

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

The Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With  
Gordon T. Wilkinson  
San Antonio, TX  
May 3, 2017  
Headquarters Company  
43<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division  
302<sup>nd</sup> Recon  
1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division

My name is Richard Misenhimer: Today is May 3, 2017. I am interviewing Mr. Gordon T. Wilkinson by telephone. His phone number is 210-653-2922. His address is 8114 Rainforest, San Antonio, TX 78239. 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:

Gordon, 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. Wilkinson:

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. Wilkinson:

That sounds OK so far.

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. Wilkinson:

Yes, maybe. It's 210-535-8644.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Who is that?

Mr. Wilkinson:

That's my daughter, Kay.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's her name?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Kay, K-a-y.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's her last name?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Barecky.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's your daughter, OK. Does she live there in San Antonio?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Hopefully, we'll never need that but you never know.

Mr. Wilkinson:

That's right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, what is your birth date?

Mr. Wilkinson:

4 June 1924.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you born?

Mr. Wilkinson:

In Virginia.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What town in Virginia?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Boydton.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was your family living there at that point?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Yes. We were on a small farm.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Let's see, two sisters and three brothers.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were any of your brothers in World War II?

Mr. Wilkinson:

My oldest brother was in the Pacific for I'd say over two years.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Is he still living?

Mr. Wilkinson:

No. All of them have passed away.

Mr. Misenhimer:

If he were I'd like to interview him.

Mr. Wilkinson:

Oh, he'd be a good one. I wish you could interview him.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What were your mother's and father's first names?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Jessie for the father and for the mother Hassie.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Wilkinson:

Well, you couldn't sell or buy anything. Or at least we couldn't. Very few people could. But living on the farm we had plenty to eat and got along fairly well. When I grew up we had no phone or anything like that. No TV in fact. We had a radio I think. During the Depression you couldn't even sell a dozen eggs. Couldn't sell anything. Very few people could buy.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have a garden?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Oh, yes, we had plenty to eat. Plenty of garden.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have a milk cow?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Several of them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Chickens and pigs?

Mr. Wilkinson:

We had calves, chickens, pigs, hogs, horses.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you had plenty to eat then.

Mr. Wilkinson:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

This is in Virginia. Is that correct?

Mr. Wilkinson:

That's right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How large a farm did you have?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Oh, I don't know. It was probably a couple hundred acres.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you father own it or was he renting it?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Owned it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Boydton High School.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What year did you graduate?

Mr. Wilkinson:

I graduated in 1941 at age 16 and I turned 17 I think less than a month later.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you go into the service?

Mr. Wilkinson:

January 2, 1945.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do after you finished high school?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Well, I'll tell you, soon after that I started driving a truck and I was working at one of the bases in Virginia, constructing ammunition depots. I got a deferment I guess by doing that for 12 months and I tried to volunteer. I wrote a letter to President Roosevelt and he came back...well I was first examined for the draft and I passed. I knew that. I got the deferment which I didn't know it had been put in and so I wrote to the President and got an answer back. He said, "It's up to the draft board." So I went a year after that. Of course I was too young when I graduated from high school because they didn't start the draft until 18.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you 19 years old when you went in.

Mr. Wilkinson:

Yes. That sounds right, either 19 or 20.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You would have turned 20 in a few days there, OK. Did you volunteer or were you drafted?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Well, first I was drafted and examined and passed it and after the deferment, I tried to volunteer. That's when I wrote to President Roosevelt trying to volunteer and he said it was up to the Draft Board so I was actually drafted. First they stamped my forms for the Navy and I wanted it because my brother was in it and they said, "Sorry, the Army needs people", so they sent me to the Army.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go for your basic training?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Camp Wheeler, Georgia.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you travel there?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Train I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about your basic training. What all did you do there?

Mr. Wilkinson:



Well, as I understand it we had 39 more training, whatever they call them, titles I guess, than they have now. I went through the infantry basic, and the training included everything up to competition by other companies and going through everything to climbing the ropes up the side of a ship.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have the obstacle course where you crawled the machine guns shooting over you?

Mr. Wilkinson:

I sure was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that?

Mr. Wilkinson:

The explosions going up around us. Well, I'll tell you like I tell everybody else. I tried to put my mind on something else as if I was watching a movie and went on through and got by.

Looking back on it I guess I was young enough and dumb enough let's say that a lot of those things didn't bother me. I had hunted and things of that kind so I wasn't afraid of the gunfire.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have weapons training?

Mr. Wilkinson:

A lot of it, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What weapons did you train on?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Everything from the M-1 rifle to the machine gun, a BAR.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were your drill instructors pretty tough on you?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Oh, they had some pretty good rules.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything particular stands out from your time in that infantry basic?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Well, thinking back on it, I guess I was, like I say, dumb enough to enjoy it. I know a friend of mine from high school that went in just before I did, they picked him up and flew him into Europe for the Battle of the Bulge I believe. I was lucky I think I was very fortunate the whole time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long was that first basic?

Mr. Wilkinson:

You know, I've been thinking, but I'm not sure if it was six or eight weeks. We went after the infantry basic, they put a bunch of us in truck driving school. I think we had a week of that, maybe more. Then from there they loaded us up and shipped us straight out to the depot in Pennsylvania I think it was. So our complete outfit and from there five days of train across country, got on the ship and as well as I recall it took us 28 days by ourselves in one of those ships and going over as I understand it, they kept saying there was submarines chasing us and this and that. I don't know whether there were or not. But anyway we landed at Eniwetok. I believe that's in the Marshall Islands. We waited a few days while a convoy was formed. From there we went to the Philippines and I was in the Luzon, P.I., campaign.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Let me back up and ask you a couple of questions here. Where did you leave from in California?

Mr. Wilkinson:

I think it was Fort Stoneman.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What kind of ship did you go over on?

Mr. Wilkinson:

That's a good question. I think...this is way back...it was one of the smaller ones. It was not the general class ship.

Mr. Misenhimer:

A Liberty ship or...?

Mr. Wilkinson:

I think it was probably a Liberty ship, yes. I know it had at least 28 soldiers on it as well as the Navy crew. I can still remember the Golden Gate Bridge. I'm sure we left from Ft. Stoneman because we went under the Golden Gate Bridge and everybody watched the lights until they went out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was there much seasickness on the way over?

Mr. Wilkinson:

I didn't get sick at all but a few of the sailors did. I think they had a new crew on. We stayed on deck as much as we could. We couldn't have any light of any kind at night.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On the way over, were you ever threatened by Japanese submarines or anything?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Well, like I said, they said a submarine was chasing us but I didn't see one. So I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you in a convoy with other ships?

Mr. Wilkinson:

No, we went to Eniwetok and that's where we picked up the convoy.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were by yourself all the way to Eniwetok.

Mr. Wilkinson:

All the way.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You say it took you twenty-some odd days?

Mr. Wilkinson:

I think it was 28 days.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do at Eniwetok?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Well, after about three days we picked up a convoy and they practiced dragging the targets with airplanes and firing at them. Then we went in convoy and had destroyer escorts I guess. Went in convoy into the Philippines.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About what day did you land on Luzon?

Mr. Wilkinson:

I have no idea. I know that the large naval battle, I think that had just completed. All I saw was a bunch of ships being nose standing up in the water. They were just full of...

Mr. Misenhimer:

The Battle of Manila Bay there.

Mr. Wilkinson:

I think it was Manila Bay, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what outfit were you in at this point?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Well, I was just a casual at that point. Went into fifth replacement where we had all kinds of things. That was when some of the Japanese, in fact I think they caught one or two in the chow line, and I know a couple or more were killed at one of the road crossings there. I think like one came in when we were in a six-man tent and I think somebody came in there one night and got us shook up a little bit.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what outfit were you assigned to there?

Mr. Wilkinson:

This is just a fifth replacement and then we went to the 43<sup>rd</sup> Division.

Mr. Misenhimer:

43<sup>rd</sup>?

Mr. Wilkinson:

43<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division. I was lucky enough to get in Headquarters Company. We set up in Cabanatuan. Please don't ask me to spell that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I can spell it, yeah.

Mr. Wilkinson:

We stayed...I don't know how long we were there. But anyway, we left from there and took amphibious training. It might have been up above Manila. Somewhere in there we took that for a week where we off-loaded on those boats into the landing craft with field packs, twice a day. I think it was at least a week. We were sitting on the ship, fully loaded, waiting for the convoy to form for the invasion of Japan. Just as I think we completed the amphibious training they dropped the first bomb and everybody got all riled up and about 30 minutes later they came out and said, "Don't scream yet because the war is not over." Then the second one was dropped and we took off for Japan.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were in the Philippines, did you get into any fighting?

Mr. Wilkinson:

I would say not really.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do that might be considered fighting?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Well, I didn't actually go out in combat.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you work with any Japanese prisoners or anything like that? There on the Philippines?

Mr. Wilkinson:

None on the Philippines. I saw a load of prisoners that came through but like I say, the war was shutting down except that Okinawa was very much alive.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your job in the Headquarters Company there?

Mr. Wilkinson:

You'll have a laugh out of this. When I went in, they'd always told us "Don't volunteer for anything." I remember the 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant came out and he was signing up three of us. He says, "Anybody in this crowd knows how to cook?" I said, "Well, I've fried an egg." They stuck me in the kitchen and it took me about a month to get out of there. I enjoyed it though.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You stayed in the Philippines about how long?

Mr. Wilkinson:

That's when dates get confusing. It was probably...we were there about a month after I got in and then we loaded on the ship to go to Japan.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Let me ask you: On May 8, 1945 Germany surrendered.

Mr. Wilkinson:

On May 8 we heard about it but that was about it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Any kind of celebration or anything?

Mr. Wilkinson:

I don't think we had time to celebrate. As I remember we were enroute or getting ready to be enroute somewhere. It seems to me that we kept moving from the time I went in basic.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now you mentioned the first atomic bomb. How did you hear about that?

Mr. Wilkinson:

They announced it over the ship.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were still on the ship at that point?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Yeah. We were taking amphibious training on the ship.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were still stationed in the Philippines though.

Mr. Wilkinson:

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What reaction did people have when they heard that?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Well, like I say, everybody yelled, "Good!" I mean, you know...everybody was saying these were the happy days and 30 minutes later they came out and said, "Settle down. The war's still on."

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anybody have any idea what an atomic bomb was?



Mr. Wilkinson:

I don't think any of us really did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then on August 9 when they dropped the next bomb, what happened then?

Mr. Wilkinson:

That's when we took off for Japan. The ship left...I don't know. I wouldn't say it was immediately but it was close to it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you know when you arrived in Japan?

Mr. Wilkinson:

No, I don't but I think it was just after they signed the peace treaty.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK. That would have been September of 1945.

Mr. Wilkinson:

I know I was there in September, yes. Before the 43<sup>rd</sup> was deactivated and sent back to the States, I joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were in the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav then.

Mr. Wilkinson:

The 1<sup>st</sup> Cav was up at Osaka I think it was, at an old Japanese camp. I was assigned to the 302<sup>nd</sup> Recon. We did all kinds of patrolling there, We found one anti-aircraft gun that was loaded and all it needed was somebody to come and throw a stream of fire. Something funny happened when we first went in. We went in the main airport over there. Of course it was torn down and

while we were getting settled, we looked up the street leading into it and this whole company was marching in perfect formation. All we could see was something up on the shoulders like rifles. We were thinking maybe that was it but when they came in, all of them had brooms, swept the place out for us.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That was Japanese you saw doing that?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Japanese, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What some other things that happened?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Well, it happened while we were sleeping they evidently swept some small ammo in one of the little depressed areas there and later on they burned it. The live rounds hitting up beside the concrete wall in the airport, kind of shook us up a little. I say, when the 43<sup>rd</sup> was deactivated I joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav and was in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Recon and we patrolled there and picked up anybody's weapons that were left. Most of them had turned in. We escorted, I believe there were three of these, 2 ½ ton trucks with soldiers on each side and we emptied the vaults of a lot of the banks that had been blown. All there was was the entrance to the vault in the ground. Emptied them of gold bricks, all kinds of things, silver dollars, US money and took them to the Central Bank in Tokyo. Put them in the vault there. Our vehicle, recon vehicle, they looked like tanks, they had a 37mm gun on the front and we had one in front and one behind the convoy. The Central Bank was surrounded with a, I guess that must have been a 6 or 8 foot wall and we drove through in one armored car. Ours was in front so we went to the wall and blocked the entrance there. The

one behind watched the entrance behind. I've wondered, well I saw a picture of it one time after that I think and the gold bars were still in there. In addition to that were patrols all around. When we first went in all the electric lines and everything were down on the ground and I remember we were on a train in, some of us going somewhere and we kept shoving this other guy off, a Japanese, because he was blocking the doorway and finally he got with somebody with English who said, "Hey, he has to go. He's the conductor." So we let him back on. That was a funny thing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what city were you at in Japan?

Mr. Wilkinson:

I think it was Osaka.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Osaka? OK. How big a town was it?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Well, it was a Japanese military camp. Most of it, the town was just outside you might say of Tokyo.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What part of Japan was that?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Well, it was right near Tokyo.

Mr. Misenhimer:

It was near Tokyo, OK.

Mr. Wilkinson:

There was a fellow living right outside of our main gate and we went out and talked to him. Of course we didn't speak Japanese. We was talking in English and finally he came out in perfect English and said, "Go ahead and talk. I was in the U.S. for fifteen years. Came back for a visit and they wouldn't let me out." So he stayed there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That happened to quite a few people.

Mr. Wilkinson:

Yes, it did. Were you ever in Japan by any chance? Funny thing, it was really curious. There was a woman that pulled her husband out to a little garden right outside the post every morning and you'd think he'd get out and go to work but he didn't. He sat there and the women worked and took him back in. Always wondered about it but we couldn't do anything about it. We'd go out and I think there was 13 Japanese workers in camp and we had trouble with one, only one that I remember. He got fired, I guess. He didn't come back any more. We had another one that kept picking up ammunition and he was putting something on a belt that he had inside and we asked to see it and he wouldn't let us see it, so one guy took his carbine and let him see. He put a live round in it and pointed it right at him and the old guy, he just laughed. Then all the others got excited, saying he's off his mind. But anyway we found it was ammunition and took it away from him.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's some other things that happened?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Well, we had 13 horses. The General and his staff used to ride once in a while. I was on guard

there one night with a carbine laying across my lap and reading Stars and Stripes on the inside and you know these stables and all, they have sliding doors, a lot of them do. That one did and I guess this was midnight or more. All of a sudden that sliding door started going back and it happened to be the one that was taking care of the horses. I said, "Don't you ever do that no more." But he came in and took care of his horses and left. Just a little thing like that, funny.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have much interaction with the local Japanese people?

Mr. Wilkinson:

They were very nice. We had no trouble that I know of with any of them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get invited to any of their homes?

Mr. Wilkinson:

I wasn't because we were not really situated where we would be. We went out a few times on a college campus there where a lot of students were studying, of course in Tokyo, but we had to go as a group more or less. I think all the visting and all that came a little later, probably after I left. I left in December. There were several of us that volunteered to re-enlist and go back over and we never did make it because we had to sign waivers everywhere we went and we got tired of it. Got to California. I know a couple of us said, "We're not going to sign them old waivers." We decided to do whatever we wanted to do. I shipped up in Oregon, Fort Stevens, Oregon. We were assigned different places. I ended up in a place called Artillery Engineer. You probably never heard of it. It's near where the Japanese fired that torpedo some up on the coast. They didn't miss one of those gun emplacements very far. But it was pretty well controlled. The river, we had control of the entrance of the river. Used to put out on the boats to keep the motors in shape. I

enjoyed it, really, and believe or not, I was talking to a granddaughter of a friend of mine. He was from Astoria, Oregon and all that's in that place now is a state park I believe. The old buildings are gone. From there I went into Military Intelligence and I was assigned to...I spent I think as near as I can remember, about 15 years overseas and including Germany and Iran.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That was in the service?

Mr. Wilkinson:

That's in the service, yeah. I was in Europe in the Cold War and my last tour was Vietnam and I got there Christmas Eve of 1969 and left about the same time in 1970. I was in Iran though for three years I guess. I was over there when the Shah was found. In fact I have a picture of it. It was a nice ground in no man's land. You could fish and all kinds of things.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's some other things that happened?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Well, we were up in Chulai Valley one time, fishing, and my son had his reel out there and pulled in a fish and one of the guards came over and taken the whole thing away from him. I went over with the interpreter and the guy says, "Well, he's the only one catching fish." But anyway, we got it back.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where was that at?

Mr. Wilkinson:

That was in Chulai Valley of Iran. I also went up on the Black Sea. I didn't like it too much up

there. The mosquitoes almost ate me. Other than that, we did pretty well. We had a...you know the old gasoline cans that used to hang on the trucks? Some of them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The jerry can?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Jerry cans. That's what we used for heat. It was hanging on the side of the oil stove and I woke up one night...in fact the dog, had a dog then, the dog woke us and I thought I was going out of the world because all I could see was coal black, laying in bed. What had happened was, that thing had stopped up the chimney and all that smoke was coming in and my wife and the kids all had to move, dark soot up in the nose and I thought, "My God." We got it cleared out, opened all the windows and so on.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where was that?

Mr. Wilkinson:

That was in Tehran.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, when you were in World War II, did you ever hear Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Yes, I did. I can't tell you her name. I think she was tried and sentenced, wasn't she?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, she was. Right. She was pardoned later on though but she spent some time in jail.

Mr. Wilkinson:

A lot of little things like that, they've slipped my mind.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was the morale in your 43<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division?

Mr. Wilkinson:

I think the morale was pretty good. Our tents, we ended up just loading on the ship and then we had a little grumpy guy over the loading. That thing hated Filipinos. He didn't bother us at all.

We went in and out all the time but the Filipinos had to jump on it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you ever in any typhoons?

Mr. Wilkinson:

In going to Japan, believe it or not, we were right on the edge of one. I remember all the rest of them I was inside the ship and I said, "If I'm going, by golly, I want to be outside so I can see what the heck's going on." I got up on a rope around one of the big posts on the ship. I sat there in the whole thing and believe it or not, water came over the front of that ship. I would say it was almost two feet and went all the way down to the back end. I must say there was a good pilot up there, steering because that ship went all kinds of turns and every other thing and he kept it on track I guess. But other than that, in Vietnam we had one just about the whole time I was over there I think, it seemed like. When I left and came back about a year later a friend of mine said, "You know that thing finally hit and it just wiped out that whole area." He said, "I went down there and got a pieces of roofing because we needed it to build a shelter where he was at one of the landing zones. But it didn't hit us. We had some pretty strong winds.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever cross the equator?

Mr. Wilkinson:



I must have somewhere. Let's see. I was in Guam, Eniwetok, I stayed in the Marshall Islands.

But that's as far south...

Mr. Misenhimer:

I think most of where you were was north of the equator.

Mr. Wilkinson:

I believe so, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I don't think you crossed it, OK.

Mr. Wilkinson:

I had, besides my brother, I had two cousins I know that were in the Pacific. All of them but Steve but he was over there even before my brother was. He was in the Army Air Force and I think he was there for a while in Australia.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you been back to the Philippines or Japan after the war?

Mr. Wilkinson:

No, but I've talked with people who were over there, Filipinos. One that I know went back there. I think...I don't know you can't tell how they are in the time of war. When I went to Germany at first that was all torn up too. My first time was in Stuttgart and that was a just a town of wrecks. You can't tell much about that. I've seen pictures of it later and I did go back there on the second tour and they had changed everything. They had built a lot of it. I remember when my wife came over and I got a call saying that you have to meet her in Frankfurt and as I was going out the gate they called me back and said, "No, she's coming here." So I had to go downtown and try to find some place for them to stay. I found one little pension. It was a small bed and breakfast

place I'd guess you'd call it and we lucked out there by meeting there and our daughter, Katy, was just a baby. She wouldn't have anything to do with me and my wife was tired from all that trip and the next day I think we had to go to Bad Merseine which is in the northern part of Germany. Had to go up there by I called it flat car...it was one of the trains that were running at the time. It was a beautiful hotel there, a resort. We stayed there for a while and then back.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was the morale in your 43<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division?

Mr. Wilkinson:

I would like to say good. We didn't have much to go on. I'm sure you've seen the old steel stove. I think we had good morale but you might say we moved quite a bit while I was there. From Cabanatuan to the ship to Japan and then the division came back to the States and went to other units. Most units of the First Cav and 43<sup>rd</sup> seemed to have good morale. I tried to join the First Cav in Vietnam when I went there but they were filled and I ended up...I wanted to go up north and I ended up with the 23<sup>rd</sup> Division, the American. So I didn't get back to them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, during World War II, what would you consider your most frightening time?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Well, of course knowing that we were going to invade Japan was pretty exciting. Of course the hurricane. I thought we were going down for sure in that. We didn't and when we got to Japan, I was really surprised at how polite the people were and that we had no troubles anywhere as far as I was concerned.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you got back home after World War II, did you stay in the service or did you get out and

rejoin?

Mr. Wilkinson:

No, I stayed in. When I was in Oregon and it came time to re-enlist or get out and I had made up my mind to get out. One day they called me in and asked, "What are your plans?" I said, "Well, if I could get a good school, I'd probably stay in." So they sent me to Counter Intelligence School, C.I.C. at that time. That was in Baltimore, Maryland. So I figured I was from the East Coast anyway, so I may as well take it. Then I got stuck. The only time after that was I was stationed in Raleigh, North Carolina, and my wife was in nursing, training in school, not my wife but the one that I married and my time came up to either get out or stay in and I went back to headquarters in Atlanta and got my discharge and I was walking by the C.O.'s office. He said, "Hey, come in here." I went in and he said, "What are your plans?" I held out my discharge and I said, "I'm going home." He said, "What would it take for you to stay in?" I said, "If you'll guarantee me assignment back in Raleigh." He said, "You got it." I almost fell over. But anyway I went back to Raleigh and at that time the students could not marry or get pregnant or anything like that or they'd be dropped from school. But we slipped out without the other students knowing it of course and went to Fayetteville, North Carolina where we got married and she never had any trouble and I was shipped out to California to language school. As well as I remember she had to have a license and got her license in California.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long were you in the service total?

Mr. Wilkinson:

I think and I could be a few days off, 29 years 7 months and a few days I think.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What rank did you retire at?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Chief Warrant Officer Four.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Chief Warrant Officer?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Yeah. Four. I went up top grade as enlisted and took one with a top grade and by golly they added on an extra grade as enlisted and extra grade as warrant officer so I don't know how many they have now. I was 04 and I know they had 05 just after I retired.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the highest rank you got to during World War II?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Well, World War II was probably P.F.C. because I took basic and went straight over. The war was over when we left for the U.S. so I don't think I made anything then unless it was P.F.C.

Mr. Misenhimer:

P.F.C, OK. Did you get home from World War II with any souvenirs?

Mr. Wilkinson:

I brought a Japanese saber back and I think one they called Long Toms, the long rifle they had.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What else?

Mr. Wilkinson:

I think a couple of the Navy daggers and that's about it. I think a Japanese pistol.

Mr. Misenhimer:

In World War II did you ever see any U.S.O. shows?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Oh, plenty of them. I enjoyed all of them. We had one team from Australia. We had several groups from the U.S. and all of them I thought was real good.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you see these at? What country?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Vietnam I guess most of them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How about World War II?

Mr. Wilkinson:

World War II, I didn't see that much because like I say we were moving most of the time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

During World War II did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Yes, they had a real good donut shop. Seemed to me like...I don't know how they got the stuff but anyway they made donuts and they was a real good price.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did they charge you for them?

Mr. Wilkinson:

I think they did but it was just a few pennies. I think some of them they gave away, donuts and coffee.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on April 12, 1945 President Roosevelt died. Where you then and how did you hear about it?

Mr. Wilkinson:

One day I know Truman took over for him. I must have been here in the States when he passed away and I think...when did he die, was it May of 1945?

Mr. Misenhimer:

April 12, 1945.

Mr. Wilkinson:

April 12, 1945...I was on a ship. I must have been on a ship somewhere. Either that or in the Philippines.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you heard that, how did people react? What was their reaction to that?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Well, I think everybody was just sort of wondering what was going to happen next.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on May 8, 1945 Germany surrendered, did you have any kind of celebration then?

Mr. Wilkinson:

I'm trying to think where I was. Celebration?

Mr. Misenhimer:

May 8, 1945.

Mr. Wilkinson:

Always a celebration.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you had any reunions of your World War II outfit?

Mr. Wilkinson:

I believe I have a set of the old fatigues. I think I gave away the combat boots.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you got out, did you use your G.I. Bill for anything?

Mr. Wilkinson:

I took pilot lessons. The funny thing was I completed it while I was waiting for the examiner to give me the test and get the license. I shipped out without getting it, so I never did get my license.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About what year would that have been?

Mr. Wilkinson:

That would have been in 1949 I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer:

After the war?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But you were still in the service?

Mr. Wilkinson:

I was still in service.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you been on the Honor Flight to Washington, D.C.?

Mr. Wilkinson:

No. I have not.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you heard of that?

Mr. Wilkinson:

I have heard of it, yes. I don't know if I could make it that long.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I understand they'll give you wheelchairs and they've got somebody there to take of you and they'll just take care of you, move you around and everything.

Mr. Wilkinson:

Yeah, but I don't like that. I try to do everything on my own if I can. So far I've been able to do most of it. I have neck trouble and back trouble and a pacemaker with heart trouble. But I consider myself very lucky and fortunate.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You're what, 91 right now?

Mr. Wilkinson:

I'm 92. I'll be 93 next month.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Wilkinson:

I think you've pretty well covered it to tell you the truth, more than I thought I'd ever remember.



Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your civilian career after you got out?

Mr. Wilkinson:

I was in the military the whole time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

30 years. What year did you retire then?

Mr. Wilkinson:

1974. I made up my mind if I went for 30 I was going to retire and never did. If I got out at 20, I'd have to get a job.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What ribbons and medals did you get from World War II?

Mr. Wilkinson:

The last one was...I guess I got a Combat Star from Vietnam and I have all the ribbons from the Pacific.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You probably got the Atlantic/Pacific Ribbon and the Japanese Occupation, right?

Mr. Wilkinson:

I have the Japanese and German.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You got the Philippine Occupation. You get that?

Mr. Wilkinson:

Yes, I did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

American Defense. I guess you got that.

Mr. Wilkinson:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

World War II Victory.

Mr. Wilkinson:

That's right. The Asiatic/Pacific.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get any Battle Stars from World War II?

Mr. Wilkinson:

I have at least two.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Two Battle Stars. Well, Gordon that's all the questions I have unless you've thought of anything else.

Mr. Wilkinson:

I don't think...maybe some little private things but that's about it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Thanks again for your time today and thanks for your service to our country during World War II.

Mr. Wilkinson:

Thank you also.

*End of Interview*

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