

Interview with Santiago Diaz

Interviewed by Richard Misenhimer

My name is Richard Misenhimer. Today is August 24, 2012. I am interviewing Mister Santiago Diaz by telephone. His phone number is 817 926-2879. His address is 1167 Amspoker Avenue, Fort Worth, Texas 76115. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Nimitz Educational Research Center for the preservation of historical information related to World War Two.

Mr. Misenhimer: Mr. Diaz, I want to thank you for taking the time to do this interview today.

Mr. Diaz: I don't mind at all.

Mr. Misenhimer: I thank you for your service to our country during World War Two. The first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the museum, to make sure it's okay with you. The heading says, "The National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, oral history project. The purpose of the National Museum of the Pacific War oral history project is to collect, preserve and interpret the stories of World War Two veterans, home front experiences, the life of Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz and the old Nimitz Hotel by means of the tape recorded interviews. Audio recordings of such interviews become part of the Nimitz Education and Research Center, the archives of the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission. These recordings will be made available for historical and other academic research by scholars and members of the family of the interviewee. We the undersigned, have read, or heard, the above and voluntarily offer the National Museum of the Pacific War full use of information contained on audio recordings and written text of these oral history research interviews. In view of the scholarly value of this research material, we hereby assign rights, title and interest pertaining to it to the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission." Is that okay with you?

Unknown female: (Translates into Spanish and she indicates it is understood and agreed to by Mr. Diaz)

Mr. Misenhimer: Okay. Now, Mr. Diaz, what is your birth date?

Mr. Diaz: My birthday is September 6, 1915.

Mr. Misenhimer: Where were you born?

Mr. Diaz: I was born in Chinapas, Jalisco, Mexico.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Diaz: Oh, I had six sisters and four brothers.

Mr. Misenhimer: Were any of your brothers in World War Two?

Mr. Diaz: The youngest brother was. No. he wasn't in the...he was in after the war. After the War when they were having trouble with Russia.

Mr. Misenhimer: Okay. Yeah, good. Now, when did you move to the United States?

Mr. Diaz: My Parents came over here when I was a baby. Probably about six months old, or something like that.

Mr. Misenhimer: And where did you live in the States?

Mr. Diaz: First, they came over to, all the way to For Worth.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you grow up there in Fort Worth?

Mr. Diaz: Yes, yes. I grew up in Fort Worth and went to school in Fort Worth.

Mr. Misenhimer: Where did you go to school there?

Mr. Diaz: In Fort Worth, at, the name of the school was James (?) Ebenizer (?) Jr. High School.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you graduate from high school?

Mr. Diaz: I had to drop out because of the Depression. When I went to school from 1924 to 1933.

Mr. Misenhimer: How did the Depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Diaz: Well, it just helped me because I liked school but, I couldn't keep going because of the Depression.

Mr. Misenhimer: What was your father's occupation?

Mr. Diaz: (Tape pauses briefly and restarts)help (?) out the family. Of course, I was the only one that could find a job. Then, the welfare was helping the rest of the family.

Mr. Misenhimer: What was your father's occupation?

Mr. Diaz: Well, when he was working, he was working for the railroad.

Mr. Misenhimer: When did you go into the service?

Mr. Diaz: Let's see, I have the date here. In June of 1933.

Mr. Misenhimer: You went into the service in 1933?

Mr. Diaz: 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer: 1943, okay. And you went into the Army, is that correct?

Mr. Diaz: Yeah. After I passed the physical and I chose to go into the Army.

Mr. Misenhimer: You would have been about twenty-seven years old then. Is that correct?

Mr. Diaz: I was twenty-seven, yes.

Unknown Female: Excuse me, sir. I have, before, we put him in the newspaper on Veteran's Day, it said 1943 to 1946. So he did go into the service in 1943. I'm not sure if June is correct, but I think it is.

Mr. Misenhimer: And where did you take your basic training?

Mr. Diaz: At Camp Barkley (?), Texas, near Abilene, Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer: And how was that basic training?

Mr. Diaz: Well, some (?) of the training was going to the Hospital and taking lessons on first aid.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you have a lot of marching?

Mr. Diaz: Oh, yeah. We had regular basic training and target practice.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you have training with a rifle?

Mr. Diaz: Yeah, we had target practice to.

Mr. Misenhimer: And were your drill instructors pretty tough?

Mr. Diaz: Well, they were pretty tough, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer: When did you finish basic training? Where did you go then?

Mr. Diaz: They sent us, in the same camp, for, I forget, how long, how many weeks we were there in hospital training, or medical training.

Mr. Misenhimer: And what all did you do in that medical training?

Mr. Diaz: We did blood smears and first aid lessons.

Mr. Misenhimer: About how long was that training?

Mr. Diaz: I don't remember, I think about two weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer: Then what did you do?

Mr. Diaz: Well, from there they sent us to Illinois for staging and we were bound for Europe. I wondered (?) if my orders were changed there. San Toriziana for tropical training.

Mr. Misenhimer: And what did you do during that training?

Mr. Diaz: Well, we had a lot of hiking and all night, staying out in the....

Mr. Misenhimer: In the woods?

Mr. Diaz: Yeah. In the woods.

Mr. Misenhimer: How long was that training?

Mr. Diaz: I don't know. A couple of weeks, I imagine.

Unknown female: Just a minute. When I asked him what training did he have in he service, he told me, OK, what he said, he said he had basic training at Camp Barkley (?), near Abilene, Texas and then twelve weeks later, he went for medical training in Illinois, bound for duty in Europe. His orders were changed to go to the Pacific theater. That's what he wrote. (tape stops and restarts)

Mr. Misenhimer: OK, then where did you go?

Mr. Diaz: Well---

Unknown female: To the Pacific, no? To the----?

Mr. Diaz: We shipped out for Guadalcanal, yeah. Yeah. We shipped out and our first stop was at New Caledonia. Then from there we went on out to Guadalcanal.

Mr. Misenhimer: What did you do on Guadalcanal?

Mr. Diaz: I was a-----

Unknown female: Just say what you did.

Mr. Diaz: Well, at Guadalcanal, when we arrived we were attached to the 53rd Sea bees for rations(?).

Mr. Misenhimer: 63rd Sea bees, okay. What all did you do there?

Mr. Diaz: Well, we were, by our officer, we worked inspection of the areas that had mosquito breeding. We became the 446 Malaria Survey Detachment.

Mr. Misenhimer: 446, what now?

Mr. Diaz: Malaria Survey Detachment.

Mr. Misenhimer: Malaria, okay.

Mr. Diaz: Our job was to find the areas where the breeding was, where the larva mosquitoes were.

Mr. Misenhimer: And how did you do that?

Mr. Diaz: Well, we gave the places that we found the larva to the control units. Yeah, the Air Control Units, and they did the work.

Mr. Misenhimer: Okay. I see. And how long were you there?

Mr. Diaz: We were kept there for most of the war. They didn't change anywhere else.

Mr. Misenhimer: I'm sorry?

Mr. Diaz: We were kept there at Guadalcanal all the war that we attended (?) we were in service there.

Mr. Misenhimer: Okay. What did you live in there?

Unknown female: (Unintelligible)

Mr. Diaz: No, we had a tent. Yeah, we had a tent.

Mr. Misenhimer: And how was the food there?

Mr. Diaz: Well, at night, we put insect repellent and slept under a net and let's see, what else, oh yeah, every morning we would go to the mess hall and they gave us atobrine (?) tablets every morning for, I guess, to keep down the malaria.

Mr. Misenhimer: Where you very close to Henderson Airfield?

Mr. Diaz: No. we weren't too close. We were rifle (?), but we went there a lot.

Mr. Misenhimer: About when did you arrive in Guadalcanal?

Mr. Diaz: Let's see, in May?

Mr. Misenhimer: May of '44?

Mr. Diaz: '44, yeah, '44.

Mr. Misenhimer: And were you ever attacked by Japanese planes or anything while you were there?

Mr. Diaz: No, not while we were there.

Mr. Misenhimer: Okay. Were you attacked by Japanese planes somewhere else?

Mr. Diaz: No, no.

Mr. Misenhimer: Now, when you were on the ship going down to New Hebrides, was that ship pretty crowded?

Mr. Diaz: Oh, yeah. There were several thousand soldiers on there and we slept in bunks of four high.

Mr. Misenhimer: Do you recall the name of that ship?

Mr. Diaz: The one we were on was the *USS William Black*. It was a converted freighter.

Mr. Misenhimer: How was that trip down there?

Unknown female: How was that trip? You said that you got seasick, or something.

Mr. Diaz: Oh yeah. The first three days I was seasick but, everyone else was to.

Mr. Misenhimer: Were you with other ships in a convoy going down there?

Mr. Diaz: No, no. We were not in a convoy.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you have any submarine alerts?

Mr. Diaz: Yeah we did one time but, nothing happened. Of course, the ship had it's course was zig-zag all the way across.

Mr. Misenhimer: What else happened on Guadalcanal?

Mr. Diaz: Oh yeah, Well, every six months they called me to headquarters to see if I wanted to become an American citizen. I finally decided I should. I was sworn in at Guadalcanal.

Mr. Misenhimer: What date was that?

Mr. Diaz: No. I don't recall the date. I think it was in 1945 though.

Mr. Misenhimer: Okay. While you were at Guadalcanal?

Mr. Diaz: Yeah. On my citizenship, it states on there that I was sworn in at the British island of Guadalcanal.

Mr. Misenhimer: When did you leave Guadalcanal?

Mr. Diaz: We left on December 6, and got home January 6.

Mr. Misenhimer: OK.

Unknown female: Excuse me. This is on that article. It says it on there. I can read it to you.

Mr. Misenhimer: Okay, you can read it to me after while. Then what happened?

Mr. Diaz: We left Guadalcanal and we stopped in New Caledonia for a couple of weeks. Then from there, we got on another ship, it was a PA boat and made another stop at Pearl Harbor but, we didn't get off the ship. From there we headed on to California and arrived in California at, I believe it was in New Year's Eve or before it was (?) here(?). There were a lot of people around there cheering and waiting for us to come off the ship.

Mr. Misenhimer: When were you discharged?

Mr. Diaz: I was discharged near Tyler, Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer: What date?

Mr. Diaz: On January 6?

Unknown female: It's got right here, 'January 6, returned to Texas.' Is that when you were discharged?

Mr. Diaz: Yeah.

Unknown female: Is that when you were discharged, when you returned to Texas?

Mr. Misenhimer: January 6 then?

Unknown female: Yes. 1946.

Mr. Misenhimer: OK, Good. Did you get home from the war with any souvenirs?

Mr. Diaz: Let me see. Well a few coconuts, some sea shells that I bought from the natives and paid with American dollars. One British coin and let's see, one coin that had a British inscriptions on one side and a Rappic (?) on the other side. I found that in a fox hole.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you ever see any USO shows anywhere?

Mr. Diaz: Well, yeah. There were a lot of US Posts at (unintelligible).
Unknown female: Any USO shows, did you get to see (?) Bob Hope?

Mr. Diaz: Oh, yeah. Bob Hope did a show there one night.

Mr. Misenhimer: Was that on Guadalcanal?

Mr. Diaz: On Guadalcanal.

Mr. Misenhimer: I know he was there, right?

Unknown female: Was Bob Hope at Guadalcanal?

Mr. Diaz: Yeah and four movie stars.

Mr. Misenhimer: Yeah, he had Francis Langford with I him, I think.

Unknown female: Did he have Francis Langford with him?

Mr. Diaz: I don't recall the name. Let's see-----I don't recall their names.

Unknown female: He talks about seeing Bob Hope all the time. He talks a lot about that.

Mr. Misenhimer: Yeah right. Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Unknown female: We don't quite understand that. You mean, did he work with the Red Cross?

Mr. Diaz: No.

Mr. Misenhimer: Nothing. Okay.

Mr. Diaz: We went to the mess (?) hall.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. Diaz: Yeah. We heard her a lot. Even before the war ended she was still saying that they were fighting us at Guadalcanal. She spoke real good English.

Mr. Misenhimer: What would you consider the most frightening time that you had?

Mr. Diaz: My thought were, at first, that after we left San Francisco, that I had the felling that I wasn't coming back. I don't know why but, I did.

Mr. Misenhimer: But you never were attacked by the Japanese, is that correct?

Mr. Diaz: No.

Mr. Misenhimer: When you crossed the equator did you have any kind of a ceremony then?

Mr. Diaz: Yes. We were told, over the speaker, that we were crossing the equator and, of course, we couldn't see anything. I got one on those, what do you call it?

Mr. Misenhimer: Is that a Shell back?

Mr. Diaz: One of them, about the-----.

Mr. Misenhimer: You probably got a certificate making you a Shell back. You didn't get that?

Mr. Diaz: I got a picture of, what's the king of the.....?

Mr. Misenhimer: Neptune?

Mr. Diaz: Yeah. I got one of them.

Mr. Misenhimer: Yeah. Neptune, right. Now on April 12, 1945, President Roosevelt died. Did you all hear about that?

Mr. Diaz: Yeah. We heard about that.

Mr. Misenhimer: And what reaction did people have when they heard it?

Mr. Diaz: Well, we were all sad that he passed away before, because, before the end of the war.

Mr. Misenhimer: Then on May 8 of 1945, Germany surrendered. Did you hear about that?

Mr. Diaz: Yeah. We were told about it and everybody was happy because we believed the war wouldn't be too much longer.

Mr. Misenhimer: Then, on August 6, of '45, when they dropped the Atomic bomb, did you hear about that?

Mr. Diaz: Yes. We were told and before then, just before then, they prepared us to go into the combat area.

Mr. Misenhimer: Then on August 15, when Japan surrendered, did you have a celebration then?

Mr. Diaz: Yeah, we knew when Japan surrendered but, I don't recall any celebration.

Mr. Misenhimer: Now, when you got out, did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Diaz: No. I didn't want to remember much. I didn't, I didn't know what was going on until later in the; in life I began talking more about the war but, at first, I didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer: What was the highest rank you got to?

Mr. Diaz: PFC. There weren't many extra because we were only eleven enlisted men and two officers.

Mr. Misenhimer: A small group. Okay. Now, what ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Diaz: Well, we got the Victory Medal, the Asiatic Pacific Medal and the Good Conduct Medal.

Mr. Misenhimer: Have you had any reunions of your outfit?

Mr. Diaz: No, no. I joined the VFW.

Mr. Misenhimer: Do you still go to those meetings?

Mr. Diaz: Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer: Okay, good. Were you ever in a typhoon down there?

Mr. Diaz: No. Well, it rained most of the time though.

Mr. Misenhimer: Now, when you got out, did you use your GI Bill for anything?

Mr. Diaz: No.

Mr. Misenhimer: Anything else you recall from your time in the service?

Mr. Diaz: I think we covered just about everything.

Mr. Misenhimer: Okay.

Unknown female: Here he says, 'at the end of the war they were sent to a camp at the far end of the island for two weeks rest and they were sent back.'

Mr. Misenhimer: On Guadalcanal?

Unknown female: Yeah. It says, 'at the far end of the island' so I guess it was Guadalcanal.

Mr. Misenhimer: Yeah, okay.

Unknown female: And then, that to, on the article that h I had on the newspaper, the medals, I guess he told you Victory, Good Conduct and the Asiatic Pacific Medal.

Mr. Misenhimer: Right.

Unknown female: That's what's in that article. Now, I'm going to read to you the article. Okay, it's got several other things in there.
Okay, "Santiago Diaz, ninety-five, shares stories of World War Two Experiences." Okay, that is the title.
"A World War Two veteran's recent visit to The Eisenhower Birthplace State Historic Site, resulted in a day of powerful wartime memory and a boost of pride for everyone involved. Armed with a walking cane and a cove of recollections about his experience in the US Army, ninety-five year old Santiago Diaz, of Fort Worth, visited the Texas Historical Commission site in Dennison this summer with his daughter, son-in-law and grandson, in tour of the first home of esteemed World War Two General and President Dwight Eisenhower.
Born In Jalisco, Mexico amid the turmoil of the Mexican Revolution, Diaz parents relocated to Texas while he was an infant and settled in Fort Worth. Diaz was raised in Fort Worth and eventually married Justina (?) Avinia (?) at nearly the same time the United States entered World War Two. When he learned he could receive American citizenship for serving in the military, Diaz said goodbye to his wife and newborn son and enlisted in the Army.
Diaz recalled completing basic training in 1943 with his fellow recruits at Camp Barkley (?) in Abilene. Twelve weeks later, he was sent to a hospital in Illinois for medical staging bound for duty in Europe, when his orders were changed to the Pacific Theater. Diaz was sent south to Louisiana to prepare for the tropics because, 'there was no jungles in Illinois,' he said with a smile.

Diaz departed for Guadalcanal from San Francisco on a crowded ship where men, including himself, became sea sick. Thousands of soldiers slept in bunks stacked four high to the ceiling and Diaz received a spot on the bottom bed. The other guys, climbing down, would step on his feet and hands, he recalled, adding that it took twenty-one miserable days to reach New Caledonia, zig-zagging the entire way to evade enemy submarines lurking in the South Pacific.

Finally arriving at Guadalcanal, the ship sat offshore all day before the troops disembarked. The men climbed down rope ladders that night to the landing craft below to avoid being observed by the enemy, Diaz explained.

Most of Diaz time overseas was spent on Guadalcanal working as a medic associated with the 53rd Sea bees before transferring to an Army Air Corps unit. While on the island, Diaz proudly took his oath and became an American citizen.

When the war ended, Diaz was stationed on the island for a short time but, returned to Texas on January 6, 1946. Afterwards, he claimed he never wanted to be on a boat of any kind again.

Diaz and his wife raised four children in Fort Worth and he enjoyed a lengthy career with the Texas and Pacific Railroad until retiring in 1982. Diaz has visited several sites from his military days, such as the railroad in Paris, Texas, where the soldiers were not allowed to get off the train. He was especially impressed by a 2003 trip to Fredericksburg Nimitz Museum, also a THC Historic site.” And then, “We encouraged him to return to Fredericksburg, since they now have a new National Museum of Pacific War and wonderful, new Guadalcanal exhibit.” And then, “He (?) will (?) be rushing (?) up (?) the Eisenhower birthplace. I know the staff will appreciate and enjoy his story as much as we did.”

- Mr. Misenhimer:** Okay, good. Alright. You spent two Christmases on Guadalcanal?
- Mr. Diaz:** On Guadalcanal.
- Mr. Misenhimer:** Yeah, okay. Okay, good. Anything else you recall from World War Two?
- Mr. Diaz:** I think we have covered just about everything there.
- Mr. Misenhimer:** Okay. Well, thanks again for your time today and thank you for your service to our country.
- Mr. Diaz:** Okay. I'm (unintelligible). (Tape stops and starts up again)
- Mr. Diaz:**(unintelligible-starts in speaking Spanish to unknown female).....pre-invasion on Guadalcanal.
- Unknown female:** You want to tell them about that? He said he forgot one thing about the

pre-invasion. He wants to tell you about it.

Mr. Misenhimer: Go ahead.

Mr. Diaz: I forgot to mention that from a distance, we saw pre-invasion landing by our troops before they left for Guam. We witnessed that and how the battleships fired first and then the cruisers and the destroyers and then how the troops landed through a spray (?) to the shore. That was before they left for Guam.

Mr. Misenhimer: They practiced there, you're saying?

Mr. Diaz: Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer: Okay, good. Anything else?

Mr. Diaz: That's it.

Mr. Misenhimer: Okay.

Unknown female: Okay. Now, I've put that was interview number 740 and it said----- (Tape stops and restarts)

Mr. Misenhimer: This is the end of this tape.

Transcribed by: Robert Grinslade
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Fredericksburg, Texas