

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewees: **Ernest Lewis Kubosh**

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Interviewer: Bill Duggan

Transcriber: Marsha Smith

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13 Pages



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Transcript

DUGGAN: When and where were you born?

KUBOSH: I was born in a rice field in Eagle Lake, Texas. My daddy was a levee walker and he had called into the hospital in Rosenberg and had Dr. Weeks come out. And he came on his horse and spent the time here at my house until my mother started labor, and he delivered me. My date of birth was August 21, 1914.

We were living on a rice field in Eagle Lake. At that time there were lots of rice fields. My dad was what they called a levee walker. He would open up a levee and let the water run so high and then close it. That's what a levee walker did.

DUGGAN: When did your family move to Eagle Lake?

KUBOSH: My grandparents lived in Skidmore, in Bee County. It's between Corpus Christi and Beeville. My grandparents came to the United States when they were in their late 40s, and bought some property in Skidmore and 300 acres of land.

DUGGAN: Where did they come from?

KUBOSH: Czechoslovakia. My grandparents were farmers - Nedbalek was their name. They had three children, a boy and two girls. When they came to this country they had to leave my mother in Czechoslovakia because they didn't have enough money to bring her on the boat. After a year, they sent the cash to whoever handled that part of it, and on her way here they ran into a storm off of Galveston. They were going to land in Galveston but they had to go down near Skidmore to come ashore.

DUGGAN: Do you know what year that would have been?

KUBOSH: In 1848 or 1849, somewhere in there.

DUGGAN: When did they move to Eagle Lake?

KUBOSH: The Nedbaleks stayed right there and educated the grandchildren at Texas A & I College. Mary Nedbalek married my father, August Kubosh, who had come to this country from Czechoslovakia. She and my dad and my granddad tried to farm, and I don't think they were ever successful. But they tried it anyway. Grandma had about ten children. My grandfather was a blacksmith. The reason he came from Czechoslovakia when he did was because they were about to draft him. So he caught a ship to the United States.

I heard people tell me that they met my grandfather at different places where he was blacksmithing. But I guess he came home enough because Grandma had ten kids! (laughs) My other grandparents were the Myskas and I don't know exactly what year they came to the United States.

DUGGAN: They settled in the Skidmore area, also?

KUBOSH: For a time. I think they were more in the Weimar area, around Schulenburg and Dubina, up in that area. My grandfather married Mary and her brother got to be a mail carrier in South Texas. Later he was postmaster in Beeville. My other aunt married a Stavinotha who moved to Houston. Again, it seemed like the women made all the living and the men were somewhere else. It was said that Mrs. Stavinotha had two jobs, both of them being office cleaning jobs at night. I remember her slightly. Apparently somebody had some pecans down in South Texas and I remember her being able to pick those pecans out real fast.

DUGGAN: Where did your mom and dad meet?

KUBOSH: I don't know. They were up around Weimar, on the other side of Eagle Lake. When my father married my mother, Emily Myska, they moved to the rice field where my father got a job as a levee walker. You had to keep the water at a certain level in the rice field.

DUGGAN: So you were born in Eagle Lake, one hundred years ago.

KUBOSH: One hundred years ago, yeah.

DUGGAN: Did your mother work?

KUBOSH: My mother did housework. She never learned to read or write. My dad had a third grade education.

DUGGAN: Did you have brothers and sisters?

KUBOSH: Yes, I did. I had two brothers and two sisters and all four of them have passed on.

DUGGAN: What were their names?

KUBOSH: My brother next to me was named Terry. Then Edna, my sister, and Ruth, my other sister and Walter was the last of the children.

DUGGAN: Did they live in this area?

KUBOSH: During World War II, Terry worked at the Dow plant in Freeport, Texas. My sister, Edna, worked for Tenneco as a typist. Ruth never did work. My younger brother, Walter, worked for Houston Lighting & Power. In World War II, he joined the Army and was in the 98th Division. When I joined the Seabees and finally landed in Honolulu we used to meet on weekends. One week he would stay with me at my base and the next week I would stay with him in his camp.

When the Seabees landed in Honolulu, they had us build an airport five miles long, all across the island. Everybody wondered what in the world we were doing this for. Later, as I was sitting at the airport, some big planes came over and that was the B29 – the first we had ever seen. They were getting ready to combat Japan.



My Division, the 133rd, packed up and moved to the island of Maui. On that trip, my company was made to go down to a place called Wailuku where we stayed in a schoolhouse. We had to go out during the day and take a list of stuff and put it on ships and buckle it down, even tanks and trucks. That was our job to get those things loaded, and then pick up a list of things such as blue jeans, shoes, socks, underwear and take them aboard ship and store them. We worked there about two months and then one morning they said they were going to take us aboard ship. They took us out in some Higgins boats and we had to climb about 50 feet of ladder. But in the meantime all of us who worked in the stores had bundled up a lot of stuff for ourselves. I had to climb up that ladder [with all this gear] and I thought, 'Well, I'll never make it.' But I just hung on! We finally got on board. Then on Maui, they had some dry runs I guess you'd call it, for the Marines.

The little towns on Maui were named Wailuku and Kahului – I think they are probably still there today. We went to the supply dump and we loaded trucks that took the material to the ships and stored and tied it down in the ships. After we got aboard ship, three days later we left there, not having any idea of where we were going.

We landed at Johnston Island in the Pacific Ocean. Johnston Island had about a 300-yard opening and the ships would go in there and park. It would take about 3 or 4 cargo ships to fill it up. Then they would put a net across the opening in case the Japanese tried to get a submarine in there. This has been so long ago, and my memory is bad now. But anyway, I remember the fish being all beautiful colors. You could see 300 feet down in the water all the way to the bottom. We stayed there a couple of weeks.

One morning we woke up and on the horizon for as far as you could see were ships; battleships, including the Battleship Texas, and the Missouri. A lot of destroyers and all kinds of ships on the horizon. The next day we took off and that's when they told us we were going to Iwo Jima. That's the first time ANY of the enlisted personnel had any idea of where we were going.

On February 19, 1945, we woke up and we could see the island, about a half mile to a mile away from us. The planes from the aircraft carriers were going in and bombing the island. They did that until about 9:00 am. We got a call from Admiral Nimitz to take the 133rd Seabee Battalion in, onto Yellow Beach

One, Two and Three on the east coast of Iwo Jima. Suribachi was here and then we were on this side of it. At 9:30 that morning, whoever was in charge - Admiral Nimitz or whoever - asked them to bring the Seabees ashore for loading duty and ramp duty. Until that time, they tell us, not a shot was fired from Iwo Jima. But as soon as we landed, all hell broke out. Everything was zeroed in on the beach. The only thing that saved us was that the sand on Iwo absorbed the shock of the shells.

Going ashore, we had two youngsters who were supposed to drop the ramp when we landed. They hook back and then they hook back in again. They didn't know what to do. So another boy and I, named Ford Tanner, moved up and saw the problem. So we dropped the ramp and he said, 'YOU left and I'LL go right'. These two kids, they were about 18 years old, they went straight out on the ramp toward the beach and they were killed about 15 feet from the water. They were lying there all that day.



The evening of the first day on Iwo, I saw a ship that I had loaded some tow sacks on to make a place to hide. I saw that ship come ashore and I told two other fellows there, 'I'm going to get those sacks and we'll fill them up and build us a bunker.' You can't build a bunker just with sand. It won't stay up because of the vibration [of the shells hitting the beach]. So I got those sacks and I moved where I thought the guys were. I said, 'I thought y'all were going to stay right where I told you to stay. We're going to build our hole.' 'Oh,' he said, 'the Marines wanted that place.' I put the sacks down and I looked back and the smoke and everything came up. There was a boy named Peck who was talking to another Seabee lineman named John Wilson. And it took Peck's head off, right above his eyebrows. Wilson didn't get a scratch.

That day we had 19 killed. We had a bunch killed on different parts of the island where they had been shelling. It ended up we had 30-some killed and right at 200 wounded.

DUGGAN: Were you wounded?

KUBOSH: Not that day. I didn't get wounded until the 4th night, at about 10:30 at night. The 4th day is the day they raised the flag on Suribachi. Somebody said, 'The Marines are on top of Suribachi' and the next guy standing there said, 'Well, what's the big deal? That's what they are supposed to be doing!' (laughs)

When they secured the beach, I found this place where I had put all my sacks and everything - food, clothes - and it wasn't too far from the water. When we got there, another boy next to us said, 'Hey, Kubosh, I'm scared. Can I get in with you, in the foxhole?' I said, 'No you can't, because Tanner's due to show up here and there's just enough room for the two of us.' He said, 'Well, if you'll let me get in there, I'll get out when he shows up.' About that time they started shelling the beach and he and I both flipped over on our stomachs, because you have a horror of holding your guts in your hands. He had a lead ball - I've got the size of it at home - it's the same size that went into my left heel. I'd already changed shoes because I had brand new shoes on. Brand new Styrofoam heel. When the ball went into my foot, it was red-hot. I sort of kicked around and it eased off. A boy from Alabama, who was in another foxhole close to me, jumped up and ran to the beach where the doctors and corpsmen had set up and brought a corpsman up there. They took both of us to the hospital there on the beach. The doctor looked at mine and he said, 'We can't handle it. Send him out to the ship.' I never did see my friend who was in the hole with me again. I got a letter from him later. He was on his stomach and the ball went in under his foot and came out the top, but really didn't do much damage, except burn the flesh.

DUGGAN: So they sent you out to the ship.

KUBOSH: We went all night looking for the ship. The odd part about it, the next morning we came up on a ship and it was the same one I had left Iwo Jima to make the run, 154. And I still had my tag. They took us aboard ship and there were so many wounded on there. As I started down to see the doctor I had to pass through a bunch of wounded men. Some of them you could see the heart beating where the chest had been blown open. I said, 'Oh hell, I don't believe I've got to go.' So I really didn't see the doctor. I saw the corpsman but the doctors were overworked on Iwo. We had 6,000 killed there on the beach and about 20,000 wounded. Some of them were seriously wounded.

DUGGAN: When did you get to see the doctor?

KUBOSH: I didn't see a doctor and then in three days, they said, 'We're going to ship you to Honolulu, all of you who can walk.' And a couple of guys said, 'Why don't we go up on a hill and see if we can find some souvenirs? They're still fighting up there.' I said, 'Okay. I can hobble up there.' We went up there and we didn't find anything. We went back and it was 5 minutes to 12:00. The Red Cross was moving us at 12:00 to a ship in the harbor to take us to the Honolulu Hospital. One of the other guys said, 'They've got some rice pudding and I don't eat the damned stuff.' I said, 'I love it and I've been living on it!' They both piled their rice pudding on my plate. There was no time to eat it because we had an assigned task at 1:00. I looked at the clock and it was 1 minute to 1:00. I said, 'We've got to get ready!' We didn't have much to get ready. We go down and get on the Red Cross truck and go to the harbor down below and look down on the ships there.

As we got on board ship, somebody said, 'There's a bunch of these soldiers who are sick. They are throwing up. We need to get them to the doctor down below, three tiers down.' And they looked around and said, 'Boy, can you walk?' And I said, 'Yeah, I think I can.' They said, 'Go down and tell the doctor and nurses to come up here.' I did and I got hold of the doctor. He was a Lieutenant Commander and he was the husband of the movie star, Claudette Colbert. So I told him about it and he said, 'Go up there and tell them to come down here.' And so I went back up there and instead of 20 people being sick, about 100 were. On the side of the ship they've got commodes just over the water and they were throwing up and bowels moving and everything. Somebody said, 'You'd better go back down and tell them this thing is getting out of hand up here.' So I go back down and look up the Commander and tell him there are a hell of a lot more of them sick now than when I came down here the first time. He said, 'Come on, let's go back up and see.'

By the time we got up there, there were several hundred people sick. He called the Red Cross in and they unloaded all the people who were sick and took them back to the hospital on the island. There were only 3 of us in that 48 barracks that weren't sick, because we didn't eat that rice pudding

DUGGAN: You think the rice pudding is what made them sick?

KUBOSH: Well, that's what they blamed it on, anyway. (laughs)

They had to call some doctors in from Guam, who weren't sick. All the doctors and nurses who ate that pudding had cases of diarrhea. We stayed there three days and then they said there were about 125 guys here who can walk a little bit, so we'll send them to Honolulu to the hospital. But they were bringing in an old ship that they dug up on some island. And it would make about 7 knots an hour. I was one of them they picked to go. We got on board ship and I still hadn't seen a doctor. This was about 9 days after being wounded. They decided the ship was going straight to Honolulu and they told me that when you get there, they'd check me into the hospital. Well, we got to Honolulu in six or seven days but by that time there were so many casualties coming in from Iwo that all the beds were taken. Before we could get off this old ship we were on, they said to stay on board. They gassed up and we left for San Francisco. We landed at 10:07 on March 19th. Now I hadn't seen a doctor yet and it had been 30 days.

They took us off but in the meantime there was a fellow who was second in command of this ship that took us from Saipan to Honolulu. He was from right out of Houston, toward Baytown.



DUGGAN: Does a doctor finally take care of your foot?

KUBOSH: Yeah. When we landed I was one of the first to see the doctor. He said, 'Who's been doctoring you, son?' I said, 'Nobody'. 'Oh gosh', he said. And he called the corpsman in there and said, 'Bring him a shot, knock him out. We're going to have to operate on that foot.' That was my left foot. I stayed in that hospital 60 days and then I got a pass to Texarkana to see my wife, Virginia Vada McClain Kubosh. She didn't know I was wounded until I got back to the States and called her. After I talked to her, a telegram arrived that she kept, that said I had been wounded in Iwo. But that's all it said.

Things moved on pretty good after that. I stayed home three weeks and I came down here to Rosenberg where my mother and dad were, and visited them for a few days. And then went back to Texarkana where my wife was. She still hadn't gotten well from whatever she had.

DUGGAN: You mentioned your parents were living in Rosenberg. When did they move to Rosenberg?

KUBOSH: It was when I was in the service. They left Eagle Lake and moved to Rosenberg. My dad got a job driving a tractor on the highway, from a friend that he knew.

DUGGAN: After the war, did you move back to Rosenberg?

KUBOSH: No, I didn't. When I left the line crew, I was living at 6619 Brady, between Harrisburg and Canal, in Houston. I thought I was going to have that apartment back, but the apartment manager had rented it to somebody else, and didn't want to run them off. So he had me move into their house. Then Virginia and I found another apartment off of Canal Street, on Brady and I could walk to work.

DUGGAN: Before the war started, where did you go to high school?

KUBOSH: Richmond High School.

DUGGAN: What year did you graduate?

KUBOSH: 1933.

DUGGAN: Tell me about your high school? Were you involved in any activities in high school?

KUBOSH: Yes. When I got into Richmond High School, when my dad moved to Richmond, he moved across the river bridge. You turn left and go under the railroad track. They were living on the river. I thought, 'Well, hell. I don't want to go to school here.' I had been going to Rosenberg and I didn't have too much luck there. One reason was that I wasn't able to go to school every day and you can't hardly keep up without going every day.

DUGGAN: Did you play any sports?

KUBOSH: Yes, I did. I played football 3 years under Herschel Sue Brannon, a new coach from Georgetown, some Methodist school in Georgetown that he played for. [Southwestern University?] Our track coach was a fellow named Mr. Emmons. He and Claude Bracey and Cy Leland were one, two, three in the dashes. I came out for track and I ran the mile. I never lost a race in high school at Richmond, but I did lose one at Wharton.

DUGGAN: So you must have been pretty fast!

KUBOSH: Pat, do you have that piece of paper where it says I set the mile at 4:59?

PAT: (caretaker) It was in the newspaper. You set the mile record.

DUGGAN: For the state of Texas?

KUBOSH: Yeah. That was pretty fast at that time. I ran a 4:49 I believe it was, in a meet. Anyway, today the girls run faster than that! I don't know what the difference is. I tried hard. But there wasn't any food - any kind of training, you didn't have anybody who knew what to tell you to do.

DUGGAN: Did you go to college?

KUBOSH: Yes. I went to Texarkana Junior College for two years and played football there. From there I went 2 years to Stephen F. Austin in Nacogdoches and got my degree there.

DUGGAN: What was your degree?

KUBOSH: Accounting but I also got a teacher's certificate. I never taught a day of school. When I graduated from college, I made application at New Waverly and they were paying \$70 a month.

They said, 'You're going to have to stay at Mrs. so-and-sos house and she charges \$35. So I thought, 'Well, hell, I've been making 45 cents an hour. That's about as much as I'd make teaching, and I'd have to go to Sunday School and all that stuff.'

DUGGAN: When did you move back to this area, Fort Bend County?

KUBOSH: When I was working at the light company, I was working between Canal and Harrisburg Streets.

DUGGAN: What did you do as kid, growing up, besides going to school? Did you have to work a lot?

KUBOSH: Picked cotton, that's about all a farm boy did. After playing football, I met a boy from Rosenberg, named John Dillon and he said, 'I've got a uniform from Allen Academy. I won \$100.' I said, 'I don't have \$100.' He said, 'You make one and I'll recommend you to go to Allen Academy.' Well, it so happened that I worked, picking cotton, and made \$100. And I bought that uniform. When I got to Allen Academy, I found out you didn't have to buy the uniform; the government issued it free. Puny Wilson was a coach at Allen Academy and he was a coach at A & M.

DUGGAN: Somebody told me that you have some connection with the Briscoe family.

KUBOSH: Andy Briscoe, had the Briscoe store between Richmond and Rosenberg. I got to be friends with Andy. He had a place on the other side of Big Bend. The next town was Ruidoso. They had a place there. He said you could buy a section of land for \$7.50 an acre. He said he was going out there in a week or so. 'Why don't you go with us and put in a bid?' I went with him and it was right past Big Bend State Park. As we were standing there, a guy walked up to me and said, 'Hey, boy, what are you doing here?' I said I was planning on buying a section of this land. He said, 'Have you got a helicopter or an airplane?' I said, 'No sir.' He said, 'You're going to need it to get to it. Don't be bidding on any of this land.' So I didn't. (laughs) But later, Andy told me there was a fellow who had a section past Ruidoso and I had to cross some of Andy's land to get to it. He said, 'I don't have the money to buy it now, but why don't you buy it?' So, I bought it for the Tex-Mex Railroad. I carried a bunch of steel pipe and stuff out there - I was going to build a fence around it. I wanted to buy another section but I thought, 'Well, hell, this is so far from Houston.' We couldn't find the marker so I didn't buy but that one section. I carried all those pipes and stuff out there to build a fence and never did get around to building it.

A fellow moved there to Marfa, Texas. I should know what his name is. Anyway, he died in about three years. Right before he died, he said, 'I'll give you \$80 an acre for your land.' I thought, 'Well, hell. I didn't pay but \$50'. I said, 'I believe I'll take it.' And he bought it from me. He bought a big hotel in Marfa. He was an artist and had a plant in Paris and one in New York. I told him I wanted \$25 down and then 10% interest on my other \$25 an acre. And he agreed. In about three years, he died. So he still owed me quite a bit of money. In the meantime, my wife died. So Ernie took over from me. I guess I was getting senile or something. (laughs)

Anyway, he took over and this girl missed a payment to Ernie. And he called her up and told this guy's daughter that they had missed a payment on his land. She said, 'Well, we have so much land out here, we don't know where it all is.' He said, 'Yeah, but if you don't make the payment, you won't have the land.' (laughs) She paid him off. But I kept all the minerals on it and have them to this day. If you can find it! But I never did find the land. (laughs)

It's a resort now. I looked it up on the map and the history on the artist that he sold it to. They have seven rooms now and it's a resort. You can see across into Mexico. That's how far it is in Marfa, Texas. The reason why I know is this artist guy who bought the land from him was mentioned in the Houston Chronicle about a month ago. His name was Donald Judd. He's well known in that area. It's all about him in that town. He bought stores and closed them and made them art museums. That's what he would do. I guess the reason it was in the newspaper was because the cost of living in Marfa is getting very high right now.

KUBOSH: Anyway, I still have those minerals. But nobody wants them because they say there is no oil under the land.

DUGGAN: What are some of the major changes you have seen here in Fort Bend County since you were a young man?

KUBOSH: When I moved and went to work for the light company, the generating capacity was 200,000. Now it's about 20,000,000. That's one of the BIG changes. It was only about 180,000 people living in Houston and now there are several million. The high schools today look like colleges. You can go out of Rosenberg towards Houston and there's a big high school on the highway. Have you been that way lately? Right out of Rosenberg. It hits Clodine Road.

Yeah, there're big changes that have been made. Highways, bridges across the Brazos right and left. Houses all the way to Booth,Texas.

DUGGAN: Is there anything that you would like to tell me about that I forgot to ask?

KUBOSH: Like you said, there have been some big changes.

Interview ends