

**The National Museum of the Pacific War**

**Center for Pacific War Studies**

**Fredericksburg, Texas**

**An Interview with**

**Bennie L. Whitley  
Battery A, 57<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division  
Okinawa**

**March 25, 2004**

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is March 25, 2004. I am interviewing Mr. Bennie L. Whitley at his home at 1407 South Gulf Street, Alice, Texas, 78332. His phone number is 361-664-9847. This interview is in support of the National Museum of Pacific War, Center for Pacific War Studies for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Bennie, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today. Let me start by asking you what your birth date is.

Mr. Whitley:

July 23, 1926.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you born?

Mr. Whitley:

I was born in Oklahoma.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Whitley:

Yes, I sure have.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How many did you have?

Mr. Whitley:

I have one brother and two sisters.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was your brother in World War II?

Mr. Whitley:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What were your parents' occupations?

Mr. Whitley:

My dad was a mechanic.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Whitley:

Did I go to high school (to wife...laughter). I guess Duncan, Oklahoma.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your last year there?

Mr. Whitley:

I don't have any idea. I "quituated". I got smarter than the teachers.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do when you quit high school? What did you do then? When did you go into the service?

Mr. Whitley:

I don't know. I really don't remember.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What branch did you go into?

Mr. Whitley:

Field artillery.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you drafted or did you volunteer?

Mr. Whitley:

I volunteered.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you choose field artillery or was it just the Army that you chose?

Mr. Whitley:

The Army.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you choose the Army?

Mr. Whitley:

I just took it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you do your basic training?

Mr. Whitley:

I went to Fort Sill, Oklahoma. I took my basic training at Fort Sill.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go from there?

Mr. Whitley:

Then I went from there to Fort Meade, Maryland, and seven days out in the Atlantic and turned around and came back. I went from there over here on the other side of the United

States and went to the South Pacific.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did travel across the country—by train?

Mr. Whitley:

Yeah, by train—a slow train.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that train trip?

Mr. Whitley:

Oh, God. It was awful. It took about a week.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Pretty bad, huh?

Mrs. Whitley:

He told me it was just like cows.

Mr. Whitley:

If you wanted to sleep, you had to sleep standing up.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have a car with chairs to sit in or anything?

Mr. Whitley:

We didn't have any of these modern conveniences.

Mr. Misenhimer:

As soon as you finished basic training, they sent you to Fort Meade, Maryland, and you started out in the ...

Mr. Whitley:

I went out seven days and turned around and came back.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You don't know why they did that?

Mr. Whitley:

I have no idea and then they sent me to the South Pacific.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What port did you leave from on the west coast? San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco?

Mr. Whitley:

San Francisco, I think.

Mrs. Whitley:

I think that's right. I think you told me that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go to from there?

Mr. Whitley:

To about four different islands and don't ask me which ones.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you go to Hawaii, do you know?

Mr. Whitley:

I don't know but I wound up in Okinawa.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you before Okinawa?

Mrs. Whitley:

Where were you when you went up in the hills to get out of the typhoon?

Mr. Misenhimer:

There was a typhoon at Okinawa—a couple of them there.

Mr. Whitley:

Yeah, one of them blew everything away that we had and I wound up in a tomb. We busted a tomb open and got in it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, there were a lot of those there on Okinawa.

Mr. Whitley:

Then the fleas like to eat us up.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You went to some other islands before you went to Okinawa.

Mr. Whitley:

Oh, yeah. I don't know which ones.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What outfit were you in then? You mentioned on the phone yesterday a certain field artillery.

Mr. Whitley:

A Battery, 57<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division..

Mrs. Whitley:

I don't know how he remembers all of that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Some of those things you don't forget. Probably remembers his serial number, too.

Mr. Whitley:

I did have it but I forgot it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

A lot of people remember their serial numbers, even after all of those years.

Mr. Whitley:

I had mine until about a year ago and then I just flat forgot what it was.

Mrs. Whitley:

Didn't need it anymore, I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you land on Okinawa, do you recall?

Mr. Whitley:

Don't have any idea.

Mr. Misenhimer:

April 1<sup>st</sup> of 1945 was the day of the invasion there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I guess you didn't think that much of MacArthur?

Mr. Whitley:

I sure didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were with that field artillery outfit there in the Philippines, also, right?



Mr. Whitley:

Yeah, I stayed with them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your job with the field artillery?

Mr. Whitley:

I was motor sergeant.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Sergeant of the motor pool?

Mr. Whitley:

Yep. Sergeant of the motor pool.

Mr. Misenhimer:

As motor pool sergeant, how many vehicles did you have?

Mr. Whitley:

I don't remember.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You had the 6x6 trucks and jeeps and all of that stuff?

Mr. Whitley:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did they move the artillery pieces? How did they move them around?

Mr. Whitley:

With those thirteen ton tractors.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What size guns did you have?

Mr. Whitley:

105's.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were these howitzers?

Mr. Whitley:

Howitzers.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were in the A Battery of the 57<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

Mr. Whitley:

57<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery.

Mr. Misenhimer:

57<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion. What do you recall about when MacArthur came back?

You were up in the hills when he came back, right, on Leyte?

Mr. Whitley:

We were all there and had been there for a long time. He parked his old boat out there and waded in through the water. "I have returned". Should have shot him right there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get into quite a bit of combat over there then?

Mr. Whitley:

Oh, we had quite a bit of trouble. We got five miles deep in a cave in there and that's as far as we could get. We got run out ever time so we finally backed up and set charges

and caved it in. They may still be living there—I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you landed on Okinawa, at first they didn't have any opposition. Is that right—until they moved inland aways?

Mr. Whitley:

No. We didn't have any trouble 'til later.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Which one of the battles on Okinawa were you involved in?

Mr. Whitley:

How many did they have?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well, there were a lot of them. Shuri Castle, there was Bloody Nose Ridge and different ones they called them there.

Mr. Whitley:

Oh I don't remember how many of them—a bunch of them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did the Japanese ever get close to your guns?

Mr. Whitley:

No, they sure didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You all did quite a bit of firing on them, right?

Mr. Whitley:

That's right.

Mrs. Whitley:

They had fun with it. Oh, that's awful.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Just tell me what all happened on Okinawa.

Mr. Whitley:

Well, you'd have fun too if the Japs took your partner and killed him and eat his butt for breakfast.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Took who?

Mr. Whitley:

Took his butt and eat it for breakfast.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I know, but who was it that they captured?

Mr. Whitley:

The Japs did us that way and then they got mad because we kicked them Japs' teeth out and cut their fingers off to get their rings and all of that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you take their gold teeth?

Mr. Whitley:

Yeah, with our heel.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What were some other things that happened there?

Mrs. Whitley:

Is that all that happened? I'm listening. I'm enjoying this.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What were some other things that happened there on Okinawa? You mentioned about getting into the tomb. How did that happen?

Mr. Whitley:

How did that happen? That typhoon hit and my face was already bloody raw from sand hitting me in the face and we busted that open and got into there. It was quiet and the fleas ate us up.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What were you living in then?

Mr. Whitley:

What were we living in?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tents or just out in the open?

Mr. Whitley:

Just out in the open and those thirteen-ton tractors.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What weapon did you have? Did you have a weapon that you carried?

Mr. Whitley:

A .45.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever have to shoot it at the Japanese?

Mr. Whitley:

Oh, yeah. I killed sixteen in one night.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Is that right? Did they attack you or something?

Mr. Whitley:

I was in a foxhole. I sat there and shot them.

Mrs. Whitley:

Can I tell him the rest of it?

Mr. Whitley:

Go ahead. Why don't you tell it—you were there.

Mrs. Whitley:

No, I wasn't there. If you don't want to tell him, then that's okay. It's about the worst thing that he had to do.

Mr. Whitley:

They put me on guard duty and said to shoot everything that moves. So in the middle of the night they started making noise and I just opened up with that fifty caliber machine gun. The next morning I went out there and counted fourteen women and kids.

Mrs. Whitley:

He's never gotten over that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That happened over there. There said that the civilians were as shields.

Mr. Whitley:

The women would strap grenades to their breasts—under their breasts—and get in the

chow line. When they got enough around them, they would pull the pins.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I understand that the civilians were as much against the Americans as the Japanese were.

That was part of the Japanese homeland so they were Japanese citizens.

Mr. Whitley:

Yeah, they were.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever have them blow up grenades anywhere close to you like that?

Mr. Whitley:

I had them shoot two boys—one on both sides of me and I was the only one that made it.

Mrs. Whitley:

God was taking care of him.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did that happen?

Mr. Whitley:

On Okinawa—stepped out of that cave and they shot those other two boys. I killed them and set them on fire. So they went to hell for killing those boys.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The Japanese were really in the caves there, weren't they?

Mr. Whitley:

They were excellent torture people.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were they?

Mr. Whitley:

Experts at that. It came naturally. I guess it did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Quite a few of them got tortured there—your people—right?

Mr. Whitley:

Yeah, they sure did. Old lady Roosevelt came over there and said that if she had her way that we would never get back into the United States. We were inhuman.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's what she said about the Marines. I guess the Army, too.

Mr. Whitley:

That's what she said about us.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did she?

Mr. Whitley:

The Marines went through after we had already cleaned it up and I guess she thought it was the Marines that had done it all but they didn't do shit—just walked through.

Everything was cleared. All that they had to do was to walk through there. I know that one place is for sure that's the way it was. I don't know how many more. The Marines got all of the credit for it and they didn't do nothing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Quite a few of them died there—the Marines.

Mr. Whitley:

I don't know how—from old age? Or from fighting each other.



Mr. Misenhimer:

What were some other things that happened there?

Mrs. Whitley:

You weren't there where the little boy—you picked up the little boy, were you?

Mr. Whitley:

Oh, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was this now?

Mr. Whitley:

Oh, I picked up a little boy that had froze black to up past his knees and his hands. I kept him two years. Took him home and put him in that ice water and set him beside that heater and got his legs circulating.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That was where?

Mr. Whitley:

In Korea—Seoul.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you stay in the service then?

Mr. Whitley:

I stayed in there a long time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you were back in Korea, then right?

Mr. Whitley:

Yeah, I was in Korea.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What outfit were you in then?

Mr. Whitley:

The same one.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Still in the same field artillery.

Mr. Whitley:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Which division were you attached to then?

Mr. Whitley:

7<sup>th</sup> Infantry.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Still the 7<sup>th</sup> I.D.

Mr. Whitley:

We never did change.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do between World War II and Korea?

Mr. Whitley:

Came home.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You weren't in the service at that point?

Mr. Whitley:

I'd been out two weeks when they started fighting again.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So they called you back in?

Mr. Whitley:

No, they didn't get to call me back in. I just waited my two weeks. I'd been out long enough that I had my two weeks coming. They couldn't call me back to Korea.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I thought you were in Korea you said.

Mr. Whitley:

I was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Back on Okinawa, anything else that you can think of that happened on Okinawa?

Mr. Whitley:

Lots of things happened but I don't remember just what.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the time that you felt most frightened?

Mr. Whitley:

I never was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you think of the various officers that you had over you?

Mr. Whitley:

Well, I appreciated it whenever they got shot.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Thought they were kind of mean?

Mr. Whitley:

No, they didn't know what they were doing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Is that right?

Mr. Whitley:

Ninety-day wonders. That's what they were—ninety-day wonders. They picked out the biggest idiots that they could to make officers out of. That's the way I made staff sergeant--I spit in the colonel's face. In three weeks I made staff sergeant.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What were you before that?

Mr. Whitley:

Private.

Mr. Misenhimer:

In three weeks you made staff sergeant? Why did you do that to the colonel? What had he done?

Mr. Whitley:

Oh, he'd given me a hard time. He had the guards come and get me and put me in that back room and sat there for a good three hours. He'd come down there and run them

guards off and said "Go get my jeep." I started driving the jeep for him. I drove him everywhere he went from then on.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where was that at?

Mr. Whitley:

It was still in Korea. Colonel Moon Mullins. You've heard of Moon Mullins?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, I've heard of him.

Mr. Whitley:

That's who it was. He's the one that I spit in his face.

Mr. Misenhimer:

There used to be a comic strip of Moon Mullins, too.

Mr. Whitley:

I think so.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And what are some other things?

Mr. Whitley:

Isn't that enough?

Mr. Misenhimer:

I've got plenty more tape there.

Mr. Whitley:

I know you have. That's what I'm afraid of.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you come home from overseas?

Mr. Whitley:

Well, I was supposed to come home a year before I did. I signed up for another year so I could see what they were going to do.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do during that year?

Mr. Whitley:

Same thing—nothing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And where did you go?

Mr. Whitley:

Stayed right there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On Okinawa?

Mr. Whitley:

Yeah. In fact, I was in Korea most of the time. We didn't stay very long on Okinawa.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You went over to Korea?

Mr. Whitley:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get to China?

Mr. Whitley:

Yeah, I spent seven days over there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What were you doing over there?

Mr. Whitley:

Rest and recuperation. Then I spent seven days in Tokyo. Rest and recuperation.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was Tokyo like?

Mr. Whitley:

About like the rest of it. All a bunch of gooks.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was it pretty well destroyed or had they rebuilt it?

Mr. Whitley:

They were working on rebuilding. It was pretty well banged up. Both of them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

We burned it down mostly.

Mr. Whitley:

Tried to.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you recall where you were when Japan surrendered? It was August 15, 1945.

Mr. Whitley:

Yeah, I was in Korea.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

You were in Korea then? Did you have any kind of celebration?

**Mr. Whitley:**

No—just glad that it was over, that's all.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

No celebration.

**Mr. Whitley:**

No. We didn't have nothing to celebrate with.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Back in December of 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Do you recall where you were when that happened?

**Mr. Whitley:**

I was at home.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

How did you hear about it?

**Mr. Whitley:**

On the radio.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

What was your reaction?

**Mr. Whitley:**

I didn't have none.

**Mr. Misenhimer:**

Did you think that it would affect you—that you'd have to go into the service?



Mr. Whitley:

I just thought it was all b.s.

Mr. Misenhimer:

In April of 1945, President Roosevelt died. Do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Whitley:

Yeah, I think so.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Any reaction to that?

Mr. Whitley:

Yeah, we wished it was her instead of him. That's the truth—that's what you wanted, wasn't it. I think that's the way everybody felt that. She was a nosy old heifer.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Whitley:

I don't know.

Mrs. Whitley:

You have some medals in your room in that box. You want me to go get them?

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you finally get out of the service?

Mr. Whitley:

When did I get out

Mrs. Whitley:

I didn't know you then.

Mr. Whitley:

When did you know me? What year?

Mr. Misenhimer:

What year did you get married?

Mr. Whitley:

1949. It must have been 1947 whenever I got out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get home with any souvenirs? How about some of those gold teeth? Did you get home with any of the gold teeth?

Mr. Whitley:

Wasn't allowed to. They took them all away from me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did they? You didn't bring anything home with you?

Mr. Whitley:

Just barely got to bring me I think. The way they felt about things they wouldn't let you keep nothing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What all did you have?

Mr. Whitley:

I had three rifles, two pistols.

Mrs. Whitley:

You had to leave it?

Mr. Whitley:

They took them away from me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

A lot of them brought the rifles home—Japanese rifles. That was earlier I guess before you came home.

Mr. Whitley:

Yeah. That was before I got to come. They had already stopped that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The USO shows, one time you think?

Mr. Whitley:

One time. I don't even remember who it was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were overseas, did you get your mail with any regularity?

Mr. Whitley:

Yes, I guess so. It wasn't bad. I didn't have nobody to write anyway—just my momma.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you got home, did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Whitley:

Just couldn't get enough to drink. (laughing)

Mr. Misenhimer:

Any trouble getting a job or anything?

Mr. Whitley:

I didn't want a job. You can't drink and drive. (laughing)

Mrs. Whitley:

I imagine there was quite a bit of drunk soldiers.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever hear of the 52/20 club?

Mr. Whitley:

Yeah, I've heard of it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

For fifty-two weeks, you could get \$20.00 a week unemployment.

Mr. Whitley:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you probably drew that, did you?

Mr. Whitley:

Oh, yeah, I drew that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That kept you going for a while.

Mr. Whitley:

Kept another beer in my hand (laugh) and now I can't drink one beer.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Is there anything else that you can think of? What about that boat trip when you left San Francisco going overseas?

Mr. Whitley:

Forty-three days.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you crowded on the ship?

Mr. Whitley:

It was full. It wasn't too bad until they got in that water that was kind of rough and those boys went to puking and it started rolling up and down those tables.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get seasick?

Mr. Whitley:

I never did get seasick.

Mr. Misenhimer:

A lot of them did.

Mr. Whitley:

You couldn't even walk down there in that hall, mess hall. Them plates would come by this way and they'd come back this way and they'd be full of puke. It would get to the end down there and then come back and be full of puke. Go back down that way.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Pretty bad, huh? What did you sleep in on the ship?

Mr. Whitley:

We were hanging on the side of the wall.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Bunks on the side of the wall. How high—how many?

Mr. Whitley:

Six.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How much room between one bunk and the next? Was there room to turn over?

Mr. Whitley:

Just enough to get in there. You just wanted to sleep. You didn't want to play.

Mr. Misenhimer:

All right, anything else that you can think of?

Mr. Whitley:

Not that I know of.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I want to thank you for your time today for doing this and thank you for your service in World War II because of people like yourself, we all live a lot better now than we would otherwise.

Transcribed by:

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