

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

The Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With
Robert M. Bookbinder
Pompano Beach, FL
January 16, 2014
86th "Blackhawk" Infantry Division
1st Battalion
343rd Infantry Regiment

My name is Richard Misenhimer: Today is January 16, 2014. I am interviewing Mr. Robert M. “Bob” Bookbinder by telephone. His phone number is 954-974-3511. His address is 3050 Palm Aire Drive North, Pompano Beach, FL 33069, Apt. 310. 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.

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. Bookbinder:

Well, thank you very much and it’s very kind of you to call me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Thank you. Now, the first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the museum. So let me read this to you.

Mr. Bookbinder:

OK, by all means. Go ahead.

Mr. Misenhimer:

(Agreement read.) Is that OK with you?

Mr. Bookbinder:

That’s OK with me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK, good. Now 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 or something. So do you have a son or daughter or some one we could contact if we needed to?

Mr. Bookbinder:

I'll give you my son, Howard Bookbinder and he is up in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. His number is 610-866-2444.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Let me read that back to you: 610-866-2444.

Mr. Bookbinder:

That's correct.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK, good. What is your birth date?

Mr. Bookbinder:

April 28, 1923.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you born?

Mr. Bookbinder:

I was born in Newark, New Jersey.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Bookbinder:

Yes, I had three brothers, a brother by the name of Mark, another brother by the name of Jack and a third brother by the name of Sol.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were any of them in World War II?

Mr. Bookbinder:

Yes, brother Jack was in World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Is he still living?

Mr. Bookbinder:

No, they are all gone now.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK. Did you have any sisters?

Mr. Bookbinder:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now you grew up in the Depression. How did the Depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Bookbinder:

Well, we lived up in the Catskill Mountains up in New York State in a home, actually above a store. My parents ran a little store like a candy store and we lived above it and there was no heat in this building. So it was not exactly the most comfortable place to live but we lived there from the year 1925 through the time my parents, my mother passed away in 1956, so all throughout the Depression. This was a period during which both of my parents were struggling just to make a living. My father in order to make sure that there was enough food, actually went into New York City during the week as a tailor and worked at one of the tailor's shops in town, in New York City so that we could manage. That was part of the problem of our period then. Of course I was a youngster. I was born in 1923 and grew up working at some of the resorts up there in the Catskill Mountains once I was old enough to do some work.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then where did you go to high school?

Mr. Bookbinder:

We had a little high school in the town that I grew up in. The town was called Woodridge, New York. It's in the heart of the Catskill Mountains and I grew up there and went from kindergarten through high school in the same building.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What year did you graduate?

Mr. Bookbinder:

I graduated in 1940.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do after you graduated?

Mr. Bookbinder:

I went off to college at the University of Kentucky and became a member while there of the ROTC.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Why did you go to Kentucky?

Mr. Bookbinder:

Primarily because it cost very little at the time. I could ill afford a school that was expensive and someone in town mentioned that it was a good school. I knew nothing about, we had no guidance counselors at that time, and so it was my choice. Only a small portion of my class which numbered only seventeen kids went off to college.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you study there?

Mr. Bookbinder:

I studied to become a teacher and initially I majored in math and surgical education.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on December 7, 1941 when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Bookbinder:

Yes, I was in the library at the university when that occurred and all of us became aware of what was occurring there at Pearl Harbor and that's how I learned of it. At the time I was at the university at the time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you heard that how did you think that would affect you?

Mr. Bookbinder:

I really didn't understand it yet. I was just a youngster. I think I was only eighteen at that time and I realized that something was going to change but I really wasn't aware until a little later on when in 1943 that I was to be called to active duty with all of the other fellows that were in this advanced ROTC program that I was part of.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So when did you actually go into the service?

Mr. Bookbinder:

I went into the service in April 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you would have been just over twenty years old.

Mr. Bookbinder:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you volunteer, were you drafted or how did you go in?

Mr. Bookbinder:

No, no. I was in the Reserves.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So the ROTC, you were called up through that then.

Mr. Bookbinder:

That's right. All of us, our entire class was called to active duty and we entered the service as an entire class.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go for your boot camp or your training?

Mr. Bookbinder:

We went to Camp Walters, Texas, near Mineral Wells, Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Mineral Well, OK. What did you do there?

Mr. Bookbinder:

We took infantry basic training. We had about four months of basic training at Camp Walters.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What all did that consist of?

Mr. Bookbinder:

At Walters the infantry training that you were required to participate in and it was originally

thought that we would be scheduled to go directly overseas after our training. However, it seems that because of our ROTC background it was determined that we ought to be able to go to Officers Candidate School. So the group of us ended up eventually at Fort Benning at the Infantry Officers Training Program at Fort Benning, Georgia. That's where I got my commission as a Second Lieutenant.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Back to your basic training. What kind of weapons training did you have?

Mr. Bookbinder:

I was trained with the rifle and of course the machine gun and the mortar. We trained with every infantry weapon that they had available at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What rifle did you train with?

Mr. Bookbinder:

With the M-1 although we did our drilling with the Springfield.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were your drill instructors pretty tough on you?

Mr. Bookbinder:

Oh, yes, they were but we were pretty tough kids, too, I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then you went to O.C.S. and where was that?

Mr. Bookbinder:

That was at Fort Benning, Georgia.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about that.

Mr. Bookbinder:

That was very, very interesting. We did very well. I guess our preparation as ROTC members paid us good dividends and shortly after completing that, we were sent, I was then assigned to the 86th Blackhawk Division that was located at San Luis Obispo, California.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long was your O.C.S.?

Mr. Bookbinder:

Four months.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you graduate from that?

Mr. Bookbinder:

That would have been around October of 1944.

Mr. Misenhimer:

1943 probably.

Mr. Bookbinder:

No, 1944. Because there was a period where there was some confusion as to when we were to be deployed and where we were to be assigned because we were sent around to various locations. I spent a week at Ohio State University and I spent another short period back at the University again before I was sent on to Fort Benning.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you'd been in almost a year and a half when you got your commission?

Mr. Bookbinder:

That's about right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then you went to the West Coast.

Mr. Bookbinder:

West Coast to San Luis Obispo, California.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you travel out there?

Mr. Bookbinder:

By train and I don't recall much about that travel because we did so many train travels. But I spent the next several months in training at San Luis Obispo and also down at Camp Callam down further south in California. We were being prepared for amphibious training and scheduled to go to the Pacific. However, the war took a turn in Europe and it was decided that they needed more troops in Europe so they sent us across the country to a camp in Massachusetts called Camp Miles Standish and then placed aboard some ships and we ended up in Europe and we landed at France at Le Havre, France. Then we were sent to a tent camp called Camp Old Gold that was outside, not very far from Le Havre. From there we were sent on to combat. We ended up at Cologne, Germany and we were on the west side of the river and the Germans were on the east side and then we were sent further south along the Rhine and crossed the river at Bonn, near Remagen, near the bridge at Remagen. We didn't cross at Remagen but near there on pontoon bridges across the river and we ended up in the Ruhr Pocket and that's where we did some of our fighting. We ended up after the combat in the Ruhr ended, we were sent further south into

Bavaria and we made our way through Bavaria, continuing combat, and ended up in Austria. On May 8, when the war came to an end in Europe, we were in Austria. Shortly after that we were advised that our division was to be re-deployed to the Pacific to assist with the landings at Japan. We were returned to Camp Old Gold and then boarded ships and I guess we were the first division to return to America after the war in Europe ended.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About when did you get back to the U.S.?

Mr. Bookbinder:

We were given thirty days at home and then were sent to a camp out in Oklahoma for retraining. It was decided that we would not remain there very long. In fact we were there briefly and we were immediately shipped to California and boarded ships that were sent out to the Pacific. The two bombs had been dropped during the month of August 1945 and we were on board ships on September 1st and the last week of August of 1945. Instead of having to attack Japan, we ended up in the Philippines and we were made the occupation force of the Philippines. We remained there for an entire year and actually the division I was finally returned around August of 1946 to the service to America, to the United States. Our division was deactivated in the Philippines in December 1946.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Let me make a couple of notes here. Now, let me back up and ask you some questions. When did you actually join the 86th Division?

Mr. Bookbinder:

That would have been in November of 1945, no 1944, I'm sorry.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were still a Second Lieutenant, right?

Mr. Bookbinder:

I was Second Lieutenant, that's correct.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your job in the division?

Mr. Bookbinder:

I was a platoon leader of what we called an A. and P. Platoon. I was the ammunition and pioneer.

Our job was not only to act as a rifle platoon but also to be aware and know what to do with the mines and booby-traps. We were trained in explosives.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when was your first combat in Europe?

Mr. Bookbinder:

That would have been in late March 1945 at Cologne, Germany.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about that combat. What happened?

Mr. Bookbinder:

We were on one side of the river, the Rhine River, at Cologne and the Germans were of course on the other side and one of my roles at that time was to see to it that platoons or squads were able to cross and find and reconnoiter the other side, find out where the Germans were and how many German there were. One of the experiences I personally had was that my platoon was carrying the boats, the assault boats that were used by the platoons to cross the river. Of course we would try to retrieve those boats when they returned as well. So that was my first experience

and when we were at the river, taking the boats down, we would be shot at primarily because the river was not that wide there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were any of your people in your platoon killed or wounded there?

Mr. Bookbinder:

Not there, no. We were very fortunate.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where was your next combat?

Mr. Bookbinder:

Then it occurred in the Ruhr and this is where we actually were exposed to some close-hand combat. That occurred for several weeks until the entire Ruhr Pocket, that was the industrial area of Germany, was actually completely encircled and we captured a substantial number of German soldiers there. In fact it was recorded that it went into the thousands of German soldiers that we had captured. Once that was done, they refined our mission and sent us south through Bavaria. We continued combat there until we reached Austria. We were actually one of the divisions that was able to be at Berchtesgaden which was the Alps home of Hitler. That's what happened there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about that visit to Berchtesgaden.

Mr. Bookbinder:

Well, Berchtesgaden was pretty well shot up when we got there. I had occasion to wander through the area that was surrounded with tunnels and I found as I went through some of the tunnels that I found a good part of the art that had been stolen by the Germans from many people in Germany and was stored there. In addition to that a personal thing that occurred to me there as

I wandered, I ended up in the home of what was formerly the home of Goering, the head air person, Herman Goering, of Germany. I found a book that I still have sitting on the side of his desk there. It's still in my home after all this time. I should also mention that when we were making our way through Bavaria I went into the city of Freising with my platoon and a number of Germans surrendered to us, including an officer and members of his group and he came out dressed as if he was going to a ball in his Class A uniform. I was kind of muddy and looked a bit of a mess at that point but I took his sword from him. I still have that in my memorabilia of that period.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about your fighting at the Ruhr Pocket. What all kind of fighting did you have there?

Mr. Bookbinder:

Well, again this was a period...the war was really coming to an end, yet the Germans were continuing to fight. We found that we were fighting at times with older men and young kids but they were trying to do what they had to do. We lost several of our people there. It was interesting as we entered these various cities and we went to many, many would turn up and were actually surrendering to us. You know, so we ended up with a great number of prisoners and at times we were not quite sure how to handle all the Germans prisoners who had chosen to surrender to us. But that was about it. We did quite a bit of shooting but most of it was actually mopping up, cleaning up the area and making it safe so that we could go on securely. As I said we moved rather rapidly during that period. My particular division did end up liberating one of the slave labor camps at the city called Attenborn. We liberated the Russian and Polish slave laborers that were held there. Also we were the first division to cross the Danube River. This is where we lost

a number of our people, trying to cross, because we crossed on pontoon bridges and the other bridges had been destroyed in that area.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You lost them to German fire?

Mr. Bookbinder:

One of the things I had to do was there were many canals in Bavaria and one of the areas in which we were making our way, they had destroyed a small bridge and my platoon was involved in the reconstruction of that bridge so that our own tanks could cross it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's some other things that happened?

Mr. Bookbinder:

Well, we actually were involved in some mine fields. As the Germans were surrendering, they would actually would try to mine the areas. Another thing that happened with me personally was we were making our way south and the Germans would put up partially completed road blocks which they would actually arm and they would also have some of their soldiers posted in foxholes nearby and this is where I somehow earned the Bronze Star for some action there whereby we actually chased the Germans who were hiding or concealing themselves at the roadblock and we actually eliminated them and that in turn permitted our vehicles to make their way through and I guess because of what I was involved with at that time, I was awarded the Bronze Star for that. I didn't get that award until later on, sometime later in my Army experience.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were not involved in the Battle of the Bulge, were you?

Mr. Bookbinder:

No, the Battle of the Bulge occurred during the month of December 1944. We did not enter Germany until somewhat later. Actually it was March.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's some other things that happened there?

Mr. Bookbinder:

Let's see. I had occasion as I mentioned before. It's hard to define some of the other things that we did because we were constantly moving and constantly gathering P.O.W.s, Prisoners of War. That would be primarily my involvement there. Constant combat as I said during the latter part of the war period and the Germans were beginning to realize that the war was coming to an end for them and so many sought to conceal their identities and would raise their hands in surrender. The numbers that surrendered to my platoon alone was substantial.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, when you were there in Germany, what would you consider your most frightening time?

Mr. Bookbinder:

I guess the most frightening time was the period when I was back at Cologne. We were going down the river and when I was trying to retrieve the boats and I ended up out on a sand bank out on the river and just in a dark uniform and this sand was rather light and the Germans threw up some flares overhead and I was lying out there in the open. How I managed not to be shot, I don't know but someone was looking over my head and protecting me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then on May 8, 1945 when Germany surrendered, did you have any kind of celebration?

Mr. Bookbinder:

Not really. We were very happy. Of course everybody was quite happy but we already knew that we were to be re-deployed to the Pacific and so we realized that our celebration would be a short one. Didn't take very long before we were shipped back, as I said, to the tent camp near Le Havre called Camp Old Gold and we were there only briefly and then we were on our way home and the celebration for us really occurred when we entered New York Harbor. Somehow the city became aware that we were the first division, Army infantry division, to return from Europe. They had all kinds of boats out there and parades and bands and all kinds of stuff.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you got to Berchtesgaden, I think the 101st Airborne was the first one in there, is that correct?

Mr. Bookbinder:

I'm telling you that the last thing that I spoke of, the celebration, our actual celebration occurred when we returned to the United States. We were the first division to return and the New York City people and others somehow got out there, they had boats out there in the harbor, at New York Harbor, even had the Rockettes doing some dancing out there on floats, and it was quite an exciting time. So we were then at that point our division was sent first to a camp in New Jersey briefly and then sent on to camps near our homes throughout the country. I was sent to Fort Dix and then eventually got to spend thirty days at home before being shipped to Oklahoma as I said earlier for some more further training. However that didn't last very long because folks in Washington must have been aware that the war was coming to an end and they wanted to get us at sea as quickly as possible. So they sent us from Camp Gruber, Oklahoma to California. We ended up aboard ships during the last week of August and we were sent to the Philippine Islands. We remained in the Philippines for the entire year.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you at in the Philippines?

Mr. Bookbinder:

We were on the island of Luzon and Manila and our purpose was primarily the occupation and also to somehow get the Japanese who were still hiding in the hills. Some were thinking that the war was still on and so we had to get them out of the hills on Luzon. They became P.O.W.s. In any event, that was our job also to assist the civilian authorities to return to running their own government.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were in the Philippines about how long?

Mr. Bookbinder:

I was there from September 1945 to August 1946.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Had you gotten a promotion to First Lieutenant yet?

Mr. Bookbinder:

I became a First Lieutenant and they gave me a new assignment. I became the Battalion S4 of the Infantry Battalion that would be the 343rd, 1st Battalion and I served as the Battalion S4 of the Battalion.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything particular you recall from your time there in the Philippines?

Mr. Bookbinder:

Yes, the business of actually leading groups of trucks out to northern Luzon to places like Lingayen Gulf and Bagio and that kind of thing. Of course the other was to try to encourage the

Japanese that were still hiding in the hills to come out and surrender because they thought they were not about to surrender and just helping to return the local government to where they could function, to where they opened their schools once again and their local buildings within their community that served their community. That was primarily our job.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then when you left the Philippines, where did you go? Back to the States?

Mr. Bookbinder:

Yes, I went back to the States and finished...I was married at that time. I was married and ended up returning to the University to earn my degree because I had only completed three years.

Following that, I thought I would continue because I couldn't get a position. Many of the fellows who had already started teaching school had returned to their jobs and so I enrolled at Columbia University in New York City for my master's and while doing that, I also took on my first part-time teaching assignment. For the next several years, until the Korean War, I was teaching physical education. I was in New York State in several school districts. I was an itinerant teacher, working between several school districts. Then came April 1951. I was recalled and was back in the service and was sent to Fort Benning once again for purposes of advanced training. I went through an advanced training program at Fort Benning once again. Then I became the physical training officer at Fort Dix, New Jersey and spent the rest of my service time when I was in during that period at Fort Dix as a physical training instructor at Fort Dix. After that, I returned to teaching and then became a school principal and I eventually became a school superintendent. I finally retired from school work in 1987 and perform a great deal of volunteer work at this point.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, let me back up and ask some questions. How long were you in during the Korean War?

Mr. Bookbinder:

One year.

Mr. Misenhimer:

One year—you went in 1951 and got out in 1952?

Mr. Bookbinder:

That's right. I was out on Long Island and I took on what was called an itinerant job in five different school districts in a place called Huntington, Long Island and actually remained there even after my period after recall during the Korean War because they kept me there—I was there for some 25 years in that particular area. I was advanced in position from elementary school principal to junior high school principal to director of curriculum for the system and finally assistant superintendent of the school district. It was called the Harbor Field School out in Greenlawn, Long Island. I worked there until 1973. In 1973 I was given a position of superintendent of schools of East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania in the Poconos. I worked there until my retirement as superintendent in 1987.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you came back from the Philippines in 1946, when did you get out of service at that point? When were you relieved from active duty at that point?

Mr. Bookbinder:

It was actually in September and I remained in the reserves for a brief period but shortly thereafter I was released and honorably discharged from the service.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the highest rank you got to?

Mr. Bookbinder:

First Lieutenant.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You never got to Captain?

Mr. Bookbinder:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Not even in Korea?

Mr. Bookbinder:

No. I was actually promoted to First Lieutenant while in the Philippines.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was the morale in your outfit?

Mr. Bookbinder:

We had excellent morale. In fact I still have contact with one of the members of my platoon back there. Are you asking about the morale during Korea?

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, during World War II.

Mr. Bookbinder:

Oh, it was excellent. I'm still in contact with a member of my platoon and he lives out in Dayton, Ohio. Of course I have been very active with recreation of a military group representing our division. Each year they work it back around the year of 1980 and I now am actually chairing the

organization and actually we have recreated a new five-year period. Morale was always excellent. I felt though that during the Korean War when I was recalled that the morale seemed to be dropping off a bit. Attitude toward the service had undergone a bit of change. Not much, but some.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, during World War II were you ever under friendly fire?

Mr. Bookbinder:

Yes, yes, this was primarily some artillery fire coming in close to us but we were lucky.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Bookbinder:

Oh, I had excellent officers. The people that we worked with were outstanding people. I think we were all very fortunate. Most of the fellows were from Minnesota and I'd never met people from Minnesota up until then. They were just excellent, excellent.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Bookbinder:

Well, I had a few souvenirs but I was lucky, I was pleased to get home and I wasn't that interested in souvenirs. I still had though a pistol that I had managed to gather and I still had that sword that I got in Freising in Germany and also I had a .22 rifle which somehow has disappeared over the years but I had that and a few other minor items. I really wasn't interested in collecting memorabilia. I was really most concerned about ever being caught with some German equipment on my person.

Mr. Misenhimer:

During World War II did you ever see any USO shows?

Mr. Bookbinder:

Oh, I got to see several. Yes, I saw a couple in Belgium and of course I saw many in the States and those were excellent. There were in really very upbeat there because we needed cheering up occasionally.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever see Bob Hope or anybody like that?

Mr. Bookbinder:

I saw a violinist, Yasha Haifitz. I saw him in Europe and I was rather impressed with that because I, as a kid, played violin. I thought that was marvelous, meeting someone like that. But I did get to several of the USOs and we did see several entertainers. When I was at San Luis Obispo, I was given a pass and ended up seeing Bob Hope and a few others at Hollywood. We went to Hollywood and were given a pass in the summer and somehow I was invited to see a performance and it was Bob Hope performing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, what all medals and ribbons did you get?

Mr. Bookbinder:

I had the Bronze Star and the Combat Infantryman's Badge and I have the European Theater of Operations Ribbon with a Star on it and that relates to the central and European campaign. Of course I have the Asiatic-Pacific ribbon and then I also have several others. I thought this was rather interesting, this last year the French consulate here in Miami, Florida invited me to a Memorial Day ceremony and they awarded me the French Legion of Honor medal. That was a

surprise that they would do that after all these years but they did that and I was rather pleased to receive that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Bookbinder:

No, very little except at times when we came into various cities as we made our way across country a couple of times. They would come to the railroad stations and we would end up with some coffee and some of the goodies and they were very kind to us. It was always good to see people who were smiling at us.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever hear Axis Sally on the radio? You say Axis Sally, you'd hear her at night?

Mr. Bookbinder:

Yes, we heard her at night and we'd listen, not uncommon, and we'd also hear occasionally a German plane fly overhead at night and it was somewhat intimidating, rather we thought it was kind of funny in a way. But she would continually try to encourage us to give ourselves up by saying that we would be better off than being shot.

Mr. Misenhimer:

April 12, 1945 President Roosevelt died. Did you all hear about that?

Mr. Bookbinder:

Oh, yes, that was a very sad day. That day everybody was rather distraught and when that word got out, somehow it really upset people, understandably, because we looked upon him as a hero of the war.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You never did cross the equator, did you?

Mr. Bookbinder:

Yes, I did. I crossed the equator and I was given a certificate for having done so when we went to the Philippines.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What kind of ceremony did they have when you did that?

Mr. Bookbinder:

I forget the actual ceremony but somewhere amongst my memorabilia is a certificate honoring me for having made it across the equator. Yes, I did. I crossed the equator.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was that the equator or the date line?

Mr. Bookbinder:

The international date line. We thought that was funny because you'd go ahead and wake up on the same day. All that was kind of funny. We did both of those things.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Bookbinder:

Not at all, not at all. Just that I had trouble getting a job as I mentioned earlier, when I got out, others like me who had already been prepared to teach were returning to their jobs so there were very few jobs available. So rather than waste a year, I decided I would continue working on a master's and then since I started at Columbia I continued attending there for the next ten years, part-time. One year I was there full-time earning my master's degree there and I ended up with a

professional diploma that they issued for credit beyond the master's degree and then completed most of the credits required for a doctorate at Columbia.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you use your G.I. Bill for anything?

Mr. Bookbinder:

I did, I took advantage of that and to my advantage that I had it available to me, yes I did. I was very deeply involved with that program.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you were overseas could you get your mail with any regularity?

Mr. Bookbinder:

Reasonably regularly. It was while in combat it was slow at times but most of the time in the Philippines it came over reasonably regularly. I kept writing to my folks at home and also to my girl and in fact I wrote to her that I would marry her when I returned from the Philippines and she got that. Another rather interesting and personal thing in regard to that, I had a manner in which I got an engagement ring was that I met the wife of the former mayor of a city on Luzon called Taal, the Japanese had stolen all of her jewelry but she had a pearl earring. I decided I would buy it from her and I took the pearl to the next little town called Lipa, which is out there in the Philippines, and a goldsmith put that on a ring and I sent that to my girl back home and that became our engagement ring.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, how many reunions have you had?

Mr. Bookbinder:

Well, we had, I didn't attend all of them. I became interested in the organization around early

1990 and went to almost every one of the reunions thereafter and in 2009 when the reunion, I became the president of that group, if you will, during the years 2000 through 2004. The leadership that followed me decided that the interest in the organization was lagging and they decided to dissolve the group in 2009 but a number of the fellows who happened to recall my involvement with it earlier, asked me to become its new leader and see if I could recreate the group. So in 2010 I recreated the group and we call ourselves The 86th Blackhawk Division Organization, Inc. and we've been functioning now for the past five years and we actually have a membership of close to 300 people.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Good, good. Did you ever see that sign "Kilroy was here"?

Mr. Bookbinder:

Oh, yes. In fact I also prepare newsletters and I also include some of the cartoons that were famous of that time. In fact I even corresponded with our famous cartoonist who recently passed away and

Mr. Misenhimer:

Bill Mauldin?

Mr. Bookbinder:

Yes, I thanked him for having done what he did during that period and he was in California at the time in a nursing home and I wrote to him and he in turn had someone thank me for having corresponded with him.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Bill Mauldin, OK.

Mr. Bookbinder:

I also prepare the newsletters and if you think that would be of any value to you, I'd be very happy, once I get your address, I'll send you some copies of the newsletters that I've prepared over the years. I think they're quite informative because they not only tell some of the experiences beyond my own of course, but the actual, personal stories of some of these fellows may have had when they were with us overseas. Also I thought I'd mention I have written three books dealing with World War II, two of them are now in the possession of the World War II Museum in New Orleans, Louisiana and they use them as resource material. If you'd like, I'd be happy to send you some complimentary copies of that, too.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Sure, if you would, that would be good. That's all the questions that I have. Have you thought of anything else about World War II?

Mr. Bookbinder:

Well, I think I've said as much as I did. I know many did much more than I but I was very lucky. I was assigned in Germany to a group of fellows who I thought were tremendous. We were well-trained, we knew what to do, we knew what was expected of us and I think because of that we ended up pretty much together throughout the period in Germany. Of course they gave me a different assignment when I got to the Philippines but I still maintained some contact with fellows that were part of the platoon and that was always kind of exciting. Other than that, I think one of the greatest things in my life experience has been being part of an experience that very few people can share, unless they have been part of it. Being part of the World War II experience. I actually dealt with some tremendously great people.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Bob, that's all I have unless you have anything else.

Mr. Bookbinder:

I thank you. I thought I'd share a very interesting thing just briefly.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK, go ahead.

Mr. Bookbinder:

During the period after my return a youngster who was about to be a student at UCLA called me and asked if he could interview me. He came with a video camera and videoed me for a couple of hours and he did pretty much what you just did with me. I was rather impressed. I haven't heard from this young man now for some time. For a while he kept in touch, letting me know his progress in school. I was rather pleased with that. So I enjoyed this gathering but I'm sorry we had the trouble with my phone.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's just one of those things.

Mr. Bookbinder:

You keep well and thank you very much for the call.

End of Interview

Transcribed by:

Janice Conner

Winamac, IN 46996

June 10, 2014

Oral History by:

Richard Misenhimer

P.O. Box 3453

Alice, Texas 78333

Home: (361) 664-4071

Cell: (361) 701-5848