

**The National Museum of the Pacific War
(Admiral Nimitz Museum)**

**Center for Pacific War Studies
Fredericksburg, Texas**

**Interview with
Charles Walter Bernhardt
955 74 74
USN**

**By John Tombaugh and Peg Van Meter
July 3, 2004
Great Lakes Naval Training Station, Illinois
YGn 288
18 June, '44 - 12 Feb., '46**

**Reinterview on
24 July, 2004**

Charles Walter Bernhardt
955 74 74
18 June, '44 - 12 Feb., '46
USN

Pacific Theater

Medals earned:
American Campaign Medal
World War II Victory Medal
Combat Action Ribbon
Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal w/1 star
Japan Occupation Medal
Ruptured Duck

Original Interview by
John B. Tombaugh and Peg Van Meter
completed
, 2004

With reinterview with of
Charles Bernhardt
by

My name is John B. Tombaugh and Peggy Van Meter and I are interviewing Mr. Charles Walter Bernhardt:

Mr. Tombaugh

Would you state your name and address?

Mr. Bernhardt

Charles W. Bernhardt, 421 Lakeview St., Culver, Indiana.

Mr. Tombaugh

Where were you born and the date?

Mr. Bernhardt

Born in Anaheim, California and born on July 27, 1926. We moved from Anaheim to Indiana at the outbreak of the depression.

Mr. Tombaugh

What was your parents names?

Mr. Bernhardt

Frank and Leona Rose Bernhardt.

Mr. Tombaugh

Where were they born?

Mr. Bernhardt

My father was born in Andrews, Indiana and my mother in Lafayette, Indiana.

Mr. Tombaugh

Do you have any siblings?

Mr. Bernhardt

A son, Douglas, and daughter, Deborah.

Mr. Tombaugh

Where did you go to school?

Mr. Bernhardt

Leiters Ford, Indiana, the center of the universe.

Mr. Tombaugh

You had some interesting story about the kids in your graduating class?

Mr. Bernhardt

Well, yes, in my graduating class I am going to include with those that actually graduated some of the boys that were in up to our junior year, there were eight boys in the class.

Mr. Tombaugh

And what were their names?

Mr. Bernhardt

Owen Fluckey, Richard Hudkins, Robert Plantz, Wayne Beery, Jeff Steenbergen, Covert Wentzel, Clifford Reichard, and myself. Of these eight men, seven of us were in the service during World War II. I felt we were fortunate to be in the last class to have the privilege of defending our country in WWII and I think most of us felt that way too. I really do, except for one. Of those people, let me see, Covert Wentzel was in the CBI operation.

Mr. Tombaugh

Was he in India?

Mr. Bernhardt

Yes, I think probably close to the head Ledo Road. I don't know if that's true.

Mr. Tombaugh

Would he have been around the area that Don Zartman was in?

Mr. Bernhardt

I have no idea.

Mr. Tombaugh

Don Zartman was at one end of the road.

Mr. Bernhardt

Ledo Road.

Mr. Tombaugh

He was an MP somewhere in that vicinity and was from Rochester, Indiana.

Mr. Bernhardt

I don't know Don Zartman. Now, Bob Plantz, when the war ended was in Germany.

Mr. Tombaugh

Do you remember what outfit he was in?

Mr. Bernhardt

No, I don't; maybe an MP there, he was guarding prisoners there, I believe, but I'm not sure. He was in the war a little later than us but was there for the occupation. I don't know if he saw any action. Richard Hudkins was a gunner on a B 17 and by war's end he was home. He'd finished his war, my brother helped him of course. My brother, Leon, was in the 35th Field Artillery. Between the two of them they got that one finished.

Owen Fluckey was stationed on the island of Clipperton about a thousand miles off the southern coast of Mexico. I believe that was a weather station. And three of us were at Okinawa. Wayne Beery was in the Marines on the brew line; Jeff Steenbergen was in the coast guard off Okinawa. He said he joined the coast guard but didn't know it would be the coast of Okinawa. I was at Okinawa in the Navy.

Mr. Tombaugh
Aboard which ship?

Mr. Bernhardt
Aboard the YNg 28.

Mr. Tombaugh
YNg 28.

Mr. Bernhardt
It actually wasn't a ship, it was classified as a lighter. It was a type of barge with cots for sleeping accommodations and living accommodations. The YNg stands for Yard Net guard. We operated submarine gates. Actually we never did operate any gates at Okinawa. We operated gates on the YNg with in the San Francisco Bay area almost under the golden gate bridge. Because we came together as a crew in 1944 and the instruction from the Naval headquarters were to send us and the YNg 30 out to Pearl, with crews trained to operate. We went aboard the YNg and knew how to operate it.

Mr. Tombaugh
When you went out there were you nestled in an LSM or something like that or did you sail in your ship out there?

Mr. Bernhardt
No, it was very insulting as we went aboard the USAT Yarmouth which was an army vessel. Here we were tough navy guys on an army ship. Isn't that insulting (laughter), and we went out to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

Mr. Tombaugh
Do you remember the date of that?

Mr. Bernhardt
1 December 1944. We went out to Pearl Harbor and proceeded to the Aiea receiving barracks. We stayed there and the YNg 28 was towed over to Pearl independently. The crew eventually went aboard the YNg 28 and got it outfitted and provisioned for the overseas trip. "While there we had 3 different locations. Along the dock directly forward of the U.S.S. Pennsylvania, 1010 drydock, and moored near the tip of Ford Island just past the U.S.S. Arizona."* Then we left to go overseas. We went overseas by way of Ulithi, then Eniwetok and then on up to Okinawa.

Mr. Tombaugh
I am going to back up just a minute; what were your experiences on Hawaii?

Mr. Bernhardt
On Hawaii?

Mr. Tombaugh
Yea, I mean all kinds as in what were your sleeping accommodations, what was your food like, and what you did there?

Mr. Bernhardt

What I did was a lot of garbage detail and stand watch and the reason for that goes back to San Francisco. I was at Treasure Island. I was at the Oakland Bay bridge and while there my father was in San Francisco and Owen Fluckey was at a base not too far from San Francisco and we were scheduled to ship out the next day. So I decided I wanted to see my father and didn't know how to get out of the place because we were restricted; I put on my undress blues and walked out at 4 o'clock with a ships company. And I saw my father and I tried to find Owen but I couldn't find him. So then I came back about midnight and turned myself in. I Just walked through the gate; I didn't know how to sneak in. And the next morning I was called in for a Captains mast. A lieutenant said: "You were AWOL!" "Yes, Sir" I said. The lieutenant said, "And you went out through the ships galley?" I responded "No, Sir." The lieutenant asked, "Then how did you get out?" and I told him. As a note, when I came in there to go before the mast, the two guys who were on guard duty the previous night were there waiting outside. One was about my age and the other was an older man about 28 years old. The youngest had tried to tell the older they were on duty when I went out, and I tried my best to convince them that we would all be in trouble if they turned me in but the older insisted and I was turned in. Now while at Captains mast he asked me how I got out and I told him and he turned to a yeoman and said to get me those two guys. He turned to me and asked, "Son, your scheduled to ship out when?" and I told him and he said one half hour he said, "I tell you you're on probation for six months and guaranteed piss and punk if you foul up." So when we got out to the receiving center the information had proceeded me. I was on garbage detail everyday and watch every night so I didn't get to do to much. The guy who drove the garbage truck finally took pity on me and after a few day he'd take me and drop me off in a pineapple field somewhere and I picked up pieces of metal from the planes and got to know the island pretty well and that was the reason.

Mr. Tombaugh

Wouldn't it have been great if you had found a lot of samurai swords with today prices as they are.

Mr. Bernhardt

Yea, my brother shipped a lot home from Europe.

Mr. Tombaugh

There was P 38s, Spandau machine guns and a whole lot of other things shipped home.

Mr. Bernhardt

I had a bayonet given to me, one of our destroyers were captured by the Japanese and using it for transportation.

Mr. Tombaugh

DD 224 USS Stewart which was a four piper of the Clemson Class of WW I.

Mr. Bernhardt

I don't know which one it was.

Mr. Tombaugh

That is the one listed as sunk and the Japanese recovered it at the out break of the war.

Mr. Bernhardt

I never heard that name.

Mr. Tombaugh

Okay.

Mr. Bernhardt

There was a lot of bayonets and rifles aboard and the navy guys each got one. Now when I went ashore as mail orderly I went past a line of GIs who had their little table set up selling souvenirs, all of which which looked like they had made them the night before and I didn't buy any of that stuff.

Mr. Tombaugh

When you were on Okinawa were you there during the Typhoon Louise?

Mr. Bernhardt

Yes, during the 9th, 10th and 11th of Oct. During the Typhoon I spent 12 straight hours on signal watch. We were in Buckner Bay. We broke one of our connections. We had a spare anchor bolted to the bulkhead and we joking had said it had been painted over so many times it would take a full day to get it ready. The deck crew got it ready in a few minutes and we were holding. I put in a request for priority message but by this time everybody in the area was using that same channel. I was standing radar watch listening all the time (what kept me out of the air corp was my lisp). I couldn't be radio operator so I became signalman. So during the worst typhoon the navy had ever been in, I was on the radio. I put in a top priority to transmit a message; just a request to transmit. I listened all night long as the chatter was going or coming from all the major ships that were out facing into the typhoon. We couldn't do that because we didn't have a motor, we were a barge. We were pulled across the Pacific and back towed all the way.

During the typhoon one of the compartments got smashed open to the sea and I lost my brand new P-coat. I sure wish I had it today. Following the typhoon I think I counted about 50 ships in the bay and on the sand and reefs and in various stages from damaged to destroyed or sunk.

We were pulled across the Pacific and back and towed all the way. One of the things that was un-nerving was when we were 300 to 500 miles outside of Enetwok when we broke our tow during the middle of the night. Both the YNg 28 and 30 were towed at the same time and we had very sophisticated sonar gear as well as sophisticated communication gear and a 24 inch signal light on that thing and which only cost \$180,000.00. The YNg 30 was standing sonar watch and indicated sub contact. We weren't too worried as we had a four

foot draft and figured the torpedoes couldn't touch us. But we were being towed by an AN and the heaviest thing they had was 3" gun and some of the Jap subs had up to a 4.7" while others had the 3" inch gun and could of come up and shelled us.

Mr. Tombaugh

Was that your mail building that was blown away?

Mr. Bernhardt

Mail building, not that I know about, but there was a lot of things blown away.

Mr. Tombaugh

There was one mail building, sorting office building or what ever you wanted to call it that was literally blown away in the wind.

Mr. Bernhardt

Never heard about that. The wind got up to about 170 mph as per the information I received.

Mr. Tombaugh

You should read the book I am writing. The radio waves were filled with Mayday! Mayday! We're grounded or grounding, coming ashore, mayday, mayday.

Mr. Bernhardt

Okay. I was signalman. Actually I was a signalman striker. I went to signal school and they used the top 10% of the class and I graduated 1st in the class and I was 1st class so I ended up as seaman 1st class, when I went aboard our skipper had just made ensign and didn't think anybody needed advancement until he made j.g.. He didn't make j.g. so nobody advanced in rank.

Mr. Tombaugh

He was a 90 day wonder I take it?

Mr. Bernhardt

Yes, a 90 day wonder and his initials were H S which I thought really appropriate.

Mr. Tombaugh

Yes. One more question, have you ever given a speech before a school?

Mr. Bernhardt

Well you know, I really haven't. Freddie Ditmire was down at the VFW one day and said I never knew you were a veteran. I never told my students, I should of told them. You know in WW II no Japanese officer ever surrendered his troops. And very few ever surrendered and the greatest number was on Okinawa because they knew damn well they were whipped by then.

Mr. Tombaugh

The only time they surrendered was when they were unconscious

during almost the whole of the war. In Japan they were considered dead whether captured or surrendered.

Mr. Bernhardt

That's why they treated our prisoner so horribly!

Mr. Tombaugh

1st POW is Ensign Kazuo Sakamaki who was the commander of one of the midget subs attacking Pearl Harbor and was launched from the I 24 and his POW number was 001.

Mr. Bernhardt

One of the things that was unnerving was to be 300 to 500 miles outside of Enewetok when we broke our tow in the middle of night; both YNg 28 and YNg 30 was standing the same watch and indicated had contact we weren't too worried we were only 4 feet and torpedo couldn't touch us. But we were being towed by a net layer (AN) and the heaviest thing they had was a 4.7 inch gun. They could have come up and shelled us and we worried a little bit about it there but anyway we were trying to get a cable across.

Mr. Tombaugh

A 3" line?

Mr. Bernhardt

I don't know, it was a pretty good size cable. Using a monkey fist with a quarter inch line to throw the initial line over and then that line was used to pull the heavier lines across. The day the war was over there was hundreds of ships in Buckner Bay from the battleships on down and every 3, 5, or 7th shell was a tracer round in the magazine. The guns were fired into the air in celebration by everyone in the bay. I was on watch when it happened and could hear the shells dropping and I don't know, maybe five or seven guys were killed on shore while we were celebrating the end of the war. I went over and stood by our stack; we had a diesel engine to provide our electric power. We got our water from a water barge as we didn't make our own. We were about two-thirds of the way north in Buckner Bay and when the capitol ships came down to the southern part of the bay some of us would jump into motor whale boat and catch the big ship and try to get green vegetable, fruit, milk or anything we could get. Tropical butter kept in the heat but it would not digest. It got overseas to us but we had to dump it. People back home made mistakes just like we did out there.

Mr. Tombaugh

Some like the LCI which was called the "Lousy Craft Indeed" or the "lousy civilian idea".

Mr. Bernhardt

The Army called it the steel coffin. By the way, the first time we went over to Okinawa and went to Kerama Retto, 18 miles off the coast of Okinawa that's where we first saw action. I was spotter and I wanted to be a gunner but when we went to Recognition School I was the best and all I had to say was either to shoot or not too

shoot. We were fairly close to shore and a plane came through and I had to make a decision. I surmised it to be an F4U Corsair fighter which had the inverted gull wing.

Mr. Tombaugh

The Japanese also had an inverted gull wing fighter which was the B7-A Grace Ryusei-Kai.

Mr. Bernhardt

I don't know if I would recognize a Zero today but we didn't really see very many Zero's, generally the Oscar and once in while a Betty and I saw the remains of a Baka (Ohka) on Okinawa. If they had developed them sooner they would have been a lot more dangerous than the suicide planes.

Mr. Tombaugh

The Baka was a small craft and the nose was full of explosives.

Mr. Bernhardt

They were carried under Betty bombers till they got close to target than cut off and zoom to target.

Mr. Tombaugh

The pilot for the Baka rode up in the bomber till they got near the drop zone and then drop down through the bomber door and into the cockpit in the plane and say something like "So long Fella's."

Mr. Bernhardt

By the way, we called the enemy planes bogies. When we were in Okinawa the most damage was done to the destroyers on the ring (Radar Picket Station). Some of the Jap planes came into Okinawa, it seemed to be over a 100, and they were coming right at you. We saw the kamikaze dozen's of times because when they came in over Okinawa there were hills and they came in at the lowest point and swept down toward Buckner Bay where the capital ships were laying at anchor on one side and the merchant ships on the other side. Every time they came in there they were looking right at us. We saw this dozens and dozens of times, but none tried to get us. They were going after the big ship not our little YNg 28 that only cost \$180,000.00.

Mr. Tombaugh

On the same line as the Japanese planes attacking, the LSM 83 was in the bay and acting as an AE. One of the Japanese planes suddenly popped over the hill and headed toward the 83. Leonard Snyder of Terre Haute, Indiana was the signalman and stationed on the flying bridge at that time. He spotted the on-coming Japanese kamikaze and yelled aft to the two men sleeping in the starboard aft 20mm gun tub to man the gun. The Japanese at this time was not satisfied with the approach toward the ship and tried to make a turn to come around on another attack. However, as he made the turn, he dipped his wing to low and it caught in the water causing the plane to cartwheel across the surface. Snyder was not able to watch to much of that as he was laughing too hard as he watched one of the men in

the aft 20mm peaking over the top of the gun tub and reminding him so much of the drawing of "Killroy was here." All he could see was the man's head from the nose up and the fingers of both hands over the sides of the gun tub. As the 83 was leaving the area due to being an AE the ship passed the downed plane and the pilot was sitting on the wing with a decided look of disgust on his face as a wherry approached to attempt to take him prisoner. Mr. Snyder did not see what happened after that as the ship was underway and he was busy.

Let's get back to the questions. Where did you enter the military?

Mr. Bernhardt

Indianapolis, Indiana. I graduated from high school on April 21, 1944 and 5 days later I was in the military. I had tried to join when I turned 18 years old. I said I'd like to join but I wanted to be assured of a high school diploma and they wouldn't go for it. The recruiter said: "Go back and we'll get you later." and they did, 10 days before I graduated they sent me my notice.

Went to Fort Wayne, Indiana late Jan.44 to enlist in pilot training and passed all but one test; that was an oral interview by an officer. As I had a lisp he had me repeat "she sell sea shells by the sea shore." "That did it," he said, "Communication by radio for pilots is important. Sorry."

The next week I went to the Great Lakes Naval Training Center to enlist in the Naval Air Corps. The same story was repeated except for the saying which went "Susie and Sammy were sitting in Sammy's sister's swing." Again I was rejected.

We had to stay over night so the navy arranged for us to go to the WGN building for the first public television broadcast in Chicago. It was hot as all get out in there with no air conditioning as we have today and the people working there were not dressed in the suits as we see them today.

Mr. Tombaugh

Why did you pick the Navy?

Mr. Bernhardt

Well it sounded so glorious.

Mr. Tombaugh

You didn't have to dig a fox hole.

Mr. Bernhardt

I wouldn't say that, my brother was in the 35th Field Artillery. He tried to get in the Navy but couldn't because of his eye sight. The advantage of being in the Navy was that you always slept in a dry bunk and you got warm chow, yep, three meals a day. I heard my brother talk of the mud and making coffee in a can during the Battle of the Bulge and he was cooking coffee on a burner and Ray Thomas from Leiters Ford was there also. That 101st "Screaming Eagles" Airborne Division really had it bad. My brother said to one of the men there: "You're surrounded." and he said, "We're supposed to be surrounded, we're Paratroopers." That's one thing about the Navy, you don't shoot the enemy face to face.

The Japanese had suicide swimmers called Fukuryus which stands for Crawling Dragon and which was the code name for the suicide frogmen (human mines); they also had the shinyo boats which were high speed small craft constructed of metal and plywood about 20' long and powered with a four cylinder gas engine producing a speed of about 20 mph. This is designated as a one man kamikaze operation. They were produced in the thousands in preparation for the known coming invasion of Japan. Originally they carried one or two 500 lb. depth charges which were set for shallow depth detonation. These were manually pushed off the bow, or stern, near a ship and the craft would then speed away while the depth charge sank. The explosion would, if done right, dish in the side of the hull sinking the ship. It also would sink the boat if it didn't get out right away. By the end of the war these were affixed with detonators on the bow of the boat and the pilot would simply ram into the side of the ship to detonate the charge or use a manual tripping switch in the cockpit. The training for this as well as the Kaiten and the Koryu were done at the Tokko Squadron I and II based at Ourazaki, located about 7 miles southeast of Kure, in the Inland Sea. In the Philippines at least some of the pilots of these were actually chained into the boats and attempted to surrender but the Filipinos got to them first.

The sonar man was in the Aleutian's island for about a year before the team (called ping jockeys) came aboard and they watched the sonar screen light flashing and they were about half nuts. One was standing watch on the main deck and thought he saw a shinyo and brought his .45 cal. Thompson to bear. With no response to the challenge he let loose with a full magazine of 16 rounds. The next morning we found the marker buoy was gone, some shinyo boat! (laughter by all)

The sister ship YNg 30 was stationed closer to the coast and had a caucasian skipper and first mate and the rest of crew was Black-Americans as was the PC 1264 which was all black except for the officers and leading rates.

Mr. Tombaugh

What was your clothing like in the military?

Mr. Bernhardt

The standard military issue.

Mr. Tombaugh

What were your medals?

Mr. Bernhardt

When I got out of the service I got the American Victory Medal, the World War II Medal, and Asiatic Pacific Medal and a couple of others I have since received. One of those was Occupation Medal due to being on the Japanese homeland for a period of time before returning to the states. The other one was the Combat Action Ribbon which you received if you were actually in a combat situation.

Mr. Tombaugh

What was your reaction to coming home following your overseas duty and the changes that were made here in the states before you went in the service and your feelings at that time?

Mr. Bernhardt

As I had just come out of high school, I didn't have time to have a job so there was nothing to compare it to as an adult would who had gone in after being on his own for some time.

Mr. Tombaugh

You went in a boy and came home a man.

Mr. Bernhardt

Yes, I grew up a little bit.

Mr. Tombaugh

What did you do after you got out?

Mr. Bernhardt

I went to Ball State University received B.S., M.S. and E.D. and retired from education after 31 years in Plymouth, Kewanna, Culver and Richland Center.

* indicates that this was taken from a booklet in his possession.

-END-

32 hours