

*National Museum of the Pacific War*

*Nimitz Education and Research Center*

*Fredericksburg, Texas*

Interview with

**Mr. William E. Berger**

Date of Interview: July 31, 2015

# **National Museum of the Pacific War**

## **Fredericksburg, Texas**

### **Interview with Mr. William E. Berger**

Interview in progress.

John Fargo: Today is July the 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015. My name is John Fargo and I'm a volunteer at the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas. Today I am interviewing Bill Berger concerning his experiences during World War II. This interview is taking place in Mr. Berger's home in Austin, Texas. This interview is in support of the Educational and Research Center for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Okay, Bill, that's out of the way. Now, let's start of...and talking a little bit about your early years. What...what's your birthdate?

Mr. Berger: June 6<sup>th</sup>, D-Day, 1918.

John Fargo: Where were you born?

Mr. Berger: Ferris, F-e-r-r-i-s, Illinois. The county is on the western edge of Illinois near where Iowa and Missouri and Illinois come together.

John Fargo: Uh hum.

Mr. Berger: It's on...the county that adjoins the Mississippi River northwest.

John Fargo: What was your father's occupation?

Mr. Berger: At the time I was born, he ran a grocery store. In his early youth, he was...son of a farmer, and he helped to run the farm. And he was married...in 1914 and

opened a grocery store; I don't remember the year, I wasn't around, but...uh, that's what he was doing when I was first born. He later developed into a...juke box operator. One of my uncles invented an electric juke box and we spread them out over...parts of Illinois, Iowa and Missouri and my father ran the...juke box business until...the Depression hit...and the...people quit putting nickels (chuckles).

John Fargo: (Chuckles). You have any brothers and sisters?

Mr. Berger: I had two sisters; they're both deceased.

John Fargo: Where'd you go to high school?

Mr. Berger: (Cough), first three years were at Ferris High School where we had about...ten or twelve people in the entire school.

John Fargo: Really?!

Mr. Berger: First three grades – freshman, sophomore and junior. It was a sort of an annex to a grade school. And then the fourth year I went to Carthage, Illinois which is the county seat of that...county, Hancock County, Illinois. And...in Carthage we had seventy members of our graduating class; it was a much bigger school on a different...

John Fargo: You know when you graduated?

Mr. Berger: 1935.

John Fargo: 1935.

Mr. Berger: As far as I know, I'm the only survivor of that class.

John Fargo: Did you go on to college?

Mr. Berger: I went on to Carthage College which is located in Carthage; it was a Lutheran Ministerial School. They...it's part of the Missouri Senate and they taught...would-be Lutheran preachers, and also various types of activity. Not all their students were eventually preachers. I was not; I was a Methodist and I...simply went to that school because it was close.

John Fargo: What...what year did you graduate?

Mr. Berger: I never graduated; I went for two and a half years (cough) and dropped out; thought I would make enough money...should go back and pay off the bills I hadn't paid...hadn't paid them very much yet, and about that time the war came along, and...

John Fargo: Did you get drafted?

Mr. Berger: I got...first, I was 4-F; I weighed a hundred and ten pounds...

John Fargo: Wow!

Mr. Berger: ...and I was 4-F. In July of 1942 they decided I was suitable.

John Fargo: So, they drafted you?

Mr. Berger: I was drafted in 19...

John Fargo: 1942.

Mr. Berger: ...and...

John Fargo: ...and, where did you go to basic training, do you remember?

Mr. Berger: Basic training was at Camp Swift near Bastrop, Texas.

John Fargo: Wow, and it's still there!

Mr. Berger: So, I, as you can see, I haven't gotten far from my basic.

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Berger: I went down there...in the summer of 1942; we opened up the camp. It was a brand-new camp at that time.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Berger: And was with, let's see, the 95<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. I was a member of the Service Company of...the 377<sup>th</sup> Infantry Bat, uh, Regiment.

John Fargo: Uh, well, let me ask you something. Before you...was assigned to the...the regiment, didn't you go to basic training?

Mr. Berger: Well yes, I was in...I guess it was...almost forgot now; it was (pause) "K" Company Infantry.

John Fargo: In Camp Swift?

Mr. Berger: Yeah.

John Fargo: And then, what'd that last...about three months or so?

Mr. Berger: About...two or three months, and then...

John Fargo: Then you went into...

Mr. Berger: I was switched from that to Service Company because I knew how to type.

John Fargo: Service Company?

Mr. Berger: Yeah, that's...

John Fargo: And that was...what unit was that?

Mr. Berger: ...also...that was in 1942.

John Fargo: But what unit was it?

Mr. Berger: The Service Company of the 377<sup>th</sup> Regiment...

John Fargo: Okay.

Mr. Berger: ...of the 95<sup>th</sup> Division. (Cough), it was a regular infantry regiment.

John Fargo: Okay, so that was a...well organized div...division at that point, right?

Mr. Berger: Yeah, it...

John Fargo: All...everybody was a Camp Swift? The whole division?

Mr. Berger: Yeah, it was a full division.

John Fargo: Full division? Huh.

Mr. Berger: Yeah, they had about...ninety thousand people there.

John Fargo: Wow!

Mr. Berger: We all came in by train about...oh, as trains kept coming in, of course, it filled up.

John Fargo: Yeah!

Mr. Berger: It was a brand-new building. We had to scrape the...uh, the little labels off the window panes (chuckles).

John Fargo: (Laughter)

Mr. Berger: They were still painting when we got there.

John Fargo: (Unintelligible words). What...what kind of...you have barracks to live in?

Mr. Berger: Regular barracks.

John Fargo: Okay.

Mr. Berger: Two story barracks.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Berger: And some of those barracks were...later, after the war, sold and moved into...the University of Texas for...housing students.

John Fargo: Really?! Now from...from there, you were in Service Company initially.

Mr. Berger: Yeah.

John Fargo: Did you go into artillery training of some sort?

Mr. Berger: Well, it was...Service Company is the one that hauls the groceries.

John Fargo: Okay.

Mr. Berger: And keeps supplies coming to the regiment. (Throat clearing), I was in that for about...six months, I guess.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Berger: And there was a notice on the bulletin board that...you could apply for Warrant Officer, so I did that. That...we had been moved to San Antonio to Fort Sam Houston by that time, which was in...uh, along about December, and this is...I think it was...in...February I was interviewed by three Colonels and they...passed me and assigned me as a Warrant Officer.

John Fargo: Wow!

Mr. Berger: No, training, just walked in.

John Fargo: No, no training?

Mr. Berger: I had been a newspaper editor and I was very well educated.

John Fargo: Uh huh, so...based upon that interview...with you...

Mr. Berger: They still interviewed; lasted about...thirty minutes or so. Three Colonels of the division headquarters interviewed me, and...I...I was still in the 95<sup>th</sup> Division.

John Fargo: Right.

Mr. Berger: And...so, overnight I moved from the barracks to the officers' quarters.

John Fargo: From a Pfc...you were a Pfc, Private (unintelligible words).

Mr. Berger: I was...no, I was a T-5.

John Fargo: T-5, so then you became...

Mr. Berger: From T-5 to Warrant Officer Junior Grade.

John Fargo: Oh.

Mr. Berger: And then I was...artillery, I don't mean artillery, I was a...Ammunitions Supply.

John Fargo: Ammunitions Supply with the 95<sup>th</sup> Division?

Mr. Berger: Yeah.

John Fargo: That was your job?

Mr. Berger: My job, yeah.

John Fargo: Well, how do you...how do you handle that?

Mr. Berger: Well, nothing to it. You just...these...three Colonels asked me a lot of questions, and...

John Fargo: No, I mean the...the job?

Mr. Berger: Oh, the...well, the job...I had access to trucks; we had trucks and we'd go to...an armory or a...wherever they kept the...bullets and...shells. We had everything from...one fifty-five artillery to...regular machine gun ammunition. And we'd haul that to wherever they were needing it for training.

John Fargo: Okay, so you didn't have to...uh, interface with the supplies of the...

Mr. Berger: No.

John Fargo: ...I mean, somebody else purchased all the ammunition...

Mr. Berger: This was...

John Fargo: ...got it to the armories?

Mr. Berger: Yeah, this was gotten to the...I guess you'd call it the...supply headquarters. You had warehouses, you know, for...

John Fargo: Yeah.



Mr. Berger: ...that kind of stuff.

John Fargo: Did you have a platoon of people to...help you?

Mr. Berger: Uh, just...a few; I think there were...two or three.

John Fargo: That...that drove the trucks and everything?

Mr. Berger: Yeah. We'd just...I don't remember who...how it was done exactly except that...I'd have a small crew to pick the stuff up and load it. All I had to do was supervise.

John Fargo: You'd supervise that and they delivered it to wherever it was needed?

Mr. Berger: Yeah.

John Fargo: In...in the States, here in Texas?

Mr. Berger: Well no, it was right in...the division.

John Fargo: In the division.

Mr. Berger: See, at Fort Sam Houston they had a connection with a place called Camp Bullis...

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Berger: ...which was a...where we went for our maneuvers and firing range and that sort of thing.

John Fargo: Okay.

Mr. Berger: There was no firing done at Fort Sam.

John Fargo: Well, you had places where there was firing. Uh...

Mr. Berger: Then...

John Fargo: ...how did you get assigned to the 543<sup>rd</sup>?

Mr. Berger: Well, uhm, I'm...I'm getting to that.

John Fargo: You...you getting to that?

Mr. Berger: We went from...(sneeze) uh, Fort Sam Houston to Louisiana to Camp Polk it was known as, now Fort Polk, I guess. And we were outdoors and camping out in tents. And then from there, we went to...California desert and practiced out in the desert. So, we learned...one type of...outdoor activity in Louisiana and another at the desert. From the desert, we went to Indiantown Gap which is in Pennsylvania...preparation for going overseas. By that time, we'd spent about...oh, nearly two years in...

John Fargo: Two years doing all that, huh?

Mr. Berger: ...training. And while we were at Indiantown Gap, we also...did mountain training. Went down into West Virginia and climbed around mountains and learned how to climb and repel down cliffs.

John Fargo: So, during that entire two years you were the supply officer for the regiment?

Mr. Berger: Yeah. And then, at that time, we were being interviewed for...going overseas.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Berger: And they...there was an artillery unit being formed at Fort Bragg. The artillery unit was...a new...two, forty-millimeter outfit; it did not exist until that time. And they had...six...heavy guns and three battalions, and...the artillery unit was called the 543<sup>rd</sup>.

John Fargo: Right.

Mr. Berger: It was not connected to any particular...unit; it was simply available for core...headquarters usage. It would shoot where we were needed. Although all we did was practice; we hadn't...we got to...overseas assignment then was

to...Hawaii. We went from Fort Bragg to...Seattle for embarkation; left Seattle at...Christmas Eve and went to Hawaii where we arrived...uh, just shortly after that about...early January. We were in Hawaii for six months...doing routine training. We went from...uh, Oahu down to...the big island of Hilo...near Hilo and fired the weapons from...to...volcanic...mountains...Mauna Loa to...uh, Mauna Kea. There's a...great big...field about twenty miles of lava.

John Fargo: Uhm!

Mr. Berger: And there wasn't anything we could hurt.

John Fargo: Hum.

Mr. Berger: So, if you fired from one mountain to the other, and we were on...lava all the time, and our shells landed in lava. And...then we went back to Oahu. From there, we were sent to Leyte in the Philippines and we loaded up on...

John Fargo: How'd you get there?

Mr. Berger: LSTs.

John Fargo: Now...from Hawaii to Leyte?

Mr. Berger: On...on LSTs.

John Fargo: LSTs?! Boy, that's not a (chuckles) easy trip, is it?

Mr. Berger: It happened...just...we were in luck; we made that...it was about...three or four thousand miles, I think, and it was as smooth as silk.

John Fargo: Was it?!

Mr. Berger: Yep. We just happened to get good luck, good weather.

John Fargo: Boy, I've been on those, and it was pretty bumpy.

Mr. Berger: They told us, the crew, the Navy crew, that was running the LSTs said they'd come around...through the Panama Canal...

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Berger: ...and they were in a storm and they were rocking about eight-five degrees.

John Fargo: (Laughter)

Mr. Berger: Said...you'd just look out and spit in the ocean (laughter).

John Fargo: Well, let me ask you about the...uh, the artillery...thing itself. Now...that...two hundred and forty millimeter, I mean, that's heavy artillery.

Mr. Berger: Oh, it...one shell weighed one ton.

John Fargo: Oh, gee! So, you had tractors that you had to...

Mr. Berger: We had...thirty-eight-ton tractors...

John Fargo: That would move those...

Mr. Berger: ...but to move...move the...guns.

John Fargo: ...those guns around.

Mr. Berger: And bulldozers to...clear the ground. And we also had airplanes for spotting.

John Fargo: Okay. So...you've got...you got the entire battalion on one LST?

Mr. Berger: Uh, no. It may have been two or three; I don't remember.

John Fargo: Two or three LSTs?

Mr. Berger: 'Cause the...guns took one...flat-car on a railroad to carry the barrel...

John Fargo: Right.

Mr. Berger: ...and another flat-car to carry the base.

John Fargo: Okay.

Mr. Berger: So, it took about...twelve flat-cars to carry our unit...just to...equipment...

John Fargo: So...

Mr. Berger: ...just the guns.

John Fargo: ...so maybe three of them on one LST?

Mr. Berger: Maybe.

John Fargo: You know? But that's...that's big, heavy stuff!

Mr. Berger: Oh, it was the heaviest they had, yes.

John Fargo: Yeah, yeah. And you...you practiced with those guns...

Mr. Berger: Yeah...which was...

John Fargo: ...all throughout your training?

Mr. Berger: Yeah, we'd set them up; we'd...didn't fire them very often. We had hundred and fifty-fives to fire for practice.

John Fargo: I see.

Mr. Berger: Or...target practice (unintelligible). So, we used a lot of one fifty-five shells...

John Fargo: Well...

Mr. Berger: ...how...

John Fargo: ...you didn't use those two forties very often?

Mr. Berger: ...one fifty-five howitzers (?). We didn't use those very often because...it was too expensive.

John Fargo: You say one shell...we...

Mr. Berger: We...one time.

John Fargo: Wow! I never realized that.

Mr. Berger: We had cranes. We had a crane truck to lift them. Truck with a...just like you'd use to...to get up a car that had been in an accident, you know?

John Fargo: Uh huh. And how did...how did it get into the barrel of the gun?

Mr. Berger: Well, we had...it was lifted up and put on a tray; heavy-duty guys...would shove it in with a stick of some kind.

John Fargo: Really? Huh.

Mr. Berger: The...

John Fargo: The...the back...pressure of that must have been tremendous.

Mr. Berger: Oh yeah, it...it reacted quite heavily. It...had a...oh, what you'd call...shock absorbers on a gun.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Berger: It moved back about...ten or twelve feet when...ever time it went off.

John Fargo: Wow, uh huh. Anybody back there...they were...

Mr. Berger: Well, they weren't supposed to be back there.

John Fargo: Uh huh, (chuckles), I'm sure!

Mr. Berger: Get out of the way when they fired it.

John Fargo: So, in addition to the two forties though, you had...some one-fifty-five calibers?

Mr. Berger: Oh, everybody had...everybody had regular weapons, of course.

John Fargo: Yeah, but I mean, the...the battalion also had a hundred and fifty-five caliber?

Mr. Berger: Yeah, just for practice.

John Fargo: Oh, you didn't take that to...?

Mr. Berger: We didn't take that to the Philippines.

John Fargo: I see, okay.

Mr. Berger: The one-fifty-fives were just for...practice for...the shells were cheaper.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Berger: And it was the same principles as far as figuring out how to fire it.

John Fargo: Yeah, yeah. So, you got to Leyte on the LSTs, and then you had to unload those big guns which was a real...

Mr. Berger: Well, we...

John Fargo: ...chore, I would imagine.

Mr. Berger: ...dropped...the LST would go right up against the shore and open up the front doors and it was just a case of driving them out, or pulling them out with tractors.

John Fargo: Uh huh. And then you went...you...you told me on the phone you went about six miles inland?

Mr. Berger: Yeah, got inland away from the shore about...six or seven miles as I recall it.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Berger: Set up our camp, and the camp was in...we were in tents there.

John Fargo: Uh huh. Any...enemy...enemy activity at that point?

Mr. Berger: They were about...twenty miles away.

John Fargo: Alright.

Mr. Berger: We never saw any.

John Fargo: So, you had security around the camp though, right?

Mr. Berger: Oh yeah.

John Fargo: Uh huh. So, your job continued to be...to...supply the guns with...

Mr. Berger: Yeah.

John Fargo: ...(unintelligible words).

Mr. Berger: We had everything from...spare tires for the trucks that hauled on...to...groceries (chuckle).

John Fargo: Yeah. Uh huh.

Mr. Berger: And...fair...partially airplanes, and spotter planes.

John Fargo: Yeah, that's...

Mr. Berger: Had spotter planes.

John Fargo: Well, what...what kind of planes did you have?

Mr. Berger: They were...I called them a Pipe Cub, but they may have been...some other brand; I don't remember.

John Fargo: But they were artillery spotters?

Mr. Berger: Yeah. They'd go up in the air and fly over the targets and call back as to where the shells were landing. See, with that distance, you start firing and...if you get short, you'd tell them you're...about three hundred yards short and they'd crank up the elevation on the gun just a little bit. Maybe it'd be over...short...over on target.

John Fargo: Right. And the airplane spotters would tell you all that information?

Mr. Berger: Yeah. We had pilots and also spotters.

John Fargo: Pilots and spotters; how many airplanes did you have?

Mr. Berger: I think we had two.

John Fargo: Only two? So, how...how...frequently did you fire the guns?

Mr. Berger: We never fired them in Leyte.

John Fargo: You never did?!



Mr. Berger: Not in Leyte. Fired them in...in Hawaii. The big island was the only place we practiced with the guns. But see, we were going to...to Japan; we weren't going to Leyte.

John Fargo: Okay, that (unintelligible).

Mr. Berger: Leyte had already been captured.

John Fargo: The ob...the objective was for the invasion of Japan...

Mr. Berger: Yes.

John Fargo: ...and that's where you guys...

Mr. Berger: Yeah, we were just...scattered around the facility...getting ready to go.

John Fargo: Getting ready to go, okay.

Mr. Berger: And this was in the...late summer and fall of...'45.

John Fargo: Never fired the guns in Leyte, huh? So, the war ended while you were in Leyte?

Mr. Berger: Yeah. (Pause) I've had the job...putting out an Italian newspaper.

John Fargo: Is that right?!

Mr. Berger: And...

John Fargo: "Japan Quits!" is that you?!

Mr. Berger: Yeah!

John Fargo: Okay (chuckle). "Japan Quits!"

Mr. Berger: See, this is...this is the kind of places we were living in.

John Fargo: You were...living in tents, huh? Did you have...pallets or boards used as floors, or was...?

Mr. Berger: We've been...had little floors, wooden floors.

John Fargo: Wooden floors, uh huh. How was the weather there?

Mr. Berger: Uh pretty hot. You can tell...the way I was dressed (chuckles).

John Fargo: Yeah. Yeah, you were in shorts and a...

Mr. Berger: Of course, that's not...my uniform; I was just...

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Berger: ...sitting on a...I...I had a job of putting out a newspaper for them since I'd been an editor. And I...would listen to short-wave radio everyday and type up the news from the U.S.A. and we pasted it on a big piece of cardboard and tack it on a tree.

John Fargo: Oh really?!

Mr. Berger: Everybody would...come up and read it.

John Fargo: Okay.

Mr. Berger: And...that was, of course, the big day.

John Fargo: How many times did you do that? I mean, was it once a month or something?

Mr. Berger: Well, I was...I did, no, I did that every day.

John Fargo: Every day?!

Mr. Berger: I expect for...a month or two.

John Fargo: Uh huh, okay. So, you were in Leyte...for how long, Bill?

Mr. Berger: (Pause), I think it was probably about...three or four months.

John Fargo: Okay.

Mr. Berger: And...after the A-bombs, of course, we weren't going in with those guns, so they...they dissolved our battalion there, and...

John Fargo: While you were at Leyte?

Mr. Berger: We were at Leyte. We had...in the same area, we had the...uh, I think it was the Ninth Corps and they had a headquarters down the road and...some of our people were assigned to different units and a few of them had enough points to come home, and sev...several people went...back to the States from there. And I did not have enough...time, so I was transferred to a core...headquarters, the Ninth Corps Headquarters, and we were sent from there to...Japan, again, on LSTs.

John Fargo: Okay, you went to Japan then.

Mr. Berger: Yeah.

John Fargo: Where did you uh...

Mr. Berger: We landed at...Sapporo which is on Hokkaido, the northern island of Japan. It was in October when we got there, and as we landed and got on the trucks to go in...we landed...in a harbor about...twenty miles from Sapporo; Sapporo was the capitol, and we were on trucks going into Sapporo and it began to snow.

John Fargo: Right.

Mr. Berger: Just...little snowflakes drifting down.

John Fargo: In October?

Mr. Berger: In October, and it never quit. By the time we left...when I left Sapporo in late...uh, February, there was forty feet of snow on the ground.

John Fargo: (Laughter).

Mr. Berger: We had...the most hellacious snow storm you ever saw.

John Fargo: What was your job; what was the job of your group?

Mr. Berger: Well my...I was assigned...to the Inspector General's office.

John Fargo: Okay.

Mr. Berger: Which...as you may know, goes around from one unit to another...

John Fargo: Right.

Mr. Berger: ...and sees that they've got everything...in order. We counted the guns and saw that they...nobody stole any guns.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Berger: And that...they were getting their proper feed...at the mess halls.

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Berger: And...officers...I remember one time, we had some...uh, I...I think they were infantry men in the...divisions who had a...

John Fargo: What division was that?

Mr. Berger: Let's see (pause) we had two divisions under that Corps and I think that was the 77<sup>th</sup> if I'm not mistaken.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Berger: But one of the GIs had...the idea to...take sugar out of the mess hall and trade it to the Japanese.

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Berger: And then he'd have a friend of his...around the corner who was holding up the Jap and take the sugar away from him. Had a nice little racket going.

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Berger: So, we heard about that and we had to inspect...

John Fargo: Had to put a stop to that.

Mr. Berger: ...to put a stop to that.

John Fargo: But...put a stop to that. We...

Mr. Berger: Yeah. ...had a court martial for the...guys.

John Fargo: Yeah, did you have much interface with the Japanese?

Mr. Berger: Yes, I did. I...I was in a...room at the...Imperial Hotel, Sapporo, a real nice hotel...about equal to...oh, the Driscoll downtown.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Berger: And there was a Japanese staff; about ten stories and...we were assigned rooms down there...the headquarters was. And the...I had a roommate who was a newspaper man from...Oklahoma, and he as in the Counterintelligence Corps; he would...we were expecting the Japs to try to invade northern Japan.

John Fargo: Oh, you mean, before the war ended?

Mr. Berger: No, after the war ended.

John Fargo: Oh, *after* the war ended! Where...where were these people com...supposedly coming from?

Mr. Berger: The Japanese were...worried about it, too, because they'd had all the war they wanted, but the Rus...Russians were north of us about forty miles.

John Fargo: That's all?!

Mr. Berger: Yeah. And...we didn't trust them; they were...

John Fargo: So, where...where were...these Japanese that were supposed to...or allegedly thought to invade northern Japan; where were they coming from?

Mr. Berger: No, I'm talking about Russians.

John Fargo: Oh, the Russians were going to...

Mr. Berger: The Japanese were...civilians living there.

John Fargo: I see.

Mr. Berger: Their army, of course, had been disillusioned.

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Berger: I mean, disbanded.

John Fargo: Okay.

Mr. Berger: And the Japanese were worried about it, so we had contact with...Japanese civilians; had some of them tipping us off to what they'd heard. And...the Russians had...shipped some...they're shipping food and things in and we were buying canned goods from the Russians, and...

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Berger: ...there was contact, but...we were trying to make sure they didn't come in.

John Fargo: Well, did...did you have enough troops to repulse that, if need be?

Mr. Berger: Oh yeah, yeah, we...we had a division up there.

John Fargo: You had a whole division and were they prepared if they had to?

Mr. Berger: We had...half the division full...fully equipped, yeah.

John Fargo: Okay. But obviously, it never happened.

Mr. Berger: Nothing happened.

John Fargo: Alright.

Mr. Berger: Of course, nothing happened because we were ready for them.

John Fargo: Yeah, right, right, right.

Mr. Berger: But the Russians, you know, didn't join the war until about two weeks before it was over.

John Fargo: Yes.

Mr. Berger: When they found out we were going to drop an A-bomb on them, they got real brave...

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Berger: ...and wanted to come into the north.

John Fargo: Right.

Mr. Berger: They'd been up in northern...uh, China and...had troops up there and they were...

John Fargo: What...what was the condition of...northern Japan...

Mr. Berger: That was...

John Fargo: ...at the end of the war? Did they...?

Mr. Berger: Pretty good; they had not been bombed much.

John Fargo: They had not?

Mr. Berger: We hadn't...bothered with them. But...I later...when I was getting ready to come home, I went down to Tokyo to...get the ship and...that was a pitiful place to see.

John Fargo: Tokyo, yeah.

Mr. Berger: Of course, you know what the A-bomb area looked like.

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Berger: Well, Tokyo looked just as bad.

John Fargo: Right.

Mr. Berger: We'd burned...mile after mile of Tokyo.

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Berger: It had been...fire bombed and...there were more...more people killed in Tokyo than there were in Hiroshima.

John Fargo: That's very true. Very true; I read about that.

Mr. Berger: But...into Sapporo, there'd been no activity during the war and we had a beautiful hotel...with room service.

John Fargo: Wow! And you had good relations with the native Japanese?

Mr. Berger: The Japanese were...made good friends, and in fact, that thing there, I bought from a Japanese family.

John Fargo: Oh, isn't that nice?!

Mr. Berger: It was a...silk painting on silk; it's...

John Fargo: You brought that home with you then?

Mr. Berger: I brought it home; it was three hundred and fifty years old.

John Fargo: Wow! How'd...how'd you get it home?

Mr. Berger: It was rolled up on an ivory scroll. I had it framed after I got here.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Berger: There's some other...pictures I bought up there. That's the way the countryside looked up there.

John Fargo: Yeah. So, they were pretty much spared...from the...

Mr. Berger: Yeah.

John Fargo: ...the bombing then, huh?

Mr. Berger: Yeah.

John Fargo: Okay. So, how did you spend up in Sapporo?

Mr. Berger: I got there in October and left...early in February.



John Fargo: February, and you had to go down to Tokyo to get a boat?

Mr. Berger: Had to...took a train to Tokyo to get the boat.

John Fargo: Well...well, was the troop ship coming home?

Mr. Berger: It was a two-week trip on the ship; it was real nice.

John Fargo: Nice ship?

Mr. Berger: I thought it was. Big ship.

John Fargo: Big ship; lot of people?

Mr. Berger: *Lots* of people! We had probably...probably a thousand men onboard.

John Fargo: What kind of quarters did you have?

Mr. Berger: Oh just...bunks. They weren't very fancy, but it was a troop ship.

John Fargo: Yeah, so you have...were you in the...the bottom of the ship with all the troops or did you have officer quarters?

Mr. Berger: Well, I was in an officer's quarters, but...they weren't very fancy. That...I was...fair...a good...on the ships I didn't throw up or anything like that.

John Fargo: Boy, you were fortunate.

Mr. Berger: I was fortunate.

John Fargo: But I...I wasn't (chuckles).

Mr. Berger: I...I...everybody around me was...heaving over the sides and...

John Fargo: (Laughter), that's right.

Mr. Berger: ...I was living it up on (unintelligible).

John Fargo: (Laughter), so, it was a...pretty normal...voyage then, huh?

Mr. Berger: Just a normal voyage coming home; nothing to do but...play cards and...

John Fargo: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Berger: ...and talk.

John Fargo: So, where'd you...land?

Mr. Berger: Uh, Los Angeles.

John Fargo: Los Angeles.

Mr. Berger: Or...uh, it was a harbor near Los Angeles; it wasn't exactly L.A., but...I've forgotten the name of it now.

John Fargo: So, you...then you went to some...

Mr. Berger: Then...caught a train to San Antonio; discharged at Fort Sam.

John Fargo: Okay, discharged at Fort Sam.

Mr. Berger: I could have gone to Illinois from where my home was, but...meanwhile, I'd gotten married. My wife was in Texas and so I didn't want to go back to Illinois.

John Fargo: Okay, so you...when you got discharged, you were married at that point?

Mr. Berger: I got married in...Fort Sam in 1943.

John Fargo: Before you left?

Mr. Berger: Before I left.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Berger: That's her picture over there.

John Fargo: Where?

Mr. Berger: On the corner.

John Fargo: Ah, okay, yeah. Yeah.

Mr. Berger: And so, she taught school while I was overseas.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Berger: And she was in Gonzales teaching school to...as a home economics teacher.  
She graduated from university while I was overseas.

John Fargo: So, you got discharged in 1946?

Mr. Berger: Yeah.

John Fargo: So,...four years in the Army, huh?

Mr. Berger: Yeah, not quite four years.

John Fargo: Huh. What was your rank at that time; still a Warrant Officer?

Mr. Berger: Chief...Chief Warrant Officer.

John Fargo: Chief Warrant Officer, wow!

Mr. Berger: Yeah. I got promoted in Japan, signed by, no less than General MacArthur.

John Fargo: As a...

Mr. Berger: (Chuckles), yeah.

John Fargo: ...new (unintelligible)?

Mr. Berger: (Unintelligible)...promotion.

John Fargo: Did you get any citations at all?

Mr. Berger: Oh, I got a commendation but that...that's all.

John Fargo: For what?

Mr. Berger: They just thought I was doing a good job.

John Fargo: Where, in Japan?

Mr. Berger: No, that was in...still with the infantry. And...Indiantown Gap.

John Fargo: Okay, so that's...that was an interesting four years then, Bill, huh?

Mr. Berger: Yeah, I...since I didn't get shot at, I really enjoyed it.

John Fargo: Yeah, yeah, yeah, and you saw a little bit of the world.

Mr. Berger: I saw the...got to see the world pretty well, and...lucked out.

John Fargo: Did you...uh, keep track of any of your...buddies from the Army...after the war?

Mr. Berger: I...had one of them...came by...I bought a newspaper in Hondo in 1946, and my wife and I moved there in June, and I had one buddy who stopped by to see me in...late fall. He was visiting somebody in our county; that's the only one I've ever seen.

John Fargo: Really?

Mr. Berger: Uh, no contact with anybody.

John Fargo: No contact with the (unintelligible) or anything?

Mr. Berger: No reason. Well, we weren't...we just...weren't mad at anybody...just...

John Fargo: Yeah, no, it...that happens.

Mr. Berger: Scattered, everybody just scattered in...different directions.

John Fargo: Yeah, yeah, that's not unusual. So, you bought this newspaper. Uh, was it...a...an on-going effort?

Mr. Berger: Weekly paper had been built...been there since 1886.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Berger: I'll show you one, if you want to see it.

John Fargo: The Hondo Anvil Herald.

Mr. Berger: Very...very tiny paper; we'd improved it a great deal since we bought it. Fact, I added on to...I had nine other weekly before...about eight...five or six years went by; we sold all them and kept this. My son's running it now.

John Fargo: Is that right?!

Mr. Berger: Yeah.

John Fargo: No kidding; still a weekly?

Mr. Berger: Short weekly.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Berger: But it's a pretty good one.

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Berger: Its about...about the fifteenth largest in Texas.

John Fargo: Did you...run that until you retired?

Mr. Berger: I ran...I ran...no, I ran it for about...uh, twenty years, and in 1965, Governor Connally, who I'd worked for...a little bit, I helped him in his campaign...appointed me to the Texas Tourist Development Agency. No, that was in '63, I guess.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Berger: And we...that was when that thing was organized; we were going to get people to visit Texas. And so, we had a...monthly meeting and hired help and...promoted the State of Texas. Then in '65, he appointed me to the Texas Water Commission as one of the three commissioners.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Berger: And we gave permits. If you wanted to build dams or...pump water out of streams, that sort of thing. I served there for four years, and then...that term was up and I worked for the Texas Railroad Commission as Assistant to their Chairman and the Insurance as Research Director.

John Fargo: Uhm.

Mr. Berger: And Water Quality Board as Assistant to the General Manager. And I spent about twenty years in Texas politics, you might say.

John Fargo: Worked twenty years working for the State.

Mr. Berger: Yeah. So, I did manage to...get enough time with the State; get a retirement from them.

John Fargo: Good! Good!

Mr. Berger: So, we retired from the State in...1960, I guess it was. No, wait a minute...1980.

John Fargo: 1980, sure.

Mr. Berger: And after that, I still owned the newspaper, but...I had other people running it. And I sold newspapers; I was a newspaper broker. I've sold papers for other people...if they wanted to...they were about a...I think I sold about a hundred weeklies in this State.

John Fargo: Who do you sell it to?

Mr. Berger: Other people, other publishers.

John Fargo: Other publishers?

Mr. Berger: You know, if a publisher wants to quit...

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Berger: ...he'd get me to sell his paper.

John Fargo: I see, okay.

Mr. Berger: I...did a lot of traveling; I covered the whole State.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Berger: Did a lot of driving around.

John Fargo: How long did you do that?

Mr. Berger: Oh, probably ten or fifteen years.

John Fargo: Really?!

Mr. Berger: I just quit that just as I...came over here.

John Fargo: Is that right?!

Mr. Berger: I [was] about ninety when I quit that.

John Fargo: Huh! Gee, that...so, you had a...a heck of a civilian career, too, you know?

Mr. Berger: I'm not...not too happy, uh, unhappy with it.

John Fargo: Yeah, that sounds great though. Yeah. Well, looking back on all those years, uh, how would you sum...sum them up?

Mr. Berger: Well, I enjoyed each one of them...different ways.

John Fargo: Uh huh. I mean, what...what's your family like? You got...one son...

Mr. Berger: I have three...children. There's that...see that paper hanging there with...that's my nineteen, or twenty...fourteen Christmas card.

John Fargo: Ah, okay.

Mr. Berger: We have thirty members in the family now.

John Fargo: Wow.

Mr. Berger: Three children; they've all married and all of them have children.

John Fargo: Sure.

Mr. Berger: And some of them have grandchildren.

John Fargo: So, you've got...you're a...great...

Mr. Berger: I've got some greatgrandchildren.

John Fargo: Greatgrandchildren, alright. Oh, that's wonderful!

Mr. Berger: And...

John Fargo: Well, Bill, I really enjoyed talking to you. Uh, I'm happy that you were able to spend some time with me and thank you certainly for your service.

Mr. Berger: Well, I appreciate your...kindness in wanting to know about that.

(end of interview)

**FINAL** copy  
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