

Transcription: Manny Rivas

Today is Wednesday, January 30th, 2008. The interviewer is Bill O'Hara, that's me, and I am interviewing Mr. Manny Rivas, and you were a corporal with the United States Marine Corps.

Manny Rivas: Yeah.

This interview is taking place by phone, from my office in the Stephen F. Austin Building in Austin, Texas, and Mr. Rivas, you are at your house in El Paso at 3405 Kirkwall?

Manny Rivas: That's correct.

OK, and this interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. OK, stage is set, all right. So, when is your birthday?

Manny Rivas: June the 3rd, 1925, I mean that's when I was born.

OK, and so you have a twin brother?

Manny Rivas: We uh, we were born as twins, yes.

OK, and who was born - ?

Manny Rivas: 20 minutes apart.

OK, who came first?

Manny Rivas: My brother.

And his name is?

Manny Rivas: Salvador.

Salvador.

Manny Rivas: We used to call him Sal.

Sal, OK. And where were you born?

Manny Rivas: In El Paso, Texas.

OK. And your parents' names?

Manny Rivas: Lydia was my mother, L-Y-D-I-A, Rivas.

OK.

Manny Rivas: And my father was Salvador Rivas.

OK, and where were they born?

Manny Rivas: They were born, now my father was born in Mexico, Chihuahua, Mexico, and my mother was born in Clifton, Arizona, and Morencio or Morencio, one or the other. They're little mining towns way up in the northern New Mexico in the mountains, up in mountains. It's uh, coal country. They dig for coal out there.

OK, and you were born in, you and your brother were born in El Paso. Do you have any other siblings?

Manny Rivas: Yeah, I got a, used to have a brother by the name of Julio. He was the youngest, and he died about ten years ago, and I got a sister that uh, lives here in El Paso. She's uh, 85 years old, and uh, they were the only. Then we had three other half brothers, uh, siblings, half, from my mother, my father remarried. Two are in Martine, and uh, Nora, she passed away, and uh, what's his name, Nora. Norrie, yeah Nora, and Bernice, yeah.

OK, so you were in the um, the Marine Corps.

Manny Rivas: Yes.

United States Marine Corps, and so when did you join the service?

Manny Rivas: Uh, it was uh, it was right on our 17th birthday on June the 3rd, the day we were 17.

OK, and is that when you could, was that the age you could join?

Manny Rivas: Yeah, if your parents would sign for you. My mother's dead. My dad, my father didn't want to sign because he said he didn't want us in the same outfit due to the fact that one of us could get killed or something like that.

Yeah, OK. And so what made you join the service?

Manny Rivas: What?

What made you join the service?

Manny Rivas: Well, at that time everybody was real patriotic and we had uh, Pearl Harbor, and uh, I saw a lot of papers on Pearl Harbor, and uh, a lot of extras that, and we had made a lot of money on that day, my brother, between my brother and I, and uh, we were patriotic, and all our, all our friends were joining up, so we didn't want to wait for the draft because that would take two years at least before they could draft you because we were only 17 and you had to be 18 before they even sign up for the, for the draft.

I see. Huh, so by enlisting with your parent's signature, you could just go down there and sign up and be ready to go pretty quick.

Manny Rivas: Yeah, at the age of 17. Yes.

Good. So where were you when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

Manny Rivas: We were, at that time, we were in Los Angeles and uh, we got a call. I used to sell papers on the corners. My twin brother and I, we had a, a corner and uh, one, he tried, he'd be able to use that one side of the street and I used the other where the streetcar was and we used to sell a lot of papers right there. And uh, when they, Pearl Harbor came, they called us, said be ready and be on that, such a corner, we want to drop at least a thousand papers, and I say, why? Pearl Harbor, and we put the, the radio on – there was no television – and we uh, start uh, selling papers immediately, and then they'd leave for us another thousand papers, and so forth all day long.

And that was in Los Angeles, California?

Manny Rivas: Yeah, Los Angeles, California.

OK, so you were living in Los Angeles when Pearl Harbor was attacked.

Manny Rivas: We had moved out there just during, no, we were born during the Depression, you know that, and uh, when we were 17, uh, 16, we were, it was real bad here in El Paso, and we moved out there on uh, 1940 we move out there. And that's from, no, wait a minute, 1941, we moved to uh, Los Angeles because we thought we might get better, my mother could get a job and so forth, so forth, and then when uh, but we came back right after Pearl Harbor back to El Paso and we're still here in El Paso.

I get the sense that you and your brother, Salvador, were very close your whole lives.

Manny Rivas: Very, very close.

Yeah. Do you remember what your thoughts were when you learned - ?

Manny Rivas: What?

Do you remember what your initial thoughts were when you learned that Pearl Harbor, you know, when a U.S. naval base had been attacked?

Manny Rivas: What do you mean, our uh, did we have feelings or what?

Yes.

Manny Rivas: Yes, because I used to have an uncle who was in the Navy, and then when Pearl Harbor, he got hit up in, when he was a Navy in Pearl Harbor, so that's close to our, our, to our feeling and our feelings like family.

OK, and yeah, so tell us a little bit more about that. So you're just, you're selling these papers with your brother on a street corner in Los Angeles, and then you're told there's gonna be a lot of papers coming because there's a big story, the Japanese have attacked –

Manny Rivas: Then that's when we put the radio on, yeah.

And so what was going on in your mind as you recall, and what was going on around you?

Manny Rivas: What was going around, the anxiety and what was happening?

Yes sir.

Manny Rivas: How many people were getting killed, and uh wounded and uh, and the urge to see what I can do, but we were too young. We were on 16 then, and the urge to uh, see what was going on, what we could help, and uh, you know, every kid was patriotic, and right after that, all our young friends who were 17 or 18 started joining the service, the Army, Navy, Marines and so forth, down the line. And then uh, that was Pearl Harbor, and so we joined six months later in June.

I obviously wasn't alive then, but I'm wondering what it was like and maybe you can kind of paint the picture for me a little bit about what it was like. I mean suddenly our country is attacked. Was there this, did the country suddenly become, I don't know, there was this overwhelming sense of patriotism and the country kind of joined and was ready to do whatever it would take to defeat - ?

Manny Rivas: Well, yes, I mean because later right after, that's when it starts making those drives for ___ and makin' the drive for lead and uh, iron, and uh, anything rubber, tires, and they forming with, forming committees to what then, junkyards and everywhere you could find a tire. A piece of, I mean a piece of iron or, uh, lead, aluminum and all that for those uh, pick-up, pick-up of uh, for the scrap drive is what they used to call it. Then uh, after that, they started going around with the uh, what do you call those, victory gardens where they used – we had one here in El Paso, a victory garden, and a victory garden so they could raise their own food. I remember we bought uh, when we were little, just before we left, before we left we bought mama about a thousand baby chicks and she had chickens all during the war because she had, they would even sell chickens for, trade 'em for stamps so they could get meat and sugar and, and whatever you know, they was ration at the ration stamps. And uh, there was no gasoline at that time. Gasoline was about 9 cents a gallon. You could buy bread for about 2 cents a loaf, and uh, wages were nothing, and the houses were, were cheap, but nobody, nobody had the money. I remember that mama used to send us with a dollar and we could come back with a whole bag, big, full of stuff, because I remember bread was, was 2 cents a loaf. Meat was about 15 cents a pound.

The dollar had lot of buying power back then.

Manny Rivas: A lot of buying power. Now with a dollar, you can't bring nothing, not even a loaf of bread.

It's a shame isn't it, it's a real shame. But OK. I'm glad you shared those – it's interesting to know what things cost back then, and compared to today.

Manny Rivas: Well I remember tennis shoes were a dollar. Now my kids, my grandchildren, they don't, tennis shoes, I mean what do they call 'em, whatever they call 'em now, they're \$59 to \$70, even \$100.

I know it.

Manny Rivas: And we used to get 'em for a dollar.

It's crazy, isn't it?

Manny Rivas: Yeah. I remember we used to go barefooted in the summer time because we didn't have to wear, the shoes off.

That's right. So where were you when the atomic bomb was dropped? Do you remember that?

Manny Rivas: Uh when was that, uh, it was - ? Oh, we were in Okinawa. We had just finished the Battle of Okinawa and uh, we were getting ready, uh, the commander, uh, Colonel, uh, I remember his name, too many, had told us that we were going to invade Japan, and the first Marine division was gonna be the leading division in the beach and then everybody will follow. And he told us, look, in the first two hours, every one of you will be killed or wounded, be a casualty before the first two hours.

Hmm.

Manny Rivas: So you had that feeling, I'm going in to my death. That was the feeling we had.

Wow, and you and your brother were together.

Manny Rivas: We were twins in the same company, different platoon.

Yeah, so let me back up just a little bit and get back to when you and your brother went and enlisted in the Marine Corps together, and you were in, were you back in El Paso then?

Manny Rivas: We were back in El Paso because right after Pearl Harbor and my grandmother and my mother said, we're coming back to El Paso.

OK, so you came back to El Paso, Texas, and then when you turned 17, you and your brother together went and enlisted in the Marine Corps, and so where did you do your basic training at?

Manny Rivas: Inside San Diego.

OK, and then, and how long was basic training?

Manny Rivas: I think it was, I can't remember, it was about three or four months.

OK. So that, did you have any more training after that?

Manny Rivas: No, we had combat training and then Camp Pendleton. Camp Pendleton used to be a tent city, nothing but a tent city out there. It was nothing but that. Now, they tell me that it's miles and miles of brick, I mean cement and buildings now, and I haven't been back since.

And Camp Pendleton is - ?

Manny Rivas: It's right there in California, Oceanside, California.

OK. It's not too far from San Diego, right?

Manny Rivas: Well, it is about halfway between San Diego and Los Angeles.

OK, all right. And so then, and then after you got your combat training -

Manny Rivas: We went overseas.

Then you went overseas.

Manny Rivas: We were 17.

You were 17 years old.

Manny Rivas: And we landed in Okinawa, I mean not Okinawa, uh, Guadalcanal. I've got a picture of my twin brother and I at Guadalcanal. We were skinny and afraid.

OK, so you were skinny. How tall are you, or how tall were you then?

Manny Rivas: 5'6".

5'6" and you weighed how much?

Manny Rivas: About 117.

117 pounds, without your gear on.

Manny Rivas: Yeah, without that.

And so that was the first destination was Guadalcanal?

Manny Rivas: Well, we, we were there to replace the wounded and the dead. They had fought in Guadalcanal for, I don't know, a year or so, and we were there, it was 180, no, the 80, 37th, pardon me, it was the 37th replacement battalion. And we were about 700 of us that came in the ship, and by the way, we still, there are nine of us alive and we talk together or uh, call up each other and, then or we go to the DFW National Convention because we meet out there and have a beer and talk about it, talk about many years ago.

That's great that you keep in touch with -

Manny Rivas: There's only nine of us alive now.

Yeah. Do you have, do you get together once a year, or do you have scheduled - ?

Manny Rivas: No, we, when we go to the National Veterans at Fort Worth Convention, that's when we get together.

I see.

Manny Rivas: I've been with the VFW 59 years.

59 years. So the nine of you, oh, I was going to ask a question and I forgot what I was going to ask. So you all do talk once in a while. Oh, I know what I was going to ask. So are they all over the country?

Manny Rivas: There are some in uh, the East Coast. There are three of them. One in Nebraska, one in Florida. No, he just died, about ten to ten, about three, three months ago, and then me in El Paso.

Wow, good cross section. OK. So how long were you at Guadalcanal?

Manny Rivas: Not too long, until December 1943, when we uh, invaded, we had uh, what they call uh, Cape Gloucester. There was nothing but jungle fighting and water was always deep up into your, into your belly, and sleep in the, in the water all the time. And then but there were a lot of mosquitoes. That's where my twin brother and I, we got malaria right there in the water in Cape Gloucester.

You got malaria?

Manny Rivas: Malaria, yeah.

The both of you got malaria.

Manny Rivas: Yeah.

Was that, did a lot of people get malaria?

Manny Rivas: Oh yeah, about 40 percent of the, of the troop, I mean the company.

So how did you deal with that? I mean I know that made you sick. Did you go to an infirmary?

Manny Rivas: Take quinine, and then atabrine after that, and then malaria, a lot of people until 19 uh, go to 47, just before I got married actually was my last attack of malaria while we were at home.

And then from, was it New Britney?

Manny Rivas: New Britain.

New Britain, OK.

Manny Rivas: New Britain, that was right next to uh, Cape Gloucester, and it was the same thing, nothing but malaria and mosquitoes and dysentery and you name it, and Japanese, just uh, soldiers, Japanese soldiers.

Sounds really miserable is what it sounds like.

Manny Rivas: It was ____, it was already always about 100 some odd degrees. And now, we didn't wear nothing, you know, out there you don't wear nothing but uh, your, your ____ t-shirt, that's all you wore. There was no uh, armor, no nothing on your body. Just came with your body armed.

Yeah. You didn't have any kind of mosquito repellent or - ?

Manny Rivas: No, there was no mosquito ____.

What about provisions like for food? How was the food?

Manny Rivas: The food was K rations.

K rations and water?

Manny Rivas: And the water, then uh, water, yeah, but I was kind of more getting, when I was telling you about, telling you about ____ the water and everything, then from there we came back to Baboobo (sp. ???) in the Solomons. We cleared the Solomons and we rested in there in the Solomons. It was 1944 then after we finished. See, we invaded uh, Cape Gloucester on New Years' Eve, I mean Christmas Eve, on the 24th of December, 1943. We had our Christmas in the, in a fighting array, 1943.

That's a Christmas you won't forget.

Manny Rivas: No.

I'm sure.

Manny Rivas: And I was looking for my twin brother to see where he was, because they, you know, we were split up in different platoons, same company.

Oh, so you weren't always, you didn't always have him in sight.

Manny Rivas: No, no, never, never.

Never.

Manny Rivas: We were fighting.

So after the battles, you would, would you get together?

Manny Rivas: I'd start looking for him, yeah, and I was asking everybody if they had seen my twin somewhere, let me know.

Did either one of you suffer any wounds in these - ?

Manny Rivas: Well everybody does. There was ____ like that, you never do.

I'm curious, Mr. Rivas, all the years have gone by, I wonder did you tell a lot of stories about your experiences during WWII over the time with family?

Manny Rivas: Not much. Here in El Paso I got a beautiful display of WWII, I mean hundreds and hundreds of pictures and posters of all the battles I was in, so forth and on the line, and I would go to schools and I would take 'em and talk about 'em to the students so they know. You'd be surprised that half of 'em don't know anything about WWII, or their parents, because they don't teach it in high school anymore. They, they have a little chapter with about ten pages and that's WWII. They forget.

Yeah, that's a shame.

Manny Rivas: And then New Britain, about the same thing. That was at New Britain was the same thing, you know, after Cape Lobster, it was New Britain about the same thing as uh, Cape Lobster, nothing but mosquitoes, water, and sleeping in tons of water and you, and that's it. And sometimes there was roots on the, what do you call, on the big tree, they're so high and sometimes low, and you, you used to try and hump 'em when there was roots from the trees and sleep on the roots, headin' down of whatever it was, and uh, you didn't bathe because it would rain every day. Just like you don't have to take it.

I know you were in the same clothes and all the moisture, you know, things were probably falling apart, and that's a lot of moisture to deal with.

Manny Rivas: Yeah, lot of water.

Lot of water.

Manny Rivas: Lot of uh, big trees, lot of jungle, jungle fighting. They issued a machete so you can cut your way through, part of your issue.

And then you eventually you were in Okinawa?

Manny Rivas: No, we, we hit Pellaloo (sp. ???) in 1944. That was an island about three miles wide and about nine miles long, and they had over 30,000 Japanese, and we were about 30,000 Marines, and uh, it was a lot of hand to hand fighting, a lot of barn side charges, and uh, you know, stuff like that.

Yeah.

Manny Rivas: Get to where I mean one time it, uh, it was I don't remember what night, what day, when my twin brother went out on patrol, and there were three other people and got lost. And three days later, I volunteered and I had three other, one of my friend's volunteered. We were gonna look for him at midnight to tour. And they told us not to, but the lieutenant said, you need your twin, you go. ____, and then like a pigeon, my instinct of a twin brought me to him and we got him out.

Where was he?

Manny Rivas: Over there where about three miles, no, he was behind the enemy lines in a cave, and uh, there were some wounded and we had to carry the wounded out and, and ____.

And you were 17 years old at this time, right?

Manny Rivas: No, I was already 18.

You had already turned 18?

Manny Rivas: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, we got him out, and uh, and uh, let me tell you, they said I don't know how you all did it. We went behind the enemy lines, and in those caves. We had to go from cave to cave. And but, my twin knew I was company, he said. He could sense it.

He said what?

Manny Rivas: Yeah, he could sense it.

Oh, yeah.

Manny Rivas: That I was coming.

Yeah.

Manny Rivas: And he started looking for me.

Yeah.

Manny Rivas: And then we got lost.

You got him and then you got him back out.

Manny Rivas: Me and three other guys.

Yeah.

Manny Rivas: Yeah, we got him out.

Is there a, I don't have a twin brother or sister, but I know, I've heard you know, some twins they have that connection and it sounds like you and your brother had that.

Manny Rivas: Yeah, we did. I can remember when my twin died. I felt him when he died, here in El Paso. I felt it.

Did you live near each other after the war?

Manny Rivas: Oh yeah, we lived here, we used to work together in an optical company after the war. We both uh, went to work and then I didn't like the optical. He, he was an optician, uh, for the rest of his life. I wasn't, I got out of there. I became a veteran's counselor and I spent 37 years as a veterans counselor with the VA, and I retired and then I went to work for the state, and then I put another 15 years at the state of the veterans ____ and I retired from the state also. Guess all my life I've been veterans ____.

You've done a lot of good service for this country. But I want to try and wrap up your actual time during the war because yesterday when we were setting up this interview, you told me about something that I wouldn't, I hate to say, I wasn't even aware of the uh, the China theater.

Manny Rivas: Well let me tell you, OK, let me keep on going, and after Pellaloo (sp. ???), we were, they told us it was going to be a three-day affair, in three days you're gonna secure those nine miles and you're gonna be out of there, and we spent there 83 days.

Oh wow.

Manny Rivas: In 83 days, we didn't get a hot meal, we didn't take a bath, and we didn't change clothes, 83 days. And the heat was 115 to 120, and there was no way you could take a shower or go in the ocean ____ because he, you can mention the Japanese are only about half a mile or maybe they're closer all the time, and anybody who would take a shower or, I mean a bath in the ocean would get killed. So we never, and then they opened the water, the drinking water when we first came in, big old water, there was no water in, in the island after we shipped in. They used to bring it to us from the Navy and they used to use those gasoline cans. Just the gasoline from cans, just rinse them out, put the water, and bring it to us. We were drinking maybe half water, half gasoline, because there was no, no water, and that's the only water that uh, that uh, we could drink. When we, when we finished, we lost 60 percent of our troops in uh, Pellaloo (sp. ???), 60, and we had, I had, hair hadn't been cut in three months. I hadn't taken a shower in three months, and we didn't care if we smelled like hell, we did. And uh, where they changing we took shower, we'd shave, we'd clean up for the first time, and when you put clean clothes for the first time, and uh, and we had a first hot meal after 63 days.

How did that taste, do you remember?

Manny Rivas: Very good.

Do you remember what you had, what they served you?

Manny Rivas: Probably spam.

Spam, ha –

Manny Rivas: So it was pretty interesting and uh, after Okinawa, we went into, back to uh, the Solomon's, Solomon Islands to rest. Then we got ready to go to Okinawa after that. And Okinawa, we spent, we got in on April the 1st and it was April Fool's Day, and uh, and so we thought we were gonna get totaled, we were gonna get hit worst than on Pellaloo (sp. ???) and we did. What happened was that the Japanese moved inland, they let us come in a mile or two and then hit us. But in Pella-, in Okinawa, uh, they took me out of the 8th Company, First Marines, and they put me in Jasco. Jasco was the Joint Assault Single Company, temporarily, and we came in on, and I did. My twin brother stayed. And I came in and uh, it was 1 o'clock in the morning. We, four man, with a rubber boats and so forth, and we had the ship, ship to shore communication with the Navy and the Marines and the waves came in, we were there waiting for 'em. It was just a, you know, and then later they transferred me right away after the, everything was safe and the beach, back to my company direct to my twin brother I think. And we were there until April 1st until November, October '45, yeah. That's when uh, they uh, they put us aboard ship because a typhoon was coming in from uh, after the war was over, they flown 'em into China. We were in Okinawa for the atomic bomb, and they were supposed to go to Tokyo, but MacArthur didn't want us to go to Tokyo, the First Marine Division. The First Marine Division had more battles, islands, than any other Marine Division or Army Division in the Pacific. We had six, uh, seven invasions. And let me tell you what, they say about D-Day, the blood and the beach, the beaches or where our raid, to us, every invasion was a D-Day for us. The beaches were red, the bodies were there, and uh, just the same as D-Day but on a smaller scale. So we had to go through six D-Days, and in Europe they went through one D-Day. Nobody can remember that. You ever thought about it?

No sir, I had never thought of that, but I, I hear your story and it did happen to you.

Manny Rivas: Yeah, every one of 'em was a D-Day for us, regardless it was small scale. In proportion, Marines were only about 35,000 in a division. There were over there how many divisions, but each one of us went through six, five or six D-Days, the same thing.

That's awesome.

Manny Rivas: I caught a, I mean I still have it, I have a what do you call, a Hamari sword. I caught that in Pellaloo (sp. ???). It was from an officer in a barn side charge and we had to uh, I had to kill him to get it, and uh, I still have my sword here and uh, bayonets. But yeah, well let me tell you what, if you can remember that when you were young and you killed somebody for the first time, you remember those eyes for the rest of your life. I tell _____.

Yeah, I'm sure it's not something that you can forget. You may want to -

Manny Rivas: The first one. But later, you forget. You'll remember that for the rest of your life. Those eyes. I was a young man, about 17, 18.

Yeah, probably about your age or so. Yeah, that's war. War is hell, isn't it?

Manny Rivas: What?

War is hell.

Manny Rivas: But you remember that for the rest of your life.

I'm sure.

Manny Rivas: People say, well if we still have WWII in us, so it cycles or something. We still do.

Yeah, you know, I served, I personally served in the military. I was in the Air Force. My dad was in the Air Force, and but I never saw combat and so I can't, I can relate to a military experience but not to a combat one like you can, and I have a lot of respect for you and all the other men and women who have served in combat because I know it's not easy. My father served in combat as a, on an aircraft crew and I have an uncle who was a helicopter pilot in Vietnam, and I've heard all their stories and I don't know, I sometimes wonder how I would've done if I had been in a similar situation.

Manny Rivas: Well, let me tell you what, uh, they say if you're brave, nothing. You're scared is what it is. When you're scared, you're brave. It's true.

Yeah, I believe that. So then, please tell me, us, a little bit about China. So you went -

Manny Rivas: China, we, we went, the trip from China, I mean from Okinawa after the war was over and they've already signed the peace and everything, and we were getting ready because we'd already been overseas 30 months, 30 months, September the 9th, and uh, our group, so there are still nine of us who had been overseas 30 months. And we geared to go home. We

were going home, the war was over and everything. No you're not, you're going to China, because we're gonna have the National Army uh, fight the Communists and uh, and get rid of all the Japanese, all the Japanese in China, because of them have been, they already been there 10, 20 years, stuff like that, since 1930 something, and they didn't want to come home because they had no family. Their family was Chinese over there. So we say you're gonna go to China, and we uh, put us in ships. We went up to uh, through, just before the typhoon hit in September of 1945, the typhoon hit Okinawa, is when they, the winds just knocked over the tents and all the buildings, the Marine buildings out of Okinawa. And we were aboard the ship. I remember that. It's the U.S.S. Robin Doncaster (???), and we went through the China, and what do you call that, China, China Sea, yeah, China Sea between Korea and China mainland. And the ocean was frozen because it was around 10, 20 below zero, and we had, what do you call, ice cutters, the front ship that could break, ice breakers. We had a couple of ice breakers in front breaking the ice, and we had two, three Marines in the bow of each ship. It would tear a lot of ships. They were shooting the mines. They were floating mines and were sticking out of the ice and they were shooting the mines that were a tail in the ocean, all the way from uh, Okinawa all the way to China. And uh, when we had hit China, we went right on the Hiho River (sp. ???). It's near Taku and Tangu (sp. ???). That's in Manila. The two towns next to the, what do you call, as you kind of leave the Hiho River (sp. ???), it's a big river. LSC's can go up the river they're so big. I think they were in the Mississippi, I don't know. Those ships go out there. And uh, we get there, it was about 10 below zero, and we had summer clothes because they didn't issue us winter clothes, no coats or nothing, just our summer clothing. And uh, we marched down in the streets of Tenten (sp. ???). There was uh, Tenten City (sp. ???) to take us over to the barracks. They gave us the Japanese barracks to us. We took over the Japanese barracks in Tenten (sp. ???). It was a beautiful town, a lot of things to do. They had horse races. They will highlight the game, and uh, you know, everything was there. I remember one time I was doing guard duty and it was about 10, 12 below zero, and I had so little – I already had my coat, winter coat, by then – and there was uh, cold, my ears were cold, and here comes this Chinese boy, says uh, I got hats, those hats, Russian hats with a lot of uh, beautiful furs.

Yeah, the sable hats?

Manny Rivas: Yeah. I bought one and I bought one for my twin, and ____, OK, worth it. And about two hours later, I had to take it off. They were full of fleas. I had to throw it away because it was just full of fleas.

So was there, was there fighting in China?

Manny Rivas: Yeah, we did. What we used to do, our company, most of it, see, the Japanese didn't want to leave China because they had been there so long, they're still families, and the Communists were coming in and bandits, there were a lot of bandits coming in. One troop of bandits would be 100, 200 people riding horses, coming into, to steal whatever they can. They used to hit our warehouses and steal from our ware – people. They used to uh, the trains, the tent trains from Tenten (sp. ???) to Peking, they would be Peking, then Chenguadou, Tianjin, Tengu, (sp. ???) all those towns, we used to have Marines every five railroad cars and put a machine gun out there, and shoot the fan backs around the, on top of the train. And we used to ride the train sometimes from Peking, I mean uh, Tenten to Peking, from Peking to Chenguadou, Tianjin, and all those places, Tsingtao. That's where I drank my first beer, Chinese beer. They have beer, Tsingtao, that they sell here. They had the factory out there. And we used to uh, ride the trains and to stop the bandits and the Communists from raiding our trains, and we used to at night, when we were going up there, we used to fire our machine guns and keep, put our hands, so they

could get warm, or our feet. But then I remember one town, it was Chenguadou or somewhere out there, near the Great Wall, right there by the Great Wall, the Communists came in and we started fighting the Communists. And uh, we still had some prisoners, Japanese prisoners, and we were gonna send back to Japan. We armed those prisoners, Japanese, so they could help us fight the, the bandits and the Communists.

That's incredible.

Manny Rivas: We did, we armed them with our guns, after we had taken everything away from them.

Yeah, that's incredible and after we dropped the bombs on the two cities in Japan, and now they're helping you fight these, the Communists.

Manny Rivas: The Communists and the uh, and the bandits.

That's an amazing story.

Manny Rivas: We stayed there nine months and the Marines didn't leave there until 1949. We were there in '45-'46.

Were you the first group of Marines to arrive?

Manny Rivas: Oh yeah, we, we were the first ones to do it right there. I'll tell you what they used to call the China Marines.

The China Marines. So you were – you served for what, four years?

Manny Rivas: Four years.

Let me look at this. Four years straight. Did you have any breaks? Did you come home at all during that four years?

Manny Rivas: I never did.

You never did.

Manny Rivas: My brother did in uh, 1942, he did, because uh, he was one, he was going to be _____. He had a girlfriend like that, and he came in to see his girlfriend.

So what was it like when you came home after being gone for four years and the war had ended?

Manny Rivas: Well, it was good home cooking! When we left San Diego, we stopped and went to church and then came right straight home after that, and uh, it was then and uh, after that, I met my wife and, and uh, so I got married in '49. My brother got married in '47.

OK, and did you all have any children?

Manny Rivas: Yes, I had, my brother had three; two boys and uh, one girl. And I got one boy. And uh, he's married and got two kids, and he's very close to me, very close.

Good. And you did, well you served as a veteran's counselor.

Manny Rivas: Yes.

Different places for your career. And your brother was, Salvador was an optometrist is that what you said?

Manny Rivas: Optometrist, yeah.

So did you go to, you know, a lot of WWII veterans came home and went to school on the GI Bill.

Manny Rivas: That's right, yeah.

Were you able to do that?

Manny Rivas: Yes, I did, and I got my accounting degree, no, ___ to be an accountant.

And your brother?

Manny Rivas: My brother was in optician, you know, he opened up his own business and everything. And but my twin brother and I, we were Boy Scouts way back, like I said, in '45, I mean wait a minute, '36, '37, '38, and '39. Then we, we came back, we were ___ to Boy Scouts as leaders, ___ leaders.

You're still involved with Boy Scouts, aren't you?

Manny Rivas: Oh yeah, 61 years now.

I see that, I've got this little sheet about you and it says that – I was involved with Boy Scouts, too, as an adult we were for a number of years – and I see that you earned the Silver Beaver Award, which is -

Manny Rivas: The highest in division.

Yes sir, that is uh, I've only known a few other men who have reached that award.

Manny Rivas: My twin brother was a Silver Beaver.

Was he?

Manny Rivas: He put 40 years in the Boy Scouts and I've got 61. And he was a Silver Beaver. We were the only two twins here in El Paso County in the Yaka (sp. ???) Council that two of the twins had, get Silver Beavers, the only two.

I have a son who made Eagle Scout when he was 13 years old. He's a senior in high school now, and he made Eagle Scout. Then he got real involved in Order of the Arrow and he made it to, what's the high, I forget now, what's the highest rank in Order of the Arrow? It's uh -

Manny Rivas: Uh, Brotherhood and some other ____.

There's Ordeal, then Brotherhood, and then the last one. I can't think of the last one.

Manny Rivas: I _____ but let me tell you, my son, he's got an Eagle Scout, and my grandson, he's an Eagle Scout, and uh, all three of us are Order of the Arrow. And uh, like right now, we're, we got between the three of us, we got 97 years in Scouting.

That's great. Scouting is such a great organization.

Manny Rivas: The other day at the Court of Honors for my grandson where he made Eagles in December, there were three generations – myself, my son, and the grandson, and uh, the professional there's this, you know what, he says this is the first time I've been to a Court of Honor for an Eagle that three generations are present. My son's a professional Scouter.

Is he?

Manny Rivas: Yeah, he is. In Dallas, Texas, uh, Longhorn District. He lives in Carlton, Texas.

That's great.

Manny Rivas: But they was, mean a good life. God, thanks to God that I have not, I'm not ill. I walk five miles every morning.

Five miles?

Manny Rivas: Yes sir.

Good for you. What part of El Paso do you live in?

Manny Rivas: I live in East El Paso by the airport, right there by the airport.

OK.

Manny Rivas: And I had cancer in 1979, no, '78 -

30 years ago -

Manny Rivas: Then I had cancer in 1992. And I had cancer nine years ago. Melanoma, colon, and prostate. And I'm all right.

So what's your secret?

Manny Rivas: I drink a beer every day.

What kind?

Manny Rivas: _____ one guy told me one time, _____ said _____, I told him, you know, I drink uh, Bud. Why? Because my dad drank Bud, and he died at 106. And I _____ my dad for beer at 200. He died three years ago at 106.

Your father?

Manny Rivas: Yeah. He was 106 years old.

That's amazing.

Manny Rivas: He lived in the United States 101 years before he died. He came in at the age of five from Mexico. Not too many people say I live 101 years in the United States.

Yeah, that's true. That's very true. I wanted to ask you a question. I see that you are a, or that you had the National Catholic Award.

Manny Rivas: Yeah, the St. George, my twin brother had it, too. We always follow each other.

You guys did everything together, didn't you, that's great.

Manny Rivas: He said, St. George or was that the highest in the Catholic church.

See I'm Catholic, but I never heard, I haven't heard of that award.

Manny Rivas: Yeah, you can get it.

Is it a service award?

Manny Rivas: It's uh, what you do, the same as the Silver Beaver. They give it to you what you've been doing. See, I was a teacher in the, for the St. George Award, for many, many years for the Boy Scouts, and somebody put my name in to get it. They say you been giving it to everybody, well, let's give it to you. My brother and I, we were, we used to be with the Catholic church and we were teachers with that St. George, uh, Scouting, and in other words, Catholic ____.

Yeah, that's neat.

Manny Rivas: And on the VFW, uh, I got 59 years in the VFW. I was, stayed commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Texas, and then uh, I've been in many, many committees, post commander, district commander. Then I was National Aid to Camp five times, and then VFW, and then I was an inspector general one time, national ____ to chief of staff. Then I sat as an executive board member for the Yaka (sp. ???) Council, I mean for the VFW. And I was a, also the executive board of the Boy Scouts of America for uh, what do you call it, ten, twelve years.

You've been busy. So what do you do now for fun?

Manny Rivas: I work with the Boy Scouts. I'm still active, and with the VFW I'm active. Right now, I'm working a veterans nursing home. I just took 'em, what was that uh, for Christmas I gave them a piano, an electric piano, Yamaha something. They called me today. They're gonna tell, there at the nursing home they want me to get them something else. I got 'em three televisions, and I got 'em all the flower vases for the dinner tables, I got 'em a refrigerator and I got 'em some carts for the food. I don't know what else.

You're staying busy doing good things for people. That's great.

Manny Rivas: My dad used to say one thing. Son, don't sit down and don't stay put because you freeze, and you freeze, you'll never work again.

Good advice.

Manny Rivas: Yeah.

Good advice.

Manny Rivas: He had 106 years.

106 years. And was, did he have good health most of his life?

Manny Rivas: Yeah. Yeah, I took him out for a walk and he _____. _____.

OK, I got a couple more of those questions I'll ask you.

Manny Rivas: Go ahead, go ahead.

OK, did you see any famous personalities while you were serving in the – overseas?

Manny Rivas: Bob Hope.

You saw Bob Hope? At a USO show?

Manny Rivas: USO show several times.

Yeah?

Manny Rivas: I saw him in Pellaloo (sp. ???) and I saw him in Okinawa.

What was that like?

Manny Rivas: It was a ____, we were always waiting for something and that guy, what's his name, Jerry Colona (sp. ???) and I remember the girls, but they were beautiful. They came with him.

Yeah, he seemed to travel with some beautiful women, didn't he?

Manny Rivas: Yeah.

Just entertain the troops.

Manny Rivas: Jerry Colona and uh, you know, the big mustache and everything. I don't know if you knew him.

Nope, I didn't.

Manny Rivas: He was always happy, always yelling “everybody” – Jerry Colona, Bob Hope and Carl ____ I think it was.

What were some of the bravest acts that you observed during the war? Do you recall any?

Manny Rivas: Yes, lots of ‘em but uh, people like I said, when you’re uh, you’re not a hero, you’re scared. And uh, so one thing I saw, let me tell you what happened to me was what do you call, in Okinawa, there was a colonel that uh, that was the saddest thing I ever seen. A colonel that used to be in headquarters, a lieutenant colonel, his son was private in the company, my company, and his son got killed, and the saddest thing to me is when they called the father to come in and look at the, identify the body of the young man. Fenton, Colonel Fenton. He came in, kneeled down, we hold hands, and he said an Our Father. He said an Our Father. It was the saddest thing I ever seen. It was happening in the 1945 in Okinawa. Not, lots of people don’t know about that, that the father and son were in the same company, the same division. He was in division headquarters, sitting in the big desk and everything. His son was a line man in the private, about 19 years old. He kneeled down with hold hands, combat, we said an Our Father for him and covered the body.

That probably didn’t happen often where you had a father and a son serving.

Manny Rivas: I never heard about that, no. But he was a young man, too. He was just a brand new recruit we had, brand new recruit, and he got killed right there. Colonel Fenton was killed right there, I mean his son was killed, and uh, you know, but uh, let me tell you what, to me, looking for my brother every time I used to go by the people I knew, have you seen my brother? Have you seen my brother? I’d stop at all the sick bays to see if he was there. When they, when I went by, what do you call, the ____ registration, and I stopped and checked the book, see if my brother’s body, I’d check the bodies. ____ tried to see who had the – your son, your brother there. It’s uh, your nerves get shot on a kind of that, and one thing, let me tell you, Pellaloo (sp. ???) what happened. Uh, we were there and there were lot of caves and there were just about the war ended, and the Japanese are eating the dogs and eating everything, and uh, we used to uh, right now ____ I’m saying that, they would throw us in jail and put a, forget the key. They would, the Japanese would come out and we’d shoot at ‘em, they’d come out and we’d shoot at ‘em. We never could get ‘em. And you know, we had a 90 – about five of us, we got C-Ration, we threw a few C-Rations out there. Oh, they came out and got ‘em. Then the next day, they looked up and we could see ‘em. We threw another five C-Rations. And then they came out, the machine gunner cut ‘em off. Right now, with the press, the way they are, and the television everywhere, we would have been sent for life, you know that? Is that the truth?

I think so, yeah. Times change a little bit.

Manny Rivas: But they would’ve done that.

Yeah, it seems like the news cameras are right on the front lines.

Manny Rivas: They’re on the front lines, yeah.

I mean they’re bringing the war straight, straight home.

Manny Rivas: But right now, it would happen to them. Yeah. Like in Okinawa we had the air raids and everything, and over there, they got their graves are caves with a big rock, like old

times. They move their, they moved the caves, uh, rock and they put their bodies and forget about it and put 'em back. At night what we used to do, we used to move those rocks and be there when the air raids came in, we were in shape because they were riding them on, they were dug in the mountain to escape. There were graveyards. You sleep in the ____ right there at night. And you were straight through there with the dead and the people, the living outside.

That's something else.

Manny Rivas: We met Ernie Pile, Ernie Pile was good ____, yeah. He was a member of the correspondent, Ernie Pile, in Okinawa just before he got killed. My twin brother, we were coming in from a patrol, and uh, it came out in the paper here in El Paso, and uh, they took pictures and everything and when I came in, I had a little take in my rifle, in the back of my rifle, a small ____, and my brother had, had a couple of uh, chickens, and uh, he talked to us, he took pictures of us. It came in the paper somewhere, but uh, we met him up there, Ernie Pile.

Huh, so he was kind of a celebrity.

Manny Rivas: Oh yeah, he was. He was a good correspondent, good uh, morale booster. He was in Okinawa. And uh, it was, we had a lot of rain out there, a lot of it. Always the jeeps were up to the, sometimes you know, when you stake a ____ or whatever, we were up to the board ____ come in. You still had a lot of horses. We used a lot of horses in Okinawa. You ever get a hold of that book called uh, can't remember, they was issued to us when we got discharged. You can see the horses. We used them to pack ammunition up to the front lines, yeah.

If there was one thing you could tell the current group of soldiers, you know, serving, what would that be?

Manny Rivas: We're behind you.

Very good. Yeah. We're behind you.

Manny Rivas: We're with you, behind you. That's what I would tell 'em, and I think they would uh, they would ____ say yes. I do a lot of talking to high schools. I go to a lot of high schools and do that, talk, and you'd be surprised at how many ____ young boys ask you a lot of questions, and I, I have a, I'm usually like I'm usually in my uh, _____. I got one, two, three, four, five, six plywood, and I got pictures of what did since World War, the Pearl Harbor until the end, and I go to high schools and speak at ROTC units in uh, high schools and I do a lot of talking like that.

Yeah?

Manny Rivas: They call me up a lot. We get, we're a vanishing breed right now, WWII.

Oh I know you are, and that's why um, yeah this Voices of Veterans Program is really designed to capture an oral history of the veterans who served in all our wars, but I think we're really trying to get the stories from you and the other men and women that served in WWII because you are dying off at a rapid pace.

Manny Rivas: Well, I see in the paper two, three here in El Paso every day.

Yeah I know, every day I read the obituaries here in Austin paper and men that are your age, the early 80's and up, they almost all of them, it amazes me, but everybody seemed to have served in WWII. It's rare to find somebody who, there's not something in there about their service during the war.

Manny Rivas: Well, I mean I'm glad that I'm a healthy holdout because I walk five miles every morning.

I think that's amazing.

Manny Rivas: Right now I'm walking every morning, 5, 6 o'clock on my way out to walk. But I stay busy with the Veterans of Foreign Wars and I stay busy with the Boy Scouts of America, like uh, you know, I go camping with my son. He's a, you know, professional, and, and uh, we go camping a lot. We went to Philmont, and we hit the rap-, you ever been to those rapids up in New Mexico?

Not the rapids. I've been to Philmont, but I haven't been up to any of the rapids.

Manny Rivas: The rapids up in New Mexico, you can shoot about maybe 50, 75 feet straight down those river boats and come out over half a mile away ____ water.

I haven't known that –

Manny Rivas: I take that, I went out two years ago. It was wonderful. Two years, I was 80 then. And uh, I go camping. I'm in charge of hiking all the time for the kids. That's what I do. I do a lot of walking because I do it here in El Paso.

God bless you.

Manny Rivas: And I've been busy with 'em like I said, the now, oh, I'm over in my 60's, for with Scouts 61 years, Boy Scouts.

That's incredible. All right, well let's see. One more thing, is there anything – we're gonna close the interview now, but is there anything you would like to add before we stop the interview? Anything else you'd like to say? You've told some great stories. I don't know if you've left some out and maybe I haven't asked the right question. But if there's anything I've forgotten to ask and you'd like to add, please do.

Manny Rivas: Like I said, the biggest thing you never forget is the first man you kill. That is, haunt you for the rest of your life. When I first got married, my wife said I used to have a lot of nightmares. On the first you, the first one you kill, because you see their eyes and they see how they turn when you stick 'em with a bayonet. You'll never forget that for the rest of your life. I used to get uh, when I came back and got married, my wife says I was at night they used to kick her out of bed, my nerves and so forth, but you never forget the first one you kill, never.

Do you think your time as a, like doing your work with the military organizations, kind of counseling and helping, has that helped you?

Manny Rivas: Yes it did. Well see, I was a service officer. Did I tell you that?

No.

Manny Rivas: That was my job, a veterans service officer, and uh, I worked uh, 30 some odd years with the, with the ____, veterans service officer, and then I worked another, I worked 49-1/2 years working as a service officer counselor.

OK.

Manny Rivas: It was my job. It's all, all I've done with veterans, and I used to uh, handle lots and lots of veterans on their uh, compensations, their paychecks and their nervous conditions and whatever they had, yeah. If I ____ I've done everything. I'm still with a few more detail on my VFW post. I was a tech commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Texas, and uh, but I went through all the ranks and up to state commander, and I was uh, man, I became a national uh, council member with a national organization also. I was a national counselor, I mean not counselor, uh, in the national board of directors for the Veterans of Foreign Wars. I was with them. So I've seen lots and lots of veterans, widows and orphans and everything, been accomplished, that's all the work I've done all my life. That's what I've been doing.

Yeah, I know you helped a lot of people.

Manny Rivas: It was my life. My wife was a, also with the, with the VA. She spent 22 years with the VA ____ herself.

And what did she do with the VA?

Manny Rivas: She was a secretary.

I have a sister. I have two sisters. The oldest one lives in Massachusetts and she works for the VA. She's a, um, what is she, she's a, well I think she's a social worker but she's a counselor, so she helps veterans who need help. You know, they need all kinds of help.

Manny Rivas: That's what she was doing.

But my sister does that in Massachusetts now.

Manny Rivas: Well, well see, she spent 21 or 22 years and I spent like I said 49 years doing that, the counselor. That's what we had plenty of time working with the veterans. And I enjoy it. That's why I've been in the VFW right now. I've been oh, 59 years with the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

And you worked for the Veterans Land Board.

Manny Rivas: Yeah.

For um, was it 15 years?

Manny Rivas: 15 years, yeah.

And that was during, was it all during the uh –

Manny Rivas: I was a ____ came in there, it was way back in the, I can't remember the year.

I think Gary took office I want to say 1982?

Manny Rivas: That's when I took out, I went with him, yeah. And I left when he left. It's when the he had just when he left, uh, I retired, because at that time, uh, I had cancer and uh, for the third time, and I had to quit and that's when I re-, I ____ I was 74 years old when I retired.

Well, I'm glad you've had a nice, long retirement.

Manny Rivas: Yeah, so far. Like I say, I had cancer three times. And uh, I had to retire, but I was already in 74 it got 74 years old just like that when I retired.

Well Mr. Rivas, on behalf of Commissioner Jerry Patterson and the Texas Veterans Land Board

—

Manny Rivas: Say hello to him. He's a good friend of mine.

I want to thank you for your service to our country. I want to thank you for taking the time to talk to me and so we can get all this down, recorded, and get it on paper, transcribed, so other people can read about it.

Manny Rivas: What do you do, put 'em in a tape, or what?

Our conversation has been recorded on a little digital recorder that's hooked up to the phone, and so somebody, a transcriber, will listen to it and probably listen it, I bet they'll end up listening to it a whole bunch of times, but they will listen to your memories and just type it on the paper and then it'll get proofread and all that, and then it'll be sent to you to look at also, and so it'll be a written document and eventually, I think the idea is to get these posted onto the Veterans Land Board web site. Well, there's a, within the VLB web site, there's a Voices of Veterans web page and all of the oral histories that are being taken will be available to download off that web site and read them, maybe the audio version as well, although I'm not absolutely certain about that.

Manny Rivas: Yeah, I worked with the Land Commissioner when he was there, you know, he first started.

He's a Marine just like you.

Manny Rivas: I see him at the VFW conventions all the time.

He's a good man.

Manny Rivas: Yes he is.

Yeah, I'm glad you like him. I like Commissioner Patterson a lot myself, and I will definitely tell him that you said hello.

Manny Rivas: Yeah, he always, when he go to the VFW state conventions, I always try to see him at that time because he makes all the meals at the conventions and uh, I go with him and I go see him and he talks to me. What's his name, uh, that man I know him very well?

Jerry Patterson, our Land Commissioner, or someone else?

Manny Rivas: The one he, we have right now, but there's another guy over there, what's his name, a colored guy, he's up there high?

Let me think here a second, that works here at the Land Office, a veteran?

Manny Rivas: Yeah, I don't know if he's a veteran, but he's there.

Oh, Paul Moore, the vet -

Manny Rivas: Yeah.

Oh the guy, yeah -

Manny Rivas: Because he called me the other day. Let me tell you what happened now. I was gonna get uh, the Land Board, I mean the nursing home a piano. They wanted a piano real bad for Christmas, and I got 'em one brand new. And then uh, the guy in charge over there, he said no, you cannot bring it in because I won't be there. I'm going to Christmas vacation. But they wanted it for Christmas. And they say, I'll come back, after I get my vacation, I'll get the piano. I thought like hell you will. You're gonna get it now. No, no. So I called him and he said Manny, you take the piano out there. And uh, I got the piano in there right away for Christmas. We got it in there on the 23rd.

This is at the veterans home, the new veterans home in El Paso?

Manny Rivas: In El Paso, yeah. I was chairman to bring that nursing home here.

Were you?

Manny Rivas: Yeah, I was the chairman of the committee who brought it.

Good, that's a very good program.

Manny Rivas: Yeah, I was chairman of the committee that we brought it here to El Paso. We spent four years working on it.

Yeah, that's something that the commissioner, Mr. Patterson, and all the rest of us here are very proud of.

Manny Rivas: Yeah, I was chairman of the committee that brought it. We worked four years to bring it in here.

Did you know, you must've known David Boyer.

Manny Rivas: Oh yeah, very well. He was a Marine, too.

He was, and he was a friend of mine. And he was working real hard to get those veterans homes, the program underway.

Manny Rivas: Yeah, when I was working, he was there, and then he got sick real after, after I left he got sick.

I know and then he died too young. He was a tough son of a gun.

Manny Rivas: Yeah, he was, I knew him well, very well. We used to sit down over there and talk about when we were in the Marines and so forth. But he was after I was in the, he was not a WWII veteran.

Right, yeah.

Manny Rivas: I think Korea or Vietnam, I don't remember what.

Yeah, he would have been of the age, I don't know, he might have been between Vietnam and Korea, but I think it was probably Vietnam.

Manny Rivas: No, I'm 82, gonna be 83 pushin'.

And your birthday is June 3rd?

Manny Rivas: Yeah.

All right, well, well have a happy birthday when that gets here.

Manny Rivas: ____.

If I ever come out to El Paso, I might take your number and give you a call.

Manny Rivas: Call me up and I'll run over there and, I go out there quite a bit because uh, like do, like yesterday, what's the name uh -

James Crabtree?

Manny Rivas: No, here in uh, El Paso.

Oh, in El Paso?

Manny Rivas: What's his name, uh, Fred, he called me. He wants to get another piano and I'm getting the money to get that piano right now.

You have a connection to pianos?

Manny Rivas: I have a connection with everything. I always got my head sticking up. I don't pay for 'em because I get somebody to pay for 'em, you know that. And I got 'em three televisions, and I got a refrigerator and I got files and oh, you'd be surprised. I'm always getting something for the nursing home.

Well that's great. All right, Mr. Rivas, it's been a real pleasure talking to you and I hope we get a chance to talk again some day.

Manny Rivas: Any time.

But you take care.

Manny Rivas: OK, bye.

All right, bye bye.