

## Roy Hughes Oral History Interview

LARRY RABALAIS: All right, this is Larry Rabalais, and today is December the 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011. This is the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pearl Harbor, and I'm interviewing Mr. Roy Hughes. This interview is taking place in Fredericksburg, Texas, at the Nimitz Museum. This interview is in support of the Center of Pacific War Studies, Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the Preservation of Historical Information related to this site. Mr. Hughes is a little bit hard of hearing, so we may be repeating some of the items for clarity. I'll let you go ahead and just tell us, more or less, where you were born and when.

ROY HUGHES: OK. I'm Roy Hughes, born October the 30<sup>th</sup>, 1919, in Ninnekah, Oklahoma. I was on the farm helping my father at eight years old.

LR: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

RH: I had seven brothers and four sisters. They're all deceased. I'm the closing chapter of the [Arielle?] Hughes and [Emilio?] Hughes, my mother and father, seven brothers, and four sisters.

LR: Were the brothers older than you therefore?

RH: I'm the eighth child.

LR: Yeah. So I was going to say they probably were in the service also.

RH: I had one older brother and one younger brother in the service. Both of them -- they're done passed on.

LR: Were they in the Army also?

RH: One is Air Force. One is the Army.

LR: OK, all right. All right, so where did you go to school at?

RH: I went to school at a little place called Agawam, Oklahoma. I went to grade school there, and then I went to the high school -- well, I'll back up a little bit there and tell you a little bit of history about the old boy.

LR: OK.

RH: I was in the seventh grade. Superintendent at a high school seven miles from there and the basketball coach had come down to talk to me and wanted me to come to the high school and said, "We need some ball players." So I said,

"Well, I'm just in the seventh grade," but, "OK, we'll give you the eighth grade test. If you pass it, OK." So I passed the test, went to high school, went -- and the second year or the third year, all eight boys in the high school joined the National Guard. And then, on September the 16<sup>th</sup>, we were called into service.

LR: What year would that have been?

RH: That was 1941.

LR: OK. So the war hadn't started yet.

RH: War wasn't started then.

LR: So this was right before Pearl Harbor.

RH: Right, but I jumped ahead of myself a little bit there.

Our basketball coach -- we played basketball those years, and I joined the National Guard. We went to the National Guard in Louisiana, and then I was forced to try out with the Oklahoma City Indians at that particular time, baseball. Uncle Sam called me the same day that I was supposed to go try out to play ball.

LR: So that would have been when?

RH: I think in --

LR: Forty-one, but --

RH: Forty-one.

LR: -- late '41.

RH: So September the 16<sup>th</sup>, 1941, we mobilized. We went to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, stayed there about six months. We moved to Abilene, Texas. We went from Abilene, Texas, to Fort Devens, Massachusetts. Then, we went into some little training up in Watertown, New York. We went into some cold weather, which was 40 below zero.

LR: Were you in artillery then?

RH: Artillery.

LR: OK, you already were in artillery at that point.

RH: That was --

LR: You were already in artillery.

RH: -- already in artillery in the National Guard. It was the National Guard with 155 Howitzer guns.

LR: I was going to ask you what size. So that's the big ones.

RH: Yeah.

LR: That's the big -- the Long Tom.

RH: Right.

LR: Yeah.

RH: So it's -- well, I think there's a little difference in the Long Tom and the regular 155.

LR: Oh, right.

RH: Now, they are the Long Tom, but ours is -- anyway, we went to Watertown. We stayed in there, 40 below zero, for three months. Of course, we stayed there three months, but it wasn't 40 below zero all the time. And we got ready to ship out. We went to Camp Ashford, Virginia, and shipped out of there.

LR: That would have been early '42, 1942 maybe?

RH: Uh...

LR: Probably.

RH: A little later than that.

LR: Yeah, a little later than that.

RH: Yeah, and we went to Algeria, Africa. It had taken us 30 days to go across.

LR: Oh, OK, the African invasion then.

RH: No.

LR: No, not yet?

RH: What we were doing in there was some training.

LR: Oh, OK.

RH: We stayed there -- I think we just stayed there until the 45<sup>th</sup> Division and all the ships got organized and got ready. And then, our first invasion was Sicily.

LR: Oh, OK.

RH: We fought through Sicily. I think it took us about 30 days.

LR: What did you go over on, an LST? An LST ship or a -- how did y'all land your equipment? What kind of ship?

RH: Oh, it was big, and we had all the guns, all the trucks on one ship.

LR: Oh, on a big one, yeah.

RH: And then, I was motor sergeant. I had 17 drivers and 17 trucks as my responsibility. I had to see about [them?]. So we come through Sicily there about 30 days, I think, or 35. And then, about 10 days, Salerno, another invasion in Italy. That was where I got my first wound.

LR: Well, how did that happen? Tell me a little bit about that. Was it artillery?

RH: Artillery. We pulled out from a river. My captain told the colonel -- we got photographed during the day, and the

captain told the colonel. He said, "We're going to get bombed tonight. I'm not going to be responsible for these 120 men. We've got to move." So he agreed. We pulled back three miles. I was the last in the lee of the riverbank. I had set up there with a machine gun and my mechanic, and the orderly was with me on my weapon carrier. They had already pulled back. They got some shelling. I didn't know where they were at. They were all in a ditch. I pulled out, went out, and we jumped out. (inaudible) digging in, and a high burst got me.

LR: Where did you get hit?

RH: This leg, shrapnel in this leg, two holes in my back. I couldn't get nobody out there. I hollered for help from a medic. I couldn't get nobody. I was wallowing around out there in the blood and couldn't do nothing. Finally, one of my best friends, (inaudible) a gun on the medics out of that ditch, said, "Do you hear him calling for you? That's your job. You go get him, or I'm going to kill you right here in this ditch." So he went and got me and drugged me and got the doc up there, and the doc looks at my leg, puts sulfur powder in it. And I said, "Doc, I feel a little stinging in my back." He'd given me a shot to put me out, and he threw me over and saw the two holes in my back. He puts the silver powders on them and taped it up, and he thought I was done out. And I heard him tell his helper, "That boy won't last very long," so I said, "Hey, Todd," one of my truck drivers. He didn't know I was still awake. I looked up. I said, "Todd, I'll be back to see you." Three months in the hospital, I come back and joined the outfit.

LR: Where did you go to the hospital at, in Africa?

RH: They put me on a ship. They thought there was an American place back (inaudible) temporarily, but they put me on a ship and took me to Tripoli.

LR: OK.

RH: So I went into a British hospital, and I stayed there, and that's where I learned to drink my hot tea. Anyway, I stayed there four days, and they finally took the shrapnel out of my leg, but they didn't bother with this in my lungs. I've still got it in my lung.

LR: Oh, really?

RH: Yeah.

LR: All right.

RH: So I went back to the outfit, and, after we pulled back the effort, pulled back from [there?], after I joined them, after I got out of the hospital, the next invasion was Anzio.

LR: Yes.

RH: We stayed there on that beach.

LR: That was a mess. That was a mess.

RH: Yeah.

LR: Yeah.

RH: We stayed -- I stayed in one foxhole for two months and 20 days.

LR: Oh, my goodness.

RH: We saw one truck over there a mile away. We couldn't shoot on him. We didn't have enough ammunition -- just waiting for a counterattack. They send me and [Cecil?] Smith -- I called him [Gut?] Smith. He was a good man. They sent me up behind the infantry to notify if the tanks broke through the infantry. I could radio our captain to pull our big guns back because we didn't have enough ammunition to counterattack, and we had to stay and defend ourselves. So we were up there, and Cecil walked out, and I think this is what happened. He walked out, and I think the Germans got a reflection off of those binoculars, because we were in a wooded area.

LR: So you're looking at them with binoculars.

RH: He did.

LR: He was.

RH: And I think they got a reflection, and I guess they thought, "Well, if there's one there, there have got to be more," so they really shelled us. Cecil got hit. He was about -- we had already dug in. He was about 20 feet from his foxhole, and, when he got hit, I went and got him. I dragged him in the best I could and put him down in his foxhole. I called the captain. I said, "Cecil is down, and we need an ambulance, a jeep and stretcher." So they worked [themselves?] to the timber and got up there and got him and got him back. And then, when we pushed off, we fought into Rome.

LR: Did Cecil survive?

RH: Cecil -- he was crippled for the rest of his life, and he'd come back to (inaudible), Oklahoma, and drove a taxi the rest of his life.

LR: Oh, wow.

RH: And about 20 years ago, he had a heart attack and died.

LR: So y'all then pushed on to Rome.

RH: We went on into Rome after we pushed out of Anzio. And I got to see just a little bit of Rome. One half of a day is all I got to see. We come back. They pulled us back, and we got -- went into some training. I thought, "Man, you're going to put us in training (inaudible) the training we've already had," but we were getting young kids in. They didn't know what the war was about, so they had to have some training.

LR: So you're still in the 155, the 1-5-5.

RH: Right, the 155, still in, yeah. So after we got that [rest?], we loaded up -- invasion of the southern France, four invasions all together. We fought into southern France right across into Munich, Germany. [Man?], the captain was pretty good, but he said, "Roy, I bet you \$10 the war will be over in three days." Of course, I think he had some inside information that he didn't let out, so I called him. Three days, the war was over.

LR: Well, when y'all went through France and into southern Germany there, did y'all find a lot of resistance or not a whole lot?

RH: We traveled pretty fast.

LR: OK.

RH: But our (inaudible) gives some places for it to be bombed, our (inaudible) OP did, but we traveled pretty fast. We ran into some resistance, small towns, but it was cleared about pretty good. We went on into Munich, Germany, and we surrounded the Germans in Munich with our guns. In three days, the war was over. In seven days, they had me on my way home.

LR: So this whole time, you were in a National Guard division, the 45<sup>th</sup> National --

RH: Forty-fifth Division.

LR: -- the whole time?

RH: The whole time, the whole thing, from the start to finish, except the three months I was in the hospital, 511 days.

The 45<sup>th</sup> Division has got it in records in their books.  
It's 511 days front-line duty.

LR: Did you pretty much have the same captain much of that time?

RH: No, we got --

LR: Different officers?

RH: We got different (inaudible). We called this second lieutenants. We got several of them. We got several captain. They replaced pretty often.

LR: Did any of your close buddies get killed that you know of? Not your close buddies?

RH: Well, no, not really, but two of them got wounded.

LR: Yeah.

RH: But old [Glenn Hightower?], my real good buddy, he was on the side of the bed in Munich, Germany, and there's an old [warden?] sitting down in the middle of the floor cleaning his pistol. Glenn was on the side of the bed. That gun went off and hit him. It put 22 holes through his entrails, came out, and they rushed him in, and he made it, but he had -- he's [done?] several operations after that down through history, but he --

LR: So that was an accident then?

RH: Yeah, it was an accident. He made it through the war fine, but an accident -- he got -- that old boy let his gun go off and shoot him.

LR: So, for you guys that were behind the lines, artillery was the big problem, not snipers.

RH: Oh, yeah.

LR: Artillery.

RH: No, no, big shells --

LR: Big shells.

RH: -- were our problem, and bombers, bombs.

LR: Oh, and some bombers too?

RH: Yeah, we got --

LR: Some aircraft?

RH: -- yeah.

LR: Yeah.

RH: Really, that's where I lost most of my hearing, was bombs.

LR: Oh, is that right?

RH: Yeah, 100%, [just?] hit once. A bomb hit me right outside, and I lay down, and it sheared all the timber off above my head.

LR: Wow.

RH: God took care of me.

LR: Yeah, he sure did. So when the war ended, then, how long before you went back to the states, and where were you discharged from?

RH: Discharged in San Antonio, but they had me on the road seven days after the war was over. I had more points than anybody in the --

LR: Oh, you did? Since you'd been in there since early on, you'd been in there for a long time.

RH: Yeah, so I had -- the thing about it, I had twin girls born two months after I went overseas.

LR: Oh, so you were married then.

RH: Yeah.

LR: Yeah.

RH: And I was anxious to get home and see my twin daughters I never had seen.

LR: OK. So you were in from September of 1941...

RH: To June of '45.

LR: Until --

RH: I think it's June when I got my discharge.

LR: -- June of '45, wow. Were you a sergeant then?

RH: Staff sergeant.

LR: Staff sergeant. Did you stay in the National Guard for a while after the war?

RH: No.

LR: No?

RH: I got out completely.

LR: You had had enough.

RH: Yeah.

LR: All right. So you spent three months in the hospital then --

RH: Right.

LR: -- with that wound, yeah.

RH: Yeah.

LR: You mostly ate K-rations and C-rations and stuff like that?

RH: Yeah. Part of the time, we did, but, while we sat and were waiting, like Anzio, I cooked meals for us sitting there.



We were on the road quite a bit. We had the cool meals, rations, but...

LR: Did y'all try to find a chicken or something like that on the side, whatever you could find?

RH: Yeah. I killed seven deer.

LR: Oh, really?

RH: And they cooked -- we had deer steaks for a couple of days.

LR: Well, it's better than K-rations; that's for sure.

RH: And we got a beef, and we got him organized and eating procedures.

LR: Well, that pretty much winds up the end of that, to the end of the war. Is there anything else you want to say before I cut the tape off about your experiences of the war? Did it leave an impression with you on life afterwards?

RH: Well, yeah. This is years later. I thought it. I thought it, and I didn't put in for anything, but I got so bad, my wife was disabled at that particular time, and we had a standard procedure for them to come -- I'd go into a (inaudible) while I was asleep, and I couldn't come out of it. I'd be asleep, and she couldn't get to me. She called the cops several times to come in, and then, after they'd get a hold of me and shake me out, I'd look up; there was a cop standing in my face.

LR: So it was like a dream, like a bad dream?

RH: A bad dream. I'd have them, nightmares, so they put me on an anti-anxi--

LR: Anti-anxiety kind of medication.

RH: -- it'd kind of calm me down some. It helped out quite a bit, but it was rough. But for quite a few years, I fought it pretty hard.

LR: Well, I thank you, and the museum thanks you, for sharing these experiences with us.

RH: (inaudible). After I finally gave into it, I went to the doctors, and they worked with me. They sent me to five different doctors. They gave me 100%.

LR: Oh, they did? Disability?

RH: -- of 100% disability of American veterans, too.

LR: Well, your country owes you that. That's for sure.

RH: Yeah.

LR: Well, thank you so much for sharing your experiences with us, Roy, and --

END OF AUDIO FILE