

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Nimitz Education and Research Center
Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With

Calvin Vince Stowell
Independence, Missouri

May 30, 2019

U.S. Army

41st Infantry Division

116th Medical Unit

Pacific

Mr. Misenhimer:

My name is Richard Misenhimer, today is May 30, 2019. I am interviewing Mr. Calvin Vince Stowell by telephone. His phone number is 816-461-3452. His son Mark is helping with this interview and he is also the alternate contact. His phone number is 816-405-6078. 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.

Okay I read you the agreement and you agreed the agreement was okay, that's right?

Mr. Stowell:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay and you gave me your address which is 12022 Newbury Lane, Independence, Missouri, 64052. Well again Vince I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today and thank you for your service to our country during World War II. And your birthdate is April 4, 1925?

Mr. Stowell:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And where were you born?

Mr. Stowell:

Flasher, North Dakota.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Stowell:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How many brothers and how many sisters?

Mr. Stowell:

Four brothers, three sisters.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were any of your brothers in World War II?

Mr. Stowell:

Oh all of us, all five of us. Well the oldest four, I was the youngest of the four and then there was a brother younger that was in the Korean War right after us.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did all your brothers come home from the war?

Mr. Stowell:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Are any of them still living?

Mr. Stowell:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

If they were I'd like to interview them. Do you know what any of them did?

Mr. Stowell:

My oldest brother John was a dental technician in the 41st General Hospital in Australia and the Philippines.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How about your other brothers?

Mr. Stowell:

My other brother Gomer was in the Signal Corps in Europe.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did he get into much combat?

Mr. Stowell:

Very little.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How about the next brother?

Mr. Stowell:

Chalmer was in the United States Marines on Okinawa.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And what did he do, he was a rifleman?

Mr. Stowell:

He was a rifleman in the Marines and he came home one hundred percent disability.

Mr. Misenhimer:

He was wounded there then?

Mr. Stowell:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

At Okinawa fighting was very tough.

Mr. Stowell:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Stowell:

My father's name was John Arthur.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And your mother?

Mr. Stowell:

Zenia, McElwain was her maiden name.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now you grew up during the depression, how did the depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Stowell:

Terrible. My father died of leukemia in 1934. And that put mother without an income, eight kids. And one time she went ten years without regular income until I went in the service in 1943. And over half my wages went back to her and my little brother and sister.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Your other brothers, were they also supporting her?

Mr. Stowell:

No, the three older brothers were married at the time and had children, each one of them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So they had to support their own family, right.

Mr. Stowell:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Stowell:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you hear and what was your reaction?

Mr. Stowell:

Well I was in high school and I didn't have a lot of reaction to it. My family wasn't affected at the time, but then my older brother was drafted and then I was next. But I felt like I would probably miss it but I didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you hear about it?

Mr. Stowell:

Radio.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when did you finish high school?

Mr. Stowell:

June 4, 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And when did you enter the service?

Mr. Stowell:

July 23, 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you drafted or did you volunteer?

Mr. Stowell:

I was drafted.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now where did you go for your basic training?

Mr. Stowell:

Camp Hood, Oregon.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And you were drafted into the Army?

Mr. Stowell:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that basic training?

Mr. Stowell:

Well it was different than anything I'd ever had of course. They established the 70th Division and we were the first recruits to train as infantrymen in that division. I got through basic training, in about a month when they took me overseas, as a replacement.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On what date did you go overseas?

Mr. Stowell:

I went overseas in June of 1944.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now were you in an outfit at this point?

Mr. Stowell:

I was still in the 70th Division. That was a new infantry division just organized. We were the first recruits to take basic training.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The 70th Infantry Division.

Mr. Stowell:

Yes. I left that a year later.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But you went overseas with the 70th Infantry?

Mr. Stowell:

No. I went over as a replacement. 70th Division went to Europe.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So where did you leave from to go overseas?

Mr. Stowell:

San Francisco, Camp Pendleton, California.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And what kind of ship were you on?

Mr. Stowell:

A troop ship, yes. Five thousand troops and thirty-five hundred Navy personnel, *USS Pope*.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And where did you go to?

Mr. Stowell:

Oro Bay, New Guinea.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that trip over?

Mr. Stowell:

Well it was uneventful, we didn't have any transport protection at all. It's supposed to be a fast troop ship and we went right straight, it seemed to me like we was on the ship about fifteen days, but I don't remember exactly.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was there much sea sickness on the ship?

Mr. Stowell:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have a problem with that?

Mr. Stowell:

No I didn't, never did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And where did you land in New Guinea?

Mr. Stowell:

Oro Bay, O-r-o B-a-y, two words.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do when you got there?

Mr. Stowell:

I went in the replacement depot.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And then what happened?

Mr. Stowell:

Well I don't remember how long I stayed there, but then I got on an LCT and went up to northern New Guinea to Biak Island. And it stopped at Finschhafen and Hollandia and all the,

Buna, the places along New Guinea. And took on things and left things on the ship. And landed on Biak Island, the little island off the northern edge of New Guinea where all the Japs were at the time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And what outfit were you in at this point?

Mr. Stowell:

I was just assigned to B Company temporarily, for quarters and rations. And about a month later or so I went to 41st Infantry Division.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And what regiment and company were you in in the 41st?

Mr. Stowell:

I was first assigned to, just a replacement group. And later we were put down and I was in B-Company for awhile before I went to the 41st Medical Division, 116 Medic in the 41st Infantry Division.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And what was your job there?

Mr. Stowell:

Well we were riflemen, we were given an M-1 and we're in rifle and fought the Nips.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But you were in a medical outfit?

Mr. Stowell:

No, not then. I was the infantry for several months.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What company in the infantry?

Mr. Stowell:

I was in K-Company, 3rd Battalion.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What were your experiences there?

Mr. Stowell:

Rifleman.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get into much combat?

Mr. Stowell:

Enough, let's put it that way. We were in and out of it all the time, you'd fight for a few days or a week or two and then come back and rest. And then the Nips at that time were scattered throughout New Guinea and it was a beginning of mop up operations and secure the three airbases there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What were those airbases, do you know the names of them or what they were?

Mr. Stowell:

Oh, Borokoe and there was two other bases. I don't recall their names now.

Mr. Misenimer:

What all happened there?

Mr. Stowell:

Well we just was mopping up continually after the Japs got scattered in the original invasion.

Was a couple of months before I got there. And it was a mopping up operation with pockets of Japs all over the island and you went and hunted them down and shot them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Stowell:

Well I was in K-Company for I don't know, about four months as I remember. I came in off one operation and the 1st Sergeant told me I was transferred to the medics.

Mr. Misenhimer:

To medics?

Mr. Stowell:

116 Medics.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And what did you do there?

Mr. Stowell:

Well in the first months of operation I was a litter-bearer, carried the men out that was wounded, basically.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You say you were picking up wounded?

Mr. Stowell:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And this was where?

Mr. Stowell:

On New Guinea, on Biak Island.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about that.

Mr. Stowell:

Well I was just basically, you didn't get in much fighting, you were kind of in the background and waited until somebody was wounded. Just come in and you and three other fellows were attached as a litter-bearing squad and you picked guys up, put them on the litter and carry them out. And they were just shipped out to the hospital, wherever. And you kept that up for two or three operations, I don't remember how long it was or anything. But then eventually, just before we went to the Philippines I was transferred into K-Company and had a platoon of riflemen to look after in combat as a combat medic.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get trained as a medic?

Mr. Stowell:

No. Well we had a first aid course, that's what you call it. Learned how to put on splints and give shot and pass out pills, but that's all the training was. It was no previous training as a medic.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what all did you do as a combat medic?

Mr. Stowell:

Well usually when you went through the jungle and down the trails is all you could do because that is just the rain forest is what it was. And that's where you fought and tracked down the Nips, is went down these trails and you'd meet Nips or come up on a group of them. And you're usually seventh or eighth man in the column, you had a couple of guys up front with Thompson submachine guns. All the time I was in the medics I carried a carbine, 30-caliber carbine. We wasn't supposed to have that, that wasn't issued to me, it was just being on my bunk one day and the Sergeant said, "You may need this someday." And so we carried them until the war was over. But the Japs didn't recognize the medic or anything else like in Europe. We didn't have the Red Cross painted on our helmets in a white circle or anything like that. We were just supposedly one of the infantry, but that's how we did and we carried two big packages of bandages on each hip. Just carried morphine and different pills, medication for the infantrymen and treated them when they was wounded. When they was hit why your name was called, "Doc." And you went and moved them, but you had a platoon to look after. And that was continued for six months or so, until the war was over.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I understand the Japanese did not respect the medics or anything like that.

Mr. Stowell:

No. We didn't respect anything on them either.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's some other things that happened?

Mr. Stowell:

Well that's about it basically, that was enough to happen. You was busy. Usually the first shot that was fired you hit the ground and then the next thing you knew after a few rounds was, "Doc! So and so was hit." And sometimes they had to point him out to where he was because you were right there and you went and took care of him. You had shots of morphine to give him. It would knock them out and immobilize them and keep them from jumping and hollering and screaming. And then you immediately call for a litter squad to come and get them and take them out. I say I didn't call them, usually the Sergeant of the platoon called them or a Lieutenant if he was there, there wasn't many Lieutenants around in combat. Sometimes there were sometimes there weren't, but anyway. It was just hand-to-mouth operation from then on. And you directed who would take him out or carry him out, get him out of harm's way. And it was always down a jungle trail, which was never wide open country, it was a rain forest, thick as, well thick as kunai grass. You've ever seen kunai grass in New Guinea?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah.

Mr. Stowell:

So thick you can't walk through it most, but that's what the jungle was there, a rain jungle, rained every day.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, go ahead.

Mr. Mark Stowell:

Anything else you can think of?

Mr. Stowell:

Just multiply that ten thousand times and that's what you got, day in, day out. Sometimes for a night, a month, sometimes for two or three days you wait, it's according to how big a pocket was and how well prepared they were to fight. They were on the run, they were hungry and didn't have ammunition, a lot of it, everything. And you threw grenades and did your share.

Mr. Misenhimer:

This was on Biak where this happened, is that correct?

Mr. Stowell:

That's right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And where did you go from Biak?

Mr. Stowell:

That's where the big airfields were being built by the Japanese, that was the reason for taking that island. It's a little island right off the northern tip of New Guinea, up near the equator. And what the Army wanted was those three airfields to bomb the Philippines and the other islands around it. The Marines were taking them, you know that was a big bomber base, B-24 bombers. There were three of them there and they were pretty well complete. They were coral runways that some of them had metal strips put down on them, some of them didn't. But that's about the story for day in, day out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long were you on Biak?

Mr. Stowell:

Well close to a year. It may be nine months, it may be, remember it rained every day, you were soaking wet. You waded rivers, you crossed, you were wet ninety percent of the time. Night and day you slept in the rain, you walked in the rain, you crossed rivers, whatever it took. And you didn't dictate to, whether it rained or not. But anyway you had no calendars, you had nothing. If you had a watch it lasted about a month, it was so water soaked it wouldn't run anymore. It was hell on earth.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you have to live in there?

Mr. Stowell:

Nothing. You had a half a poncho you put together when you could. But they were usually torn

and everything and you didn't have a pup tent or anything of any kind. You put two of those together and you slept under it, they were four by four and I was five foot and a half, so half of me stuck out, or a foot and a half. Your head usually was out a little bit or maybe under just so you could sleep. Your helmet was over your face trying to sleep at night. You didn't do very good with the trouble with the Nips and the bugs and the what have you, mosquitoes. They were as big as dive bombers.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I understand the conditions were pretty bad there.

Mr. Stowell:

Terrible, hell on earth.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you stayed in the pup tents all the time on Biak?

Mr. Stowell:

No, never saw a pup tent all the time I was over there. The only thing we saw was what we called a six-man tent or a twelve-man tent. And you didn't take them with you, you didn't carry them on your back, you just carried your poncho. Your poncho had a hole in the middle for you to stick your head through but you couldn't fight with a poncho hanging over you. So you never, you always put it on after you're soaking wet and it rained every day, every night almost. You was wet constantly. And so anything that was affected by water was useless in a day or two.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So there on Biak you did have the six-man and eight-man tents then, right?

Mr. Stowell:

Well yes, when we're going through a rest period or they'd take you off the front line for maybe two weeks and give you a rest or something that's where you slept in. They were usually close to the beach where it was secured. But everybody stood guard every night. We medics, we didn't have to stand guard in the infantry when we was attached to them. But I took my turn always at guard duty and everything else because that just relieved one of the other fellows in

guard duty that night, let him get some sleep if it was possible.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Stowell:

Well they invaded the Philippines. And we were told that we were going in to take Manila. The 41st Infantry Division was the first infantry division overseas in World War II. It went to Australia, the 41st did. And they were in Australia basically and then they went to New Guinea from there. And they spent, some of the boys spent three years in the jungles of New Guinea. So when they went to the Philippines we went and we were to take Manila. But they didn't meet any resistance so they dropped us off at Mindoro Island. And we stayed about two weeks on Mindoro. And then we invaded Palawan Island, that's on the west side of the Philippines, a long narrow strip of land. And we put the Nips across Palawan, that was an Army prisoner of war camp. The night before we got there they burned all the soldiers and put gasoline on them and burned them, so they were all dead when we got to them at Puerto Princesa. And then my company walked across the Philippines and met a little resistance here and there, it kind of a delaying for us. And we finally got on the other side of Palawan. The second night we were there, woke us up in the middle of the night. There was a ship pulled up in the harbor or on the edge of the island and with search lights. The ships were searching, we assume for Japanese prisoners because they had vacated the island basically. And got everybody out because they knew we were coming. But for two nights or three, I don't remember exactly now, those search lights would come on, we was put up basic camp just inside the jungle from the beach. So we just see the lights, never did anything. But then we met a few Nips here and there and annihilated them easy, they were in small groups, seven or eight. Annihilated them. But they had vacated the island basically and took the troops someplace else. But we only spent about six weeks on, maybe not that long on Palawan until we were sent to the peninsula Zamboanga, the tail end of the Philippines to relieve the rest of the division. And took that whole peninsula down there after that. Then eventually that's where the war ended for us, or the fighting end. We were

in kind of a rest area in Zamboanga on the edge of Zamboanga. And then of course the A-bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. And they told us that we were going to Japan and we would occupy Hiroshima. MacArthur used us, we were his favorite troops sent. We were known as MacArthur's "Jungleers" because we spent more time in the jungles than any other service. And he promised us a town and that's when we're gonna take Manila to begin with, give him a town or something that was halfway civilized. We went from Japan from there and set up base camp in, right on the edge of Hiroshima. Nobody lived in Hiroshima at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, then what happened?

Mr. Stowell:

Well they organized, I was still left in K-Company as an assigned medic. And they couldn't do anything with you except feed you. You was assigned for quarters and rations, they couldn't give you KP or any guard duty or anything else. So I stayed out in the company and never worked much in the first aid station or anything in the battalion headquarters. And I just jump on jeeps or trucks, they brought shiploads of guys into the Port of Kure in Japan, twelve miles away. And took them through Hiroshima and showed them and I spent my first month doing that basically. Because the Lieutenants after breakfast would come out and assign everybody duty. I was always the last man standing and they would say, "Doc, get lost or disappear." Well to get lost or disappear is pretty hard because you couldn't go into town unless two or three of you went together armed. We carried ammunition, everything into Hiroshima just like we did in combat because we didn't know what we was going to run up against. But we never had one iota of any trouble at all in Hiroshima. But anyway that lasted for about a month. And then I was assigned for duty at the prophylactic station, of a house of ill repute. I had to get supplies and everything and order them, and keep them there and see that the prophylactic station was taken care of. But there was MPs all over the place, make GIs obey and one thing another. I never had anything to do with that, I just run the prophylactic station or was in charge of it, I had two assistants. And we kept that busy.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What is a prophylactic station?

Mr. Stowell:

Well after them boys went in and spent their time with the ladies, they had to come out and go through a regiment of treatment. Of course they had to wash themselves off with sterile water and Clorox solutions, their groin area. And then there was about four different things that we had to, we injected their penis with. And also rubbed on their area around their groin and see that they did it. Everybody that went inside of that house, they had to go through the prophylactic treatment afterwards. So there's MPs all over the place making them do that, it was an order. And like typically, always resisted everything, that there was enough MPs I never had anything to do with policing of it. But I just had to have supplies ready and set up the thing. And the doctors helped set up the regiment of giving a man treatment after he'd had time with the girls. Women I should say. There's a mother and her two daughters was in one room. And these girls came from what they called a syndicate. And they're, all the older Japanese people were indebted deeply to these syndicates in Japan because they had loaned them money to live on. And the farmers were so poor that the government took all their excess produce and sent to the Army and they were starving to death. But the Army controlled that completely and we had nothing to do with it. But the Japanese Army was taken over by MacArthur and his men in Tokyo. And we were right on the edge of Hiroshima. You could go in Hiroshima and travel around, we all did in our mobiles, we didn't walk anywhere. Because where we gonna walk, what we gonna do? Nothing but bombed out buildings and land, no vegetation, no nothing. Everything had burned that would burn at 4000 degrees, what do you expect. The trees were burned completely and the insides of houses had no wood work in them, what was left. And they were, most of them condemned from people going in because they were leaning or something. And it was, you had to watch what you did. There was no vehicles in Japan, I didn't see a Japanese car all the time I was there for three months. The only vehicles you saw was the United States Army vehicles.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's some other things that happened there?

Mr. Mark Stowell:

Tell him about the people you met.

Mr. Stowell:

We landed on Saturday and downtown Hiroshima or most of it was off limits because of the buildings being unsafe standing. Anyway they had off limit signs and my buddy who drove the jeep for the Captain or the doctor, he came by and he said, he got the other three medics out of the company, and he says, "Let's go to Hiroshima." And one of us said, "It's off limits." And he said, "To hell with off limits, we fought them for two years we'll go where we want to." So we went into Hiroshima and the first thing we came across was this burned out streetcar in the middle of the street. And when I say burned out, everything was burnt. There was no sticks of wood, there was nothing that would burn left in Hiroshima for about a five mile radius. And of course we lived out on the edges where people lived and we traveled in this jeep. But the first thing we walked up to this streetcar and there was a Japanese man said, "Good morning gentlemen." He was an older man with a bowler hat on and he had a kimono on and he was walking with a cane. But everybody wore kimonos at that time because they had no clothes. And he had a kimono on and he had been a caretaker for the estate of Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. in California. And he and his wife retired and went back to Japan and was caught there. But anyway it was very interesting to talk to him, he was well educated and talked just as good English as we did and so on. And you went on and once in a while, we always met somebody who could talk good English. We went in a house, he was sitting out on a stoop like thing. And there was an old fellow there and he said, "Hi fellows." And we stopped and low and behold somebody could speak our language, so we talked to him. And one of the things he wanted to know was when he was going to get his back payments from the United States Navy. He had retired, spent thirty years in the United States Navy and retired back in Japan but he hadn't got any pension after he got there. And of course our answer was how in the world would we know

when he was going to get his paycheck. So he laughed and he talked to us and we talked war and he talked war. And we went on and met other people, but those things happened quite often.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay then what happened?

Mr. Stowell:

Well we was in town one night and we always went to town no less than two of you and you were armed. Usually you had a .45 or a Jap 32 caliber pistol on your shoulder holsters hid under clothes. But we always went in armed because we didn't know for a week or two what we'd run into at any time. But in our outfit there was no trouble but there was across Japan. We heard of soldiers coming back from China and everything and they got rather rude and they were gonna tell our men what to do. And of course they were annihilated pretty quick because the guys had arms and you fought them and had no patience with them whatsoever. But anyway, we ran into a lady who had, she and her sister were born in Hawaii and their parents had retired from their jobs in Hawaii and went back to Japan, in 1940 they went back to Japan to see their mother, these two ladies. And they were, oh in their thirties probably as I remember and I wouldn't bet on that either. But anyway, one of them we got rather well acquainted with. She invited us to her home quite often. She had married finally a Japanese man and had a little boy about three or four years old. We never saw much of either one of them but we would go to her house at night and take food to her and her family, so on. And she told us a lot about what went on in Japan and everything else. And she was a very fine lady, very well educated. I don't remember now what she did in Hawaii but she and her sister were caught back there. But we spent a lot of evenings sitting around a hibachi in the middle of her floor. And of course they only live in one room, one corner is the kitchen and the other corners had big mats on the floors. They don't have wood floors or anything. And so you'd sit around there in blankets at night, it was cold in the wintertime, it snowed a couple of times in Hiroshima. About an inch of snow each time. But we visited her often and she kept us informed from her side. And of course we would tell her things about what was going on in America. But that was an interesting part of it, she was very

fluent in English and everything. But you met other people and you can use phrases in Japanese and some things like that. But other than that that was about the time that I spent, I spent three months and a week in Hiroshima. And then I had enough points to come home. That was about it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So how long were you at Hiroshima?

Mr. Stowell:

Three months and a week.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So when did you come home, what date, to U.S.?

Mr. Stowell:

I think I left Japan on the 15th of January.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Of '46?

Mr. Mark Stowell:

Is that '45 or '46?

Mr. Stowell:

It's '46, January of '46. I had 53 points if I remember right. So they come around and told us one day we'd be leaving such and such a day. And then we of course went down to the ship and caught the ship in Kure, which was their big Naval base. And I came home on a new ship and came in to Tacoma, Washington, discharge at Fort Lewis, Washington. Then I was shipped to Fort Leavenworth in Kansas. And then from there I came home to Independence.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What date were you discharged?

Mr. Stowell:

I think January the 23rd, 1946.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you were overseas what would you consider your most frightening time?

Mr. Stowell:

Well that's hard to say. You was scared to death every day in combat. After the first shot was fired it was hit the ground and hope and pray that they'd run out of ammunition or whatever. It was, you were scared so many times it got to be old to you. And you didn't go to sleep at night for the first week and then you're so tired you didn't care anymore. But combat was a ruthless thing, you had to live with it but you didn't want to. I can't explain it any other than that. And it's hell on earth.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was the morale in your outfit?

Mr. Stowell:

Well it was usually about as good as it could be under the conditions. We had lousy food. We didn't get food half the time, ate K-rations for a week or month at a time. Didn't know what a hot meal was. Rained every day. Your morale couldn't be good anyway you looked at it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Stowell:

All the officers I had were good. You'd catch a bad one every once in a while but you just accepted it. Usually he didn't last long, because the officers didn't like him either if they were that type of person. But some of them were. And you very seldom got an officer right out of the United States, once in a while which they usually didn't last long because they wouldn't do what the fellows told them to do to save their life in combat. And unless you were combat wise you didn't last long. And if you didn't listen to people it was just your own worst enemy, because it took a certain type of person to care. But the officers as a whole, I had some that, my last casualty I took care of was my 1st Lieutenant and he'd been commissioned right on the line, he never went to school or anything. But he was a true blue, most of them were. The Captain of the K-Company, Captain Kununan, I thought the world and all of him. He was always good

to me and I was good to him and that's the way you treated people. If they treated you decent, you treated them decent. But it was tit for tat. You kill my dog, I'll kill your cat. And anyway. And most of the noncoms, if they were cocky for a day, somebody took it out of them real quick. And they knew their place from then on.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the highest rank you got to?

Mr. Stowell:

Buck Sergeant, and I made that at the prophylactic station (*laughter in background*). Well, as the Captain said, "You've been out in K-Company, we didn't know you were here, everything went so well." He said, I was a Corporal at the time, he said, "I'll give you another stripe." And so I guess I got it. I can't remember every wearing Sergeant stripes because nobody wore stripes over there.

(End of side one of tape.)

(Beginning of side two of tape.)

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay go ahead, what else happened then?

Mr. Stowell:

Well when I made Sergeant in Japan, there's a lot of guys that were already Sergeants because he was around them all the time. And we never seen the Captain, they say the Captain that's usually what the doctors' rank, there was a few of them Majors and so on. But we didn't see any higher up echelon. But anyway, the Captain apologized to me for ignoring me and of course he did the other three medic men in K-Company. Of the three rifle platoons there was always a medic assigned to a rifle platoon. And of course your heavy weapons people are your ..., I trained in the States, I didn't carry an M-1 gun, I carried a 60mm mortar and I was first gunner, had all my training in the United States. Now we trained completely with the M-1 rifle don't get me wrong. We went to ranges, learned to take them apart and put them back together in no time, and so on. There's a lot of things between the line and what I've told you.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on April the 12th of '45 President Roosevelt died, did you all hear about that?

Mr. Stowell:

Yes, see we was across the dateline, it was always the day after or so before we heard anything. And the only radio we had was in headquarters company. Out in the battalion they had short wave radios and we got things second and third hand. We couldn't believe when they said, we just came in off a big fight, when we came in and they said the war was over. And we said yeah it sure was. We'd fought for two weeks, killed 150 Nips or so, our platoon had. But anyway, there was no communication, we were at the low end of the totem pole in the Army and the Navy and everything. The infantry had less food, less everything. One time the Captain came in our company and he said, "Did you have fresh eggs for breakfast?" And the mess Sergeant says, "No." He said, "Why not?" And he said, "Well I had six eggs to serve 300 men." And he said, "How do you make six eggs" And anyway, there was always a snafu, everything normal all fouled up.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on May the 8th of '45 Germany surrendered, did you all hear about that?

Mr. Stowell:

Yes, we heard about it but it was a grapevine that you heard about it by. You didn't hear it, no announcement by the company or anything else. There was no communication hardly whatsoever, except get over there, do this, do that. In the infantry you're at the low end of the totem pole. Your life's not worth a nickel.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you heard that what did y'all about it?

Mr. Stowell:

Well we knew it to be fact. When you live it about thirty months you know, nobody will tell you a lot of things, you find out. But usually the officers, occasions, you never saw much of them in combat or during even rest periods. They took to themselves because they eat better than we did.

And I guess they did, I don't know. We sure didn't get nothing fit to eat. When you eat Australian food it's seasoned with mutton and mutton as you know don't season things very well like lard and few other things. But we lived off C-rations and Australian C-rations and K-rations most of the time in combat. Not always while we was in rest areas or taking a break, had a cook and a kitchen and so on. But you don't get much at the low end of the totem pole.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on August the 6th of '45 they dropped the first atomic bomb, did you all hear about that?

Mr. Stowell:

Yes we heard about it and got all kinds of reports on it. But it was always via the grapevine. Except if you'd go up to headquarters company if you were in a position to go up and listen to their radio. At night usually you'd get things straight. But they never let us do that. Once in a while we were out standing guard or doing something else constantly, we was always in a war zone. And you stood guard twelve hours throughout the day and then all night long, took your turn. I didn't have to but I did, I relieved my buddies, let them get the.... But the infantry themselves they did, it was

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then August the 14th when Japan surrendered, did y'all have any kind of a celebration then?

Mr. Stowell:

Well we didn't believe it. We were skeptical, we figured more Army talk. And finally it got through to us and we heard it and the Captain of the company told us that Japan had surrendered. And we had been told we was going on maneuvers the next day with the 7th Fleet to invade Japan and we would be the first ashore, one of them. We'd make the initial landing in Japan, one of the divisions. So like in the Army you hear something, you'd say, "Well when I see it I'll believe it."

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you crossed the equator did y'all have any kind of a ceremony or anything?

Mr. Stowell:

Oh yeah, they give us a paper on this ship and I haven't looked at it for seventy-five years so I can't tell you what's in there in the drawers, in the dresser. Kids will go through it one of these days and get educated a little bit more. But anyway, yeah we had the On this ship there was five thousand army troops going overseas and thirty-five hundred sailors, so you guess how much communication. There was quite a group of Marines who guarded the soldiers. You couldn't find a place to sit on the deck of this ship. If you found one in the morning you sat there until you eat. We would only eat two times a day, we'd eat at breakfast at ten o'clock and we'd eat lunch, the next meal at two o'clock in the afternoon. And otherwise you sat on deck or you stood up, you had your choice because there wasn't that much room on this ship. Just figuring you didn't want to spend any time below deck because you was looking at somebody else's rump when you're there, bunks six high. Just room enough between, sleep between the bunks. So if you had the top bunk it was hot as heck, no air conditioning, nothing else on the ship. And if you had the bottom bunk people was sitting on your bunk all the time talking or something. It's a very monotonous life on a troop ship when there's that many troops and that many sailors you can't find a place or path to walk hardly. You're trying to play cards or something to keep yourself, mind occupied.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. Stowell:

Lots of times, lots of times. Headquarters would listen to it, battalion headquarters and they had radios and everything and they always tuned in to Tokyo. Oh yeah, our division after we wiped out a hospital in New Guinea, Tokyo Rose said that we were her butchers. And I heard her say that, but anyway she didn't like us. And that's the only modern music or anything we heard was from Tokyo Rose. The Army didn't tell you anything you wanted to hear. But anyway. And of course the only shortwave radios that we had was in headquarters company and when there's seventy-five men standing around talking you didn't hear a whole lot.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Stowell:

No, it didn't take much adjusting, we enjoyed it so much. I had my problems, yes. But anyway, yeah I still have my problems to an extent.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Stowell:

Yes, I went to dry cleaning school, I learned a trade in Washington, D.C. or Silver Spring, Maryland, right on the edge of Washington, D.C. I lived in Washington, D.C. and walked a block in was in Silver Spring and that's where the school was. And then my first house I bought was under the G.I. Bill. And I went to that school for three months, and took all the schooling I had on dry cleaning. I got involved in the dry cleaning business and spent twenty-nine years in the dry cleaning business on my own and bought my own factory, but forty-one years altogether.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you belong to the 52/20 club?

Mr. Stowell:

No. The only thing I belonged to was the 41st Infantry Division Association, it's still operating.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well the 52/20 club was when you got out they would give you twenty dollars a week unemployment for fifty-two weeks.

Mr. Stowell:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You didn't take any of that?

Mr. Stowell:

I got signed up for it once but I didn't take any because the way things went I didn't have to.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you were overseas were you in any typhoons?

Mr. Stowell:

I was on the edge of two of them. One was in the Philippines and one of them was on the way to Japan. We were up near Japan and that big typhoon hit which everybody talks about today. And we went out to sea to avoid it. And I was standing up on deck of the ship and this wave come over the troop ship, which was about three stories high. And if I hadn't have been leaning up against the rail I'd been seafood for some fish I guess. But anyway, everybody went to go down below the hatches because the ship was flooding with water temporarily. The waves were so strong that I was just forced and held up against this railing of the ship. It was up on kind of a little higher deck. But that was probably as scared as I ever was all during combat and everything else. I had nothing to do, I just held on for my life.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now have you had any reunions of your outfit since you've been out?

Mr. Stowell:

Yes. My outfit had a reunion every year. I went to four of them. And the last one I attended was in 1990. And I only got to see three or four fellows that I knew. And we had a good time talking. And of course when you meet somebody like that you don't want any of your family around through the talking, because sometimes it wasn't conducive to conversation or anything. And what you talked about nobody else was interested in. But I went to, I think three or four of them, I can't remember now. But I still belong to the association and pay my dues and everything.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was there anybody you were in the service with that you kept up with after the war?

Mr. Stowell:

Yes, the three other medics. There was a buddy in Oklahoma and one in Detroit, Michigan, one in Chicago, Illinois that was still close with. We kept until they all passed away now. Anyway, yeah you kept up with them usually at Christmas time and once or twice a year. But they were

some close ones that I just lost. One boy from Oklahoma, we were real close. But they made good friends. And we were all seventeen, or eighteen, nineteen, and twenty. I was discharged from the service three months before I was twenty-one years old.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Stowell:

I had bundles of, I give most of my souvenirs to my buddies. I had every souvenir there was because I was a medic. And they made sure that I had the finest souvenirs when you'd And the last one I had was an officer's sword that I hid from my boys, got into when they were little, four and five years old. And I figured I'd better hide it because they'd end up cutting themselves. And I went off and left it in the house that we owned. I hid it and I forgot it for five to six years afterwards and finally, but it was too late then to go back and claim it. They give us guns in Hiroshima, when we got to Hiroshima, they were still in what they called Cosmoline and we called it too that, the American name for it. But it came out of the factory and had a bayonet fixed on the end of it, 32 caliber. And I finally traded it for something, I don't know what it was now. But I had swords, pistols, pictures, lots of things that I don't know where it's at today.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever see that sign, "Kilroy was here?"

Mr. Stowell:

Oh yeah, that was all over the Army.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That sign was everywhere I think.

Mr. Stowell:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were in the service did you ever see any USO shows?

Mr. Stowell:

Oh yes. We saw, when we was in New Guinea and on Biak. And New Guinea is Biak as far as I'm concerned, it's close and everything. But I saw them all, Bob Hope, Joe E. Brown, you name it, the baseball players from New York Yankees. Now I never went to any shows in Japan. We'd seen them all once or twice and once you've seen Bob Hope, you've seen him, period. About the same thing over and over. And all the other things. But usually you got to go see those, they made it a point when we was fighting that we would get to go. And they would, once or twice they brought us off the front line to shows and I don't remember which one they were but they were in New Guinea.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you were in the service did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Stowell:

Yes. Oh you had donuts and coffee at the Red Cross camps when they'd set it up. But in the jungle you didn't get a lot of things like that because mosquitoes and the varmints. When you get to New Guinea and it rains every day, those people had a hard time living in it. And of course we adjusted and we lived in it. We were wet all the time. And it'd be washing and cleaning yourself is at a minimum, dirty water to wash your face in. And halazone tablets to drink after. But it was hard on those people to come and put on a show because you had no running water, you had no fresh water. Once in a while we would have a big water tank at the middle of the company when we were in rest period. But that was about once or twice is all I ever seen them because we were on the front lines all the time. We always had Nips sneaking in at night even when we're at bivouac area. You could hear the Nips at night like they can hear us. You're never by yourself so to speak. And consequently those people didn't, entertainers they didn't like that. Of course they slept, they'd go back on the ships I understand and sleep on the ships rather than in a tent where the Nips creeped up at night. Even my brother, when I was on Leyte and visited him in the hospital, Nips hit their tent one night and stole from them. But they were starving to death. The last ones we killed were skin and bones.

Mr. Mark Stowell:

So you didn't have much interaction with the Red Cross?

Mr. Stowell:

No, not really. When we got on the ship they handed us a bag and I don't remember what was in it. Probably some shaving cream or something like that. But the luxuries of life you didn't see them in the infantry. The base section boys always had PXs to go to. If we had a PX, well we had one on Biak for awhile and I don't remember ever a PX in the Philippines and I fought on two of them, islands. We had a PX in Japan. But the infantry never saw anything, it was hell on wheels. Pardon the French.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you were overseas could you get your mail with any regularity?

Mr. Stowell:

I would say fairly regular. But sometimes when you was in combat they didn't bring mail to you or anything. You got it in two to three weeks. You got maybe, sometimes fifteen or twenty letters at one time. But everyday, they didn't deliver infantry mail everyday I'll tell you that. Because we didn't see officers let alone anybody else.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Stowell:

Yes, my three children took me.

Mr. Mark Stowell:

Well we took you on our own, we didn't go on an Honor Flight.

Mr. Stowell:

No, no we didn't go on the Honor Flight.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You've been to Washington to see the World War II Memorial and that sort of thing then, right?

Mr. Stowell:

Yes. In Washington, D.C. in dry cleaning school I was there four months, lived in Washington, D.C. in the district. And I saw it pretty well when I went back, my kids took me, it had just opened when we were there fifteen years ago. And they took me on a plane, a private. A lot of them flew from Kansas City out but I didn't.

Mr. Mark Stowell:

No we tried to get you to go and you didn't want to go. So we took you. But it wasn't fifteen years ago, it wasn't that long ago we went.

Mr. Stowell:

What was it ten?

Mr. Mark Stowell:

Maybe ten.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well Vince is there anything else you recall from your time in World War II?

Mr. Stowell:

No, it's just typical Army life. And I guess typical Army, I wasn't in the Army before and I never wanted to be afterwards. A few of the boys re-enlisted, at the end they'd combine all from officer's promotions and everything. But I didn't have no desire to spend any time in the Army and taking orders from the government, they weren't the best leaders or keep their word, they could change their words but you couldn't, so. The infantry is the lowest totem pole in the Army. And there's not many people, everybody tried to get out of it. But once they get you, they want you.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Stowell:

No.

Mr. Mark Stowell:

No, I think we're good here Richard.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay.

(End of interview.)

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