

Transcription: Donald Rovick

Today is Tuesday, December 7th, 2010, Pearl Harbor Day. My name is James Crabtree, and this morning I'll be interviewing Mr. Donald Rovick, and Mr. Rovick is at his home in Austin, Texas, and I'm at the General Land Office Building in downtown Austin, and this interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you first of all for taking your time to talk to us. It's an honor for all of us, and I guess the best question sir, is to start at the beginning, and tell us a little bit about your childhood and your background before you entered the service.

Donald Rovick: My parents were separated and I lived with my grandparents in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The great folks, they were Swedish immigrants, and my father's parents were Norwegian immigrants, and all fine people. My father served as a Marine in the Marine Corps in World War I, and he served in Germany. I thought a lot of that and heard some stories about his service there, and so I wanted to become a Marine. My grandparents were intensely interested in the news. They used to listen to the news nightly on the radio and read the newspaper. My grandmother who was nearly blind would bring the newspaper up to her nose and she'd read it page after page, and she took an interest in what was going on. So we were aware of the problems in Europe and Asia while they were developing in the late 30s and early 40s, and we had just returned to the house from church on Sunday, December 7th, 1941, when we got radio news that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. I realized that I'd have to go into the service and I was a junior in high school. So I graduated and I wanted to be a Marine. I graduated in 1942, June, and I felt at that time I was unready because of youth and inexperience to go in the service, and at the time the news was all bad and the thought was that the war would continue for another 10 years. So I looked for a way to get more tough and used discipline, so I tried to go to work on the Canadian located Alaska Highway, and I wasn't able to get work when I applied with a friend at the employment office in Minneapolis, but the person there recommended there was another place operating with employment opportunities in Kodiak, Alaska. At that time, the Japanese had forces out on Kiska and Attu, and I thought helping to build a defense facility on Kodiak Island might be a place to be and it would be a way I could save up a little money to have something after the war and maybe get a little discipline. And then when I returned from Kodiak, I ran into a kid I'd met in high school football who was quite an athlete, and he said he was going in the Marines and he wanted to become a paratrooper. I'd read about paratroops. My idea was that the battle was going to be severe that there were chances of being killed and if it was unnecessary, I'd prefer to be killed by somebody I could see rather than be killed at long distance by someone dialing a knob on a big gun or dropping a bomb from 30,000 feet up. So I thought I would go into the paratroops, I hoped to, and my friend wanted to, and he had spoken to another graduate from the same high school who was in paratroop training down in California. So we signed up and were shipped to southern California for training at the Marine Corps recruit base, San Diego, California. I finished that, and then went to rifle training at Camp Mathews, and learned that my friend Bobby Scarfelt and I had been accepted for entry into training at Camp Gillespie for paratroop training.

Well let me ask you real quick, sir, when you signed up to enlist, were you back in Minnesota when you enlisted?

Donald Rovick: Yeah.

And when you walked into the recruiting office, how long was it do you remember from the time you signed up until the time you were on your way to San Diego?

Donald Rovick: I think it was only about a week and a half.

Had you talked to your dad about going into the Marines?

Donald Rovick: No, he was down in Maryland and I was in Minnesota.

But his service as a Marine in World War I had made that impression on you.

Donald Rovick: It impressed my decision, yes. He was proud and happy to have been able to serve and I was proud and happy that he had served.

What did he tell you about being a Marine in World War I?

Donald Rovick: Not so much except that he'd met a lot of people that he really liked and that he'd seen some parts of the world he didn't expect to see.

I know as a Marine, they still really teach the history of the Battle of Belleau Wood and the Marines in World War I, and their fierce fighting, and the Germans referring to them as Teufelhunden, or devil dogs, and that name still sticks today.

Donald Rovick: Well, also there was problems during the occupation in a way, there were dissidents who were not among the German soldiers were not willing to surrender even after the signing at Armistice.

Versailles.

Donald Rovick: But no, he didn't go into great detail, but he did have a couple of books showing scenes from the war in France and Belgium and Germany.

Did he keep any of his uniforms or his rifles or anything like that?

Donald Rovick: Oh, he had a jacket that hung in the closet, and I thought a lot of that. But when I came home, I had a sea bag full of stuff, even a small sword, but so I held it with me down in San Diego where I arrived, and we were going to be discharged at Great Lakes, and I wanted to save my money for liberty when I got home, so I took my bag with me. I threw it on a freight car the morning we were departing for Great Lakes. I didn't see the bag until two weeks after I got home. Somebody had emptied out the bag.

Took all your items you had collected during the war.

Donald Rovick: Yeah, I had one set of greens, one set of khakis, one set of dungarees, and one pair of underwear and one pair of socks. Yeah, somebody collected everything.

So sir, when you got to San Diego, tell us about your memories, your first impressions of the recruit depot.

Donald Rovick: Well, we lucked out, had a great drill instructor. He was introduced, and I forgot his name, but he had been a pilot in the Canadian Air Force who fought in the Battle of Great Britain. He'd been shot down and his crash landing affected his eyes so he no longer had the depth perception necessary for flying. But he was a square shooting guy who thought plainly. He told us that he knew we'd be giving us problems, and he said that if you didn't like his methods or his behavior or the cut of his jib, just let him know and he'd meet us out in the back of the barracks and he'd take his stripes off and give it to us bit by bit. But he was a good Joe. I got crossways with him early though. I got permission to go to the post office and pick up stamps. I was out of stamps, and my buddy Scarfolk decided to come along with me to pick up some stamps. On the way back, it was a hot afternoon after a hot morning training on the sand dunes down there running through the sand dunes and what not, and I didn't really have time to drink water before I'd gone to the post office. On the way back we decided to take a shortcut. We passed by a place and the door was open. Could hear the tinkle of glass and ice and a jukebox, and right inside the open back door was a Coke machine. So I wanted a can of Coke and I thought I'd get one for Scarfolk, too, and I did. I handed it to Scarfolk, raised the can to my lips and noticed that Scarfolk was looking over my shoulder with a little bit of dismay, and I turned around and looked and there was my drill sergeant, staring in my face. He says give me that can, boy, and he says, see you back at the barracks in three minutes. It was about four minutes to the barracks and about a minute after I got in, we had assembly call, and the drill sergeant gave us a little lecture on obedience to orders. He said some of us are not taking their orders serious enough. So Private Rovick, you introduce us to the drill of up and on shoulders, and let's see what we can do here. So I had to lead the platoon in up and on shoulders until I thought my arms were ready to come off.

And tell us what that was. That was some sort of a physical exercise?

Donald Rovick: A physical exercise, yeah, calisthenics with grand rifle, mostly winding up over your head or behind your back or out in front, you know, extended on both hands, you know, and so it could get fatiguing even though the rifle only weighed about 9 lbs. I think it was.

They still do the, when I went through basic training in '97, it was still the same stuff, and it does wear you out pretty quick, especially when you can't quit.

Donald Rovick: It was embarrassing to know that I had caused my troop members this problem before supper, you know. But it was a lesson.

Did you only have one drill instructor?

Donald Rovick: No, we had two, and the other one was a big guy. He was about 6'4-1/2" or I remember once he was filling in for our drill instructor and he got some guy looking off the formation, and he jerked him out from the back by his throat, you know, and dropped him out in front of the front rank. He picked one guy up off his feet by his shirt collar, you know. He was kind of a fearsome object.

Sure, that's what DI's are all about. When you got to the recruit depot, I assume you came in on train, is that right?

Donald Rovick: Yeah. It was a nice train. That was my first introduction to Texas. We passed through the Panhandle on our way out West.

When you got to the depot, or when you got to San Diego and then they took you to the recruit depot, what was that first day like? Did they shave your head right away?

Donald Rovick: Oh yeah, we ran through the whole bed there, we got cut down to size, and run through the business of issuing of uniforms, and told what size we had to take and how to make it fit. It was kind of a humiliating experience trotting around in front of all these strangers without your clothes.

Did they pick you up at the train station in buses?

Donald Rovick: No, we had trucks.

OK, so you got on the trucks and then they drove you from the truck station –

Donald Rovick: I remember we were sitting in the station and I think it was a corporal came out and he started calling off the train carrying people from a lot of original points, and the corporal was reading off the names and loading people on buses in order, and he called for the group from Indianapolis. And we couldn't understand him at first, but then we realized that he was looking for people from Minneapolis, so there were some 15-16 of us, so we went in. I had quite a buddy there, he was Bobby Scarfeld. He'd been a wrestler, 145-lb. class, and gymnast, and he played football at the 145-lb. weight, and he played guard. What was good about him was he had his own imagination and he really enjoyed playing, and he had great reflexes, and a feel for balance and leverage that he learned in wrestling and gymnastics. So he taught a lot about playing opponents who use their head. We were taught by an older coach who was lacking quite a bit in imagination, so we only taught two ways to play defense and two ways to play offense. I played tackle, and occasionally I had to play against Scarfeld and he was the toughest opponent I ever played against.

So you went to different high schools -

Donald Rovick: No, we went to the same high school. He was behind me six months, and then he was the guy who got me to train harder for the beginning of the paratroop training. He got me to go out running after our days' activities in boot camp to prepare me for all the running we did in paratroop training.

So you went through your basic training and you graduated from there.

Donald Rovick: And went to Camp, what was it, well a rifle range, and -

Up at Camp Pendleton?

Donald Rovick: No, this was, they were still just building Pendleton and we heard that it was about a half a days' march from the barracks to the nearest mess hall there in Pendleton at that time, so we never did see Pendleton. We heard that it was being put together. But I've forgotten the name, I had it on the tip of my tongue, but it was kind of a desert location, and I actually was thoroughly impressed by those drill instructors out there, the rifle instructors. I saw two of 'em one evening shooting in competition with one another 300 yards off hand you know with the old Springfield, competing for a six-pack of beer I was told, and they were shooting possible after possible, and I thought it was just great, they were wearing these old style campaign hats, the peaked hat and the flat brim.

Yeah, they still wear those.

Donald Rovick: Yeah, they do?

Yeah, smokey bear covers, campaign covers.

Donald Rovick: Yeah, well I sure would've liked to have had one of those. I still got my old piscotter.

Oh that's great.

Donald Rovick: And a couple of emblems. I got one stolen when I was in a nursing home for a while. I had one son who became a Marine, too.

Did you talk to him a lot about your time in the service?

Donald Rovick: Not a great deal, but yeah, I was gonna say he got a bum deal. He was a straight shooter, one of the real clean livers in the family, roadrunner, road racer. He raced in 5K's, 10K's, 15K's, 20K's, and competed when he was assigned to duty at Camp David, and his time was improving, but he got picked up during a first visit with another clean-living Marine to a party at a house near the base there, and they had been invited to a house party and they got there to find a big event going on with activities outside. They were invited by a couple of girls who they looked for and they couldn't find 'em, and when they couldn't find 'em outside, they went inside the house, they had been in the house just a few minutes, not even long enough to finish their first beer when police sirens announced police raid, and there were several people apparently in that party were using drugs. But of course, well at least to my mind, of course my son wasn't using any and his friend wasn't using either, but they happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time, so they were dismissed from Camp David duty and given an early release from the Marine Corps.

Yeah, that's too bad.

Donald Rovick: Yeah well, that was a shame because he really wanted to make the Corps a career and he was a good Joe, you know.

Well sir, going back to your service, you get through basic training and then you go through jump school. Tell us a little bit about your jump training there.

Donald Rovick: Well, I lucked out there, too, and had a good drill instructor there who was an Argentinian, Viadonno was his name. He had been a member of the first parachute regiment wounded on Tilogi. And he was a tall guy, too, so he developed a nice stride, a nice, long even stride which made it a lot easier to get through the runs. We started out at about three miles after an hour and a half of calisthenics. I mean these were exercises, believe me, a lot of squats, and setups, not just crunches as they go nowadays. You lift your whole trunk and hit your knees with your elbows, and then pushups. You might do 100 pushups. Then there would be a three-mile run. In those days, water conservation was a big thing. It may have had something to do with the capacity of ships that carried drinking water and provided drinking water for the troops, but they thought that the salt content of the blood was more important than the water content. So we were issued and ordered to use two salt pills after each calisthenic exercise and before the run.

Yeah, we went from three miles to about eleven miles in three weeks. The level of exercise went up and we'd run anywhere we went in camp. We'd go to class in the morning and we would run to classes and run from one class to another. Of course the runs were just jogging, really, but nevertheless it was a workout. The thought was that if one man goes down, the platoon would jog around him in a circle until he got up and then he could run back with the _____. I made a mistake on my first, end of my first week at training. I accepted an invitation meant for somebody else to go for a date with a couple of girls down on Mission Beach in San Diego, and of course we hadn't been allowed to even unbutton the second button on our shirt or roll our sleeves up, and I was a Scandinavian boy, so I got down to the beach, and I'd never swum in the ocean before. I got down there where the guy, hour and a half, two hours before the girls were supposed to be there, and I went swimming, got tired in the surf pretty easy, went up on the beach, and having had a pretty full week in training, I fell asleep on my belly in the sand. Then when the girls showed up, I hadn't, I didn't want to be a wimp, so I didn't put my shirt on, spent the afternoon and early evening with the girls. I had one heck of a sunburn. It was late July I believe. I got on the bus going back to the base and I found I had blisters. I put my shirt on and found I had blisters about the size of my fist, and both shoulders.

Yeah, sounds painful.

Donald Rovick: Yeah, particularly on Monday when we started the calisthenics, my shoulders, both shoulders got rubbed raw. I couldn't do deep knee bends very well, couldn't bounce off my knees. The skin on the back of my knees was raw, in a hurry. So it wore my legs out doing squats, and then we went out for a run and I think we were up about five miles, and I made about two and a half, and I just couldn't straighten my knees, like running down a ramp, and I knew that the platoon would have to run around me, and I thought my God, what am I gonna do? But I knew I couldn't run in with them. So I just laid there as though I'd passed out, and I was taken into the sick bay. A corps man looked me over and he got kind of a quizzical look on his face. He said what's your problem? He'd seen a little bit of my back and a little bit of my legs. He says what's your problem? He looks at me with kind of a strange look in his eyes, and I knew that you could be discharged and even court marshaled for destruction of government property if you got sunburned on duty. So I told him I'd hurt my leg and we'd started using a tethered jump at the jump tower, and I told him I hurt my shin. So he put me down as a possible fracture and took an x-ray, put me on light duty for a day. The next time I went out, I made the run. I had a lot of raw spots for a while.

When all this training was going on, were you able to kind of keep in touch with what was going on in the war?

Donald Rovick: Well no, at that time, we were pretty fully occupied. Our commanding officer at the training base was Lemmio Shepherd.

Oh wow, I know who he is.

Donald Rovick: Yeah, he became Commandant. He was known among us as skinhead. He was a salty little bird, you know, and he insisted on compliance and discipline, and he believed in keeping you busy. So we had classes, you know, sometimes in the evening and then sometimes we had movies, and we really had some of the best food, and one of the nicest camps in California. We got more leave or liberty than we could probably afford, but discipline was a must. You had to look sharp and be sharp. You couldn't go out with wrinkled pants or crumpled field scarf, and you didn't want to be caught wearing non-GI clothes, and he could

suspend leave at any time. I remember one lecture he gave. Some guys were coming back after having caused problems on leave in San Diego or Los Angeles, and he gave us a lecture. He said that we have to remember that our duty was to the flag and to the Marine Corps. He says I want you to think of it this way. You give your soul to God because your ass belongs to the Marine Corps. He used to show up in camp barber shop with a pack of paper matches. He didn't want any hair longer than one of those paper matches. The story was if he really got angry he would climb up on top of his desk and give a fist-shaking, stomping lecture from there. But he treated us good with all the liberty we could stand, more than we could really afford.

When you got through with your training, where were you assigned to on active duty?

Donald Rovick: Well, I and some other guys were assigned to become parachute riggers. Parachute riggers were sent to Lakehurst, New Jersey. They used to make two guys out of each training platoon take training as parachute riggers. They gave it on the basis of written and oral tests for the frequent tests you were given, sometimes daily, always a week. We were shipped down to Lakehurst eight at a time, so we'd be assigned various duties in the repair shop for parachutes, were training in repair on parachute equipment. I wound up working in a parachute packing loft as a clown. I had to keep records on scores on the location and condition of the parachutes in service, and also keep track of the social affairs of the young Mustang captain who was in charge of the loft down there. He was in charge of the packing loft and the training schedule.

Was it pretty tedious work packing parachutes? I know you can't mess anything up.

Donald Rovick: No, it's not tedious but you got to do it right. Boy, at that time, yeah, we went through with, our platoon had 35 men and I think there were 6 officers. One was Davey Doctor. One was a real serious guy. I forget what his name was, but I know he won a Silver Star on Iwo. He and I packed together for a while. We set a new record out there for packing a parachute that I jumped with. It was 11 minutes and some 12 or 13 seconds. I picked an old silk chute to be used and it was an old one, so it lost some of its elasticity so it took a long time to open. It had me worried there for a while. I looked up and I saw that thing open up and I started singing songs to myself, a big cloud of dust but I had to drop down below the rest of the flight because it took a while to get open. The elasticity of the fabric makes a difference in the speed of opening. There was a good bunch of guys there, too, and I enjoyed them. The executive officer was from Texas, too. Now I forget what his name was. He was a big guy who walked around camp with a cane, and he had a pet bulldog, a big English bulldog, who was a great lover. He used to try to make love to everything that moved. There was a story that went around that he chased a skunk down into a culvert there and kind of regretted that one.

How long did you ultimately spend at Lakehurst?

Donald Rovick: That was only a month. The regular training schedule was three months for a native license, but we had had all this training at Camp Gillespie and quite intense, and then we had an instructor at Lakehurst who had tried to become a paratroop and wasn't able to make it, so he gave us some breaks. The Marine Corps paratroops had begun at Lakehurst, New Jersey, among a couple of green Air Force regulars in 1928. So they developed it independently although I think the Russians may have started before that. But I don't think that they knew about it. They just developed the idea that they could help progress in some landings by dropping people by parachute behind a beach to shut down bridges or attack gun positions or set up defense positions on roadways or something like that, and they developed from a few men

with the idea of maybe using a platoon or more by 1930s. They put on a display at a Navy day, I think it was 1932, and then sometime after that the Marine Corps decided to make it a special branch at about the same time they developed the idea of using raiders. So they developed the training there at Lakehurst and then at Cherry Point and at Camp Gillespie.

It's pretty famous Marine Corps history, the Edson's Raiders and groups of that sort. Did you do anything similar to what they did?

Donald Rovick: Well, they tried to teach us what was first to be hand-to-hand combat, and they made some classes in gathering intelligence, and that sort of thing. They had intended Marine Corps paratroops to be an independent organization like the quick action force like the Raiders, and our last exercise, our commanding officer had read some story about some Raider unit had marched 50 miles in a day in 12 hours, so he raised the exercise, a drop on outside of Escondido, California. They go over this town of Escondido, a simulated takeover of course, but road blocks all around, and then taken over the city. The police department, fire department, radio station and electrical supply unit and then the assembly outside of town at 11 o'clock and the drop was made at dawn in a field 2-1/2 miles outside of town, run into the town and a few guys outside of town hit our access roads, and reassembly outside of town at 11 o'clock and then at 12:00 depart for camp, carrying full combat packs and weapons up to light mortars, light machine guns, and back to camp in 11 hours.

That's a full day.

Donald Rovick: That's a full day, yes sir, lots of feet sore, I tell you. The guys who picked out the landing strip or landing field for the paratroops for the parachute drop hadn't checked it out very well. It was a field in adobe soil out there that had been plowed in the spring, when it was damp, and it hardened in the sun. So they had furrows out there in hard-packed dirt that caused a lot of injuries, a lot of broken ankles and legs.

When was it, sir, that you were finally able to get out into the fight? I know you had mentioned before places like New Caledonia and Guadalcanal?

Donald Rovick: Well, the troops were organized and pretty much some of them were already trained, the 1st Parachute Regiment, had begun to train before the war began, and soon after the war was begun, the 1st Parachute Regiment was sent to New Caledonia. They thought that the Pacific War would expand to the south, so they went down to New Caledonia to help arm and train for jungle combat. I spoke about, yeah, it was kind of a primitive setup but they had a camp called Camp St. Louis, and those guys worked pretty hard down there. As I understand, they were jumping five or six days a week, and exercising their marches and all the field training possible. They weren't getting enough supplies and they came up with the idea that maybe somebody ought to go out and purchase supplies from the natives down there. There were a lot of small communities down there. It was pretty fertile country and it was pretty well populated, but they were separated into small communities, and because it was French, the only common language down there was French, and one of the few guys who spoke French was one I mentioned to you before, Wally Hopkins. He had learned among other things to speak French as well as being a ___ and an accountant, had graduated from USC, spoke French, and they used to send Wally out with a command car and a few bucks that he'd collect from individuals and go shopping for whatever fruit, vegetables or meat he could buy from the natives.

So New Caledonia was the first place you went to.

Donald Rovick: Yeah, a lot of the training stopped. The high command hadn't really decided where to go, but they knew that the Japanese were moving south through the Pacific and they wanted to keep the traffic open between the United States and New Zealand and Australia and also India if possible.

Tell us sir about your memories of Guadalcanal.

Donald Rovick: Landed there, we were kind of late, we got there with the first five nurses. We were picked up on the beach by a sergeant, there were four of us – Mueller, Cardelini, Redford, and Rovick, four corporals graduate Raiders from Lakehurst, New Jersey, picked up by a corporal who was one of the original outfit there. I spoke of it as a service, but it was actually a section, delivery section, service and supply headquarters, 3rd Amphibious Corps.

Was there still fighting going on at Guadalcanal?

Donald Rovick: No, Guadalcanal was pretty much secured. There were still some Japanese running around in the brush, but they were generally not much of a threat. The camp was a pretty good setup. The unit had good relationships with the 1st Marines CB Battalion, so we had a functioning ice or cold locker for whatever cold food we could get, and they also had a shower with hot water, with a concrete floor, and a concrete floor mess hall. And we had a location between Lunga Beach and Henderson Field, which is really just north of downtown Guadalcanal. The headquarters was to our south, and Henderson Field just a short distance to the north and west, and we were in an area that had the advantage of having been a location for a coconut grove operated by contractors for Lever Brothers. So the underbrush was pretty well cleared out. They had said that this was the location of the headquarters for that particular coconut plantation. So we had pretty good tents built up, erected on raised platforms about 2-1/2 feet off the ground, wooden platforms, and they had open sides to the tent, flaps were extended over wooden frames and they had enough mosquito netting to close things in. They had doors with mosquito netting on them, and we had electric lighting in each tent. There was another tent for larger squad tent for some recreational – they had a ping pong table and some card tables and a radio that sometimes worked so we could hear radio Tokyo Rose. We had a great tech sergeant who was our senior NCO, Mike Wells. He'd been a semi pro footballer, and he sure looked like it. He was all man, hair from the top of his toes to about half an inch above his ears, and a nose that was artistically bent. But he was a smart guy and though he didn't talk much, he sure made a lot of sense when he did, and he took good care of us. I got crossways with my first visit with the CO, who was a character. The sergeant who picked us up on the beach was kind of gruff. There were 60 men in a unit and they were all 1st Parachute Regiment guys who had hung together for quite a while, and they'd been through the fighting on Tilogi, Kabuto, and Anabogo and some of the patrols on Guadalcanal and a couple of the other islands, so they had a history that was hard to beat. We were newcomers, and they talked to us and we asked them what the outfit was doing. Well, he says not doing much. And he says we run a flight now and then, but we're not doing much, we're open for something to come up.

Did you ever feel, sir, like you missed out on not getting into any of the combat?

Donald Rovick: Well, got close to it later, up on Okinawa, and we got a little closer to it on Guam. Some of our outfit went to Pelalu, and I remember one of the guys saying they speak about those Japanese as all wearing glasses. He says yeah, that may be so, but they got cross hairs etched into every one of the lenses, you know. Yeah, Pelalu was kind of a dirty thing. And

then our forward echelon went up to Saipan, and I was with the other four newbies and some even newer guys. There were 16 of us who went up to Guam was the second or relief echelon who resupplied our forward echelon who had been up on Saipan. They were supposed to finish the campaign on Saipan and then move back down to Guam, and we got a trip up on an LST. That's one of them floating bathtubs with the big bow doors.

Sure.

Donald Rovick: There were 16 of us from our outfit and about 20 guys from Marine Corps prime mover outfits. That's a big outfit, the big tractor/trailers meant for carrying tanks and pulling heavy guns, and then a small part of the 1st CB unit, the old friends of the outfit. There were about 16 or 20 of them with a small backhoe and a small bulldozer, and then a deck load of about 100 Navy POL's.

Did you, sir, ever, did you feel lucky or blessed that you didn't have to go into combat?

Donald Rovick: I felt a little deprived, but I did have a chance, we were up on Okinawa. Of course maybe we saw a little bit of combat while we were waiting to get, we were deployed on six different light carriers on Okinawa. They expected heavy defenses on the beach at Okinawa because we were so close to Japan. So they put an outfit on eleven different light carriers. I was with 11 other guys and went on a carrier called a CB-94, Lunga Point, and while we were waiting for that ship to show up, we were on a transit ship on one of the atolls there and they scheduled a movie on the rear deck of that transit ship and we just got out to watch the movie. I think it was A Guy Named Joe with Spencer Tracy. A plane flew overhead and he was making a lot of noise, and he came back going the other direction but a little bit lower, and then he came down over us again, going even lower. Some of the guys were griping that he was making too much noise and they couldn't follow the movie, and then he came down and this time you could hear he was in a dive, so we started scrambling for a hole in the deck. But his target was the next ship behind us.

So you guys didn't recognize it was a Japanese plane at first?

Donald Rovick: No. We thought it was some Navy training mission. There were no real warnings. But the target was a carrier that had pulled in to moor just behind us. That was the carrier, the Randolph, the newest carrier in the fleet, full-sized carrier. Just poured at the tower at the level of the hangar deck and started a fire that lasted for three days. Three days after that, we got on a carrier and went up to Karamarato, on the way to Okinawa. We pulled into Okinawa to pick up ammunition for the ship's guns, 5-inch and 3-inch guns, and Karamarato group, Rocky Islands south and west of Okinawa, and we watched the ship's crews go over to pick up ammunition in long boats. They were there all day shipping stuff back and we didn't have any duty.

Do you remember where you were when you learned that the war was over?

Donald Rovick: We were on Guam.

Tell us a little bit about that day.

Donald Rovick: We were preparing to get ready to drop supplies on Honshu. We were expecting to be called to help supply troops landing on Honshu in Japan, and we'd pretty much

gone to bed and we heard firing, saw some machine gun fire, and heard some rifles go off, and some pistols, couldn't figure out what the heck was going on. So I was with my buddy, Lorenzo Romandu Giuseppi Cardolini, who was quite a dude, and we went out and talked a little and went up to the company office. We found out somebody listening to the radio there found out that Japan had surrendered. So we went back to our tent and Cardolini had received a pint of good bourbon from home. His mother and brothers would sometimes send him a pint of booze, sent in a loaf of homemade bread. So we had a couple of drinks and went to bed.

That's great.

Donald Rovick: And I wound up, well most of the outfit, the old outfit, were high enough in points, so they were shipped home almost immediately, and those of us who were newer like Mueller and Cardolini and Redford and I were shipped to temporary duty, I and Mueller wound up at the pit service depot, one of the first black outfits in the Marine Corps, and we were met in the office by the sergeant in command. The lieutenant colonel got up behind his desk, walked across the room with a big grin and shook our hands and says, welcome. He says maybe we can get something done now. That was the biggest camp I'd ever seen. There must have been 15,000 men in that camp.

Well sir, I want to thank you. I know it's been over an hour now we've taken of your time.

Donald Rovick: Well, your dime. I appreciate your interest and if you ever feel like calling in, do so.

Yes sir, well I want to tell you that, I want to thank you. This program is about thanking veterans like yourself for your service, and especially as a fellow Marine, you know Commissioner Patterson is a retired Marine lieutenant colonel.

Donald Rovick: I hope you're in good shape.

Yes sir.

Donald Rovick: All the guys who came back from Iraq with so many guys there still on active service keeping in constant deployment -

Yes sir, no, I'm doing well and my friends in the Marine Corps are doing well, but we all, sir, everyone here at the Land Office from Commissioner Patterson on down, we want to thank you for your service.

Donald Rovick: Well thank you for your interest.

Yes sir. As we were wrapping up, I just wanted again to thank you for your service to our country.

Donald Rovick: I expected to. At that time, everybody expected to.

Yes sir, understood. Well again, thank you and in a few weeks or so we'll have copies of this interview to you on CD and then a little after that we'll send you a nice certificate and letter from Commissioner Patterson himself.

Donald Rovick: Well my goodness. I don't need all that.

Well, we're going to send it to you. Well all right sir, take care.

Donald Rovick: You've got a lot of interesting guys who had done more than I.

Yes sir.

Donald Rovick: And I think of them. I think particularly of our cook. He was a marvel. He was from Texas. Up on Okinawa, he fixed a barbecue for us. We'd been eating nothing but chocolate bars for about four days, and he barbecued a cow that didn't know the password.

That's great. All right sir, well take care.

Donald Rovick: Well thank you.

Yes sir, take care.

[End of recording]