

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Ralph Contreras

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Oral History project

Interview # VR2-A-L-2011-015

Ralph Contreras, a World War era Marine who served with the 6th Marine Division at Guam and Okinawa, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Veterans Remember* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: May 20th, 2011 Location: Contreras residence in Dixon, Illinois

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History, ALPL

Transcription by: University of Illinois at Springfield

Edited by: Betty Workman and Rozanne Flatt, ALPL Volunteers

Total Pages: 53 Total Time: 2:37 / 2.62 hrs

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on July 18, 2011.

The interview is archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

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Abstract

Ralph Contreras, *Veterans Remember*, VR2-A-L-2011-015

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: Ralph Contreras was born in Dixon, Illinois on August 12th, 1925, the son of a Mexican immigrant who worked in the local cement factory. Ralph dropped out of school at an early age, and found work at a local store to help supplement the family's income. Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941, sixteen-year-old Contreras immediately wanted to get into the Marines. He was finally able to do so in 1943, having a neighbor sign for him when his mother would not.

Contreras recounts the tough training he received in Marine Corps basic training in San Diego, his supplemental training as an 81mm mortar gunner, and his shipment overseas. Once at Guadalcanal (after the American liberation of the island chain), he was assigned to the 22nd Marine Regiment, and saw his first combat on Guam in July of 1944. Shortly thereafter, the 6th Marine Division was created, incorporating the 22nd Regiment. Contreras was assigned to operate a flamethrower, but when it failed to work, he grabbed a Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR). By the end of the Guam campaign, his platoon was down to just a handful of Marines. The unit then returned to Guadalcanal to recover and receive replacements, and next saw action at Okinawa in April of 1945, where Contreras drove a jeep for the company commander. The 6th Marine Division first cleared the northern part of the island, facing relatively light resistance, then moved south to the vicinity of the Naha-Shuri line, where they encountered fierce resistance. It was here that Contreras became a combat fatigue casualty, returning to combat after a short convalescence. Following the Japanese surrender, the regiment was assigned to occupation duty in Tsingtao, China, a duty he found enjoyable. In April, 1946 Contreras was finally shipped home to Dixon. Ralph passed away on January 14, 2017.

Subject Headings/Key Words: Dixon, Illinois; immigrant life in Dixon, Illinois; Marine infantryman during WW II; 6th Marine Division; American liberation of Guam in WW II; combat at Okinawa; Naha-Shuri line in Okinawa; combat fatigue casualty; occupation duty in Tsingtao, China

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