

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

**Nimitz Education and Research Center
Fredericksburg, Texas**

An Interview With

William P. Bakel

Wichita, Kansas

June 26, 2015

Army Air Corps

Pacific

308th Airdrome Squadron

Mr. Misenhimer:

My name is Richard Misenhimer, today is June 26, 2015. I am interviewing Mr. William P. Bakel by telephone. His phone number is 316-821-9197. His address is 3131 West Keywest Court, Wichita, Kansas, 67204. 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.

Now Bill 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. Bakel:

Well, it's just something we've always felt we had to do. I tell my kids that somebody called a war and I showed up. *(Laughter)*

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's right. Now the first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the museum to make sure this is okay with you.

"Agreement Read"

Is that okay with you?

Mr. Bakel:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Bakel:

Yes, I have a daughter that lives close by. Julia Reilly, that's spelled R-e-i-l-l-y. Her home phone number is area code 316-722-4176.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you have an address?

Mr. Bakel:

Yes, 720 Queen and that's in Maize, M-a-i-z-e, Kansas, 67101. And that's just a little town adjacent to Wichita.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Hopefully we'll never need that, but you never know. Now what is your birthdate?

Mr. Bakel:

6/13/1920.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You just had a birthday.

Mr. Bakel:

I did, 95th.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Congratulations.

Mr. Bakel:

Thank you. Ninety-five and still alive.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And where were you born?

Mr. Bakel:

Ransom, Illinois.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what were your mother's and father's first names?

Mr. Bakel:

My father was Joseph, he went by J.J. Bakel and my mother's name, her married name was Clara.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Clara, okay. Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Bakel:

Yes, I had two sisters and one brother.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were they older or younger than you?

Mr. Bakel:

They're all younger.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was your brother in World War II?

Mr. Bakel:

No, no he just missed it. He's twelve years younger than me, but he did go in the service.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were your sisters involved in any kind of war work?

Mr. Bakel:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now where did you go to high school?

Mr. Bakel:

I went to a small high school, first two years in Ransom and then the second two years was at Streator, Illinois, S-t-r-e-a-t-o-r. I graduated from Streator High School in 1938.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And what did you do when you finished high school?

Mr. Bakel:

I went to a seminary, I'm a Catholic. Went to a Catholic seminary, St. Bede's seminary in Peru, Illinois. And I studied for the priesthood for a year.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And then what happened?

Mr. Bakel:

Well I discovered girls and airplanes and I decided to become an aeronautical engineer.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So what did you do then?

Mr. Bakel:

I attended the Aeronautical University of Chicago starting in 1939. And I graduated in May of 1941 with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Aeronautical Engineering.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that school?

Mr. Bakel:

It's good, it was good. In those days I think they would be considered condensed courses now. We didn't take a lot of foolish stuff. And I think that may be part of the realization on the part of the United States that we had to turn out engineers as fast as we could. Because they would probably be needed if we ever got into war, that was always my feeling. Because they helped us grind out pretty quickly and so I actually only went..., I went to school during the summer also, but I graduated after three years there, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what did you do?

Mr. Bakel:

Well we were to graduate in May of 1941 and I had three friends, very close friends, and at that time we were being offered jobs in the aeronautical defense industry left and right. As soon as we graduated we had a choice of jobs at one of the airplane factories. But we got together in early spring of '41 and we said you know in all probability there's gonna be a war. And about that time one of the guys brought in an article from the Chicago Tribune newspaper that said that the Army Air Corps was looking for engineers in the aeronautical field. So we talked about it for a couple of weeks and finally the four of us decided to go ahead and enlist in the Army Air Corps. We went down to the old post office building in Chicago on the first day of April, if you can believe that, in 1941 and signed up for this program that the Air Corps was advertising. And

we, all four of us passed the physical, but we were not called up because the nation at that time really wasn't ready for the manpower coming into the services, you know. So we were told to go ahead and pursue our normal life and at some point in the future, the very near future, we would be called up and we would become Aviation Cadets in the Air Corps.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So when were you called up then?

Mr. Bakel:

So we graduated and two of us of the original four took jobs with Consolidated Aircraft in San Diego. We got jobs in the engineering department out there and went to work out there, oh this would have been the middle of May of 1941. And we weren't called up, I wasn't called up until after Pearl Harbor which was on December the 7th. I was called up the 12th of January, 1942 and told to report into Chanute Field, Illinois and it's near Rantoul, Illinois, for cadet school.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now let me back up, on December 7th '41 when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor how did you hear about that?

Mr. Bakel:

Well, we were..., I'll have to back up a little bit, I don't know how much detail you want Richard, am I giving too much detail?

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, no, the more the better.

Mr. Bakel:

Really, okay.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Keep going, all the details you've got we want.

Mr. Bakel:

While we were out in San Diego working for Consolidated Aircraft we were working on Navy airplanes. I decided to quit out there and go to work for Curtis-Wright in St. Louis. It was closer

to home. And so in November, about November the 1st, I went to work for Curtis-Wright in St. Louis. And then to get back to your question—on December the 7th, it was a Sunday afternoon, we were coming out of a local theater near St. Louis and everybody in the streets were talking about it. So I learned it by word of mouth on the streets. And everybody was excited. And I don't know how, I guess someone listened to the radio and it was Sunday afternoon and it just spread.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you heard that, how did you think that would affect you?

Mr. Bakel:

Well, I didn't even stop to think about it. I knew that I was gonna go in the service ultimately anyway and it was just a matter of time. I don't know whether I even thought about it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you were called up then on January the 12th of '42?

Mr. Bakel:

Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And where did you go for your training?

Mr. Bakel:

I was inducted right there in Chanute Field as an Aviation Cadet. Now this was not a flying cadet school. What most people thought of cadet school in the Air Corps was you go fly airplanes, learn to fly airplanes. This was a special school for what was called engineering officers, squadron engineering officers. And I believe the MOS was 4823. Yeah. Now we were cadets for six months and we had aviation cadet status. I believe our pay was seventy-five bucks a month. Our curriculum was principally the understanding maintenance and operation of Air Corps airplanes. And having a degree in aeronautical engineering it was pretty easy for me. I had no problem with the course and I did pretty well. It was, you know it was something that I was pretty deeply educated in.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And how long was that school?

Mr. Bakel:

It was six months, I graduated or I was commissioned, we went in January, I was commissioned in late May of '42. Commissioned as a Second Lieutenant.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And then what happened?

Mr. Bakel:

Well we were sent to a base, my first operational base was in Tucson, Arizona. Let's see I'm trying to think of the name of the base. I could research it, but I don't have a

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's okay, go ahead.

Mr. Bakel:

I joined the 34th Bomb Group down there. And we were, it was a B-17 Bomber Group. And I became the Squadron Engineering Officer of one of the squadrons in that, the old 34th Bomb Group.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What squadron was that?

Mr. Bakel:

I don't recall the squadron. Here again I could research it, but....

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's fine, that's not important, go ahead.

Mr. Bakel:

We weren't there very long and there was two of us from my cadet class, the other man was a close friend, Irving Abel, A-b-e-l. It was sort of strange, he was Jewish and I was Catholic.

(Laughter) Anyway we were pretty close friends and so we were assigned to the same bomb group, 34th, but he was in another squadron. But we had been there about a month and we were

selected to go to engine class, engine school operated by Pratt & Whitney Aircraft. So the closest air base was Brainerd Field. And we attended the engine school run by Pratt & Whitney out there for about six weeks. During this time we were taught the details, operation, and construction and how engines operated and were built and so on. Then we reported back to our group in Tucson. Now at this point and time I think I can summarize pretty much the next two years. I didn't go overseas until the early spring of '44. So from, you know like summer of '42 until the early spring of '44, I was assigned to about six different bomb groups. Well a bomber group in those days consisted of four squadrons. And one of them being the headquarters squadron. So the way that it happened is that the Air Corps decided that they would keep two of the squadrons including the headquarters squadron in the States. They would send the other two squadrons in the bomb group overseas. And the two squadrons that remained in the States then formed the nucleus of another bomb group which is composed of four squadrons. So I was in, I don't know the exact number, four, five, or six maybe it was even seven, I don't know, different bomb groups and we sort of were the training squadrons. Yeah. Now, during that time we moved from Tucson to Spokane, Washington in Geiger Field, and we moved to a..., let's see the next base was Colorado Springs, somewhere in there was a small airbase in Ainsworth, Nebraska; Colorado Springs; back to Geiger Field; Rapid City, South Dakota. We finally ended up in Pueblo, Colorado, airbase there in Pueblo, Colorado. At that time I was reassigned and you know things moved rather rapidly in those days, you just never knew what was going to happen next, you know. The story I'm getting to is we were assigned to an airdrome squadron. Now in all probability you've never heard of an airdrome squadron.

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, I have not.

Mr. Bakel:

They were a special squadron designed to move into air bases very early on and set up operations as quickly as possible; and by what I mean by operations we had to set up the communications, armament, ordinance, supply, communications. And then my area of course was

maintenance, which was the largest section. But the squadron was the O. T. and E. of the squadron was specifically set up to move quickly into a forward air base and set up operations as soon as possible and operate the base for maybe uh three or four months until squadrons of either bombers or fighters moved up to that forward area and picked up the operations. Now is that cleared up for you?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, that makes sense, I understand.

Mr. Bakel:

Yeah, now it proved to be a real good concept in the war in the Pacific because of MacArthur's island hopping campaign. And that's what we would do, the Marines or the Infantry would capture a small island or part of a small island that had a Japanese airfield on it. And once the area was secure, fairly secure, the Seabees would move in. They would rebuild the airstrip because it was a shambles, it'd been bombed and everything else you know. So they would rebuild the airstrip and we were standing by waiting for them to get it rebuilt and then we just moved in and set up operations. Now the plan was that we would get there, maybe D plus two or three, they got us in there early. So a lot of people mentioned to me, "Well you were in the Air Corps and you moved around a lot from base to base when you were overseas, how come you always got on a ship to take you there, why didn't you fly there?" Well the answer to that question, Richard, is well we were going get there when the airbase wasn't operable. So we couldn't fly in, we had to be transported there by ship, just like the infantry. Now at this point and time I don't know do you want any more detail on what an airdrome squadron consists of?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Sure, go ahead.

Mr. Bakel:

Oh I don't know, that's about it. Is it clear to you?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah I understand what you're saying, right.

Mr. Bakel:

Our purpose was pretty clear. So we went overseas in very early spring of '44. And we landed at Finchhaven, New Guinea, and Finchhaven was pretty secure at that time. And they put us in sort of a holding area in there and they put us to work, put our people you know, our maintenance people, our communications people, and our bomb loading people and armament people. They put them to work down on the flight line helping down there on the flight line, but not really assigned other than just doing work that was necessary to be done. That continued for about six weeks and then we were loaded on another ship and headed to Hollandia, New Guinea. And we were in the harbor at Hollandia, New Guinea waiting for a convoy to be established and our first operational base you might say was scheduled to be on the island of Biak and that's B-i-a-k. Biak was a pretty, pretty much of a hot spot at that time. And it was just another one of those islands that MacArthur deemed important. And I believe it was invaded by the Marines, but I'm not sure on that. All of this can be verified you know in history.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh yes, right.

Mr. Bakel:

Well one evening about sunset we steamed out of Hollandia Harbor in a Liberty ship bound for Biak. And during the middle of the night we formed a convoy and when we woke up the next morning—although we steamed out on our own, well the next morning we were surrounded by a lot of ships. However, the particular Liberty ship we were on suffered a bearing failure on one of the engines. So we limped back to Hollandia Harbor, we had to leave the convoy, limp back to Hollandia Harbor. And we sat in Hollandia Harbor about three weeks while the engine was repaired. Then we started off again, more or less on our own. We weren't formed with any convoy. But our operational plan had changed and we were designated to go to the island of Noemfoor. I think that's the proper spelling. Now it was a very small island about five miles by eight miles, something like that in size. But it had three landing strips on it, three Japanese strips. And it was adjacent to Biak and the garrison there and the airplanes there at Noemfoor

was causing a lot of problems at Biak. Because they were re-enforcing..., the people from Noemfoor went to Biak at night. It was, you know just maybe I would say less than a hundred miles, probably fifty or sixty miles away. And then the Biak people or people trying to secure Biak was being bombed by the airplanes from Noemfoor. So they sent in a paratroop regiment and captured the island of Noemfoor. And so we had our plans changed, we landed on the island of Noemfoor. And it had been secured pretty well. And the air base was ready..., one of the air bases that was later designated as the bomber strip was operational, so we had to set up operational there. And we were, I believe the island of Noemfoor was so small that..., this is sort of a side story. That when I went down to the museum at New Orleans, the World War II Museum, my first trip down there was about five years ago. When I reviewed the data they had on the Pacific Theater, they had a big map there that showed all of the battles and everything. The island of Noemfoor was missing, it wasn't even designated. So I talked to one of the curators there and I said you know that was a small island it's probably small peanuts, but you know it was..., you know it was like I always say about World War II, somebody called a war and I showed up. Well there was a 154 people killed in the battle securing Noemfoor and you know they were guys that just showed up too. And that always bothered me. So the next trip I took down there sure enough they had put Noemfoor on the map. *(Laughter)* And I don't know whether your museum has that island of Noemfoor or not. Do you know?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh yeah, they do. Yes we have it, yes.

Mr. Bakel:

You do have Noemfoor?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, we do.

Mr. Bakel:

How much detail do you have on it?

Mr. Misenhimer:

I'm not sure just exactly how much we have there.

Mr. Bakel:

I hit you with a bad question, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

We do have it.

Mr. Bakel:

On Noemfoor?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes sir, I've talked to some that were at Noemfoor and Biak, everywhere.

Mr. Bakel:

Well that's wonderful. You know that's very interesting to me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Good.

Mr. Bakel:

The squadron that I was in during this time was the 306th, 306th Airdrome Squadron. Yeah and that identifies the squadron that was landed at Noemfoor. While we were at Noemfoor I was reassigned to the 308th Airdrome Squadron and I won't go into the details of why, but it doesn't contribute to anything. But somebody thought they needed my talent in the 308th I guess, I don't know. Well anyhow I guess it turned out that the engineering officer of the 308th squadron was an elderly gentleman and they wanted to send him back to the States for some reason or other. So they needed an engineering officer. So at that time the 308th Airdrome Squadron had just landed on Morotai. Now Morotai was a large island in the Halmahera group. And you probably have that in your museum also. Do you recall that name?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes we do, yes we have.

Mr. Bakel:

Okay. At Morotai I got there after the squadron had landed maybe a week after they had landed,

I think they landed at D plus three with no, no resistance at all. They got off of their Higgins boats and walked ashore and didn't even have a shot fired at them. Well I'm not sure of the details but it turned out that I guess General MacArthur's headquarters had put out some intelligence information to mislead the Japanese to another island. And then the Navy went over and bombed the hell out of this other island. But we didn't land there, they landed on Morotai. And that's why they didn't meet any resistance. That plan worked real well. At this point and time I must say I have a lot of respect for General MacArthur.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Good, good, so do I.

Mr. Bakel:

Yeah good. Anyway, when I got to Morotai and Morotai they were operating this little strip. But the infantry had only secured a very, very small part of the island. They had just pushed the Japanese back, set up a perimeter around this area, and there was a lot of Japanese opposition on the island of Morotai that gave us a lot of trouble. And I must say that the first two months that we spent on Morotai were pretty hazardous. We were bombed almost daily. Our squadron area was about four miles from the airstrip that we operated. While most of the time they bombed the airstrip, sometimes they'd come over and bomb our squadron too. Fortunately we, I think only lost one man to enemy bombs, but every night we spent half the night in a fox hole. Then during the daytime, I think the first operational unit had finally came in, it was the 35th Fighter Squadron. And slowly but surely the fighter squadron neutralized the people who were remaining on Morotai. Now Morotai is part of the Halmahera group and so the operation, air operations were extended to the surrounding islands that were coming over and bombing us too. But eventually we got to the point where we were enough free of bombing at night anyway. Alright the base, the Morotai base is a fairly forward base and eventually we got B-24 bombers up there at another strip. We operated the fighters' strip and there's another strip that was a bomber strip. And from there they could extend much farther, yeah. Well about this time we were loaded on a ship again to go to the Philippines. And if you were to ask me a date I'd have

to..., I guess I should have researched this but it's in our squadron history. Well what I can do is, let me leave it up to you Richard. You probably have a lot of detailed information on this, you don't have to have me repeat it. I can go back and research the dates we left and this and that but I'll leave it up to you if you want me to do that or if it is just a blur.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's too much for a blur, okay.

Mr. Bakel:

Yeah, we were on this Navy transport and we were headed for Leyte Gulf. And we were up there during the Battle of Leyte Gulf which I don't know what part of that battle we were in. But we first got word well you're going in to Dulag. And the Navy needs a base there set up real quick because our Navy carriers are being pretty heavily hit and the Navy needed some emergency bases to land on in case their carrier was not available. So your history probably records and I'm sure it does that the month of November and December had the heaviest rainfall in twenty years or something like that. I think the rainfall in November in this area, the Philippines, was something like twenty-eight inches of rainfall. We tried to go ashore, it was a sea of mud. And the three airbases that the Japanese had set-up that we, I can't remember which one we were going to operate. They were built in a swampy area. We couldn't even get to them, just a sea of mud. So that effort was scuttled and then we were supposed to go into Tacloban and that got scrubbed for some reason. In the meantime we're sitting out here in a harbor, we didn't off load any equipment, we just off loaded advance parties. We tried to go in and set up, we just couldn't do it. So all of our equipment and most of the manpower remained on the ship. Of course I was always part of the ones that was going ashore to see if we could set up. We just were told to give up. Finally we ended up going on up and landing in Subic Bay on Luzon. Now that period in between is the "blur" period. We were constantly bombed, strafed, and kamikaze airplanes and everything else out there in that harbor. And we moved you know, we moved from harbor to harbor and we just seemed to be in the middle of everything. And I can remember, my memories of that period was on this Navy transport sitting underneath a gun tub

in a flak jacket and a helmet and a life jacket and holding my ears because of the noise. The guns operating on that transport—the noise was just terrible. You had nothing to do but sit there and sweat it out, you know you.... Well anyway it was sort of a blur. Once we got to Luzon, here again I'll leave dates up to you, we were scheduled to set up operations, the first operational unit at Clark Field, which is northeast or east by northeast I guess from Manila. We were trucked up over a path into Clark Field and when we got to Clark Field, Clark Field was still in shambles. It was fairly secure, but a lot of fighting going on up in the hills. All day long we could hear the guns going off in the foothills there to the north of Clark Field. And the hangars were almost all demolished, runways were in terrible shape; it's a large base. There's just scattered Japanese airplanes and all over the place. We made an attempt to set up operations but we just didn't, just couldn't. After we'd been there a couple of weeks, one afternoon my squadron commander and I were called up to headquarters and said that we were going to be reassigned to another base. And this is where the story gets kind of interesting. I don't know whether your information has the airbase up at Laoag, Laoag, Luzon.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I don't know about that one, no.

Mr. Bakel:

Yeah, that doesn't surprise me. But the story we got from this Colonel was they..., a base was needed to the farthest north as possible so that P-38s that were equipped with cameras, they had stripped out all the armament and everything out of P-38s. They installed three cameras, there were two oblique cameras looking out either side of the airplane at about a 45 degree angle. Had another camera pointed downward. And these were positioned in the nose of the..., they were large cameras positioned in the nose of the P-38. They were called "photo Joes." And they needed this base so that, from this base they could over fly Japan and photograph Japan inch by inch to prepare for the invasion. So this base turned out to be in the northern province of Laoag. Ilocos Norte Province, Laoag in the Luzon. And it was at the northern tip of Luzon, almost its very tip on sort of the northwest coast up there. And the base itself, the city of Laoag at that time

was I think about 18,000 people, it was a Japanese airbase there. And the Japanese had occupied the city of Laoag early on. The airbase had been secured by the guerrillas up there and it was like about three hundred miles north of Manila. And in between the base, in between our forward base around Manila and at Laoag was all of General Yamashita's Japanese Army. So we were literally being transported over the top of the enemy and landed at this base. We were told it was a very important base we wanted to get you up there as soon as possible, we want to set up this operation because the invasion of Japan was scheduled for November. So we kept driving up there we don't want take the time to put you on a transport and sail you up there we're going to bring in a small flight of C-47 "gooney birds" and we're going to load you on a gooney bird and take you up there. So from now on you're going to be

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(begin side 2 of tape)

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anyway you were part of the airborne up there, so what happened?

Mr. Bakel:

Well I think we left less than a week later and I was put in charge of an advance party of forty people. Now my squadron history shows eighty people but I only remember about forty of us. And the squadron history also show four officers and I only remember two of us. *(Laughter)* And the other officer was our medical officer, Captain Williamson. He was, as most of those medical officers were, you know they were in their forties you know, while we were just kids. But he was a wonderful, wonderful man. But we went up there, we were loaded on these C-47s that we were actually flew out to the west coast of Luzon and then turned north to evade going over the enemy territory. And we flew up north at sea and then came back in to the base at Laoag. Now when we landed at Laoag the only thing at Laoag was this airstrip, which is a real nice airstrip. It had been repaired locally by either the guerrillas or the people the guerrillas got after, so it was in pretty good shape. The only thing there was a carcass of a C-47 that had been destroyed for the most part and a couple of nipa huts in a road

that went in to the city of Laoag. Now um....

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, go ahead.

Mr. Bakel:

Now let me ask you at this point Richard, you said the more detail possible, but you want all this detail?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes sir, you're doing fine, exactly what I want.

Mr. Bakel:

Okay.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Keep going, you're doing great.

Mr. Bakel:

My memory of Laoag is pretty clear, it was the last base I was on.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Alright, keep going, yeah you're doing fine.

Mr. Bakel:

Yeah, okay, okay. The forty of us were off loaded from I think it was six or seven C-47 gooney birds. And all we had was two jeeps, two trailers; one trailer had our kitchen and supplies on it, we had medical supplies, we had enough food for about thirty days. And very little in the way of housekeeping, no tents or anything like that. It was pretty sparse. So these gooney bird pilots, they were anxious to get us the hell off their airplane. They wanted to get the hell out of here, they didn't like that at all. They didn't see any Army up there, they didn't see any Marines. We didn't even see the guerillas, we just were sort of put off on this base where there was nobody around. So they off-loaded us in a hurry, got the heck out of there. Well it was the middle of the day and we started setting up, you know trying to decide what to do. About this time there was a big explosion and everybody hit the dirt. Right at the edge of the field there was about three or

four explosions went off in rapid succession. And we sent some enlisted men forward, about this time some Filipinos started showing up and they were members of the Filipino guerillas that actually were around the base, we just didn't see them. And they informed us that there's a bomb dump up there and someone had set fire to the bomb dump and the bombs were going off. So just, you know don't panic just stay away from that bomb dump. Well it turned out that within about a hundred yards of that bomb dump was our kitchen trailer. So the mess sergeant and I and another man, who I don't know, climbed in my jeep and we sort of timed when the bombs were going off and they were going off about every two or three minutes. So we timed our little ride in there on a jeep, as soon as a bomb went off we went full speed in there, the two enlisted men hooked up the kitchen trailer and we came back out and we got out before another bomb went off. But to make a long story short on this issue, that night we decided that we were pretty well exposed there, even though the guerillas had assured us we were safe. We decided to get the hell off of that airstrip. So after..., we sent our non-com in charge into the town of Laoag. Well he couldn't get there because about half way into the city of Laoag there was a bridge over the river and that had been bombed out. About four miles from the base, three or four miles from the base, he said there's a sugarcane grove and a grove of Banyan trees. He says looks pretty good for a camp area. So after dark we just loaded up, didn't put any lights on or anything else, we found that Banyan grove and we hunkered down there for the night. And we were perfectly safe, nothing happened. The next day we went back to see what we could you know, well to cut the story short again, we were up there by ourselves for three or four more days then the rest of the squadron finally came in and we set up operations. It turned out that we located our squadron area in that sugarcane field right next to that Banyan grove and that became our permanent squadron headquarters. At this point and time Richard I'm getting a little bit weary. Can we, is this a good place to stop?

The photo Joe organization is what we called them. And what they would do is they would come in to our base in the middle of the afternoon and they would land and we would service their airplanes. They would remain overnight, usually stay with me in my tent. And we slept

pretty good in that camp area there, it was, we had—actually had Filipino contracts come in and built us nipa huts for mess hall and quarters and everything. So they would remain, the pilots would remain overnight and then they would leave at first light in the morning to go photograph Japan. These people were unique, I don't know if you got any information on those photo Joes or not. But they were very unique people and they were..., in this P-38 that didn't have any armament at all, the only armament they had was the pilot's .45. And then one night one of the pilots and I were talking and he showed me that his .45 ammunition was slugs, was not slugs it was bird shot. And the reason it was bird shot is because if they were shot down it's better to have bird shot to shoot birds and stuff to survive on you know. But anyway, stripped down as they were with just those three cameras they were able to fly high enough so that over Japan, the Japanese Zeros, they were out of range of both the Japanese fighters and the anti-aircraft. They just flew over it. And I'd say it was pretty hazardous mission, you're all by yourself over Japan you know. And they were given corridors to fly. And once they would get lined up on their corridor they would turn on these cameras and fly for as long as they had enough fuel still remaining to get back to our base. They would photograph this corridor and then they would either get low on fuel and head back or they had run out of film or something, but they would come back and they were also equipped with what we called Tokyo tanks. They had two very large fuel tanks, one on each wing which enabled them to increase their range drastically. But they would land and it would be almost dark when they landed so they were almost twelve, fourteen hour missions. Which is very unusual, sitting in the cockpit of a P-38 which is extremely small and trying to control your bowels. You had a relief tube, but that's it.

(Laughter) During this time other operations started to move in and we had a pretty, pretty good base up there. The runway was really good. There is one little side story I might mention. I've written some of this up in detail in a story I put together and I can send you a copy of that but, I'll briefly summarize two events that....

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, go ahead.

Mr. Bakel:

One of them was, one day a young lady, maybe fourteen or fifteen, and her aunt came into my office on the strip there. And they could speak pretty good English and they told me that..., the younger girl was named Lucy, I couldn't remember her aunt's name, but Lucy, actually she could really speak good English, I don't think the aunt could speak much English. But Lucy explained to me that her brother had been part of the guerrilla forces that had liberated this base of Laoag and that he had been captured on the base at the end of the runway one day. And four of them, four or five of them were captured and they were executed at the end of the runway and put into shallow graves. In fact they had to dig their own graves and then they were executed and fell in these graves. And she wanted permission to reclaim her brother's body. So I contacted Captain Williamson, the medical officer, and between the two of us we said well why not you know. So he said you set up a date and we'll go out there and we'll let her and her family dig up the body because they seem to know where it was buried and I'll provide an ambulance to transport the remains back into the city of Laoag. So she did that, she brought her friends out, they dug up her brother and two other guys, two or three other guys. Then Captain Williamson took them back to the base. That was sort of an indication of how we operated with the civilian population in the city of Laoag. We were welcomed to it with open arms and the guerrillas had liberated the city you know about two weeks before we got there. So they were recovering from almost four years of Japanese control. And they would do anything for us, whatever we needed. It was there I first met the leader of the local guerrilla organization and he was headquartered in what they call a constabulary building. He was a very nice man and he told us that anything we needed to call on him. And we were perfectly secure up there, we didn't have any enemy action against us at all, which was very unusual. But when you stop to think about it, Yamashita's Army to the south of us was pretty much occupied with trying to survive MacArthur's coming after them. So they didn't even stop to think about a little old base that we had up there. So that made sense. It was during this time too, after a couple of weeks we'd been up there, that this Filipino approached me with that gun that I wrote the article on that was in the

World War II magazine.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, tell me about that. You said he approached you with the gun, so go ahead.

Mr. Bakel:

Yeah, he came up to me one day in broken English, told me he was a member of the guerrillas and that he was sort of a spokesman for their organization. He wasn't the leader or anything but he could speak pretty good English, so he was their spokesman. He had this gun and he said that, he lead me to believe that he had made the gun and he tried to impress on me the fact that the barrel was made from a 1933 Ford axle. But I guess the events that had happened in the last few months surrounding those types of guns kind of indicates that he didn't make it. But anyway I was under the impression he made it and he wanted to present to me, give it to me in appreciation for our coming up there. And when I took it and looked at it, it looked to me like it had been about a three-inch length of steel rod that had been bored out to about a .32 caliber. And he indicated that while the Japanese had confiscated all their firearms in the city, they didn't confiscate ammunition. So they had been left with, somebody had been left with a couple of boxes of .32 Rimfire pistol ammunition. So that's what they built this particular gun for, was those two boxes of .32 caliber Rimfire ammunition. And it's single shot and it has a latch over the top, you've seen pictures of it. I've got more pictures if you want them. I opened it up and looked down the barrel and it was a smooth bore barrel. So at that point I said, you know, "Shoot straight?" And he grinned and he took it away from me, he closed the action, cocked the gun, stuck it in my belly and pulled the trigger. Well you know you don't do things like that and I almost slugged the guy. But anyway, he grinned and said, "Okay?" And I said, "Okay." Anyway, I've still got that gun and I..., recent years..., anyway I just threw it in my footlocker when I got it, didn't pay any more attention, got home I forgot about it. And then it's just been the last few years I dug some of that stuff out. And I tried to get a background on that gun or that type of gun because it occurred to me that there were a lot of Filipino guerrilla or other guerrillas for that matter in the European Theater that wanted to fight but didn't have any firearms. So

there was probably a lot of those guns fabricated locally. And apparently that's what this gun was.

At this point in time I'll just summarize by saying we operated the base, we became..., in fact our squadron commander became base commander of Laoag and the fighter groups moved in. About this time I can jump to when the war ended.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, go ahead.

Mr. Bakel:

Because it's just merely operating a base up there. Let's see the Hiroshima bomb was dropped on August the 6th I believe, the Nagasaki bomb on August the 9th, on August the 15th the Emperor of Japan capitulated and then the signing of the, the formal signing was on September the 2nd. As I recall it was along about the 15th or 16th of August that we got the word that the war was over. And I don't know how this word got down to us, maybe it was just The Stars and Stripes, I don't know. I can't recall. But we did hear about the dropping of the atomic weapons probably two or three days after they were dropped. We had no idea what kind of a bomb that could be. That atomic weapon didn't mean a damn thing to us. But the end of the war meant a lot to us. *(Laughter)* The strangest day in my life, we headed out to go down to the airstrip and somebody ran out of the orderly room and waving their hands and said the war is over. So we congregated around the orderly room and we had a new commanding officer at that time.

He'd only been with us about a month. In fact up to that time for about a six weeks period I had served as Squadron Commander, being the next in rank. Anyway, he didn't know anymore than we did. So he says, "Well I don't know, don't go out and bomb anybody or don't go out and shoot anybody." Anyway you know banter back and forth like that. Finally somebody says well I guess this means we just stand down. So we literally did nothing from then on except about this time we were given, as a squadron we were given another mission. It turns out that we were still the nearest base to Japan, to medical facilities and things like that, that had been set up in Manila and on Luzon. So we were to become the triage base, if you will, for returning prisoners

of war being returned from Japan. So the corps of engineers came up there and built a real nice mess hall, real nice quarters. And our supply officer, Lieutenant Jones, and a few of those people all involved in setting up of a sort of a triage. And about that time I believe it was 11th Airborne staged through Laoag and gooney birds would go up and bring these prisoners back from Japan. And among the first prisoners that they brought back was General Wainwright. So he came back, well these folks were really in bad shape. Now I met the first few airplanes that came back and you couldn't believe how emaciated and poorly they were. But our medical people -- they were supplemented by other people from headquarters in Manila and they would separate them out. The ones that had to remain in Laoag for several days to be reconstituted for flight further south and the ones that could leave the next day to go south. The supply people had flown in fresh meat and ice cream and fresh turkey and fresh vegetables. Everything they could get their hands on to feed these prisoners in our brand new mess hall. So I met a lot of interesting people. I did not meet General Wainwright, although I saw him get off the airplane and he was immediately put in a stretcher and carried away -- he was in such bad shape. This continued to operate beyond my tenure up there. At this time the point system came into effect. I had I think accumulation of about 95 or 96 points. I was married and had a dependent and had served eighteen months overseas and had four battle stars, so all these contributed to the accumulation of the points. And we were selected, as you know, the higher the points the quicker you got sent home. So we were designated within a week or so. And I just probably from the end of the war, which was in August, we spent September up there. Along about late, middle of October a group of us were in the first group to be sent back to Manila to go back to the states. And we reported into Nielsen Air Force Base where the 22nd Replacement Depot had set up operations. And we checked in and we were told that you're on a list and due to your physical and so forth status you will not be flown back but you will be put on transport, sail back. So the thing to do is to get comfortable and watch the bulletin board for your name. And the bulletin board will have a bulletin every morning posted at eight o'clock that day and will tell you, if your name appears, the schedule of returning home. So the four of us, four or five, I

guess it was five of us total looked at this 22nd Replacement Depot, I was in pyradimal tents in a muddy rice field, we said, "Oh we don't want any part of this." So we went off base and we found a nipa hut, a little two room nipa hut right close to the base. It wasn't occupied, we just moved in. And we went to supply and got us some cots and we were able to go to the mess hall there and we set up operations. We were there from middle October until late November. Well I'd almost say early October really, cause we were there four or five weeks in this nipa hut. What we did is we played a lot of poker, got bored and we made several trips into the city of Manila and we tried to find ice cream. There was actually a movie theater had been set up in Manila. But Manila's pretty well bombed out. It wasn't just a whole lot of activity. We went to Resalle Stadium and watched a couple of soccer matches. But for most part we just hung around this nipa hut and checked in on the bulletin board every morning at eight o'clock. Then one morning our name appeared. And we got on a transport and we arrived in San Francisco and to make a long story short, we were given physicals and everything. I was mustered out at Fort Sheridan, Illinois. At that time I was still a Captain, I'd been a Captain all the time I was overseas. At that time I was promoted to Major and I stayed in the Reserves. So I was separated as a Major and I got home to my home in Illinois, Ransom, Illinois the day before Thanksgiving after an all night bus ride out of Chicago. At this point that probably ends everything I've got to say except I can answer any of your questions you want.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that trip coming back, how long did it take you to come back?

Mr. Bakel:

I'm guessing ten days, week to ten days. Here again I can give you dates if you need them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, no that's fine, that's not needed.

Mr. Bakel:

I have my squadron history and it takes all that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was the morale in your outfit?

Mr. Bakel:

The morale in the 306th Squadron which was the first squadron I was assigned to was very, was good in the States. But we were given a commanding officer as we left the States. He was our commanding officer when we got overseas and I'm going to just say he was a very sorry officer. And that's the reason that I left that squadron to the 308th is because the enlisted men in the 306th Squadron came to me and said we, you know we're gonna file a complaint to the IG, we want you to know about it. And I said, "Well I can only agree with your position." But I said I don't want any part of testimony or anything like that against him, but you guys do your thing and I'll support you, cause I think that you've taken the right course. So to make a long story short, he was relieved of his command and I was offered a chance, based on our headquarter's approval, to become Squadron Commander but I didn't think I was suitable for that command. I was technically oriented and I liked what I was doing, so I passed on that. And I requested reassignment. I just didn't feel like staying there and actually you know I had sort of testified that I agreed with everything that the enlisted people said about our commanding officer. So I requested a transfer, I guess that's part of why I was transferred up to the 308th at Morotai. To answer your question, the morale in the 306th was terrible. The morale in the entire time that I spent in the 308th was excellent, we had a good commanding officer, Major Tombs, T-o-m-b-s, Ferdinand Tombs he was from Wisconsin. And he was a remarkable man and we were doing the mission, that airdrome squadrons had been designed to do. We were you know moved into the forward areas, we set up. We were given total latitude, set up operations, do what we wanted. We set up the communication we even had the fire fighting capabilities, we operated the crash and rescue crews, our medical team was excellent. We were just, just a wonderful outfit. I was just proud to serve with those people.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever hear of Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. Bakel:

Yes. In fact the first night that we landed at Noemfoor we heard Tokyo Rose and she welcomed the 306th Airdrome Squadron to the island of Noemfoor, if you could believe that. We'd been on the base less than twelve hours and they knew about it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah I've heard things like that before. I don't know how she got her information.

Mr. Bakel:

It's amazing to us.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Bakel:

Not really, no. Everybody was a veteran. Yeah we started to tell the war stories, but pretty soon you know we figured out that no matter what kind of war story we had, someone had a better one. That's why we didn't talk about it a whole lot you know. It was, the general feeling in my opinion was, hey that phase of our life is over, let's get on with rebuilding our lives and yeah rebuilding the nation because you know there wasn't anything available. You couldn't buy a washing machine, you couldn't buy an aluminum cooking pot for crying out loud. There's just nothing available, so everybody just got with it and moved on.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Bakel:

Oh gosh. My service records downstairs. We got, you know the Asiatic Pacific. We got the usual medals, Asiatic Pacific, you got three battle stars, Philippine Liberation Medal had one star, one battle star, and then our unit, 308th Airdrome Squadron, was given a Presidential Citation from the president of the Philippines in reward for our setting up that operation at Laoag. And I'm kind of proud of that, in fact I wrote in a while back and I got the actual ribbon, Presidential Citation Badge they called it. And I got the Liberation Certificate, not the Liberation Certificate, the Unit Citation, Presidential Unit Citation document. But I did not

receive any medals of heroism at all, none. The only thing I'm proud of is the battle stars and this unit citation.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Bakel:

Yes. I had had a little flight training in the service so I picked up a little bit more under the G.I. Bill and I visualized at one point in time maybe being a manager of an airport, of a civilian airport. But I got so busy at a job, I went to work for Cessna Aircraft here in Wichita. And I got so busy with that job I gave up on that. But I did use the G.I. Bill in some flight training.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what souvenirs did you get home with besides the pistol?

Mr. Bakel:

I brought home a Japanese rifle, a long barrel Arisaka rifle. I actually brought home three pistols, one is the regular Nambu army-issued pistol in 9mm, and then there's another Nambu officer's model which is a very fine gun, it was 7mm, I brought that back. And then I had the usual, some currency that I'd picked up, you know when we were in New Guinea it was guilders and pesos in the Philippines and so on. I brought some of that back. I brought the contents of my..., I did some flying over there so I had a survival package and I brought that back. That's the one that contained the fishing gear and the folding machete and the silk maps and first aid kit, stuff like that. I brought back one of those. My helmet and goggles and I think that's about it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Bakel:

Only one brief experience, other than coffee and donuts when we departed and coffee and donuts when we got back. When we were up in Laoag, first time we'd seen Red Cross representative was up there in Laoag. At the end of the war they gave us some ice cream powder. I don't know

what the hell the cook did with it, I didn't get any ice cream. You know just didn't have too much exposure.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you had any reunions?

Mr. Bakel:

Yes. I attended two reunions of the 306th Airdrome Squadron and then we've had numerous reunions of the 308th in places like Washington, D.C., most of them were in Branson, Missouri at the Welk Resort. And the last one I organized was two years ago. My grandsons, my daughter married a person who in later years owned and operated a winery in the Sonoma Valley in California. So we arranged a, last reunion two years ago out there at this winery. And there were only two of us showed up. There are only four of us alive, so we just don't have reunions anymore. Now I still keep in contact with one person from the 306th and two people from the 308th. And as far as I know they're the only ones alive, too. We don't know of anybody else.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What would you consider your worst day?

Mr. Bakel:

Yeah, I can recall the worst day. *(Laughter)* It was on Morotai and they had a bug that lived in the kunai grass that gave you dengue fever. And I caught dengue fever. I caught dengue fever the same day we had a hurricane and our medical officer shipped me off to the hospital that had been set up on the beach. It was a twenty-man tent, just set up on the beach. And he brought me up there and dumped me off there in the middle of a hurricane. And that night I was sicker than a dog and the only thing I can remember is that hurricane howling overhead. The tent survived, I don't know how but it did. About a foot of water washed through the tent. I can remember during the night waking up in terrible pain and this nurse flashing a flashlight in my eyes and I finally came to, I just had passed out kind of. I finally came to I think a day later and I

was in this cot that I looked down at this mud underneath and they had set my cot in six bedpans. If you recall a G.I. cot had six legs you know. And it was sinking in the mud apparently and they found six bedpans and I was sitting, I was laying on this cot that was sitting in six bedpans.

(Laughter) But that was the worse day of my life was that dengue, I also got malaria. So I had experience with both. But the only reoccurring was two or three times after I got back I did have a slight reoccurrence of malaria. And I was you know instructed to turn myself in to the VA, but I never did get that sick. I was just off work for a day or two and I was okay.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well Bill, that's all the questions I have unless you've thought anything.

Mr. Bakel:

Okay, well if you think of anything let me know.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well thanks again for your time today and your service to our country.

Mr. Bakel:

You're welcome, hope this was helpful.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Thank you. Bye now.

Mr. Bakel:

Bye.

(End of Interview)

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