

# The National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with:

W.W. Marsh

934<sup>th</sup> Heavy Automotive Maintenance Co.  
359<sup>th</sup> Field Engineers

3-June-2014

This is Clarence C. Bryk and today is June 3, 2014. I have the pleasure of interviewing Mr. W.W. Marsh. This interview is taking place in Fredericksburg, Texas, at the museum. Here is Mr. Marsh, to introduce himself and tell about himself. This interview is in support for the Nimitz Education and Research Center Archives for The National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for preservation of historical information related to this site.

W.W. Marsh: I am W.W. Marsh and I will try to tell you some of the important things that pertain to my life, when I first went into the service. I went into the Army. I had a choice, but before we get into that, let me tell you where I was born and how my childhood. I was born in Dubois Nebraska, a little service station stop on the Richardson and Pawnee County line. My father was a farmer and he farmed a farm there. It was about three miles from the Kansas line and when I was born, my Uncle had to ride a horse over to Burn, Kansas to get Doctor Myers to come and deliver me. I was born in Richardson County Nebraska on December 12, 1923. I was a farm boy. When I reached the age of 18, I had to enter the Draft. I had just finished high school at Troy, Kansas. At that time, that's where our family was living, in Donaldson County. It was just across the river from St. Josephs, Missouri. The time came for the Draft Board to check my family out and there were five of us older boys. My oldest brother had already enlisted into the Army Air Corps. and was in training. My father was able to keep two of the other brothers, on the farm. There were three of us that were subject to being Drafted. My father had decided that he would keep my younger brother and one older brother on the farm. He could keep two of his boys on the farm and I remember very well my father taking me up to the County Courthouse and putting me on a bus going to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. That is where I was inducted into the Service. When I got there, I ran across one of my high school buddies Floyd Ruckie. He now resides in Arizona. He had already volunteered into the Army Air Corps. and he wanted me to go in with him. So, I went down to the Air Corps. Office and enlisted into the Army Air Corps. there at Fort Leavenworth. I passed all the tests, except one thing. I only weighed 119 pounds and you had to weigh 125. The Officer I was talking to said, "Marsh, do you think you could eat six pounds of bananas?" I said, "No sir, I don't think I could do that." He said, "Well then you will have to either go into the Army, Navy or Marine Corps. That will be your three choices, because you don't weigh enough to be taken into the Air Corps." I resigned myself, that is what I was going to have to do. I went to the room where the Army, Navy and Marines were and there were three

desks with an Officer at each one. A fellow escorted me into this big room and he asked me, "Which one do you want?"

I knew I was not a good swimmer and I didn't want to get into any water and I had heard so much mean stuff about the Marines, that I didn't want the Marines. So, I walked over to the Army desk and volunteered into the Army. That is where it all started. I was at Fort Leavenworth for about two weeks. This was in 1943. I spent thirty-four and one-half months in the Army. I got shipped out of Fort Leavenworth to Camp Croft, South Carolina. That was the Infantry Basic Training Camp. I spent seventeen weeks in Basic Training at Camp Croft. After we had completed Basic Training, I got shipped out. They asked me if I wanted to get into the Cook and Bakers School and I said no, I have done too much cooking at home. I had seven brothers there so I have done enough cooking. So, they put me into Ordnance. They sent me to Camp Stokes(?), Kansas, where I was transferred from the Infantry into the Ordnance. I was transferred into the 938<sup>th</sup> Heavy Automotive Maintenance. As I was a farm boy, they thought I knew a little bit about mechanical work. But I fooled them. I hadn't even learned to drive yet. I had three older brothers who did the driving and I never got a chance. Anyway, the first thing they did was to put me in a Jeep along with an Officer. He said, "crank it up." Down the road we went, we were going all over that road before I learned, before I learned how to guide that vehicle well. We went about two miles down the road and came back and he said, "You are qualified. I'll get you a Driver License." That is the way I got my Military Drivers License. I had never driven anything before, not even a tractor. They decided I needed more training in the mechanical skills and automotive repair. After I had been there about a month, they shipped me to Bragg, Oklahoma and after arriving there, they said that they were sending a bunch of men to a camp in Nebraska that had a mechanical school. They gave me three months of automotive mechanical training, working on jeeps, trucks and so forth. When I came back from there, to my base camp in Oklahoma, it was around Christmas time, they were preparing to ship the whole Company overseas. They loaded up in January and shipped us to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. We went by Military Convoy all the way from Oklahoma to Camp Kilmer. That was a slow go, because you had to slow down, as you went through towns and you had to keep everyone in line in the convoy. It took us three days to get from Oklahoma to Camp Kilmer. When we got to Camp Kilmer, they started teaching us Bayonet practice, so we would be prepared whenever we got to where we were going. We had about a week that we did nothing but practice with our bayonets on dummies. About a week after we arrived there, they told us we were shipping out. They had

issued us all our clothing and equipment we needed including a shovel a rifle, a bayonet, blankets, overcoat and the whole set-up for overseas. They marched us down to the train station in Camp Kilmer and we got on the train to go Brooklyn. We got on that train and we had not been on it more than ten or fifteen minutes and here comes a man walking through the train and it was Red Skelton. He was greeting each one of us telling us how much he thought of us for giving our lives in the service of our country. He chatted with each one of us for a few minutes. We got off the train and went up the gangplank onto the transport ship and we still didn't know where we were going. After we got on the ship, the Company Commander came through and told us we were going to France. That was late January or the first part of February in 1944. We disembarked at La Have, France. Then they dropped our vehicles off there. We picked them up and went to a little town called Fe'camp, France. When we got our equipment, they had it all covered with Cosmoline (Rust preventative). We spent two or three weeks there, doing nothing but cleaning Cosmoline off of our equipment and that was a nasty job. I do remember that that was a cold, cold, place because it was right on the English Channel and the winds blowing off of the Channel would freeze you. I was really happy, when we loaded up and moved out and headed across France up through Belgium and on into Germany. We stopped at a little town just out of Cologne. We went through several towns that were completely destroyed. We went to Bruhl, Germany and that is where we were first encamped in Germany. On the way we stopped in one place in France, overnight, and that was the day that President Roosevelt died. The next day we took off to Germany. We were stationed in this town in Germany, I can't recall the name of it right now, and there was a big school there and we were quartered in this school building. The Officers had a building, right besides the school, that they stayed in while all of the Enlisted men stayed in the school building. I could tell one story that happened there, while we were stationed at that school building. We had one soldier that had had just too much Army. He and I as well as several others were on

guard duty one night. We were standing guard twenty-four hours. We would be on and off. Some of the soldiers in our Company did not take war too good. I myself didn't, but I knew what I had to do. This one night, while we were on guard duty, I was at one station and this other fellow was at the next station, where he was guarding the Officer's building. This soldier kind of went 'haywire' and he started yelling at the Officers in the building and he opened fire on the building. He shot the windows out. I heard the Officers yelling at me to do something about it.

I wasn't going to try to do anything because he would probably shoot me. Finally, he ran out of ammunition and he collapsed. It was a terrible situation and it shook me up really good. I knew I didn't want to go over and confront a man that had gone berserk. That was an instance that happened in France as we were moving up. Getting back to Germany, we had set up shop in Bruhl, Germany and we pretty close to the Front. We were about fifteen miles from the Front and were close enough to hear the shelling and gun fire. We had to be very careful at night as we were an Ordinance outfit that serviced the vehicles for the rest of the Army in that area, because they did have a lot of damage to the vehicles while they were up at the front. They would bring them back and we would work on them. We had to be careful at night, because there were a lot of German soldiers who would infiltrate through the lines at night. We had to be very careful. We had to keep a close guard on everything and everybody. They would create havoc. You had to be within a certain distance from where the fighting was taking place to get credit for war zone service. We were there twenty-eight days and you had to be in a zone for thirty days, to get a Battle Star. I lacked just a couple of days but I didn't qualify for a Battle Star and the war ended. Which was May 5, 1945.

Clarence: How did you find out the war was over?

W.W. We did get Stars and Stripes paper every so often. The news came back from the Front that the Germans had collapsed and were ready to make peace. That was a happy day for me. At that time, I thought my war was over. But it wasn't.

Clarence: What were the local Germans civilians doing?

W.W. It was a non-fraternization area and we could not make any contact with them. We would see them, but we did not inter-act with them. They were shy of us and we were shy of them because we didn't know if they would have a gun on them or whatever. That was the reason we were told that there would be no fraternization. When the war ended, we saw thousands upon thousands of German soldiers who surrendered in our area. I can't tell you how many thousands of German P.O.W.s I saw as they marched them in. They had a big field just outside of town that they built a fence around. They herded them all in there and they tried to feed them.

Clarence: Were you involved in guarding them?

W.W. Yes. We had to guard them.

Clarence: What did they do with all their weapons?

W.W. When they took them in, they took their weapons? I saw all kinds of rifles, pistols and guns piled up in piles, six to ten feet high.

Clarence: Was this done in an open field?

W.W. Yes. They encamped the POWs right out there in an open field. It was a sad sight to see, the people and the condition that most of them were in. Some of them had burlap sacks wrapped around their feet and didn't have any shoes on. Some of them had holes in their pants. Some didn't have shirts. They were in all sorts of condition. It made you really feel sorry as a human being to see them in such terrible condition. I was taught as a child to have compassion for our fellow humans.

Clarence: Were they sullen or how did they act?

W.W. They just milled around. It wasn't a very big area and they had to get them food and water. They dug big trenches for them to use as a bathroom, which was right out in the open.

Clarence: How long did they stay there?

W.W. We back into France and they were still there when we left. They started sending some of them home and some of them they kept, because they were high Officers in the German Army or they were SS men.

Clarence: You could tell the SS men?

W.W. Yes. They had this Lighting Bolt pin on their uniform.

Clarence: Obviously they didn't take them off before they were captured.

W.W. No. the insignia was sewn into their uniform. That may be the reason that some of them didn't have shirts on. They discarded them before they surrendered. After that, I was assigned to go with two other Sergeant's and a Corporal and me. I was a PFC. At that time, since we had been in Ordinance, we were put on patrol. We went from one American camp, to another, where they had stored their equipment to inspect their vehicles to see if they were combat ready. If they weren't, since we were Ordinance people, we had to tell them what they had to get them combat ready. We did that for about two weeks and then they called us in and shipped us all back to France. We were in central France. Some of the guys went into town, but I didn't as I wasn't interested in doing so at that time. We were in Central France up until August. When we got to Central France, they issued us new kakis. We had had wool clothing when we were in Germany, because it was much cooler there. They had a reason for issuing us kakis. It was because they were getting ready to ship us to Japan. We spent about three weeks there and then they shipped us by French train. It was like a cattle train. They shipped us to Marseilles which was the debarkation point for Japan. We were still on the train, when the first Atomic Bomb was dropped. That really shook us up.

Clarence: How did you hear about it?

W.W. Primarily by word of mouth. We got off the train at Marseilles, France and they put us into a big camp. There were thousands of American soldiers there. Some of them were shipping back to the United States and some of them were being shipped to Japan for duty. Our Company was scheduled to go to Japan. Our equipment was already on the boat and then the second Atom Bomb was dropped. Japan surrendered soon after. We were within three days of our Shipping Orders out. So, they put us on hold awaiting to see what was going to happen. They kept putting us off day by day, delaying our shipping out, until the Japan signed the Surrender Agreement. Then they cancelled our shipping orders. They then put us into REPO Depot. Some of the men who were in the Company had enough service to go back home. Some of us didn't. Those of us who didn't went to REPO Depot (Redeployment Depot). I was there for a couple of

more weeks and they put me in an Engineering Company and sent me to Northern France, right upon the Belgium border. That is where the Company they put me in, was running a rock quarry to crush rocks to rebuild the French roads. They had German POWs up there breaking the rock out. They had rails and little carts that they would put the rock in and roll it down and dump it into the quarry. Part of our job at that time was guarding POWs. After the 938<sup>th</sup> decided they were finished with the rock quarry they reassigned a bunch of us on Detached Service. That is when I got sent back to Etain, France. They assigned me, on detached service, to the 359<sup>th</sup> Field Engineers. I can't remember the town, but it was on the Muse river and boats would come up the river and they would load rock into them. They had trains come in and they would load rail cars at the bottom of the mountain. They also had trucks hauling rock. All of this rock was to repair the roads of France. You can imagine how bad the roads had been torn up. They had an encampment for us and they had one for the German POWs.

Clarence: What did you live in?

W.W. We lived in tents.

Clarence: How was the food?

W.W. I don't recall. I have a story about food, I will tell you later on. I was shipped back to the states from this little town of Etain. What we had there was me and two other men that ran a water purification point. We had about four or five pumps that we pumped water out of a small lake, purified it, with chemicals. Actually, it was Chlorine and we also put Alum in the water, for some reason. Put Alum in and then the chemical which is Chlorine based. We had a container on the pump where it went in and another place where the Alum went in.

Clarence: Was this your source of drinking water?

W.W. Yes. We serviced five or six Camps in the Central France area.

Clarence: How many people would that serve?



W.W. I have no idea. We were on Detached service and this one Company was fairly close to town, that we furnished water for. That where we had to go to eat. I was issued a three-quarter ton weapon carrier. It is between a six-by and a jeep. I never had a bit of trouble with that vehicle, all the time I was stationed there. It was sometime in April 1946, that they stopped the rock quarry. I don't remember how long I was at that water purification point, but I was there until I came home. I came home during August of 1946.

Clarence: How did they notify you?

W.W. We had an Officer that would come to our water point. He serviced all of the enlisted men that weren't attached to the main Company. He would come around once a month with information and stuff that we needed. He would order our gasoline for our gasoline motors.

Clarence: You were notified that you could go home.

W.W. Yes, I got a notice.

Clarence: How was that trip?

W.W. They came and picked me up and I left the truck there with the other two men. They took me back to Germany and sent me by rail to Bremerhaven, which was a port of debarkation when you came back to the States. I got there and it was a beautiful sight to see that ship that I was to get on. I remembered the ship that I came over on. That is another story. It took us fourteen days by Convoy to get to La Havre, France and I was sick as a horse for twelve of those days. There was a bunch of us that couldn't keep food down. I got sea-sick and I couldn't get over it. I could walk down toward the Galley and when I got close enough to smell the food, I would have to turn around and go to the side of the ship to be sick. It is a terrible feeling. That was for twelve days.

Clarence: How was it on the way back to the States?

W.W. That was an easy trip. I didn't get sick.

Clarence: How did they feed you on tht ship?

W.W. The same.

Clarence: Who cooked the food?

W.W. They had transport people. I don't know if they were Service people or not. On the trip over they were.

Clarence: Any card games, on the way back?

W.W. No. I never played cards. I had been on detached service, so I didn't have any close buddies with me.

Clarence: How long did it take you to get back to the States?

W.W. Six days. Going over, we were in a Convoy and the Convoy can only go as fast as the slowest ship. And going over we were subject to enemy submarines.

Clarence: Where did you land, when you got back to the States?

W.W. I saw the Statue of Liberty.

Clarence: How did that make you feel?

W.W. Real good! I was really glad to see it. They stopped us outside the harbor there and waited until daylight, so we could see it. We came in one evening and they parked us out in the Bay until the next morning.

Clarence: What kind of sleeping arrangement did you have on that ship?

W.W. Coming back, it wasn't as bad a when we went over. Going over, we had six racks with about two feet between each one.

Clarence: So, you got home in August of 1946?

W.W. Yes. I went from there by rail to Camp Kilmer. From there, they; shipped a bunch of us to Fort Sheridan, Illinois. That is the time, I went through Pittsburg. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon and it looked like night-time. Smoke, smoke, smoke. It was terrible.

Clarence: Was this train ride a little better than the other one?

W.W. Yes. It didn't take us long to get there.

Clarence: Did you get discharged there.

W.W. Fort Sheridan, Illinois, I got Discharged.

Clarence: : You were a civilian, but you weren't quite home yet.

W.W. I wasn't home yet. I still had quite a few days Leave time that had built up while I was over there. I couldn't take any while I was on detached service. They didn't Discharge me until the 6<sup>th</sup> of December. I remember, it was Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> as the day I came home. They shipped me to St. Joseph, Missouri which is only twenty miles from home. I was ready to hike it.

Clarence: Did the family meet you?

W.W. No, they didn't know I was coming.

Clarence: How did it feel to be back in St. Joseph, after all that time?

W.W. It made me feel good to be back in the States and knowing that I was going to have my Discharge sent to me.

Clarence: Was the family still living on the farm?

W.W. Yes. My oldest Bob, was a pilot and he was in Houston, Texas at that time? He got out in March and I didn't get out till later in 1945.

Clarence: When you got back to your old surrounding, was it a let-down? You had been in the center of everything and all of a sudden, you are back on the farm

W.W. I was glad to get home. No let down. I was just proud to get home. I immediately started helping my two brothers who were on the farm.

Clarence: How many acres where they farming at that time?

W.W. About 160 acres.

Clarence: Was that for raising feed for the cows? Was it a Dairy farm?

W.W. It was a multiple farm. My father raised hogs. He claimed that hogs are what got him out of debt. We raided grain and alfalfa hay and raised Red Clover and let it go to seed and sold the seeds. That was expensive stuff back then. We raised hogs and milk cows and had horses. By that time, we had a new John Deer with an electric starter.

Clarence: Had anything changed when you got home?

W.W. A lot of things had changed. My father had sold the farm and he was moving to town. I helped chuck out the corn that Fall and helped him get the farm ready for a Farm Sale. The first of March they had the Farm Sale.

Clarence: How did you feel about the farm being sold?

W.W. I grew up on that farm. I was four or five, when my father moved there, so that was my childhood. There is another story that you might be interested in. I only had one fight all the time I was in the Service. It happened when we got on the boat. There were a lot of unhappy people getting on that boat. An Officer came through and we were all in the bottom of that ship. He assigned each one of us a rack. I had put my Duffle bag on the end of my bunk. There was just enough room to slide the bag between my bunk and the one above me. This happened the first evening after we had got on it. This was after Red Skelton had talked to us before, we got on the boat. I put my Duffle bag on the end of my bed, like everyone else had done. I was in Company B and this fellow, who was in a different Company than I was, got assigned to the same area that we were. I went to do something and I came back and he was laying on the bunk above me and his Duffle bag was on my bunk. I said to him, "Is this your bag?" he said, "Yes" I said, "Do you mind getting it off of my bunk?" I figured I was mistreated and I wasn't happy about getting on that boat and I guess he wasn't. I grabbed his Duffle bag and threw it on the floor. That made him mad and he jumped off the bunk and we went to town.

Clarence: Did you land a couple of good ones?

W.W. I landed a couple of good ones and he landed one or two. Then our buddies took over and separated us. That is the only time I really had a fight. Another story you might be amused by: When I was stationed at Etain, the Fall before I came home, I had all my clothes and we lived in a tent that had boards all the way around it and it had a door and it was a four man tent. Two of the men that were there before me had been relieved and shipped out. I was running the Purification point by myself which kept me going. I had been busy loading the water tanks that came in, that morning. I had a big pump so it didn't take too long to fill the tanks. As I was working, I noticed a young Frenchman who kept walking back and forth on the street. I noticed him, but I didn't give it another thought. Now, I had all of my clothes and equipment and about everything I owned in my tent. I got a weapons carrier and I drove up to where I got my meals and I ate and I came back and my tent had been broken into. I walked in and everything was gone. The only clothes I had left were the ones I had on. I was really mad and I figured it had to be that young Frenchman I had noticed. I jumped into my vehicle and I thought that he was probably headed for Verdun or to Metz and he couldn't be very far down the road. I figured he

would be walking so; down the road I went. I went down the road and there was an encampment of black people. I wheeled in there and there were about eight or ten of them standing around. I was so mad, I yelled, "Did you see a Frenchman with a bunch of clothes?" One of them walked over and said, "Yes, I did see a Frenchman walking down the road with a bunch of clothes under his arm." I wheeled out of there and about a mile further down, I saw him walking along there. I have regretted, what I did, but I did it. I drove up beside him as he was thumbing a ride, with my clothes. I stopped and chopped him with my fist. He never knew who I was or why I was there. I knocked him down and I told him "Get up and get those clothes off!" He was wearing some of my clothes. He started pulling them off. He took them off, down to his shorts and I told him to get on down the road. I turned around and went back to my tent.

Clarence: When you think back to the period of time you were in Europe, what comes to your mind? What made the biggest impression?

W.W. The biggest impression is, when we first went up into Germany and we were going down the street marching ourselves. When we stopped to eat in the chow line, by the time we got our meal finished, we had cannisters that we put the waste in and we would empty the scraps out of our mess kits, there were at least thirty or forty kids, for six to twelve years old, that just swarmed those canisters. I saw that happened several times. That got to me more than anything else.

Clarence: It is good that you tell about what you saw, because people don't hear about things like that.

W.W. You asked me if there was anybody in the Service that I didn't like. Our Company Commander, was pretty rough on the whole Company. He was working us ten or twelve hour shifts plus we had to pull Guard Duty. This went on for quite awhile and it got pretty draining on the soldiers that were involved. He was a Captain and not well liked. There was a lot of complaining and discontent. The word had got back to him that there were a lot of men that were very unhappy. Now, normally, in the morning, we would fall in rank and march to the shop. One morning we lined up and he said, "I understand that there a lot of people in this Company that are very unhappy with working conditions and don't like the food. I am here now and if you have any complaints, I would like to hear them. Just raise up your hand and I will listen to what you have

to say." One fellow raised his hand. The Captain, said, "What's your problem?" The guys said, "The food here is not very good, especially the gravy. It's terrible." The Captain said, "Sir, I tell you something. I am making you the official gravy maker." He told him to fall out and to be in the kitchen by 11:00am and you will be the official gravy maker. Another fellow raised his hand and the Captain said, "What's your problem?" the guy said, "The moral in this Company is terrible and there is a lot of discontented men here." The Captain said, "I'll tell you what, I am making you the official moral builder. You go to your quarters and you figure out how to raise the moral of this Company." I guess it was about a week later and I was on the front gate of the work area, where the shop was. A jeep pulled up and I saw right away it was an Officer of a higher rank than our Captain was. I asked him for the Password. We had orders that we asked everybody for a Password. He said, "I'm the Battalion Commander and I am coming for inspection." He gave me the Password and I passed him on in. The very next morning, everybody fell out and the Captain said to the newly appointed Gravy maker and Moral builder, "You go to the shop today." One of the Lieutenants had put the word out as to what had happened. The Battalion Commander went through the Barracks and this one fellow was in there by himself. The Commander asked him why he was still in the barracks. They guy told him, "I'm the official gravy maker." Later he ran across the moral builder and he asked him what he was doing in the barracks and he told him that he was the official moral builder. The next morning both of them were in the shop.

Clarence: What happened to the Captain?

W.W. He was still a Captain and he was still there, but I am sure that the major Officer had a talk with him.

Clarence: Is there any other things that come to mind?

W.W. I got shot at one time.

Clarence: Tell me about tht.

W.W. Right at the end of the war, there were three of us that were going from Company to Company to check the vehicles for combat readiness. We were in a jeep going through the outskirts of a town and we got shot at. We heard a rifle shot. We didn't get hit or anything, but I can tell you, we got out of that jeep really quick. We never got shot out again, and we never found out who shot at us. That is the only time, I was ever shot at, that I know of. I was very lucky that I didn't serve in any major battle of the war. I was a behind the lines man and I was fortunate that way. The war was almost over by the time I got up into Germany. As I said, I only served some 20 plus days in actual combat zone. I think the Lord looked over me during the war.

Clarence: I can't tell you how much we appreciate your coming over and sharing your experiences with us. It has been a great experience for me.

W.W. I am glad I did it. I didn't anticipate what it was going to be exactly, but I enjoyed it.

Transcribed by:

Floyd C. Cox

April 27, 2020

San Antonio, Texas