

**The National Museum of the Pacific War
(Admiral Nimitz Museum)**

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

**An Interview With
Kenneth A. Alberding
U.S. Air Corps
Headquarters, 456 Photo Unit
San Marcos, Texas
Radio Repair School
Madison, Wisc.
June 2, 2004**

Mr. Misenhimer

My name is Richard Misenhimer. Today is June 2, 2004. I am interviewing Mr. Kenneth A. Alberding at his home at 4502 East 500 North, Wheatfield, Indiana 46492. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, Center for Pacific War Studies, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II. His phone number is (219) 843-3729. Kenneth, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today. Do you have a middle initial?

Mr. Alberding

A, that's for Alvin.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Alberding

San Pierre, Indiana.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is your birth date?

Mr. Alberding

August 7, 1921.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Alberding

I had 2 brothers and 4 sisters.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were any of your brothers in World War II?

Mr. Alberding

Yes, my oldest brother, Wilbur, was.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did he come home from the war?

Mr. Alberding

Yes, uh huh. He was only in it 5 months, trained down in Georgia and was sent over to England and then after the invasion into France, he was with a headquarters unit in the signal corps.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your father's occupation?

Mr. Alberding

Farmer.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were your parents' names?

Mr. Alberding

Charles Alberding and Aletha Starks Alberding.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Alberding

At San Pierre. I did all 12 years there.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you finish there?

Mr. Alberding

1939.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do when you finished high school?

Mr. Alberding

I decided, stayed home, worked with my dad for one year and then the following year, went to Purdue University. Then after that, enlisted in the Air Corps.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did you go to Purdue?

Mr. Alberding

Went just one year.

Mr. Misenhimer

You grew up during the depression. What effect did the depression have on you and your family?

Mr. Alberding

Well you learned to be very frugal. That's hard to get out of your system. I find myself pinching pennies even there's no need to. But you know, we didn't even really realize that we were poor. Everybody else was in the same boat.

Mr. Misenhimer

Of course living on a farm, you had all your food.

Mr. Alberding

Yes, we produced so much produce and beef and pork and whatever we wanted for food. We had plenty of food. My dad did buy a new car. He probably had a little advantage

over some of the farmers around here, and as much as we had a hay business, so it was a cash income for other purposes.

Mr. Misenhimer

December 7, '41, as you know, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Did you recall hearing about that and where you were?

Mr. Alberding

Yes, I remember exactly where I was. My dad's birthday is on December 8th and we were celebrating at my uncle and aunt's house south of here. The middle of the afternoon, I needed to go home to do the chores, to feed the cattle. And on the car radio, heard of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you feel that would do to you?

Mr. Alberding

Well, I really didn't know. I assumed that probably would involve me, but I didn't have any great concerns at the time.

Mr. Misenhimer

You had just turned 20 shortly before that.

Mr. Alberding

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when did you go into the Service?

Mr. Alberding

January of 1943, January 9th. I enlisted in July 22nd of '42 in the cadets, and by enlisting I got a choice of services and I had a liking for flying so I enlisted in cadets. But they had more enlistments than they could take in training at a time, so I enlisted in July '42, I wasn't called to active duty until January of '43.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you still going to Purdue at that point?

Mr. Alberding

No, I wasn't.

Mr. Misenhimer

So what did you do during that period of time then?

Mr. Alberding

I was working with my dad on the farm.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you sworn in at into the Air Force?

Mr. Alberding

At Columbus, Ohio. I enlisted in Chicago, so when I got the call to go over to Chicago and then by train from Chicago to Columbus, Ohio. And then from Clemens, Ohio to San Antonio, Texas to the cadet center.

Mr. Misenhimer

You weren't in Columbus very long then, just to process through.

Mr. Alberding

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you go to San Antonio?

Mr. Alberding

By train.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that train trip?

Mr. Alberding

You stopped in every little town on the way over, but a lot of camaraderie because the fellow I shared a booth with was from Demotte and the other man was from Ohio. And so it kind of seemed like it would go pretty quickly because getting acquainted with all the other fellows.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have a place to sleep on there then?

Mr. Alberding

Yes, it was a Pullman.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did that trip take?

Mr. Alberding

You know I really don't know but I would assume that...like when we just came back by train from Austin to Pontiac, Illinois and I'm thinking that took about 23 hours then.

Mr. Misenhimer

Probably longer back then stopping so often and all that. How was the food on that trip?

Mr. Alberding

Well I think it was pretty good. I can't particularly remember.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got to San Antonio, where did you go there?

Mr. Alberding

Kelly Field, and the cadet, I think they called it the little separate section the Cadet Center, and that's where they processed the cadets that came in. The cadet training is divided up into 3 different divisions: bombardier, navigator, and pilot. You were classified (and what all was involved in determining that classification I don't know), but you were classified for training in one of those 3 areas. Naturally the majority of us wanted to be classified as a pilot, and I did get that privilege of being classified as a pilot. I didn't get to pursue it.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand they required a college education to be a pilot or not?

Mr. Alberding

No, prior to the war, yes, 2 years. You had to have at least 2 years of college. But because of the demand being much greater than after the war, just high school education was all that was required. You had to be a high school graduate.

Mr. Misenhimer

But you were classified as a pilot but you didn't go to pilot training?

Mr. Alberding

No, I...kind of embarrassing. Passed out taking the immunization shots and that was a weakness when I was a kid of passing out. And when we were taking the immunization shots, why, I passed out. Later I was called for an interview with an officer and the questions he asked I didn't think was relative to the fact, but I assumed that maybe I

already had their mind made up what the results were going to be, but all of this may have been routine. So I went to what they called enlisted status then, just a buck private, and stayed there at cadet center for about a month I think before I was washed out of that. and already went through cadet training, being trained for an officer, so we were pretty well disciplined, but I assume somewhat patterned after West Point because, as I say, being trained to be an officer and get up at 5 o'clock in the morning and go outside for roll call. Most of the time it was pretty warm down there in Texas, but in January it can get pretty cold at night. It's still cold at 5 o'clock in the morning and I know a few times I didn't get up early enough to get fully dressed and just put on my pants and shoes and cap and then throw an overcoat over. No one noticed that then in formation. If they examined it, then found out I was out there like that. We were only out there for a few minutes just to pass the roll call and then you went back in the barracks and you had time to get fully dressed before you went to other activities.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now this was during that month that you were there?

Mr. Alberding

Yes, this was during that month I was there. Of course, I had to pull guard duty. I remember pulling guard duty sometimes. I particularly remember that shift from 2 o'clock in the morning to 6 o'clock in the morning. It seemed like hours and hours and hours and it was only 4 hours, but you was waiting for the sun to come up, and it seemed like it took forever to get up.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you walking a post, were you?

Mr. Alberding

Yes, you'd walk a post and have a certain area that you'd walk, and you made another circuit and you'd do an about face and go back and forth, back and forth. Really wasn't a need for it, we just trained.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your pay when you first went in?

Mr. Alberding

As a cadet, it was \$75 a month, as a buck private it was \$50.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you went back to \$50.

Mr. Alberding

To \$50, yeah. And since I was married, (I got married in October before I went in the Service) you had an allowance, \$25, taken out of my paycheck and the Army added 25 cause of your wife, so it was \$50. So I took out that \$25 and give them \$15 for war bond, a few dollars for laundry, I drew \$13 in cash.

Mr. Misenhimer

Insurance I think you took out.

Mr. Alberding

Oh, yeah, insurance. That was six dollars and something I think. So I'd draw \$13. It wasn't worth the effort of standing in the pay line, but that was one time they'd just keep track of you so it was mandatory to pick up your check.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you in Kelly Field before they...

Mr. Alberding

Just about a month, and then...

Mr. Misenhimer

I mean before you passed out.

Mr. Alberding

I don't recall, but I suppose maybe 2, 3 weeks cause I stayed there altogether about a month. Then I was sent to San Marcos, Texas. That was navigation training base that was just being established. The sole purpose of the base was to train navigators. It was a 9-month course, and when you finished the 9-month course, why, they got their commission raise and then they were assigned to a bomber group for training in bombers.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you graduate and get your wings there, then?

Mr. Alberding

This was a cadet training.

Mr. Misenhimer

Who were the navigators there then?

Mr. Alberding

That's what I say. This was cadet's training for navigators, see. My work was in a photo lab when I first went there. I worked there 6 months and later was transferred to the print shop. I done photo work up there in the print shop cause the processor was used for printing those what they call photo offset. And we made a plate by photographic process and then that was put on the printing presses. In the photo lab, I was there about 6 months, and where the training and the work was, well the good bulk of the work was,

taking pictures of the cadets. And we would make about 20 copies of 4X5 pictures that went into their files and I assume then for any public relation work, why, then these pictures would be used for local newspapers in various places, and any promotion a man may have received on down the line or any change in duty or so forth, why they'd use those 4X5 photos for publicity.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you took that many of each person, is that right?

Mr. Alberding

We'd take one picture and make about 20 copies. So that was routine cause I think there was probably a class coming in and going out about every month. Then a lot of it was public relation work in general for the field and then some of it was taking pictures of instruments that the cadets would be using in their training and later on, when I was in the print shop, then I didn't realize how those photographs were used. Sextants and various instruments that were used for navigation purposes. They had to become familiar with them, and so I had to have the materials for the instructors to teach that in the classrooms.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you first got to San Marcos, had you had any training in photo work at that point?

Mr. Alberding

No, I hadn't, and just by a stroke of luck that I got into that. Well I say I never had any. While I was at Purdue, my roommate and I were dabbling in processing pictures. We'd go in the bathroom and cover the windows so we would have a dark room, and process the pictures using the bathtub, you wash your prints. So I got interested in that, but it was

kind of coincidental the way I ended up in that. One of the first things done when you got to San Marcos was to be classified, be assigned to some duty. And I went to the classification center along with a big group of men standing in line to see the classification officer, and low and behold, sitting behind the desk across the room was Wayne Stalley, a young man that I met at Purdue University. And after our cordial greetings with one another, he asked me what kind of work I'd like to do. I never thought I'd ever be asked that in the Army. And since he was in classification clerk there, I thought he had some input into it, so it was at that time that I told him, "Oh, I'm kind of interested in photography." And he said, "Well I'll see what we can do." I don't know where the classification officer had me, but I ended up classified as a photo technician and assigned to work in the photo lab.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you go through any kind of basic training, marching?

Mr. Alberding

No, I didn't. I only made the few weeks that I was at cadets, so I didn't have any real basic training per se. They considered cadets being basic training.

Mr. Misenhimer

So then when you got here, you went to work in the photo lab then.

Mr. Alberding

At the photo lab. I guess my first duty before I was assigned there was, I recall, assembling a weather vane out on the runway. As I say, the camp was just being established there and so there was a lot of new things to do, to be built, and the needed a weather vane out there. That was one of my first duties. After about, like I say, 6 months

in the photo lab, why I was transferred to the print shop. And there worked with Corporal Wallace, who was the man that was operating the copy camera at that time, so I worked with him, somewhat as an apprentice. And learned the trade and learned the business and techniques that were used, and later on he was transferred to someplace else and so then I had full responsibility of the copy camera. And it was a huge thing. We could take a 24-inch by 24-inch film. We never used anything that big, but that was held in place by a vacuum behind the door, so we placed the film up on that and it was held in place by a vacuum. It had bellows that was big enough that if it would support me, it was big enough that I could have crawled into it. It was huge. And the bellows and the lens was on the outside of the dark room, controls where the film was was already inside the dark room, and we used an arc lamp to, electric arc lamp, to light up the copy that we put in the bulletin-type, like a bulletin board behind the glass. And with this camera, I could either enlarge or reduce whatever the call was for that particular job. Like I before mentioned in the photo lab taking pictures of the navigation instruments, I would be sent copies, usually 8X10s, from the photo lab and the artist in the print shop would take these, and with an indelible ink, draw all of the lines and thicken lines on it with indelible ink. And after he had finished with that, then I would take them, put them through a solution that would bleach out everything, just actually remove the emulsion. So all was left then was the indelible marks that the artist had put on there, so we had a black and white sketch then of that instrument, and to exact proportions because it was taken from an exact copy. I had to make a copy of that and we had the negative, and then the negative was taken and made a plate (and this was also by photographic process), although the speed of the emulsion on these plates was very slow. It was just done in

open daylight or under electric lights. And they were developed and when the image would come out on the zinc plate, (we call it a plate but actually it was very flexible, not much heavier than, probably not as heavy as, poster board) and went onto a machine that was somewhat similar to a mimeograph machine only instead of the ink coming through a stencil like it is on a mimeograph machine, the ink would attach itself to the dark marks on the plate and pick up the ink that way when you run the paper through. The paper was fed through with a...picked up and fed through with vacuum and on the other end, I had gas burners that dried them. They dried the ink just as fast as it came out of the machine. That process, I understand, was relatively new at that time. It's a common way of printing today. At that time, it was relatively new. Some of the other things that I would do, I had to deal with a weather map. A buddy and I would go to the weather bureau and pick up a weather map and bring it back, and I made a copy of that and then they were brought into the print shop and made out copies. And these were then distributed in the classrooms for the navigation cadets to learn to read the weather map. That was quite a challenge because a weather map was in color, and my film that I used was just black and white film. And so it took some trial and error to get it just the exact exposure and the right processing to come up with a compromise on the best results that you could possibly get, make a black and white print from a color print. That was a daily task. Then weekly, there were printing jobs that we had and we published a tech newspaper, and that went out every week. And so there was a lot of photographs, as well as the print material, we copied. Photographs I'd make half tones.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you just learned all this from the job there.

Mr. Alberding

On the job training. (laughing) Never had any experience with it before.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when this Corporal left, you took over. Did you get a promotion to a Corporal then?

Mr. Alberding

No, I didn't. It was hard to come by promotions there, and reason for it was that many of the personnel that were there were washed out cadets that, like myself but unlike myself, may have been given an enlisted status before they went into the cadets. So many of them had rank when they went into the cadets, and when they washed out of the cadets their rank was returned to them. And so the complement at many times was pretty well filled up, and so it was very difficult to get a promotion. I did make PFC by an act of Congress. Legislation was passed that any private with 6 months of active duty and good conduct, why, got promoted to PFC, so it was about \$4 a month more.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how many people worked in the photo lab?

Mr. Alberding

Oh, probably about a dozen.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about the print shop?

Mr. Alberding

The print shop, maybe more than that because there were several civilians, all girls, that worked in there. They'd run the mimeographs and done some of the clerical work and so forth. And so I would say we must've had 15 or 20 maybe sometimes in the print shop.

Mr. Misenhimer

What's some other things that happened there in your notes there?

Mr. Alberding

Some of the things that we printed other than what I mentioned, a good deal of it was material for the classrooms for the cadets. Of course, I mentioned before that was the sole purpose of the base. And then, too, if there was any action of any kind, aircraft, and we did have a lot of aircraft accidents – tragic ones. This hilly country, there really wasn't mountains, but a lot of foot hills around there, but many times when they started to climb on the mountainside before, actually there was several collisions. Took pictures of those things. Also if there was any breakdown. For example, I remember a truss in a hangar that weakened and broke and a photographer from the photo lab went out and took a picture of that and made copies of that. I suppose those had to be sent in to operations to report. But then later on in the print shop, there was an effort to cut down on the use of paper, so our weekly newspaper had to go by the wayside, and then we'd not print that. And then more and more printing materials was printed elsewhere in central printing establishments. The material sent there, we'd just file it, and so we put them on shelves and it was put in categories so that when there was a call for it, why, rather than printing up a special copy, why, if they already had it on file, why, that was what we'd use. This Wayne Stalley that I mentioned that I met when I first went into classification, he got married shortly after we were down there. I say shortly, I don't

know just how long, but he met a young girl going to college there, State Teachers College of San Marcos. That's former President Johnson's alma mater. And when he became President, why, the college became a university. He had seen to that. It was no longer just a college but a university. I had been back there just this past year, and of course it's grown tremendously since I was there, but getting back to Wayne's marriage. At that time, he asked me whether I would want to go home on furlough. And I said, "Well, I hadn't been in long enough." Cause I had been in enough to know that you had to be in 6 months before you were eligible enough for furlough. And he being in there and me working classification, I was aware of the fact of since I had about 6 months time from enlistment and being called to active duty, why, I was, even though I'd only been in a few months, I was eligible for a furlough. So he seen to it that I got a furlough and then invited me to come home with them on their honeymoon. (laughing) Of course I suppose there was a little forethought of that, I helped pay the gas coming home. That helped out for him. Also, his working in the office, he was able to get furlough probably on Friday night when furlough really didn't start until Monday morning, so we were probably home before our furlough really started. Fortunately, there wasn't any mishap or we would have been investigated or we would have been AWOL, absent without leave. But I come home and I remember him leaving his house, I think in maybe Spencer, Indiana but he lived in Cloverdale and we got in in the middle of the night, left us off at the depot and then we were out there in the middle of the night at the depot waiting for a train to come in to take us to San Pierre.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was your wife in San Marcos with you?

Mr. Alberding

Yes, she came down there by train shortly after I was at San Marcos, and that was an interesting experience for her, too. First time she had taken a train ride and they stopped in every little town for mail stop. Trains, at that time, carried the mail and picked up milk and delivered it. So that made for a long ride then, too, because every stop took a long time. But I was able to get a little one-room apartment, which many, many of us had, married couples, and lived in the houses down there, and the families owning them would make the extra rooms into just little one-room apartments for people. And at a later date, I got a car down there, folks brought her car down and they went back by train and I was able to get a 3-day pass at that time and go down to, we went down to Corpus Christi, and the Gulf. It was the first time any of us had seen the Gulf, so that was interesting. I remember watching them fish out there on the pier, fishing for red fish and there were huge fish. I suppose, oh, they must've been 18, 20 inches long some of them. I recall this one fellow that caught 3 of them and it looked like he had a load when he carried them off of the pier. We took a picture of them fish laying there on the pier. Prior to going down, getting down to Corpus Christi, we stopped along a little river had a Spanish name and means pecans.

Mr. Misenhimer

Nueces River.

Mr. Alberding

That may have been.

Mr. Misenhimer

Nueces it would be, right.

Mr. Alberding

And there was a man fishing there with a rod and reel and he caught a fair-sized fish, when he caught it and handed the pole over to my dad and he turned to me and he says, "I'll take a picture of it." Well he got ready to reel it up, so I took a picture of my dad holding that fish. After taking this picture of the big red fish down there on the Gulf, why I made prints of both of them for helping the artist down in the print shop, why he attached the big red fish to the rod and reel and made a postcard with that and sent it to my dad. A lot of little things you can do with trick photography and a little artistry work. Then about a year and a half I was at the print shop, and getting towards the end of the war and they were in need of Infantrymen. And so those that were drafted into the Service, the government had the liberty to assign them to the branch of service they wanted to you know. And so those men that were drafted then many of them did get transferred to the Infantry. Since I had enlisted into the Air Corps, why, I was exempt from that. I'm kind of grateful for that. My friend, Wayne, that I spoke of before, he was one of them that was transferred to the Infantry. And it was really rough because we really had it easy in the Air Corps. As a matter of fact, I remember the ground forces calling us the Boy Scout Troops because we had it so much better than they did. And just never had any close order drill. Once a year, we'd go out on Biovac, and that was only for about 3 or 4 days, and it was a hike out 9 miles from the camp, and that was pretty strenuous for us because we hadn't been in any of that training. All of a sudden, you march for 9 miles. Then also, for those who had rank, they had specific difficulties because they got their rank for technical knowledge. In his case, it was clerical work, but in the ground forces, you got rank you're expected to be able to command men. And

most of the Air Force men didn't have that experience. Then sometime later, there was a need for radiomen, and so a group, a large consignment, of men was sent up to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and I was in on that group. And got to Sioux Falls and then they found out, well they didn't have room for us. It was one of the goof ups of the Army again. But you can understand the logistics and wonder why maybe there wasn't more because it really took a lot of planning from the top down to arrange for all this. But anyhow, we were only there about a month and then were sent to Traux Field, Madison, Wisconsin, and went there by train. And I'm sure they were really village trains, wooden cars, I think there was Abraham Lincoln there, and long ride, and just hard back seats and hard to sleep in. Some of fellows slept in the aisle, but we had to go to the washroom, you had to step over the bodies to get there. We did start school there. They divided the group up, about half of us went into what they called radio mechanics and the other half were radio operators.

Mr. Misenhimer

About when did you arrive there?

Mr. Alberding

That would have been in April because we arrived in Sioux Falls, South Dakota the day that President Roosevelt died.

Mr. Misenhimer

April 12th of '44. (editor's note: it was 1945)

Mr. Alberding

Yes, April 12th, and I drove my car up there. Sergeant Neubauer was put in charge of the contingent there. He selected the men from our print shop, which I remember very well,

and when I learned that we were gonna be sent or transferred out, I first heard we were going to Scott Field. That's down there in Saint Louis on the Illinois side. So I went to see if I could get permission to drive my car down there. That's when I learned that you aren't going to Scott Field anyhow. You're going to Sioux Falls, South Dakota. So I managed to talk Sergeant Neubauer into just taking care of me, count me present whenever he had to make roll call on the trip up there, and I left maybe a day before the train did and got up there when the train arrived, and that was one thing Sergeant Neubauer said, "Make sure you're there when I get there." Well, as it turned out, I wasn't right there on the spot because we got to Sioux Falls and the first place we went was to the depot to find out if the train was on time and what the schedule was. And they said, "Well, it's delayed so it's gonna be late coming in." So that gave us time to go out and get lunch. We thought we had plenty of time and it was while we were eating lunch that we heard of the death of President Roosevelt. But we went back to the depot and in the meantime, the train had come in, had come in on time or at least not as late as what the trainmaster said it would be, and Sergeant Neubauer was pacing the platform wanting to know where Alberding was.

Mr. Misenhimer

I'm gonna stop and correct myself. It was April of '45 when President Roosevelt died, not '44.

Mr. Alberding

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

I said '44 and I was wrong. It's '45.

Mr. Alberding

Yeah, 1945. We were there in time to load onto the trucks and go out to the base, and Mary was able to get a room in a private home, just a room, and stayed there at Sioux Falls. And then, like I say, we were only there a month and got orders to go to Truax, so my dad came out by train and took the car and my wife, Mary, back home. At that time, she was expecting our first child, a daughter, and so then she remained with my folks the rest of the time. So at Madison at Truax Field, then we did start training as radio mechanics, and we were really doing training mainly as troubleshooters, as I seen it, on radio aircraft. And the big bombers had, this is before the days of the modern radio construction, they used the old tubes so it took a lot of space. And today with transistors they can make them very tiny. But we learned to troubleshoot. Well first we built a transmitter and built a receiver. Even before that, they had to start from scratch and learned the basics of DC Current because the radios would work on DC Current, then learned the mechanics of radio transmission and this was under the guidance of an instructor taking us step-by-step. We'd be on the transmitter and a receiver, and that gave us basic knowledge of what made things tick inside a radio box. You run in 2 or maybe even 3 shifts. I remember night classes. I didn't know it at the time, but it was just a few years ago that I found out actually we were being trained for B29s. That's what was being used in the Pacific because of the long range that was needed there in the Pacific, and apparently we were needed more as radio operators on the 29. My wife's brother, Alvin Kendzora, was also in the Pacific and he was a radio operator on a C47, sometimes flying a C46, but most of the time C47s in the Pacific. And so the bombers then also had a radio and a radio operator. As I was saying, the work of the radio

mechanics was to troubleshoot any problems and things and were back on the base, and the war ended just a couple of weeks before we finished that course. And of course, immediately, why, all training stopped and we done some celebrating. Those of us had cars there thought we'd storm the gate, and that didn't work, though. The MPs were anticipating something like that so they were out in force and stopped any of that. But it was a day of celebration.

Mr. Misenhimer

This is when Japan surrendered in August?

Mr. Alberding

Yes. I'm thinking maybe that, yeah, we were there when Germany surrendered also.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, May 7th of '45. Did you have a celebration then also?

Mr. Alberding

Yes, but really a great celebration when Japan...it was all over. Then they set up a discharge center there on the base and I worked the discharge center for a while. I don't know what the official title of it was, but those of us working at this duty, we'd have maybe 25 or 30 men in a group that was taken through the various places and stops that they would have to make to facilitate the discharge. One would be the hospital and get their medical records cleared. And then there would be quartermaster to turn in any excess clothes, and then I think another stop might have been classification center to get their records straight. So it would take a few hours to take these groups around to the various places, and worked with that for some time and then was sent to Scott Field to do

the same thing there. Then from there, I was sent to Jefferson barracks to be discharged.

I discharged out of Jefferson Barracks.

Mr. Misenhimer

And that's where?

Mr. Alberding

St. Louis.

Mr. Misenhimer

So when did you get your discharge?

Mr. Alberding

January of 1946. I was just looking at my own discharge papers. I just got a miniature copy of that. I was just in 3 years and one week in active duty.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me go back and ask you a couple questions. When you were at San Marcos, what kind of planes were they flying?

Mr. Alberding

AT7s and AT18s, more AT7s than the AT18.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now AT7 is?

Mr. Alberding

It was a twin-engine plane.

Mr. Misenhimer

It had a Cessna?

Mr. Alberding

No, I don't know who built that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did it have one tail or two?

Mr. Alberding

One. The AT18s was a double tail.

Mr. Misenhimer

The AT7 was the Cessna, called the 'bamboo bomber' cause it was made out of mainly plywood and things.

Mr. Alberding

Yes, I recall that now. I'm thinking that I was told that they were used by the British maybe as a medium bomber at one time. Do you have any recollection of that?

Mr. Misenhimer

That was the Hudson I think.

Mr. Alberding

But that was also designated as an AT18?

Mr. Misenhimer

Now the AT18 was the Hudson. It was bigger, quite a bit larger than the other one, right?

Mr. Alberding

Yes, bigger than AT7s.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, quite a bit larger. It had twin tails and it was a tail dragger.

Mr. Alberding

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And that had been used by the British as their medium bomber.

Mr. Alberding

I was thinking it was.

Mr. Misenhimer

You're right, yeah.

Mr. Alberding

Well I suppose that we used both for pilot training, and multi-engine craft.

Mr. Misenhimer

They were used different places, mostly for bombardiers, they called the T11, I think was the bombardier, and these were the Beachcraft now, not the larger one. They used them different places.

Mr. Alberding

I only recall seeing one AT7 at a museum, and that was out at Ohio at Akron, seen one there. There's not many of them being preserved.

Mr. Misenhimer

No, they were fabric, or they called them the bamboo bombers because they were not metal. So they didn't last as well as some others.

Mr. Alberding

They were, both the AT7s, AT18s there were equipped for training navigators, and so on one side of the fuselage was small, square tables for the cadets to work, and I think maybe the AT7s, two cadets and an instructor. The AT18s, that had room for 3 and an

instructor. And I just learned this this past year that later on, and that may have been after I left the field there, that they began using some C47s. They had a longer range that would allow them to go out over the gulf and give the cadets experience navigating over the water. With the AT7s and 18s, you couldn't do that. There was also a navigation training base down in Houston had been right close to the gulf there. But I remember a few times when there was storm warnings in the Houston area and the planes would be brought up from Houston to San Marcos and tied down there until the storm went over.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever get to fly any of those planes?

Mr. Alberding

I'd fly in them. Once I recall going up to Rochester, Minnesota. Ernest Rahbain that worked on the print shop there was from Rochester, and he learned the cross-country flight going to St. Paul. And back up just a little bit. The pilots that piloted these navigation training flights had to periodically take cross-country flights to keep them abreast and experienced in cross-country flying. So naturally, when that time came, he thought he would try to get a flight to his hometown or near his hometown, and if there was any empty seats that was on there, we was able to get release from your duty, why, you were free to get a free ride. And so Ernest Rahbain that lived in Rochester right next to Mayo Clinic, he asked if I wanted to go with him. Sure, I'd go. I was able to get off and we went up there. I recall going over Olatha, Kansas. There's a Navy training base there in Olatha, Kansas, and as we approached it and come near it, why, I could hear the pilot radio in to the tower and give his identification and location and his flight plan, and we passed on. Shortly, I seen him looking to the right and to the left and up and down,

and he was seeing a front ahead of him and he was looking for a way to go over it, under it, or around it. And wasn't able to see any opening and all of a sudden we hit that front and it was like putting the brakes on a car going down the road at 60 miles an hour. It was just like hitting a wall there. And so he immediately turned around and we went back to Olatha and landed there and stayed overnight. I think we must've slept on benches in the hangar there, and the next morning I recall seeing these Navy pilots taking off in formation down the runway and it was quite a thrill to see them. As soon as they lifted off of the runway, it seemed like they went up at a 45-degree angle. Through the night, there was some planes that did take off, but there was ice in the storm and we didn't have de-icers.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of plane were you in?

Mr. Alberding

That must've been an AT18.

Mr. Misenhimer

It had a longer range.

Mr. Alberding

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you get the time off to go?

Mr. Alberding

Well, there at the print shop, we was always kept busy but never rushed, and there was only a few that would be substitutes and all. One old man that worked out in making the

plates after I had made the negative, he'd take the negative and make the plate, he could operate the copy camera, so I assumed he operated the copy camera while I was gone.

Mr. Misenhimer

You weren't officially up there. I mean you were just on your own going up there.

Mr. Alberding

Yeah. Of course, I've always wanted to fly, and it was a disappointment when I didn't get to train for flying, and as you read in my article I submitted to the Winamac Journal, I did get to fly an AT6 down there at San Marcos recently.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that?

Mr. Alberding

That was quite a thrill, quite a thrill.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you fly against another plane? Was there any dog fighting against another plane?

Mr. Alberding

No, no, just take up and done some aerobatics, did a lazy 8 and came back where we started and then made a loop-to-loop and barrel roll, and then he let me have the stick for a few minutes and he let me make...oh, I didn't make any turns, but tipped it over one way and then the other and come back down for a landing.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long was that flight?

Mr. Alberding

Probably not over a half hour, all too short. (laughing)

Mr. Misenhimer

Is that something they do there at San Marcos all the time or was it somebody came in there?

Mr. Alberding

Well what used to be the Confederate Air Force and now the Commemorative Air Force, that's what I called it. Since then, I sent some pictures that I promised a man there, and he wrote back and said it's no longer called Confederate. It's called Commemorative Air Force. I wasn't aware of that change. I don't know when that took place.

Mr. Misenhimer

About a year ago I think.

Mr. Alberding

Is that right. So they use the hangar that was built back then in probably '42, and this man that pilot took me up in this AT6, he and other man bought that. And I think it came from some other country. Many of the other countries did get a lot of our aircraft after the war and used them for many years. That was good because that does give a place for these in the Commemorative Air Force to buy these planes and keep them restored.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever see any USO Shows?

Mr. Alberding

I don't recall that we did. On the base, there, we had a special service group that would put on entertainment, and I have pictures of some of those activities. They'd put on a dance or they'd put on a concert or some kind of performance or just a stage play. Since my wife was with me and we lived off the base, I didn't take part in a lot of the base

activities. We could have, but when we got off the base we didn't bother to go back until the next day.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have an experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Alberding

Yes, in traveling. You mentioned the USO, they also had servicemen centers in the USO league. Sometimes in traveling, we'd go in there and we always had free donuts and coffee and a place to write and read.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you had any reunions since you've gotten out?

Mr. Alberding

No, I haven't. I've thought of it many times, and all these years I've kept in touch with quite a number of the men that I was in service with, and always thought of how great it would be to be able to have a real reunion. We just never made the effort and the time to do it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you use your GI Bill when you got out?

Mr. Alberding

Yes, my brother Wilbur and I got a loan with the Veterans Administration backing bought this farm. If it hadn't been for that, we wouldn't have been in any position to buy it. As I recall, a serviceman was given... could get up to \$10,000 backing, and that meant that the loan company was guaranteed at least that much. So that made it possible

because we'd borrowed money for the down payment to buy this place. As I look back now, you know, I wouldn't think of doing that now.

Mr. Misenhimer

Right. When you got out, did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Alberding

No, not really. While I was in the Service, I wondered just what will I do when I get out. One of the things I recall thinking of, and that was to go into full time Christian work, and I recall when I was discharged and went from Jefferson Barracks into St. Louis I suppose, and a fellow I didn't know arrived and I had my car up there and I gave them a ride. And that was a question he posed. He said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "Well, I've given some thought to being a preacher." And then he asked, "What church?" And I didn't have any one in particular in mind, just I felt at that time led to be a witness for the Lord. I felt grateful to the Lord that I spent 3 years in the Service and never went overseas, and that was one of the fortunate ways that I was able to come back alive. But farming was just a natural, and the first year, my brother and I done custom hay baling. He bought a hay baler and I bought tractor. And may of dealers gave servicemen priority because it was just hadn't been much farm equipment built during the war. All the factories was building tanks and trucks and things like that, and so many of the dealers were giving priority to servicemen. I bought a 70 Oliver tractor and my brother bought an Oliver hay baler, and we done custom baling for summer. And then the following year, we learned about this farm being for sale, and we were able to get the GI loan, and so the 2 of us together bought the farm. He was killed in a tree accident in

October of 1950. We bought this in 1947, so we were only together a short time, and he was killed in a tree accident.

Mr. Misenhimer

Sorry to hear that. I see you've got some more notes. Anything else you want to say?

Mr. Alberding

Well, very interesting for the photo experience that I had, both in the photo lab and the print shop, and never of course really used that training commercially. I was always interested in photography and through the years have taken a lot of pictures, and was very grateful for the opportunity to have that experience.

Mr. Misenhimer

You have a scrapbook over there?

Mr. Alberding

Yes, this is a picture album that my wife made up, made the cover with the emblems and the patches with the camera on them indicated a photo technician, which was my classification. That there is my high school graduation picture. We didn't have many dollars to work with, so she made this photo album out of paper that I could get at the print shop. That one shows the man mixing up chemicals in the photo lab, and this was the office of the photo lab, and that's the picture of the copy camera and that's Sergeant Wallace, Corporal Wallace that I was telling you about. This was the outside of the dark room. This is the lens, and with this light here when we made a half turn, why, after we made the exposure, why, we'd turn that lamp in front of the lens and flash a light back and through a half turn screw, and that put a grid on the negative. Then we could use that for print. This picture is washing and then cutting pictures. Here's a picture of the files

and this is a huge enlargement, probably made for aerial photos I assumed. We never made anything that big. The biggest we ever made was a picture 24 maybe by 24 picture of the Colonel of the field.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is this over here?

Mr. Alberding

These are, I think the designation is either P81 or P82. It was a twin mustang.

Mr. Misenhimer

Put the 2 of them together, right.

Mr. Alberding

Put 2 mustangs together, the photo lab pictures, photo lab crew. And this is a series of pictures that was made up and cut up into little 2X3s or 2X2 ½ and put in packets and sold.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is this a TA18?

Mr. Alberding

One of the first experimental jet planes, and came in here. It was quite an attraction.

Mr. Misenhimer

You got to see it there at San Marcos, huh?

Mr. Alberding

Seen it there, um, hm. There it is in flight. That's an official picture by one of the photographers. That man there in that next picture, Sergeant Atkins made that one and

probably taken from an AT18. Some more pictures of inside the photo lab. He went through navigation, a cadet through navigation training at San Marcos.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was his name?

Mr. Alberding

Edgar Alberding. And got to see him once in a while, but cadet schedule was pretty tight and full, so we didn't have much free time, but we did go to San Antonio one time. I remember he was at San Antonio and I met him, and maybe he was at Randolph Field in San Antonio, but there on the base, we didn't get together very often. But he was a much greater scholar than I was, but he'd get airsick every time he went up, and he tried everything, anything anybody suggested. He did it all and maybe just don't eat, just take a candy bar or something like that along you know. He tried everything and he'd just get airsick every time he went up, so just about 2 weeks before the graduation, why, he went to the flight surgeon to ask to be grounded cause he had the fear of having to fly after he got his wings. I rather doubt that that would have been the case. I can't imagine any bomber crew that would have a navigator that got airsick. But most students, I would imagine, that got airsick, they'd wash out academically, they wouldn't keep up their work. But even when he was sick, he'd keep up his work. So he asked to be grounded, so then he went back to enlisted status. Well he ended up over in Guam, and they were using B29s for reconnaissance and many times as they could come back and the cameras had been jammed and they didn't have any pictures. So he and 2 other fellows were picked out and assigned of finding what the problem was with these cameras and correct it. Actually, it was 2 different cameras. One was infrared that they used for the night,

and the other was just a regular 35-millimeter camera. It had 2 electric solenoids in them, one to feed the film and one to wrap them up. And what he discovered was that, he was over in Guam so he used little micro switches that were used. Them things weren't any bigger than your little finger. I remember salvaging some of them from...I'd go visit the salvage yard there on the base and see what I could pick up, and I remember picking up some of them switches and this little rectangular box with a button not much bigger than a pinhead sticking out of it you know. And I guess many applications for those things but I think in most cases, why, they had a little finger that would be attached over that button, and they were very sensitive. You could almost blow on them and activate them. So he used them and put them in the configuration that the film was going through so that when these solenoids would get out of synchronization, the film would double up and would make contact then with the finger on this micro switch, and that would shut that one off if it was the finger. So I assumed then that it was activated off and on periodically, you know, to keep those two, you know the were up and the feeder in synchronization. They fixed the camera up with that on there and the B29 went out for reconnaissance and he come back with pictures. So higher echelon noted that that worked. Why, then they changed more of them and of course, every bomber was equipped with a plan to bring back a photo report of the results. And so at one point and time, they got a lot of volunteers. I supposed the Army usually does, you, you, and you. And set up tables and set these cameras out there, and then Edgar and the other 2 men took them through step-by-step and redesigned these cameras with the electric solenoids. I imagine it was rather strategic little operation out there. He did get some paper

recognition of it cause just very recently my son was up in Vancouver, Canada setting the copies of veteran recognition for the work.

Mr. Misenhimer

On the pilots that were flying the training for navigation, were any of them the women, 'The WASPS'?

Mr. Alberding

No, not that I know of. I remember when the WACS came in from in there and as a matter of fact, they were putting up barracks around 456th, I was in headquarters, and made a couple of barracks. I don't know really screened off, they screened it off, you know, from the rest of them there at camp. We had a few officers, women officers. I wasn't in contact with any of them, but...

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your outfit? did it have a number, a name, or?

Mr. Alberding

There it was Squadron 456, and it was called the headquarters unit. The men that went to various jobs like myself and the administrative, I guess you would call it, the administrative work and all of the office personnel, those that worked in the personnel department and those who worked in classification were stationed in the 456 Headquarters. Then we had squadrons that were specifically designated just for airplane maintenance. It took a lot of men to maintain these, keep these planes flying.

Mr. Misenhimer

In the photo lab, though, you were still in the 456?

Mr. Alberding

456, I was always in the 456 there at headquarters.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you recall?

Mr. Alberding

Well I think we pretty well covered it. I always looked forward to furlough time, and I mentioned when we had the car down there so we could drive home on furlough.

Gasoline was rationed during the war, but farmers never had any problem getting enough gas. We always had enough gas rations in extras, and so my dad would send the gas ration coupons plus Staley that I was telling you about before, he had a friend that worked in the ration office on the base. And of course, the ration coupons were issued in books, and if you didn't qualify for a full book, why, the coupons would be torn out. Somebody got a hold of them, and so Wayne always had access to some more when we'd come home on furlough, extra gas coupons.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of car did you have down there?

Mr. Alberding

Had a '41 Chevy that was a car that my wife's dad had, and he passed away while I was in the Service then when the estate was settled, I bought it from her brothers and sisters. So I had a fairly new car. Then after I got home I would take it to San Pierre to have it serviced periodically, and the man that run the service station that every time I'd bring it in there, he'd try to buy it. He offered me more than I paid for it of course. I didn't sell it. I'd use the car and I'd have to pay a premium to buy a new one. My wife worked there on the base. She got down there. For the first she worked in post exchange, worked as a

clerk in the post exchange, and worked at that for several months and had the opportunity to go over and work post operation and logged pilot's time. And there she was under civil service, and there at the post exchange, she wasn't. She worked, as I say, there and was logging pilot's time. I don't think she logged any of the navigator's time. All the flying personnel got one half of their base pay for the flight.

Mr. Misenhimer

Flying time.

Mr. Alberding

They had to fly so many hours a month, I guess, to qualify for that. So that amounted to quite a little bit. But I assume the enlisted men did, too. Do you know?

Mr. Misenhimer

I'm sure they did. Any one of them on flying status – a gunner and all, they got the flying pay. As a student, I don't know how it worked, you know like the student navigators.

Mr. Alberding

The cadets.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, cadets. I'm not sure.

Mr. Alberding

I'm thinking that just \$75. That would amount to half of a base pay if you figure a base pay of a private was \$50, not \$75 dollars. Once I knew what the 2nd Lieutenant's salary was, but I don't remember how. At that time, it seemed like quite a little bit to enlisted men. I understand our Master Sergeant that had longevity time probably drew

more money than the 2nd Lieutenant did. The Master Sergeant that was our first sergeant in 456, Sergeant Forgione, he was Italian and had black hair and real dark eyes and could almost look through you. There was a Master Sergeant also that was in charge of the motor pool, and the 2 would get into some controversy sometimes you know. One time, I heard this from a man who was working as classification clerk in there. Master Sergeant Sottosani in the motor pool came down there and he and Pierce got into a discussion that was rather heated and Sergeant Pierce said, "Okay, we'll settle this. I'll call the Colonel" (meaning Colonel Hutchinson on the field). So he picks up the phone and he dials Colonel Hutchinson. Sottosani is sitting there with his eyes wide open, oh, what's going on here. Colonel Hutchinson's secretary answered the phone, why, Sergeant Pierce said, "Tell Colonel Hutchinson I have his car." So it was ready for him to pick up. He had Sottosani worried there for a bit.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you on the flight line? This is during your time as a cadet.

Mr. Alberding

Right, I was on the flight line, and usually the first sergeant would make up the formation out of a squadron and then we'd march out to the flight line. Oh, and Manyhan, he was an old infantryman. When he became commander, why, he took over that job. He lined us up. I can recall he would look at us and oh, he didn't like this flight. He wanted this flight ahead of the other flight, and so he'd march us down off of the street down into the roadside ditch actually, while the other flight marched past us. But then he'd have us instead of right turn about face, you know, and march back up on the street, why, he'd

have us back up. Seemed like it took him forever you know, and if he went in the office and sends the first sergeant, it's done in a few minutes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you can think of there?

Mr. Alberding

No, I can't right now.

Transcribed by
Christa Granger
November 15, 2005
Alice, Texas

Oral History by
Richard Misenhimer
P.O. Box 3453
Alice, Texas 78333
(361) 664-4071