

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

The Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With  
Robert T. Axworthy  
Oklahoma City, OK  
July 28, 2015  
GHQ AFPac

My name is Richard Misenhimer: Today is July 28, 2015. I am interviewing Mr. Robert T. Axworthy by telephone. His phone number is 405-789-8593. His address is 6835 Northwest 11<sup>th</sup> Street, Oklahoma City, OK 73127. 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. Axworthy:

Well, thank you.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, the first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the museum to make sure this is OK with you. So let me read this to you. (agreement read) Is that OK with you?

Mr. Axworthy:

That's OK with me.

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, 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. Axworthy:

Yes, I do.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Who would that be?

Mr. Axworthy:

That would be David Axworthy and right now it's the same address as I have and same phone number.

Mr. Misenhimer:

He's your son, the same address. Does he have a cell phone by chance?

Mr. Axworthy:

Yes, he does. The number is 405-517-9362.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's fine. Hopefully we'll never need it but you never know.

Mr. Axworthy:

OK.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, what is your birth date?

Mr. Axworthy:

3-12-24.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you born?

Mr. Axworthy:

Berkley, California.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Axworthy:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How many of each?

Mr. Axworthy:

Three brothers, Don Axworthy, Gordon Axworthy and the other one was me. There were three of us. I had two brothers.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were any of them in World War II?

Mr. Axworthy:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Which one?

Mr. Axworthy:

Don, my older brother, he flew in B-29s. Matter of fact he was close to the...

Mr. Misenhimer:

Is he still living?

Mr. Axworthy:

No, he died probably five years ago.

Mr. Misenhimer:

If he were, I'd like to interview him.

Mr. Axworthy:

Yeah, he would have had some interesting deals.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I'm sure. What were your mother's and father's first names?

Mr. Axworthy:

My father was Cecil T. Axworthy and my mother, do you want her maiden name or?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Her first name.

Mr. Axworthy:

Nan or I guess it would be Anna. Her name was Nan all of her life but it really stood for Anna.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Axworthy:

Oh, it was a very...can I talk about some of that?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Sure, talk about anything you want to talk about.

Mr. Axworthy:

The 1930 stuff...I grew up in Madera, California and went through eight years of grade school at Lincoln Grammar School and I never missed a day of schooling in that complete years. That has worked well for me because I'm 91 years old right now and I have been very, very lucky with my health. Was with my military stuff, too, so it worked out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you finish high school?

Mr. Axworthy:

In 1941, that terrible year and it was a bad year to graduate from high school because you moved from there right into the military. Didn't have much choice.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Axworthy:

Oh, yes, absolutely. My dad was a minister at the First Baptist Church of Madera and we were having our Sunday dinner and I don't know how come we turned on the radio. Maybe we had some information but that's where we were when we got the information.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Axworthy:

I didn't think-- that was for the old guys but none of us figured...danged Japanese. Was the damned Japs. Why they should know better than that, you know. We're gonna squash them like a bug. Terrible. It was terrible because a bunch of my friends were Japanese. Now Madera and the San Joaquin Valley of California, we had a real mix of all sorts of...but we had more Japanese than we did blacks in the area at that time. They were my friends just like everybody else. I didn't consider them, being a Baptist preacher's kid. Dad was very, I guess you'd call him a progressive religious because I don't think he ever met anybody that was different than him. He considered everybody the same and one of the dirtiest word in my vocabulary as I was growing up in the 30s was "Okie". Well, Okies were from Oklahoma. Goodness, gracious, Oklahoma is way back there and they had all this -- and they had bad things back there. They had a Dust Bowl and holy cow, all these people, it was so bad that they would load up their stuff and head for Madera, California. I thought I was on the wrong end of the Grapes of Wrath. And it was sort of true because the main agricultural interest in the area was at that time probably cotton was the biggest thing and before the time of cotton machines, pickers for cotton, you

know it had to be picked by hand and that required a bunch of people and so the ranches there in the San Joaquin Valley were generally very large, thousands of acres in many cases. With thousands of acres of hand-picking or something, you needed a bunch of people so there was quite a system built into the agricultural stuff in the valley where people, landowners, had a transient camp deal that the transients, they'd come in by the hundreds, to work at these peak times. They needed cotton picking for instance and that created a real, well just about every major farmer that they said was maybe a couple thousand acres or something, was a rich, important person, just about. They built these camps. All these camps were there when these Okies started heading for California and the agricultural market there, land of milk and honey. Of course this was right at the heart of the wors....everybody was broke.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Right, that Depression was then.

Mr. Axworthy:

Nobody had jobs and it was bad, but they had a bunch of these camps already set up for transients regularly for many years. So a lot of the living stuff was available for these people from Oklahoma. The Oklahoma thing was just sort of...they weren't all Okies by any means but they came from that whole area, Texas, Kansas, Oklahoma and the weather was as bad in one place as in the other. So at any rate, these people...there were over a million people there over the years. All the new people coming into California. It affected certainly the way we lived and as I said, the dirtiest word in my vocabulary as a preacher's kid was "Okie" for the official. It was like two words just like the "Damn Yankees" of the East Coast in the wartime. The word Yankee was only part of it. The whole word was "Damnyankee", all one word. It was the same way with the Oklahomans. If it wasn't just the Okies but they were "dumb Okies." I said that in

the presence of my dad at some point and I got a terrible lecture which stayed with me the rest of my life. He said, "You don't do that – you calling somebody dumb. How do you know. You don't know. How can you say that. That's terrible. That's swearing, the worst thing you can do." So when I went into the Army I had this background and of course one of the first and major things of their adapting of these civilians into the Army when I got drafted, you know you had to...well, I discovered that we were fighting the Japs and "Japs" was never a word in our vocabulary growing up. Jap was, you know you just didn't do that. It would be like today calling somebody a Nigger or something. It just wasn't done. That's the way it was with the Japanese, they were all our friends and neighbors. That was a transition thing. You know mom used to always brag over the years when we were growing up, after we had grown up and were looking back at that period, you know we got through all of that economic problems and we never went hungry. This was always a real strange thing to me because I didn't know that was an option. I never understood that things were tight. But as a poor country preacher, Dad, his regular income was supposed to be \$50 a month but I don't think he ever had that. He got what was in the basket in the, I can't even remember words for gosh sakes. Give me another question and I'll answer.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you enter the service?

Mr. Axworthy:

It was April 24, 1944.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you drafted or did you volunteer?

Mr. Axworthy:

No, I was drafted. I'm afraid I was drafted kicking and screaming. I had actually had when I



graduated from high school in 1941 as I said this was a difficult year for people graduating. I had enrolled in Sacramento Junior College in chemical engineering. The chemical engineering was one of those things that was on the good list for the Draft Board and I got a 2A educational deferment while I was going to college. Well, that got me through two years of college at which time my parents moved up to Spokane, Washington and right near Spokane, Washington was Washington State College and so when I graduated from Sacramento Junior College I immediately enrolled in Washington State College and that was the point at which I became at the top of the list in the draft system. At that point it was just a matter of a few months I stayed there in Washington State, four or five months, at which time my name came to the top of the list of the draft deal and I was drafted on April 24, 1944.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you were drafted, did you have any choice of the branch of service?

Mr. Axworthy:

No, that was a problem. The previous year or two I had been encouraged by the Draft Board that I could select my branch of service if I would volunteer and go in, instead of waiting for the draft system. I would have some control over...well, I just didn't do that. I didn't feel that strongly about any particular part of the Army anyway. I was going to just take my chances with the rest of them and that's the way...on January 1, 1945. This was a while after I got out of basic training. My basic training was actually my first military post was at Seattle, Washington at the base there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that basic training?

Mr. Axworthy:

I thought it was exciting. I thought it was great except it was tough. It was very hard. The whole idea of suddenly living outside and it wouldn't make any difference in the morning what the weather was like or anything else, you knew what you were going to do. At the crack of dawn or whatever the magic time was, you got up and we did it and we would do it all day, regardless of whether it was raining or anything else. We did our thing and you got to where you were very sensitive to weather. You never realized you never really been concerned with weather. If it was too cold, you got out of the cold and if it rained, you got out of the rain but when you're committed to 24 hours every day, it's got to be in whatever the weather is. That made the whole thing very tough. Fortunately I was in Camp Roberts, California which is about half-way between Los Angeles and San Francisco and this was moderate weather and I remember a lot of mud. I remember a lot of rain and whatnot, digging foxholes and what not. It was quite muddy, plus the fact that you're not used to doing things in the mud. You got out of there if it was bad and did something else. But I thought it was exciting because first of all, I'm a gun nut. I love military weapons and stuff like that. Actually I'm a chemical engineer by training but I was interested in that part of it so that part was real good. Plus the fact that my dad was a preacher and he was an officer in World War I. He had some obviously very bad experiences in France. He came home with a fetish against weapons. You know he felt basically they should be outlawed. He never allowed us as kids to have a cap gun. We just didn't have guns. Because of that I guess I was fascinated with guns and when I got in the military the guns were one of the great points and I was never very good as a gunner but I loved them. That was a good part.

Mr. Misenhimer:

In your basic did you have a lot of marching?

Mr. Axworthy:

To the point where I broke my foot. This was in mid-1944, a few months into 1944 and the Army had changed their training system. It used to be you had a basic that was 21 weeks and was well thought out because it was figured that every week you would walk one more mile. So the first week you walked a mile, the second week you walked two and then by the time you got to the 25<sup>th</sup> week to graduate, that's when you had your 25-mile hike with pack and weapon and the whole bit. That was tough. When I got in with my group, it was one of the first ones that changed from 25 weeks to I think it was 17 weeks. You did the same thing, had the same checkpoints in the training and miles of walking and everything and that was...it was so by the end of the 17 weeks you did 25 miles. Well, it was too far. It was a bridge too far because half-way through my training, my foot started hurting tremendously and of course only goof-offs would go to...fall out to medical in the morning if you were sick or something you would report on...(here come words and you'd go on)...at any rate I walked too much and my foot broke. My metatarsal bones on the top of my foot broke. It was a function and it was later referred to, much later they were called march fractures. Boy, I had a beauty. It was rather humorous later, looking back on it, because after I'd gone on sick call and they looked at me and sent me back to service. But they had my name and everything. On more thinking about it evidently, somebody figured out that's where they had this problem with his foot and it was starting to be called a march fracture so they had to pull me out of duty. In the meantime I was on duty after I'd been on sick call and I had some guys, we were out on a hillside probably about five miles from Camp Roberts base and I had a runner from battalion come running and he ran all the way, running and came out and he interrupted the Lieutenant who was doing whatever it was and Lieutenant looks at the piece of paper they handed him and he says, "Axworthy, come on here." He goes down and talks to me and says, "You've been called back to battalion so you go back with the runner

here.” I took off and the only thing I could think of is that somebody at home, some part of the family, maybe dad or mom, had had a problem, was sick or something. I didn’t ever remember somebody coming out there, running a whole training session. So at any rate I turned myself in like double time all the way back, five miles or whatever it was. Now in the meantime my foot was absolutely killing me. It was obviously worse and worse and when I got back to the headquarters outfit and talked to the Sergeant. He says, “Axworthy, go over and sit over there in the corner. Get off your feet.” What’s the matter, what’s the matter? “You’ve flunked sick call. Sit over there. They’re sending an ambulance.” So after walking for over five miles at double time, I was sitting there and the ambulance came rolling around and they put me in the ambulance and took me across to the other side of the place to the hospital and I spent the next eight weeks or so in the hospital. The treatment for the march fracture was very simple: incidentally it was not a civilian thing, it was a military deal. The thing was that if your foot hurt you would stop using it. You wouldn’t walk on it if it was that bad but the military are committed so we were marching ourselves into...incidentally I read some stuff later and the term march fracture was not generally used by anybody else except those in the military and were involved with it. I discovered that this had been quite a major deal. It was all built around their reduction, reducing the time of training which all had to do with marching, how much marching you did. Originally and over the years I guess that 21 weeks had been pretty well determined as you know somebody from civilian life who gets in there and who does all this stuff, he will slowly work himself up to where and the demand of the military on him would be within the limits of what the body could stand. The big problem there with me was the fact that I weighed probably 130-135 pounds, close to that. I had the same packs and my weapons weighed just as much as the 220 pound guy. That was all on a 130 pound guy. That was probably why I was one

of those. There were a bunch of us. Nobody ever gave me any numbers about it but I could sort of gather because we had a bunch of guys from our own outfit who ended up in the hospital the same as I did. I figure it was probably ten or fifteen percent of the guys. I would be interested in what those numbers actually were that actually had that broken metatarsal bone fractures, march fractures. At any rate that..I always said that turned me into a goof-off because I learned from all these guys in the hospital all the ways to get out of duty, of you don't do, you never volunteer. So I think it probably made a good soldier out of me, the military. So what's next. I just wander on. I hope you're still listening.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, yeah. Now after basic what did you do then?

Mr. Axworthy:

After basic then it was just a matter of...of course by now my group that I started training with, they were off and shipped out. They had completed their 17 weeks or whatever it was it finally ended up. They had completed that and they had got their orders and I assume that they had gone to the South Pacific. That's where everybody was going from our training at that particular point. Now this was in, well right in the Bay Area of California and it was just only a few miles up to San Francisco and then we'd get on troop ships in San Francisco and head to the South Pacific. So that's what my guys that I started training with and we got a little bit of information about where people ended up. After I finished my basic training I ended up in San Francisco, got on the troop ship and then on January 1, 1945 I sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge heading to the South Pacific and the next stop from there was in two little islands. But we were on our way to Leyte because MacArthur, he was probably right in the process of doing his thing on Leyte about the time I was getting ready to ship out because I arrived on Leyte with live ammunition in my

M-1 rifle and went down the cargo net. Boy, that was and that was the problem that the troop ship was not really a troop ship, it was a modified, some kind of a ship, boat, and it wasn't that big and I don't know whether it would have been called one of those, what was it, boats that they made so many of,

Mr. Misenhimer:

Liberty ship?

Mr. Axworthy:

Liberty ship, could have been something like that. Although I think it was older than that. But they were using all sorts of ships and then we heading for Leyte but we stopped at two military bases, two hospital bases on oh, the big long...I'm sorry I don't remember things well.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was it New Guinea?

Mr. Axworthy:

New Guinea, that's where it was. There was Hollandia and what was the other one? Hollandia and ???? But we stopped at both these and as I said they were military, they were hospital deals and we picked up maybe 50 or 100 new passengers from each of those hospitals and we were heading for Leyte. These guys were just coming out of the hospital. They had been shot, had got sick or something in Leyte and in battles in the Philippines and had been sent to the rear to these hospitals and now they had been wounded and whatnot and now they were sent back, being sent back into the outfit that they originally left. This really killed me because I was bright enough and I knew that most of this business of going into the infantry and fighting that you had a good chance of getting wounded. I knew that only, not even probably only 50 percent of those that got wounded, actually died. I figured oh, boy, the odds are still in my favor even if I got wounded, I

still, I'm going to make it one way or another but it was...oh well, we got there... Hollandia and Finschhaven, and we got there, both these guys, and with the weather as it was in the South Pacific there and everybody up on deck who would not have their shirts on and they'd have shorts on so you could see pretty well their whole bodies and these were guys that just came out of the hospital, all healed up. Well, by God, if you'd been shot, sent to the hospital and healed up and then sent back into service, you got great searing wounds here and there, great chunks of flesh that had been gouged out. This is bad, this is serious for God's sake. My idea, well, I'll just get a flesh wound. I know that I know these programs and whatnot. It's just a flesh wound, don't worry about it. It's just a flesh wound. Oh, my God, have you ever seen a flesh wound? These are terrible things and my whole world just collapsed around me that was built on...it's sort of like writers have a terrible habit of making things sound and I liked the one about this guy who was in this horrendous wreck, you know, with cars coming together but don't worry about our hero here because he was thrown clear. Now wait a second, I'm inside a car and suddenly the car stops and I keep on going, what's going to happen to me? Oh, you're going to be thrown clear. No, no, it's in a metal box you understand. Well, that is not a good expression. You don't get thrown clear under extremely weird circumstances. It's one of those things that writers use I guess. At any rate, all of that was being re-created in my mind as we approached Leyte and it was rather exciting. What's the next step?

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you got to Leyte, what did you do there?

Mr. Axworthy:

Well, when we got to Leyte the first thing of course was to get off the troop ship onto the ground somewhere. Well, they had, were those Higgins boats?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, Higgins boats, right. When you got on land, what happened?

Mr. Axworthy:

We got to Leyte and we're getting off the troop ship and hanging over the side of the troop ship they had these big heavy rope cargo nets. Squares, and you had to climb down these cargo nets. Unfortunately on a big troop ship and out in the bay and the water is going up and down, well the troop ship is going up and down and the little boat that we're transferring into is going down and up, instead of up and down. Meantime you're loaded down with your B-bag, your duffle bag and your weapon, which was an M-1, and it was a dangerous deal because especially the little guy is overloaded with all of this stuff he's carrying and climbing down this silly cargo net and there were definite rules for climbing down the net. For goodness sake, you grab onto something, don't grab onto a horizontal rope on the cargo net because somebody is above you and will very possibly step on your hand if you are grabbing, so you hold the vertical part of the cargo net with your hands. You're going to have to step on the horizontal one of course which is stepping on the guy below you if he's got his hands in the wrong place. So you have a quick education in what you can do and can't do and then of course the main thing is for God's sake, don't drop any of your equipment. There's guys who are 15-20 feet below you and an M-1 rifle falling down and hitting him in the head, he's going to be dead, he's not going to make it. So this is serious stuff and with all those things that you're holding, you could not say, "I can't." In the meantime the boat is going down and up and you're going up and down and it was very exciting. In fact it was really the worst part was the fact that all of these guys are right out of training just like I am and they've never wandered around with live ammunition in their rifles in their entire military deal. If you had live ammunition you were on a range and you had non-coms there that were needing



you, "Keep that weapon downstream, downwind for God's sakes, don't aim it at your buddy." All this stuff and in the meantime behind you is all these guys with live ammunition and that I think is what scared me more than anything else. They kept saying, "Well, there's still small arms fire on the beach." Oh, there was not fire on the beach, we'd been in weeks at that location and I'm sure there were some unidentified Japs that were spread around in the hillsides but at any rate they had us sort of scared to death on the whole thing. The next step was landing on the beach so you actually got through, you got off of the troop ship, you got onto the Higgins boat and you got all the way to shore and now the next thing they say, "OK, now the chances are we'll hang up on a high spot here before we get on the beach so don't expect to step off on the sand. We'll be well out possibly because the land is undulating underneath the water here and there will be high spots and low spots. So if the boat hangs up and then you are on the front and you step off the end of the ship, the boat here, onto the water, that water may be six foot deep. It may be ten foot deep, you just don't know. Watch the guy in front of you, see what happens to him. So don't expect to suddenly have ankle-deep water. You don't know what you've got." So that was another thing. Oh, my God, I'm going to step off with all that equipment on me. I'm not going to be able to swim very good. That's for sure. OK, well then the next step was the critical spot of the entire training site, everything worked right up to now. It did work. After we got on the ground and we actually walked through the sand up to, there was a monstrous tent, one of these huge, huge tents. Had to be a couple of acres of tent there at any rate, and a big line of guys that were lined up and there were officers shouting here and there about what you should do and shouldn't do. Had to get in the right place, the right deal. They divided us up into where our paperwork was at the same place that we were. There was a lot of waiting there. Then there was on the sound system the first thing I noticed was that there had been some sound system, I didn't

pay any attention to what it was and finally there was, "Axworthy, where's Axworthy?" Well now in infantry basic training you hated to have your name called anywhere except on mail call. If your name was ever called, it was a bad sign. Something terrible was going to happen. Well, that's the way I felt about it when they called my name. The Lieutenant said, "Hey, Axworthy, can you type?" I said, "What are we talking about here? No, no, I'm not a typist." He says, "Come on, I see you're education here. You've been through college or been through part of college here. Didn't you ever type any reports or anything?" I said, "Well, yeah, but I'm not a typist. I don't do that. Yeah, I used a typewriter." "Go over and see that thing over there. That's a typewriter. Go over and type this thing." He gave me a thing to copy. He says, "Copy this thing. I'm going to shout at you to start and I'll shout at you to stop. I'm going to see how many words a minute you can type." Well, I typed 11 words a minute. Hunt and peck, hunt and peck. But I didn't have any mistakes so that pleased Lieutenant. He says, "I pulled your paperwork here. You've got the highest AGCT score that I've ever seen." "Oh, yeah, what's that?" "That's how we tell what you're going to do in the military. It's your Army General Classification Test." I said, "Oh, yeah, I took some sort of a test, yeah." He said, "You've got a high one. You go over by that tree over there and sit down there and they're sending a jeep out from GHQ." I said, "GHQ, what's GHQ?" "General Headquarters, GHQ, General Headquarters, MacArthur's Headquarters." "He runs the Army." So I went and stood over there until the jeep came up and he took me over, it was only several blocks away to this low building that was sort of a big deal but it was obviously very temporary and I came in and there was a Lieutenant Colonel. The Lieutenant Colonel was the guy I reported to. I said, "Private Axworthy reporting, sir." He looks over and says, "Good God, who in the hell sent me a damn buck private?" Obviously this was my boss for the next couple of years. It was nice to know that you're wanted, you know, but that

was the key thing. I was suddenly not in the infantry, I was in MacArthur's General Headquarters in their signal section and it was a whole different world from what I had...from then on I never marched. I don't think I ever marched again. But we could get jeeps from the motor pool. Not when we wanted them always, but we could get them usually. The guys that were the other enlisted men that were in the same group with me. These were a real interesting group. The fact was, evidently they had when they had requirement from GHQ for personnel and of a specific type like in my case they were looking for a clerk/typist, if they don't have one, they don't wait until they can find one, they assigned one, they made one and just like I got in with eleven words a minute, suddenly became, and that was basically what the Lieutenant had told me after I had the eleven words, he said, "Don't worry about it. You're smart enough I think you can fake it." Then my next word was from the Lieutenant Colonel who said, "God damn." Buck Private. Incidentally that Lieutenant Colonel as we headed out there was sort of a good friend. You don't have good friends in the military, I mean an officer when you're an enlisted man but he was as good a friend as I had there. He was writing a book and that's another story. OK, that's how I got into GHQ and from then it was just a matter, and they did, they gave me a few higher level jobs occasionally. But that really at that point I was, it not only changed my entire view of the military and everything else. I was suddenly able to start thinking again and it was sort of neat. This story builds up to the point where I...people always ask me when you were in MacArthur's headquarters out there, did you see him often. Of course they were in the same building. Well, once he was talking to our group. At this point I completely, because I never had a conversation with him in my life. Of course I'm not an officer and I think he only talked to officers but I did knock him down on one occasion which was an interesting story. At this point I would leave it blank and ask you if you have any questions but ...

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were in MacArthur's headquarters, where was that at?

Mr. Axworthy:

That was on Leyte in the town was Tacloban but they weren't really existing. This was all military, the whole thing and the base, the headquarters on Leyte were just a few blocks from the water where we landed but away from the water. It was right there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, was MacArthur there?

Mr. Axworthy:

Oh, yeah, when he was there. He was gone more than he was ever there. Yeah, that was his office.

Mr. Misenhimer:

His main headquarters were in Australia.

Mr. Axworthy:

This was where he came when he left Australia. This was "I have returned" on the beach where I landed. He had landed a few weeks before that and that's where he had his famous "I have returned" speech. That's where the G.I.s were really pissed off with that. It was "We have returned."

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever actually meet MacArthur?

Mr. Axworthy:

Not formally, yeah, other than knocking him down which was very good but no, I never would have had anything to talk to him about. As I said, I was an enlisted man and he was an officer

and if he had asked me for something...now my job was in the signal section. My job was to keep track of all of the signal, the signal corps teams, individual. Now they had all sorts of different things in the signal corps teams would do. They had high line guys that string telephone wires. You know, how do you communicate with, how does the Army communicate? Well, you got radios. Who runs the radios? Well, are you just talking to the radio or did you...well, no, you usually try to turn it into some gobbledy-gook of some sort. Who does that? Well that's the signal section. Their business is signals so that's what was our purpose in the general headquarters is if you were going to communicate with somebody else, that's why we had our, all of us had, oh, that's another story...have what do you call it? Clearance. We were all cleared for at least Top Secret and some of them had...but you know if you're in a telephone conference in a military deal, first of all you're not going to do it, you're going to have to have somebody do it for you. Well that person that does it for you is in the signal section, a signalman. That's his job. Whether it's a radio or whether it's a wire line, whatever it is, that was our deal. I often said I probably saw some of MacArthur's communications before he did. Because it didn't go to him, it went to me or one of my buddies but so you know it was sort of ....nobody ever asked me for information other than "Where's the 7845<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion? Well, they're up on the other side" and my boss, together with his bosses, would be moving these outfits around...well, we're working on this new invasion that's going in over here so we need to have somebody there to set up some radio stuff so this 72<sup>nd</sup> Signal Group, have somebody. So I knew where that Signal Group was right at the moment and that was what I did and that was one of the things that I did with my writing, not fighting. I always told people I was in the infantry but the infantry was just my training. But I never, matter of fact, later on as we stayed in Leyte until our land forces got up into Manila and then we moved from Leyte up to the city hall, it was the new city hall in

Manila, it was the old city hall because there was another one that they were building so it was the old city hall. When we got there it was still smoking because when they moved the signal corps from, when they moved the GHQ from one location to the next, first of all they have to get a location for us to be and in this particular case MacArthur had already decided that we were going to go to the city hall. That was the best building that was available to him although it did have holes in the wall from...I guess mostly from the U.S. bombardments and stuff as we were fighting for Manila. So at any rate where do I go next? I got to Manila.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long were you in Leyte?

Mr. Axworthy:

Oh, gosh, actually I don't have any marker points as to when this happened and that happened but I would say just general probably as much as a month, two months, probably.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Two months, OK.

Mr. Axworthy:

In that area.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK. Do you know when you went to Manila?

Mr. Axworthy:

No. I have no...

Mr. Misenhimer:

But Manila had been liberated?

Mr. Axworthy:

Yeah, yeah. There was still smoking...

Mr. Misenhimer:

Fires and things?

Mr. Axworthy:

Yeah, yeah. Different parts of the old city of Manila. That was really...

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you do the same thing in Manila as you were doing in Leyte?

Mr. Axworthy:

Yes. Only it was...instead of a plywood, single level hovel like we had. We had hundreds of people that were in the headquarters so it was good-sized. Then we had a real building in Manila, the old city hall, and to me I guess it was marble and whatnot, granite or something. So it was substantial but it had these gaping holes here and there from...

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long were you in Manila?

Mr. Axworthy:

Well, up until I went to Tokyo and I went to Tokyo...my paperwork does not say when I was moved. Wonder if something says what my time in the Army of Occupation was. Would the Army of Occupation start when we went to Japan?

Mr. Misenhimer:

That was probably around into September I imagine.

Mr. Axworthy:

It was cold weather. That's the part that I remember was when we went up to Japan suddenly our

clothes that we had in the Philippines, they didn't work any more. Everything we had was lightweight, suntans, never, ever had a tie. We could have had a lot of heavy shoes and we get up to Tokyo we were back, we had shoe polish again. That was a major thing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were doing the same thing in Tokyo?

Mr. Axworthy:

Basically the same thing in Tokyo. Only in Tokyo we had real good facilities because we were in the Dai-ichi building and that was a major...I don't know whether it was a government building. It was like a government building or whether it was (I don't know the word in Japanese)...

Mr. Misenhimer:

I think it was government but I'm not sure.

Mr. Axworthy:

So at any rate it was right where there was a whole string of them, not close to each other, blocks apart right across the moat from the chief of the Japanese, the Emperor.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About how long were you in Japan?

Mr. Axworthy:

Well I would say maybe three months.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Three months, OK.

Mr. Axworthy:

We went directly home from there but this was the period of time that we were fighting the battle of points. Had to have a certain number of points before you went home. It was one of those



things that was kicked around by the military guys was the fact at some point in late 1945, MacArthur's position was that we could land a million men at any spot in the Pacific within so many weeks or something like this, you know, and we can do that any place in the Pacific except San Francisco. But you know this was a major troop movement thing. Just moving people around. But we're talking in terms of millions here and those things just don't happen overnight so of course we were all pissed off the whole thing. This was...

Mr. Misenhimer:

So when did you come back to the States?

Mr. Axworthy:

That's probably documented. My induction was 24 April 1944. The place of entry in the service was Ft. Lewis, Washington. I have a great story about that. But the PR1-1 Demobilization AR615-365, 15<sup>th</sup> of December 1944. What's that? For separation.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That was the authorization. What day did you actually get out? May 2, 1946 when you were discharged? Had you been in Japan until about then?

Mr. Axworthy:

Yes, right. It would have been a few days there at Ft. Lewis but it wouldn't have been much more than that because I was basically home by then.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you came back from Japan not too long before May 22, 1946.

Mr. Axworthy:

Yes, but I saw that date somewhere in here with the Good Conduct Medal, Victory Medal World War II, Army of Occupation Medal-Japan, Asiatic-Pacific Theater Service Medal, Philippine

Liberation Medal. I guess that's all that's on here. Is that the same one? The Philippine

Liberation Medal. Is that the one I got from the Philippines?

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's the one you got from the Philippines, right.

Mr. Axworthy:

I mean it was their medal that they gave us.

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, I think it was an American medal.

Mr. Axworthy:

I got a thing on the wall that they gave me. I had the privilege a couple months ago of giving the first salute to my grandson, Ian Axworthy, who had just graduated from college in military, what do you call it?

Mr. Misenhimer:

ROTC?

Mr. Axworthy:

ROTC. And when they did his graduate ceremony there was a new medal and he became a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant and I saluted him for the first time. He had gotten the Philippine Liberation and he got a whole thing and he put it in a glass case and I'm reading the glass case right now. It's got the medal and I ended up finally as a Technician 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, T-3. That was on December 29, 194 .

That's when I left the States.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the date? I'm sorry.

Mr. Axworthy:

December 29, 1944. This was

Mr. Misenhimer:

Let me ask you some questions. Was there ever a time you felt frightened?

Mr. Axworthy:

Yes. When I figured out that down in Hollandia and Finschhaven that my hope of just getting a flesh wound was down the tube, when I saw guys who had flesh wounds and they were terrible, terrible. Suddenly I realized that was down the tube.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Axworthy:

Oh, that was big.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you, at Leyte or where were you?

Mr. Axworthy:

I think we were up in Manila. I don't associate anything in Leyte with that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on May 8, 1945 Germany surrendered. Did you hear about that?

Mr. Axworthy:

Yeah, that was a big thing. The big thing was the bomb. That was the...

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you hear about the A-bomb?

Mr. Axworthy:

Actually I was told about it. I talked about the Lieutenant Colonel and he knew I was a chemical engineer and he had gotten the story of the A-bomb. I imagine everybody in the military had about a quarter of an inch of paper, eight and a half by eleven sheets and it gave the whole story of it. He asked me to read that thing over and then meet with a bunch of other GHQ people in the signal section and give them a condensed story of this whole thing. I had overnight to do that to do it the next day. That was our date as I was a budding chemical engineer. The war was won by chemical engineers and none of us like to think about that but that's what they did. We knew, absolutely knew, that the invasion was going to be...it was going to be terrible. Nobody really believed that the Japanese would roll over and play dead. We knew that it was going to be, we'd eventually have to kill them, maybe down to the last one and that would be a terrible, terrible thing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Axworthy:

Yes, I had an Aerosaki rifle.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything else?

Mr. Axworthy:

Well, I don't think I brought it home but I ended up with one but I had a hand grenade, empty hand grenade that I had got. But I don't remember bringing it out of my gear. I think I probably maybe sold it to war surplus or something. I told you that I was...

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Axworthy:

No, I went right back to where I had left in the state college.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Washington State College.

Mr. Axworthy:

Right. Now I had the G.I. Bill and that made the whole...that was...I'll tell you I don't know whether anybody ever figured out but the G.I. Bill probably made more impact on more kids than anything that we ever did military wise, that the government did for us military.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I think the G.I. Bill contributed to the good years we've had since.

Mr. Axworthy:

Yes, I don't think there's any question about it. I know in my own case I would have eventually graduated I think. I had a poor preacher for a dad but he would have needled me and I would have done it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you had any reunions of your outfit when you got out?

Mr. Axworthy:

No, because GHQ there was just a handful of us there. I didn't have an overall, some battalion or any crap like that. It was all strictly...so no, we did...that was...yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. Axworthy:

Oh, yes. That was every once in a while we'd get her. Everybody was real pissed off about...seems as though she was actually an American or something. She talked American.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I hear she played good music.

Mr. Axworthy:

Yeah, no question about her. She had a good audience. Everybody sort of put up with her. Did I say anything about I was sweating out my draft situation that summer. I had worked at a...I was a budding chemical engineer and I worked at a chemical company in Spokane that made magnesium. Magnesium is the stuff that we made the bombs out of, fire bombs.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, incendiaries, right.

Mr. Axworthy:

Yeah, that did horrible things both to Japan and Germany. They both had unbelievable, you know, statistics that indicated more deaths than what we did with the bomb. Unbelievable.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well, that's all the questions I have unless you have something else.

Mr. Axworthy:

No, no I never did get you the whole story of my knocking down MacArthur but we'll have to leave that for another time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, no, tell me about knocking down MacArthur. What happened?

Mr. Axworthy:

It was in the Dai-ichi building. We had just gone up from Manila to Japan and we had this fancy

new building and we got our new clothes because all we had was suntans and combat stuff that we had in the Philippines. We got up to Tokyo and suddenly we had to graduate up to where they wanted us to wear ties for God's sake. That was terrible stuff and we had to be to the office on time. We had a real office and wonderful, the Dai-ichi building was a beautiful building. That was getting back on the horse again just after we left that mess down in the Philippines. The front opening doors in the thing, in this big Dai-ichi building, had big doors entering it and in this particular occasion we'd come back up and we'd just had this story from the boss that we were now gonna wear these kind of clothes in these kind of situations, blah, blah, blah and shine our shoes and do all the rest of this and I was late the morning after we had all this changes. So I was racing up the front steps on the thing and somebody opened the big doors and I sliced through and they opened it for MacArthur who was coming out. So as he's coming out I was going in and he's a big man. He was over six foot, six foot three or four, something like that and here I was five foot seven and a half or whatever it was and I completely nailed him and we ended up on the floor and the biggest general on his staff who was a massive guy picked me up by my shirt and actually I think he was holding me at arm's length in front of him and he says, "What's your name, rank and serial number, boy?" MacArthur was dusting himself off and he says, "George, come on, the boy's trying to get to work. Let him go." So George let me loose and I zipped around the corner and ended up back in the signal section and vibrated for about a week.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's quite a story.

Mr. Axworthy:

Yeah, well, he did sort of talk to me when he...he was talking to George, whoever that General was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

All right, Bob, thanks for your time today and thank you for your service to our country.

Mr. Axworthy:

OK, thank you very much.

*End of Interview*

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