

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

The Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With
Clifford V. Fritz
Winamac, Indiana
August 24, 2017
U.S. Navy
U.S.S. Buttress ACM-4

My name is Richard Misenhimer: Today is August 24, 2017. I am interviewing Mr. Clifford V. Fritz at his home at 915 North Falvey, Winamac, IN 46996. His telephone number is 574-946-7155. 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:

Cliff, 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. What is your birth date?

Mr. Fritz:

7-11-27.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you born?

Mr. Fritz:

Pulaski County, Indiana.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Fritz:

Yes. I had three brothers and one sister.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were any of your brothers in World War II?

Mr. Fritz:

Yes. My oldest two brothers and one just older than I would have been but for some reason he didn't pass the physical. But we would all have been in if he would have passed the physical, all

four of us.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did your oldest brother do?

Mr. Fritz:

He was in the 82nd Airborne.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you know where he jumped?

Mr. Fritz:

Germany. He got out about probably about the time the war ended in Germany or the European war.

Mr. Misenhimer:

May 8, 1945.

Mr. Fritz:

I remember the year. I don't know exactly but I know what I was doing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How about your next brother? What did he do?

Mr. Fritz:

He was in the Army. He was a mechanic on the B-17. He was stationed in England.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Are either one of those still living?

Mr. Fritz:

No. They both are deceased.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did your sister do any kind of war work?

Mr. Fritz:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Fritz:

My dad's name was Lester and my mom's name was Hazel.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Fritz:

We didn't have much. We lived off the land just about. My dad, he'd walk three or four miles just to shock grain for ALL day for fifty cents. Back then fifty cents would buy quite bit of stuff out of the store. Fifty cents a day would go farther.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I think a loaf of bread was a nickel.

Mr. Fritz:

Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That would be here in Pulaski County, right?

Mr. Fritz:

Yeah, that's where I grew up and I know if we went to town during the week, Jenkins used to have a little concession stand beside the station over here. You lifted up the lid and they'd sell

ice cream and cigarettes and about everything. If dad had a nickel sometimes he'd stop and buy me an ice cream cone. I'd try to make it last all the way home which we lived out about 12 miles. But you used to get two dips for a nickel.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh yeah, yeah. Made it different back in those days.

Mr. Fritz:

Oh, man.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Fritz:

Oh, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you hear?

Mr. Fritz:

One of my brothers and I, we lived out there south of the Bethel Church about a mile and a half and he had a car. Of course I was only 14 years old. Francesville used to have a theater and we'd been to the show on a Sunday night and I came home. My mom had gone to bed and she hollered at us and said, "Did you hear that Pearl Harbor got bombed today?" "Pearl Harbor? Where's that?" She said, "Looks like we're going to get in war." I was 14 years old then. Everybody told me how lucky I was since I was only 14, I wouldn't have to go service but it got me. In fact I turned 18 before I went on active duty and when I came up to sign up for the draft and the lady I told I already enlisted and the Navy's already called me. She says, "Well, if they don't get you

one place, they'll get you another." So that's the way that worked out. So I ended up even though I was 14 when it started I ended up going after all.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Fritz:

I started high school in Francesville but I didn't have money to buy books and I had to walk a half-mile to catch a bus and I didn't have anything to go and I just went back to work at a job that I had for the summer. That was the end of my education.

Mr. Misenhimer:

In your first year, your freshman year of high school?

Mr. Fritz:

First year of high school. Yeah. I went the first week. In the front door and out the back.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What year would that have been?

Mr. Fritz:

It would have been 1942 I think.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you go into the service?

Mr. Fritz:

I was sworn in, you know you have to go through all the rigmarole before you get anywhere. I passed the physical and I was sworn in on July 5, 1945. I was sent home to await orders and I went to active duty on August 2, 1945.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go for your basic training?

Mr. Fritz:

Samson, New York.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You went in the Navy, right?

Mr. Fritz:

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And you volunteered?

Mr. Fritz:

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you choose the Navy?

Mr. Fritz:

Well, I had a buddy that went in about a year before I did. He was a little older than I and he wanted me to go at the same time he went, Bruce Sodervick, I don't know if you remember him or not. He was going and he wanted me to go. My folks wouldn't sign. I had to have a signature so I didn't get to go with him but later on the war was dragging on and both my brothers, one was in Germany and one in England. They both wrote home and told my folks it would be better to let me join the Navy. So I already wanted to go to the Navy. Then they signed and I went in the Navy mainly because if I wouldn't have went in the Navy the draft was going to get me and then they do with you what they want to. So that worked out well.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was your boot camp?

Mr. Fritz:

Oh, it was kind of...had its rough parts. It wasn't bad. I got along good with the guys, like a big family after a while.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How were your drill instructors? Were they pretty rough on you?

Mr. Fritz:

They could be if you got out of line. I remember we were taking judo training and I used to wrestle at that time, before I went in the service, and this judo instructor was showing me how to do a stop fall. He grabbed me by the head and threw me over his shoulder you know and I landed wrong and I kind of sprung an ankle. So the next time he did it, when I went over him, I grabbed his head and he chewed me out and then he really threw me. But that was...you learned to cope with deals like that. First time in you think, "Man, this is tough." But then you figure...same way with swimming classes and all that. You got to figure out what they want of you and then what you can perform. If you're way off, they tell you about it but I never had no trouble swimming. Used to swim the length of the pool and back and one thing and another.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have knot tying?

Mr. Fritz:

Oh, yeah. In the Navy you get that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have weapons training?

Mr. Fritz:

We did but not very much. I remember going to target practice. We used carbines. We were shooting off our stomach, lay on our stomach and shooting a target. Seemed like we were shooting out the hole in the bank, sort of like a cave, into a target. I got a marksman ribbon which didn't mean nothing. I think everybody got it. That's the only time we ever shot a weapon. We went to, I remember going to a class where they teach to put a gas mask on and they'd tell you how serious it was. Gas was coming in. You had to get that helmet on or the filter on that they put on your mask within so many seconds or you would get a whiff of the gas. They actually turned some gas on and you smelled it if you didn't have that on. So you learned to put that on pretty fast. We had boxing and judo and all kinds of stuff in the gym as well as all kinds of exercise.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long was that boot camp?

Mr. Fritz:

It was supposed to be ten weeks but I went in and of course I was homesick like everybody gets. They said if you go to the Seabees, you go to a different camp and then you get two weeks off. I thought that sounds good. So I signed up and volunteered for Seabees. It came to the last day and they hadn't called me but they put my name on the bulletin board as a fill-out if someone was sick or for some reason couldn't go, then I'd go. So I just went ahead and got ready. I got all my shots. They made me get all my shots and everything else. Then it came the day and I went. Nothing was ever said so I guess they accepted me but I got in the Seabees because of my farm background. You know, I'd been operating tractors and all that kind of stuff so Seabees were a

construction crew in the Navy. They went in with the Marines and laid out airstrips and stuff like that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you were with the Seabees then.

Mr. Fritz:

I served with the Seabees for a while. When the war ended, they didn't have a need for the Seabees so we got shipped to California and then to Pearl Harbor and we didn't do anything for a few weeks and then they called me in and gave me a choice: either go to Wake Island as a Seabee or stay in as a Seabee and I didn't know where I'd go and they'd ship me to Wake Island or they give me a choice of being a fireman. So I took the fireman so I was in the Seabees from the end of boot camp until...it wasn't that long. I was in Pearl Harbor when all this happened.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were in Pearl Harbor when you went into the Seabees?

Mr. Fritz:

Yeah, I was shipped to Pearl Harbor when I was a Seabee. See I became a Seabee about six weeks...I did about six weeks Samson, New York, in boot camp.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That would have been in September some time.

Mr. Fritz:

Yeah, that would have been in September.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That was in 1945. You were in the Seabees for how long?

Mr. Fritz:

From then until probably...I took a few weeks training and then they shipped us...I'm guessing I got switched out of the Seabees to fireman in about December.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Three months.

Mr. Fritz:

Something like that, yeah. But they were cranking them out. There wasn't any need for Seabees.

They didn't know what to do with us actually. They could have sent me home but they didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer:

As a fireman is that a firefighter or just a fireman?

Mr. Fritz:

Fireman was...well I became an engineer after...It's in the mechanical end of the ship, down in the engine room.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Engine room of the ship.

Mr. Fritz:

Back when they were the old steamships. That's where they got the name fireman because they actually used fire then to steam their ships, drive the ships. But my ship that they put me on was a diesel. So my work was as a diesel mechanic and throttle operator and troubleshooter and all kinds of stuff. I ended up being a Third Class Motor Machinist Mate. Third Class Petty Officer.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you go to Hawaii?

Mr. Fritz:

Probably in October. I know I was over there for Thanksgiving. Probably it was in October.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you travel over there?

Mr. Fritz:

Well, I left Davisville, Rhode Island, that's where the Seabee training place is at. They had a Marine base and a Navy and Army, all at Davisville. It's just outside of Providence. If you're in Rhode Island you're not far from Providence because it's not a very big state. But anyway we shipped out of there on a Saturday morning at like seven o'clock, got aboard a train. They were all cattle cars that the guys ride in but I was lucky. They had one car for the officers and they didn't have enough officers to fill it and I got in the Pullman car. So I got aboard and we went clear from Davisville, Rhode Island to Treasure Island, California on this one train.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Train trip.

Mr. Fritz:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long did that trip take?

Mr. Fritz:

We left on a Saturday morning and we got into Treasure Island a week from the following Sunday night. We got in there and we said we wouldn't be there but for a little while. We were there like 72 hours before we boarded that transport ship. You need the name of that ship? I got it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

If you've got it.

Mr. Fritz:

Joseph P. Dickman, PA-13. When we left we still didn't know where we was going. But after we got out at sea, they told us we were going to Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Spell the name of that ship.

Mr. Fritz:

Joseph P. Dickman.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What kind of ship was it?

Mr. Fritz:

Transport ship, PA ship.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that trip over?

Mr. Fritz:

I'd not been at sea before and I sure got seasick.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were quite a few people seasick from it?

Mr. Fritz:

Yeah. We got out at sea and you feel...going out of the harbor you didn't feel anything. Out under the Golden Gate Bridge. I thought this was pretty nice you know. Got out at sea and then you could feel it rolling and the bunks were four bunks high in the quarters. I remember I went to bed probably about 9:30 or 10:00 o'clock. I was up in this bunk and there was this guy just across in the next bunk from me. We got to talking because some guys were starting to get sick.

We decided that seasickness is all in your head you know. You just keep thinking about it and you end up getting sick. So about that time there's an officer came down and says, "We need some help. There's some guys throwing up in the hallways or bulkheads or whatever they called them back then." Out there in the passageway I've lost some of my Navy terms. Anyway we need somebody to help clean up." So we got a mop and a bucket. That was a gory job anyway. We worked at that for probably an hour and we went back and got up in our beds and said, "What's the matter with them guys? They don't need to be doing that, you know." And the next morning, we both woke up about the same time and he hit the deck, taking off for the head and I was right behind him. We were both sick. I didn't get over it. You know that stuff just keeps climbing and you just don't get over it. I know they wanted me to do some deck work. Try to keep busy on a ship if you can and I couldn't do it and I about got in trouble because I didn't do it. Finally about the last couple days before we got to Pearl Harbor, the sea leveled out and I got rid of my seasickness. It can get so rough and then it can be just like an ice rink. You know, everything quiets down. The ship still rolls on calm water but it's not anything to make you sick but seasickness was my problem. I got really sick coming back. But anyway that's the first time I'd ever been out on water like that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

People tell me that when they leave San Francisco it's really got a roll to it out there.

Mr. Fritz:

It's so rough, close to land. Seems like it's worse a half a day out or so than it is when you get out on the ocean. Unless you get in a storm. If you get in a storm then everything is very rough.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Everybody gets sick leaving there.

Mr. Fritz:

Oh, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What all did you do in Hawaii?

Mr. Fritz:

Well, we went there. We got off that ship and they put us in a barracks at IEA Naval Base. We didn't have nothing to do. So they assigned me the job of sweeping the sidewalk around the chow hall, twice a day, morning and night. That's all I had to do. Beautiful weather over there and I 'd go swimming or just be goofing around. Had a lot of time to do laundry and we were just awaiting orders and that's when they gave me a choice: either go to Wake Island or get out of the Seabees or go back in the Navy as a fireman. So that's the way that worked. They assigned us aboard a ship after a while. We were aboard that ship at Pearl Harbor for a few months and then we shipped back to the States. So our job at Pearl Harbor aboard the ship was mainly to keep the engine running and every day that ship, it was a little ship, a little old minesweeper, and we'd go outside the harbor almost every day, five days a week, and around the island and check radar buoys to make sure they were tied and we did experiments with depth charges and stuff like that. Then we'd go back. We'd be back into port by about usually two o'clock in the afternoon. Then because of what's on the duty roster you're on stand-by or what you done with the rest of your hours, you know. But back then I'd take, we had a duty day and then a stand-by day and a liberty day. Of course the liberty day sometimes I'd go into Honolulu. We kind of made the engineering I forget, yeoman? Anyway I had to keep track of how much fuel was in the tanks and how much fresh water and keep up with all that stuff, a lot of bookwork. So Friday was field day. That's when you get ready for inspection so while everybody else was polishing

the brass plates in the engine room, I'd be up in the office, doing bookwork. Then we used to have to chase parts. We'd borrow either a jeep or a weapons carrier. Usually spend the whole day going to hunt parts and kill time, actually. But we went around the island. I've been up to IEA Hospital. I've been up to the IEA Cemetery, Navy cemetery where all the guys are buried.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The Punch Bowl they call it now, the cemetery.

Mr. Fritz:

I don't know what they call it now. I think it was, I'm not sure what they did call it back then. I called it the IEA Cemetery. It was connected with the IEA Base and all that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

This is on Oahu, right? The main island.

Mr. Fritz:

Yes. I know there's an Amelia Earhart monument up there, near the cemetery. You've been over there, have you?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, I have.

Mr. Fritz:

That's kind of hazy any more. That's been a long time ago. I'm sure it's changed a lot. I probably wouldn't recognize it now. But I've been in and out of that harbor a lot of times because every day we'd go out. We'd sail past where those big ships got sunk. Steel hulls bubbling up out of the water. Some of them sitting there with their bows up out of the water. But actually we was docked right across the bay from I think it was the Oklahoma or the Oklahoma City they got sunk, not during the raid on Pearl Harbor, but they had an accident there. They was

getting some LSTs ready to go to Guam down south and they was loading the shells and somehow or other they blew them up and it took the Oklahoma down with them. It was still there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now the Oklahoma was sunk on December 7 and it turned upside down.

Mr. Fritz:

On this one the bow was sticking up.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's a different one.

Mr. Fritz:

I would swear it was the Oklahoma or Oklahoma City. I heard on the news that they raised some ship. That might have been the one they raised. But on the island right across from the bay it probably wasn't from here to Agnew Street there was a salvage yard with stuff that got blew up in the harbor and they dragged it up into that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's called "Westloch" where that happened. They all blew up and they were getting ready to go to Guam I think it was. And they were loading up for that and they had this fire in one of them and it kept on going. It killed a bunch of people and blew up a bunch of LSTs.

Mr. Fritz:

Yeah. Well our ship, we was docked right where that happened. There was a Marine base over here where we went, had a ship's service out there and a football field and movies. We'd get movies at night out there on that island. Seems like that wasn't too far from Hickam Field, the Air Force, because we used to hike across that way. Actually I took classes aboard an old

German submarine. They had a school, thing set up there to teach guys how to operate the fresh water evap. They took two of them from our ship, two engineers, to show you how to run salt water evap. So we hiked across Hickam Field and go to school there or class and go back. We actually used that coming home from Pearl Harbor to San Francisco. I ran that until I got so seasick I couldn't see the thing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the name of your ship there in Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Fritz:

The one I got assigned to?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah.

Mr. Fritz:

The U.S.S. Buttress.

Mr. Misenhimer:

It was a minesweeper?

Mr. Fritz:

Yes. ACM-4. Seemed big when you was on it until you went around another ship and then it was a toy. It was 182 feet long. My son looked it up on the computer here a while back and he says, "Longer than that 182 foot six inches" or something like that. But it was a small ship.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How big was your crew on it?

Mr. Fritz:

I think it was about 45 people.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Wasn't real big.

Mr. Fritz:

Everybody had their job to do. I guess the hardest job that I had aboard the ship was when we were docking. I was on throttle watch. There was bell up here and a hand on it that would ding and then the hand that was on it would say how many rpm they wanted. So then you answer that. Then you got to record it. When you're docking, you're doing so many rpm forward and back and every which way. You can't keep up with it. It'd just drive you crazy. Now when you're pulling away from the dock, you kind of get it out and then you're not going backward and forward. Here they got to get a certain speed to go in there. If you ram the dock, you're in trouble you know. We did that every day so if you had the duty and I hated that docking.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get to Honolulu?

Mr. Fritz:

Honolulu? Yeah, we went on liberty a lot in Honolulu. Went to Waikiki Beach and Royal Hawaiian Hotel. We saw John Wayne coming out of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. We were in the back of _____ and somebody says, "Hey, there's John Wayne!" I'd get my little camera out and gonna take a picture. I got a picture there. He's holding his hands up or something so I couldn't get a picture of him. But he was out there then.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was there still quite a bit of damage there from the December 7, 1941 raid?

Mr. Fritz:

You could see it around the harbor, sunken ships and as far as buildings being torn up, I didn't

see a lot of that. Of course they mainly concentrated on ships in the harbor I think. They did a pretty good job clearing that up.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Could you see the Arizona?

Mr. Fritz:

I saw the Arizona but I'm thinking the Saratoga.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The Arizona still is now.

Mr. Fritz:

Is it above water?

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, it's below water.

Mr. Fritz:

I was going to say, it's water then I think we could see the oil and stuff coming up there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oil still coming up.

Mr. Fritz:

Yeah. We could see that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The have put up a big memorial over the Arizona there.

Mr. Fritz:

I've heard that, yeah. Like I say, if I went over there now, probably the only thing I'd recognize would be old Diamondhead. I'm sure it's out there in the harbor.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, yeah.

Mr. Fritz:

Long way to go over there by water. Went by air you'd be there in hours I suppose.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The time we went, we flew over.

Mr. Fritz:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Still a long flight.

Mr. Fritz:

We had a kid aboard ship there, had chronic seasickness. He could sit on the bank, on the dock, and watch ships rock in the water and get sick. They flew him back because they figured he'd never make it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was there any time you ever felt frightened?

Mr. Fritz:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was that?

Mr. Fritz:

Probably during a storm at sea on that little old ship. It was really rough. That thing was taking a 45-degree list to the side. It seemed like...well I was stuck right over the starboard shaft to run

the starboard screw. It was out of balance. During that storm we was in, that screw would come out of the water and go R-R-R-R-R-R. I wasn't a Christian man back then but I was praying because when I was seasick I was so sick I couldn't walk and it was just quite an experience. It was scary. Well, I left my station and you're not supposed to do that in the service. I left my station and my station was the forward engine fresh water evaporator. It had to be checked every so often and flushed and all that and I just walked away and went to my bunk. You know who come down and tried to get me out? The Captain, Captain of the ship came down. "We need you up there. You got to get up." "Captain, I can't stand up." He must have felt sorry for me. It was rough.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What were you doing to be out there when you got in that storm?

Mr. Fritz:

We was coming back to the States.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Coming back to the States? On the minesweeper.

Mr. Fritz:

Like I say, you walk through it and you think it's pretty big. But get out on the ocean, it's awful small. I got pictures where we're coming out of Pearl Harbor and the water was coming over the bow, waves that big. One other experience I had. I went on liberty with a guy that I didn't know. We went out to Waikiki Beach. We got to drinking, getting drunk, and we was going to get in trouble. So I snuck away from him and I didn't know where I was at. So I went and I got me a cab and went back to Honolulu and I stayed at the U.S.O. for a while and played pool, one thing and another. Then late at night I thought I need to get back to the ship so I called me a cab and

told it where to go. They went around the island like you was going to take a tour and then they came up into this junkyard that we was talking about which was across the dam from our ship. I wasn't paying any attention and they said, "Here you are." I opened the door and got out and I looked around and no lights, dark, junk and I thought, "Woe is me." I looked across the bay and I could see our ship. I said, "Now what am I going to do?" Out there in the middle of the night in a junkyard and I thought about swimming it and I thought, "No, a lot of things can happen." So I started walking back up the trail to get back to the main road and I heard this PA system going off. There was some sailors up ahead of me and I thought, "What in the world is that up there?" because it was deserted, nothing there. I kept walking and pretty soon I heard one of them say, "Somebody's coming." And a bunch of guys out there clowning around. They had this weapons carrier and they were just fooling around out there in the junkyard and they was playing on the PA system. I walked up there and I spooked them and then they helped me out really. I told them my situation and they said, "We know where you need to go. We'll take you around there." So they loaded me up. I thought, "What am I going to do out here in the dadblamed junkyard." All night long, what am I going to do, you know, but that worked out good. But that was scary, too. Those kenacki's (natives) over there, they'd work you over. They didn't like service guys at all. They said never go to hitchhike by yourself in Honolulu because we had to go down this old road and there were big tall cane fields on both sides of it and they'd be out there. If they'd see you and there was more than one, if you'd run you were in trouble but something you had to watch out for. So I learned enough to not go on liberty with a guy you don't know and don't get lost. Never be alone.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was the morale on your ship?

Mr. Fritz:

Most of the time great. There was one time when we were anchored in San Francisco Bay, they had a canning factory just at the edge of San Francisco. Talk about stink. When the wind was the right way it would just stink like crazy and one day we was coming back off a liberty and we went to Pier 6 and then a whaleboat would come in and take us out to the ship. There was one set of whaleboats come in and they were stinkin' just terrible. I don't know what happened, one goin' up and two of the guys in an argument over it. In the Navy you could always put on the gloves and I learned about fussin' and fightin'. We went back and got aboard ship and that's what they'd do. They put on the gloves. I don't remember who won but most of the time... I don't think I had an enemy on the ship. I think I got along great. I reckon they're all gone now but this old guy from Arizona, I'd sure like to got in touch with him later. He took care of me. He was an older guy, a big guy. I went on liberty with him I felt at ease. He was a big guy, nobody messed with him. He watched over me like a dad. Most of the guys on board ship was like that. I was probably the youngest one aboard ship. I don't know but I was just a kid and all the guys were like 30 years old, maybe even older. See they drafted them up to 38...

Mr. Misenhimer:

Something like that, yeah.

Mr. Fritz:

We had one guy in the barracks in Samson, New York that was just old enough he shouldn't have been there and he would get mad at us young guys and threaten to whip up. I thought what's that old man doing here? 38 years old, that isn't very old really. But to us kids it seemed like it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When your 19 or 20, that's pretty old.

Mr. Fritz:

Yeah. I'd just turned 18. Hardly ever been away from home.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Fritz:

We had a Lieutenant aboard ship that I never cared for. He was from Chicago. He always thought he knew so much. One day they brought him down...he was the engineering lieutenant. He oversaw the engineer room and that kind of stuff. He came down there one day and was spouting of and one of the big officers come down and said, "Need to light the big engine off". You had to prime them before you started them, big diesel engines. Five hundred horsepower. Twelve cylinder vee, big GM. You had to prime them. The officer says, "Let's see the Lieutenant do that." He couldn't do it. He didn't know what valve to open or what to do. But he was kind of a...and he caught us one day. You get so much time off for noontime chow. And that's all right. You're entitled to an hour or...I think it was an hour. You eat and then you go back to your quarters and rest or if you wanted to loaf around down there. We got to talking or resting and we went overtime in the quarters. He came down and caught us and wrote us up. That's the only extra time I had to pull. Had to chip the junk off the deck so many hours a day after that for a while. He's the only officer I had ever had any problem with. All the rest of them...of course the guys are tough in training and they're paid to be tough there. They teach you discipline and they really mean business, like putting your uniforms in your locker. You have to square them. You can't roll them, you got to make them square and you had to have

them straight so when they come in they put their ruler on the side and every one of them had to touch that ruler. Just stuff like that. It's stupid but yet they got to have it that way. I had trouble with that when I first went in. But you soon learn you better do what they're telling you or you're going to get in trouble.

Mr. Misenhimer:

They want things done their way and that's it.

Mr. Fritz:

Right. They had a unit in Samson, New York they called Square Gestapo. Anyway, you couldn't cut across anything, like a corner. If you just went square there and you didn't dare cut across the yard down there. You'd go out there, square it out. They wouldn't let you cut across anything. Just stuff like that. I think they want you to do what they want you to do and that's it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

They don't want you thinking, should I do this or should I not do that. They want you to go ahead, do it.

Mr. Fritz:

Do it. There's no options.

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, that's right. So when did you come back to the States?

Mr. Fritz:

In February 1946.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And you came back on the Buttress?

Mr. Fritz:

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you got back to the States, what happened?

Mr. Fritz:

Well, we anchored out in the middle of San Francisco Bay, kind of between the Oakland Bay Bridge and the Golden Gate Bridge and that's where we stayed until I got discharged. There'd be a whaleboat going in every noon and eight o'clock at night. Being an engineer I was the engineer on the whaleboat. I'd sometimes pull duty. That was a cold, San Francisco gets cold at night. Saltwater spraying you in the face and you learned to put your peacoat on. If you didn't, you'd freeze to death. Used to running around those big old ships like the Saratoga and all those big old ships. We were in a whaleboat out there. But that's what we used. I remember one time we was having trouble with the whaleboat and we couldn't figure out what was wrong until we had it in drydock. We was supposed to fix it. Ran good and I was engineer. On this Saturday morning I was taking the crew in and we got out there in the middle of all those big old ships and we're going like crazy and that stupid thing quit running. I couldn't get it to run so all we could do was drift. We had nothing to hold it and we drifted and we came across a merchant marine ship and they knew we were in trouble. So they launched out another whaleboat and came out and pulled us in. We stayed aboard that merchant marine ship all day til they finally brought another some kind of landing craft and picked us up. But we'd go in at night and the guy steering the thing, I can't remember, he was...I don't know what it was. Like I say, I'm losing some of that. Anyway, he knew where to go and they'd wind around through those things. The thing is out there you can't plan on a ship being in a certain spot because they're anchored down. If the wind blows,

it'll blow until you're in a different world you know. That really messes with where you're at.

But they just easily give me so many rpm and I'd do it. That's all I'd do, set the engine and keep running. A whaleboat would be big on Bass Lake but they're not big out there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, yeah, right. About how long were they?

Mr. Fritz:

Oh, I'd say 16 to 20 foot.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, around 20 feet.

Mr. Fritz:

Let's see, what kind of engine did they have? I should remember that, 4-cylinder diesel. Don't remember what they called it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When were you discharged?

Mr. Fritz:

I was discharged August 16, 1946. I was in just a year and two weeks. But everything was over. I was a Reserve. We got out on the point system. Every month you had so many points we had to reach by the time. But every month they started to shorten them. They started taking off a couple points. So I got discharged way ahead of where I should have but I was ready to get out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were in one year and two weeks, right, OK. When you got out, did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Fritz:

Not really. There just wasn't any jobs, good jobs. If I would have been smart...I was a diesel mechanic. I overhauled Cummins diesel aboard ship and I knew what to look for when something wasn't working right and I could have went to bus shop or something like that up in South Bend and got me a good paying job but there again you got your roots down here and when you're young you just don't think that way.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you were in the service, did you ever see any U.S.O. shows?

Mr. Fritz:

No, I don't think I did. Well, I might have. I don't know. What kind of shows did they have?

Mr. Misenhimer:

U.S.O. They had people like Bob Hope or Bing Crosby or...

Mr. Fritz:

Oh, yeah, I saw some of those. I saw Bing Crosby with the Andrews Sisters. I saw some of those.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where would that have been?

Mr. Fritz:

San Francisco.

Mr. Misenhimer:

San Francisco, OK. Did you have any experience at all with the Red Cross?

Mr. Fritz:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get home with any kind of souvenirs?

Mr. Fritz:

Not really.

Mr. Misenhimer:

No flag, no gun, no nothing?

Mr. Fritz:

No. I never was issued a gun. My uniform, that's about it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on April 12, 1945 President Roosevelt died. Do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Fritz:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you when you heard?

Mr. Fritz:

I was out there in the barnyard, loading manure in a manure spreader. My mom, it was a long day and I'd been out there forking manure all day long, and she brought me out a drink of lemonade. The house was just up a ways and I was working for Ralph Fritz. A different Ralph than what's out here. This would have been Marshall. Ralph was Marshall's brother.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I know him, right.

Mr. Fritz:

John David...Marshall's mother-in-law owned the farm and Ralph, I think Marshall was in the service then. Ralph was running the farm and he hired me. I worked for them quite a lot before I

went in the Navy. When they cleaned the barn out, they'd just throw it outside the barn, you know. Come spring you had to get rid of that and get it on the fields before you planted corn. So that's what I was doing, I was hauling manure. My mom came out and she said it came over the radio that President Roosevelt had died.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your reaction when you heard that?

Mr. Fritz:

I just wondered what was going to happen with the war and one thing and another. Harry Truman took over then. It wasn't long it was over in Germany after that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

May 8, 1945 was when Germany surrendered. Did you have any kind of celebration then?

Mr. Fritz:

I don't remember.

Mr. Misenhimer:

August 6, 1945 they dropped the first atomic bomb. Did you hear about that?

Mr. Fritz:

I heard about that that night. We were out doing calisthenics. We didn't hear it until the 16th.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you heard that, what did you think?

Mr. Fritz:

They told us we were out of it, the Japs had surrendered. I don't know if we even knew about that bomb or not then.

Mr. Misenhimer:

August 15, 1945 was when Japan surrendered. Did you have a celebration then?

Mr. Fritz:

Well that would have been right after they told us. They told us the next day. They heard it the 15th and we heard it the 16th.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have a celebration?

Mr. Fritz:

No. You couldn't do that in the Navy I don't think. I don't remember anything going on. We was a happy group in the barracks I know that. Everybody thought we could pack our clothes and go home. It didn't work that way.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Fritz:

Yes, I did. I maxed it out. You could do a lot of things with it. I spent time in the Navy, I would get out and I didn't have a lot of education so I had to do something with my hands. I really wanted to be a jeweler or a barber. I was going to go to school and take classes to do that. I was going to use the G.I. Bill. Well, back then everybody was wanting to learn to fly. There was a little airport over by Medaryville. Bob Lake was one of the chiefs and he was teaching people to fly under the G.I. Bill. So my oldest brother was taking lessons and I thought, "Boy, I'd like to do that." So I started doing that and I flew a few times. I was getting close to the time when I was going to solo and I was driving a milk truck for Bowman Dairies. It broke a spring on a Saturday morning so I was... Willie Hauptle was working on it and he says, "I can get it ready to go by

tomorrow morning if you go get the parts for me.” So I got in my car and I was coming down to SR14 and I was going out here to get parts. A plane came in like this, hit the ground and so I stopped and Bob Lizenby, I was meeting him. He was going and we both went running out there and some other people came and we dragged the guy out of the fuselage and he wasn’t moving. We never knew why the plane came down. I’d flown the same plane the night before. So I says, “Huh? I don’t know what the problem is.” I got real quick concerned. So I quit it. The guy ended up passing away.

Mr. Misenhimer:

He died, OK.

Mr. Fritz:

They didn’t know whether he got up too high and didn’t turn the carburetor heat. Because a carburetor will freeze on you at a certain point. Maybe he was diving it because you can start if you dive far enough. The prop will turn your engine and start it. We didn’t know if he was trying to do that or what. But anyway...thing hit the ground and turned over and that was the end of him so I quit and that messed up my G.I. Bill.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you use the 52-20 Club? You know what that is? They would give you twenty dollars a week for 52 weeks if you didn’t have a job.

Mr. Fritz:

Oh, yeah. I used that I think when I first got out. I got a certain amount of mustering out pay and then I had that coming in so I came home. Of course the first thing I had to do was buy a car. I had saved up a little money for that. The bank gave me the rest of it. I didn’t have a good job for a while. I remember drawing I think maybe three or four weeks of that pay.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you had any reunions of the people you were in the service with?

Mr. Fritz:

No. I had a contact with a guy from Adrian, Michigan, guy by the name of Henry Marvin. He wrote me a letter and I think I wrote back. No, we never had any reunions. I know a lot of service people do but I never did. As far as I know there was never a reunion for our ship. Probably too small a group.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Fritz:

I don't know. I had some but I never did anything great so I guess whatever they give you.

Mr. Misenhimer:

World War II Victory Medal, American Defense. Did you get Good Conduct?

Mr. Fritz:

I should have.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What else do you remember about your time in the service?

Mr. Fritz:

Well, I didn't realize while I was in there but actually it was like a big long vacation. You know a lot of times I got to do what I wanted to do. I never had to worry about money. Always had a place to sleep, plenty of food. I was a kid and I didn't have fears of a lot of things that older people do. So as I look back, I enjoyed it. There was hard times. You wanted to go home. You

don't know why but you wanted to go home. I don't know, it was just a different kind of life, that's for sure.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Fritz:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Are you familiar with the Honor Flight?

Mr. Fritz:

I've heard of it, yeah. Chief Engineer aboard, he did everything but tie me to the ship. He didn't want me to get out of there at all. I considered re-upping. You know, I'd stay and make a career out of it but there again you don't know. You want to go home so you go home. But even after I got home there wasn't any good jobs out here. I really thought about it. He says, "Just let me know if you want to come back." So I could have went right back but our ship was up for de-commission and actually when I left the ship, they were getting it all cleaned up, ready for inspection and I hear now that when they re-inspected it, they said it's too good a shape. We don't want to de-commission it. But now it's been drug out to sea so they may have de-commissioned it. I don't know if they took all the good stuff out or what but the scrappers would have had a ball with that one. That's what happened to it. I think they sold it maybe to a fishing company and they ended up getting rid of it. It's all on computer if a guy wants to go poking in there and check it out. Darren, my son, he's good at computers. He checked it out. Actually it recorded in there the voyage back from Pearl Harbor to San Francisco. That was recorded in there too. I was engineer, one of the engineers, when it came in. I have no regrets for going in the

service. Lot of guys that weren't in wish they would have been now. I'm getting medication from the VA now. Lot of times they give a scooter to ride because my legs are bad. You know it takes them so long to do anything. I got a prescription from my doctor and I went to Knox and ordered the scooter and the day they called and told me they were going to deliver the scooter, I got a letter from the VA saying come to Chicago and tell us what color you want. But they'll do anything for you. I've heard of guys getting you know, handicap vans and all kinds of stuff out of the VA. That's where most of these Braun vans go, that's government stuff.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get your scooter then?

Mr. Fritz:

Yeah. That's been nine years ago. I had a heart attack eleven years ago and when I had the heart attack they found out my kidneys were bad so they wouldn't put me back on my arthritis medicine and I could hardly walk when I came out of the hospital after my heart attack because my arthritis was so bad. It was always bad and they won't give me anything for it yet because of my kidneys. My kidneys are on my last stage. Kidney disease is in five stages and I'm in the last one. But I ain't got much road ahead of me anyway at 90 years old. I've got two bad heart valves and blockage in my heart. They can fix it with a stent but because of my kidney disease, they can't do the heart because if they do that camera deal in your heart, they got to give you a dye and that dye kills kidneys. So if they do that, chances are they'll shoot my kidneys the rest of the way. So I'm kind of between a rock and a hard place now. But day by day.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Are you on dialysis?

Mr. Fritz:

No, but they're wanting to get me there. I got to make up my mind. I've got an appointment with the heart doctor on the 11th maybe of September. I've got to make up my mind if I want to let them put that shunt in my arm or whatever it is. Has to be in there 90 days before you can use it. They said in case of emergency then they go in an artery in your neck which goes clear into the heart. It says it's not a pretty picture. I don't know what to do. I'm waiting to get my readings before that because... I've got to go the 4th and get blood tests here so when I go in they'll have that and he can tell me what my numbers are and then I can kind of go off of that. So just have to wait and see I guess. Last time I got a reading it was up a little bit, heading the right way. My kidneys have been as low as 12 percent and the last time I was in they were at like 18 percent. My creatinine was 3.7 and now the last time it was 3.1. You want that as low as you can go. So I don't know. The heart doctor, he's got me on a patch, trying to get me where I got better breath. It's a nitro patch. I put it on every morning. I think it helps.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you get in the car repair business, the body shop business?

Mr. Fritz:

I expect when times was tough and I was working on a farm at Wanatah, big farm. I was making \$150 a month and they furnished me a house. One night a brother-in-law came up and said that Bob Rohloff was Gutwein's body man at Monon at the Ford place down there on Main Street. I don't know if you're familiar or not but they've been there forever. Anyway he worked for them and they got into it. So he was coming back to Francesville and going to start a body shop and he needed help. So I thought that's something I'd like to do because I was kind of familiar with cars anyway. So I went down and talked to him and he offered me \$25 a week. I was married and had one young'un. No way I could live on \$25 a week. I told him I'd sure like to do it but at \$25 a

week, I just can't do it. He says, "Well, I'll give you \$35." But then you got to work longer before you get a raise. So I thought, "Well it's a chance to learn the trade." So that's how I got started. I went to work for him. \$35 a week. Actually he paid me six dollars a day because the first day I was looking for a house because I had to move from Wanatah to Francesville. So I needed some time and so I didn't work the first Monday and then I went to work and he gave me six dollars a day. I worked for that for several months. He finally raised me to \$45 a week I think or something like that. That wasn't good enough. I was doing everything by then. Back then you used lead and you used...you had lacquer and enamel. That's the only sort of paint you had. Anyway I went to work for Newboldt down at Monon and I hated that. Then I went to work across the street and worked for Gutwein's. So that was a good job. You learn the trade and then I, like a dummy, went and bought a milk route. Lost my shirt on it for about two years. I finally sold it and went back to work at a body shop and I've been there basically ever since. I tried other things, like selling motorcycles, I was into used cars, but basically it's been auto body repair the rest of those years, 56 years I've been before I had the heart attack. I worked til I was 79, past 79 I had the heart attack. I was 80, I started to quit, regardless what. I wonder if I wouldn't have had the heart attack, would I have quit at 80 or not. I wonder. Didn't take my Social Security until 70. Then I kept on working. That helped me, too, there's a certain amount you can't make over a certain amount but what you do make, you got to pay taxes on. If you're paying taxes, you're paying Social Security. So every year I would get like, for like nine years, from 70 to 79, I'd get like twenty to thirty dollar a month raise because I was still paying in. So that's going right on now. That's really helped me out today. That's a long time to work, 79. Back then when I was in San Francisco and they were going to discharge me but they wanted to ship us to Great Lakes to get discharged. They said, "If you can figure out a way, we'll discharge

you out here and then you get paid mileage to go home.” It was like \$300 so me and a guy from New York and the guy from Michigan I was telling you about, the guy from New York had a brother or sister-in-law or something that lived out there, San Lorenzo Village. It’s near San Francisco. We had in our mind we were going to buy a car off of him and drive home. We was going to make the Navy think that. We went over there and he give us a false bill of sale. We showed it to them and “Well, OK, we’ll discharge you out here.” Got discharged out there and we rode a troop train home, not a troop train, a day coach from San Francisco to Chicago. Monday night to Friday night. So that’s how we made \$300. It didn’t cost but a fraction of that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Cliff, I want to thank you for your time and thank you for your service to our country during World War II.

Mr. Fritz:

Like I say. It was like one big vacation. I didn’t think so at the time but as I look at it.

End of Interview

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