

Transcription: Victor Jacaman

Today is Friday, January 29th, 2010. My name is James Crabtree and I'm at the General Land Office Building in Austin, Texas, and I'll be interviewing Mr. Victor Jacaman, and he is at his home in Laredo, Texas, and this interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you very much for letting us interview you today. It's an honor for us, and as I mentioned earlier, we're going to give copies of this interview to you for you and your family, but it's also something that is for history and for posterity, so hopefully future generations can hear your story as well.

Victor Jacaman: Yeah, I hope so.

I guess the first place, the best place to start is just tell us, sir, a little bit about where you were born and your childhood and your family and that sort of thing before you went into the military.

Victor Jacaman: I was born in Laredo, Texas, and my family, five brothers and two sisters, and I went into the service when I was 18 years old, and that's when I started. When I went into the service in 1943.

Were you drafted into the service?

Victor Jacaman: I joined, believe it or not, I joined when I was 17 years old, but my mother started crying and she said what do you want me to do, sign your death warrant away, and this and that, and OK mother, and I felt sorry for her and I told her no, I'm not going there anymore, don't worry, don't worry. So what I did, I knew I was gonna get drafted and two weeks later I got drafted.

So you were born and raised in Laredo, and you came from a fairly large family. I guess then you were in high school when Pearl Harbor happened, is that right?

Victor Jacaman: Yes sir, I was in high school.

Tell us, sir, what your memories were when you found out that Pearl Harbor had been bombed.

Victor Jacaman: Well, I'll tell you what, I did something that nobody had ever done. I was young, maybe I was about 15 years old more or less, but nevertheless, I got so mad I went into the kitchen and I looked at all the plates and cups and everything made in Japanese, and all of it was made in Japanese, I started breaking it. Here comes my mother and father and they said what are you doing? Well, I'm breaking all the Japanese stuff, the cups and plates and everything that says Japanese. They started crying, they started laughing. They said well what are you waiting on? Keep on doing it. They got a big kick out of that.

So when the war started, you were in high school still, but I guess based on your anger and what you'd already told me, you were ready to go. You were ready to sign up.

Victor Jacaman: Oh yeah. When I was 18 years old I got drafted.

So tell us then what that was like.

Victor Jacaman: I was in my high school, then I went St. Joseph to play football, and so do you want me to start it now?

After you got drafted, where was the first place you went?

Victor Jacaman: I was drafted in Fort Sam Houston, and then I went, they sent me over to Little Rock, Arkansas, and then I had amphibious course which is live ammunition and we got trained on that, and that was in Memphis, Tennessee. And then after one year, we went overseas.

Tell us, sir, a little bit about the group of guys that you were with when you were in training and what your training was like.

Victor Jacaman: Well, the group of guys I was training, a good buddy of mine was Richard Jelenik. Richard Jelenik was a Polack and he was a very good friend of mine. As a matter of fact, when the war was over he went over and visited me, him and his wife, and I had other friends that, and there was one friend that I wanted to – there was an Italian, and then there was a nice guy, the Irish who was named Jackson, and we all shook hands and we said the last guy that comes out of this alive, we'll go to the parents and tell them about that. So I wanted to do that but I couldn't do it because I had the address on my wallet, but then we had to cross the river at Germany, I don't remember the river, but nevertheless I crossed that river and then I couldn't find the address. So I was really sorry I couldn't fulfill my desire, my promise. So when we went overseas on the boat we had to zig-zag because we were afraid the torpedoes might hit us. So we landed in Naples, Italy. Next day at noon time, there was American planes covering the sun and it got dark. The planes were coming in squadrons, B-52's, P-38's, and etc. They all flew by squadrons. We then said Italy, you are going to get it. And by golly, he lasted about two and a half years. OK, so we made the southern invasion in France, in San Rafael. We kept on fighting until we arrived in the city named Mont Lebon, Belgium. I want to show the pictures, that's where the bomb fell, and then there were two Yanks that were under enemy shell, which the sergeant and me, and then I'm Victor Jacaman from Laredo, Texas, we were inside a house and there were two soldiers and me. The sergeant said get the hell out of here right now. So we got out, the two soldiers got out, and I didn't have a chance to fly away from that window. I flew about three yards. And then we were in the Battle of the Bulge. I went into a house that was on top of a hill and the Frank man said, he was rocking in his chair, and he said maldición de la guerra – that means the curse with the war, the curse with the war. That big stuff was bombing when the Germans attacked and they had been suffering, other mines when we attacked that city. So I was in the same battle as Audrey Murphy was.

Wow.

Victor Jacaman: You know him, right?

Absolutely.

Victor Jacaman: OK, let's see. The Germans come and attack us. There was an American hero who was sheltered up because the bomb that hit it close to him, it got him out of the foxhole, and he completely shell shocked. That bounced him out of his foxhole. He was taken to the medics and the officer said he had to get discharged because he done his duty, and then he went AWOL, and we all started balling the heck out of him. Said what's wrong with you? You going to the States. And no, no, I'm going to stay here. He had 355 days of combat zone, full combat. So he said I want to stay here with my boys. So he was always the first on the line to be

the first man. So we were supposed to attack at 3 o'clock in the morning, and then he come with us, so he was the oldest American. He was from El Paso. He went AWOL from the hospital, and they said, he says no, and we all ball the hell out of him, you know, and then he was supposed to go back to the States but he wanted to stay with his boys.

So he went AWOL from the hospital to rejoin you guys.

Victor Jacaman: Yeah, to fight some more.

And this guy, was he in your platoon or your company?

Victor Jacaman: Yeah, he was in my company. And he walked right in front of us all the time and he did that time, and there was one German that got out of his foxhole, and he says Komrad, Komrad, with his hands up, and then there was another German in the foxhole, and then the one that was in the foxhole, he shot at the American, at the American hero from El Paso, and then that guy, he had a .45 and he emptied all of his .45, all the shells, and then he killed both of the Germans and then he fell dead. We all felt so sorry about that poor man because he was a hero.

So did you see this happen?

Victor Jacaman: Oh, I seen it happen, oh yes, I seen everything. And when we was passing by, we were looking at him because he really had a good battle, and we were all looking at him and felt sorry for him because he was dead. You know, to us, guys like this, all the soldiers were like brothers. We acted like brothers because it was a tough war.

Absolutely. You mentioned being in the Battle of the Bulge which is a very famous and iconic battle, can you tell us a little bit, sir, what your thoughts were going into that battle? Did you know it was going to be the big battle that it became?

Victor Jacaman: No, I didn't know about it, but I knew it was coming. OK, then as we were advancing forward, we were part of the guy that died because he had a lot of guts. OK, the Bulge in Belgium, Mont Lebon, which is Mont is like forest, Lebon in Belgium, the city there, there was a building there, and we were two soldiers on the building on a house, and then we were shooting away at the Germans, so a sergeant came in there right away and said get the hell out of here right now. So we got out, the two soldiers ran out and there is no alternative for me, because I didn't have too much ____, so I flew out, I flew out for about three yards, and looking ahead the rifle, because when I fell, the bomb fell right in the house where we were at. So and let me see, now we then had a trip to go to on a convoy. We didn't know where we were going. We were riding high in the mountains. We had a shield envelope from the President of the United States, which was then Harry Truman, and we couldn't open it, we couldn't go to a city or anything like that or talk to anybody. It was a secret mission. So when we were on that mission, we seen a guy come to me and says hey, hey, there's a Frenchman, he's the only one that speaks French. Ask him what the hell is going on. So I asked him and I told him, I says _____, people of England, why so many people with flags, and then he says _____. I said no, I don't know. And he says because we were taking ____, and he says Hitler _____, and everybody started firing their rifles and everything, we got so happy, and then when we got in the first city it was burned over, and there was a lady, she got up on top of a table and she was singing the French national anthem. So then I also got on top of the table and I was singing the national anthem. And then the lady said in French, she said _____ American can chantel the national anthem. I was singing the national anthem also.

How was it, sir, that you knew French?

Victor Jacaman: Because I had it in Laredo in the school.

So you had taken French in school and you knew enough then to speak it.

Victor Jacaman: Oh yeah, they used me as translator all the way along.

I imagine.

Victor Jacaman: She said Hitler caput ____, we all got very happy. When we got discharged, there was a lot of, millions of soldiers, we got discharged and sailed on boats. So when we were on the boat, there was a harbor in New York, and we were at the Statue of Liberty. We seen the Statue of Liberty, and then we seen the ferry passing close to us, and then I let out the Mexican holler, because I knew how to holler real well then, I was young. And then when I led the Mexican holler and the ferry started blowing the whistle, and then our boat started blowing the whistle and all everybody started blowing the whistle, everybody was happy because the war was over.

That's great. Let me ask you too, sir, what type of contact did you have with your family back home when you were in Europe? Were you able to get letters from them or packages?

Victor Jacaman: Yeah, I did get a letter and packages. The packages were food, and then there was Arabic food because I'm Arab, Arabic food, which the soldiers said, tell your mama to send you some more packages. Their food is very, very good. Yeah, I shared it with them, my buddies.

And you mentioned you came from a fairly large family. Did you have any other siblings that were in the service during the war?

Victor Jacaman: Yeah, I had a cousin of mine.

A cousin, but no brothers or sisters.

Victor Jacaman: No, the brothers was young. I had a brother one year younger than me, but he had flat footed, he didn't pass.

So he didn't go. So you were the one that was in the service. I imagine your parents were worried about you while you were there.

Victor Jacaman: Oh yeah. My mother was eaten, and then she got up and she said, I'm gonna eat, what is my son doing? Is he eating? Oh, what is he doing? You know, she thought I was gonna die you know, one day or another, because you never know whether you're gonna live or not, but I told my mother I was dancing the conga. Dancing away from the damn bombs and everything.

Yeah, that's great. Tell us sir, a little bit about some of your leaders, your lieutenants and your sergeants and that sort of thing. What were they like?

Victor Jacaman: We were in the 7th Army, and I was on the 36th Division, 133rd, that's where ___ and 7th branch, and there was a General Patch that was in charge of us.

Did you see the generals very often? Did they come and speak to your men very often, or - ?

Victor Jacaman: No, because we were too busy in combat. I didn't even see Audrey Murphy. You know, he was a big hero but we didn't know about it until later. There was millions of people that were over there. There were Frank people, there were all kinds of people.

What were your memories of the Germans? Did you take any German soldiers prisoner?

Victor Jacaman: Yes, we took quite a bit of German prisoners. We had one time about 8 prisoners that were in a house that were eating, we caught them, and then the lieutenant told me, ask them and see where the Germans are. So I translated in French, and the lady sat there over on the right side and everything, and I helped with the language like that. And so captured about 10 of them right there.

Did they say anything to you, what they were like, were they afraid of you?

Victor Jacaman: Well, they would be afraid because it's like who wouldn't be afraid to die, you know? But Hitler had so many young kids. You feel sorry for them. They were 15 years old, 16 years old, they were very, very young. You know, Hitler put them by force and things like that.

Absolutely. So you mentioned you were in the Battle of the Bulge, how long ultimately were you in Europe? How long was it after the war was over before you were able to come home?

Victor Jacaman: Well, when we got the letter, because the person that gave the sealed letter to a colonel that we had a convoy and we didn't know where we were going, just then about the second two, three days later, we seen the Frenchman. I asked him and he said that the war was over.

How long did you end up spending in Europe before you were able to come home?

Victor Jacaman: Well, I was in Germany for about two or three months before they gave me a discharge. I took a hold of three apartments in Bremhaven, Germany, and then there was no flooding over there, so I didn't care, I haven't seen, I was in combat and the lady that wanted to have the Germans that were ready for the war because they had something fruit in a bottle, so they wanted to get the bottle so they could eat because they had a lot of stuff, food and everything. So I gave her the stuff, fruit and everything, and I did, I played along with her and we had sex and then a lieutenant come in and says yeah, that's when you were fraternizing with a girl, and this and that. I said none of your damn business, you 90-day wonder. I says you take off that coat right now and let's have it out. Oh, don't get mad, don't get mad, he went off and he told the colonel, and the colonel just, I know you had it with the lieutenant, and he says I know you had it rough, too, but just remember you are still in the Army, so he didn't do nothing about it. I thought he was going to give me a court marshal.

So that was before you were about to get out.

Victor Jacaman: That was when I was out of the Army, but then they couldn't touch the German girls, that's why they didn't have no fraternization.

Yeah, so this was a German girl.

Victor Jacaman: Yeah, a German girl.

Were most of the Germans pretty friendly like that did you think, or were some of them scared of the Americans?

Victor Jacaman: Yes, they were friendly, and then one German girl, she did the washing for me and I gave her money. Then there were Marks. So I says money? She says come here, come here. She took me inside the room and she had dollar bills stacked up about four or five feet. You want it, you take it. I don't want no money. Give me chocolate, give me candy, give me chewing gum, but don't make me feel bad, money, they hate money because you cannot use it. It wasn't worth nothing.

When the war ended, you ended up getting discharged and you came back to Laredo, is that right?

Victor Jacaman: Yeah, I came back to Laredo on a train, and when I was coming back, there was about four or five soldiers that they said Jacaman, Jacaman, I was laying down going to sleep, and they said Jacaman, Jacaman, I said what's wrong? There's a beautiful girl over there. We just don't have the guts to talk to her. Because I've been ___ her for two, three years and the other guy had been in the service and they just got nervous. So I passed by and well let's see, I passed one train, two, three, five trains. After the fifth train, she said there she is, and then I started to attack, but then I said what am I gonna tell her? I've been in the service, too. But then I said I'll think of something. A little falcon, so I grabbed a coat and started drinking water, and then she says what do you play? She was playing her cards. She said I'm playing solitaire. I says you mind if I join you? She said oh please do, everybody looks at me and I'm getting nervous. So I ended up playing cards with her and being very good friends.

Oh that's great, and that was on your way home?

Victor Jacaman: It was on my way home, yeah.

Yes sir. Are there any other stories that you think are important that we hear, that you want to share with us about your time in the service?

Victor Jacaman: Well, yes, I did have some problems with some of the service men there because one guy, he was in the weapons carrier truck and got off and then he started with his flashlight flashing at everybody and he stopped where I was and he said what's your name? I said my name is Victor Jacaman. And then he said, hey Mac, let's get this guy and whip the hell out of him. So they both got out and then I was ready.

This was in your unit?

Victor Jacaman: That was Europe, yes. So those guys, they drink so much so they wanted to fight.

OK, so they were drunk.

Victor Jacaman: So I hit them once and then after I hit him once he fell. I hit him again and then he tried to hit me again and I hit him another time and then the MP's come by, and he says oh please, please soldier, forget about it. They're going to take all the uniform away from us and everything. So I says well go ahead and get the hell out of here but don't fool around with the non-comp's. So we took off. And by the way, the invasion of southern France, it was a tough one because there was a lot of beautiful islands and a lot of beautiful places over there that people could enjoy themselves, but I'm planning to go by there next time, or maybe I'll go there within a week or two.

Oh, you're planning on going over there?

Victor Jacaman: Yeah, I'm going to see all the combat zones that I've been in.

Wow, have you been back since you were there?

Victor Jacaman: No, I haven't.

So this will be your first trip back since you were there.

Victor Jacaman: Yes. I have a magazine here that they give us for \$250 discount which is not too much, but then it says 65th D-Day anniversary tour. It says France, Luxembourg, Belgium, Germany, 11-day tour, and I want to see about it. I already wrote them seeing if they could send me there, but boy, they were high.

Yeah, the cost I'm sure because you would have to fly over there, that's right.

Victor Jacaman: Is there any better prices they can give me because I've been in the second World War?

I don't know, you'd have to probably just call the different travel companies. It's such a long way away.

Victor Jacaman: Yeah, but they are charging about more than \$5,000.

Yeah, wow, I don't know. I've never traveled over there as a tourist, so I don't know what the cost would be, but I would think look around.

Victor Jacaman: Yeah, I have other addresses.

Yeah, I would do the same thing.

Victor Jacaman: There was one incident the first few days that I was in the service that something that astounded me was I liked a girl, and I told the girl, she was a WAC, OK. So I asked her, hey let's go down to the movies, I invite you to the movies. She said soldier, we'll go to the movies on one condition. I said what's the condition? She said we'll go dutch. I said no, I'm inviting you. She said no, you want to go? The only way we can go to the movies is dutch, because you get the same salary that I am. Is that not being patriotic? You tell me. She says you're not paying mine because you get the same money I am. Boy, I was so proud of that girl.

Was this when you were still in training?

Victor Jacaman: Yeah, that's the first days in training, yes. I guess I was in San Antonio.

And in San Antonio you were at Fort Sam Houston?

Victor Jacaman: Fort Sam Houston, yes. Randolph Field, there was a lot of places in San Antonio.

How long did you spend in basic training?

Victor Jacaman: Maybe about a year and then I was two years overseas fighting.

What was your final rank when you got out?

Victor Jacaman: Well, I'll tell you what, I was PFC. We were fighting real hard, the Germans were shooting at the officers first, and then the rest, so that could discontrol the Army. And then a sergeant, I think a lieutenant come in and says Victor, you want officer's commission? I'll give it to you right now. I'll give you a lieutenant. No sir. I don't want it. You cannot say I'm a coward. I'm fighting this war, but I don't want to get shot the first before everybody else because the Germans were first trying to kill the officers so they can discontrol the Army. I said no, I'm fighting the war. Let me fight the way I am, so I just didn't accept it.

And who was it that had offered you that?

Victor Jacaman: The officer that was in charge of us.

Your battalion commander?

Victor Jacaman: Yeah, he was an officer, a captain, yes. I had a lot of incidents there. I met a lot of people, and I took a big kick out of the Scotland overhead short planes and we _____, and they played the flute and everything, which is different kind of people there.

So you went through Scotland at one point?

Victor Jacaman: No I didn't, but they had come to us. They were fighting north of us.

So you fought alongside some of the Scots.

Victor Jacaman: Yeah.

Did you fight alongside any British or anyone else?

Victor Jacaman: Yeah, I did see the British over there. They would say bloody blokes, and I didn't go to England though. I just stayed there where I was. We already mentioned the thing about the player blowing the whistle, right?

No, I don't think you have.

Victor Jacaman: Well, when we were arriving at the harbor in New York -

Oh yes sir, you did mention that, OK. Well sir, are there any other memories you want to share with us? I know you've written a lot of things down so you didn't want to forget anything.

Victor Jacaman: No I don't, let's see. For one thing, a lot of people that were young, they would always pick fights, and believe it or not, I always win on them. But you know, the young devils want to fight. There's three papers I have here I want to send them over in email as soon as possible, and the other incident I had was, there was one time a man pointed a rifle at a guy that was getting a discharge, he was 40 years old, but they were giving him discharge because they didn't want a man that old. So he got the young guy pointed a rifle at him -

And where was this?

Victor Jacaman: That was in France. And then he grabbed a hold of the rifle and threw it to one side and he started beating the hell out of that guy. He says you SOB, if you want to point a gun at me, you better kill me or otherwise I'm going to kill you, but don't you ever point a gun at me.

Why did the one guy point a rifle at him?

Victor Jacaman: Well, because the real Army guy, even you, never point a rifle at anybody.

I understand that, I'm just wondering why did the one guy point a rifle at the other guy who got discharged?

Victor Jacaman: This kid didn't even know better. In other words, he was passing by and the rifle just passed the rifle, he wasn't going to kill him.

I thought there was some animosity or something there.

Victor Jacaman: No, no. And then there was one time that I was eating, and to show you what the Army is, I was eating and then I told the sergeant there, I says pass me the sugar, and then he didn't do it. I says pass me the sugar, he didn't do it. So I reach my hand over there to get the sugar, and you know what he did? He grabbed a hold of a knife and boom, he hit it right in front of me and he says soldier, if you want something, you say please. And that corrected me right way. And that's the way it was. A lot of times when we get punished, they give us about two, three days of KP and peel potatoes and things like that. There was a lot of songs that we sang in the Army, which were very good, like they say the pay in the Army they say is mighty fine.

Oh, I've heard that one before, yeah.

Victor Jacaman: You heard it?

Yeah.

Victor Jacaman: They say mighty fine, they pay you \$50 and take back \$49. Yeah, you've been in the service?

I'm a Marine veteran.

Victor Jacaman: Marine? Oh good. What war?

I was in Iraq.

Victor Jacaman: You speak Arabic?

No, I don't speak any Arabic, just a few phrases, just a few we picked up over there.

Victor Jacaman: ____.

I don't know what that is.

Victor Jacaman: That's how are you.

I know you mentioned you were Arabic. Where is your family originally from?

Victor Jacaman: My family are originally from the Holy City, Bethlehem, where Jesus Christ was born.

When did they come to Texas?

Victor Jacaman: They come to Texas about, they come first in 1918 or 1917, when Pancho Villa was in existence, and then they used to attack the stores. They had a store over there and they attacked my grand historic, I wouldn't say mine because I wasn't even born yet, they attacked his store and his father's store and mother. So he went there to save them. And so they got him into a firing squad, and then he says ready, aim, and then the colonel come in there, he said don't shoot, don't shoot, he's a personal friend of mine, let him go, let him go. So they let them go. But they didn't used to have the blindfolds, and my dad said the rifle was so big but he seen it very, very big, and so he made history there because they want to kill him.

This was your grandfather?

Victor Jacaman: No, my father.

And who was going to shoot him? The Pancho Villa?

Victor Jacaman: Pancho Villa's group, yes. Those guys, they used to say, the Pancho, we already caught this man here, what do we do with him? He says well, shoot him. Then he says well, we haven't ever tried him. Shoot him and then we'll try him. They used to kill people like dogs over there, and that's why they went away and then they went to Eagle Pass, and then they got to Laredo because Laredo was better.

So your folks came directly from Bethlehem to Laredo.

Victor Jacaman: From Dorion, Mexico, and then Laredo.

OK, and you say they ran a shop, a store?

Victor Jacaman: Yeah, and my father was selling rice on trainloads. And he did make his father a history and I did, too.

That's right, yes sir. Well sir, I tell you we've really been honored to be able to interview you today and like I mentioned earlier, all these interviews, we save them in our archives and the goal is that school children and historians and future generations -

Victor Jacaman: Yeah, I think you ought to get those things in history so the kids would know about it.

Absolutely, well that's what we try to do.

Victor Jacaman: And I think we're worth it.

Yes sir, absolutely. And I want to let you know, too, that Commissioner Patterson who is in charge of the Land Office is a veteran, and we have a lot of veterans that work here, but even those that aren't veterans are very thankful for your service to our country.

Victor Jacaman: Thank you, thank you. And listen, before you close up, the land, things like that, how do I, I'm going to try seeing if I can sell land here through the government deal, through the veterans, and how would I go about it?

Well what I can do, sir, is when I send you these disks, I'll send you a bunch of our brochures with a bunch of information in there about how our land loan program works and loans.

Victor Jacaman: OK, because if you could have something close to Laredo, something like that, I would appreciate.

Absolutely, well the way the land loans work is you go out and find a piece of property you want to buy and then you call the Veterans Land Board and they make the loan. They are the bank for that. But I'll send you all the brochures, sir, and it has more detail on that.

Victor Jacaman: And how about if you want to be a dealer, if you want to sell land?

There's nothing like that. The Veterans Land Board was created just for veterans to get loans to buy land.

Victor Jacaman: I would like to buy a land, OK.

I'll put all that in the mail to you when we send these disks out once they are made up. So well sir again, I really appreciate your time and your stories and definitely your service to our country.

Victor Jacaman: Thank you.

Yes sir, thank you.

Victor Jacaman: Thank you, I appreciate it.

Take care. Thank you, bye bye.

[End of recording]