

**THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR**

**Center for Pacific War Studies**

**Fredericksburg, Texas**

**An Interview with**

**Douglas A. Skinner**

**San Benito, Texas**

**December 1, 2006**

**101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division**

**501<sup>st</sup> Paratrooper Infantry Regiment**

**Plane Shot Down on D-Day**

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is December 1, 2006. I am interviewing Mr. Douglas A. Skinner by telephone. His telephone number is area code 956-361-2728. His address is 332 Roberts Drive, San Benito, Texas 78586. This interview is in support of the National Museum of Pacific War, Center for Pacific War Studies, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer

Mr. Skinner, 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. First off what is your middle initial?

Mr. Skinner

A.

Mr. Misenhimer

The first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the Nimitz Museum to make sure it is okay with you. When I do these in person I give them to the man to read and sign. So let me read this to you. "Agreement Read." Is that okay with you?

Mrs. Skinner

I'm sure it would be Richard.

Mr. Misenhimer

I can send you a written copy of it.

Mrs. Skinner

He hardly has any hearing left.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is your birth date?

Mr. Misenhimer

Your father was a rancher during that time, right?

Mr. Skinner

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you all have your own garden?

Mr. Skinner

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And of course you could butcher your own cattle?

Mr. Skinner

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

But it was pretty tough wasn't it?

Mr. Skinner

Yes and no.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Skinner

I didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your last year of school?

Mr. Skinner

January 13, 1923.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Skinner

Fleetwood, Oklahoma.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Skinner

Yes. I had one brother and two sisters.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was your brother in World War II?

Mr. Skinner

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your father's occupation?

Mr. Skinner

He was a rancher.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you grew up during the Depression; how did the Depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Skinner

(Laughing) It was sort of like trying to eat off of a table without anything on it.

Mr. Skinner

I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer

5<sup>th</sup> grade, 6<sup>th</sup> grade somewhere in there?

Mr. Skinner

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you quit going to school what did you do then?

Mr. Skinner

We worked out there on the farm.

Mr. Misenhimer

December 7, 1941 Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Skinner

Yes a lot of it I can.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you when you heard about it?

Mr. Skinner

I was up in the mountains I think, working.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you go into the service?

Mrs. Skinner

Richard, Doug recently applied for an upgrade in his pension and he gave me the information and I wrote a letter to send to the military. I can send you a copy of that. It

gives you all the information about when he went in the service and what happened during the invasion. Would that help?

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you have it in front you; you can let me have it over the phone.

Mrs. Skinner

He went into the service on January 1, 1943. He volunteered. That was in Montague County, Nocona, Texas. He went into the Army. First he was sent to Fort Hood to Camp Walters for induction. The date of entry into the service was April 1, 1943. After leaving Fort Hood he shipped to Lindale , Kentucky where he was placed into the Armed Forces division. He volunteered for the Parachute Infantry and from there was shipped to Fort Benning, Georgia. That's all that was in this letter. I will send you a copy of this. We weren't married at that time so I didn't have any idea.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me ask him some questions. When you first went in, what was basic training like?

Mr. Skinner

We were trained to fight.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you do a lot of marching and that sort of thing?

Mr. Skinner

Yes sir, a lot it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you crawl under the infiltration course where they shot the live ammunition over you?

Mr. Skinner

Yes sir.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did that seem?

Mr. Skinner

I did it.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got into the paratroopers, how was that training?

Mr. Skinner

That was rough. You didn't know if you were going to come in tonight or in the morning.

Mr. Misenhimer

They had some towers I understand; did you parachute out of those towers?

Mr. Skinner

Yes. We went to cables first and then to those towers they had and then graduated up into the real McCoy.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was it like the first time you jumped out of an airplane?

Mr. Skinner

(laugh) It felt like the bottom fell out. I kind of was tricked. I remember how it was to do because when I was a kid we had those trolleys tied to trees and we did that. So that wasn't too bad.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you finished at Fort Benning where did you go then?

Mr. Skinner

Fort Hood I think it was.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do there?

Mr. Skinner

Trained.

Mr. Misenhimer

More training, huh?

Mr. Skinner

Yes.

Mrs. Skinner

According to this letter, you shipped from there to Scotland.

Mr. Misenhimer

You went to Scotland?

Mrs. Skinner

Yes that's what it says in this letter and then to England.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you travel to Scotland? On a ship?

Mrs. Skinner

Yes that's what it says in this letter, a ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was that ship pretty crowded?



Mr. Skinner

Yes. You thought you were in a suitcase.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was there much seasickness?

Mr. Skinner

No, not too bad.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do in Scotland?

Mr. Skinner

Trained.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then you went from there to England?

Mr. Skinner

Trained.

Mr. Misenhimer

The next thing you did was go into D Day, is that right?

Mr. Skinner

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

What unit were you in? What company?

Mr. Skinner

I don't remember.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you know what regiment you were in?

Mrs. Skinner

I think Doug has had a little stroke. He just doesn't remember like he used to.

Mr. Skinner

101<sup>st</sup> Division. 501<sup>st</sup> Airborne Regiment.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what did you all do to get ready to go across to jump?

Mr. Skinner

We were ready when they got us lined up in England. We were in England for I don't know, three or four weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've seen pictures of General Eisenhower speaking to some paratroopers. Did he speak to your group?

Mr. Skinner

Yes. We were the first bunch that went in on D Day.

Mr. Misenhimer

They had to postpone D Day one day. It was supposed to be the 5<sup>th</sup> and it wound up being the 6<sup>th</sup>, right?

Mr. Skinner

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

What time did you all take off to go over there?

Mr. Skinner

I don't know. It was dark as pitch.

Mr. Misenhimer

Somewhere around midnight I think.

Mr. Skinner

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was it like to jump into that dark country over there?

Mr. Skinner

Well if you really want to know how, get into the sack and jump out at night (laugh). It was black and you didn't know where you were going or what was going to take place.

Mrs. Skinner

According to what he told me, the plane was shot down.

Mr. Skinner

We bailed out the side, they shot the plane out from under us. I went out through the side of it; several of us did. Some of them didn't even get that far. It blew the plane up. Some of us, I don't know how many were left. There were about six or seven left that hit the ground. I didn't see anybody else but the two guys. We were in the briars, the trees and things.

Mr. Misenhimer

Just tell me what happened after you hit the ground.

Mr. Skinner

We got in where the cattle were and they shot the cattle down. There were three of us that

got out of it alive. I've forgot everything.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you land anywhere close to your objective?

Mr. Skinner

No. We were out in a place where we didn't even know where we were at. We hadn't ever had any briefing on it. We just had to fight our way out of there. There were three of us that got out alive.

Mr. Misenhimer

Out of how many?

Mr. Skinner

A plane load.

Mr. Misenhimer

There are about 20 some odd on a plane I think.

Mr. Skinner

Yes sir.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your first contact with the Germans?

Mr. Skinner

When we hit the ground the bullets were flying.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you have, a rifle?

Mr. Skinner

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What rifle did you have; the M-1?

Mr. Skinner

Yes I had an M-1. We ditched it and got a German rifle and two other rifles. We borrowed them from the ones that we annihilated.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you think the German rifle was better than the American rifle?

Mr. Skinner

We had more ammunition for it.

Mr. Misenhimer

As I recall, the German rifle was a bolt action. Is that right?

Mr. Skinner

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were short of ammunition for the M-1?

Mr. Skinner

Yes. We fought there I don't know how long but we finally got some bullets going around, picking them up after everybody else was shot.

Mr. Misenhimer

This was for the M-1, right?

Mr. Skinner

The M-1's and we had some of those little folding carbines.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the first city that you got to?

Mr. Skinner

I don't think we ever got to a town. We were off in pastures fighting. I don't even know; we never did get into town. I don't know what it was. We had parachutes hanging up everywhere.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand that the Germans had flooded a lot of the ground. Where you landed, was it flooded or dry?

Mr. Skinner

We were up above the water. We were supposed to capture that dam there and we never made it. Our plane was shot down.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you see your company commander next; or some of your officers?

Mr. Skinner

Colonel Johnson was killed when he hit the ground from the best that I could find out. With no communication and the dark you don't know where you are at or what you are doing,

Mr. Misenhimer

What rank did you have then?

Mr. Skinner

PFC.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about your Platoon Sergeant or someone like that; did you find any of them?

Mr. Skinner

No, it was just me and two more PFC's. We fought all the way out and then we got in some thicket trees. We annihilated all of them. There were about seven or eight of them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have hand grenades?

Mr. Skinner

We had them but they were already shot up at that time. Mine was in a pocket on the side of my pants and a bullet ripped them off the second day I was on the ground.

Mr. Misenhimer

You talked about the trees. Was this what they called the hedgerows?

Mr. Skinner

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

They were pretty tough to get through weren't they?

Mr. Skinner

Yes they were, they sure were.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were some other things that happened there?

Mr. Skinner

The funniest thing; it ain't funny anymore, but when I hit the ground my chute took off and it fell over a cow. She saved my life. She pulled me to the other end of the field

before they killed her. That's the only thing that I can say was funny.

Mr. Misenhimer

Who killed her, the Germans?

Mr. Skinner

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did the Germans have a lot of machine guns around there?

Mr. Skinner

No they didn't. They had very poor guns.

Mr. Misenhimer

Good.

Mr. Skinner

But they had plenty of them.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else happened?

Mr. Skinner

We did the best we could. We ate what we could get. We had to eat a horse.

Mr. Misenhimer

Could you cook the horse or did you have to eat it raw?

Mr. Skinner

We pan fried it over a fire.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you over there before you came back to England?



Mr. Skinner

I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer

About a week before you got back to England, or how long?

Mr. Skinner

Yes somewhere along in there. That was something that I didn't pay any attention to. I was so glad to get out of there.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how many of you all came back?

Mr. Skinner

Out of my bunch?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes.

Mr. Skinner

Myself and two guys.

Mr. Misenhimer

Just the three of you. Then when you got back to England what did you do then?

Mr. Skinner

They put us on a ship and we went to England I believe it was.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what did you do in England then?

Mr. Skinner

They doctored us up. Then from England we went to Scotland. They were just putting us

wherever they could find a place to board us.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you wounded over there or anything?

Mr. Skinner

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you wounded?

Mr. Skinner

In the ankle.

Mr. Misenhimer

What happened?

Mr. Skinner

I got shot before I hit the ground wherever I was at.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you got wounded before you ever landed?

Mr. Skinner

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

But you could still walk around?

Mr. Skinner

No but I could crawl to beat the band. (laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you jump anymore into France or somewhere?

Mr. Skinner

No, that was it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you involved in the Battle of the Bulge?

Mr. Skinner

I went back to the boat.

Mr. Misenhimer

The Battle of the Bulge, were you involved in that?

Mr. Skinner

No I wasn't in the Battle of the Bulge. We went from there and they shipped us somewhere over in England.

Mr. Misenhimer

I know the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne was involved in the Battle of the Bulge and they were at Bastogne where they were surrounded at Bastogne.

Mr. Skinner

Yes they were over there. I don't know how far they were over there from us. You have to remember we weren't close to anybody.

Mr. Misenhimer

After Normandy did you get into any more fighting?

Mr. Skinner

No. I had to stay in the hospital.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you in the hospital?

Mr. Skinner

About a year I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer

That long, okay. With your ankle?

Mr. Skinner

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

When that year was up what happened then?

Mr. Skinner

I finally got out and that was the end of it.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you come home?

Mr. Skinner

I can't remember anything now.

Mrs. Skinner

He went to England or Scotland, he can't remember. He was never sure where he was. He was transported to an old castle, which they were using as a makeshift hospital. I don't believe he said exactly when he came back home. He went to a hospital in San Antonio when he got out, when they sent him back. He was there for six months during which time he was awarded three convalescent leaves to visit family. When he had sufficiently recovered enough to return home he was placed on convalescent leave for about two months before being discharged on December 2, 1944.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay on December 2, 1944 he was discharged.

Mrs. Skinner

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Mr. Skinner, what was the highest rank you got to?

Mr. Skinner

PFC.

Mr. Misenhimer

What medals and ribbons did you get?

Mr. Skinner

I don't know. They are hanging up there on the wall.

Mrs. Skinner

He got a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star.

Mr. Misenhimer

You got the Combat Infantryman's Badge didn't you?

Mr. Skinner

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got out of the service what did you do then?

Mr. Skinner

I went back to driving a truck I think.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Skinner

Well yes for a long time.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever see any USO shows?

Mr. Skinner

Yes I saw some over there. Doris Day.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get home with any souvenirs?

Mr. Skinner

Yes but they stole them all from me before I got here.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Skinner

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was that?

Mr. Skinner

Not much. A cup of coffee.

Mr. Misenhimer

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

Mr. Skinner

They were fine I guess. I never had any dealings with them. I got along with them alright.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were home when the war got over, right?

Mr. Skinner

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you all have any kind of celebration when Japan surrendered and the war was over?

Mr. Skinner

No sir. I looked up at the moon and howled. (laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you had any reunions?

Mr. Skinner

No. The two other guys that were with me and the fifth group that I was in.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you use your GI Bill for anything?

Mr. Skinner

We bought a house.

Mr. Misenhimer

What would you consider your most frightening time over there?

Mr. Skinner

Trying to get out when all off those guys were firing over our heads.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever hear Axis Sally on the radio?

Mr. Skinner

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else that you recall from your time in the service?

Mr. Skinner

There will be something that comes along but I don't remember anything now.

Mr. Misenhimer

Mrs. Skinner, what are some of the stories that he might have told me.

Mrs. Skinner

Well really he never told anything until I wrote this letter for him. I was kind of shocked at a lot of this stuff. A lot of the guys just didn't mention anything.

Mr. Misenhimer

A lot of them didn't.

Mrs. Skinner

I've got in this letter everything he told me and of course he doesn't even remember that now, a lot of it. One of them that kind of struck me was when they were loading the plane to take them to England I guess to the hospital or maybe it was a ship, I don't remember, but they were shooting at them, the Germans were and they shot somebody's head off and it landed in his lap. No wonder these guys came home not talking.

Mr. Skinner

I didn't try to tell something gruesome. That head they just shot it plumb off.



Mrs. Skinner

Were you all on a boat?

Mr. Skinner

Yes.

Mrs. Skinner

And they were shooting at the boat?

Mr. Skinner

Yes, they were shooting at anything.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes they hadn't taken a lot of ground there by then. What did you think of the medics?

Did they do a good job?

Mr. Skinner

The guys that carried us in were medics.

Mr. Misenhimer

Mr. Skinner I want to thank you for your time today. Thank you for this information.

Mr. Skinner

I appreciate people doing what you are doing.

Mr. Misenhimer

We're just trying to preserve the history of our country at that time. We will be in touch with you later. Thank you and have a good day.

*(end of interview)*

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