



TEXAS GENERAL LAND OFFICE
COMMISSIONER DAWN BUCKINGHAM, M.D.

1700 N. Congress Ave. • Austin, TX 78701-1495 • 512-463-5339 • FAX: 512-475-1415

PRESS RELEASE

Voices of Veterans: PTR1 James Rothermel Shares His Story of Service in the U.S. Navy During WWII

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 22, 2024

Contact: Kimberly Hubbard
(512) 936-9582
media@glo.texas.gov

AUSTIN — Today, Texas Land Commissioner and Veterans Land Board (VLB) Chairwoman Dawn Buckingham, M.D., is proud to introduce the next installment of the series highlighting the VLB's Voices of Veterans oral history program. This week, we highlight the service of PTR1 James Rothermel who served in United States Navy during WWII.

Rothermel was born in Burton, Texas and following graduation from high school in 1938, he attended the National Youth Association (NYA), a work education program, where he would work for half the day while getting an education the other half of the day.

"I was a painter," Rothermel said about his time at the NYA. "My father was a painter and I had sort of picked up the trade already with him, and after I finished up at the NYA project at Inks Dam, I was employed at the Naval Air Station in Corpus Christi helping build it in 1940."



VOICES OF VETERANS

name Rothermel, James		
military branch Navy	rank PTR1	conflict WWII
date interviewed 04/22/2010		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> interview available on voicesofveterans.org

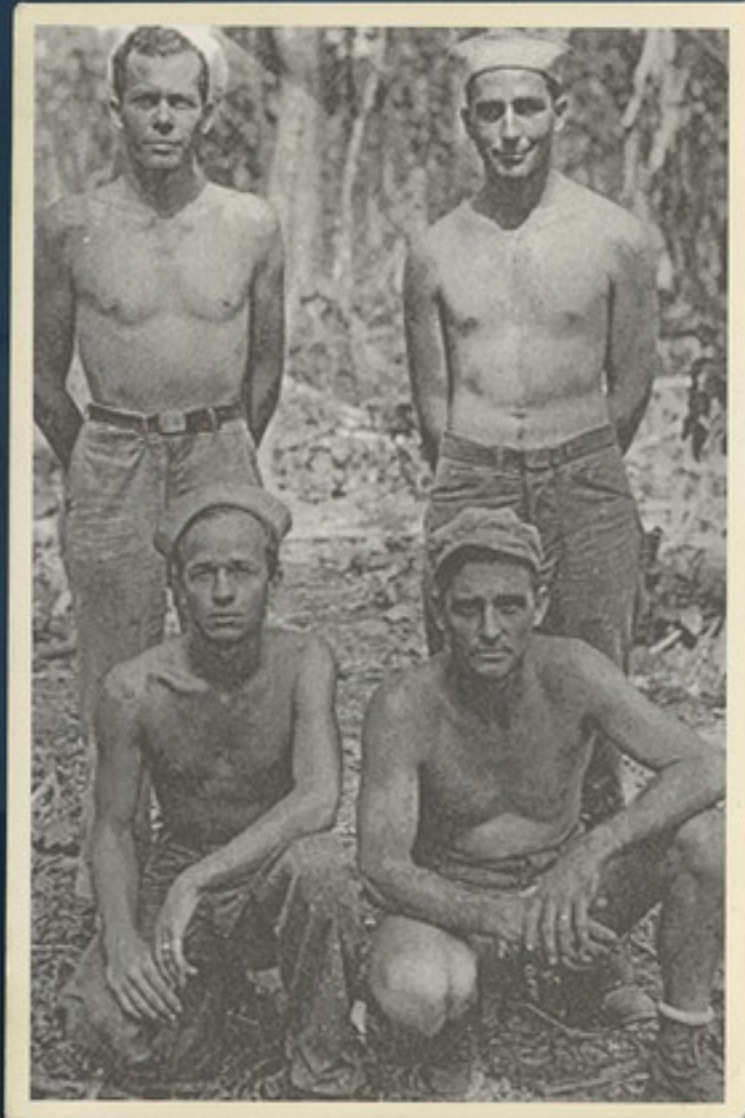
Mr. Rothermel, a resident of Brenham, served in the Navy from Mar. 1942 to Dec. 1945. An amphibious landing craft operator, he saw action at the famous battles of Guadalcanal, Saipan, and Okinawa. He left the Navy with the rank of PTR1.



Rothermel said it was during his time in Corpus Christi when Pearl Harbor was bombed, thrusting the United States into WWII.

"I had been working at the Naval Air Station at Corpus Christi, came home for a weekend and just as we were crossing the railroad tracks in Refugio, Texas going back to Corpus, we heard it on the radio," Rothermel recalled. "We immediately said, 'Well, we're gonna whip them, we'll be through with them in 6 months.' That was sort of our impression at that point."

Even at the time, in the shadow of a dark day in American history, Rothermel said there wasn't a point he thought he would enter the service. Instead, he worked for a few months doing what he's always done before volunteering to enter the Navy in March 1942. When asked why he enlisted, Rothermel said he was going to get drafted, so he thought volunteering would be the best course of action.



VOICES OF VETERANS

VLB CHAIRWOMAN, DAWN BUCKINGHAM, M.D.

He said he wanted to go into the regular Navy and when he went to take his physical, do his interview and test, he was offered a chance to enter into the U.S. Naval Construction Battalion (CBs) and because of his years working a trade, could enter the Navy with a higher ranking.

"This ensign says to me, 'you've had six to eight years experience in painting, I can give you a third class petty officer rating right now,' Rothermel explained about the entry process and what he was told. " He said, 'if you go into the regular Navy, you're going to be an apprentice seaman for a year or two, so you'll have an extra pay grade that other people won't have and I would suggest that you go into the CBs,' and so, I accepted."

After he signed up and joined the Navy, Rothermel said he went home and waited for his orders, which came in June 1942 and he reported to Camp Allen, Virginia outside of Norfolk. For the next six weeks, he trained before heading to Davis, Rhode Island where he helped construct [Quonset huts for quarters](#) as the base was just being built. After just a couple of weeks, Rothermel said, they boarded trains and headed for San Francisco, California as they awaited word on where they'd head to in the Pacific.



VOICES OF VETERANS

VLB CHAIRWOMAN, DAWN BUCKINGHAM, M.D.

"You know, the thing that really sort of shocked me was when we were boarding the ship in San Francisco, there was a Navy band out there playing Sentimental Journey, and Red Sails in the Sunset and some of those type songs, as we were boarding," Rothermel explained as they were getting set to leave. "It was then I first really fully realized, when we went under the Golden Gate Bridge, that all of us on that ship were expendable."

Rothermel said he'd spend the next month reading a lot of books, including his pocket Bible, to pass the time and just thinking about what would happen next, really not understanding the gravity of the situation at hand.

"We were thinking pretty heavy about where we was going and what we were doing. We didn't know where we was going. We landed at New Near Caledonia, sometime, I can't remember just how long, I think around 30 days getting there," he explained. "We were out in the Pacific with no escort and then, too, I guess that we didn't fully realize that we were in hostile waters and what have you."

To listen to PTR1 Rothermel tell his story, click the button below:

[PTR1 James Rothermel's Story](#)

Veterans can email VoicesofVeterans@glo.texas.gov to tell their stories. Please note that the Veteran must be a resident of Texas at the time of their interview.

Voices of Veterans is a state agency's first Veteran oral history program. It records the stories of Texas Veterans through their time in service and after returning home from combat.

The VLB records interviews with veterans over the phone or in person. Their interviews are then permanently archived in the Office of Veterans Records at the GLO, where they join the historical documents of other Texas heroes such as Sam Houston, Davy Crockett, Jim Bowie, and William Barret Travis.

Veterans' interviews are also available to researchers, historians, genealogists, and the public. These precious records inspire future generations and remind us of our Veterans' sacrifices.

To listen to the over 500 archived stories of Veterans documented through the GLO's Voices of Veterans oral history program, click the button below:

[Voices of Veterans](#)