

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview with

**Robert P. "Bob" Benzinger
Rio Verde, Arizona
October 30, 2006
Radio Technician
U.S. Navy**

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is October 30, 2006. I am interviewing Mr. Robert P. "Bob" Benzinger by telephone. His address is 18714 Buckskin, Rio Verde, Arizona 85263. His telephone number is area code 480-471-0037. 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

Bob, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today and I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II.

Mr. Benzinger

I'm glad to do it.

Mr. Misenhimer

First off let me ask; I'm assuming your first name is Robert is that correct?

Mr. Benzinger

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

What's your middle initial?

Mr. Benzinger

P as in Paul.

Mr. Misenhimer

I would like to get an alternative contact. We have found out that sometimes in two or three years we try to contact somebody and he has moved or something has happened.

Do you have a son or daughter or someone that you might give us a name and phone number in case we can't reach you?

Mr. Benzinger

I suppose I can give you my son's. Robert A. Benzinger. Address is 4980 North Castle Ridge Road, Tucson, Arizona 85749. His phone number is 520-749-3941.

Mr. Misenhimer

The next thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the Nimitz Museum. When I do these in person I give them to the man to read and sign but since this is by phone, let me read it to you to make sure it is okay with you. "Agreement Read." Is that okay?

Mr. Benzinger

That's fine.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me start off by asking, what is your birth date?

Mr. Benzinger

March 6, 1926.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Benzinger

Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Benzinger

Neither.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your father's occupation?

Mr. Benzinger

He was an accountant.

Mr. Misenhimer

You grew up during the Depression. How did the Depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Benzinger

Not serious. He always had a job through the Depression. It wasn't necessarily a good one but it put food on the table and a roof over our head and I was unaware of any real hardships growing up but it was modest.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Benzinger

In Oconomowoc; it's about 30 miles west of Milwaukee. We moved there in 1931.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you finish there?

Mr. Benzinger

1943.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do when you finished high school?

Mr. Benzinger

I got out of high school pretty young so I started the University of Wisconsin in engineering school in June, immediately after graduation. They were running three semesters a year at that point so I was able to get in three semesters of engineering before Uncle Sam beckoned.

Mr. Misenhimer

So when did you go into the service then?

Mr. Benzinger

June of 1944.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you happen to remember the date?

Mr. Benzinger

It was in June but I don't remember the day.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's fine. What branch did you go into?

Mr. Benzinger

The Navy.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you choose the Navy?

Mr. Benzinger

While I was still in college they came around with a test called the EDDY Test that was supposed to test aptitude for electronics. I passed that thing and when it came time to enter the service I had the EDDY test waving around and it was automatic Navy. By this time there was no more enlistment. It was draft period except for minority cruises. At 17 you could still enlist in the Navy or marines. Otherwise when you hit 18 it was up to the draft; there was no more enlistment.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you were 18 at that point?

Mr. Benzinger

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of engineering were you studying?

Mr. Benzinger

Mechanical.

Mr. Misenhimer

So then you went into the Navy in June of 1944?

Mr. Benzinger

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any particular part of the Navy?

Mr. Benzinger

There were specific boot companies. At boot camp in Great Lakes there were specific companies constituted for the EDDY test people that were scheduled for electronics.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was my question. You were separated for electronics.

Mr. Benzinger

Designated.

Mr. Misenhimer

Designated, that's a good word. And you took boot camp there at Great Lakes?

Mr. Benzinger

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about your boot camp.

Mr. Benzinger

I don't know if it was anything specific. It was like everyone else; there was no differentiation against other boot camps. As far as that training was concerned, one company was like the next.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you got the same training as anybody in boot camp; not anything special because of electronics?

Mr. Benzinger

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have a lot of marching and things like that?

Mr. Benzinger

Yes, a fair amount of close order drills. We spent some time on the rifle range, a very brief fire fighting. I think that was only one day if I remember right. It was rudimentary. Otherwise it was as rough or as easy as anybody else would claim.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have knot tying?

Mr. Benzinger

I suppose but I don't remember specifically.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about swimming?

Mr. Benzinger

Yes. I grew up with a lake in my backyard so I had no problem with swimming.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand that they may have made you jump off of a high board into the pool or something like that; is that correct?

Mr. Benzinger

I don't remember.

Mr. Misenhimer

How were your drill instructors? Were they pretty rough on you?

Mr. Benzinger

Well yes and no. Regrettably we had a so called Company Commander who was a disaster. He was a "Diamond A" if you know what that was. Supposedly a Chief Diamond A, which was an athletic specialist, he had been a cook and weighed about 350 pounds and he wasn't too bright. So he had a Seaman First that was an old guy, pushing 40 who had to do most of the stuff. The Chief was a disaster.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you live in there?

Mr. Benzinger

In barracks. They were two story barracks with one company on each floor.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many people in a company? Around 50?

Mr. Benzinger

I think that was about right. Maybe it was more than that.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was the food there/

Mr. Benzinger

Horrible.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have anything they called the Great Lakes Shuffle?

Mr. Benzinger

It doesn't ring any bells.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've had people tell me that they would make them take a piece of steel wool and put it under their shoes. They would have to go all over the floor to clean the floors in the barracks. They called it the Great Lakes Shuffle.

Mr. Benzinger

It could have been and passed out of memory.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long was that boot camp? Six to eight weeks or something like that?

Mr. Benzinger

Yes. I was going to say 12 but that was too long. It was probably 8 weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you finished boot camp then where did you go?

Mr. Benzinger

The next place was to a so-called pre-radio school which was in an old high school on the west side of Chicago in a Jewish neighborhood I think because the name of the high

school was Theodore Hertzl. Theodore Hertzl figures greatly in the Zionist history. So that was four weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do in that?

Mr. Benzinger

That was mostly basic math and science. It was pretty easy stuff for me.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes with your engineering studies and things.

Mr. Benzinger

It was pretty simple stuff.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you live there?

Mr. Benzinger

I think it was in what was the gymnasium. It had double deck bunks set up in that place.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how many people were in this class?

Mr. Benzinger

I don't remember.

Mr. Misenhimer

20, 30, 40 or 50; what kind of range.

Mr. Benzinger

I suppose. I can't remember whether it was specifically the same outfit as boot company.

I think it might have been.

Mr. Misenhimer

Could be, okay. That was four weeks you said?

Mr. Benzinger

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do after that?

Mr. Benzinger

Then we went to another school which I think was called Radio School. That was in Texas in what turned into the University of Houston. It was a pretty small operation but we're talking about 1944. The University of Houston was more name than anything else. There, believe it or not, we were billeted in the balcony of the gym. That was three months.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you travel down there?

Mr. Benzinger

By train.

Mr. Misenhimer

How as that train trip?

Mr. Benzinger

It was fun. It was a mixture of civilians and Navy and we had a lot of fun on that train ride. We went through New Orleans and then west through Texas and from Orange, Texas west to Texas, that was the flattest country I have ever seen in my whole life. Flat and faceless. We got there in I guess September or October. I think it was October.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were on that train, did you have a place to sleep or just sit up in a chair car?

Mr. Benzinger

I think we just sat up. I don't think we had sleeping accommodations there.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long was that school in Houston?

Mr. Benzinger

Three months.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do in that?

Mr. Benzinger

That was getting into electronics. The basics of electronics, vacuum tubes, resistors, capacitors and that stuff; all the basic components of electronics, plus we did the radio.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you were learning to repair radios; or what was going to be your job?

Mr. Benzinger

It was constituted that we were supposed to maintain and repair anything that the Navy owned that had a vacuum tube in it. That was all the communications equipment, receivers and transmitters, radar, both search, air search and surface and fire control radar as well as sound equipment and fire alarm systems; anything that had a vacuum tube in it.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you weren't going to be a radio operator or anything like that, it was strictly repair?

Mr. Benzinger

They didn't bother to teach us the code.

Mr. Misenhimer

I just wanted to let you know that I had a somewhat similar experience to yours there. Is there anything in particular that you recall from that school?

Mr. Benzinger

I guess the thing I recall most from that was the weather. It was a disaster. I think it started raining in Houston about the 15th of October and we left I think the second week of January and it hadn't quit yet. (laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

We have a saying, "It rains somewhere in Houston every day." (laugh)

Mr. Benzinger

The first part of it, until it started raining, was just humidity. It was humid enough that it was tantamount to rain. A dreadful climate.

Mr. Misenhimer

I can sympathize with you on that; I know how it is there.

Mr. Benzinger

Our three months was up I think the second week of January, about the 10th of January or something like that. Then I went back to Chicago to Navy Pier which was eight months there. It was specific Navy gear; no more fundamentals, it was specific Navy gear. I hit Chicago in the middle of a blizzard at Navy Pier. It is a warehouse on Lake Michigan. The wind blew right through Navy Pier. It slowed down a little bit but otherwise it was dreadfully cold. I froze that whole winter. I grew up in that climate. I grew up in

Wisconsin. But hitting there from Texas in the middle of January, I never did warm up.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were wishing you were back in the heat and humidity down in Houston. (laugh)

Mr. Benzinger

Not that bad. (laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do at that Navy Pier?

Mr. Benzinger

That was all of the Navy gear; sonar, radar. That of course was fascinating. Everything there except the basic communications gear, everything else was secret. Our rating was radio technician. That was even before they recognized electronics. The rate later on turned in to electronic technician. Then finally it was subdivided and broken down into I don't know how many; specialized electronics for this, that and the other thing. I was still in the radio technician days. That was eight months of concentrated electronics. A fair amount of fundamentals because radar was new to us at that time. We hadn't had anything that approached radar so cavity magnetrons and all that stuff was new to us. That had to be taught in fundamentals. Then on to more specific stuff and some of the fundamentals too such as antenna theory. Of course everybody called the Mystery R.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was strictly training while you were there at Navy Pier?

Mr. Benzinger

Yes, pretty much. The whole program after boot camp was a year; a month in Chicago, three months in Texas and eight months at Navy Pier. It was pretty fundamental because

the Navy, if you were at sea, there was no depot that you could send your problems, you had to fix it yourself or else. Some of the Army training at that time that I knew about was fairly rudimentary and usually specific to one piece of gear. There was always another repair depot where you could send the stuff that to work on. No such luck for us.

Mr. Misenhimer

I was working on that one antiaircraft gun; that was my specialty. Also we had ordnance in case there was something beyond us. As a matter of fact it was by Sperry Rand. We actually had a civilian Sperry rep with our battery. So we had help. Anything in particular that you recall from your time there at Navy Pier?

Mr. Benzinger

The bunks there were three high. Every one of them had a curse on it. The lower bunks were vulnerable to the rats that vacationed at Navy Pier. The middle bunk was the right height for inspection. The top bunk you had to deal with the birds that were flying in and out of Navy Pier. Each level had a curse on it. At the same time I was there, do you remember, have you ever heard of Alvino Ray who played a guitar? He was there at the same time I was, in the next company adjacent to us. Occasionally he and I would get the Midnight to 4:00 fire watch and it was fun. He would watch for the OD while I slept and I would watch for the OD while he slept. His name, his right name was Alvin McBirney. While he was there he had a band at Navy Pier in his spare time and concerts were a held in an auditorium at the end of Navy Pier. Of course the liberty was great. You probably don't know Chicago but Rush Street was right close to Navy Pier on the West Coast of Lake Michigan as far as Chicago is concerned, many good restaurants, at the end of Rush Street was the Ambassador Hotel and what is famous worldwide is the Pump Room. The

Pump Room is the biggie as far as eating is concerned. One night about three or four of us were in there for dinner. In the next booth were Bob Hope and Frances Langford and Jerry Colona. They were in town for a show and were in the next booth.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get a chance to talk to them?

Mr. Benzinger

Only to exchange pleasantries; nothing more.

Mr. Misenhimer

But you at least got to say hello, huh?

Mr. Benzinger

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How were the people in Chicago? Were they friendly to servicemen?

Mr. Benzinger

Yes very much so. In contrast to Texas where Texas was simply overloaded with servicemen. In Chicago and even better in Milwaukee, it was impossible to buy a drink. It wasn't some guy wanting to tell you his life history. It was just walk into a bar and somebody would buy you a drink at a table over there. Sometimes you would sit at a bar somewhere and have four drinks stacked up waiting. Milwaukee was fabulous for that. Chicago was pretty good too.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were fairly close to home. Could you go home some weekends?

Mr. Benzinger

Yes. It was terrific. My time in Chicago was pretty special. When in uniform all of the transportation was free; all of the street cars and buses and the El. That was all free, even the South Shore. My high school buddy, we were closer than most brothers, all the way from grade school through high school. He was about a year older than I was and got drafted into the Army. He ended up in that nice quiet spot in Belgium in late 1944 where nothing was supposed to happen. He was in the 106th and by Christmas of 1944 he was a German prisoner. He got into trouble with a burn on his lower leg and foot from hot ersatz coffee in the prison camp and got a serious infection. When he was sprung out of the prison camp, by the Russians I think, he was in bad shape. They flew him back to Chicago to old Chicago Beach Hotel on the Southside on 59th and South Shore drive. The Chicago Beach Hotel was turned into an Army hospital at that point. He had only been there a day or two when I heard about him. I was getting good liberty so I could go down there every week. I still have a good feeling about that, that I was able to do some good. When he got there he didn't much care if he lived or died. He was down under 100 pounds. It was quite a while before they were sure that he was going to keep the leg. It was in that bad of shape. He recovered and came back fully and he ended up totally healthy with it and ended up with a PhD in Engineering and was a skier and healthy. I also felt good about that, that I could do some good.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is he still living?

Mr. Benzinger

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

If you don't mind, I would like to get his name and phone number and possibly interview him.

Mr. Benzinger

Grindrod, Paul E.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was his address?

Mr. Benzinger

4221 Esch Lane, Madison, Wisconsin, 53704 Phone: 608-259-2876.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay and he was a POW captured in the Battle of the Bulge and rescued by the Russians.

Mr. Benzinger

He had been in Triple A for a couple of years. I don't remember on which particular weapon. Somewhere in 1944 Triple A pretty much collapsed and they were sent to the Infantry.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's no fun. I'll give him a call one of these days.

Mr. Benzinger

He's retired. He was with Oscar Mayer for many years.

Mr. Misenhimer

He was in engineering you said?

Mr. Benzinger

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

At Navy Pier what was a typical day's schedule? What time did you start in the morning, and things like that?

Mr. Benzinger

I don't remember that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was it five days a week or six days?

Mr. Benzinger

Classroom work from 8:00 to 4:00 and that was kind of divided into one month segments. Like a month on receivers and a month on transmitting, a month on Sonar and a month on search radar and a month on fire control radar, etc. all in one month segments.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you go five days a week or six days a week?

Mr. Benzinger

Five days a week.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any inspections or that sort of thing?

Mr. Benzinger

I don't remember how often but whatever it was, it was too damn many.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you all have parades?

Mr. Benzinger

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

One thing about the Army, they like a lot of parades.

Mr. Benzinger

I suppose if we would have had a parade ground of any size we would have had them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any particular friends that you remember from the school there?

Mr. Benzinger

Just the fellow who was my roommate in the fraternity at Madison. He went in the same time I did. He didn't go to the University of Houston, he went to College Station, out in the middle of nowhere. (laugh) We got back together at Navy Pier.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then after Navy Pier what did you do?

Mr. Benzinger

When I left Navy Pier I had orders to Shoemaker, California. It was a shipping out station. It was a delay enroute so I had a couple of weeks at home. I don't remember any specific travel orders, just on my own. I was looking for a flight. I flew to San Francisco. Luckily I didn't get bumped; wartime priorities came first. He seemed to stop in every town to fly from Chicago to San Francisco. The first hop was Kansas City. From Kansas City to Omaha to Salt Lake City, Reno. I missed one. It seemed like we were stopping in all of the towns. Every hop I worried about a bump until when the plane left.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of plane was this?

Mr. Benzinger

DC-3. That was standard for the airline.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was after the war, right?

Mr. Benzinger

Yes. I was just graduating from Navy Pier when the war was over.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when you got to California, what did you do there?

Mr. Benzinger

Really just horsed around until we got orders out. I don't know if I was there more than two weeks. I had orders to embark on a ship. I went to the Philippines non-stop. Twenty seven days at sea.

Mr. Misenhimer

What ship was that on, do you recall?

Mr. Benzinger

It was a charter thing, McCormick Line, *The McCormick Dove*. It was a terrible ship. It bounced like a cork.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was it crowded?

Mr. Benzinger

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

You left out of San Francisco, did you?

Mr. Benzinger

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was there any seasickness on the way over?

Mr. Benzinger

No. I was lucky, no seasickness except one time. That was in the days when people were taking salt tablets. Somebody finally made me take a salt tablet and I don't think I had it down more than a few minutes when I was hanging over the rail. That was the only time I was ever sick in the Navy.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've had people tell me that when you left out of San Francisco there is some place that had big groundswells that really tossed the ship around and a lot of people got sick there.

Mr. Misenhimer

A lot of guys did get sick from those groundswells that you were talking about.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do when you got to the Philippines?

Mr. Benzinger

The first thing of course was a receiving station. This was in Leyte Gulf on the tip of Samar. The receiving station was on Tubadao near Guiuan. It was the only town that amounted to anything.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do there?

Mr. Benzinger

Nothing but wait for assignment. I was assigned to work in a motor pool. I'll never forget, the latrine was an oversized box with a couple of sticks holding up a hunk of canvas. I was peaceably sitting there one day when a Filipino woman came up with a big basket on her head and tried to sell me some bananas. I had grown up in a sheltered life in Wisconsin and it was kind of disconcerting to me. (laugh) I wasn't there very long and then I was assigned to the ship repair base on Manicani Island. Ship Repair Base 3864 which was assigned to the 7th Fleet to supply and prepare for the Invasion of Japan. At that time this was the biggest operation west of Guam. A bunch of the stuff came up from Hollandia and from other parts of the States; we had two dry docks that would lift anything; a whole raft of smaller docks and I don't know how many, but a lot of smaller docks that were for cruisers, destroyers and what have you. Over on the tip of Samar they set up a hospital over there. There was also an airfield across the bay on Samar that had a squadron of Blackcats, some F4-U's and B-25's. It was another island there; a huge operation there on Calacoan Island. So I think if I remember right we had over 400 anchorages in the harbor. But the work there was very interesting. Most of the time I was working on ships. You could bet that when they needed someone from the beach they were treated like visiting royalty. You got to the point where a kid of 19 got pretty cocky about it. I liked the small ship Navy. Only once did I work on anything as big as a destroyer. LST, LCI's all landing crafts. To get an idea, I remember on one job on the radar on an LCI which was anchored a long way from the Base. We were working on it

and some kid in shorts came by and said, "How are you doing? Do you need anything like some Joe?" Then he left and I asked the radar operator, "Who is that man?" (*end of tape side*)

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me again about the fellow that came by in shorts and offered you some coffee.

Mr. Benzinger

Yes. He told me that was the old man. He came by a little later and said, "How are you doing?" I said, "It won't be long and I'll be done." He said, "How are you going to get back to the beach?" I said, "I don't know, maybe I'll have to ask the signalman to haul out the tare flag and hope some boat passes." (*Editor's note: A tare flag is a request for transportation.*) A little while later I hear engines warming up. I thought, "Maybe it's going to be easier; the harbormaster has assigned them to a new anchorage or something." When I got out on deck, here we were going hell bent for election to the base at 6 knots. (laugh) Damn if he didn't take me all the way to the dock on the island. That kind of treatment was typical I guess. When they got too big, then it was different. Then they went straight to the pier. One day we had the *Antietam* and the *Ticonderoga* which were still pretty new carriers at that time; they came into the harbor. It was pretty to watch. I happened to be out in the harbor at the time. They came in with about six or eight destroyers, in line. They peeled off to their assigned anchorages then a lot of flag signals. At one point they all backed down and dropped the hook; it was pretty to watch. I thought, "Come Saturday I'm going to get a boat and go out and see what a carrier looks like." I had never been aboard a carrier. On Saturday morning I woke up and looked out the window of the barracks into the harbor and here these two carriers, with

white uniforms lined up on deck from end to end, were having their Saturday morning inspection. (laugh) I decided instantly that was no place for me. That was not my Navy. So I never did get aboard a carrier.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've heard people say that the destroyers, the carriers and the cruisers, that was a different life from on the smaller ships.

Mr. Benzinger

Yes, destroyers were too big for me. I worked on a couple of DE's that were alright and PCE's were okay. In fact one of them I worked on was the *El Paso* which was PF-41.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have to work on any submarines?

Mr. Benzinger

No. Submarines went a separate way. When we got through in Chicago there was an option there for additional training either for aircraft or for submarines. Aircraft was I don't know how many weeks at Corpus Christi and volunteering for submarines would have been New London. I think I should mention that before I was in the Navy I was in a fraternity in Wisconsin of all engineers which was the only one still in operation. All the rest of the other fraternities had been shut down. We had some members who were being called up. One of them graduated and went to submarine school and was Engineering Officer on the *Bullhead* which was the last submarine we lost in the war. Just before the end of the war the *Bullhead* went down with all hands. We lost 52 submarines during the war and the *Bullhead* was the last one.

Mr. Misenhimer

I read an article on that just the other day.

Mr. Benzinger

For years it was unknown. They were unable to match it in Jap records but they finally did. They finally had records that matched up and I think that's when they finally started looking for it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Within the last year I think it was, I'm not sure when it was, but it was not too long ago.

Mr. Benzinger

That's right.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was somewhere in the Philippines was it not?

Mr. Benzinger

No. I think it was down in Sunda Strait.

Mr. Misenhimer

You're right.

Mr. Benzinger

The *Bullhead* was operating out of Australia. I think it was in Sunda Strait that they went down.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were there still any Japanese running loose in the Philippines when you were there?

Mr. Benzinger

Yes but relatively few and they had taken to the hills. We saw one every once in a while.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you there in the Philippines?

Mr. Benzinger

I guess I got there in September and I must have left around the 1st of May, 1946. I was discharged from the Navy on the 13th of June, 1946.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you come back? What kind of a ship?

Mr. Benzinger

The one I came back on was Navy but I don't remember the name or hull number.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did it take to get back?

Mr. Benzinger

It was a little quicker. I think it was 25 days.

Mr. Misenhimer

Not much quicker, but a little bit. Where did you land?

Mr. Benzinger

San Francisco. That time when I got off the ship they moved us to Treasure Island, which was an artificial island that was filled in for the World's Fair. You talk about humidity; Treasure Island was, it seems like, about six inches above high tide, so it was wet.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you discharged at?

Mr. Benzinger

I must have been discharged in Chicago, so I suppose at Great Lakes. I went back from

there on one of those Army cattle cars. (laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

On a train, huh?

Mr. Benzinger

On a train.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else that you recall about your time in the service?

Mr. Benzinger

I suppose I could tell crazy stories forever.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me some of them. We like to hear those.

Mr. Benzinger

I don't know. One that I remember, we had a typhoon warning and the shop foreman gave me a work order to go down to a tugboat which was having trouble with a transmitter. He said, "If you don't get it fixed before they leave, go to sea with them." Tugboats had to get stuff out of dry docks and rearrange some barges and do whatever work there was in the harbor. (laugh) I had no desire at all to ride out a typhoon in a tugboat. So when I got down there the receiver was fine and the transmitter nothing. So I started checking with the meter and found that on the output tube the polarity was reversed. So I started chasing backwards and got to the motor generator and it was running backwards which was why of course they had the reverse voltage on the output tube and the ship's line was reversed. I called the ship's electrician and I said, "Your ship's line has got the polarity reversed." He said, "Yes, that happened a couple of days

ago." I said, "You fix that and the transmitter will work fine, I'm going ashore." So I escaped having to go with them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Those typhoons were not too much fun out to sea.

Mr. Benzinger

Fortunately none of them hit while I was there. They got pretty touchy about it after that typhoon just about blew Okinawa away.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh yes. Right. Let me ask you a question. In April of 1945 President Roosevelt died. Did you all hear about that and what kind of reaction did you have to it?

Mr. Benzinger

I was still in Chicago at that time, still at Navy Pier. There was reaction; I don't know if there was anything really emotional about it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then on May 8, 1945 Germany surrendered. Did you all have any kind of celebration or anything?

Mr. Benzinger

Not much because our war was in the Pacific. It wasn't all that emotional as it might have been to somebody that was in Europe.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then on August 15, 1945 when Japan surrendered, how about then?

Mr. Benzinger

That was a lot of whoopee. (laugh) I remember one of the big deals, it didn't affect me

directly, but one of the big deals that came with that was the end of gasoline rationing. That was just about immediate that the rationing ended.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were still in Chicago then, right?

Mr. Benzinger

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you downtown Chicago for it or anything?

Mr. Benzinger

I don't remember where I was. I guess I was ashore somewhere but I don't remember where. One story, there was a tug boat that had been up at Tacloban which was about 30 miles northwest of us; it was skippered by an old Chief Boatswain with hashmarks all the way up his sleeve. He was doing some tug boating and they hit a reef and bent the screw. So they sent him down to our place to go into dry dock and get the screw fixed or replaced. Apparently the harbormaster forgot about him. They were there for months. The old Chief always sent somebody up on the boat deck under the awning, looking around the harbor with glasses, looking for an Ensign that put his LCI on the reef or the bar or a barge that was in trouble. He would take off. "I could still do a little tug boating but I didn't dare tell the harbormaster" he said. The first thing was, "Do you have any beer aboard?" First he wanted some beer and then he would make a deal. The fantail on the tug boat is a long flat deck and below that, above the shaft alley was a hold for storing gear, camels, lines and towing gear. He had all that stuff out on deck and that whole hold was full of beer. He kind of took a shine to my buddy and me and he would call into the

base and say he had some trouble and would always ask for the two of us. So we would get out there in that little VP. There was the Chief up on the boat deck with his feet up on the railing and he would say, "Get yourself some beer. You know where it's at." He always had some little thing that he wanted done. One day we got out there and he had all the gear out; it was for a TBS. He took us down and showed us the crates and said, "Can you guys fix this thing up?" I said, "Where did you get that?" He said, "Don't worry about that." He had some buddies up in Tacloban that he hadn't talked to for a long time and he had it so that he could talk to them. Finally the story came out that a couple of nights before a barge had gotten adrift and he up anchored and took off. The barge had nothing on it except for electronic gear. He knew what the heck he wanted. He picked out all the crates that went together, the main stack and the motor generator set and all the accessories; he had it all there. So we ended up hooking it up for him. We spent New Year's Eve of 1945 with him. He had been hoarding Very ammunition for I don't know how long. We filled the harbor with Very ammunition. With the beer and that we had a big celebration for New Year's.

Mr. Misenhimer

Had his screw been repaired by then?

Mr. Benzinger

No I think it was still there when I left.

Mr. Misenhimer

They hadn't fixed the screw on it yet?

Mr. Benzinger

Nope. (laugh) He just didn't complain about it. In the spring of 1946 or maybe late winter

there was a big push to try to get technicians for Crossroads. Crossroads was the first atomic bomb test. Apparently they were pretty short of technicians because the pressure was pretty hard. I had no interest in that and I didn't think they could find anybody else in the shop. I don't think they got anybody. I wanted out. They must have been in trouble for technicians because they squeezed pretty hard.

Mr. Misenhimer

You mentioned that you had seen Bob Hope there in Chicago; did you ever see any USO shows anywhere?

Mr. Benzinger

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Benzinger

None. I might have when we landed in San Francisco, but I don't remember any.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get home with any souvenirs?

Mr. Benzinger

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Nothing from the Philippines?

Mr. Benzinger

Yes some jewelry and trinkets, but no war souvenirs.

Mr. Misenhimer

Of course Tokyo Rose wasn't on the radio anymore when you were over there, was she?

Mr. Benzinger

No, that was all over.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is there anything funny that you can recall?

Mr. Benzinger

One time I had a call to fix the radar on a destroyer; the only destroyer I ever worked on. Again this was either assigned an anchorage or was a hell of a way from the beach, so I had the VP wait for me. I couldn't believe that they had this gangway down. Normally it would be a Jacob's ladder that was hanging over the fantail. When I got to the end of the gangway here was a Lieutenant with a necktie and a garrison cap and a .45 strapped on and next to him was a White Hat in boots. I hadn't seen anything like this ever over there. I must have looked like the wrath of God. I was wearing Marine greens and a tropical helmet (a pith helmet). I had stuffed a tool roll inside each side of my shirt and a meter slung over each of my shoulders. I must have looked pretty terrible to that Lieutenant. I started off down the deck and he started screaming, "Didn't I know enough to salute the Officer of the Deck and salute the Ensign and request permission to come aboard and where in the hell did I learn sailing?" I think he even doubted the legitimacy of my birth a few times. (laugh) So like I said I was getting pretty cocky by this time so when the Lieutenant calmed down I said, "Lieutenant, my boat is still here. If you don't want me aboard I'll go back to the beach. If you want me to go to work, I'm here to fix your SG, your surface radar. If you want me to go to work call your Chief Radioman to show

me where the gear is at.” He blustered a little while longer and finally he told the White Hat, “Get the Chief Radioman.” Later on I found out he was the Navigational Officer and he had no desire at all to haul up the hook in the Philippines without his surface radar working. (laugh) It was a unique position; something that was essential and being essential, at least the small ship Navy pretty well overlooked the courtesies and the nonsense that went with it in order to get the service that they needed. But destroyers were too big. (laugh) They were too much Navy.

Mr. Misenhimer

And like you said, on the carriers they had them all lined up on the side in their whites.

Mr. Benzinger

One other one that was kind of funny, one day they told me that the base commander, who was a four striper, that his office intercom had crapped out and I should go over there and fix it. I got over to the administration building and told the yeoman there that they sent me to fix the old man’s intercom. He said, “Yes, go on in.” I went in to the office and was astonished to find that the skipper was there. So I stammered for a while and told him that I came over to fix the intercom. He said, “Okay, go ahead.” Well, I noticed that the plug was out of the wall; apparently the sweeper had hit it or something and knocked the plug out of the wall socket. So I walked over to it and I knew he was watching me from the corner of his eye and I picked up the plug and stuck it back in. (laugh) I said, “Would you like to try it now, sir?” He said, “No, it’s probably alright. Thank you.” (laugh) I laughed but I was not at all interested in having that kind of a witness to my work. That was something silly. Another job was on a communication ship, the *Columbia* if I remember correctly, but I am not for sure. It was a communication

ship and the shop foreman thought they ought to have lots of technicians aboard and if they're crying for help from the beach they've got real trouble so he sent three of us out there. Actually it was on a transmitter which was an elementary problem really. The transmitter wouldn't hold a frequency, it was drifting. At that point the master oscillator on those transmitters was in a temperature controlled oven which was thermostatically controlled to keep a constant temperature to hold the frequency. The contacts on the relay for that thing got dirty and weren't controlling temperature. We filed or sanded, I don't remember what, but anyway we cleaned up the contact points on this thing and we had to wait around for I don't know how long to make sure that the transmitter was on frequency, checking and checking periodically. In the meantime, this was a Lieutenant that was overseeing this, and a technician came in and said that he had a problem with the SG surface radar and he couldn't find the problem. What he was wanting to do was to alter the circuit and change the resistors and some other stuff in it. One of the guys that I was with was particularly sharp on the SG and he said, "Did you check VT-607?" Or whatever the number was. He said, "I think that's probably a bad tube." So the guy disappeared and the officer said, "This guy has just made First Class and I'm teaching him all that I can." (laugh) He came back bright and smiley and that fixed everything. It was calibrating like it was supposed to. He said then that he was having a problem with a receiver that did something or other. It was a strange set of circumstances. Just not long before that I had the same piece of gear with the same odd symptoms and it just about drove me nuts. I think it took me about three days to fix the thing because the problem was that a capacitor had opened. You know how unusual that was because capacitors short but open? So that was in the avc circuit somewhere. I said, "Did you check C-110

or whatever the number was? I think if you check that you are going to find that it is open.” That didn’t compute at all. He went away and he came back a while later and said, “By God that’s what the problem was.” (laugh) We finally decided everything was fine and we went back on deck and we were waiting for the boat to pick us up. The officer stuck with us and he asked, “Are you guys all First Class?” He could see we weren’t Chiefs, we weren’t wearing the right clothes. Three heads shook no. He said, “Second Class?” Three heads shook no. We were all Third. (laugh) We all had the same idea that if he asked if we were all Third Class we were all prepared to say, “No, we’re Seaman Strikers.” (laugh) He didn’t ask the question. He just turned around and went away. He couldn’t stand that these Third Class guys had fixed three pieces of gear for him in about an hour. (laugh) We laughed about that for days afterward.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else?

Mr. Benzinger

No I guess that’s about the size of it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me ask you a couple of other questions here. When you got out did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Benzinger

No. I went back to the University of Wisconsin. I went back to school and mechanical engineering. I thought for a while that I might shift to electronic engineering because of the Navy experience but I found out in a hurry that every guy that had ever pounded on a key during the war was in electrical engineering. I decided that was a bummer end, so I

stayed with mechanical.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you use your GI bill to go to college?

Mr. Benzinger

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you had any reunions?

Mr. Benzinger

Yes. The Manicani Island Association. I only went to one of them. That was a big base over there. By the time I got there, there were between 8,000 and 9,000 men on the island. There wasn't anybody there that I had ever known. So that was the only reunion that I went to. That was in the early 1990's; 1994 maybe; that was in Nashville. I stayed a member of the association and get the mail and what have you. They published one book on the island and supplements since then which ended up about 1 ½ inches thick, on the base and dry docks and all that went with it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Speaking of mail, when you were in the Philippines could you get your mail with regularity?

Mr. Benzinger

Yes, that was no problem. I suppose it took a couple of weeks to get out there.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were there, did you get paid regularly?

Mr. Benzinger

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you paid in U. S. dollars or Philippine pesos or what?

Mr. Benzinger

We got paid in U. S. but we also got lots of Philippine money but I don't remember what we did now, whether we traded or what? Philippine money was just half of what U.S. was. One peso was 50 cents and a 20 peso note was \$10. There was no problem with exchanging it. Every once in a while we would get a shuttle boat between the island and Guiuan and we went over there several times to the Spanish, I hate to call it a cathedral, but the Catholic church there and a bunch of shops and what have you. It was pretty primitive really. We went up there some for a change of scenery.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've heard people talk about that you could buy cigarettes so cheap at the PX and they would sell them to the locals. Did you all do any of that?

Mr. Benzinger

Yes we got cigarettes for 50 cents a carton. I don't remember if there was much with the locals on that score. I believe there was but I never got into any of that kind of trading.

Mr. Misenhimer

You said that you got polio in 1952; tell me about that.

Mr. Benzinger

That was quite an experience. It was on a Wednesday and I got up feeling not too good. I went to work anyway. I was working for Chevrolet at the time in engineering and about

noon I couldn't take it anymore so I went home. Thursday I was sicker. Friday, my wife was a nurse, and I think about Friday she knew what it was. I could still walk on Friday. We went to the doctor and had a spinal tap which was negative. He didn't know what it was. Saturday morning I couldn't walk; nothing worked. So I had to ride in an ambulance to a hospital, Highland Park General in the Detroit area. They took another spinal tap there and it was positive. They said, "Get this guy out of here. We don't want anything to do with polio." So I had another ride in the meat wagon up to Pontiac, Michigan to a Catholic hospital there, St. Joe's. I was there for 2½ months. I lost everything from below my shoulders, back, abdominals, both legs, nothing wiggled, nothing moved. The first few weeks you are too sick to care about anything. Finally the realization came, "Am I ever going to get off of my back?" It started coming back and by the time I left the hospital after 2 ½ months I could walk a little and put some clothes on. At the door, in the wheelchair, the doctor said, "We both know better now, but I didn't think you would ever walk again." That was the day before Thanksgiving. By the time I got out of the car and struggled into the house and got out of my clothes, I was through for the day. That was a day's work. Finally after five months without a paycheck; I had only been working for Chevrolet for about a month, so I got a week's pay and that was it. If I had been working for them for six weeks they would have carried me on full salary the whole time. Things got pretty lean. I was 26 years old and at that age you don't have a lot in the way of resources to fall back on. My wife went back to work. Our oldest son was about four at the time. She put him with her sister in Wisconsin and she went back to work. Quite frequently she was assigned on the same floor where I was at so at least I knew when I hit the button or turned the light on something was going to happen sooner or later. The

rest of the time it was pretty iffy.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were back in the hospital in Wisconsin then, right?

Mr. Benzinger

No that was in Pontiac.

Mr. Misenhimer

So she was working at the hospital there then.

Mr. Benzinger

Our son stayed with her sister until I recovered.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you recover completely then?

Mr. Benzinger

I think the best was about 50%. You don't realize in normal health how much of your physical ability is there for endurance and athletics and for whatever. On 50% you can live a fairly normal life if your strength is in decent balance. I was lucky there. I didn't have anything that was totally missing. I never walked with a limp or anything physically obvious. I was lucky on that score. You can live a pretty normal life on about 20% of your normal health capability. It limits your activity at that level. You are pretty well limited to how long you can last. You don't carry fertilizer in 100 pound sacks. (laugh) If you watch it and what have you on 20% strength you can live a pretty normal life.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were there in Pontiac, were you in an iron lung or anything like that?

Mr. Benzinger

Close. I found out later on that they only had one lung that was big enough to get me into and another hospital was the one that owned it. It was actually on loan to St. Joe's. It belonged to the big polio hospital in Detroit and they wanted it back. St. Joe's wouldn't let go of it until they were sure I wasn't going to need it. I never did but I understood later on that there was quite a scrap over it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Bob, I've enjoyed this. Is there anything else that you can think of?

Mr. Benzinger

Yes but from there it really degenerates into trivia. I've pretty well covered it.

(end of interview)

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