

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Nimitz Education and Research Center
Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview with

Zeno P. "Buddy" King
Teague, Texas
June 1st, 2012
Band leader, 83rd Infantry Division
331st Infantry Regiment
Omaha Beach 6/21/44

Mr. Misenhimer::

My name is Richard Misenhimer, today is June 1st, 2012. I am interviewing Mr. Zeno P. “Buddy” King by telephone. His phone number is 913-641-0385. His address is 1900 W. Second Avenue, Corsicana, Texas 75110. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Nimitz Education and Research Center, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Buddy, 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. King:

You’re welcome.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the museum and make sure this is okay with you.

“Agreement Read.”

Is that okay with you?

Mr. King:

It sounds okay, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The next thing I’d like to do is get an alternative contact. We find out that sometimes several years down the road we try to get back in contact with a veteran he’s moved. Do you have a son or a daughter or someone we could contact, if we needed to, to get you?

Mr. King:

I have two sons and the closest one here is my son Lindsay King. His address is 1625 Glenbrook, Corsciana, Texas 75110.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you have a phone number?

Mr. King:

His phone number is 903-654-0007. He is in business there, he's a real estate broker with the name King Realty Company. That's the name of the company.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What is your birth date?

Mr. King:

January 16, 1919.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you born?

Mr. King:

Mexia.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. King:

I had a sister. She was two years older than I and died about thirty years ago.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was she involved in any kind of war work during World War II?

Mr. King:

No sir. Her husband was an oil producer and was one of the executives with Sun Oil Company and that's where she worked.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. King:

I think it had a very serious effect. I was 13 in 1932 and 20 in 1939. All my teen years were during the Depression. My dad was in business for himself. He was an automobile dealer – the first Chevrolet dealer in Mexia. He sold that business in 1929 and then went broke in 1930 and went into the grocery business. Then sold that grocery store in 1935 or 6 to the A&P Grocery Company who were coming into Texas at that time. They bought a lot of grocery stores. He went into the feed and seed business and had a feed store there for many, many years in Mexia. He was a retail merchant in Mexia, Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you live in the country or in town?

Mr. King:

We lived in town. I was in born in the house – 100 N. Ross Avenue, Mexia - it's still there but it doesn't look the same.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have a garden?

Mr. King:

Yes, we did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How about chickens?

Mr. King:

Lots of chickens behind the house and four cows.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Milk cows or what kind?

Mr. King:

Milk cows, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you had food to eat then.

Mr. King:

We had plenty of food.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. King:

I went to high school in Mexia, Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What year did you finish there?

Mr. King:

I didn't finish there. I left my senior year and went to the Allen Academy, a military school in Bryan, Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What year would that have been?

Mr. King:

I took my last year of high school and my first year of college at the same time there at Allen. It was a prep school.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What year would that have been?

Mr. King:

1936.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that school. Tell me about that.

Mr. King:

It was a small school for boys, a military school, and it was one of the, I believe, twenty-one honor rated schools in the country by the War Department back in those days. Each year, they could send two of their honor graduates to the military academy without having to go through the political part of it. The person who qualified for it only had to pass the physical and they would come back for a year and finish high school what they called the West Point School and could go into the military academy. I went down there, and my roommate and I both went down there and took the test qualifying for the academy. I did and flunked out on the physical exam. In 1936. I chose the Naval Academy, but I flunked out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But you didn't make it.

Mr. King:

I passed the physical exam, I think, but then they gave me the eye chart, and 30 seconds later I was out of there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what did you do?

Mr. King:

Then I stayed at home and worked for two years with my dad until I went to SMU in 193. I had a music scholarship at SMU in Dallas.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about that.

Mr. King:

Well, I wrote a letter to SMU in 1938 in the summer asking if scholarships were available for playing in the band and a couple of weeks later, a young man drove up in a brand new Ford car to my dad's feed store where I was working and introduced himself as Frank Malone who was the director of the SMU Band and he came to Mexia, which was 90 miles from Dallas, to hear me play. So we went out

to the house and my mother served him a glass of tea while I got my horn out and warmed up. I can tell you that a man that you have heard of, probably, Tommy Dorsey was my hero. I wanted to play trombone as good as Tommy Dorsey did and nobody else did really in the world but I tried it. When we sat down and Malone asked me if I was ready to play, I said, "Yes." He said, "Can you play the Tommy Dorsey theme song." I said, "I can play in B flat or I can play it in B." He said, "Play it in B flat." I played it for him from beginning to end and then when we finished that he said, "Now, let's do it in B." So I played it again, front to back, in the higher key and he said, "I think I've heard all I need." A week later, I got a letter from SMU saying I'd been granted a full scholarship to play in the band. The scholarship covered all tuition. It did not cover books, lab fees or your living expenses. A week after that, I got a letter from Malone. _____ agreed to furnish me room and board for thirty dollars a month, three meals a day two blocks from campus, and they had a son Guy McNatt, Junior who was in the band. Another week or so I got another letter from him saying that the bandleader, who had a band in one of the nightclubs in north Dallas played there on Saturday night had agreed to give me a job playing every Saturday night in his band for seven dollars in 1938. That was enough to make my room and board. That was _____.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What instrument did you play?

Mr. King:

Trombone.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about going to SMU.

Mr. King:

I went there, I got another letter from Mr. Malone saying that band tryouts for chair positions would be held on a date I don't remember, early September, and they would be in the McFarlin Auditorium, which was the big auditorium on campus – seated three thousand people, at two o'clock in the

afternoon. I got a bus to Dallas and rode a streetcar to the end of the line, which was at SMU. When you got to the end of the line – Holland Streetcar – you were at SMU. I got off the street car and I asked somebody where McFarlin was and he said, “That building right in front of you.” I went in there and walked down this long aisle toward the stage and I noticed a group of young fellows on the other side of the stage there, just as I stepped on stage one of them broke off and stuck his hand out and he said, “My name is Earl Flath, what’s yours?” I can tell you that Earl Flath was the first person I met in Dallas and he and his wife Jean, who met at SMU, became two of the dearest friends my wife and I had in all of our lives. He and his family, he had a younger brother, his name was Joe, and Joe Flath was Joseph Frank Andrew Flath, he was the first person I ever met, that I know of, that had three given names and their father was Dean Earl Flath, Senior, the dean of the engineering school at SMU. They were just the kind of people the world needed more of, that’s all I can say about them. That was the great good fortune I had.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How do you spell their last name?

R:

Flath. They’re all gone now.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did that tryout for the chair go?

Mr. King:

I wound up on first chair. That’s where I spent my years with the SMU band.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you graduate from SMU?

Mr. King:

I would have. I need to tell you a little something else. A couple of months after that, the seven dollars a week I was making _____ and the name Durwood Cline might possibly

mean something to you. Durwood Cline was one of the leading dance bands in Texas back during those days. He was from Dallas. He was a contractor. He had frequently 2 and 3 bands working at a time and his band would be Durwood Cline and His Orchestra and the band, if he was working somewhere, would be “The Durwood Cline Orchestra.” After a couple of months, I went down – he also had a music store _____ right in the middle of _____ Dallas. I went there one week to meet him and I asked him if I could audition for his orchestra. He said, “We don’t do auditions. If you want me to hear you play, come out and sit in with the band,” and he told me they were going to be at a country club there in Dallas that Friday night. He said, “I’ll hear you play better on the stand.” I went out there that Friday night, rode the streetcar way out there. I played two or three sets with them and packed up my horn and he said, “Come by the store next week and we can talk.” I went by the store next week and he said, “You play very well, I can use you. Are you a member of the musician’s union?” I told him, “No, I’m not. It cost fifty dollars to get into the union and I don’t have it.” He said, “Well, I’ll take care of that. You pay me back two dollars a job.” He said, “Do you have a tuxedo? That’s our uniform.” I said, “No, but I’ve already priced one and I can buy a tux for \$37.50 with a shirt and tie and shoes, the whole thing for \$37.50 at _____
_____ “ pay it out two dollars a week. I can’t begin to tell you how many nights I spent on the band stand _____ he just was maybe the most important person in my life. Two nights almost every week, sometimes more. Around Christmas we’d be working every night, and some time in 1940, I think it might have been, he called me one day and he said, “I want to introduce you to the name Carol Lofner.” Carol Lofner was a boy who grew up in Illinois and he and Phil Harris, have you heard of him?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh yes, very much

Mr. King:

They were good friends, grew up together in Illinois and moved to California when they grew up, organized the Lofner-Harris Band. Then they separated, and both had bands of their own. Phil went his way and became a fine entertainer, of course. Carol went his way and had the Carol Lofner band. He and his wife, and I'd never heard of him at this time, had a divorce and he moved to Dallas. He and _____ had been friends for years. _____ Carol had a tenor band and that may not mean anything to you, but that is a band with nothing but tenor saxophones in it. I went down to get acquainted with Carol Lofner _____ he had _____ set up, had the music set out and when I walked in there I recognized one of the fellows named Brown, he was a good tenor man. To make a long story short, I wound up playing with the Carol Lofner Band _____ both the next year or so before World War II. Carol became one of the greatest friends I ever had. He was a fellow who just had _____ all his adult life to give himself a new Buick for Christmas as a present. That was early December every year. The one he gave himself last year would have 50,000 miles thereabout, by now. That's about how much he drove every year. That's the reason he gave himself a new one. Shortly after I joined the band with Lofner, he started calling on me to share the driving with him. That's what I did for the rest of my time with him. My wife and I met in Mexia High School when she was 13 years old, I was 15. From the minute I met that girl I never looked anywhere else. Not then, not since then. We married in the summer of 1939. I was 20 and she was 18 and we both went to SMU on scholarships. She was on a scholarship to work and do stenographic work in the business office. There was no more recognizable people around university administration anywhere than Anita King. She was there every day after class and worked there in the business office. They would loan her out to some of the deans of the school, so she worked for all of the deans up there at various times. Long in December of 1941, I played a dance on a Saturday night like I did every Saturday night. I went back to our apartment and got in there at two or three o'clock in the morning and went to sleep and woke up at nine o'clock and went in the

kitchen and she had the coffee on, of course, and we had a little old radio on the kitchen table and I turned it on and it was Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That was December 7, '41.

Mr. King:

That's December the 7th, 1941. In sixty days, I was in the Army. I did not finish at SMU. I lacked a year. Then I went in the service. I went in the service at Foster Field in Victoria, Texas.

Immediately, when they finish recruit drill which is three or four weeks then I went in to the band. I played in the post band at Foster Field until summer, this was February and March that I started, and in the summer there was announcement on our bulletin board that in some time in July, the dates of which I forget, exams would be given for admission to Army Music School for training as an Army bandleader. I signed up for those tests and went to Randolph Field and a whole room full of people. We took these tests in three days. In July, later in July, I got orders transferring me to Army Music School at Fort Myer, Virginia, which is Washington, D.C, to become an Army bandleader. That's what I did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Let me go back and ask you a few questions. What date did you actually go in to the service?

Mr. King:

February the 5th, 1942.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you volunteer or were you drafted?

Mr. King:

I would have been drafted, but I volunteered. I don't know why they didn't draft me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you in the Army or in the Air Corps?

Mr. King:

That was the U.S. Army Air Corps, at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you were in the Army Air Corps.

Mr. King:

In the Army Air Corps. They changed it to the Air Force some time several years later. It was after the war, I think. I was in the Air Corps for six months. Then I was transferred to Washington to the Army Music School, which was at Fort Myer, Virginia, which is the home base of the United States Army Band. The US Army Band was our last _____
_____ when we got there, I didn't know how many, there were 75 in the class. When we walked in there and got everybody seated, the Colonel who was in command came out and said that, "you people are the highest grade 75 _____ took that exam world wide." We were there from everywhere. We were told not to expect much sightseeing around Washington - in the three months that this course would last, we were going to be given a four-year college course. And said, "You'll be busy." Boy, they weren't kidding about that. After - I believe it was four weeks - a Sergeant came out there in the classroom where there were, like I said, 75 of us, and read out 25 names including mine and said, "Report immediately to me in the Commandant's Office." We reported in there, the 25 of us, and he said, "The Army needs bandleaders and they need them now and we're graduating you 25 as of tomorrow." And said, "You'll be going taking the test and then down to someplace to pick out your officer's uniforms and you'll be appointed Warrant Officer Junior Grade Bandleaders tomorrow morning. Tomorrow afternoon you begin getting your assignments as to where you will go." One of the other members of that 25 was a fellow by the name of Robert W. Smith. Bob Smith and I were the two who were assigned to the 83rd Infantry Division. Which was in formation at Camp Atterbury, Indiana. We were given two weeks' leave in route to get there and he was commander of the 330th Infantry Band and I was commander of the 83rd Division

Artillery Band. There were two bands in the division. The division was only cadre at that time. It was about 750 officers and non-comms. Beginning the first of November, or a little before I guess, they started bringing just troop train loads, just one train after another, through there for assignment to fill the division up training_____ which was about 25. From those people, we were able to find fine musicians. They went through two huge assignment centers. The first list in that thing, the first question that was asked of each recruit when they got in there was, "Do you play a musical instrument?" If he said, "Yes," he went that-a-way. If he said, "No," he went the other way. The ones that went that-a-way went to another desk and the next fellow asked him, "What instrument do you play?" If he said, "Jews harp or guitar or something like that," one way; if he said, "clarinet player or base horn," whatever, a band instrument, he went a different direction. Literally, in a week's time, I had a 35-piece band. Six months after that we were combined in to one band and made into a division band and assigned to division headquarters. Our original bands were 28-piece bands with one bandleader. We now had a 56-piece band and 2 bandleaders, and it greatly enhanced the ability to perform, of course. We continued for the rest of the time we were in the service. Frequently we would split up as two bands, we could be in two places at the same time playing for parades. I think our record was seven in one day. I think one day I thought we were going to play eight but we ran out of daylight. Seven was our record. Six was a lot of times. Two was just nothing to that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now you were a Warrant Officer, right?

Mr. King:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What does the bandleader do?

Mr. King:

Shortly after we were combined, the Colonel, who was the Personnel Officer, G-1 in the division, called us to his office and he said, "I have got to appoint of you one of fellows as commanding officer of this band." He said, "Which one of you was appointed Warrant Officer Junior Grade first?" We just said, "Neither one. We were appointed both at the same time, the same date, on the same order." He said, "Well, you're both Chief Warrant Officers now. When did that happen?" Again, from the division headquarters on the same orders. He just said, "We've got to go alphabetically," the Colonel said, "Your name's King and your name's Smith. K comes before S." He said, "King you're it." That's how I was chosen to be the commander of the band. It could have been the other guy just as easy. Anyway, I couldn't say enough about Bob Smith. He is one of the greatest fellows I ever knew. One of the finest musicians I've ever known. We're great friends, all our lives. He died in 2005. He was 87. He and his wife died within three months of each other. He was a professor at Lebanon Valley College in Pennsylvania and began as a professor, ten years later was promoted to dean of the school, and served as dean until he retired. Lived in Hershey, Pennsylvania and while at Hershey he was music minister of the First United Methodist Church there. He had a 40-plus voice choir and he served there for fifty-one years as music minister of that church. I have a tape of his choir singing "Majesty," a beautiful hymn with him accompanying on the organ. It's a very prized possession that I have. We've had great musicians within the band. That's what makes a great band.

Mr. Misenhimer:

As bandleader did you play an instrument?

Mr. King:

I played an instrument but not in this band, of course.

Mr. Misenhimer:

In the band you didn't play an instrument.

Mr. King:

My job there was to direct the band. We played radio programs and concerts and went on tours and accompanied the people coming through, entertainers and so forth, and parades how many of those, we discussed it after the war, but neither one of us kept account of the parades we played for, the division, had lots of reviews and parades and the bond got loaned out every once in a while. A separate battalion or regiment came through, or the engineers. _____
_____ (laughing).

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were playing for these parades, did you ever play a song called the “Colonel’s Bogie”?

Mr. King:

Yes we played that many times. “Colonel’s Bogie March” if I remember right. An outfit, say the infantry, you know 3,000 soldiers in an infantry regiment, and they have a photographer out there to take pictures of these guys, somebody would have his rifle out of line a little bit, they would put it on the bulletin board. Not being lined up like it’s supposed to be. We were told, in the very beginning, that we were going to be given the same thing every other soldier was to be given, we were armed – every man in the band got a rifle. Even I carried side arms. We were told we were going to be ready for whatever happened. We couldn’t take the same courses because we didn’t have time, but we took the same thing in lesser amounts. We had the machine gun course, we had the rifle range, we had the pistol range. I fired a good score with the rifle. I couldn’t hit the side of a barn with the pistol. We really got in to it and, of course, overseas, we were at Camp Atterbury, Indiana for the first six or seven months and then on maneuvers in Tennessee in the summer of 1943. We were on the offense there for half the time and defense the other half of the time. Learning how to fight a war there and then went back to camp Breckenridge, Kentucky. That’s where troops went for overseas movement. We got to Breckenridge in September, which was just a year after the division was formed, and we were assigned quarters in the division headquarters area next to the MPs. The MPs were next door to the band barracks at Breckenridge and next door to them was the _____. Our 1st

Sergeant there, who was a career Army soldier, an Army band player of 23 years (name) _____, his job there was to pave the way, _____ us for the MP _____ the band had different hours. We'd be out somewhere 100 miles away playing a concert somewhere and come back in during the night when everybody else was asleep. So we had a little different hours than most people and a good relationship with the MPs right next door was a good idea for us. Anyway, we'd been there at Breckenridge for not very much more than a month and orders came down from the division, it was blanket order for everybody, each unit in the division was assigned one officer and one non-commissioned officer to go to mines, booby-traps, and demolition school – one officer and one non-commissioned officer, to go to poison gas school. Smith went to poison gas and I went to mines and demolition. My non-commissioned officer was a drum major. Staff Sergeant _____ from Wisconsin. It was the classiest drum major in the Army. I'm judging that but I never saw another Army band while I was in the Army. I never heard one unbelievable. I think the other Army band leaders would probably say the same thing. They never heard a different band, they just heard their own. Anyhow, he and I went to that school and passed it and were detached from the band for four weeks. We were taught mines and explosives and demolitions, it's kind of funny in a way. Twenty years after the war, my wife and I went on a tear trying to find all these people – there were a 100 names that had gone through our roster - and I finally found a Justin _____ in Frankville, Wisconsin. One Saturday afternoon I called up there and his wife answered the phone and she said – I told her who I was – and she said, "He's out in the backyard doing something. I'll go get him." He came in and he didn't say, "Hello," "How are you," "Where've you been," or what. He said, "Hey, let's go blow up something." (laughing) I just said, "Boy, we could still do it, couldn't we?" It was an interesting experience. When we left England, we were in England for seven or eight weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you go to England?

Mr. King:

We went there in the end of March of '44. Camp Breckenridge in September of '43 in preparation for overseas movement and during that time we had the advanced classes, and that's where we had the school on explosives and again played parades _____. They had two big _____ in _____ every Saturday night.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you leave from to go overseas?

Mr. King:

We left from New York.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you recall what ship you were on?

Mr. King:

We went out all by ourselves, half the division, on the *HMS Samaria*, a big British luxury liner before the war. We had 8,000 men on that ship. I thought we were going out by ourselves. Went all day and the next morning we looked up and got out and we were right in the middle of the biggest convoy of the war at that time. Two hundred and some-odd ships in that convoy. The other half of the division was on the *USS George Washington*, you've probably heard the name. Smith had half of the band on the *Washington* and I had half of the band on the *Samaria*. It was fourteen days going across and we landed at Liverpool. We got in to Liverpool at just about straight up midnight and got on a train in the dark and went down in the dark somewhere and unloaded in the dark, no lights anywhere, and they put us in a big Quonset hut out there at two or three o'clock in the morning. It was daylight the next day before we could see anything. We spent the next, I think it was six or seven weeks, maybe eight weeks, in England. Then we packed up our instruments, left them in England and

loaded on a ship to go to France and we went on, as usual, four big truckloads of us down to South Hampton and got on the boat, went across the English Channel. We were out on a problem one morning and somebody just looked up about daylight and said, "My lord, look at all the airplanes." Just hundreds of them flying over us. That was D-Day and we hadn't seen those airplanes fifteen or twenty minutes before orders came back to go back to camp. That's when we found out that the invasion started. Of course, we used _____ lock and load pack up all our instruments, and I can't tell you what day it was, I think our day schedule was D+10, but were out in the Channel and the weather was awful and they didn't let us off the boat and I think it was D+15 when we actually got off the boat, on the landing craft, and landed on the beach. Omaha Beach looked like the world's biggest scrap iron pile. They had paths bulldozed through it and the beachmaster took us through the path and the MPs picked us up off the beach and took us back. Our mission then, in combat, was security for the division headquarters. They sent the word were division headquarters was setting up and we set up our perimeter guard stations there. That was about it. July the 4th, if you've been talking to other people in the division, July the 4th was the first day of combat. I guess they told you that we took over the position of the 101st Airborne there. Did you know that?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Go ahead. No, I didn't know that.

Mr. King:

The 101st had landed the night before and worked their way back to the defend _____ the town just off the beach. We took over their position and relieved them so they could go back to England for replacement and reoutfitting and whatever. Our first attack was July the 4th 1944 in Normandy, in and around _____. On July the 8th, I received orders to send 32 men to carry stretchers up to the 1st Battalion of the 329th. We had no training or whatever in that. They said the trucks would be there by the time I got the men ready. Stack their arms, fold the tents,

select the first 32 I had. About the time we got a load ready, a truck came in, two trucks, and we put them on there and Al Seguin, who was our 1st Sergeant, I hate to tell you this because I may break up, but we were just getting ready to leave and I had told Smith, “You stay here with these people and I’m going with these 32 people up to the 329th.” Seguin walks up and he says, “What’s going on here?” I don’t know where he’d been – doing something. I just said – I called him Pappy and he called me Chief – I said, “Pappy, stay here with Smith, he’ll need all the help he can get. He needs you.” He said, “Chief, I’ve been everywhere you’ve been for two years. I’m going now.” I just said, “Pappy, get your butt on this truck so we can go.” So 34 of us went up. We’d been there about maybe an hour, we were stretcher bearers, they determined that they’d put one medic on a stretcher and three band members. The terrain was terrible, there were shell holes, dead animals, and the hedgerows were all over everywhere. The casualties were heavy, you knew that already. We’d been there, I guess, an hour when orders came down to send 15 men of these men to the 331st Regiment, we were at the 329th. Seguin said, “I’ll take them,” and he counted off the men and there was a Lieutenant coming by with a group, I don’t know how many were in it, 25 – 35, whatever, replacements going to the 331st. Seguin asked him, said, “Aren’t you going to the 331st?” He said, “Yeah.” He said, “Can I go with you? I don’t want to wait.” He said, “Lieutenant have you been there?” And the Lieutenant told him, “I can take you.” So they left together and about an hour or so later I got word that the whole detachment had taken a wrong turn somewhere and turned right into the face of a German tank and machine gun crew and the Lieutenant had surrendered the men. That was the last I ever saw of Seguin and those fifteen men. They were taken prisoner. I can tell you that that was the worst day of my life. I didn’t know, if the Germans didn’t kill him whether we would, we were firing everything we had over that area. Anyway, they all finally made it through and got back home years later. That was a tough day. We went in the Normandy thing with 56 men and came out with 35. That’s our story of Normandy. We just did what we were told to do. Carrying stretchers and casualties was tough work. That’s about all I can tell you. One day we were out there

and it looked like every airplane in the world came right over our heads. They did what they called carpet bombing about a mile wide area and I think it was ten miles deep. That's when the breakthrough came and I think the 27th of July, but I wouldn't guarantee that date, the 25th, maybe, 26th, 27th is when – three or four weeks since we'd gone up there – and the German defenses just collapsed. Boy we went through there and the next thing I knew, we were loaded on trucks headed south and we went through the action of St. _____, have you heard of that?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, go ahead and tell about it, though.

Mr. King:

We were assigned to set up and administer a prisoner of war camp there, wire enclosure. The engineers went through the little town of Dinan, south of Dinard, which is right in just the edge of Saint-Malo, on the coast. We were told to expect 1200 prisoners, put the wire up, we had the perimeters all the way. We had machine guns facing one corner of it. They thought it was going to be just a one combat team operation for the division, as far as I know, and at this point we were members of the 3rd Army, which we were when we went in. This is General Patton's army. In a matter of days, we were just covered up. 1200 prisoners? We had 3000 inside of our wire and there wasn't hardly room to sit down in there. I was screaming my head off trying to get them to move them somewhere else before we had more coming. By that time, most of the division was committed at Saint-Malo _____ just off the coast and they had this wild German colonel up there and you may have heard of him before. What was his name? Von _____ . He said, "German soldiers don't surrender and I won't either." But he did later on. They got a point where they could get on the coast with these Howitzers and barrel tube fight in the back doors of these places on the island out there and their guns were aimed out towards the ocean. They fired a few rounds in those back doors and the flag came up. The sum total of this thing is: we were at 13,600 prisoners through our 1200 man prison. We'd been there I don't know

how many days, 2,3,4, whatever, and a Jeep drove up with a three-star flag flying on it. General Patton. He jumped out and said, "What can I do?" Of course, I saluted and reported to him. I just said, "General, we've got more people than we can handle here and we've got more coming." I said, "I can't get any transportation." Boy, in thirty minutes the trucks started in. He didn't lose any time with that. We were putting 80-90 people on a truck. They weren't trying to sit down, just stacking them on there. We had 3000 people to get rid of. Two days later, we had that many more in there and he came by again. I saw him twice there at our POW post. Both times, boy the trucks showed up. They didn't lose any time with that. Where they took all those people I don't know. The band had total charge of that prisoner of war enclosure down there except for the mess. They sent a mess detachment from somewhere and they sent us an interrogation group, a Captain and two or three enlisted people, all of whom spoke German and did the interrogations. From there, we went down south along the Loire River and just on guard duty. Have you heard about the 20,000 the division? The 20,000 surrender?

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, go ahead.

Mr. King:

Twenty thousand, the whole army, was surrendering to the 83rd division coming up from the south. This thing was engineered by one of our recon troops. Now we were not part of that. We were just witnesses to it. They brought all those 20,000 German soldiers in there and stacked their arms and marched them off to wherever they sent them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was this General's name?

Mr. King:

I think the General's name was Elster. He was the commander of a German Division and he was surrounded and didn't have a chance. They were coming up from the south, east, north of him going

toward Paris at the time. From that we _____ on 40+8 cars, box cars, all the way up to Luxembourg, got in in early September and were assigned quarters in a school in Luxembourg and we had picked up two or three men. I don't think we were up to forty by now but were close to thirty-five/forty personnel in the band and assigned quarters in a school building in Luxembourg and that was the first night we spent under a roof since we had been in France, in Luxembourg. And we had been in Luxembourg about a week, maybe, and I got word that our instruments were on the shore in _____, a little bitty town back in Normandy. They had a huge supply depot there and they had brought our instruments over to us and I checked out three trucks and took them to _____ and back and brought our instruments up there and I have some pretty exciting pictures of these guys unloading these instruments in Normandy. Kids looking on and civilians there, too. We had a rehearsal, put some new pads and springs on the reed instruments that had been sitting out in that old field for a month (laughing), not a very good way to store instruments. Anyway, we thought we had enough prepared stuff to last ten years but we used most all of it right there. We got back in the music business then. Then we were sent up north, the division, our next station, band was at Aachen, Germany, a good-sized town. We were at Aachen when the Battle of the Bulge began. You've heard about that, I'm sure.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about it, though.

Mr. Misenhimer:

From the others in the 83rd, as well, I hope. Anyway, on Christmas Eve evening, we and everybody else we heard about were loaded onto amphibian trucks and the whole road system, I believe, was loaded up and went down and made contact with the German army. I think our first contact was a little place Huy, but I'm not sure about that at all. We were in the Battle of the Bulge for the rest of the time. In late January when the line was reestablished, we were taken out of the line and sent back to Belgium for a rest and replacement. We actually played a dance. A medical battalion thought they

needed a rest and they rented a place or got it some way and had all the nurses and anybody else they could find and we played a dance. _____ couldn't believe that's what we did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do during the Battle of the Bulge?

Mr. King:

We were on guard the same way out in the open, we lost two or three more of our people. One of our men, one of our trombone players, got a frozen foot there and spent the rest of his life with an amputated foot and lived in Palo Alto, California. Whenever we were off of some special assignment, like that prisoner of war camp, we went back to our basic duties, which was security for division headquarters.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you weren't actually in combat then.

Mr. King:

No, no, we were rear echelon soldiers. Anyway, shortly after that, in, I guess, about the first of March, we crossed the Rhine River and went on this last battle. Have you read that book *The Last Battle*?

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, I haven't read that, no.

Mr. King:

You'll get it in your library, I bet.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh yes. I've heard of it but I haven't read it.

Mr. King:

You'll see many references to the 83rd. I have it and I've given a copy to each of my sons. Is in the index and various references where the division fought.

Mr. Misenhimer:

It's called *The Last Battle*?

Mr. King:

The Last Battle by Cornelius Ryan. He's the same author that wrote that *Longest Day*. They made a movie out of that. I think, someone told me, that they tried to make a movie out of this *Last Battle* but _____ . Anyway, our duty on that thing was to guard captured assets. You know, there was just one little town after another and each town had a Burgermeister. As they'd go in these towns they'd blow a lot of them up and whoever was in the lead company, whichever regiment it was, he'd just stick a gun in the Burgermeister's side and say, "Get all the weapons in town and anything else of value and pile it in your office." Our duty was to leave a detachment and guard this stuff, secure it. We made these detachments, they were six-person, and of course we ran out of people quick, started borrowing from anywhere and everywhere. By the time we got to the Elbe River, we had 325 people on our main roster, just temporary. I left these groups of six all up and down 100 miles or more in these little towns. I can't give you the dates of this, but you know the 83rd Division was the first and the only one to cross the Elbe River and establish a bridgehead. You knew that, I guess, if you talked to Clifton Wooldridge. We were in race with the 2nd Armored Division to see who could get to the Elbe first. They got there first and got across it some way and got their nose bloodied there and the 83rd went across down south of them and held on and sent the 329th and the 331st, we had two regiments across the river, and the 2nd Armored came and rode across the river on our bridge. So, anyway, our division headquarters at that point was at Barby right on the Elbe. Roosevelt had died and Harry Truman had become President and they put a sign up there on the bridge and called it the "Truman Bridge." Have you seen a picture of that sign?

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, I haven't.

Mr. King:

I have it. It's a picture of me standing by it. It's mentioned also in this book. I have the picture (laughing). One afternoon, we got orders – we were going to be in Berlin in three days no question about that. We were in the 9th Army by this time, and got orders to hold there, go no further and let the Russians take Berlin and found out later that been decided earlier and that General Eisenhower had made the decision. Pointless to take Berlin and lose a bunch of people and turn around and give it up. I think it was a good decision, but anyway, we didn't go. We did go beyond the little town of Zerst, and I hope you'll look this up on a map, Zerst, we were to meet the Russians there. We took the band over there and the instruments and everything, we were going to play a parade or whatever they wanted for the Russians and it took two or three _____ of people maybe more, several truckload, and General _____ went over. He was going to meet the Russians. We waited there for an hour or more and nobody showed up, and it was raining, so we gave it up and came back. Somebody else met the Russians down south of us. Anyway, Zerst was about forty-miles from Berlin. If anybody got closer to Berlin than I did, they got all the way. (laughing) Then we went down south after the war ended and occupation began. The band was stationed at the little town of _____ on the Danube River. Division Headquarters was at _____ . The Danube, if you look at the map, you know _____ was a good-sized town there and _____ other towns and go clear on down you get to Budapest. Of course we never got out of Germany, but that's where we were. We got _____ the engineers built us a bandstand at _____ and we started playing programs there in the evening and the USO people came through then, come through there. We got very, very busy there and that's where we were after the war on occupation duty. Smith had a lot of points and the division headquarters, I was told, _____ board on me and said, "You can't go home yet." So Smith was the first one to come home and I stayed there through the summer until September. I transferred to the engineer battalion company. We had two new

bandleaders come in there. It wasn't long after they got there until they were sent from other units of the division and the whole division was sent home, but I did not come home with the division. I came home with an engineers' battalion. We were not in a convoy this time. We came home on a boat all by ourselves.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Of course, the war was over by then.

Mr. King:

The war was over and I got back home and joined forces with my wife and little boy. He was two years old at that time. In the final analysis we both came back to SMU and a year later I graduated and I was still on the staff and stayed there for three years as an instructor and assistant bandleader.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Let me go back and ask you some questions about World War II. What would you consider your most frightening time?

Mr. King:

The only thing in World War II to me was that experience on July the 8th when we lost all those people. I knew darn well we'd kill them and the Germans would. We had plenty of things. Down there at the POW camp, I haven't mentioned this, one of the assigned, we had some personnel assigned to us there, too. He and the personnel, the guy assigned to us, had just come in to report and one of our players, a fellow by the name of Sherman _____, who was a bassoon player in the band and who came back to the US and spent the rest of his life as principal bassoonist with the Boston Symphony, that's the kind of player he was, and I was standing there doing something and a shell came in, a 908 field artillery _____ had just come in and set up beside us. A shell came in and burst and killed this guy standing there with us. His first day with the band, it a put a scratch under Walt's nose about like he'd cut shaving himself and didn't touch me. I told Walt, I said, "Boy, I can get you a Purple Heart for this after things calm down a bit." He said,

“No, I don’t want a Purple Heart for this. People are getting hurt bad.” He’d have given a penny or two for that thing a year later, of course, some months later, more points. Anyway, we had plenty of situations where somebody was hurt and I was lucky and just that’s the way it works. If you get hit, you’re hit. If you’re hit six inches in one direction or another it may make the difference between getting killed or just getting wounded.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was the morale in your outfit?

Mr. King:

It was great.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now you mentioned April 12th of ’45 when Roosevelt died. You all heard about that, right?

Mr. King:

Oh yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the reaction people had?

Mr. King:

Well, Truman, of course, was immediately the new President. I don’t remember that there was anything serious about it. It was just a fact that he died and we had a new President, but he’d been Vice President for the last whatever year or two or three. We named the bridge for him.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On May the 8th of ’45 Germany surrendered. Where were you when that happened?

Mr. King:

We were there at division headquarters in Barby, France and we were told to stand down, that the war was over, it is official and I called all these people up, we knew it was going to happen a couple of days ahead, I called up these people up at our band from these various places where they had been

over the last 100 miles and on the 8th of May, VE Day, we went into division headquarters, right in the front of it, and set up and played the loudest, fastest program you've ever heard in your life. Nobody told us to play and nobody told us to shut up. Thirty years later, at a division reunion, a man who had been a Lieutenant in the division headquarters handed me a little inch-and-a-half square picture he had taken that day and he said, "This is you playing on VE Day," and I still have that picture and I have an enlargement of it here on the wall.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any other kind of a celebration besides that?

Mr. King:

Not that I'm aware of, no. Probably had plenty of private ones. Soon after that, we were on our way south. I can't tell you what the dates were, it just wasn't important at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What all did you do from the time the war was over until you came home in September?

Mr. King:

A fulltime band by then, playing parades, the division was back in training, playing concerts, programs of all kinds, accompanying these USO people that would come over. We were busy with the band.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On August the 6th they dropped the first atomic bomb. Did you all hear about that?

Mr. King:

Yeah, we sure did and we were just as pleased about the war getting over, over there, as we were the people that were over there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was there any talk of sending you all to the Pacific?

Mr. King:

They'd already told us that we would be coming home for retraining and to the Pacific. Like I say, when the war ended there we were just as happy as the guys were who were already there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On August the 15th when they announced the surrender, did you all have any kind of a celebration then?

Mr. King:

If we did, I don't remember. I probably had a celebration, maybe a private one, but nothing official.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. King:

I had the best officers in the world, all the way from company officers to division officers to the three Army commanders. We had General Bradley, our first Army commander, General Patton, our second Army commander, and General Simpson, the third one, the last one. I just say you can't get any better than that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever see that sign "Kilroy was here"?

Mr. King:

Yes, I've seen it. I don't know it got there, but I've seen that sign. (laughing)

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever see any USO shows?

Mr. King:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Any big names?

Mr. King:

Well, yes, Bob Hope was in our place one time, and I'll tell you a little story there at _____
_____ and Hal McIntyre, did you ever hear that name?

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, I don't think so.

Mr. King:

He had a big, good band of the Benny Goodman/Glen Miller-type. He was the show that night on _____
_____. He called me at my little office one afternoon in there and he said he was a man short and asked if I had a sax player that could play his book. It kind of ticked me off a little bit. I said, "Mr. McIntyre, I've got six sax players that could play your book or anybody else's." I said, "What do you need?" He said, "I need a fourth, I've got a man sick." I said, "I'll send you one." So I sent one of our tenor sax players named Bob _____ and I told him ahead of time, I said, "Now _____, you won't be able to change clothes. You won't be able to wear your band jacket. We don't allow our people to appear out of uniform." He said, "That's no problem." I couldn't hear it, we were going somewhere else with the rest of the band. The next day, _____ walked up to me and he said, "Man," he said, "that was fun playing last night." He said, "After the show was over," he said, "McIntyre came over and thanked me for coming and said I did good and he handed me a twenty-dollar bill." I said, "Bob, you know, my commission on these jobs I book you guys is fifty-percent. You owe me ten bucks." Well, Mr. Misenhimer:, I can tell you that that tightwad still owes me ten dollars to this day. (laughing) We did all kinds of things. _____ was quite a town. We were busy as we could be doing things the band does.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. King:

Well, only once or twice when one of their wagons would come up and they'd serve us a cup of coffee and a doughnut or something. I never had any experience with the Red Cross.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get home from World War II with any souvenirs?

Mr. King:

Yes, I bought what I call a chocolate set in Brussels after the war. I brought it home to my wife and we still have it. My son has it now. I brought a little toy home – our baby boy, who is now 69 years old, was six months old when I left and two-and-a-half when I got back. I bought him a little toy camel. He was sitting there playing with it, it was almost Christmas, and I bought him a little Christmas toy, a little kind of a fire truck that I brought back, I bought it over there. I remember Anita asked him, she said, "Who brought you that little camel?" He looked at me and said, "That man." But he learned I was his daddy.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever hear Axis Sally on the radio?

Mr. King:

No. I've heard of her but I never heard her.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. King:

I was awarded the Bronze Star back in Britain, the European Theater and all those other service medals, but the only decoration I ever got, more than I deserve, was the Bronze Star.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you get that for?

Mr. King:

Meritorious service during the Saint Malo action.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You didn't get the Combat Infantryman's Badge did you?

Mr. King:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When were you discharged?

Mr. King:

February the 4th, 1946. This is hard to believe: I was in the Army exactly 4 years to the day. One more day and I would have begun my fifth year.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. King:

No sir. I got as busy as a man could get. I came back to SMU and they appointed me the director of veteran's housing and I went to work for the university immediately and I went back into school and was named the student director of the band and got my degree the next year and made assistant director of the band I served two years as that director of veteran's housing. Someone had a defense plant on the south coast and they gave SMU a hundred little 22-foot house trailers that they'd used, camper trailers, as workers' quarters during the war. We put them together and called them "trailerville" and I was in charge of trailerville for two years and we estimated the life of it to be about three years, all veteran's. All married. All had kids. They had a mayor and a city manager and any other office you could have, they elected them right there. It was a great experience. Had 108 trailers, 100 of which were SMU owned and 8 of which were privately owned, all of them occupied. Around 9 bath houses, 12 trailers to each bath house. A laundry room and a women's and a men's restroom. That's the way we did it for the first two years we were back.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you use your GI Bill for anything?

Mr. King:

Yes, I guess I did. We bought a house in 1948 and moved in it. We had a GI loan but I don't think it was anything other than that. We lived there three years before we moved in to another place.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you use your GI Bill to go back to college?

Mr. King:

I don't remember. I literally don't remember. I guess I did. It was available, so, I guess I did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you had any reunions of the Army outfit?

Mr. King:

The 83rd Division?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes sir.

Mr. King:

They will be coming up with a 66th reunion, I believe, in August in Nashville, Tennessee I plan to go, if I can get my plans together. I haven't been to all of them. I've been to maybe a dozen of them all together.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you kept up with many people you were in the service with?

Mr. King:

Yes, I have and I'm getting to be the only one left. I hate to report that, but I was looking at a picture – well, I'm sorting through pictures is what I'm doing right now. I'm on the verge, some time in the next three or four months, will be going into an elderly living facility probably up in Corsicana.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You don't know where that will be or the address or anything yet, do you?

Mr. King:

The address is going to be Heritage Oaks Retirement Village, I know that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Will you keep the same phone number you have now?

Mr. King:

No, no that won't be possible.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So if we need to reach you, we need to reach you through your son, then.

Mr. King:

My wife died almost eleven years ago after sixty-two years I was married to her. She was my life.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I'm sorry to hear that.

Mr. King:

From the age of 13. I don't think I could look the world over and find another one like that girl.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were there any funny incidents or something comical happen along the way?

Mr. King:

It wasn't a comical period, but I'm sure something did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything else you recall from your time in World War II?

Mr. King:

I'll give you one quote, if you want it. We had a Lieutenant in division headquarters and to protect the innocent I'm not going to tell you what his name was. He was seasick on the dock in New York

and he spent the entire fourteen days going overseas lying in his bunk just going, “aaaaahhhhhh,” every time that ship rolled. The most miserable person I’ve ever seen in my life and when he got off the ship in Liverpool and walked out on that dry land out there, I think the first statement he made that anyone could comprehend was, “If my wife ever wants to see me again, she can damn well come over here.” (laughing) He was a good officer, but he was seasick. We were delayed several days in going ashore in France on account of the weather. It was awful. I can tell you that when you’re on the deck of a ship and there’s a thousand other people or five hundred or whatever it is and they’re all seasick, it’s hard not to be seasick. You want to call it funny, that’s not funny necessarily, but when they finally did give the order, “get on these nets and get off of this thing,” on these landing craft, boy they didn’t have to say it twice to anybody. They were ready to go.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get seasick?

Mr. King:

Oh yeah. Not too bad. I wasn’t just desperate as some of them were. I did not get seasick and I did not get seasick coming back.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the highest rank you got to?

Mr. King:

I was Chief Warrant Officer the whole way. Pay grade four. Someone told me not long ago in the Army that Warrant Officer has five pay grades now.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I don’t know. I’m not familiar too much with those.

Mr. King:

Pay grade four was approximately the same as a Major’s pay.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I want to thank you again for your time today.

Mr. King:

Well, I hope you got something that you can use.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I sure do.

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