

Joseph A Rousseau
Veteran

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Hoosick Falls Historical Society
Interviewer

Interviewed on December 1, 2004 at the
Louis Miller Museum, Hoosick Falls, New York

Int: We are at the Louis miller museum on December first 2004 and we are going ahead with our interview of veterans. Would you please state your name.

JR: my name is Joseph A Rousseau from Hoosick falls NY

Int: Would you tell us a little about before you went into the service what you did and your life?

JR: I was born in Schefferville (?) Quebec Canada March 28 1928 of American parents. I stayed in Canada until the age of twenty 1948 I came to the states and I enlisted in the service

Int: And when you enlisted what did you enlist as, which branch

JR: The army sixth of December 1948

Int: And you were in the army where did they send you in the army

JR: I took my basic training in camp Pickett Virginia with the seventieth airborne then I went to the transportation company in fort Eustace Virginia to learn how to load cargo and unload cargo and personnel on ships and planes and trains

Int: So that was your major job they taught you how to do the actual loading of these different vehicles types of transportation alright so where did they send you after they taught you that?

JR: Well I went on maneuvers in veaces {unclear} in January 1950 we were there for two weeks doing maneuvers then I came back to Eustace and I then went on maneuvers at built {unclear} air force base in April. Then in May I got shipped to Fort Lawton in Seattle Washington on my way to Alaska while I was there the Korean War started.

Int: When you were in California getting ready to go to Alaska?

JR: No, that was in Washington State in Seattle

Int: I see. And there you were, and the Korean War broke out.

JR: Correct, and I was sent to California to prepare to be shipped to Korea. Then I got on board ship and they called four names out to get off the ship and two of us got transferred to open army base and two got, I got transferred to fort mason port of demarcation in San Francisco to process the personnel and the dependents that were coming back from Japan.

Int: What do you mean by dependents coming back from Japan?

JR: The wives and children of the veterans.

Int: In other words, they went to Korea and their families got shipped back and you had to help process them back into the country

JR: That is correct

Int: OK. So there you were loading ships and taking care of the personnel first then what happened?

JR: Then when this was over with the dependents I got transferred to Camp Stolmand (?) to the port transportation truck company which was assigned to the atomic energy commission the first of December I was shipped to Marshal Island to test Greenhouse Operation

Int: And what was the Greenhouse Operation?

JR: That was in April 1951.

Int: That was the name, the code name of it. What did they actually do?

JR: We tested four H-bomb, I mean the A-bomb

Int: Four a-bombs

JR: When they blasted the bomb we just sat there with the dark goggles and we just looked at them.

Int: And how close were you to where they were detonating them?

JR: In the marshal island I was no closer than about fifteen miles

Int: Fifteen miles

JR: Because they tested on the other end of the lagoon.

Int: I see, and you were there when they tested the four [A-bombs]. And what did you see?

JR: We just saw the glow of it the mushroom and the colors of it, orange and yellow, with the dark goggles that you can't see the sun trough it's it was like there were ten suns out.

Int: I see, weren't they worried about radioactive fallout and so forth at that time?

JR: We were checking for that but they didn't know what the... what the... was ah...

Int: How many rodigans. (?).. how much radioactivity you were going to get.

JR: Yes how much damage that was causing. So we were there as guinea pig.

Int: To find out how it was going to affect people.

JR: Right

Int: Did you have a Geiger counter badge on?

JR: I did. We had a color badge on if we had some radiation they read it but most of the time they didn't pick them up

Int: I see. They didn't even pick up the badges they just let you wear them. Alright so you finished that times try out and what came next?

JR: I went back to the states in May and I was assigned to Camp Stolman again that was my home base and in September we took a convoy over to the desert in Nevada then we started doing tests there again we did seven tests

Int: Now before that there was no camp there was there

JR: No, we pulled up and my CO [commanding officer] asked at the gate where we were going to go and he told us to go into the desert and pitch tent and that's how camp desert rock got started.

Int: So, you were the one of the first ones there in a tent

JR: I was the head chief of the convoy

Int: now they built that and then they started another test site that was called ah...

JR: This was operation buster jangle and we did above ground tests and underground tests from oh point three to about fifteen kiloton

Int: And how did the government set it up, in other words they were going to drop a bomb at X what did they have? So many distance away something and sommat?

JR: Well at the tests they did some at the tower and some at the like I said at the ground and some would drop from so many feet but at a distance there was like a airplane set in the field and sheep and animals and houses with dummies in it that kind of stuff to see at different distance from the zero zone

Int: So you wanted to get what kind of effect it had from the zero zone

JR: That's right

Int: And where were you stood

JR: Well we stood in the background not too far away

Int: How far would you say you were from it?

JR: Well some of them, the smallest one we were about a half mile but some we were two, three miles it all depended

Int: But some were close as a half mile

JR: Right

Int: And the government at that time had no idea of radioactivity even though they dropped it on Japan?

JR: Some of it yes then once the blast went through we had some scientists that some of us had to drive through the zero zone with asbestos protective suits

Int: And you were one of the ones that drove through?

JR: I didn't drive trough but some of our men did.

Int: So they were trying out what kind of suits you could wear to stop the radiation

JR: Yes that kind of stuff and the scientists knew more about it than we did

Int: So that was the end of that how many atomic bombs...

JR: We did seven over there

Int: Seven bombs they dropped

JR: On the ground above ground and under ground

Int: I see so ok when are we up to now?

JR: This is the fall of fifty one from September to about the first of December

Int: OK, now you're finished with the...

JR: Then now I go back to Stolman again

Int: Yeah, because that's your home base

JR: Then because we are the transportation for the GI's being sent overseas we brought them down from camp Stolman to Pittsburg which was where the ferry use to come to. To take them to fort mason to board ship

Int: So you did that for a while and then what happened?

JR: Then in June 1952 I got shipped back to marshal island for the ivy test which we test two bombs over there one was the H-bomb the first of November 1952

Int: And you were there when they tested H-bomb.

JR: Yes

Int: And tell us a little about that.

JR: Well they didn't know how strong it was going to be so they put all personnel on board ship fifteen, ten miles from shore and we watched, which means we were about twenty five to thirty miles away from the zero zone

Int: And what did they have in that zero zone aircraft carriers all kinds of ships or what?

JR: Well they had ships anchored and then they blew then up and one of them was an aircraft carrier that I don't remember the name of but it stood on end in the blast which the blast was half a mile to a mile wide on the funnel

Int: It went into a mushroom like they show on television?

JR: The mushroom are thirty, forty thousand feet up

Int: Now did you have to wear black glasses when you were fifteen miles away?

JR: Always did, always wore black glasses during the test

Int: Was there any other things that you wore during the test other than the black glasses?

JR: No

Int: So you were wearing you regular clothes?

JR: That's correct

Int: Alright so that's in the marshal islands and they tried one bomb and the H-bomb

JR: That's right

Int: Alright now what happened to you?

JR: Then I came home for discharge {laughter}

Int: OK so now I want to ask you some questions about the atomic tests. Now did you keep in touch with any of your friends that were involved in these tests to find out that people suffer from it, get cancer from it get anything from it

JR: I did I belonged to the national radiation survivor until 1998 then one had an accident and died and the program kind of got let down

Int: But in your understanding did this effect a lot of your friends or people that were in there with you...

JR: I saw some in 1995 in Portland at one of the reunions that was a little bit disfigured and they were sick you know

Int: So there were people that got sick from being at these tests

JR: Oh yes

Int: So you were pretty lucky that it didn't affect you that much I mean it might have affected you a little but...

JR: On one of the tests ivy they use to send a drone a b-17 drones through the clouds to collect the radiation and they have on the wings that were attached and I watched them come in as I was driving my CO up to the airport so I had to stop to let the drone come down and one of the boxes fell down and went over our head and my CO lost all his hair I didn't so there is something in the genes that caused it and you just get a funny feeling and it tastes funny in your mouth and they wash you down with some chemicals that they have there

Int: And that's to get some of that radiation off you

JR: Right

Int: So there you are you went through all those radioactive tests and the bomb tests so you are one of the few people that saw this happen

JR: I say twelve atomic bombs and one H-bomb

Int: That's unbelievable alright so they sent you home to discharge, you told us, and what happened I mean after you got discharged what did you do?

JR: I moved to troy because my uncle and my grandfather live there and I got a job there and I ran the gas station for about two years then in 1955 I met a girl from here, from Hoosick falls and we got married

Int: And what was her name?

JR: Margret Sardline {unclear}

Int: And you got married and what happened after your marriage where did you live? did you live in Hoosick falls after that?

JR: I did live in Hoosick falls.

Int: Then what did you do

JR: Then I quit the business in troy and then I started to work for noble woods and I worked there until 1972

Int: And what did you do for noble woods?

JR: I was an erector I built the machinery and I set them up I was a road man then they call it... repairs

Int: And you went out to all the factories that bought your machines and you would set them up and get them going

JR: That's correct

Int: What type of machines were they?

JR: Paper mills

Int: Paper mill machines alright so you did that until when?

JR: Until 1972 when I went to work for van dix {unclear} in green island as a machine repair man

Int: And how long were you there?

JR: I worked for eighteen years and then I retired in 1990

Int: So you were comminuting from Hoosick falls to green island all this time

JR: Yes

Int: So did they ship you around or did they just set you up in a plant? You worked in a plant in bendix {unclear} you were in charge of keeping the machines going?

JR: Right

Int: Alright now tell us a little about your family after you got married how many children did you and your wife have?

JR: Well we had three sons one got hurt and died in an accident at the age of fifteen one works as a pilot and the other works for the state as the deputy chief for fire protection

Int: So one son and his wife run the upsie dasie {unclear} so now what are you doing?

JR: Just retired and enjoying-

Int: Just retired and enjoying yourself that's good {both laugh}

Int: Well Armand we thank you for being interviewed we thank you for your information is there anything else that you would like to tell us that you think now that you would like to say?

JR: I can't think of anything to be honest with you {laugh}

Int: Alright well we thank you very much for being here