

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With

Benton Harold Askins

Tulsa, Oklahoma

December 11, 2019

U.S. Army

997th Signal Service Unit

Mr. Misenhimer:

My name is Richard Misenhimer, today is December 11, 2019. I am interviewing Mr. Benton Harold Askins by telephone. His phone number is 918-592-7659. His address is 1224 South Columbia Place, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 74104. 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.

His alternative contact is his daughter, Krista Askins. Her phone number is 918-269-6847.

Harold, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today and I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II.

Mr. Askins:

You wanted to know what I did during World War II?

Mr. Misenhimer:

I'll get to that after awhile, right now I've got other questions for you.

Mr. Askins:

Okay, go ahead.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the museum to make sure this is okay with you.

Mr. Askins:

It'll be fine, any information we have here is fine for you to publish.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, well let me read this to you because I have to. It says -

"Agreement Read."

Is that okay with you?

Mr. Askins:

Yes sir.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now my first question, what is your birthdate?

Mr. Askins:

June 5, 1919.

Mr. Misenhimer:

June 5, 1919.

Mr. Askins:

Right, I'm a 100 years, 6 months old approximately.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well, congratulations on that.

Mr. Askins:

Well at 95 I stayed more in my yard.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you born?

Mr. Askins:

You familiar with Arkansas? Clarksville, Arkansas, Exit 58 on I-40. I was born there close to Arkansas and raised there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Askins:

One brother, fourteen years older than me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

He was not in World War II then?

Mr. Askins:

Well, he was working in the shipyards.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Askins:

My mother's first name was Ollie, my father's first name was Buck. Ollie, O-l-l-i-e.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Askins:

Well I guess, we were extremely fortunate, I don't know how my father did what he did. But one thing that I did that I'll report to you is that in high school myself and two of my buddies decided that, because of the tight money situation, we were going to join the National Guards so we could have some spending money. Which we did. And when we went to one training session and were called out for about six weeks of supply duty. My father always managed to somehow meet the needs. In fact, he bought some property that I wondered how he paid for it, but then that's long gone and we'll never know.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now where did you go to high school?

Mr. Askins:

I went to high school at Clarksville, Arkansas and graduated in 1938.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what did you do after you finished high school?

Mr. Askins:

Well I worked of course on the farm with my father for the summer and then that fall I enrolled in a business college in Fort Smith. And spent a year there and then went to work for Equitable Title Company which was part of Olin Industries along with Winchester Arms and so forth, and was working with them until I went in the military in '42. I went into the military, regular Army in '42.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What date?

Mr. Askins:

July the 12th. And that's the paper I mentioned to you that would be in the package in addition.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah.

Mr. Askins:

Well it showed me in a khaki uniform and I was on a street in Fort Smith. I was inducted in Little Rock, I had to go back to Fort Smith the next day to resign my job and move my car and clothing and so forth from Fort Smith to my parent's home in Clarksville.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you volunteer or were you drafted?

Mr. Askins:

I was number twelve on the draft when it began. And I tried to get into the Navy and they turned me down because of a hip injury I have. And I was turned down by the Army twice and then on the third try they took me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then where did you go for your basic training?

Mr. Askins:

Camp Crowder in Neosho, Missouri.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about your basic training, how was it?

Mr. Askins:

Well, it was a picnic compared to the guys that had never been involved in the Army, I had had eighteen months in the National Guard with about six weeks of supply duty and then a regular Army camp. And I had to peel potatoes a time or two and do a little bit of that type of thing, regular Army KP or whatever you gonna call it. And just was fortunate enough that I had had the training and it didn't bother me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then after basic training what happened?

Mr. Askins:

I entered radio school there at Camp Crowder and was in it until, well my last course of training like, studying, well my last course was Principles of Electricity. And when I finished that course I had a three day pass and then they moved me from there to another company in the camp, which would do like, well training for setting up and operating a fixed radio station.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, then what happened?

Mr. Askins:

Well, it started out, I finished school, organization, and our team of ten people, and a second lieutenant, commanding officer went from Camp Crowder to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. We had already qualified or whatever on all Army weapons, a .45 automatic, the old .30-06, then a little carbine which was a lighter gun. But the other nine guys and I decided that if we're going to be working on a radio or something, and fix radio stations we needed something other than having a gun strapped across our shoulder. So we selected the .45 automatic pistol. And I carried one, my father got me one. The officer we had at the time, 2nd Lieutenant said, "Boys, if that's what you want, we'll get them. You get them and I'll see that they get overseas." And he did, we bought them and he took them overseas for us.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Askins:

Well, the travel started when we left the States of course, January the 2nd of '44. And with our full equipment we were thinking well, we must be headed for Asia. But south of Australia, well we were on a troop ship unescorted and week or two into the trip out in the middle of nowhere the ship stopped. And the announcement came aboard, "There's something on the horizon that we have no way of knowing what it is or any way of identifying it. Well we're going to sit still and wait and see what happens. If there's anything aboard this ship not necessary for its

operation, it's going overboard." So we sat there two days and finally moved on in. We're south of Australia and they turned the ship around and let us out at Milne Bay, New Guinea.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And you went to New Guinea then?

Mr. Askins:

Right. Are you a veteran sir?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, in the Army.

Mr. Askins:

Thanks for your service sir.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Thank you, you're quite welcome.

Mr. Askins:

I have made the statement to myself I guess, during my times in New Guinea, which we'll finish up on in a minute. That if I got home, I'd dig ditches if I had to to make a living, but I'd be through with the Army. Which when we were discharged, I was discharged the 7th of January of '47. And getting the discharge you're going through segments, different officers and so forth of different things. I walked in this office and the guy had a big sign behind him, said *Join the Reserves Today*. And I looked at him, I said, "Sergeant," he was a Sergeant, I said, "Sergeant, is the Reserves all you got to talk about today?" He said, "That's right, Sergeant." I said, "Man, there's a good man here behind me." And I turned around and walked out. So that was my end of that. When we landed in Milne Bay, when they unloaded us there off of this troop ship, I guess our records finally caught up with us, was sorted out. And I was sent to Brisbane, Australia area, no other of my team members was with me, I was strictly on my own as far as what was going on, and who knew what and so forth. So I wound up in a radio station down there. It was in operation, but they were still installing. So I worked on that until that was completed. And well, it was, I don't know whether you've seen an old Army transmitter or not.

They're about like the size of a small twin door refrigerator and about four or five feet tall. You could hang a florescent light bulb suspended in the air over the transmitter. If the transmitter is on the air that light is burning just like it's in a fixture. If it goes out you have a problem you got to take care of. And the one thing that I remember distinctly was, I was on the floor I guess with the guy that originally was on the installation of that unit, it went off the air. And instead of standing there and waiting for it to discharge the static electricity, he turned around and put his hand on it to open it up and it knocked him colder than a cucumber. So I had to get that back on the air and they hauled him, carried him out of the room. And he, I guess, just knocked him out and he finally just came out of it completely. And then when I left there, if you want me to go on to the story to my final destination?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, keep going.

Mr. Askins:

I was given orders to move back to New Guinea. Caught a plane out of Brisbane, got out over the Coral Sea about half way, it was a twin-engine plane and it lost one engine. He took us back to Townsville, Australia which is about half-way up the coast from Brisbane to the Coral Sea. And got on an old C-47 and took off and went to Finschhafen, probably never heard of it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, I've been there.

Mr. Askins:

You've been there?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes sir.

Mr. Askins:

Well what year?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, about '93.

Mr. Askins:

Okay then, it has changed I'm sure since then. I know it, I don't know about Finschhafen, I finally got to Hollandia, I spent two days on the airstrip at Finschhafen. I got there and a C-47 was going to Hollandia. Got on it and pilot got on and said, "Boys I'm overloaded, but if anybody wants off I won't complain." And this boy got off. Then the next day I caught a plane and got into Hollandia and they went to my, I had received then a new address, 997 Signal Service Unit. Have you even heard the name of Humboldt Bay or been there?

Mr. Misenhimer:

I've heard of it, but I'm not familiar with it.

Mr. Askins:

Well Humboldt Bay, it was a good anchorage and according to figures that I've seen recently off the internet, approximately close to half a million troops went through Hollandia working their way to the Philippines. But anyway, I reported to the company I was assigned to and they sent me down to Humboldt Bay telephone exchange. And I was there, well on the Friday 13th of October of 1944, there was five of us on a jeep, we'd been from there out to the headquarters, to see where we were going to be moving to. And it decided to leave the road and I was the fifth man to try to get out and I didn't get out. So we went into the jungle and I got a broken arm, got beat up a little bit. But that was the extent of my experience I guess you would say in the war time operation. It put me in the hospital there and said I'd be there six weeks. And I just, at that time I was eating my meals off the Navy because we were in the Navy section of the base because of the equipment there. And according to a picture today in the front paper, this big Navy supply section of Quonset huts, probably two or three blocks were, has two big four story buildings on them. And the population, in all my travels across New Guinea I saw one only small native village which was in the middle of what they call Lake Sentani in there. And at the time that Hollandia was being taken the Japs had three airstrips in operation. But they had had some administrative problems with headquarters I guess, out of Japan. They had mostly just service troops there and when the Americans took it over, why I think about the 5th or 6th of June,

something like that, Japanese they were out there to the hills. And when the war was over in August of '45, I at that time really didn't realize we were surrounded by Japanese. But the only incident in the battle, you consider war, active, I was standing in the chow line at the Navy mess hall, on the edge of the jungle and some guy comes running out of the jungle. And somebody said something to him, said, "What's going on?" He says, "When the bullets started flying off of that bulldozer I decided it was time to leave." So that was the end of that for me. But they said..., after, say around about '96 I guess, I'm a twice wedded soldier, my first wife and I did. Children's mother died in '91, in '96 I met a lady. When my wife died I figured in the 70's I was through with marriage, but this lady I met in '96 changed my mind about that. Anyway, she said her husband was in the, I guess the Combat Engineer's. And he had a job, the only thing she knew about it was sealing the caves and different places, or sealing the caves with the troops in it. Instead of having to come out and fight, they'd just hide out in caves. And I stayed at Hollandia from, probably June of '44 until the war was over. And the Army Signal Corps Construction crew had to have been busy because they had set up the five-position telephone operating work on the base headquarters. Five positions with a hundred lines on a position, in other words we had five men on the switchboard all the time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, go ahead with your story.

Mr. Askins:

Okay, well basically that's it other than the fact I guess, we had pretty good, well for instance one thing, our five-position board was right next door to a Signal Corps office. And it had the transceivers in it that we could pick up Army radio signal out of San Francisco. And we were going to listen to the, we'd go in there at night if everybody was out when we were on duty on the switchboard, we could go in and get the radio receiver and plug it in to our system and listen to the music while we were on duty. Now I assume Tokyo Rose, Tokyo Rose you've heard the name of course?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh yes.

Mr. Askins:

I've got a set of headphones here that I've got quite a few, she's got quite a few hours of recording on there. I have built me a, guess you would call a crude, I know it would be called a crude, it would be a crude crystal type radio receiver. And at night when it's dark, you've got a tent with nothing but candles in it, you get on your cot, put your mosquito net down, and turn Tokyo Rose in. And I'd lay there and listen to her many a time. Now I understand that she had pretty good information on, well I ran into one guy all the time I was out there who I knew from my hometown. And he had been to the Philippines and he and a buddy had what they called, had battle fatigue when they came out. And he said they asked their Captain to get them out and let the others be able to stay and fight. And the Captain, told them, says, "Boys, if anyone goes, we all go." So, I mean they didn't leave any men behind like the Japs did. And when the war was over we could get information, we had to figure it out. Well I knew supposedly what day I would be leaving this island I was on. And I had written my brother at the time, who was still in California, and told him when I'd be there. But the day came and the ship wasn't there. So they put us on another ship. On the way in, it had about a two-day layover somewhere out in the Pacific while they worked on some of the machinery. Then when I got in to the camp in California, unloaded, got at the separation point, I ran into some of the guys that I left in New Guinea. They said they were paging you here all day yesterday. Anyway I called my brother and he said, "Well, I met the ship and you weren't on it. But I'll come up and get you." So I went down to the gate and he came and got me, took me to San Diego. Brought me back the next morning and I asked the guard if he could take me in, he said, "No." And I said, "Can I take his car in?" He said, "Yes." So I took his car in and put my .45 automatic in the trunk of his car along with a couple of other items I'd picked up, what I think was a Navy blanket and the other was an all leather yellow picture holder from that, picked up in Australia while I was there. I was discharged on the 7th of January of 1947. I met a lady while I was in the service, training in Camp Crowder, Missouri, and if you want that story I'll tell you the story about meeting her.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Sure, go ahead.

Mr. Askins:

Well, as I mentioned the Army give me the different courses to study, preparing for radio repair. I had completed the course, had a three-day pass given to me. I think I finished class at midnight, went in and changed clothes, put my billfold in Then when you left camp overnight on leave you had to turn your mattress folded up and leave it on your cot. I went through that procedure, I picked a guy that was going to ride to Fort Smith with me. And at that time there was what I call today, a 1940's era of a Quick Trip. It was a filling station at the Arkansas Missouri state line. The only thing there, well they had a filling station, a post office, a restaurant, and a service station of course. I would pull in there anytime, day or night, seven days a week. And a guy, I'd give him my keys, he'd service my car and I'd take it and take off. This particular day I got down there, filled the tank up with gas, I didn't have a billfold. So I had to go back to camp and get my billfold and come back and buy another tank of gas, so. Now at that time too, I guess you're aware of the fact that we had gas rationing in there in that war years.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh yes.

Mr. Askins:

This guy, the last time I was in his station before the rationing started, had to start using stamps, I got ready to leave he said, "Well, I'll see you next time." And I said, "Well I'm sorry but four gallons of gas probably don't get me very far." "Well, I'll see you next time." So I got to thinking on the way into camp, he's telling me something. So the next time I got a pass I went in, went through the same procedure with him and paid him and went on. And we never did, finally I asked him, I said, "How are you selling me gas without stamps?" He said, "These truckers come through here, all they're interested in is getting that tank filled. They'll give me about maybe a 96 gallons of gas, I'll get stamps for a 100. So I've got more gas than I can sell." So anyway, to continue on that, my wife. With that three day pass, I picked up my buddy, well I

stopped in Fort Smith and talked to a guy from, here in Oklahoma, Fort Still, that I knew in Fort Smith. Anyway, I made the three-day pass, was on the way back, stopped at Fayetteville, Arkansas at the bus station. Was drinking coffee and I was talking to a guy that was with me, he had been drunk all the time we were gone, and was asleep while I was driving. And I said, "I need to park this car and catch a bus on in to camp." "Oh no, no I'll stay awake and talk to you." Well he talked me into it, got about five miles out of Fayetteville, he's sound asleep and I'm sitting there, the car's running and I thought wait a minute there's something wrong, this car is not on the payment. Anyway, I got the front end back to recover but the back end hung up and took the left rear wheel off of it. A local farmer near there heard the crash, came out there and he took us on in to Roger, Arkansas. And we caught the bus I wanted to catch (*laughs*) in Fayetteville. So we got to camp on time, it was for us a bus ride. Went and checked the bulletin board and it was posted I was supposed to move that day. So I went to my commanding officer and I said, "I've got a problem." Told him what had happened. He said, "You've got eight hours, you can do whatever you want to." So I caught me a bus back to Rogers, sold my car for \$35. I had a little time to kill before the bus come through going back to camp. So I walked about a block up the street and a drugstore was open, I went in. The only two people in there was a young lady that's working behind the counter and a local G.I., one of her schoolmates. And I'm sure I was a sad sight because I hadn't had very little sleep, no food. But anyway, I guess I spilled my story to them. After I got back in camp, about two months, I got letter from some girl. And I didn't recognize the name, so I responded and said I'd appreciate a picture if you write me anymore. She wrote me and sent me a picture, and I said well this is it. And we corresponded through the war. And when I got my discharge we got married the 27th of January of 1947. And then she died of a heart attack in December 7th, 1991. But that pretty well, I mean that's just the synopsis I guess, of a miniature version of my life up to that point.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, I've got some questions for you. Now when you were over there in New Guinea, what unit were you in?

Mr. Askins:

Well, my company was 997 Signal Service Company. And as far as being with them, I remember checking in to the company headquarters in Hollandia. I was immediately dispatched on down to Humboldt Bay and stayed there. My training in Crowder, the final training for, well one of those radios, I don't know whether it was transmitters, you use four ninety-foot poles to put an antenna up. And I know we did it, the ten of us, dug a hole twelve-foot deep and put a ninety-foot pole in it. Anchored it and then climbed it, just in training. So I don't know, I didn't see any of the stations' antennas at any Well, I don't even know where the transmitter station was in Hollandia. I assumed it was there, because if I could get that little old crystal radio to play off of the Humboldt station, it was re-broadcasting out of Tokyo.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you ever in any combat?

Mr. Askins:

No sir. As I said, the guy running out of the jungle and saying, when the bullets bounced off of his bulldozers he decided to leave. See these stations that I was supposedly trained and worked in in Australia are setup to be outside of the combat area, in secured areas. In other words, MacArthur's headquarters were in Brisbane. Then they moved him to Hollandia, it wasn't the Philippines. Hollandia was the buildup for him or so forth, but I've seen days when it looked like an American automobile parking lot almost, it was ships and planes. They started out early one morning and ran into squall lines in between them and the Philippines and had to turn and come back to Hollandia. I was not in any combat, no. The only combat that I know of any of our people being in, one boy in our organization, they were short of combat photographers. And I think it was Biak or one of those points they were going and they didn't have enough combat photographers and he volunteered. About two days of it and he came back and brought the film in he had shot, he had of course a working man with him, being a regular combat photographer. But he said, "I won't volunteer for any more of it."

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you left to go overseas, do you know what ship you were on?

Mr. Askins:

I have no idea, it was originally an Italian cruise liner and it had been converted. In other words, I think, when we boarded in California I was of course passenger number one on the list. A sailor met me at the top of the gangplank going up, he said, "Follow me." And he went to the bottom inside, well I was carrying a duffel bag, I finally just started to, went down the stairs and we got to the bottom and I was number one man in that compartment, first man in. And after a few days of, 23 hours a day on a cot and nothing to do but lay there. They asked us for volunteers, which in the Army back then was a 'no-no', you don't volunteer, but I decided anything would be better than laying on that cot 23 hours a day. So I volunteered as a plumber's helper and that gave me a pass where I could maneuver, work with the guys or when I wasn't working I could go out on deck or do whatever I wanted to to pass my time, rather than laying on the cot.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the highest rank you got to?

Mr. Askins:

Sergeant, three stripes, Sergeant.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Askins:

A 2nd Lieutenant.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes sir. What did you think of him?

Mr. Askins:

Well, he was a nice guy as far as I was concerned. I mean I had no problems with him. As I said, after our training and we're deciding on things to do, he made the statement about weapons, "If you guys want that kind of weapon instead of Army issue, I'll see that you get some for you."

Which he did. Now that's something to me is kind of odd though in a way. He came to me in Milne Bay, I don't remember seeing him, I don't remember any part of it. All I know is I got my weapon back. When I left Milne Bay one man that I trained with, I saw him in Finschhafen when I'm going from Brisbane to Finschhafen back to Hollandia, and I have no idea how I contacted him or anything else, I don't remember. Only thing I remember was I had borrowed money from him when I went from Milne Bay to Brisbane. And when I finally got paid I got a money order, mailed it to the address he gave me. I got it back, it came back undelivered. And when I got going back from Brisbane, going up, going to Hollandia, I stopped off in Finschhafen I contacted him. He was a radio operator. And he came out to where I was and I gave him the money. And he is the only one of my people that I trained with I ever saw. Now there is one guy that he came overseas and landed at Lae, New Guinea, which is, I think east of Finschhafen. And we worked together and we talked quite a bit together after the war was over. I knew he had some people in Fort Smith and so forth. That was the only time, when he handed me my .45 that was the last contact I had with any commissioned officer during the rest of my time out there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was the morale in your outfit?

Mr. Askins:

What about it, what?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever see any USO shows anywhere?

Mr. Askins:

Yes. I've got a picture here of Imby Bay Theater, it's an outdoor theater of course. And well I saw several shows. One of them I saw, it was a USO show, but it was such a big crowd there that I was up in the jungle, completely out of the theater area. Now at Hollandia, where the five-position board was, there was an open air theater and we had mahogany lumber benches for that theater. And it was within a block of our tent. And it had, I guess two or three USO shows

and then they'd have local movies that you could go to.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Any big names in the USO shows, Jack Benny or Bob Hope or anybody?

Mr. Askins:

I don't remember, Bob Hope, I never did see Bob Hope. In fact I don't remember any of the stars. I remember and I don't particularly remember the individual scenes, but I know I referred to the show 'Oklahoma', was shown there at this particular theater. Now the local newspaper hyped those things when there was something coming.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Askins:

No, well I said no, no military souvenirs. I had, as I said, a Navy blanket which was a nicer blanket than what any Army or Navy had that I saw. And they had leather goods, which I, like an open folder, 8" by 10" to hold two pictures. And I brought those in from Australia. I had no military souvenirs whatsoever, sir.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Askins:

No. Well now, wait a minute (*laughs*). I have a notebook/folder here with probably 25 or 30 personal letters that I wrote my family and I noticed when I was looking through there. And I had some Red Cross paper. I don't know where I got it, when I got it, or what. But I was in Australia at the time, so I guess. Now Australia was a pleasant experience, we were out in the country of course. I have only two recollections of associations with Aussies. Well one of them was a local Aussie lady, said she was a private secretary to a bank president and her salary was \$45 dollars a month. Now I met another lady, she had her teenage daughter, was on the beach near the station, we were a few miles in off of the beach where the transmitters were located. The transmitters and the operators or soldiers or whatever you want to call them were sending

out messages, we never were in their area at all. I never saw MacArthur's headquarters. And the one that was with the teenage daughter was there, she had been in Singapore, living there. And her husband told her to get out and move in. Australia had one, was bombed one time on the northwest corner. And the pictures of that are here in a book I've got.

(End of side one of tape.)

(Beginning of side two of tape.)

Mr. Misenhimer:

On what?

Mr. Askins:

Doolittle's bombing in Japan, from an aircraft carrier. And then there's what they call the battleship of a president, you remember I guess the name of the Tehran, Iran Conference, where the American President, British Prime Minister, and Stalin got together in Iran for a conference. Anyway, on President Roosevelt's trip over there, he started out on a battleship over in the island, Cuban area, the islands. He got tired of sitting on deck looking at the water, so he asked the ship's Captain to give him a demonstration of their action, of their activities in action. And somebody, they went into combat mode, and somebody accidentally fired a live torpedo at his ship, the battleship he was on. And of course radio silence went bananas then, it was, everybody trying to figure out what to do. Anyway it maneuvered around and it was missed. And that was a military secret I understand for quite awhile.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you were in the south did you ever cross the equator?

Mr. Askins:

Yes sir. Well, we got some kind of a certificate, I don't have it. I don't know what happened to it, but they gave us a certificate of whatever for crossing the equator.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Right, did you have any kind of a ceremony when you crossed it?

Mr. Askins:

There was no ceremony to it at all, no, not that I remember.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you ever in any typhoons in the Pacific?

Mr. Askins:

No. Now I felt one earthquake in Hollandia. And some of the troops, matter of fact two or three different troops were involved in typhoons. The Flying Tigers, are you familiar with them?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh yes.

Mr. Askins:

And Merrill's Marauders, all that stuffs on the internet.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now April the 12th of 1945 President Roosevelt died, did you hear about that?

Mr. Askins:

No, I don't remember. I know I've got a letter here dated in April of 1945, but I don't remember any particular event.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where would you have been in April of '45?

Mr. Askins:

I would have been in Hollandia, I was in Hollandia by June of '44.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, and how long were you there?

Mr. Askins:

Until it was over, I came home.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then on May the 8th of '45 Germany surrendered, did y'all here about that?

Mr. Askins:

Oh yeah. Now on those letters that you are going to be getting have, well I think there's two of

them, notes that I scribbled on the back. One of them about when the Japanese surrendered, I had written on the back of one of those letters that by radio from San Francisco we heard that the Japanese had surrendered unconditionally. And that's my handwriting on the back of one of those. And I think in the other one I wrote about, I mentioned listening to the ballgames, that I mentioned that we didn't hear one. And then the next one, written a note, mentioned this signal from London came in loud and clear.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Askins:

Not really. My brother, who was working of course in California when it ended, he had been home, we had written each other about going into business for ourselves. And he had written me that forget it, it wasn't going to work. So when I got home and married, my job before I went in the military was an office job, Olin Industries Plant, I was the only person in the office. And when I got out, these people offered me a job, but instead of it being in Arkansas, Fort Smith they wanted me to go to St. Louis, Missouri and I turned them down. And then we got married and came over here and signed in to go to school. And I asked the people, I said, "I need a job, where can I get some work?" And the school administrator said, "We don't recommend people that we have met in school." And I said, "I didn't ask for recommendation, I asked where I could get a job." He said, "Well, there's a company here that's looking for a billing clerk." And I asked who it was, he told me, I went down there and they hired me. A guy said, "I've got a girl doing the job I'd like to have a man on. I'll take you and put you on her job and I'll move her to another one." So I stayed with that company 42 years. Main problem when we came home was finding a place to stay. We got married and came over here to Tulsa and was here a week in the Mayo Hotel. In the middle of January I walked out of the hotel in the street and it was just like throwing a bucket of ice water on you. But we progressively improved our living quarters from a one-room garage apartment to a two-room garage apartment, then to a three-room garage apartment, and from a garage apartment to a house with three car garage. The guy and his wife

got a divorce and my wife and I, he asked us to live in his property instead of in the garage apartment. Which we did for almost a year, rent free and all utilities paid and so forth. Now as far as like, the automobile I gave away when I had one wheel missing. I bought another one here and it cost me \$500 for the car and another \$200 to get the motor rebuilt. So I mean that kind of thing, as far as people on the street, I don't remember any particular negative action in any way in that regard.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Askins:

I used it for my schooling.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go to school?

Mr. Askins:

It was a private business college, it was very competitive, in other words a right or left turn I could have gone to local state run university and my grades would have gone with me. So it turned out to be a good deal, I worked for this company 42 years. In '62 their current sales manager died and I was moved in to that position, and was a sales manager from '62 to '87. And they furnished me a car and unrestricted use of it until about two years before I retired Uncle Sam says document your business mileage. So I really didn't make a fortune, but I made a living and I'm thankful for the many blessings that I really received over the years. We were active in the church and developed some really good relationships that way.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you had any reunions of your outfit?

Mr. Askins:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you kept up with anybody you were in the service with?

Mr. Askins:

Yes. But I'm the only one left, well now I don't know for sure. Last time when one of the guys I talked to, he said, "I'm 99, I just renewed my driver's license." So I don't know. At 99 I had four doctors and four kids that said no more driving. So I'm living in a rental property now, next door to my son. My daughter just came in before noon, brought in groceries and so forth that I asked for. They pretty well take care of me. It's a lot better than laying in a facility somewhere. My body's been beat up, I've had broken collarbone, fractured hip, broken arm, broken leg. I've got an artificial tube in my main artery, down through my body. So at 100 years old, I've been through the mill. But thankfully I'm still up and about and I'm living alone.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Askins:

Service ribbons?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes sir.

Mr. Askins:

I don't know. I had Marksmanship, Conduct, and one or two others, I don't remember. It's over here on the discharge papers. Okay, let's see – Victory Ribbon, Conduct Ribbon, and American, I can't read that word.

Mr. Misenhimer:

American Defense.

Mr. Askins:

It's a copy, American something. And the others on there I can't read them, it's a copy and the thing's instead of all being clear it's, I mean it's dark and half of it is not readable. And then I've got a full page where they give supposedly what are you qualified to work or do.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get any battle stars?

Mr. Askins:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, okay. Now have you been on the Honor Flight to Washington, D.C.?

Mr. Askins:

One thing I don't understand, I mentioned that I contacted one of my buddies in Finschhafen when I was on my way to Hollandia. His wife, I had visited with her some, I visited with him over the years but I visited with her some after he passed away. And she informed me that he had to go on to Japan. Well, to me we were discharged on point system, his points he should of had more points than I because he stayed in the island all the time while I was in Australia, out of combat area. So he should have had more points when discharged than I did. So I assume probably he was in a company of, still active in a different company and the whole company had to go to Japan because of the difference I don't see that other one, page. It's here in this book with this

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Askins:

No, I am a member of the VFW but I actually don't do that. I was given that membership, a life membership to the VFW because of volunteer work I had done in the Chamber of Commerce. Right now I wouldn't be in any physical condition to make that. Five years ago I could have, but not today. Now we were boarded in, the nearest thing we had to a permanent type building was a tent on a platform. And it was floored, part of it. I don't remember about any of my quarters in any area of New Guinea other than Hollandia because, well in Milne Bay when we there, of course things were in flux because of the, I guess unexpected arrival of the troop ship loaded with people. And records getting caught up. And I was the only one from my organization that made that trip to Brisbane and was down there that period of time. But as far as activities with the military, I haven't had any, even ask about benefits. When I was in Australia we were

quartered in a building which was part of the same building that the transmitters were in. Of course the government didn't, I guess, ten men there, twelve maybe, I don't remember exactly. But the government was paying us \$2.70 a meal, I think, at that time for per diem. And I was making more money off of the per diem than I was off of the regular salary. I just found a ticket I'm looking for. "Army of the United States, Separation/Qualification Record", and it gives you the name and so forth, and time spent and so forth, and then your qualifications, whatever. A whole page of material, just general information.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Askins:

Well, no, there's all kinds of things happen. I'm sitting here now looking at where I rode the jeep off of the side of that hill into the jungle and broke my arm. I don't know whether you were aware of it or not, I don't know, some of those islands when they were getting ready to go, well they'd take the jeep, take the carburetor cover off and put a, like a three or four foot hose on the carburetor where they could drive it in. And the carburetor would be under water, lot of interesting In Europe the military had access to utilities and so forth that we didn't have out there. Everything was built from scratch in the jungle and I wonder how the guys, just like putting together that five-position board. And anyway, if you at any time you've got any further questions that I didn't answer, I've given you information that you can use and want a certain point answered or something, give me a call and I'll do the best I can with it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, alright.

Mr. Askins:

I hope helped you out, if that's what has occurred. I enjoyed the visits of the museum there, it's been a long time ago. But at 100, I just got a lot to be thankful for and I appreciate what everybody's done, I always do.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well that's all the things I have Harold, so we'll keep in contact and talk to you later.

Mr. Askins:

Okay, thank you sir.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Thank you, bye now.

Mr. Askins:

Okay, bye.

(End of interview.)

Transcribed by:
Gayle Misenhimer
Harlingen, Texas
February 20, 2020

Oral History by:
Richard Misenhimer
P.O. Box 3453
Alice, Texas 78333
Home: (361) 664-4071
Cell: (361) 701-5848