

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Nimitz Education and Research Center  
Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With

Norris N. Jernigan  
Visalia, California  
January 15, 2020  
Army Air Corps  
Intelligence Office  
393<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Squadron  
509<sup>th</sup> Composite Group

Mr. Misenhimer:

My name is Richard Misenhimer, today is January 15, 2020. I am interviewing Mr. Norris N. Jernigan by telephone. His phone number is 559-732-6491. His address is 3210 W. Cambridge Avenue, Visalia, California, 93277. 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.

Norris, 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. Jernigan:

I was proud to do it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now 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. Jernigan:

Ok.

Mr. Misenhimer:

*"Agreement Read."*

Is that okay with you?

Mr. Jernigan:

Yes it is.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now the next thing I'd like to do is get an alternative contact. We find out that sometimes several years down the road try to get back in contact with a veteran, he's moved or something. So do you have a son or a daughter or someone we could contact if we needed to, to find you?

Mr. Jernigan:

Yes, I have a son living in Georgetown, Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, what is his name?

Mr. Jernigan:

Timothy.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you have an address for him?

Mr. Jernigan:

Yes, 147 Blazing Star Drive, Georgetown, Texas, 78633.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How about a phone number for him?

Mr. Jernigan:

Yeah, 707-599-8989. The area code is 707, he's got his cell phone when he was still living in California and he still has the same area code, 707.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Read that whole number off to me again, I don't think I've got it right. Read the whole number to me again.

Mr. Jernigan:

Okay, 707-599-8989.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay fine I have that, thank you very much. Hopefully we'll never need that but you never know. Okay, what is your birthdate?

Mr. Jernigan:

My birthdate is June 11, 1925.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And where were you born?

Mr. Jernigan:

I was born in Eugene, Oregon.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Jernigan:

I had one older brother, he is deceased now.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was he in World War II?

Mr. Jernigan:

Yes he was and I had a stepbrother and a half-sister.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was your stepbrother in World War II?

Mr. Jernigan:

Yes, he was in the Navy.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Is he still living?

Mr. Jernigan:

No, he's been deceased about six, seven years I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer:

If he were I'd like to interview him, that's fine. Now what are your mother's and father's first names?

Mr. Jernigan:

My father's first name was George.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And your mother?

Mr. Jernigan:

My mother's first name was Lena, L-e-n-a. Her maiden name was Lake.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Jernigan:

The depression was tough, we worked hard on the farm and grew most everything we ate, and we got along fine. Back then neighbors looked out for neighbors and it was a different world.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You lived on a farm then?

Mr. Jernigan:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And you grew certain amount of stuff to eat, is that right?

Mr. Jernigan:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you made it through okay then?

Mr. Jernigan:

We made it through fine, yes. It wasn't easy, but hard work and just determination and we made it okay.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then where did you go to high school?

Mr. Jernigan:

I went to high school in Galt, California.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And what year did you graduate?

Mr. Jernigan:

I was due to graduate in class of 1944, but I enlisted before that. And so I did not graduate until 1947. And it was a different high school that I graduated from. I graduated from Grant Union High School in the Sacramento area.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on December 7, '41 Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Jernigan:

Yes, we didn't hear about it until late in the day, we were all working on the farm. Of course that's a seven day's job you know. And we working all day and waiting for delivery of some additional cattle that we were buying. And when they arrived they told us about the attack.

That was the first we heard it, we had not had the radio on all day.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you heard that, how did you think that would affect you?

Mr. Jernigan:

You know I never heard of Pearl Harbor, I didn't know where Pearl Harbor was. But then as we talked I realized that that was really hitting the United States. So, you know, all of a sudden I realized that, oh boy we're headed in to war for sure now.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And you were about sixteen at that point?

Mr. Jernigan:

That's correct, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then when did you go into the service?

Mr. Jernigan:

In the spring of 1943 I was looking toward June with my eighteenth birthday approaching. And I decided I did not want to register for the draft and be drafted. So my dad agreed with me and signed for me to go ahead and enlist. And I enlisted in the Army Air Corps and was sworn in on June 10, 1943, the day before my eighteenth birthday.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you choose the Air Corps?

Mr. Jernigan:

Well I had visions of becoming a pilot and my older brother was already in the Army Air Corps.

And of course I, at that time, felt that would be the only place to be, so that's why I selected that. And I did want to become a pilot, but it didn't work out after I was in it for a few months. Few months I was eliminated from the program, two-thirds of our school squadron was eliminated at the same time. We never did get a good straight answer as to why, but the one that made the most logic was that they did not have a school to send us to in the next phase. And they just can't have kids sitting around waiting for six months. So they just eliminated us from the program.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So did you have any kind of basic training?

Mr. Jernigan:

I went through Army basic training at Sheppard Field, Texas before proceeding on into the next phase of my Army Air Corps Cadet training, which was a transfer to Denver University where I put in a semester at Denver University. And that's where we got our first flying lessons. We got ten hours of flying instruction as part of that semester.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now how was that basic training, was it pretty rough?

Mr. Jernigan:

Well, you know I was a tough kid working on the farm. I was very agile and strong and you know, I just endured. Many of them couldn't, they passed out in the heat. It got so hot there in the field, but I was used to working out in the sun and the heat and working on the farm, so I endured. It lasted about six weeks I think it was before we moved on to the next phase.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then you took Air Force training after that?

Mr. Jernigan:

Yes. Then they moved in to the next phase which was to go to a college. At that point the Air Corps Cadets would go through Army basic because back then the Air Corps was part of the Army, it was just a division of the Army. So we had to get some Army basic training. And then

the next step after that is to send the students, the cadets to a college for training there and the first initial flying lessons.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Jernigan:

Well, when we were finally eliminated from the program we were sent various places. And I wound up eventually being assigned to a tactical unit that was training for overseas duty, using the B-29. I was stationed in Nebraska. And I was initially sent there to work in the motor pool and because I had had the cadet training they felt that I should get into something that would be more useful. And there was an opening in the Intelligence Office and so they asked me if I'd be interested in that. I said, "Yes, I would like very much that." So I went and talked to him and was accepted in the Intelligence Office of the 393<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Squadron. And that's where I spent the rest of my military, or time was in the Intelligence Office of the 393<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Squadron.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And where was this at?

Mr. Jernigan:

That was in Fairmont, Nebraska near Geneva, Nebraska.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about that experience, what all happened there?

Mr. Jernigan:

Well, when we first arrived there we were just a large pool of personnel and then they divided us into three different squadrons. And assigned us to what would be the 504<sup>th</sup> bomb group, which would be a B-29 group training for overseas duty. We were in training all summer, because we arrived there in early spring of 1944. And so we were in training all during that time until the summer when suddenly the 504<sup>th</sup> group was about ready to head out overseas, because the training was pretty well complete. Our orders came through separating the 393<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Squadron from the 504<sup>th</sup> and sending us to Wendover, Utah. We didn't know why and after we



were at Wendover, Utah we still didn't know why for a day. And about the second day we were there we were called together and told that our bomb squadron had been selected to be the bomb squadron of a new group that would be handling a new secret weapon that if successful should shorten the war by at least two years. So the 393<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Squadron became the bomb squadron for the 509<sup>th</sup> Composite Group.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, then what happened?

Mr. Jernigan:

Well, we went in through intensive training from the time we arrived there and on December 17<sup>th</sup> of '44 the 509<sup>th</sup> Composite Group, was initially called as a group and was activated as the 509<sup>th</sup>. Then we went into additional training and instructed that secrecy was the top priority there. That we were not to talk to anybody else in the group, we just do our job within our squadron and don't ask any questions and just do your job. And so we were in training from then until the spring of 1945. In January of 1945 the Commanding Officer, Colonel Paul Tibbets decided he'd like to have the crews experience some over water navigational flying. So he sent a group of us down to Cuba, to have the groups and squadrons do those navigational flights over open water, to get that experience. So that was included in the training. We were in training then until April. We were only down in Cuba about five, six weeks. Came back in April, Colonel Tibbets decided that the training was complete and he gave orders that we should be sent overseas. So half of us left Wendover, Utah around the 1<sup>st</sup> of May and were sent over on a ship to be the advanced party to set up things on the island of Tinian, where we would be stationed. The flight crews began arriving then in June.

Mr. Misenhimer:

This island was Tinian, is that right?

Mr. Jernigan:

Yes, in Tinian.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay.

Mr. Jernigan:

And when we were at Wendover, we called it Wendover, and told that we were selected as the bomb squadron for this group. A stranger to us, who was addressing us, introduced himself as Colonel Paul W. Tibbets. Paul Tibbets had quite an experience of flying B-17s in Europe and then he was brought back from Europe to fly the bugs out of the B-29, because the B-29 when it was first in operation was not a very safe airplane. In fact, a lot of the pilots shied away from getting into the B-29 program because they referred to it as the "flying coffin." But Paul Tibbets was the test pilot for the Army Air Corps to find all the problems that needed to be ironed out in the production for the B-29. So he had quite a, you know, it was several years of really great experience at being a leader and an outstanding pilot and that's why he was selected to head up this particular group.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Jernigan:

When we got overseas we were still waiting for this new secret weapon to show up because we had not seen any yet. They had some practice bombs that they were dropping, the crews were dropping. But it was just a practice bomb, not the real thing. And it was just a large bomb filled with TNT. The middle of July, the Manhattan Project had been working several years on developing this atomic bomb, and on the 16<sup>th</sup> of July they actually tested one. It was a plutonium bomb that they exploded on the New Mexico desert. And they decided that plutonium, they were able to produce plutonium quicker than they could refine the uranium, to get it to the point where it would detonate. So they only had one uranium bomb, but they tested the plutonium bomb. And that first bomb, the uranium bomb arrived over on Tinian right around August the 1<sup>st</sup> of 1945. And in the meantime President Truman gave the orders to go ahead and use it. So on August 5<sup>th</sup> that uranium bomb was hoisted up into the bomb bay of a B-29. These bombs were so large that you couldn't back the airplane over the bomb or run the bomb cart under the

airplane. We had a hydraulic pit lift that the bomb was placed on the lift below ground and the plane pushed over the loading pit and the hydraulic lift lifted the bomb up into the airplane. They were very heavy bombs. The uranium bomb that was used on Hiroshima weighed 9,700 pounds. So that was pushed up into the B-29 on August 5, 1945 and the first atomic bomb mission was flown taking off from Tinian at 2:45 a.m. on August 6<sup>th</sup>, and was dropped on Hiroshima. Three days later a plutonium bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. Nagasaki was really the secondary target. Every time a mission is flown you have an initial target and alternate targets because you never knew what the weather condition would be over Japan. And so you would pick more than one site, so that it wouldn't be a wasted flight to Japan and back. The initial target on the second bomb was Kokura. But when they arrived at Kokura they were instructed to bomb visually only not by radar, because it was such an expensive project. When they arrived there the cloud cover was covering the city, they couldn't even see the city. So they proceeded to Nagasaki for the secondary target and that's where they dropped the second one.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Jernigan:

Well they had circled Kokura so long that they began to run low on fuel and so they proceeded to Nagasaki. And it was pretty well cloud covered there too and they made several bomb runs and circled there and finally the bombardier said, "I see it." He saw a break in the clouds and was able to go ahead and release the bomb. By then they didn't have enough fuel to get back to Tinian. So they headed to Okinawa where they landed and refueled and then came back to Tinian. So if we didn't have a place for them to land they would have landed in the water somewhere (*laughs*). They might have made it to Iwo Jima, there was a landing strip on Iwo Jima. For both missions we always had a standby crew with the airplane on Iwo Jima, because there was also a hydraulic lift there and a loading pit. So in case anything happened from Tinian to Iwo Jima, mechanically to the airplane, they could land there and transfer the bomb to the standby airplane and go ahead and finish the mission. So they might have been able to make it to

Iwo Jima, but I don't know. But anyhow, Okinawa was closer and that's where they headed. That was a good thing because they were literally out of fuel when they landed. They said one of the engines started cutting out soon as they touched down. So, pretty close call.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, that's pretty quick. Now what was your job on Tinian?

Mr. Jernigan:

My job was to work in the Intelligence Office and our job was to put together information for the Intelligence Officers to brief the crews on their target areas, assembling maps and aerial photographs and any other information that we could muster to make their mission successful. My specific job was to assist the air/sea rescue officer who had briefed them on where they could ditch in the water and possibly be picked up. We received a teletype everyday giving the location of all the submarines operating in the Pacific and where the fleets were operating, and where the amphibian planes might be circulating around. So in case they got shot up, they could be briefed that they could fly to a certain longitude, latitude and go ahead and ditch in the ocean. Their chances of being picked up were very good.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any direct contact with Colonel Tibbets?

Mr. Jernigan:

Well, he was my group commanding officer. As an enlisted man I had no personal contact with him, I had talked to him a few times and he's very easy to talk to. And he really felt good about his whole group, because everybody had pretty much allegiance to him because he was a great leader. So yes I had some contact with him, but strictly brief because of difference of rank. He was a Colonel and I was a Private, so *(laughs)* you know you don't hobnob around together.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your rank at that time?

Mr. Jernigan:

I was a PFC when we were overseas and I did not make Corporal until I got back from overseas.

They brought our whole group back in October of 1945 because they wanted to get it reorganized, because a lot of guys wanted out because the war was over. And they wanted to get the group reorganized so they could go and do the Bikini Island atomic bomb test that they did after World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now there on Tinian were you aware of what an atomic bomb was?

Mr. Jernigan:

I was not until the first one was dropped.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's what I mean, before yeah.

Mr. Jernigan:

They always referred to this new secret weapon as a "gimmick" or the "gadget." And we finally were going to drop the gimmick or gadget, whichever one we wanted to call it. And then after that it was dropped, we started referring to it as an atomic bomb.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you been back to Tinian since the war?

Mr. Jernigan:

No, I had the opportunity to go back about seven, eight years ago. And a professor from University of Maine was leading a group over there and I was invited to join them. But then I found out it was going to cost me \$5,000 from Honolulu to go, I'd have to get to Honolulu. And at that time my wife was still living and we were traveling when we could. And I decided for \$5,000 the both of us could have some great trips if I elected not to go. So I've never been back to Tinian.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I've been to Tinian and they have that pit there. They have the pit with the lifting to put the atomic bomb up in the plane, so you could see what it was like.

Mr. Jernigan:

Yes, yes. But the one on Iwo Jima they can't even find where it was now I understand, because of time has just taken care of it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you heard about the atomic bomb being dropped, found out what it was, what was your reaction to that?

Mr. Jernigan:

Well we were thrilled because finally the thing that we had told we were going to be using, it would shorten the war, they're planning to drop. And we thought maybe that first bomb would do the job, but the Japanese elected to ignore it and they probably thought we only had the one bomb. But then when the second one was dropped then they started taking notice. And of course the Potsdam Proclamation that was put together at the Potsdam Conference that President Truman and Churchill and Stalin attended, where they mapped out the completion of the war in the Pacific, demanded full surrender of the Japanese, unconditional surrender. And they officially rejected that. So they had the opportunity to, you know after the first one was dropped, they had the opportunity to say okay we get your message and throw in the towel. But you know they knew that our troops are being amassed on Okinawa and the Philippines to do that invasion of Japan, so they were stationing troops in that area where the invasion would take place. Then they also instructed the civilians to fight to the death, never give up, fight with sticks, stones, pitchforks or whatever you can grab your hand on, but never give up, fight to the death. Our troops would have had to fight their troops plus their civilian life. So it would have been a bloodbath on both sides. It would have been horrible, horrible bloodbath. So the two atomic bombs averted that and now it became not necessary to make that invasion. So anyhow, we feel like the contribution that we made in learning how to use that thing and successfully dropping the two contributed heavily toward them finally giving up. Because, my goodness the whole country was pretty well bombed out before we ever got over there. But they just would not give up. So this was an extreme measure, but it certainly did what it was supposed to do.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That was a big part of their military, they did not want to give up even after both bombs were dropped.

Mr. Jernigan:

You're exactly right. So the emperor finally stepped in, because the military was convinced that they could still turn the war around and win it. When they were planning, way back before Pearl Harbor, when they started planning of hitting the United States there was one of the government official that said you're crazy, don't do it, you're going to start a war that you can never win and it would be total destruction for us if you do that. They wouldn't listen to it, but proved that he was right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now how long did you stay in Tinian after the war was over?

Mr. Jernigan:

They brought our whole group home in, as I recall it was in October, maybe first of November, somewhere around that time. So we weren't over there all that long, the group that I was with, I went over on a ship as the advanced echelon, we arrived there the last day of May and we were home, I mean back in the States around November 1<sup>st</sup>. So I was not over there all that long. Just, you know a couple of those poor devils were over there for months and months and months before we ever got over there. And they were there months after we left, so I tip my hat off to them, they did a great job.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you were overseas was there ever any time you felt threatened or scared?

Mr. Jernigan:

Eh, you know I was just a kid and probably didn't have the sense enough to be scared, but actually there were Japanese still on the island of Tinian. They were holed up in caves on one end of the island and they would come out at night and steal food or whatever else they could get their hands on. And also there was a small island a few miles off of Tinian, a very small island, where we found out after the war had around 2,000 troops over there and they would canoe over

at night and steal stuff. I had some stuff, when we were still living in tents when we first arrived there, we were in tent city. Had some stuff stolen from under my bunk when we rolled up the sides of the tents for a little bit of fresh air in there. And so evidently somebody from outside the tent reached under my bed and stole some things that I had. It's kind of an eerie feeling, you know it was kind of a bluff, playing poker you know. You know we were all just kids really and I imagine there was some little twinge of fear, but I found the whole time I was in the military exciting. I enjoyed the military and I would have stayed in longer had I finished school before I went in, but I had to get back home and finish school.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What date were you discharged?

Mr. Jernigan:

I was discharged on March 17, 1946. My enlistment was for the duration plus six months. So I was in until March of 1946.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What are some other things that happened while you were overseas?

Mr. Jernigan:

Oh gosh. We were able to tour around the island, the Intelligence Office had a jeep assigned to them and we'd get in the jeep and tour all around and explore. I never ventured in to any of the cave areas down the other end of the island, but some did and found some souvenirs and so forth. They were lucky they didn't run across some Japanese guys that were in there. We had a beach that was set aside for enlisted men and of course there were a couple of other nice beaches that were just for officers. But the beach that we had for enlisted men was good, so we would go down there almost every day and swim in the ocean. Golly, anyhow we just had to find our own entertainment to do. I can't think of anything that was spectacular that we did, just kind of waiting it out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, the time that you were there up until November when you came back, anything in



particular stand out from that time?

Mr. Jernigan:

Well, when we got back we were given a thirty day leave immediately after we got back. So I spent the month of December at home, then I had to go back and stay for January, February, and up to 17<sup>th</sup> of March. I was sent out to Camp Beale in California to be discharged, that was a separation center at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How about the time you were still in Tinian after the war, September, October, November, along in there, anything particular stand out from that time?

Mr. Jernigan:

Uh, not really. We just you know toured around with the jeep and we would go swimming. And there was always some USO shows on one of the bases there on the island that we would go take in in the evening. And there was a lot of poker playing and well, just hanging in there really. I can't remember anything spectacular that we did, just other than waiting it out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was the morale in your outfit?

Mr. Jernigan:

Well the morale was good up until after the war was over. With all that leisure time you know the guys, the war was over they just wanted to get out, get home and get out. So that waiting around, was kind of, you just had to find something to do. But morale stayed pretty good. After they brought us back we were sent to Roswell Army Air Base where they reorganized the group. And there again, there wasn't a whole lot to do, because we were at Roswell from the time we came back from overseas until I was sent to a separation center to be discharged. So we would go into town almost every day. We'd just hangout you know, have a few beers whatever, go to the USO.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you were overseas were you in any typhoons any time? Big storms?

Mr. Jernigan:

We were in the edge of one, it was really a terrible storm. It hit us in the night and we were in Quonset huts by then, we were no longer in the tent area. But as I recall the wind was so strong, and of course the upper part of the front of the Quonset hut was just screen and the rain was coming clear across to the middle of the Quonset hut, it was pouring in so hard. It was really a hard windstorm, but by morning it had passed, so. But nothing hit the island direct while we were there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Jernigan:

Not really, I had a lot of pictures and things like that, pictures and maps, and so forth. But no, I didn't bring anything else like guns, or swords, or helmets, or anything back.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever see any USO shows when you were in the service?

Mr. Jernigans:

Yes, we saw several when we were over on Tinian. I remember one we saw was with Eddie Bracken and oh gosh, the girl that used to dance, oh gosh. My memory's fading on this, so. You know I can almost say her name, Peggy, Peggy Ryan. Peggy Ryan, that's it, she used to dance with Donald O'Connor. We saw that one. And we saw another one, it was a group that did a production of, what was the name of it, the Canteen, something like that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Hollywood Canteen?

Mr. Jernigans:

I think it was just a stage production type thing. It was good. We had our own movie theater, house, right there in our group, in the Quonset hut area where we were housed. And it was called a "Pumpkin Playhouse" because when they were dropping those first practice bombs on Japan, we called them a pumpkin because this big uranium bomb looked almost like a pumpkin,

it was so huge. Sort of pumpkin shape. Anyhow, we had the Pumpkin Playhouse. Almost every group had their own theater and we would, you know if nothing we wanted to see at ours we could always go to another group and sit in on their theater. Well we had movies every night if you wanted to go to them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When I was in Tinian they had an example of the atomic bomb, both of them, both the uranium and the other one, they had both there. You could look at them, see what their size was.

Mr. Jernigan:

Oh really, well yeah, quite impressive isn't it?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh yeah.

Mr. Jernigan:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Jernigan:

Just a little bit. When we were overseas we had a Red Cross group that put up a tent and they were serving coffee and donuts and that sort of thing, and Cokes and cigarettes and that. But mysteriously their tent burned down and they moved on, so (*laughs*). But we used to move around on troop trains, going to some of these towns there'd always be Red Cross people there with a tray of donuts walking alongside the cars. You could open the windows and they'd give you coffee and donuts. But the Red Cross also furnished all of us cigarettes, so I didn't smoke, I always gave mine to some of the other guys that did. That was one of things that I think they could of passed on, but that was, you know almost everybody in the service smoked at that time and so. And I realized they were doing a favor to the guys. They thought in the long run it wasn't. That's just a personal feeling.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any experience with the Salvation Army?

Mr. Jernigan:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. Jernigan:

Yes, it was very strange, right after we arrived over on Tinian, all the B-29's had a tail insignia, it's usually a big circle with some letter inside the circle. Our group elected to put a black arrow in the circle. And she welcomed the black arrow group on to the island of Tinian. You know, top secret, that we were all top secret, the movement was top secret, but Tokyo Rose welcomed us. You know, pretty hard to keep a secret in this world.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever cross the equator?

Mr. Jernigan:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have any kind of a ceremony?

Mr. Jernigan:

Oh a slight ceremony and gave us a little card declaring that we had done that. I still have that somewhere in my files, souvenir (*laughs*).

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now April 12<sup>th</sup> of '45 President Roosevelt died. You were still in the States then weren't you?

Mr. Jernigan:

Yes, we were still at Wendover Field and we had not left there yet. And President Truman was sworn in then. It was quite a shock, you know.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the reaction people had when they heard about Roosevelt dying?

Mr. Jernigan:

Various reactions. Some weren't that upset about it and others deeply upset about it. You know, boils down to politics I guess. But anyhow, I thought it was a tragedy because we were still in a terrible war and to have to change leaders I didn't feel was good. But as it turned out Truman took up the ball and ran with it. You know an interesting thing about Truman, he was the Vice-President, and when Roosevelt died and he was going to become the President he had to be briefed on the Manhattan Project. He had never heard the Manhattan Project, because that was such a top-secret thing Roosevelt never briefed him on it. And I think that is a real tragedy. But if you have a secret like that going on, whoever is President should certainly brief his Vice-President on what was going on. Because that had to be, you know it had to be carried on, that was a crucial thing to beat the Germans and developing that thing. Because the Germans were working on it before we ever got started, they were already working on it. So thanks to Einstein, he wrote the letter to Roosevelt advising him about, suggested that the United States should start to research too. But sure it was a deep, deep secret project, but my goodness, the Vice-President just stands just a breath away from being President and certainly should be apprised of things like that needed to be carried on without any delay, so. Anyhow, Spencer had to sit down immediately and brief Truman on knowing the Manhattan Project.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, that's hard to believe.

Mr. Jernigan:

Yes it is. But Truman didn't hesitate one minute when that test bomb on July 16<sup>th</sup> was successful, to say go ahead and use it on the Japanese. And it was funny because he was at the Potsdam Conference when he got the message that the test was successful. He thought he had a feather in his cap to hold over Stalin. When he mentioned to Stalin that the United States had a new secret weapon, Stalin evidently just said "yes", something to that effect you know. Now the tragedy of that is one of the scientist that came over from Britain with the British scientists to help work on this project, Fuchs was his name, was a Russian sympathizer. And he was feeding

all that information to the Russians the whole time he was working there at Los Alamos.

*(End of side 1 of tape.)*

*(Beginning of side 2 of tape.)*

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on April 12<sup>th</sup> of '45 President Roosevelt died, you were still in the States, but did y'all have any kind of ..., what did you do when you heard that?

Mr. Jernigan:

Well, I was very disturbed about it, because like I said before that I didn't feel it was time to be changing a leader of the country when we were so deep in war. So I was upset about it, I thought my goodness what in the world's gonna happen now? And as time went on I realized that Truman, he stepped up. He stepped up and carried the ball, so my hat was off to him.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on May the 8<sup>th</sup> of '45 you were still in the States when Germany surrendered. Did y'all have any kind of a celebration then or anything? On VE Day you all had any kind of a celebration in this country you say?

Mr. Jernigan:

Oh I guess so. When Germany surrendered we were on our way to Seattle to be shipped out. So we celebrated somewhat on the troop train going up to Seattle. And then, of course we were in Seattle a couple of weeks and then shipped out on the *USS Cape Victory* headed for Tinian. So, I was on the ground echelon to go over, I didn't fly over.

Mr. Misenhimer:

August 14<sup>th</sup> of '45 Japan surrendered, have any kind of a celebration then?

Mr. Jernigan:

On August 14<sup>th</sup> yes. Then there was real celebration on Tinian. We heard about it late at night. And we were just all bedding down getting ready to go to bed when we heard somebody yell, "It's all over, it's all over!" And of course we had to rush out and find out what was going on. The guy had had his radio on and heard the announcement that the Japanese had decided to

surrender. So yeah, there was celebration then (*laughs*), half the night at least. We were ready to leave right then and come home, so.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I understand in some of the places that they fired all their ammunition into the air and several Americans were killed by the falling stuff from the thing.

Mr. Jernigan:

(*Laughs*) I'm not surprised it didn't happen, you know around our area, might have somewhere on Tinian, but not around our area because I don't think anybody in our group still had any weapons. The flight crews had .45 caliber pistols, but they only carried them on them when they were flying, so (*laughs*).

Mr. Misenhimer:

I'm talking about anti-aircraft guns and that sort of thing, firing up into the air.

Mr. Jernigan:

Yeah, well I didn't see any of that, no. But I suppose on places like Corregidor and Iwo Jima that they probably would be firing them off there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Jernigan:

Not too bad, no it wasn't too bad. As I was working in the Intelligence Office, I was, well you know in the office, doing office work all the time. So it wasn't like I was out in the field somewhere, up to my waist in danger or anything. Anyhow when I got home I immediately got a job to carry me over until the next semester of college opened up. So, I was just busy getting reacquainted and looking up old friends and so forth and reminiscing. So it wasn't too bad, I didn't have any problems. My older brother did because he had been stationed in the Philippines. And they had some horrible experiences with the Japanese rushing into their camp yelling, "Banzai, banzai!" and swinging their swords and everything. Any sudden loud noise, like a gunshot or anything, he would just fall to pieces because he was so used to that, just

day-by-day waiting for Japanese who were still on the Philippines who would come in firing their guns. He was in the Army Air Corps too, he was a gunner on a B-17. And they were in Air/Sea Rescue and they were flying out there in the Pacific and dropping by parachute, dropping big life boats for people that had been shot down, or in the water. Or for ships that had been sunk, or survivors were out in the water. So that's what he did, he was a gunner on one of those B-17s.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the highest rank you got to?

Mr. Jernigan:

Highest rank I got to was Corporal. When we got back from overseas we organized, the more senior enlisted men in my office were eligible to get out immediately and so all of a sudden found myself doing a job that called for Staff Sergeant, but I never could get the promotion to back it up. I got the title and I changed my military occupation specialty number to Intelligence Specialist because of the job I was doing. And now that's what I was discharged as, an Intelligence Specialist. But they just did not have promotions. While we were overseas there were some promotions within the flight personnel, but not in the ground personnel.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you got out did you use the 52/20 club?

Mr. Jernigan:

No I did not.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You know, you could get \$20 a week for 52 weeks.

Mr. Jernigan:

Right, and no I got a job instead.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Jernigan:



I did later on, the first house that my wife and I bought was through CalVet, which is a veteran's loan for Californian veterans. And later years we had sold that house, we did get a G.I. loan on the next house we bought, so yep.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You didn't use it to go to school or anything?

Mr. Jernigan:

Yes, I enrolled in college the following September. And took a G.E.D. test, so when I entered college to get my high school diploma because I left at the end of my Junior year to enlist. And so I still had another year, I should have had another year of high school. But they allowed the service guys coming back to take the G.E.D. test to get their high school diplomas that way. So I took advantage of that while I was in my first semester of college.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you had any reunions of your outfit?

Mr. Jernigan:

We had reunions, the first one I attended was in 1975. They had had a couple before that, that I had not heard about and I heard about the one in 1975 and my wife and I attended that one. And we attended everyone of them after that until three years ago, we had our last reunion because there was only two of us left to be there. The year before that, at the reunion, I was the only original veteran there, so it was obvious it was time to hang it up. So we decided not to have reunions any longer. But we had them, when we first started attending every two years. And then later on they were losing so many guys, I said we'd better go to every year. So starting, I think with the year 2000, we started meeting every year. And my wife and I were able to attend everyone together until she passed away in 2015 and I continued on. So I was the last person for the group to declare the reunions over, because there was nobody else to speak for the group. The other veteran of the group was there but he was not able to do anything like that. Anyhow, I became the last spokesperson for them. It was really funny years ago, when my mother was going down so rapidly. I said to some of the group, I said, "You know, it looks like it's going to

be last man out turns out the light and I think that's going to be me." Well I never had any dream that would happen, actually come true, but it did, I was the last one that had any say for the group, I was the last spokesperson.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Jernigan:

Oh golly. I've got all this somewhere. Air Offensive Japan, World War II Victory Medal, Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal, American Campaign Medal, and a Good Conduct Medal. Then in years later, much, much later about, I'd say it happened about oh, about ten, fifteen years ago when the group was finally awarded a Valor Medal for the mission that our group did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Jernigan:

I've been to Washington, D.C. several times, yes. Yeah, the most impressive time being there was when they fly the World War II veterans there for .....

Mr. Misenhimer:

Called the Honor Flight.

Mr. Jernigan:

Honor Flight, yes and that happened in 2014. You're not there very long but they really pack a lot into those three days, you know. One day to fly there, one day to tour all the memorials, another day to fly home and all of a sudden it's over. But going to the Vietnam Wall and the Korean exhibit, really got to me being there with all those other veterans. And the Korean Monument is, it's really something. No matter where you walk around that whole area, if you look at the different statues there that make up the memorial, one of them is staring right at you. And that just breaks me up. The way those kids were treated from Vietnam when they came home was absolutely criminal. Not a one of them asked to go over there. Whenever they come home they're greeted with people jeering at them, spitting at them, and somebody should have

shot the son-of-bitches.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Jernigan:

Oh yes, I found it at the World War II Memorial. Have you seen it there?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, I think that sign is everywhere.

Mr. Jernigan:

Did you see it?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes. Anything else you recall from your time in the service?

Mr. Jernigan:

No, not really. I had some great friends and we kept in touch the best we could through the years and in later years some of us were able to get together. And not too long after that they started dying off and I find that all the guys I knew in the service, my buddies are gone you know so. All I have is my memories. They decided that I would make a good airplane mechanic and I'm about as mechanically inclined as (*laughing*) a statue, you know I'm not. But the wisdom of the service you know, just you had to do. Do you remember how they filled positions with numbers, so that's the way I look at it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Jernigan.

Yeah, well nope, I hope I contributed some to your stories. That was a long time ago and have memories, I'm sure I've forgotten a lot of stuff that we did that I could have said oh yeah we did this or that on Tinian. But you know I mean, it was quite awhile ago, but I can say I was just a kid when I was there, so. But it's been a good life. My wife and I would go traveling, my wife and I love to travel when she knew what I had heard. After she passed away I decided I'm

gonna just continue traveling. I've been to Israel twice and next August I'm going to Greece and Turkey and Israel again, and so God willing I'll do that. I always have to add "God willing" because you never know. Because I'll be 95 and you don't know what the situation will be by then, so. Well I think that's about it, good talking with you and it's just good reminiscing again and remembering. Helps me remember, yeah I remember certain guys you know that I'd forgotten about, so. Anyhow, I'm glad to contribute and really enjoyed the museum. I was there in December when I visited my son for Christmas there in Georgetown. My granddaughter assisted me driving down there in Fredericksburg one day so that we could go to that museum. And we really enjoyed being there and she insisted that I fill out that form, as a veteran. So she's proud of me and having a grandfather that was a veteran, so.

*(End of interview.)*

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March 28, 2020

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