days later...three days later. We got (unintelligible) the flag going up on Suribachi; (unintelligible words).

Eddie Graham: Yeah.

Mr. Rees: But those Marines style anyway. Every time they...anywhere...Guadalcanal or Guam or anywhere...(unintelligible words) a flag (laughter). There's other pictures just as famous as that one, and...and (unintelligible words) other areas where they...

Eddie Graham: (Unintelligible sentence.)

Mr. Rees: But...I'm sure we thanked them for it.

Eddie Graham: So, you had left Guam...then you said that's was where you were finishing up your career; where did you go from Guam once you...?

Mr. Rees: I came back...went back home to my parents' home, Des Moines, Iowa, and I was there...oh, I was there on August 5th; that's when the atomic bomb was dropped and...and I had to go back, so I went back...went back to Mare Island,

California; finished out my career there...went through October, November; over four years and two weeks.

Eddie Graham: Well alright; is there anything else that you want to add that I haven't asked you about?

Mr. Rees: Uhm, I don't know, but I wished I was...reenlisted, but I came home and got married and (laughter), otherwise, I would have reenlisted.

Eddie Graham: (Unintelligible) Well I see you were in Korea, Vietnam...after...after...(unintelligible) been in Korea, you just reenlist?

Mr. Rees: Probably, yeah.

Eddie Graham: I don't know about Vietnam, because you...

Mr. Rees: Yeah.

Eddie Graham: ...but...

Mr. Rees: Possibly, yeah, so yeah.

Eddie Graham: Well, I think you've...certainly did your share of protecting this country...

Mr. Rees: Yeah.

Eddie Graham: ...with all the...what you've told me, and I'm kind of an idea that there's a lot more to...

Mr. Rees: Yeah, looking back on it, I kind of glad and enjoyed it.

Eddie Graham: Well then let me just say something...on behalf of the Museum we appreciate you sharing these experiences...

Mr. Rees: Yeah.

Eddie Graham: ...and we certainly wish you all the good luck and...

Mr. Rees: Thank you.

(end of interview)

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