

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

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

An Interview with

Walter J. Buczek

August 9, 2004

**Army 1631st Engineer Construction Battalion
Ie Shima, Okinawa**

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is August 9th, 2004. I am interviewing Mr. Walter J. Buczek at his home 3486 North 1225 West, Medaryville, Indiana 47957. His phone number is 219-843-2753. This interview is in support of The National Museum of the Pacific War, Center for Pacific War Studies for the Preservation of Historical Information Related to WWII.

Mr. Misenhimer

Walt, I want to thank you for taking the time to do this interview today. What is your birthdate?

Mr. Buczek

February 1st, 1920.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Buczek

At Calumet City, Illinois.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Mr. Buczek

Yes, I had one brother and he was in the service, too, and I had three sisters.

Mr. Misenhimer

Your brother, did he come home from the service?

Mr. Buczek

Yes, he did.

Mr. Misenhimer

What branch was he in?

Mr. Buczek

He was an anti-aircraft gunner.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Buczek

In Thornton Fractional in Calumet City.

Mr. Misenhimer

And what year did you finish there?

Mr. Buczek

1938

Mr. Misenhimer

OK, and what did you do when you finished high school?

Mr. Buczek

Well, I was working in a book bindery but then, as the war broke out, I went to Hammond Tech and took up machine shop. And, from there, I went to work at Pullman Standard in Hammond. We made the M2 tanks, anti-air craft guns and shells for mortars, and we made the mortars, too.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were doing defense work there?

Mr. Buczek

Yeah, that was defense work.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, OK and how long did you work at that?

Mr. Buczek

I think I was there about two years.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, when did you actually go into the service?

Mr. Buczek

It was in March. I don't know the dates.

Mr. Misenhimer

It says here May 12 of 1943.

Mr. Buczek

I was working as a maintenance mechanic and when I got hired in, I was supposed to be a machine operator. But, there was no opening so the boss said he hasn't any opening on a machine, and he would put me on with the maintenance gang, and as soon as there was an opening, he would let me know. So, I worked there, I forgot just how long it was but, anyway, one day he came over and said he had an opening on a machine, and I'd make a lot more money on the machine than doing maintenance work. I was with maintenance repairs on machinery. I told him no, I like what I am doing, and I'm not worried about the money.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were you making during that?

Mr. Buczek

I was only making 75 cents an hour. So I stayed on as a maintenance mechanic and machine repair. Then one day, the boss comes up and he said, "This is it. I just got home. I just got

back from the draft board and I told them you are a good man and I need you and I've been getting you off all this time." I wondered why I wasn't being drafted. He told them I was a good man and he needed me, but the draft board's answer was the Army needs good men, too. And then I got drafted.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. Let me back up a little bit. On December 7th of '41, when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Buczek

Yes!

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you, and what was your reaction?

Mr. Buczek

I was probably working at the defense plant then.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were working there then? You started before the war started?

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And, did you have any idea how that might affect you?

Mr. Buczek

Well, I expected to get drafted at any time because all my buddies were going, and here I was staying at home. So, I got drafted and went through Chicago and Camp Abbott, Oregon.

Now, that was a brand new camp that was just opened up. We were the second company that

was taking training there. Within a year's time, they had to close that camp because that's all volcanic area and the troops that were training and marching, the first were OK but as time went on, that volcanic rock crumbled up and it was like walking in ashes. They had so many cases of dust pneumonia in a year's time they closed the camp up, and we moved to Fort Lewis, Washington.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. Let me back up. You were sworn in in Chicago?

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And, how long were you there?

Mr. Buczek

Not very long. Just to be processed, get on the train and head for Oregon.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get your uniforms in Chicago? Or anything like that?

Mr. Buczek

I don't recall exactly. I think maybe we did.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. How was that train trip to Oregon?

Mr. Buczek

A four-day trip!

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have anything to sleep in or just sit up in a chair car?

Mr. Buczek

No, we had sleepers.

Mr. Misenhimer

You had Pullmans, huh?

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

All right and how was the food on that trip?

Mr. Buczek

Well, I'm not a very fussy eater so I was satisfied. I know a lot of guys complained, even on Okinawa, "What, mutton stew again?" And, I just loved the stuff!

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, a lot of people complained about the mutton. All right, and you arrived at this Camp Abbott in Oregon -- what all did you do there?

Mr. Buczek

Well, we really started taking training then -- basic training.

Mr. Misenhimer

Ok. Was this Infantry type basic?

Mr. Buczek

Yes. But shortly I was sent down to the school for a week and then I got pulled out as an instructor, so I only went for training in the most important stuff, like the rifle range, and I forget what all. Most of it, I never got.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about the infiltration course? Where you crawl under the live ammunition, did you do that?

Mr. Buczek

No, I don't think so.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. Bayonet training?

Mr. Buczek

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. Rifleman and that sort of thing?

Mr. Buczek

Yes. Just the rifle.

Mr. Misenhimer

The school, what kind of school was it you went to?

Mr. Buczek

Automotive Transport School. I was with Mechanics and Truck Drivers.

Mr. Misenhimer

Ok. Mechanics repairing trucks?

Mr. Buczek

Repairing trucks, yeah. That was the Second Echelon. I went up to the Fourth Echelon and went into complete overhaul, re-boring and complete tearing the engines down and re-boring.

We were in just repairs.

Mr. Misenhimer

Had you had any experience with that before you went in?

Mr. Buczek

No, that's why I couldn't figure out why they pulled me out as an instructor. In fact, when they pulled me out as an instructor, and put me in front of 35 students, you know, that was something. I told them right out I was just a Buck Private just like they were, and they probably knew more than I knew about mechanics. But I said we'll all learn together. I had open class discussions. And after I got in Okinawa, I met one of my students and he said, "I enjoyed your class more than any of the others, and I think I learned more in your class."

Mr. Misenhimer

Good! What's some other things that happened to you there at Camp Abbott?

Mr. Buczek

Hum, not much more.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you live in there?

Mr. Buczek

We had brand new bunkhouses built. Everything was new there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Barracks? Regular barracks?

Mr. Buczek

Yes, new barracks. We had those double decker bunks.

Mr. Misenhimer

What, about 50 people to each floor? Something like that?

Mr. Buczek

They were just one-story. I don't recall but it must have been around 25 to 30 of them at least.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK, all right. But you say the dust was so bad they had to move you all out?

Mr. Buczek

Well, they couldn't train any more. They had so many cases of dust pneumonia they had to send too many of them to the hospital.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you were transferred from there to Fort Lewis, Washington?

Mr. Buczek

Yes, that was North Fort Lewis.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. You were there at Camp Abbott for roughly a year, then? Or how long?

Mr. Buczek

Yes, roughly a year.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you travel by train down there again?

Mr. Buczek

To Fort Lewis?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes.

Mr. Buczek

No, we had to take all our equipment from the school, and we took trucks there.

Mr. Misenhimer

A convoy of trucks?

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did that take?

Mr. Buczek

I don't recall.

Mr. Misenhimer

More than one day, though?

Mr. Buczek

Yeah, I imagine that could be a 300 mile trip or maybe longer and with trucks, why, you can't go too fast in a convoy.

Mr. Misenhimer

Right. 35 or 40 miles per hour I imagine.

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what did you do at Fort Lewis?

Mr. Buczek

I was with the school, yet, teaching at the school for one year. And, after one year, why, a lot of the boys were coming back, and they were in 4 or 5 years already so they were putting

some of them in the schools to teach. I got transferred into this Army Engineer Unit that was being trained for road construction.

Mr. Misenhimer

And what did that training consist of?

Mr. Buczek

Well, we went on bivouac and after bivouac, I forget just how long it was, but, then it wasn't too long. We loaded up on a boat and headed for Okinawa.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they teach you to drive bulldozers and that sort of thing or what?

Mr. Buczek

No, I was a shop foreman in a machine shop.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK, all right.

Mr. Buczek

I had, I think it was three guys working for me. We had a truck that was designed for field repairs. We had a lathe in there and all our equipment that we needed. It was also a welding truck that did all the welding out in the field.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was this a semi truck?

Mr. Buczek

No, just a straight truck.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, this school where you were teaching, about how long were those?

Mr. Buczek

In the school?

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were teaching in the school, how long was the class?

Mr. Buczek

It was full day's teaching.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, but I mean was it two weeks or a month or two months?

Mr. Buczek

I think it was three months.

Mr. Misenhimer

And about how many people were in the class?

Mr. Buczek

Oh, I had 35 or 36. We all more or less specialized in one subject so they went from one class to another.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your subject?

Mr. Buczek

Tools and equipment. But, you know, when you're teaching tools like that, you're also getting into some repairs and how they're used and what they're used for.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, then when you were in the engineering outfit, it was a road construction outfit?

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. Now you've got the number of the unit here. The name of it was the 1631st Engineer Construction Battalion.

Mr. Buczek

You might put Army Engineers because that was questioned by several guys. "What kind of outfit was it? "Because there were some private construction outfits, too.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, this was Army Engineers?

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you loaded up on a ship? Where did you load up at?

Mr. Buczek

Well, I didn't load the ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

No, I mean where did you load on the ship at?

Mr. Buczek

Seattle, Washington.

Mr. Misenhimer

And, what type of ship was this?

Mr. Buczek

It was troop ship. And, then like you were saying, APA, it had that, it said on it USS LaPort.

Mr. Misenhimer

The USS LaPort

Mr. Buczek

Yeah. APA 151.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many people were on that ship?

Mr. Buczek

I don't recall. But there were quite a few. It was pretty big ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was it pretty crowded?

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And what did you sleep in on it?

Mr. Buczek

We slept in bunks down in a hold.

Mr. Misenhimer

In a hold, huh?

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how many bunks high?

Mr. Buczek

I think it was about 4 bunks high. Loaded up like sardines.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah. Right! Were these the kind that folded up during the daytime or not?

Mr. Buczek

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

They were permanently there?

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that trip over there? You went first to Hawaii? Honolulu?

Mr. Buczek

Yes, that was our first stop, Hawaii. We saw a USO Show, and I don't know what all we did over there, but they had to entertain us somehow.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. So you saw a USO Show there?

Mr. Buczek

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any particular name player?

Mr. Buczek

I don't recall. I didn't. You know you don't try to keep that in mind.

Mr. Misenhimer

Sure. OK. About how long were you in Hawaii?

Mr. Buczek

I think we were there 2 days. Yeah. June 4th to the 6th.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. That was what year? '45?

Mr. Buczek

Yes. We never got off the ship. They were afraid they wouldn't get all the guys back together again.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you see the USO Show?

Mr. Buczek

Aboard ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

Aboard ship, well I see. OK, they came aboard ship to do the show.

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

All right. Now, when you were going to Hawaii, were you with other ships, were you in a convoy or by yourself?

Mr. Buczek

We were not allowed to travel alone. We had to have a battleship escort. That's why it took

us so long because we stopped at Hawaii and waited for a battleship escort convoy. We joined them and then the next stop, if they were turning off, we stopped at another island. And so on, hedgehopping on these various islands waiting for the battleship escort.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were they battleships or destroyers?

Mr. Buczek

They called them battleships.

Mr. Misenhimer

So some of your stops were, was Eniwetok one of them?

Mr. Buczek

Yes. I don't just recall what some of them were, but there were several of them. And some of the islands, they weren't too big, and they sprayed them by plane first because they were mosquito infested. We played baseball and games there while we were waiting for the next ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

I see one place it says you did landing practice. What was that? Landing practice?

Mr. Buczek

I don't recall exactly but I imagine it was getting off the ships.

Mr. Misenhimer

This is a nice map showing your journey there.

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

On this landing practice it shows like an LCVP or landing craft. And you crossed the dateline then, right?

Mr. Buczek

Yeah. That's when we jumped a day.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, you lost a day there. He is showing me here a little card, The Main of the Golden Dragon. You didn't cross the equator did you?

Mr. Buczek

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

This is, rode over the 180th meridian. That's the dateline. OK, but that's coming back, the 2nd of March, 1946.

Mr. Buczek

Yes, that's the day we were coming back.

Mr. Misenhimer

The USS Admiral H. T. Hayes. APA 125. That's when you came back, that's when you got that pin?

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you married when you were in the service?

Mr. Buczek

That's where we got married. I met my wife's brother in Fort Lewis and he was getting

married. So, he asked me if I'd be the Best Man. I agreed. I couldn't get off before the wedding and, so, I met her on the cathedral steps just before the ceremony in Portland, Oregon. She was the Maid of Honor.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was the first time you met her, huh?

Mr. Buczek

Yes, that was the first time I met her. Three months later, we were married in the same cathedral.

Mr. Misenhimer

Well, good! How long did this trip take from Seattle to Okinawa?

Mr. Buczek

52 days. It tells you right here.

Mr. Misenhimer

52 days and then you got to Okinawa?

Mr. Buczek

Yes, well we landed on Ie Shima at first and then we had to load up and go to Okinawa.

Mr. Misenhimer

July 14th, you arrived there it says. July the 14th.

Mr. Buczek

Eisenhower was there but he left before we landed. And there's just a small channel between Okinawa and Ie Shima. When the tide is in, you can't see the channel. When the tide is out, well then you can see the channel and boats can go through it.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. I see. Now, tell me about the mix-up in the orders you said, you had a mix-up in the orders there.

Mr. Buczek

Yes, we got crossed up on orders of another construction unit. We were 1631st and they were 1635th, the same kind of unit as we were. They were supposed to land on Ie Shima and we were supposed to land on Okinawa but the orders got crossed up. So, we landed on Ie Shima and, when we found out that the orders were crossed up; we had to move to Okinawa.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, you had unloaded all your equipment?

Mr. Buczek

Right. They warned us about picking up souvenirs. One of the guys who was a truck driver wanted to go souvenir hunting. He found a Jap hand grenade and wanted to figure out why it didn't go off. He unscrewed the cap and we were lucky enough he had a corner bunk in a tent. And, he found out why it didn't go off. It went off and severed a vein in his arm, and he lost the use of his arm. He had shrapnel in him, and they had to get that out. So, he went down to the hospital and they sent him home.

Mr. Misenhimer

It did go off then?

Mr. Buczek

It went off. That was the only casualty that we had in our company.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was this on Ie Shima?

Mr. Buczek

Well, with the heavy equipment we were working on mainly road construction, and when they had repairs to do, then we'd have to repair them.

Mr. Misenhimer

There was an airfield there, right?

Mr. Buczek

We weren't on an airfield but we worked constructing airfields. We had airstrips that weren't too far out but we'd be situated in one place, and we'd work from there.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. But were there airplanes there, bombing Japan or anything from there?

Mr. Buczek

The airstrips, no, not that I recall.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. OK. Most of them are going from Tinian and Saipan. B-29's.

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And landing on Iwo Jima if they had any problems.

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, how long were you there then?

Mr. Buczek

I think we were there about 10 months.

work benches and trucks and where ever we could because you could hear some of the shrapnel hit a workbench or something once in awhile.

Mr. Misenhimer

It has to come back down.

Mr. Buczek

Yes. But that was about the worst that we went through. And, they did have Jap hedgehoppers. They'd fly so low that they couldn't get the anti-aircraft guns low enough to shoot at them. They went through so fast that they couldn't do much about it but they never did much damage.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about Kamikazes? Did you see any Kamikazes hit the ships there?

Mr. Buczek

No. They said at Okinawa, when we were talking to some of the soldiers, they had those suicide bombers. Those guys that were there on the ships said, boy, they had to either get them, or the Japs would get them.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's the Kamikazes, the suicide planes?

Mr. Buczek

That's what they call them?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes. Right.

Mr. Buczek

Well, I didn't see any of them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Ok. I also understand there were some Japanese stragglers for a while on Okinawa.

Mr. Buczek;

There were but we didn't encounter any of them.

Mr. Misenhimer

You didn't encounter them, OK. Because I did understand they did come in and kill some people later, even after the island was secured.

Mr. Buczek

We never lost one soldier in all the time we were there except that one that picked up that hand grenade and wasn't supposed to. And we had only one man that got malaria, out of that many men in malaria infested areas.

Mr. Misenhimer

Sure. About how many men in your construction battalion?

Mr. Buczek

I think there was supposed to be -- I can't think how many there were, but there were quite a few.

Mr. Misenhimer

Several hundred, huh?

Mr. Buczek

Yes, there were two or three hundred.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have to take Atabrine for the malaria when you were there?

Mr. Buczek

Yes, I think we did.

Mr. Misenhimer

The tablet?

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Turn you yellow?

Mr. Buczek

Not bad.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. What are some of the things you worked on while you were on Okinawa?

Mr. Buczek

Well, with the heavy equipment we were working on mainly road construction, and when they had repairs to do, then we'd have to repair them.

Mr. Misenhimer

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Mr. Buczek

We weren't on an airfield but we worked constructing airfields. We had airstrips that weren't too far out but we'd be situated in one place, and we'd work from there.

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Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And landing on Iwo Jima if they had any problems.

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, how long were you there then?

Mr. Buczek

I think we were there about 10 months.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. I believe on this card here, coming back, it says it was on March, the 2nd of March, '46.

You were coming back across the Dateline.

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were some other things that happened on Okinawa?

Mr. Buczek

Well, we went through 2 typhoons. You know what they're like. The first typhoon we went through, we didn't get any storm warning. So, after the typhoon was over, some of us went

down to the seashore and the troop ships that were in port there were laying on their sides on shore. And, the airstrip, the planes were just torn from their anchors. During a typhoon, we lived in tents. Being with the heavy equipment, we threw ropes over the tents and tied them to the dozers and lowboys and such. After a storm, we had the only tent left standing but it was in strips. We had to tear it down anyway. During the storm, there were gusts of a hundred, a hundred fifty miles, so we were told just make your way to the K-Ration truck whenever you can. So, between gusts, we ran from post to post or whatever you could hold onto until we got the K-Rations and took whatever we could carry to where we stayed. Now, I was in charge of the machinery shop truck, and we parked along side of a great big hill. You might call it a small mountain. We just set a couple of planks across the benches on each side and that's where we slept. Other guys went where ever they could, even into some of those tombs. Where else could they go?

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. So, now your truck had a solid cover?

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Not a canvas?

Mr. Buczek

The sides opened up.

Mr. Misenhimer

But, it wasn't canvas covered, it was a solid cover?

Mr. Buczek

Yes. It was solid.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how big was this truck? How long?

Mr. Buczek

Oh, it was about 8 by 16 or so. No, no, longer than that. It had to be. 16 is a short one. See, it'd be, altogether, 20 to 30 feet somewhere in there.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, a good sized truck.

Mr. Buczek

Yes, it was a good sized truck. We had quite a bit of equipment in there.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do for electricity? Did you have your own generator?

Mr. Buczek

We had our own generator.

Mr. Misenhimer

Inside the truck?

Mr. Buczek

Inside the truck, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. You mentioned the tombs. Tell me about the tombs.

Mr. Buczek

Well, the tombs – after we took the island, people weren't allowed to bury any people in

those tombs. So, we just went around and looked at them and some of them, like you see in that picture, were pretty fancy. According to that book, they were, the people were, spending more money on their tombs than they did on their homes. After we took the island, some of the natives who could speak a little bit of English, told us the only way they could stay alive was to bury themselves because there was fire from the air, planes dropping bombs and the island was surrounded by boats. The boats were firing on the island. There was hardly a home left standing there.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. You were telling me a short while ago how they were burying people – how did they bury them?

Mr. Buczek

According to that book, when they buried them, they put them in a wooden casket, in a sitting position. And, they let the flesh decay for 3 years before they put them in vases and put them up on shelves in the tomb.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, there were a lot of people in one tomb?

Mr. Buczek

Yeah, that was kind of a family tomb.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. Right. Walter is showing me a small booklet here – it says, see, Mom, how do you pronounce it? N A N S C I S H O T O.

Mr. Buczek

Your guess is as good as mine. “Nun say shoto” I think.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is that what they called Okinawa? I guess they did or something?

Mr. Buczek

Yes. Something like that. Another thing about Okinawa, it was quite an interesting island because in the days of the pirates, that was pirates' paradise. The pirates kidnapped the women on the mainland and brought them to Okinawa for their wives or whatever.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, that's where the Okinawan people came from then, huh?

Mr. Buczek

Yes, they were really a mixed race.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. So, these women they captured, were they Japanese women or what?

Mr. Buczek

Well, they were not Japanese. Most of them were Chinese, wherever pirates went, you know.

Mr. Misenhimer

This is the little booklet that they gave you about it. It says here that "Minesi" means "Southwestern" and "Shoto" means "Islands". So it means Southwestern Islands.

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. This a rather interesting little booklet here. It gives you all the information - about 30-35 pages, uh. 38 pages. It gives you information on the island there and things. Now, tell me about the second typhoon. How was it?

Mr. Buczek

The second typhoon, we did get storm warnings. So, everything was pretty secured and, you know, the ships go out to the open sea. They close all hatches and float like a corked bottle. Talking to one sailor, he said he was in the Navy for 20 years and he never got sick. Well, he did this time!

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. Do you recall the dates on those, either one of them?

Mr. Buczek

No, I don't recall the dates. That was in the time I was on the island.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand that one of them was, I'm not sure which one, really sank a lot of our ships, too. One of them did.

Mr. Buczek

Yes. In the book, they usually get about 5 or 6 typhoons a year. I only went through 2 of them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Which was the worst one?

Mr. Buczek

Well, the first one was the worst. Because we didn't have time to prepare for it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me ask, on April 12th of '45, President Roosevelt died. Do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Buczek

No, I don't.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were still in the States at that point, probably still at Fort Lewis, then. So, there was no announcement, nothing about that?

Mr. Buczek

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then, in May of '45, Germany surrendered. Did you hear about that?

Mr. Buczek

Yes, we heard about that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any reaction to it?

Mr. Buczek

Well, we were glad it was over over there, whether or not we got to go home. We did hear, like they called it, Tokyo Rose on the radio.

Mr. Misenhimer

You could hear her?

Mr. Buczek

Oh, yeah! That wasn't too far from Japan. We heard her very well.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of her?

Mr. Buczek

Well, I didn't think much of her!

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. Now, when they dropped the atomic bomb, in August, you heard about that did you?

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And what did you all think when you heard that?

Mr. Buczek

Oh, we figured it would be over with pretty soon. And, it didn't take too long.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. And, then when Japan did surrender, any kind of a celebration or anything?

Mr. Buczek

No. We didn't really have anything to celebrate. All we could do was just celebrate among ourselves.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, you say you did not carry a weapon there on Okinawa?

Mr. Buczek

While working, no. We had them but we usually left them in the bunkhouse.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. You had them there ...

Mr. Buczek

But, in our tents.

Mr. Misenhimer

What weapon did you have?

Mr. Buczek

The M1's. Yeah. Well, I don't recall any celebration in our company.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else from your time on Okinawa?

Mr. Buczek

No, I can't think of anything.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, after the war was over, did you continue building roads? What did you continue to do?

Mr. Buczek

Well, we just about quit working all together. We didn't do any more. We just got stuff ready to turn in.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, you were there about another 6 months after the war was over, then?

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

You just didn't do too much from that time?

Mr. Buczek

No. Everybody was just glad it was over.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. Now, did they send most of the equipment home or what did they do with all the equipment and stuff?

Mr. Buczek

Well, you hear all kinds of stories. But, I heard they were putting brand new batteries in

Jeeps, loading them up on the ship, going out in the open ocean, and driving them off. I don't think they brought anything back. It stayed there and, what they did with it, I don't know. Japanese POW's, we had so many of them they were doing odd jobs. You know, cleaning up around the place, and somebody was put in charge of them. And you would watch them while they were doing this or that. They didn't want any of them to escape. They carried a gun with them and guarded over them while they worked.

Mr. Misenhimer

Japanese soldiers?

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

They weren't the Okinawan civilians?

Mr. Buczek

No. They were Japanese soldiers. Some of them did surrender.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, there were some. I'm not sure how many. And, of course, some of them were wounded and captured.

Mr. Buczek

Yeah. I heard stories like on Okinawa and Ie Shima, they were telling us that the Japanese hid on those islands in coral caves and would train a little kid to say "Candy," and they'd send them over to some American troops, hand out, saying, "Candy, candy" and when they got close to the American troops, a charge went off that was tied onto the kids backs. So, that was pretty dirty of them to use kids for something like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah! OK. What are some other things like that you heard there?

Mr. Buczek

Oh, we did go into the Japanese caves to get out some of their machinery. We got out lathes and stuff that they had. They had a little machine shop in the cave and then we got to use them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was it American made?

Mr. Buczek

No, Japanese made. But, they were pretty good lathes.

When the Americans took the island, the way they had to clean them out was, what did they call them?

Mr. Misenhimer

Flame throwers?

Mr. Buczek

Yeah, flame throwers. Burn them out. Otherwise, they'd stay in the caves who knows how long. At the same time, they could sneak out and do some damage.

Mr. Misenhimer

Sure! Now, what else did you find in these caves besides machinery?

Mr. Buczek

Well, mostly, it was machinery.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any bodies in there or anything?

Mr. Buczek

No. We didn't find the bodies. But, we did find bodies out in and around the island.

Decomposed bodies, just the skeleton and with the clothes and everything.

Mr. Misenhimer

These were Japanese?

Mr. Buczek

Yes. Evidently they didn't find them when they were cleaning up the island. Because what they did there was dig long trenches with dozers and put all the bodies in there because you couldn't stand that island if they didn't clean up all that stuff.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah. All the disease, too, that could have come from it.

Mr. Buczek

Yeah, right. The Americans some areas there for our casualties and buried them in individual graves. People go to Okinawa just to see the graves of some of their friends and relatives.

Mr. Misenhimer

Right. Right. How about your trip back? Anything happen on the trip back? Anything else happen on your way home? When you crossed the Dateline, when you got that little card, any kind of ceremony or anything?

Mr. Buczek

No. There were so many troops on the ship that, coming back, the ship was just loaded with GI's.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, they just gave you that card then?

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you land back in the States? Back into Seattle?

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do then?

Mr. Buczek

Well, we didn't stay there very long because we were getting our discharges as fast as they could dish them out.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. And, you were discharged at Seattle?

Mr. Buczek

At Seattle, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you remember what date that might have been?

Mr. Buczek

I don't recall. An awful lot of the guys had souvenirs from Okinawa and they brought them along. When we went for an inspection and to get our discharges they left all the souvenirs on the bunks. They thought when they got their discharges they could come back and pick up

them up. Well, when they got their discharges, they said you go that way and, boy, were there some of the guys crying that they had souvenirs of all kinds worth a lot of money and stuff, and they never got to pick them up.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get home with any souvenirs or stuff?

Mr. Buczek

Well, my wife came down from Portland and I had a friend who had a car there. So he came over where he could drive right up to the barracks we were in and whatever I had we got it out.

Mr. Misenhimer

I see. OK. What are some things you got home with?

Mr. Buczek

I don't recall, but I know that some of the clothing was perfectly good and so was some other stuff they just threw away, so I just took it home.

Mr. Misenhimer

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

Mr. Buczek

We got our mail pretty well.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Buczek

No, I didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. And the highest rank you got to was Staff Sergeant?

Mr. Buczek

Let's see – 3 stripes above and 2 below, yeah, Staff Sergeant.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you recall what your pay was as Staff Sergeant?

Mr. Buczek

I don't recall because we got just so much and the wives got part of it at home.

Mr. Misenhimer

Allotments coming home?

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

It says here your discharge was March 14, 1946.

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

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

Mr. Buczek

We had pretty good officers. They treated us real well. Really, we didn't have too much to do over there, and you know the war was over and, toward the end, we stopped working, so what was there to do but just to kill time.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. Did you play baseball or anything like that?

Mr. Buczek

No, we didn't have any baseballs or things. Everybody was on their own. Playing cards mostly.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you go through any more of the caves at that point?

Mr. Buczek

No. Where we went through, some of them could have been booby-trapped. We had to watch out for that.

Mr. Misenhimer

You had to be careful where you were going?

Mr. Buczek

Yes. They warned us about picking up souvenirs when we knew from the experience of one guy! That was enough.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. You mentioned about hearing Tokyo Rose. Did you have a radio of some sort to pick her up?

Mr. Buczek

We had radios.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about Armed Forces Radio, did you ever hear Armed Forces Radio?

Mr. Buczek

No. We went down to the seashore and picked up shells.

Mr. Misenhimer

These are seashells?

Mr. Buczek

Seashells, yeah. We made bracelets and necklaces with them. We went down to an airplane dump, and there were a lot of these incendiary bombs with parachutes with nylon rope. So, we got them and took the string out of them and were making hula skirts out of them.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was there on Okinawa, huh?

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

(Mrs. Buczek – You made some booze didn't you? For this party or something?)

Mr. Misenhimer

Moonshine?

(Mrs. Buczek – There was a guy from Kentucky there that...)

Mr. Buczek

Yeah. He was a bootlegger in Kentucky! So, they cooked a little booze and our officer took it down to the officer's club and they had a party there. They asked, "Where in the world did you get this stuff? Boy, that's really good stuff!" He told them "The boys are making it," and they didn't believe him.

Mr. Misenhimer

You all didn't drink it?

Mr. Buczek

Oh, I had a taste of it but I never drank too much.

Mr. Misenhimer

I mean the enlisted men, they weren't drinking it also?

Mr. Buczek

Yeah, the enlisted men were. The officers told us, well, if we don't have any trouble it's OK but if we have any trouble, that's it!

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. What was he making it out of?

Mr. Buczek

Cornmeal and rice. Whatever we could get from the mess hall.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. He set up a still then, huh?

Mr. Buczek

This bootlegger made a still. He knew how to make them, and so that was more or less the pastime. And, also, there was a cow running around and the guys got together and killed the cow. This one guy got in there and he skinned her while she was still kicking and brought it in so we had some steaks.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever have any experience with the Okinawa natives there?

Mr. Buczek

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Never saw any or anything?

Mr. Buczek

No. We saw them. They were passing by on the road going back and forth. They liked to collect junk.

(Mrs. Buczek – They said they had the girls doing their laundry though.)

Mr. Buczek

Yeah. The laundry girls, they were doing laundry.

Mr. Misenhimer

Right, they were doing laundry for you?

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you getting paid when you were over there, regularly?

Mr. Buczek

Yeah, we got regular pay there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was this U.S. dollars or what did they pay you in?

Mr. Buczek

They paid us in yen.

Mr. Misenhimer

In yen?

Mr. Buczek

Yes. And then they had a place where you could exchange your yen for American money.

Mr. Misenhimer

But, they paid you in yen?

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And they paid the girls, I'm assuming, in yen. For their work and stuff.

Mr. Buczek

Uh huh.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have a houseboy to keep your tent or barracks?

Mr. Buczek

No, we didn't – we did it ourselves.

When we were there, most of the caves and souvenirs were pretty much picked up already.

But, they were selling souvenirs like, you know, robes and stuff. They had so many of them, they had drawings. They showed movies and then, at these movies, they were drawing names out of the hat. But we had to pay for them. I don't know where they come from.

Mr. Misenhimer

I see. When you got home, did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Buczek

No, not at all.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. Did you use your GI Bill at all?

Mr. Buczek

No, we didn't get anything on the GI Bill.

(Mrs. Buczek – That Ag. Program)

Mr. Buczek

Oh, yeah, that Farm Training program.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh yeah, through the GI Bill?

Mr. Buczek

Yes. It was on the GI Bill. When we lived in Lowell, we rented a farm there and started farming....

Mr. Misenhimer

(This is Side 2 of Tape 1 with Walter Buczek)

You were saying that you used the Farm Ag program after the war.

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

You had never farmed when you were growing up. Is that right?

Mr. Buczek

No, just garden.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. But you decided you wanted to be a farmer?

Mr. Buczek

All my life that's all I wanted.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. Of course, you were living in the Chicago area, right? In Illinois?

Mr. Buczek

Calumet City, just south of Chicago.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. Did you have any trouble adapting to farming?

Mr. Buczek

Oh, no.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did the Ag class help you quite a bit?

Mr. Buczek

Oh, yeah! See, not being born and raised on the farm, that helped an awful lot. And, we had a very good instructor. In the evening, at the high school, and when the students were all out, we didn't interfere with the classes.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. Anything else in your time in the service?

Mr. Buczek

I might say our pastime on the ship while going over there was watching flying fish. It was comical. A lot of people don't believe fish can fly but they do come out of the water and I think they can go 35 or 40 feet above the water before they go down.

Mr. Misenhimer

I believe you mentioned they could go about 65 miles per hour they could fly?

Mr. Buczek

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, that's moving pretty fast.

Mr. Buczek

Those fish can really go.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you see dolphins? Porpoise?

Mr. Buczek

No, I don't recall seeing any. You'd have to stay on deck and watch all the time, and those decks were steel and they were awful hot. So, we went for the shade.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah! OK. All right. Walt is showing me a couple of paintings he got in Okinawa, they were painted on the OD canvas of a tent.

Mr. Buczek

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. But, the scenes don't look much like Okinawa, I don't think.

Mr. Buczek

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

But they're nice paintings. Just a friend of yours painted them over there, huh?

Mr. Buczek

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you had any reunions since you've been out?

Mr. Buczek

No. All the guys that I can remember were teaching at the school and even on Okinawa, I heard when they passed away. The last one wasn't too long ago when he passed away. I don't know any that are surviving.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you have any kind of an organization that sends out a newsletter or anything?

Mr. Buczek

We did have when we first got out. We started a letter and passed it around and kept it going in a circle how they're doing. That phased out after, I don't know, not too long. I know our blacksmith, said that he was shoeing a horse and the horse kicked him and knocked out all his teeth. He added that to his letter. He was the one that had a common law wife who was living with him, and she sent him a "Dear John" letter saying she wanted to get married for the longest time, and he didn't want to get married, so she found another guy and got married. He almost blew his head off. One of the guys heard him fumbling with the gun and he looked at him and asked him what he was doing and told him, "Put that gun away!" and he stopped him. But, he was awful nervous and I believe he would have done it. Then, in the letter we'd send around, he said that he got married again with another woman.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. Was there any time that you ever felt frightened?

Mr. Buczek

No, I didn't. We never had any encounters or dangerous positions.

Mr. Misenhimer

Maybe the typhoon might have been scary?

Mr. Buczek

It was a little scary but I don't scare very easily.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. Did you get any kind of medals or anything?

Mr. Buczek

Oh, let's see. No, we didn't get any medals. Just the regular ones. You know, these guys all got medals for battles they went through and stuff but I didn't get any. Except my dog tags.

And rifle tags.

(Mrs. Buczek – He didn't even get an overseas medal. I wonder why?)

Mr. Misenhimer

You probably got the Asian Pacific Theatre Medal, I imagine, right? This medal says, Efficiency, Honor and Fidelity. Some type of medal for doing a good job with the unit or something.

Mr. Buczek

I've got 2 of them here. And, that's about it. (Unintelligible area of tape) What was this from?

Mr. Misenhimer

I don't know. "34 – that may be a high school or something. 1934. Some type of a medal from that. Yeah, here it says, the American Theatre Service Medal, the Good Conduct Medal, Asiatic Pacific Service Medal, and the Victory Medal.

Mr. Buczek

I don't know what I did with all those. After so many years and you shuffle them around, show them around – we had our centennial here, we had to dig everything out. I've still got my uniform. But the pants don't fit. My jacket, I got it on but I couldn't button it up.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah! Was there any particular friend you had along the way that you recall?

Mr. Buczek

Oh, I several good friends. I had some in Washington and had some in New Jersey. Our daughter was in New Jersey, so, every summer we would go to New Jersey to visit our daughter and we'd come home and rest a week or two and we would go to see my wife's mother in Portland, Oregon. And, I had friends over there in the service. We'd kind of compare notes, you know, visit each other. And, then there was a, one friend that lived in Iowa. Well, if we're going through Iowa, we'd have to stop and see them.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, you kept in contact with some of them that way, huh?

Mr. Buczek

Yeah, you'd make contact with one and maybe he'd had contact with 2 or 3 others and let you know what's going on.

Mr. Misenhimer

Right.

(Mrs. Buczek – Those were the instructors, but the battalion ...)

Mr. Buczek

Being in the school, it was just the instructors there, and the battalion they took their training

and went to different outfits.

(Mrs. Buczek – Well, the ones that were overseas, your overseas group)

Mr. Misenhimer

Your 1631st – you all didn't have any reunions?

Mr. Buczek

Well, the 1631st reunion, that's the one on Okinawa. We had in our tent, that's where we had our newsletter going around.

Mr. Misenhimer

Just a newsletter, right.

Mr. Buczek

That's about it.

(end of interview)

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