

**THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR**

**Center for Pacific War Studies**

**Fredericksburg, Texas**

**An Interview with**

**Robert E. Burley  
San Benito, Texas  
December 19, 2006  
Air Force  
Gunnery School  
1025<sup>th</sup> Gunnery Section, Laredo, Texas  
Maintained Machine Guns for Gunnery School**

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is December 19, 2006. I am interviewing Mr. Robert E. Burley by telephone. His address is 1102 N. Bowie Street, San Benito, Texas 78586. His phone number is area code 956-399-2277. 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. The first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the Nimitz Museum. When I do these in person I give it to the man to read and sign but since this is by phone let me read it to you. "Agreement Read." Is that okay with you?

Mr. Burley

Sure.

Mr. Misenhimer

The next thing I would like to get is an alternative contact. We are finding out that sometimes in two or three years when we try to get back in touch with a Veteran he has moved or something. Is there someone that would know where you were that we can get in touch with; a daughter or son or someone?

Mr. Burley

I have a daughter in Corpus Christi and a son in Harlingen. Her name is Barbara Schweers. 48 Great Lakes Drive, Corpus Christi, Texas, 78413. Her phone number is 361-334-3506. My son is Robert Burley, Jr., 2226 S. 25<sup>th</sup> Street, Harlingen, Texas. His phone number is 956-425-1148.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is your birth date?

Mr. Burley

June 9, 1924.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Burley

Piqua, Ohio.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Burley

No sir.

Mr. Misenhimer

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

Mr. Burley

My dad was on WPA. My mother was working in a factory. It was payday to payday.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were your parents able to keep employed during most of the Depression time?

Mr. Burley

Yes. The WPA had the Works Progress deal and he did work around building swimming pools or something like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

There were a lot of things done with that WPA that are still lasting.

Mr. Burley

Is that right?

Mr. Misenhimer

At Lake Corpus Christi there is a shelter house built there that was built by WPA that is still there. The curbs here in Alice, just about two years ago they tore out the corners that said WPA because they had to make them wheelchair accessible but they said WPA up until two years ago. A lot of good things came from them.

Mr. Burley

He was an auto mechanic by trade.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Burley

Troy, Ohio. It's about five miles south of Piqua (my birth place).

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you finish high school?

Mr. Burley

1942.

Mr. Misenhimer

On December 7, 1941 Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Do you recall hearing about that and where you were?

Mr. Burley

I was standing downtown on the corner of the local sweetshop where everybody hung out. That's where I was.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you feel that would affect you?

Mr. Burley

I had no idea.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were 17 at that time, right?

Mr. Burley

Yes. I graduated on the 5<sup>th</sup> of June and my birthday was on the 9<sup>th</sup>. I turned 18.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were born in 1924?

Mr. Burley

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you go into the service?

Mr. Burley

October 26, 1942.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you volunteer or were you drafted?

Mr. Burley

I enlisted.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you went into the Army Air Corps?

Mr. Burley

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

But when you first went in it was in the Army, is that right?

Mr. Burley

No, I enlisted in Dayton in the Army Air Corps.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you choose the Air Corps?

Mr. Burley

Actually I wanted to be an airplane mechanic.

Mr. Misenhimer

You enlisted in Dayton and then where did you go from Dayton?

Mr. Burley

I went to Cincinnati, and then across the river into Newport, Kentucky to Fort Thomas.

That's where I was sworn in, at Fort Thomas, Kentucky.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then where did you take your basic training?

Mr. Burley

Atlantic City, New Jersey.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you travel from Kentucky to Atlantic City?

Mr. Burley

By train.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that train trip?

Mr. Burley

It was alright. I don't think it was a regular passenger route. We went by Baltimore and Washington. We ended up in Atlantic City on the boardwalk.

Mr. Misenhimer

Had you been away from home much before that?

Mr. Burley

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

A new experience, right?

Mr. Burley

Absolutely.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was basic training?

Mr. Burley

It was rough. I waited about three days after I got there and I asked them when I could get a furlough. They said, "Well, wherever you are in six months from now, you might ask somebody that." (laugh) It was alright. We drilled on the boardwalk and down on the beach and also in what they called Haydon Hall which was a big enough building that you were required to salute officers inside the building. We were living in hotels. They had been stripped of anything less than the mail chute I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes at that point in 1942 they were bringing so many people in that they didn't have the facilities for them all everywhere.

Mr. Burley

We drilled on the football field, I remember that.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how long did that basic training last?

Mr. Burley

About three or four weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get any weapons training there?

Mr. Burley

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when you finished that basic training where did you go/

Mr. Burley

I went to Buckley Field in Denver, Colorado.

Mr. Misenhimer

Another train trip?

Mr. Burley

A troop train. We went from Atlantic City to Chicago. We let a bunch of people off that were going to radio school. The shades were drawn the entire length of time that we were on that trip.



Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have a place to sleep or just have a chair car?

Mr. Burley

Just a chair car. They would go down the aisle with a GI can full of hot chocolate. You would stick your canteen in there and help yourself. They had someone standing between each car as guards. You couldn't move around any. That trip took us five days.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was during the summer, is that right?

Mr. Burley

No it was in January.

Mr. Misenhimer

You went in October, right...so January, right.

Mr. Burley

We had on our O.D.'s and we got out there in Denver and it was nice and warm. The next day there was snow on the ground.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was the food on that train going out there?

Mr. Burley

I don't recall really.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you live in when you got to Denver then?

Mr. Burley

We lived in barracks.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do there?

Mr. Burley

I ended up in armament school. I went to that school and 911 was my MOS number. It was an armament school and we went to school until 10:00 at night from 6:00 in the morning.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you study there?

Mr. Burley

About 37 mm guns, 50 caliber and 30 caliber guns.

Mr. Misenhimer

How to repair them and that sort of thing?

Mr. Burley

How to field strip them. We walked in the classrooms and there were tables with no chairs. We stood up the whole time. There was a can in the middle of the thing with spike nails. That's what we used to take the 50 caliber machine gun apart.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did that school last?

Mr. Burley

It seems like it was six weeks that I was there. Going back 60 years (laugh).

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, I understand. Then when you finished that school where did you go?

Mr. Burley

We got shipped out and I really didn't know where we were going. I ended up in Victoria, Texas. I only stayed there a day or two while they tried to figure out where we were to go. Then the next day we took a train to Laredo. We got there at 3:00 in the morning. They only had two trains. One got there at 3:00 in the morning and one got there at 3:00 in the afternoon. So in the afternoon they loaded us on a truck and we started down towards the squadron barracks locations. Then they said, "Half of you get off here and some of you get off at the next stop." I ended up in 1025<sup>th</sup> Training Squadron.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do there then?

Mr. Burley

I was assigned to the gunnery range. The firing ranges were 20 miles out from camp. One range at 11 through 20. We would load out 90 guns in a truck and bring them back in that night. They were 30 caliber and 50 caliber. We had one night of night firing. Two armorers for each range. The gunnery students would come in by the truckload. They would have one order of firing and when they finished they would leave and another group would come in. Our job was to keep the guns operable. We had ten guns with two spares.

Mr. Misenhimer

These were training to be aerial gunners on planes?

Mr. Burley

Yes they were.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were they shooting at?

Mr. Burley

A cloth target on a jeep. It ran on a track 200 yards away and it was 500 yards in the back. Ammunition was painted different colors so it would show which gunner hit it by the color of the bullet.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've heard some of them talk about riding on a pickup with a shotgun and shooting skeet.

Did you all do that?

Mr. Burley

I did; I worked on the traps. They had what they called a phase where the trucks would go around on a road and had nine trap houses along that route. They had towers to throw out several clay targets at a time. So the students could figure out different angles and lead the clay targets. I was on that for a while. Mainly I worked out on the gunnery range.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get to do any shooting at all?

Mr. Burley

Yes. When the classes were finished if we would have three or four cases of ammunition left, the range officer would say, "Get rid of it." We would fire out there at the bank around the target track. We used up a lot of ammunition that way. Then they finally said they didn't want it back in. So we used it up with the range officer present.

Mr. Misenhimer

The guns that they were firing from, were they hooked to a mount of some kind?

Mr. Burley

We had fixed gun stands which could rotate with stops in each direction so they couldn't turn around and fire down the line. They had a couple days of that and then they would fire from truck mounted consolidated tail turrets and trucks with a Sperry ball turret. The trucks were parked during this training.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were these twin 50's or single 50's or what?

Mr. Burley

Twin 50's on the truck mounted turrets. The ground mount was a single mounted gun. The range officer and instructors would have a certain mount. My range was number 10.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you flunk many people out? How did that work?

Mr. Burley

I never got into that phase of it. I have no idea

Mr. Misenhimer

So you don't know whether they passed?

Mr. Burley

No. At that time we could tell by the age of them who was coming in and what was going on with the war. We started getting instructors that were returning from overseas. They were teaching these students to fire a 12 round burst. They would get a 12 round belt from the instructor. The guys came back that had been overseas and they said, "Forget all that. Just pour as much lead out there as you can and hope they fly into it. That's the way you do it in combat."

Mr. Misenhimer

What were some other things that happened there?

Mr. Burley

We had a mess hall out there. We used to play a lot of cribbage. That was about it. Go back to camp after firing was over, then back and forth to the gunnery range.

Mr. Misenhimer

Could you get passes to go into town on the weekend?

Mr. Burley

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was there much to do in Laredo at that point?

Mr. Burley

No. (laugh) Most of the guys just messed around or went to the USO in town.

Mr. Misenhimer

Could you get away to go to San Antonio or any place like that?

Mr. Burley

No I never tried.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you there?

Mr. Burley

A total of 30 months.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you stay there the whole time or did you go somewhere else?

Mr. Burley

No. Somewhere along the line, towards the end of that time, I was shipped to Lowry Field in Colorado to the B-29 gunnery school. Before the war ended I got married. I remember that. This was approximately two years before I was discharged.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your wedding date? What day did you get married?

Mr. Burley

December 25, 1944.

Mr. Misenhimer

You're going to have an anniversary here very shortly.

Mr. Burley

Pretty soon yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then did you go back to Laredo from Denver?

Mr. Burley

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Back to doing the same thing?

Mr. Burley

Yes, the same thing.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the highest rank that you got to?

Mr. Burley

Corporal.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you recall what your pay was in when you first went in?

Mr. Burley

\$46.10 a month.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the highest that you got to as a Corporal?

Mr. Burley

It was in the neighborhood of \$80. When I got married, I got an allotment.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were there at the field in Laredo, any funny incidents that you recall? Did anything funny happen along the way anywhere?

Mr. Burley

Someone was stealing guns.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were they stealing the machine guns? What were they stealing?

Mr. Burley

Carbines, I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer

They didn't keep real tight control of them did they; if a person managed to get away with them, huh?



Mr. Burley

I guess. I just went in and answered their questions.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they ever catch the people or do you know?

Mr. Burley

That I don't know. Out on the range I noticed a place on my arm. The ambulance driver said, "I can fix that." He squeezed it and tried to treat it. Then they put me in the hospital with what they called "lymphangitis", blood poisoning.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you in the hospital?

Mr. Burley

I don't know for sure, about a week I guess. I was on KP in the hospital and I hit it on a shelf and opened it up. There was a core in it, they had to get out. I didn't want that done. They got me in a corner and took it out. I had a red streak going up and down my arm. They said that when that red streak gets to your heart you are in trouble. It went down with the use of hot packs, and it would go back up. Finally I was well.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were some other things that happened there?

Mr. Burley

I had a good buddy from Helena, Montana that I ran around with. He and I would go to town together. One afternoon a friend of mine at the barracks said that there was a new girl at the USO. So I went to the USO and met her and she ultimately became my wife. She was up there working at the sub-depot, in the office. Her sister and brother-in-law

moved to Laredo and she was staying with them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was she a Texas girl?

Mr. Burley

Yes. She was born in Lozano between San Benito and Rio Hondo.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you were from Ohio. Were most of the people there from the North or where were the people from?

Mr. Burley

They were from Pennsylvania, Texas and most of them from the East, Rhode Island, Connecticut and the South.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get out of the service with any souvenirs of any kind?

Mr. Burley

No, I didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer

You mentioned the USO. Did you ever see any USO shows?

Mr. Burley

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

In that gunnery practice there was any of it actually flying in planes? Or was all of it on the ground?

Mr. Burley

I worked on the flight line one day. They had AT-6's with tow targets and they would shoot plastic bullets. I worked there one day, that's all I did. I cleaned up the planes after those students got air sick. They put me on the ground range. I forgot to mention the B.B. machine gun. They had targets in the shape of airplanes about 25 yards I think it was. They would go up and down and moving around and the students would shoot at them. I got on another deal where they had targets of different colors on the track and fired 22's at that. This was all in camp.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were some other things that happened?

Mr. Burley

Nothing of any importance.

Mr. Misenhimer

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

Mr. Burley

They were alright. We had a Non-com, a Staff Sergeant; he was in charge of the range.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have a lot of inspections?

Mr. Burley

Yes. We had the weekly barracks inspections of our footlockers and of our bunk areas.

There were 34 of us in a barracks.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Burley

When I was stationed in Biloxi, Mississippi, my wife worked in the Red Cross Office.

We were there for six months, maybe over six months.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do in Biloxi?

Mr. Burley

That was an emergency rescue unit. We performed routine maintenance on armament assigned to the unit..

Mr. Misenhimer

The same gun?

Mr. Burley

Yes, machine guns and side-arms.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get to fly in any planes anytime?

Mr. Burley

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you stationed anywhere else besides Denver and Biloxi and Laredo?

Mr. Burley

I was discharged at Maxwell Field in Alabama.

Mr. Misenhimer

What date were you discharged?

Mr. Burley

January 29, 1946.

Mr. Misenhimer

You went there from Keesler Field?

Mr. Burley

Yes I was on the last shipping order out of Laredo to a separation center. Then when I left the separation center I was one of the last troops to go to Maxwell Field in Alabama.

Mr. Misenhimer

On April 12, 1945 President Roosevelt died, you all heard about that I'm sure.

Mr. Burley

Yes sir.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any reaction to it?

Mr. Burley

We had just got married and we lived in one room of a house in Laredo. Our landlord told us. We were impressed that the old lady got the word. She sat down and cried. Roosevelt was the only President I knew.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's right. You were born in 1924 so you were only 8 years old when he was first elected.

Mr. Burley

He was the only one.

Mr. Misenhimer

On May 8, 1945 Germany surrendered. Any celebration then for VE Day?

Mr. Burley

I was there on the post at Laredo. I don't remember anything special.

Mr. Misenhimer

Of course on VJ Day you were in Biloxi you said.

Mr. Burley

Yes. We went downtown and stood on the street corner and watched it all; people yelling, car horns and the like.

Mr. Misenhimer

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

Mr. Burley

I couldn't get my old job back. When I left Troy I was working for the Waco Aircraft Company in the tool designing department. When I came back they had fulfilled their government contract and closed down, so my job wasn't there. I finally wound up in a furniture factory loading box cars with furniture; heavy work. I wasn't made for that. I then went to work at Aeronica Aircraft company in Vandalia, Ohio on the assembly line. I worked there for three months and then packed up and came to San Benito and have been here ever since. In 1947.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you use your GI Bill for anything?

Mr. Burley

No sir. I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do so I didn't take advantage of it. I still

have some GI insurance.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's a good deal too, because you get a dividend every year, right?

Mr. Burley

Yes. It just about pays the premium.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you had any reunions?

Mr. Burley

No. I met up a few times with a couple of guys that were in Laredo, that's all.

Mr. Misenhimer

There in Laredo did you have medics assigned to you in case anybody got hurt or anything? Were there medics out there with you on the field/

Mr. Burley

Yes. We had an ambulance and a driver out there on the gunnery range.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was there anytime that you felt frightened?

Mr. Burley

The first trip to Mexico I guess. I didn't like that a bit but I was going along with my buddy shopping.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get any ribbons or medals?

Mr. Burley

(laugh) I always joke that I got a Good Conduct Ribbon with six cactus clusters. I got

Good Conduct and American Theater.

Mr. Misenhimer

Everybody's job was important. They had to have somebody to train those people to be gunners.

Mr. Burley

I had my share of KP. I even got that in Fort Thomas. I was on KP when they came to say we're shipping out.

Mr. Misenhimer

There in Laredo when you were out on the range, what clothing did you wear?

Mr. Burley

Just our regular fatigues.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you assigned a steel helmet and that sort of stuff?

Mr. Burley

Yes, helmet, gas mask and mess kit.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else that you can think of?

Mr. Burley

No not offhand. You have a good bunch of questions.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else that you've thought of?

Mr. Burley

No. But it's turned the clock back, I'll tell you that.



Mr. Misenhimer

Thank you again, I appreciate it. Thank you again for your service to our country.

*(end of interview)*

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