

Voices of Veterans Interview with Pete Salas Rocha

INTRODUCTION

Interviewee: Mr. Pete Salas Rocha
Date of Birth: July 28, 1922
Hometown: Corpus Christi, Texas
Branch of Military Service: United States Navy
Dates of Military Service: 1942 – 1945
Rank: Petty Officer 1st Class
Duty: Storage Officer
Assigned Ship: LSM 262 (Landing Ship, Medium – Amphibious Forces)
Military Theater: Asiatic - Pacific
Major Campaigns: Leyte, Philippines; Okinawa
Interviewed by: Dennis D. Rocha, son
Date of Interview: October 29, 2005
Note: Italicized words contained within brackets [] are annotations inserted during transcription by the interviewer for clarity.

TRANSCRIPT

Interviewer: This is Dennis Rocha. Today is October 29, 2005. I am interviewing my father, Mr. Pete Salas Rocha, a World War II, U.S. naval veteran of the Pacific theater. This interview is taking place at my residence in Austin, Texas. This interview is biographical, for the purpose of compiling historical perspectives from Mr. Rocha regarding his naval military service during the war in the Pacific. This interview is in support of the Texas General Land Office's Voices of Veterans Program and also in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, archives of the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Parks and Wildlife, for the preservation of historical information related to this site. In consideration of the relationship as father and son, for the purpose of this interview I will be addressing the interviewee, Mr. Pete Rocha, as Dad. Good morning Dad and thank you for doing this interview. Please tell me where and when you were born and the name of your parents.

Mr. Rocha: My name is Pete S. Rocha. I was born in Kenedy, Texas, July 28th, 1922.

Interviewer: And what were the names of your parents?

Mr. Rocha: My father's name was Pete Garcia Rocha from Laredo, Texas and my mother's name was Herlinda Salas Rocha from Kenedy, Texas.

Interviewer: Where did you spend the majority of your childhood as a young boy and teenager?

Mr. Rocha: Mostly in Corpus Christi, Texas. That's where we moved to and that's where I went to school.

Interviewer: OK. Do you remember how and when you found out that the US declared war on Japan?

Mr. Rocha: The day...a few day's after Pearl Harbor, I found out the day that Pearl Harbor was attacked. And that came into my mind that I had to do something with myself, whether sooner or later, I had to join the armed forces. That stayed in my mind.

Interviewer: What was your reaction when you heard that?

Mr. Rocha: Well I was too young and perhaps I didn't take it that serious. But as days went by, I considered that I had to do something with my life – make a change.

Interviewer: Did you hear about that on radio?

Mr. Rocha: No, I think I read about it in the paper, because I didn't have a radio at that time.

Interviewer: Well, tell me in as much detail as you can about the day you enlisted in the Navy. How did that happen?

Mr. Rocha: I was taking a walk downtown by what was the federal building. It was on a Saturday morning. I was wandering around by...and a chief from the federal building called me. He said he wanted to talk to me about enlisting in the Navy; that there was schools being offered if I would enlist now. And I would have an opportunity to be promoted and go to school. And that's what prompted me to join. So I had to consult with my mother first. And my mother, of course, did not approve of it, but I made up my mind. And a few days later I went back and I talked to the chief. By the following Saturday, I was to report to the office there. From there on I was to go to the area where I was going to be inducted into the Navy.

Interviewer: What was your age at that time?

Mr. Rocha: I was 18 years old.

Interviewer: Where did you receive your basic training?

Mr. Rocha: At Great Lakes, Illinois.

Interviewer: Tell me about your basic training experience.

Mr. Rocha: Well, it started out a little scary at the time because, I didn't... I wasn't aware of the treatment of the basic training, especially the inducting of discipline on you. And perhaps they sounded like threats...you had to do this, or whatever, and if you don't do it right, you will be punished. You will be assigned extra duties out in the cold weather. It was freezing weather at the time, at the time...during my training.

Interviewer: Did you either choose or were given any specialized training during that experience?

Mr. Rocha: After basic training, as the chief told me in Corpus Christi, that I would be given a...some kind of training. At that time, they were being offered. So I was transferred after basic training to Naval Air Station, Norfolk, Virginia, where I started attending aviation storekeeping school for a period of three months.

Interviewer: As a Hispanic in the military during the 1940's, in your opinion, were you treated any different from any other enlistee because of your cultural background?

Mr. Rocha: Never whatsoever. I never felt that during.... perhaps, because mostly the people that I trained with,...they were Yankees. Perhaps that's the reason I was never mistreated of any kind.

Interviewer: I understand that following basic training, you said that you had duty assignments in both Norfolk, Virginia, and Key West Florida, is that correct?

Mr. Rocha: That's correct.

Interviewer: How were you transported to these places following basic training? And what were your duty assignments while you were there?

Mr. Rocha: After my final training at Naval Air Station, Norfolk, Virginia. I was offered places to go. But prior to that, the chief at my school told me, "If you behave yourself, and you graduate from this school with good grades, you will be given a choice where you will be assigned to a job. But if you fail, there is a carrier sitting out in the bay there. You will be a deckhand perhaps the rest of your career in the Navy." So as I graduated with good grades, upon graduation, I was given a choice of transfer. And since I heard about Florida so much, Miami especially, and when they mentioned Key West, Florida, I decided that I wanted to go to Key West, Florida. So they gave me that choice.

Interviewer: How did you get there?

Mr. Rocha: By train. There were no buses. There was no other way, because there was a shortage of buses at that time. So most of our ways of transportation was by railroad.

Interviewer: So you arrived in Key West first. What was your duty assignment while you were in Key West?

Mr. Rocha: As my duty as a Storekeeper, 3rd Class... because when I graduated from school, I jumped from Seaman 3rd Class to Petty Officer...Petty Officer 3rd Class. So I was assigned my duties as a supply storekeeper at the Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Fleet Air Wing 12, headquarters.

Interviewer: During this time when you were going through this stateside training, tell me about any special friendships you had during this training in the States. For example, at Key West, were you close to anybody?

Mr. Rocha: Oh I uh...mostly the people that I hanged around there, while I was stationed there were military people. But I did get to know important people in Key West that worked at the supply department. Civilians. Although, there were Cubans there, not young ones, but in their 30's and 40's... male Cubans. I became acquainted with a few of them that worked at the supply department. But in town, I never had any friendships with Cubans at all.

Interviewer: OK. So you eventually went to Norfolk Virginia, right? What did you do there?

Mr. Rocha: I transferred from Key West to the amphibious forces at Little Creek, Virginia and my world changed completely from aviation to amphibious training. And it was going to basic training all over again, but it was harder. More discipline, but I passed the grade, especially in training where you had to use methods of jumping and all kinds of chemical warfare, identification of aircraft, enemy aircraft, ships, and all that. But I made the grade.

Interviewer: So this was like some kind of specialized combat training?

Mr. Rocha: Well it's....the amphibious forces, at that time in Little Creek, was like in today's times you call the Navy Seals, but, perhaps, it was not as bad, as hard as it is in today's times. To become a Navy Seal in today's time is entirely different. I've seen that in movies, of course, but in my training, it was something....landing. picking up Marines, and stuff like that.

Interviewer: And you eventually ended up in Long Beach, California, right?

Mr. Rocha: Yes, we had to go through the canal zone, and go across to the Pacific. And when we wound up in Long Beach, California, I had to go to gunnery school at San Diego, California, where I trained to handle a 50-caliber machine gun a 40-millimeter aircraft gun.

Interviewer: Can you describe for me this 40-millimeter aircraft gun? How does that work? Can you describe that for me?

Mr. Rocha: It works automatically and manually. To operate it manually, I was a pointer and I can't recall what the other side was...two people to operate it. You sit on a seat and the leader of the gun is standing behind us. He operates it manually or automatic, but if it goes haywire, then we take over. But mostly the time we start commencing firing, it's done manually. Then they let us do it...the decision as to the pointer; what level we are going to commence shooting.

Interviewer: Tell me about when you received your combat assignment to go overseas to the Pacific war. Do you recall when that was and how you received that assignment?

Mr. Rocha: Well, it started at the training in Little Creek, Virginia. We knew we were going overseas, because they required for landing purposes, they required our type of equipment - personnel. That's why we were trained for that. Mainly to land Marines. And that's what we did when we got there.

Interviewer: When you received your combat assignment, did you receive any specific instructions about where you were going?

Mr. Rocha: Never whatsoever. It was all confidential. The only one that knew all about it was the commanding officer. He would not address it, as to where we were going, and how. We just listened to orders and followed instructions. That's about all.

Interviewer: Were you anxious or scared at all about the duty you were about to undertake?

Mr. Rocha: I don't recall. Perhaps it was because I was not married. I didn't have a family. All I had was my mother waiting for me at home. It never came into my mind. However, there were married people. They were scared and they would talk about it. But I never did say nothing about that.

Interviewer: What was the month and year you were shipped overseas to the war?

Mr. Rocha: It was September 19th, 1943, when I started heading out from the Hawaiian Islands. And we were given special instructions to head south, past the equator, and come back towards Guam, which I didn't know it was Guam then. But around New Zealand, we made a stop there, and from then on, we went to Guam.

Interviewer: And why do you think you took this long route to get there?

Mr. Rocha: Because we were ordered to avoid battles. To stay away from the battles until our final destination to Guam. That, I found out later. But I didn't know why. Perhaps the reason why was because we were carrying special cargo to Guam. And after we dropped our cargo we had at Guam, then we went into other assignments.

Interviewer: Describe for me the type of ship to which you were assigned.

Mr. Rocha: My ship was called an LSM, medium ship, built to land personnel. It has a bow in the front and a ramp. You come close to the shore, open up the bow, and drop the ramp, and drop off the troops. All well equipped. While all that is done there, we had support from the back from destroyers and cruisers and stuff like that.

Interviewer: What does LSM stand for?

Mr. Rocha: Landing Ship Medium.

Interviewer: Do you remember the number?

Mr. Rocha: LSM 262. They didn't have name for those landing ships because there were so many. Like big ships, they have a name and their serial number. But we only had the number and what type of ship we were on.

Interviewer: What was your rank and your assigned duty while on board ship?

Mr. Rocha: I was a Storage Officer as a First Class Petty Officer. My duties were to procure all the supplies needed for the ship other than ammunition and fuel. But food and pay work, making reports to Washington DC about my job; and mainly the supplies required to operate the ship. That was my duties.

Interviewer: How would you receive these supplies, as you needed them?

Mr. Rocha: By method of invoices either mailed out or information we got on the radio, where supplies ships were to come into us and we would board them and procure our supplies. Some of the parts for the ship – I ordered them by mail. Somehow or the other, they got to us.

Interviewer: Now you have said that because of the nature of your duty as supply officer, you had pretty much the “run of the ship” and had access to areas that most other sailors did not. How did that benefit you?

Mr. Rocha: Well, it gave me more freedom to move all around the ship, perhaps because the commanding officer gave me that authority to do that. Perhaps because I had supplies all over the ship – in different areas and I had to go personally to check on them. And the cook and I kind of worked together because he would be the one that would draw food for the crew. So he had to log in on a little book and hand it to me daily as to what he drew out of the storeroom. And part of those supplies were down in the engine room. So I managed to get down to the engine room, communication room, and mostly all over the ship. I had that privilege to do that. Not all of the crew had that privilege. But I did.

Interviewer: Who was the commanding officer of your ship?

Mr. Rocha: My commanding officer of my ship was Lieutenant Commander William T. Dorsey from Ohio – the state of Ohio. He's good man.

Interviewer: Could you describe his personality as a commander?

Mr. Rocha: He was very quiet – like he had a family at home and he would be thinking about them. He was in his forties and I considered him to look a little elderly – gray hair. He had plans on retiring when the war started. So he had to stay in the Navy

and he mentioned that that was his second tour of duty in the Pacific. He had been there before. So went all the way to Little Creek to re-train to go back with us.

Interviewer: What were your immediate superiors like? The other command staff.

Mr. Rocha: Well other than the captain, the others I hardly had any communication with, especially the executive officer. He was indifferent from me – the rest of the officers. He'd hardly talk to the enlisted men and I hardly talked to him. I went directly to the commanding officer for my purpose or any problems that came up. I would take them directly to the commanding officer.

Interviewer: Do you have any interesting memories about the other command staff?

Mr. Rocha: Well as I said, the executive officer, the one that - I don't know whether he had a dislike for me, but he showed it to the rest of the crew. I don't remember where he was from. He never mentioned anything. All I knew, the commanding officer mentioned to me where he was from and I also had a another officer – an engineering officer – that I talked to because of the engine parts that he needed, and all that.

Interviewer: Did you develop any close friendships with anyone on board?

Mr. Rocha: Only one person that I recall was – a colored man, a Negro. His name was Robert E. Lee. But he had reddish hair. He was from Richmond Virginia. He was a mess attendant, to serve the officers. And he – the reason I made close contact with him was because I used to sing. And he liked to listen to me. Songs about the Ink Spots – singers that - they don't exist now, but they did then. He admired me for that.

Interviewer: Tell me about any interesting experiences you had during the journey overseas, while you were not in combat? What was that like day to day?

Mr. Rocha: Well, we had one person on ship - he went haywire, while we were cruising, prior to going into battle. And he went into the ammunition room and he stayed there for several hours. And they were trying to get him out of there but there was only one way to get there. I couldn't imagine what would have happened to the ship if he would have done something wrong down there – I don't know what. But he finally came out and they got rid of him. I don't know how and when, but they got rid of him.

Interviewer: What was the mealtime like? How was the food on board ship?

Mr. Rocha: It was excellent. Due to the fact that Marty was the cook and he had a restaurant in New York City called Marty's Restaurant. He was an expert cook. He was drafted into the Navy and therefore, we got excellent food, and perhaps because of the supplies that I procured for him – the proper supplies. I have no regrets about the food. It was wonderful.

Interviewer: How was the weather, generally, on your way out to – across the Pacific? Did you run into any bad weather?

Mr. Rocha: The weather is calm on the way out there because that's the way the Pacific Ocean is named – "Pacífico". It's always calm unless you run into a storm. And that we did off the coast of the Philippine Islands once. And we had rough weather where the ship became almost like a submarine. It would go under water and come out. And nothing to eat because you couldn't hold food in your stomach.

Interviewer: Did you ever get seasick?

Mr. Rocha: Just one time. That time. It was in July 1945 when we ran into a typhoon. It pushed all the way – almost to the coast of China, trying to get away from it. And the captain kept saying, "Pray that the engines won't give out. Because if they do, we're gone." But the engines didn't give out.

Interviewer: Do you recall any humorous moments while you were on board ship? On this long journey?

Mr. Rocha: Humorous moments? [thinking] Well – [chuckles] I couldn't recall any humorous...

Interviewer: That's fine. So I understand that because you were on a supply ship, this amphibious ship, you were always under way in the company of a flotilla of other ships. Is that correct?

Mr. Rocha: Yes we had a flotilla of twelve ships. We traveled together. And we were not the lead of the ships. Somebody else was, but we traveled twelve ships together as group, wherever our assignment was.

Interviewer: Do you remember the names of any of the other ships that you traveled with?

Mr. Rocha: No I don't. Like I said before. LSM's, they had a serial number. They didn't have a name, just by the number. And one of them was the lead of the whole group.

Interviewer: You were not in the company of an aircraft carrier?

Mr. Rocha: No.

Interviewer: Did your ship perform many practice drills on the way to the war and what were the drills like?

Mr. Rocha: Mostly about suicide planes that would come into us – close to the islands, which we did encounter one off the coast of Leyte Gulf. And we hit it. We sunk it.

Interviewer: Describe for me in as much detail as you can, your very first general quarters combat experience? Where did that occur and what was that like?

Mr. Rocha: It's Leyte Gulf, Philippine Islands when we made a landing there. And that was my first experience with landing troops there. However none of our ships were hit. We were lucky that – areas that we picked to land. By the time we landed, the Japanese were a little late to get to us. That's what happened at the final battle of Okinawa. We landed at a time where they didn't even know the area that we had landed. Naha, which is the capital of Okinawa got the first landing from other groups, but we came around the back. That's where we landed with the Marines. But by the time they found out we were there, we were already on the beach – for hours. It was a rough area where we landed. Real cold and drizzling rain.

Interviewer: Can you describe your emotions during a battle and how did you feel right after it was over?

Mr. Rocha: Well - mostly I thanked to God that I didn't get hurt and that nobody on my ship got hit or hurt, but I think about other – the ones that didn't see the action, like the ones that were down in the engine room. One of the crew cried like a baby. He wanted to know what was going on outside. He kept hearing all the commotion. "Did we get hit?" Or this and that. But he was real scared. But I didn't. I stayed real calm for some reason.

Interviewer: When you went to general quarters, what was your role?

Mr. Rocha: Directly to a 40 millimeter gun – aircraft gun. We had two in the front and I was on one of them.

Interviewer: You operated it with another man, is that right?

Mr. Rocha: The operation was done by two people, manually and there was a leader gunner in the back of us who would do it automatically, himself. He would decide where to shoot and how he would handle it, because the guns would operate automatically. But mostly we operated it manually with our hands.

Interviewer: And during most of the battles, how were you engaging the enemy? How were the Japanese attacking you most of the time?

Mr. Rocha: Well, from the ground was one of them. But we dropped them off so quick that they went into the jungles and the purpose of us was to defend ourselves from suicide planes if they were around. And mostly the defense was coming in from the back – destroyers firing into the island before we got there.

Interviewer: Do you specifically recall shooting down any aircraft either yourself or someone else from your ship?

Mr. Rocha: I feel that the only suicide plane that we knocked down in front of our ship that I had something to do with. Because I was the pointer. And as he dropped, he was going for the big ship – a destroyer that was next to us, but he never made it there. So when they said, “Commence firing at will.” we started firing. And we lowered the gun real low because he was coming real low. And usually we don’t do that because there are troops off shore. But we lowered it and made a good hit and knocked it down. So we opened up the bow. Somehow or the other we got instructions to pick part of it – see if we could get the pilot. So we hoisted part of the plane on the ship, but we never did find the pilot. But we did take some parts off of the aircraft and then dumped the rest of it in the water.

Interviewer: What did you do with those parts?

Mr. Rocha: Well mostly the mechanics took part of it, and off of that, I have a bracelet with my dog tag on it as of now, made off of that aircraft.

Interviewer: Was your flotilla ever concerned about submarine attacks or mines?

Mr. Rocha: There was always a fear of that and since I slept on the water line of the ship, I could hear the waves bouncing, but I knew there was a danger of submarines, but it never occurred to me that we were ever going to get hit. There was always that danger around.

Interviewer: Well, tell me about any other combat experiences or battles you remember – that stick in your mind.

Mr. Rocha: Well, it was off the coast of Subic Bay, part of the Philippine Islands. We were cruising. We got a signal from the shore and we thought it was a trick. But we never approached the area until we found out we were all lined up facing the island. And our ship was picked to find out what it was. So we approached the shore and we found some stragglers from the Air Force. How they got there, I never found out. Well, we picked them up on our ship. We carried them on our ship for a few days. Finally we ran into a cargo ship and transferred them there. But my duties were to feed those stragglers from the Air Force and give them some of our clothes and food because they were almost starved to death. But I never found out how they got there. But I was glad we picked them up.

Interviewer: Were you in the Battle of the Philippine Sea at the Marianas Islands?

Mr. Rocha: The Marianas Islands – the only battle that I encountered was at Saipan, but it was full of sick people with leprosy. So there weren’t very many Japanese there. That was easy to take. That’s the battle I participated in. And then from there on I went to Leyte Gulf, the Philippine Islands. That was the early spring of 1944. And then I - by November, we went into Okinawa – to secure Okinawa, which didn’t last very long but we had high casualties. And that was my last battle around Iwo Jima. And then we went on to the final destination – Okinawa. That was by the spring of 1945.

Interviewer: There was a battle at the Philippine Sea that became known in history as the Marianas Turkey Shoot. Are you familiar with that? Have you heard that before?

Mr. Rocha: No, I never heard of that one.

Interviewer: I believe it was a time that the Navy shot down many planes that were attacking and that it was like a turkey shoot. I was just wondering if you were familiar with that.

Mr. Rocha: Well like I said, we traveled by ourselves. I never – I was never close to aircraft carriers or battle ships. They did their own battles out on their own. Our purpose was to land. When we made landings – to land the troops and then pull back.

Interviewer: I want to ask you a little bit more about these kamikaze or these suicide bomber planes. Did you ever witness any ships getting hit or sunk by these planes?

Mr. Rocha: No, I didn't. Like I said, the one that we knocked down was going towards a destroyer, but he never made it. We knocked it down. And the ones that were in Okinawa, they couldn't hardly get to us because the Marines were up there flying, spotting them out, especially at night.

Interviewer: What military branch were these troops that you were carrying?

Mr. Rocha: I never found out what their rank was or who they were.

Interviewer: Were they Marines?

Mr. Rocha: All Marines. I never landed - I never encountered any Army. They came later on after we took the battles – made the battles, secured the area. Then the Army would come in to support the – whatever duty they had, to clean up or whatever, afterwards.

Interviewer: Did you ever witness anyone wounded, injured, or killed?

Mr. Rocha: During the campaign of Okinawa, a marine dragging a Japanese with his arm almost off. And somehow, we were picking up some of the wounded to take them back to the hospital ship. This marine came up with this wounded Japanese and asked the sergeant, "I have a prisoner here. What do you want me to do with him?" He said, "He's your prisoner. You were not supposed to take prisoners. You take him out of here. Do whatever you can." So he took him off – dragged him off. Perhaps he killed him, because that's what he had to do. Japanese were hard to come around as prisoners. They would not give up.

Interviewer: Did you ever know anyone personally who got injured or killed?

Mr. Rocha: No I don't. I didn't know anyone.

Interviewer: Did your ship have to treat anybody that was injured on board?

Mr. Rocha: We just - our corpsman would just wrap them up with bandages or whatever we had. We had very limited medical supplies. As a matter of fact, my office on the ship, I had two other people with me, the yeoman, which is called, more or less, the secretary, to type - for communication, typing letters and such, and the corpsman, who had his supplies, medical supplies. We had three desks there: my desk, the yeoman's desk, and the corpsman's desk. And at times, I used my desk as sleeping quarters to come up from my quarters to... [unintelligible].

Interviewer: I understand that you injured your back during an experience on board ship, is that correct?

Mr. Rocha: That's true.

Interviewer: Can you describe for me how that happened?

Mr. Rocha: The swing of that 40-millimeter that I was on had a safety belt. But I got up on it so in a hurry, because of the suicide plane. I didn't secure myself properly. As we made a fast turn, I slipped off, and I fell on my rear end. And I injured myself. I reported at the time, so it was recorded. So later on, I had problems with my back. And it's recorded that it did happen.

Interviewer: Did you either write or receive letters from home anytime during your service time?

Mr. Rocha: I used to receive letters from all the places I was stationed, Norfolk Virginia, places that I - Key West, Florida, letters from Chicago, California, and of course, from my mother. But I recall that my commanding officer made a remark when we went into Tokyo Bay. He said, "Do you know anybody in Japan?" I said, "No, sir. I haven't gotten off the ship yet. But perhaps when I get off, I'll get a letter from Japan." Because, I was one of the persons who would get a lot of letters from all over. Perhaps that's the reason he asked me that question if I knew anybody in Japan. But I never met nobody in Japan when I got off.

Interviewer: Did you ever receive news about how the war was progressing or about events back home?

Mr. Rocha: Not whatsoever. I only found out what was going on from what I as seeing daily, on a daily basis. Other than that, one day or the other was the same to me. I do recall that on Sundays, if we were cruising, routine cruising, I used to dress up with my dress uniform on Sundays. The commanding officer admired me for that. He said, "Why are you so dressed up? You're not going nowhere." I said, "I feel better sir. It's Sunday and I feel better. We're not in battle." He said, "That's good! I wish all the

other boys would do that, but I can't force them to do that." Unless we were approaching a military area where something was taking place, like the signing of the final papers.

Interviewer: How did you hear that the war was over?

Mr. Rocha: Over the communications, when we were anchored off of Okinawa. We were watching a movie on board deck of the ship The same old movie we used to see. I think that's the only movie we had. And we were watching that movie and all of a sudden, they sounded an alarm for an attack. That perhaps suicide planes were coming toward us. And the Marines were up there. It was getting dark. The Marines were out there cruising. And when we heard the news about the war ending, some fellows without permission, from other ships were shooting up in the air, for joy or whatsoever. And the Marines started cussing down at them, "Stop shooting up here you bastards! You're shooting at us!" So some of those men were court-martialed for that.

Interviewer: Were you aware of the atomic bomb at that time?

Mr. Rocha: None whatsoever. Like I said, we carried a special cargo from Providence, Rhode Island all the way to Guam. And I figured that, perhaps, that was part of it – the mission. And I never found out if it was or not.

Interviewer: OK. We are back on Side 2. While we were taking a break, you were telling me about this interesting way mail would be received on board ship. Could you tell me about that? What you just told me?

Mr. Rocha: As I said before, I got mail from mostly places I was stationed at, although I was never stationed at Cape Cod. But some of the fish that I ordered from there came on board ship. Upon opening the containers, there were love letters from the girls that packed the fish, asking us to write to them. But I never did do that. Perhaps the other fellows did it, but I didn't. But that was one way of getting letters from someone.

Interviewer: Generally, when the war was over and you got the news, how did the other sailors react on board your ship to the news of the end of the war?

Mr. Rocha: Well, they were thrilled to death to get back home. Perhaps most of them were married. But I took it pretty calmly. I was never in hurry to get back. I new that the war was over and I was taking my time getting back. However, I had enough points to get back. And that's the reason, I didn't stay on that ship very long. But I don't recall where or how I got off. But I wound up on an aircraft carrier, the USS San Jacinto, to come back to the United States. And the deck was cleared from aircraft and it was converted for passengers to bring them back to the states. I didn't like it, because it was too crowded. So because of that, I transferred to the regular crew of the USS San Jacinto to bring back the troops. And we brought them all the way to San Francisco, Treasure Island. I made a second trip – to get another group. And on the second trip, I got off the carrier at Treasure Island, San Francisco.

Interviewer: Your ship was in Tokyo Harbor during the signing of the declaration of surrender by Japan. Can you describe for me the events leading up to and on that special day?

Mr. Rocha: We were there, but our ships were so small, we were way on the outskirts of the ceremonies. I couldn't hardly see it. I could see the USS Missouri where MacArthur – was taking place, the signing of the papers. And we were all dressed in dress uniforms walking around the ship. We didn't have to stand at attention or nothing – no duties or nothing. Just wandering around the ship while the ceremonies were going on so far away from us. While that was taking place, a little Japanese fisherman came towards our ship – paddling. And he motioned to me that he wanted something to eat. Somehow or the other I understood what he wanted. So I went to the galley and got a couple of eggs, bread, and I don't recall what else. And I tied it with a string, in a bag and handed it down to him. And one of the sailors asked me why I was doing that. I said, "The man is asking for something to eat and I'm going to give him something." He says [the sailor], "You don't have to do that. We just fought these SOB's and we don't have to feed them." I said, "This man didn't fight you. He never did. it wasn't his war. So I'm feeding him, whether you like it or not." I out ranked him anyway. He couldn't say nothing to me. But seems to me like, every island we encountered after the battle, we had to feed the people anyway. So what I did, I don't think it was out of the way.

Interviewer: How would you describe the general feelings about the Japanese people from your shipmates?

Mr. Rocha: Well - I got off at Yokohama on liberty. The land was flattened out. Our instructions were to be respectful to the people. That was our instructions so I never talked to no one but... [unintelligible] I didn't have no hate towards them because I know they didn't create the war. It was the warlords. That stuck to my mind. But I did encounter a little words of hate while we were walking around. I heard a man cussing at one of the Japanese – civilians there – so I approached him, and I hollered at him, "Weren't you given instructions to how to behave off the ship?" And to my misbelief, it was my brother, Rudy - that I was instructing to behave himself.

Interviewer: So that was just an accidental encounter you had with ...

Mr. Rocha: With my brother, yes. I never did expect - such a big war, such a big world, and there he was. That's the only time I saw him until we got home after the war.

Interviewer: That's amazing. So describe your return home following the war.

Mr. Rocha: Well I was a little frightened, uncertain of myself as to what I was going to do. After considering myself so important in the Navy, my role in the Navy - what I did. What am I going to do next now? Am I going to continue in the same role or what? So....

Interviewer: Did it ever cross you mind about staying in the Navy?

Mr. Rocha: The Navy didn't want me to get out. They needed my rank – my type of work at that time, to get rid of all the equipment and all that. And later on as a civilian, I did that. But not as in the Navy. At the Naval Air Station – Corpus Christi. I had duties like that to strip ships down that were sent down to us. Huge crates - we had to inventory and identify every item, and send them back to stock.

Interviewer: What were the reactions from your family and your friends when you returned?

Mr. Rocha: My mother was almost starved to death during those times because they figured that one of us, since my two brothers and I were in - one of us – they were getting messages around the neighborhood about somebody getting killed. And she was always expecting one of those letters and she never got one. Since I was the first one back, I came in very quietly. However, my brother Rudy, who was little wild. I got up one morning and I heard somebody coming down the street singing a song. And I walked out in front and there he was with a sea bag hanging on his back, and singing with a guitar, and my mother started crying. She said, "Here comes one of my other boys." But he made a sound that he was coming. He was walking down the street hollering. Detour – was the name of the song. "Detour, there's a muddy road ahead."

Interviewer: Describe how, when, and where you were discharged from the Navy.

Mr. Rocha: I was – waited for two weeks at the receiving station at Treasure Island, California. The reason for that is that there was no transportation to Texas. I didn't know where I was coming to be discharged but I wound up at Camp Wallace in Houston, Texas. At that time, that was where the discharging area was. I don't recall whereabouts in Houston. But it was close to a railroad station. That's all I recall. Of course, we did most of the traveling by railroad. And that's where I was discharged – Camp Wallace.

Interviewer: Would you say that...what would you say was the most difficult time for you during your military service, if there is any?

Mr. Rocha: During my military service, my most difficult time perhaps was the first basic training that I got because I was unaware of the treatments on how they were going to deal with us. And I took it very seriously that we could go to prison or whatever, if we didn't do what we had to do. But I took it that it was part of the training. But afterwards, I loved the Navy. And up to the day I die, I'm going to love the Navy.

Interviewer: So if you could describe your most memorable experience from your military service, whether it's good or bad, what would it be?

Mr. Rocha: My description of my military service is that I was treated as a leader. I never felt that I was treated otherwise. I even joined a club while I was stationed in Norfolk, Virginia. I was given special invitations to go to society parties and gatherings at Portsmouth, Virginia. It was a huge plantation home and all the girls were all dressed up in formal and there I was with a special invitation to go to a place that I had never

been before as a civilian in Portsmouth, Virginia. And that's the reason I love the Navy and what took place around me.

Interviewer: Well that concludes my inter...my questions for this interview. Do you have any other comments or any other experiences about your military service that you would like to share – as we finish?

Mr. Rocha: As I continued my duties as a civilian after I was discharged from the Navy, I started all over again as a civilian with the Navy. My final job was as a foreman. I became a leader again. And that, I am proud of. And that will remain in my mind for the rest of my life.

Interviewer: Well, very good. Thank you very much Dad for participating in this interview. And, most of all, thank you for your honorable military service to the United States Government in the defense of freedom.

Mr. Rocha: You're welcome.