

If you would start and tell us your full name, where and when you were born if you want to, and what branch of the service you were in.

Mr. Rudolph: Louis Rudolph. I was born in Buffalo, New York, on August 19, 1919 and I served in the Army.

What unit were you in?

Mr. Rudolph: _____. It was formed in New Caledonia. It didn't have a number, just _____. When I went to Korea for Vietnam they gave it the 23rd. Colin Powell and Swartzkoff both were in Vietnam in that division.

Really? That's interesting. What were your parent's names and their occupations?

Mr. Rudolph: My mother's name was Henrietta Kyron and my father was Louis Rudolph. He worked for the transit system in Buffalo, New York. As a foreman for the _____ they made all the streetcars then. They made all the windows and doors and that.

Any brothers or sisters?

Mr. Rudolph: All together there were nine of us; five boys and four girls. We are down to two now, myself and my sister. They all died young; 55, 62, 21, 45. I'm the only one that got up this high.

How long did you remain in school before the war?

Mr. Rudolph: I left the beginning of high school in 1941. That is why they gave us our diploma now.

What kind of recollections do you have of the Great Depression?

Mr. Rudolph: We lived it with nine children. You passed your clothes down to the younger ones. In the summer you got a buzz cut as close as you can get it. You wore sneakers or you went barefoot. We used to take tar from the road and make chewing gum.

How did the Great Depression affect your family and how did you all cope?

Mr. Rudolph: My dad always worked so we always had something to eat. Other than that things were hard to come by. I wondered why my mother died at 57 years old. You can see why you know washing clothes and hanging them out on the line and nine kids.

Were you old enough and did you have a job before your time in the service?

Mr. Rudolph: I was working at Curtis Wright building airplanes. That was in 1941. Then I went up to the draft board and had my number moved up. They told me, "Go home. It's in the mail."

So you weren't drafted into the service?

Mr. Rudolph: Yes.

You were?

Mr. Rudolph: Yes.

Okay and they told you to go home anyway?

Mr. Rudolph: Yes. They said to go home and wait for it and it came.

Before Pearl Harbor, before that day in December, how seriously did you and your family and your friends take the threat to the Americans from the Nazi's or the Japanese?

Mr. Rudolph: To tell the truth I didn't never even pay any attention to the war. We were in the service and they drafted us but I didn't know why. I had no recollection why the war was going to come.

Do you recall where you were when you heard the news about Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Rudolph: Yes, I was stationed up in Camp Edwards, Massachusetts, and we heard it on the radio. It was on a Sunday. We had barracks with 65 guys and we had an old radio. I didn't listen to the speech.

You were already in the military when the attack on Pearl Harbor came?

Mr. Rudolph: Yes.

What were your thoughts when you found out about that?

Mr. Rudolph: I came home on furlough and I was in the Yankee Division and in World War I they were almost annihilated. So I went home and was telling everybody, "Hey would you like to have a Japanese skull to hang on your chandelier?" not knowing we would go. I got back to the base and they asked for volunteers. I didn't volunteer but they took all of us guys that met them on maneuvers down there and they would actually fire live ammunition and all that and maneuver through the unit. Within a couple weeks after Pearl Harbor, about three weeks, we were at Brooklyn Navy Yard on a ship to go over to _____. We were 30 days on the ocean with 20 minutes this way and 20 minutes that way going to _____.

What did you think about the way that President Roosevelt handled everything at the beginning of the war?

Mr. Rudolph: I think he did real good. I didn't like the phrase he said, "Our boys will never leave the country" and the next weeks said, "Our boys are all over the world." Eleanor was going out too then. I still think he handled the situation really good.

Just for my own curiosity how does President Bush compare?

Mr. Rudolph: He wants to be king or a dictator. If they keep this all the time until Congress election is over with and then his election, this is all. He's not very bright. He went to college but most of the time he was drinking.

We have already gone over you being drafted but what was the being drafted process like? What was that like for someone as young as you are?

Mr. Rudolph: You just signed up and they would send you your notice. You went through a local hotel that we went to, to leave and then we went down to Buffalo and from there we went to Fort Niagara and did all of our skills and IQ. So many people went to the infantry and so many went there. My brother worked at a gas station and they put him in as a medic. He shot needles with a grease gun.

You didn't have a choice of where you went?

Mr. Rudolph: No.

You just went wherever they told you to go?

Mr. Rudolph: Oh yes.

That was pretty standard for people that were drafted wasn't it? They just kind of got put somewhere?

Mr. Rudolph: Yes.

You weren't tested for anything, you already told me that. Where did you do your basic training and were you selected for a more specialized after that?

Mr. Rudolph: I did it at Camp Croft, South Carolina, down there in Spartanburg, Carolina. It was an infantry training place so we had no selection, but I did do special island mortars; shooting mortars. We would fire live ammunition over our troops in training. We didn't have any rifles so we used wooden sticks to train. It was an infantry camp so that is what you got.

What was your impression of your fellow recruits?

Mr. Rudolph: They were all National Guard. We met them on maneuvers back from Carolinas to _____ in the back end of trucks. We would throw it all together. You didn't get to know them too well to begin with because the war started and we were going. Being with them for a couple of years they were good people.

Do you keep in touch with any of them now?

Mr. Rudolph: What's left. They started this guy about a month ago we went to see him in Massachusetts and he had one leg cut off and had a stroke and couldn't talk and then a couple of others died. There is only one left and he is in Indiana. I write to him and send him Christmas cards.

That always just kind of amazes me the way that everybody keeps in touch like that. I know that that wasn't the case with the Vietnam conflict. My dad was involved in that. He didn't have any part of keeping in touch with anybody.

Mr. Rudolph: My son _____, he had no buddy that he was in the Army with to talk to or communicate with.

When you left for basic was that your first time out of your hometown.

Mr. Rudolph: No, before that I went to the CCC. I went to the state of Washington up in the _____ Valley. We were putting in big irrigation pipes that we dug the trenches with the steel in it for irrigation. That gave me a chance to get away also. At that time it was \$30.00 a month. There were nine kids in the family.

What was it like working for the CCC?

Mr. Rudolph: It was good. Everybody seemed to get along good. You would get good pay and could even set some back. A lot of it was hard work but it was good. I talked to Bradford because a lot of these young people don't know what to or what they want to do. They don't grow up you know.

I would have to agree with that. If they drafted women I would have signed up for it. Did you participate in stateside maneuvers? What were your thoughts on your training?

Mr. Rudolph: We met them, they were just getting out from their maneuvers in Georgia and we met them there and went up to Camp Edwards and then we went overseas. When we got overseas to Caledonia which is part of the Guadalcanal I trained with the Australian Rangers. We did a lot of training on the island there at Caledonia.

What was your training like when you left? Did you feel like you were ready to fight a war?

Mr. Rudolph: Basic training or what?

Just your maneuvers and getting ready to go and all that stuff.

Mr. Rudolph: The training was good. The cadre that taught us. It was rough. Basic training was 13 weeks I believe it was. They put you through a break for lunch and you would want to lie on the bed and then you go again.

Did you feel like you were ready?

Mr. Rudolph: Yes.

What were the living conditions like in the military camps?

Mr. Rudolph: Compared to now or then?

Either way.

Mr. Rudolph: You had big barracks that had maybe 40 people downstairs and 40 people upstairs. When you went to mess hall it was like a big picnic table. If the dish got to you and it was empty you had to wait for more. Now they sit around at a table with three to four to a table. They got two or three people in a room now. We had KP. We peeled potatoes. They don't do that now.

I don't think that they could get away with it now. I had an uncle who got KP duty and he swears that he got KP duty more often than anybody else in the entire battalion.

You said that you went through the Panama Canal to get to where you were going.

Mr. Rudolph: Yes, that is something I will never forget. The western entrance is farther east than where we got in. It didn't run across. It sort of ran at an angle. Like I said, we would get in and the lots would fill up with water and move on. They had street cars on either side with cables that pulled them through.

What kind of ship were you out on? Were you just on a troop transport?

Mr. Rudolph: We went over on a cruise ship called the Argentina. Where they have maybe two in a state room they had about 30 in a state room and 30 days going over. When we went from Australia to New Caledonia we had a ship that you were down below deck and the plumbing didn't work. They had a big

_____ that they had running off the side with that much water on the floor. We had boards where we walked. We couldn't lie in the bottom bunks because of the water and they were all steel bunks stacked up. That _____ they just converted it from a luxury liner to a troop carrier. It still had bathtubs in it and everything.

Tell me about life on that ship. You were on there for 30 days.

Mr. Rudolph: A lot of us slept on the deck. Early in the morning along comes a sailor with a hose to get us up. At night they made you pull watch duty. These are soldiers and they were Navy and they would go out and they would have coffee. Their finger gets like this from having coffee. You didn't get no coffee. They went downstairs and they had sheets and they had coffee. Most of the time I was out on the deck.

What was the food like?

Mr. Rudolph: The food was exceptionally good. When we got to Caledonia we had cooks and a kitchen. We never had any fresh meat. They say that coffee, you couldn't have coffee because people the servers were getting it. We used marmalade and water for coffee. Come around Easter we took communion out in the field. We had our mess kits and we had grape juice and stuff.

How many soldiers were on board that ship and where did everybody get off?

Mr. Rudolph: Argentina and I think about 800. Our division was on it and another one was on it.

Where did you all land? Did you say you landed on Australia before you went off?

Mr. Rudolph: Australia, yeah. Brooklyn Naval Yard then Australia and in Australia for a week and then shipped over to Caledonia. Then we moved in and went up to _____. I can give you a route on that too.

So you did all this moving around before you got to Guadalcanal? What was Guadalcanal like battle wise?

Mr. Rudolph: It was all coconut trees. The Navy bombarded it for a day and knocked all the tops of the trees off. We landed in a landing ship that holds. A torpedo clearer would come over the Japs and torpedo. They would come over our ____ and you could see the guys in there, the guy running the ship and dropping the torpedoes. When we landed the Navy went back to the ship and they had lights, sheets, and pillows. We had nothing. We finally found some pretzels and peanut butter. We ate that for about a week. I can't eat peanut butter anymore.

What exactly was your unit's job at Guadalcanal? What was your goal?

Mr. Rudolph: Mortar man; 60 mm mortar man. We moved right along with the whole company. You would shoot over their heads. At night you had to dig you a hole to get in or at least huddle under the ground. The Japs would all night pound you and during the day it wouldn't because you are moving by then.

So it was almost like you were taking turns. The Japanese would do it at night and you would do it in the day?

Mr. Rudolph: Yeah.

What was life like on the battlefield? I mean just day to day life getting meals together and writing home and getting letters. What was that like?

Mr. Rudolph: I never got many letters and I didn't write too much either at Guadalcanal. We were waiting to move up into Anderson Field. The Japs launched four big ships up on the beach and all the Japanese got off. We had to go a couple days later and get them out of there. Those ships, I got pictures from Time magazine and still the ships were there. The Navy planes were coming over and they dropped a bomb. You could see the flash but then a little while later we heard the boom because light travels faster than sound.

Speaking of the sound we have been reading in this class that the interviews are for a book by Gerald _____ called *The World within War* and in there he talks about the different sounds that you came to realize and to notice; like the different sounds of the American bullets and artillery versus the Japanese bullets and artillery. Did you notice anything like that?

Mr. Rudolph: No. They use lighter ammunition, 27 and we use 30-30, so ours made more noise than theirs. We had the big mortar they dropped the shell in and they had what we called the knee mortar. It was about that long with a saddle and they would stick it in the ground and shoot it. The Marines came along and said knee, knee meant three in Japanese. They try to sit it on their knee and shoot it. It would break their legs.

Probably. There would have been a kickback after that.

Mr. Rudolph: If you can hear the shell coming over it is not yours. The one you don't hear is the one that you would hit the ground on.

What was your first combat experience and what kind of reaction did you have to that?

Mr. Rudolph: We were advancing in the field and _____. We were a mortar squad and we were dragging along with them and pretty soon orders came back that they needed mortars up there so we had to rush in closer and shoot over our men's head. We got pretty accurate with it. We had to set it up. There are bubbles like a level to set that mortar up. In training we would shoot it over their head and they could see how close we got to the target. It would build confidence.

So the mortar crew was responsible for lifting moral?

Mr. Rudolph: Yeah.

Wonderful. That must have made you feel good. How would you describe the cohesion within your unit, the comradeship, the relationship between the men?

Mr. Rudolph: It was very good, very close. You would depend on each other. It was really good.

Did you have any leave time overseas before you went back to the U.S?

Mr. Rudolph: After I got wounded, I will tell you that story. I got wounded in the Navy. A sniper was shooting at me. They usually tie themselves in a tree. I had a 45 and I had a mortar but I couldn't throw it at him. The shell hit and I went down. The sniper was shooting at me so I had to play it dead because he kept shooting at me. It hit the Bible and I didn't know that until he left and it went on through here. They picked me up on a stretcher and they ran along. A Jap opened up and they dropped the stretcher and they took cover. I was laying on that stretcher with bullets coming over me. They pick you up and run you a

little farther. They put you on the back of a jeep, to a battalion station and work on you there. They took us to a tent hospital along the coast. They worked on you there and the next day they put ships to go to New Zealand. I went to New Zealand then. They put us on these ships, no, they picked us up and; no they flew me from Guadalcanal to the Haberties. At Haberties then they put us on a ship and to New Zealand. I was in the hospital about three or four months. I seen a guy go home with cut their finger in one and here I got, I still got my _____ in my arm. The bullets went here and a bullet here. They sent me back to the outfit. I had to hitchhike by ship from New Zealand to Caledonia. In Caledonia take a ship, hitchhiking now, to the Fiji Islands. I would get off that ship and I would hitchhike _____ 17 miles up into the Fiji Islands. It was a rainy night. They all thought I was dead. I walked up and they had this big bold pyramid of a tent. I opened the flap and walked in and they almost died because I was back. They took all my packs and everything because I couldn't do anything with it anyway and divvied it up.

So after a few months of being in the hospital they sent you back to your unit?

Mr. Rudolph: Yes. I had met them on the Fiji Islands and we did some more training and then we were going to move to _____. I was too far off so I went home and they went to _____ and _____ went to the Philippines.

I just can't believe they sent you back. While you were in the field did you get hot food, C-rations or something in between?

Mr. Rudolph: No hot food. We got canned rations and very far in between. We never got any coffee. I put a little marmalade in water.

I'm going to have to try that marmalade and water. It got my curiosity up now. You mentioned the tents. Was that pretty standard for battlefield sleeping or was there something else?

Mr. Rudolph: Sleeping, we slept in pup tents or under trees. The only time we had barracks was in the states from June and by December we were on ships; that was the only time we were in barracks. Then I went overseas and when I came back I was at Fort Ord, California, for about five month's maybe. That is the only time I slept in barracks. The other time was spent in pup tents.

When you made it back to the states or back to California, how long was it before you were out of the Army?

Mr. Rudolph: I was wounded in 1942 and we hit the states in November of 1943. It took a year to get back and we landed at Frisco and they gave us leave to go home and then come back. At that time I was in the hospital in Walla Walla, Washington. They let us go home, I got married, and I came back through Fort Ord and was on _____. It was a year to get back from overseas. I did two years overseas altogether.

Now here is a question for you. Were you impressed with the qualities of the Japanese, the leadership abilities, their abilities to withstand the hardships, the weapons, and the skills, any of it or were they just the enemy?

Mr. Rudolph: The Japanese, what were they like or what?

Were you impressed with any of their wartime qualities?

Mr. Rudolph: No. I seen dead ones later on and they smelled there for awhile. They would blow up from lying there so long in the sun, they would blow up. A lot of them they had a big hole and they pushed them in. That was the only contact I had with them.

That is probably all you wanted to have with them. Did you have much contact with any civilians or any refugees?

Mr. Rudolph: Yes. When I was in the Fiji Islands they had, what do you call people from the church who go over?

Missionaries?

Mr. Rudolph: Yes missionaries. They would have us over for something to eat. When I was wounded in New Zealand I met a family that had me up in their house and I would go there on weekends.

Tell me about the medical treatment you received after you were wounded. You got shuttled around quite a bit.

Mr. Rudolph: On Guadalcanal itself, a couple of days after I was wounded, they did it you would pass out, come to, and pass out and then they flew you to a Navy hospital. It was real good. I remember lying there on the table and they were working on me. A nurse came in and they had a hole where they were working on where the bullet came out and she said, "Appendix?" The guy said, "Yes, Japanese appendix." The doctor got it out and he had a corpsman finish stitching me up.

You have shown me your medals. If you don't mind before I leave I would like to get a brief still shot of those because they look wonderful. How did you go about getting some of those? The only one I recognize, I will be honest, is the Purple Heart. That is the only one I recognize. Could you tell me a little about how you got some of the others?

Mr. Rudolph: I have two Purple Hearts. I have a Bronze Star and the Legion of Merit and then all the other stuff they give you, the Good Conduct and the Victory Medal.

How did you get your Bronze Star?

Mr. Rudolph: When I was wounded I proceeded to go head first. I got up and went back to try to get my mortar round. When the Japanese hit, that is when the sniper got me. I got that for doing that for going back in it and getting the second Purple Heart.

I have never heard of somebody getting two Purple Hearts. How was it that you got the two?

Mr. Rudolph: I got wounded and then I turned around and went back again to try to get that mortar and I got wounded again. The shell landed and knocked me down and then when I tried to get back there the sniper got me.

That's very interesting. I'm impressed. What about your friends and your fellow soldiers in battle? At Guadalcanal how many of your fellow soldiers were killed there or wounded?

Mr. Rudolph: The ones that came back you mean?

Right.

Mr. Rudolph: When they came back or what?

How many of them were wounded first of all at Guadalcanal?

Mr. Rudolph: How many?

Yes.

Mr. Rudolph: From our division there was one battalion and then we had supporting groups too. We had one battalion of infantry and then later on another battalion that was at Haberties, they came up later on. The Marines got all the credit.

Right. That tends to be the way that goes I've noticed.

Mr. Rudolph: They have a photographer and _____ in every squad. If they move they take a picture.

What was your sense of the big picture of the war in everything that was going on; Europe, Japan, and here at home, everything? What was your sense of that? What was your take on it?

Mr. Rudolph: We knew there was a war in Germany but we had no radio coming in or nothing. We didn't know about it until I got back to the states. I was at Fort Ord and then I followed on D-Day when they landed. We picked it up on radio. We knew there was war but we never knew much. We knew that in Germany they might take a city and move. In infantry, in jungles, you are lucky if you make a few yards.

So in Japan it was more of a how much ground can you cover as opposed to taking a particular city or particular target?

Mr. Rudolph: Yes because to take Guadalcanal the Marines and ourselves would maybe take six months. In Guadalcanal there were no cities or airports. In Europe they go from city to city.

The last question on this piece of paper is were you involved in any of the famous landings or battles of the war? I think that Guadalcanal counts. I think we ran through that pretty well. Just to wrap up this part of it what is your best memory, your favorite memory, the one that never ceases to make you smile?

Mr. Rudolph: When I went to see Saving Private Ryan I had to walk out. After being in it yourself and the blood and those guys landing on the beach I couldn't take it.

Saving Private Ryan was done very well.

Mr. Rudolph: He made it realistic. That war is not a game. He did real good on that movie.

For the years that you were in the military what is the one thing that stands out in your mind? What is it that you remember from your time in service?

Mr. Rudolph: When I got discharged. The wife was with me at Fort Ord and I got my discharge. A buddy of mine he had a friend that was a woman had her car and hotel; her husband was overseas and she was in back in New Hampshire. She gave permission; she sent a letter saying I could take her car back east from California. I got discharged, I ran home and she was ironing and getting ready. I took the iron and I took a stick and put it on the floorboard and put that iron on it and took off. Literally, strike when the iron is hot. So we drove all the way across country with her car. I picked up my brother, the one that died in Korea, he was a young kid then and we took to New Hampshire and we hitchhiked back to Buffalo. She came flying out of that house. She took this blanket out of the back seat and pulled it out and there was all this liquor and stuff. I was coming across country with it. We came through Illinois and I was driving and this car wouldn't pass. I said, "What is wrong with that car?" "I don't know but he has a big hat on." It was a

state trooper. He pulled me over; no license, not my car, no ownership. I had all that booze in the back that I didn't know about.

That sounds like an adventure. That is some of the things that my friends might pull now. Well, Mr. Rudolph this has been marvelous. This has got to be one the most incredible experiences I have ever had in an interview. First of all we got this beautiful house to interview you in.

Mr. Rudolph: She designed it.

Oh it is brilliant. It is wonderful.

Mr. Rudolph: She measured the furniture and made sure you had enough room around the table to where you wouldn't have to move around you know. She had everything set.

You have been a magnificent interviewee. You knew what you wanted to say and there it was. I didn't have to do any work at all; the best kind. I got treated like a princess with tea and cookies and everything.

Mr. Rudolph: I made those cookies. You didn't try the cookies.

I was too focused on you.

Mr. Rudolph: We are active in the Democratic Party and every meeting I would make the cookies and make the coffee.

If you want to you can give me just a brief explanation of all of the medals.

Mr. Rudolph: The Purple Heart, the Legion of Merit, the Bronze Star, the Asiatic Pacific with two stars, in the service before Pearl Harbor, the Victory Medal, the Good Conduct Medal, the combat infantry badge, the unit citation, the Marine-Navy citation. There isn't any more Army that has them I guess.

Those are very nice.

Mr. Rudolph: This is the Marine citation. Here is the one about the Bible.

The one that was in your pocket?

Mr. Rudolph: Yes. These are the certificates they gave you. When you get a Purple Heart and then you get another one it is a cluster like this. It means you have two. This is our Americal (?) Division. That is a southern cross.

What is this one?

Mr. Rudolph: That is the pre Pearl Harbor.

Those are very nice. I like those a lot.

(End of Interview)