

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

***Center for Pacific War Studies
Fredericksburg, Texas***

***Interview with L. C. Finger
Army Paratrooper***

Interview With L. C. Finger

Mr. Holcomb: This recording will provide information on your World War II history. We ask in the beginning that we provide some information in regards to your past, and in that regard I'd ask for your name, your current address, and marriage status.

Mr. Finger: Okay. I'm L. C. Finger, and I live at 60 Wildwood Lane, Kerrville, Texas. The zip code is 78028. I'm married, been married for nearly sixty-one years.

Mr. Holcomb: And your wife's name?

Mr. Finger: Anna Louise.

Mr. Holcomb: L. C., we will get into your early life. Where were you born, and when, if you'd care to tell us your age. And where did you go to school. This will cover your early years before your military.

Mr. Finger: I was born at Garner, Texas, a little small farming community. When I was rather small we moved to Mineral Wells, Texas, where I grew up until I was of age. I went to Mineral Wells High School, went to Travis Elementary School and I went to Mineral Wells High School for the tenth grade. And that's as far as I went. I got up to about fifteen, sixteen years old, I worked for the Western Union delivering telegrams on a bicycle. And then we moved to Fort Worth. My mother and daddy split up so me and my mother and my sisters moved to Fort Worth and I went to work at Convair, building B-24s for the Army, the Air Force.

Mr. Holcomb: And about what age were you then?

Mr. Finger: About eighteen or something like that. I worked there until I went into the service. I can't tell you for sure, it was in February, but I can't remember what year for sure.

Mr. Holcomb: What occurred that you went into service. Where you drafted? Were you volunteered, or how did you get into the service?

Mr. Finger: Well, there's three of us wanted wanted to join the Navy and we went and talked to the Navy recruiter and he told us we'd have to have a release from our Draft Board before he could take us, so we drove over to Mineral Wells and got a release from our Draft board, took it in there, and he said "Boys, I can't take you." He said, "I'm full up." So we had to turn our papers in to the Army recruiter and I was automatically drafted after that. I'd signed the paper to be inducted, so they inducted me in the service. There was six of us.

Mr. Holcomb: Into what service?

- Mr. Finger:** Into the Army. And there was six of us from Mineral Wells went in the same time, all boys I'd gone to school with, known all my life.
- Mr. Holcomb:** Did you stay with those friends through training and so forth?
- Mr. Finger:** Mostly. I was in one barracks and they'd be in another one and all that. We wasn't all right in the same barracks. But we was right in the same area, in the same division.
- Mr. Holcomb:** From the time that you were inducted into service, would you please give a brief of your transportation from your area of induction to your training facility, and what transportation you used for that, and then your training location and some of the memories that you have of the training.
- Mr. Finger:** I had to go to Abilene for a physical, Abilene, Texas, for a physical and everything, and when that was all finished they bussed us back to Mineral Wells to Camp Wolters Military Base. They later became a fort. We stayed there for two or three weeks. They walked us and trained us a little bit, you know, to keep us doing something. And then they put us on a train and sent us to North Carolina, and that put us in the Eleventh Airborne Division. And that's where we took our training right there and all that, and we were in glider troops, is what it was, and after two or three trips in the glider, why, I found out what they were and I didn't like 'em. But when we moved on down to Louisiana for maneuvers and when I got down there they kind of build up a jump school in the division and asked for volunteers, so I volunteered to jump. Parachute jump. I made five jumps in Louisiana to qualify and then I made three over in New Guinea later on. So I had eight jumps all together. Lot of fun.
- Mr. Holcomb:** Yep. Give a little more detail in your training. When you were in the gliders, pick it up about that time, when you were in the gliders, and then on up until you made those jumps.
- Mr. Finger:** We were training in how to get in and out of the gliders, have to do that, we planned it, and then we was just regular training up most of the time, then went up in North Carolina. And then when we went to Louisiana, why then we—we never did make a trip in a glider down there. I didn't see any down there. I don't know where any were. Anyway, when they asked for volunteers to jump, why then I jumped in Louisiana. Took training and trained to jump. You learned how to land, and—
- Mr. Holcomb:** How much gear did you have to carry in weight or size or however you'd care to describe it, to make your jump?
- Mr. Finger:** Well, you didn't carry much with you. I had a, I was a BAR man, that's a Browning Automatic Rifle, and it's too heavy to jump with, so I had a forty-five pistol that I carried with me, and that was the only—I never did really make a combat jump, but they was preparing us. They was jumping some of us out of an L-3 over hills into

Ormoc Valley there in Leyte. And it hadn't got to my turn yet, and they were jumping us with no equipment, come back and got our equipment and dropped it to us. We was by ourselves with no equipment until we got our equipment back. Had to make two trips per man. We was kinda left stranded there.

Mr. Holcomb: That's very interesting. That is very interesting. (M r. Finger chuckles)

Mr. Finger: Course, that's on down the road.

Mr. Holcomb: So they dropped you without your equipment and then they had to drop your equipment and you had to find it.

Mr. Finger: I wasn't looking forward to it, I guarantee you.

Mr. Holcomb: Sounds a little chancy

Mr. Finger: Yeah, jumping out of that little old AL-3 was going to be probably a problem, you know. You just had to jump out and get out any way you could, I guess. Try to miss the tail. (Both chuckle)

Mr. Holcomb: What time was this. What year was you in training, and then through the training into being a paratrooper? What years was that?

Mr. Finger: I don't remember exactly, but probably be in there around forty-one, forty-two. Forty-three. 'Cause we went into the Philippines in forty-four. I was in combat until about the fifth or sixth of December, of forty-four.

Mr. Holcomb: L. C., you mentioned awhile ago that you made some practice jumps in New Guinea. Where was that?

Mr. Finger: It was around Oro Bay where we went in. We went in, disembarked at Oro Bay, went inland two or three, a few miles, I don't know.

Mr. Holcomb: Was that near Hollandia?

Mr. Finger: No, I think we was north. Hollandia is kinda down on the southern tip, and we was on up to Oro Bay and Buna Bay, up in there.

Mr. Holcomb: Your practice jumps, and when you were ordered to make a combat jump into Leyte, was the landing complete at that time? Give us a brief of the war situation, the battle positions of the Japanese and the Americans, and so forth, as you remember it.

Mr. Finger: Well, we were setting up on the beach, just between Takloban and the beach, and they would take us, take patrols, this is the first thing we did. They'd take patrols on a

landing craft and take us down by water and drop us off at a certain place. And they'd go on then and drop another one off. And they'd drop another one off. And they'd drop another one off. And we'd start walking, patrolling back that whole country down there, and the first one to drop off walked back to where we was camped, the others would walk back to where he left, where they left them, and then they'd pick 'em up by the boat. And we did that for some time, and then we had no, had a little, pretty good sized building there that we was staying in, some of the boys built—

Mr. Holcomb: Was that combat activities, or was this a training thing?

Mr. Finger: No, that was mostly in combat activities, but we never did run into anybody. They're just checking to make sure the Japs wasn't coming back in there. And then we didn't get into, we moved on up to, oh, two or three miles up the beach I'd say, up the island. And that's where we, it's a runway there, and that's where they was fixing to take us off. They'd take us off to the Ormont?? Valley where they was jumping.

But then one night there was a bunch of Japs came down out of the mountains and come into this engineering camp, they killed the guards first, one's on sentry duty, and then they killed a bunch of 'em in their beds and foxholes and wherever they was at, they killed a bunch of 'em. We was in breakfast lines the next morning and they come got us and we didn't even get to eat breakfast. And they got us and took us up there and that's the first combat we got into there. But we worked all, we hunted them all day and we set up on this road going through this rice paddy, and we set in on that road where we'd get down we wouldn't be silhouetted. And then there's just about dusky dark that evening, there's seven plane loads of Japanese paratroopers come in there and bailed out. And they took the airstrip that night.

But one of the boys, he had a thirty caliber water-cooled machine gun, and he crippled one of them planes, it had to land up on the air field, and when it landed it blew up, so we got rid of one plane load. That's before they ever jumped. And then the rest of 'em jumped, and you could see 'em. They used white parachutes, and you could see 'em, you'd pick one off every once in awhile.

The next morning we went up to take that runway back, and that's when I got hit. I got hit by a sniper up on top of a cocoanut tree. Then all it's coming back.

Mr. Holcomb: Now this time frame, and the part of the war that we probably would recognize, as MacArthur's return to the Philippines. Is that right?

Mr. Finger: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Holcomb: Okay.

Mr. Finger: That's the return of MacArthur.

Mr. Holcomb: Yeah, the return of MacArthur. Into Luzon, Leyte Gulf.

Mr. Finger: Yeah, I guess. You see, we didn't get up there. Leyte Island is down on the southeastern end of the Philippines, and that's where we went back in, and I think we was waiting down in New Guinea and holding down there until he got ready to come back, and then we went up there and started joining in the second of May.

Mr. Holcomb: And your particular situation was that you were pursuing Japanese who had come into an engineering camp and massacred some American personnel, and while you were doing that the Japanese landed paratroopers, and you were involved in mopping up operations. And you got hit by a sniper.

Mr. Finger: Yeah.

Mr. Holcomb: Would you tell about the location and—

Mr. Finger: I don't have any idea of right where I was, but we was, it was the first runway, first airport—

Mr. Holcomb: With others, were you kinda isolated by yourself, or were you with other, uh—

Mr. Finger: No, there's about eight or ten men that went up in this with the lieutenant, went started up to try to take the runway back through this big grass, and there was a trail through there. And the lieutenant decided it was too much for us, just one patrol, so he said "Let's go back," and we turned to go back and the sniper was behind us, and when we got up there about even, why then they, I guess we made enough noise that they heard us. And then that's when I got hit.

Mr. Holcomb: And where was your wound?

Mr. Finger: In the right and left leg, went through the right leg, shattered the bone, cut the main artery. Six inches below my hip is where they took it off. And it hit the other leg, just a flesh wound on the inside of it.

Mr. Holcomb: And that was where the Japanese military issue rifle, I believe they used a twenty-five caliber.

Mr. Finger: Yeah, well, they had twenty-fives and thirty caliber, thirty-one caliber, I believe.

Mr. Holcomb: Did you find out what you got hit with?

Mr. Finger: No, I didn't. No.

Mr. Holcomb: Sounds like a thirty caliber, not a twenty-five.

Mr. Finger: Yeah, that's what I, I figured it for a thirty 'cause it done more damage. I got hit twice, but I didn't, the other one just went through my clothes, it didn't hit me. So I got hit twice. It fired pretty fast for a bolt class, bolt action rifle, you know. Might have been two of 'em shooting at me, I don't have no idea. But I had a Thompson submachine gun at that time and I guess they was shooting me first 'cause I had an automatic weapon. I had a pair of coveralls on, had the belt tight, had my bosom up here, had the top all full of clips of ammunition (chuckles). Actually, I went head first when I went.

Mr. Holcomb: Well, I'll say this. It was a very difficult time for you, and we know that, but would you give us some benefit of how your wound was treated in the field, and then how they transferred you to medical facilities, and then your recuperation, and then all the way back to the States?

Mr. Finger: They got me back to an aid station, and of course they'd given me a shot of morphine or something and I didn't know much, but I'd wake up, they'd taken me off, I just remember a series of coming off the _____?? to an aid station, putting me back on, but they patched my leg up, I guess splinted it and whatever. I found out after I got home that I stayed up there in the barracks on that air field that first night, and the next day I got transported to a hospital. And that night the doctor came in and told me that the circulation had been off too long, it was cold, the leg was cold up to the knee. He said, "We're gonna have to take it off." I'd sooner have, I didn't care. I didn't object, I didn't tell him no, and I woke up the next morning about ten o'clock, I guess, this nurse there fooling with me, looking in my eyes, you know (chuckles). I woke up and the first thing I done, I raised up to see if that leg was gone, I guess. And she pushed me back down and said "Don't worry about it. It's gone." And that's helped me more than anything, you know (chuckles). Never did like to have sympathy from people, you know. I didn't want nobody giving me sympathy, 'cause I didn't need it.

The hospital they took me to was a big old Catholic church, a great big old church, long and wide and they had a hospital set up in the back part of it. The front part of it they had services during it. I stayed there for a time. Before Christmas I was shipped out there. They flew me out and flew me down to that little island between there and New Guinea. They couldn't fly a patient over so many hours, and that, I can't remember that little island now, but they stayed there overnight, took me off, put me in a bunk, in a tent, and then the next morning we loaded up on that old C-47 and went on to New Guinea, to Biak, New Guinea, that's an island off the northern coast there. You know where it's all at.

Mr. Holcomb: Yes.

Mr. Finger: And I stayed there through Christmas, and it seemed like a little bit after that, maybe the first, first part of January. They put me on what they called the Dutch luxury liner, and sent me back to San Francisco, and it wasn't no luxury (chuckles). There was about eight or ten of us boys on there and I don't know, the old engines quit about every

two or three days. And we'd just drift out there until they'd get 'em running again (laughs), and go some more. I was doing so well I'd get up and walk around on crutches on that old ship, and get a little exercise. It's interesting, now you look back on it.

I came back, got in, they took me off at San Francisco. I don't remember any of that hospital, either, it's been sixty years. My mother lived out there, she lived in Alameda just across the bay from San Francisco, and when my wife found out I was coming back why she caught a bus out there and she was at my mother's out there. I don't know, I guess I called 'em or had somebody call them. My older sister was there and she had a car and she came and brought them over there and I got an overnight pass and went home with them (chuckles). I was glad to get home and seem 'em.

I don't remember how long I stayed in San Francisco. It wasn't very long. **(Some few words intelligible here)** Utah, our hospital in Utah or Temple, Texas. So I was closer to home, so I opted to go to Texas.

Mr. Holcomb: Was that Scott White?

Mr. Finger: No, they had an Army hospital there.

Mr. Holcomb: Oh, yeah, they did. That's right. Oh, gosh, yeah.

Mr. Finger: What was the name?

Mr. Holcomb: VA, just VA.

Mr. Finger: Is now. It was Army then, now it's VA. They took it over. There's a bunch of them big old two-story barracks in there. Of course I was put, I was on the ground floor, no elevators. And I stayed there, well after it healed up they kept me in traction all the time, didn't do it in New Guinea, VA, and when that thing healed over it healed over except the marrow of the bone, it quit growing over, it had a little hole in it about like your little finger, and that's when they, when I got back to Temple why they took me in there and they opened that up, cut this from here over to here, like that. I had thirty-six stitches in there. It tapered that stump where it would work better and cleaned the bone off. They used a spinal to do that and I was awake, and I kept feeling the sawing and filing on that bone, see (laughs).

Mr. Holcomb: (Laughs)

Mr. Finger: But it never bled. And I stayed there until I got that all healed up, and had a tube in there all the way around, sticking out over here about a quarter inch tubing. When he pulled that out I knew I was about ready to go. He grabbed that one day and pulled it out. Felt good, it quit hurting.

Mr. Holcomb: (Laughs)

Mr. Finger: And I got my first leg down there, and they taught me to use it, how to use it and everything.

Mr. Holcomb: What kind of time frame, are we talking about six months, eight months, nine months, a year, what?

Mr. Finger: I got back over there I would say some time in January, to Temple, and then I got to—

Mr. Holcomb: You were wounded in December.

Mr. Finger: Yeah. And I got discharged in September.

Mr. Holcomb: Almost a year.

Mr. Finger: Yeah. From September, like from September to December being a year.

Mr. Holcomb: Was your recuperation complete when you were discharged?

Mr. Finger: Yeah.

Mr. Holcomb: Did you have to keep reporting to a hospital or a doctor or anything?

Mr. Finger: No. After I got out of the hospital I moved back up to, I guess Mineral Wells, and they called me, notified me to report to the Army doctor, VA doctor, at Waco, and I went down there and he said "What are you doing here?" I said, "Because you told me to be here." They wrote me a letter, they called me in for a physical to see how you were doing, you know. So he said "Well, I'll fix it so you won't have to come in and be checked up anymore." Nothing wrong, so I never did have to go back any more until I went to the VA—

Mr. Holcomb: L. C., did you have rehab training to help you function as normal as possible without your leg?

Mr. Finger: Well, not really. I don't believe I had any that I remember, but I just stuck it on and kept going. And I worked in, I've been working in the aircraft industry nearly all my life.

Mr. Holcomb: From the time you were discharged in, say, September, how did you go about getting a civilian job, and with your impairment.

Mr. Finger: We moved back to Fort Worth when I got out, discharged out of the Army at Temple, and went up there and I don't remember how I got the job, but I went to work for the Ford

Motor Company there in Fort Worth, Frank Kent Motor Company, and he had Ford, Lincoln, and Mercury, and I worked in the shop back there rebuilding fuel pumps and carburetors and engines, we rebuilt engines, we done everything in that one shop. And I did that, and then, for quite some time, and then, I can't remember dates anymore. I left there and went to a job in Temple, Texas. I was working with this guy rebuilding starters and generators and magnetos off equipment. And I worked there for quite a while. And then I decided to go back to college, I went to John Tarleton College for two or three years. I went from there back to Fort Worth, to Consolidated, and went back to work for Consolidated building airplanes, bombers.

Mr. Holcomb: At John Tarleton, did you get a degree?

Mr. Finger: No, I didn't. I just went a couple of years. I worked there until we got the contract finished. You know, they'd lay off a lot of the younger people and then after, I moved, I wanted to go see my folks out in California so we went out there. And then I came back down to Southern California and I went to work for Northrup Aircraft and was there for quite a while. And then I moved back home, went back to Convair, 'cause it was home, you know. I never did like to be too far out, away from Texas. I kinda like Texas. You know how that is.

Mr. Holcomb: Yes I do.

Mr. Finger: And then in sixty-three, I went—well, no, in sixty-two I went to work for Southern Airways, they had a helicopter school in Fort Wolters. And I worked there for about five or six years, then my boss notified me that if I wanted to I could come back over to G.D. if I wanted to come back. And I went back over there in December of sixty-three, and then I'd already put in an application for a civil service job in Corpus Christi, working on airplanes and helicopters. And I went back over there and stayed until September of sixty-four, and I went to Corpus Christi. And I stayed down there until May of sixty-eight, something like that. And then Bell opened a helicopter repair center from Viet Nam, aircraft from Viet Nam, and I went up there, as an Army quality control specialist. And I stayed up there for five years and three months, and they was closing down. Viet Nam was over and they was starting to pare down. And I had to go somewhere, so I went to Corpus Christi. I could have gone other places.

Mr. Holcomb: L. C., during that period of time you and your wife had how many children?

Mr. Finger: We had one, and then adopted my sister's son. She couldn't handle him. So we adopted one and raised two boys. Still alive, both of 'em.

END OF RECORDING

Transcribed by: Betty Paieda
June 27, 2009
Harbor City, California