

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Nimitz Education and Research Center
Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With

William L. Huffman
Houston, TX
November 30, 2018
U.S. Air Force
B-24 Navigator

Mr. Misenhimer:

My name is Richard Misenhimer, today is November 30, 2018. I am interviewing Mr. William L. Huffman by telephone. His phone number is 713-782-9693. His address is 2508 Westerman, C-312, Houston, Texas, 77056. 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.

Bill, 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. Huffman:

Oh I didn't do a whole lot, go ahead.

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.

"Agreement Read"

Is that okay with you?

Mr. Huffman:

Golly, I have no idea. Am I liable to get into something that I don't want to?

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, no way. Next thing I need 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. Huffman:

Gosh I don't know, let me tell you that I am now 95 years old. And it's not very likely that you're gonna call me next time and get a response. So does it make any difference? Let's try it, but go ahead, I'm gonna show you that, well go ahead, go ahead.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What is your birthdate?

Mr. Huffman:

August 22, 1923.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And where were you born?

Mr. Huffman:

In Houston, Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Huffman:

At that time no.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You didn't have any relatives in World War II?

Mr. Huffman:

At that time, yeah I did have. But I've never, he must have died. You remember that all those people that, and just before, about that time that died from flu?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes sir.

Mr. Huffman:

Millions of people died under that. And I think he did too. He was in the Navy at the time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That was 1918, was that flu epidemic.

Mr. Huffman:

Well I don't know when he died to tell the truth. But I know it's just before it, yeah go ahead.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Huffman:

My mother was Willie Maude Akridge.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And your father?

Mr. Huffman:

Joel Reese Huffman.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Huffman:

Very badly (*laugh*). We were living in Houston, I was born in Houston and we were doing pretty good. My dad was a carpenter and there was things going on there, suddenly it wasn't. And he had to sell or give, get rid of everything and go back to East Texas where he grew up, had kin folks. And you know somehow make enough to find something to eat and sleep in, if you know what I mean.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then where did you go to high school?

Mr. Huffman:

High school in Pasadena, Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And what year did you finish high school?

Mr. Huffman:

'41, 1941.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Huffman:

Yeah, uh-huh, I was playing football. I was going to Texas A&M and it was a Sunday.

Mr. Misenhimer:

It was a Sunday, uh-huh.

Mr. Huffman:

And suddenly somebody came out there and talked to the upper classman. And they all dropped, quit playing ball and went and got their personal clothes and stuff and left. And that was the end of it. We didn't really know what was taking place, but they soon knew.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened? After you heard about that what happened then?

Mr. Huffman:

Well those upper classman, at that time everybody at A&M was in uniform you know. And of course I was just a kid and I never saw them again. And I saw pictures later on of some of them. Like, oh I don't know. I don't know where it was, go ahead.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then when did you enter the service?

Mr. Huffman:

In 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer:

In 1943?

Mr. Huffman:

I think so.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you volunteer or were you drafted?

Mr. Huffman:

Well you didn't have a choice very much. The only thing you had a sort of a choice is what type you're in. Now all the time I was still at home, I was in the service I was working and all that, but going to school and all, I can't remember what it was. But we were at home but still enlisted, you know what I mean?

Mr. Misenhimer:

So when did you go on active duty?

Mr. Huffman:

In '43.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And where did you go for your basic training?

Mr. Huffman:

You know the biggest place in North Texas, golly, it's so long ago. What's the name of that big place where everybody went? I'll think of it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was your basic training?

Mr. Huffman:

Well it wasn't as bad for me, it was in July when I went up there in North Texas. Hotter than a hen in hades and the northern boys would pass out and they'd throw them in a bunch of ice to thaw them out. If they said they got used to that hot weather, that's when they got, when they really got in service.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now was this at Wichita Falls?

Mr. Huffman:

Wichita Falls is right, that's right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what all did you do in basic?

Mr. Huffman:

The only thing I remember there was that we did all sorts of training from daylight till dark, marching and all sorts of stuff. And I guess we got used to that temperature. First thing I knew we went to a college, a little old college up someplace, to do some basic training. And most of that was bookwork. And they gave us a little old airplane to train on, little, you know little bitty plane. And we went from there. It didn't last long, it'd been, you would think in some basic training on it too. It was a girls' school that they took over for military work. And it was good

and bad. It was better than we had before and it still had a heck of a lot going on. Then we flew a little bit, well didn't fly, we had an instructor with us and he'd use the little thing. From there we went to San Antonio I think, San Antonio, and did some more basic stuff. Mostly marching and you know basic military training. Let's see, from there we went to ..., boy it's hard to recall all of this stuff. We went to someplace for primary. I went to someplace, North Texas again for primary training. And we you know did basic stuff. And from there we went to someplace for basic using a BT-13, something like that. And at that time I was doing real good, in fact my instructor would have me do things for the other fellows that were having trouble getting started. And I was enjoying that. And suddenly they needed pilots overseas. You probably remember that they had a hellacious thing in Europe someplace, I forget what it was. And then all of the pilots they could roundup, were sent over there and that affected us. And most everybody you know that had some experience along in there about the Russians and doing things to help make that thing work over there in Germany or wherever it was. And in that deal that's when I got the axe. I was flying a BT-13 and one day we went to a remote field to practice some sort of landing, I forget what it was, and had my instructor in my plane with me. And I was supposed to, he said, "Hurry up and land this thing." He was the instructor and said, "Hurry up and land this thing." Said, "I'm supposed to be on the ground and control everything that was on." So I tried to land twice and the other planes would cut me out. So he grabbed that thing and sort of, well the other planes went on and landed, and that turned me in. That was near the end of the war, you remember that I'm sure. And my instructor took the plane and landed and hustled another plane out of the landing thing. And when he did that why, that night he went overseas to help land in Germany. And I found out I was washed out of that pilot school. So I was, you know P.O.'d this, unhappy as all get-out. But first thing I knew they sent me and eight other guys that got the same axe like I did, were sent on a plane, on a train plane, to San Antonio, Texas. And finally we were changed to military training school. And we went to a different thing. So I ended up in the service as a navigator. You know what a navigator is?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah navigator, yes sir.

Mr. Huffman:

And that's the way I ended up from then on. And they made me a Lieutenant and all that stuff. It was such a weird situation then, I went through four training schools to different things and to change our schooling. And the first one was to go overseas and we thought we was gonna be shooting stars and stuff all for the rest of the war. That's not true. Then they had other stuff, they taught us to cope with those Japs that would ..., I forget what they called them. And we learned to cope with that. And the next one was, they changed and I forget what the third one was. But the last one was, we could see things in the water. And we could see into the water with this, they called it ..., let's see, it's rough getting old and can't come up with all this stuff. Anyway we could see the plane and see the sea into the water, what was down there. And boy the Air Force thought we were hot stuff then. And we would, what it really was was the Japs would, the Japs had a whole lot of islands in the Pacific around their planes, around Japan. And they could fly those things at night, and still killing us right and left. So we went through those as fast as we could and was having a heck of a time with it. And of course our people were just tickled to death that we could stop those ships that were headed, Jap ships that were headed for those, full of soldiers, were full of people that could work, stay there in the Pacific. But once we got going with that, ability to cope at night, well our people were just tickled to death. And low and behold the war was over. What else you need to know?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now you were in the Army Air Corps right?

Mr. Huffman:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now at A&M had you been in the corps there?

Mr. Huffman:

No, I was in the, I was just in the military at the first semester in '41. I went to A&M in the fall,

stayed one semester and then it started, you know in December of '41.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So how long were you at A&M?

Mr. Huffman:

Just one semester that first year. And then I went home and went to *(laugh)* work, there was plenty of work in those days. And I worked until '43 when I went on active duty, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now I understand you were a navigator on a B-24, is that correct?

Mr. Huffman:

Correct.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And that was here in the States, is that right?

Mr. Huffman:

That's right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was it like to navigate that B-24?

Mr. Huffman:

Well I tell you, B-24 had a Well the navigator and the bombardier both was in the nose of the durn thing. And the navigator was busy as you can imagine as a man being busy. And the bombardier he was busy only when he was ready to drop something. And in the meantime he was smoking and talking and interfering. He had been a military soldier before transferring into the Air Force. Of course he's up there in the nose with me, wanting to talk and smoke and all that crap. And I was as busy as you can possibly be. But somehow you get through it. But it goes on.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you were on this B-24 where were you stationed at that point?

Mr. Huffman:

In the nose, you know, you've never seen a B-24?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where was the plane stationed, what town?

Mr. Huffman:

Now say that again.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What air base were you at on the B-24?

Mr. Huffman:

Gosh we were, what's the big one in Virginia, not Virginia, yeah Virginia.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I'm not sure, but you were in Virginia then right?

Mr. Huffman:

Yeah. That's where we got all that, all that stuff to, where they gave us the special For instance, when we first, I forget of what phase of it was in, but we went to a, I'll think of that name of that big base in a minute, but we began to cope over water when we got to there. So we could cope with those Japs, all those islands out in the Pacific that were giving us bad news. But before that we learned to cope with a one man ship that had one guy in there and he didn't want to live, he wanted to kill Americans, I can't remember all those names and things. But after we got through with that, after they decided we went to the, that old B-24 had a bigger, a bigger, let's see. Oh yeah, we dropped our alternate gunner, you know the little ball on the bottom to shoot on things that got below us, you know what I'm talking about don't you?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, the bottom turret.

Mr. Huffman:

Yeah, they let him go and gave us another officer. And I can't remember what his name was, but he had another plan where he could detect what's in the water under us. And he did things with that and I did things with it and oh hell what a mess. But I can't think of the name. And we

fought, the three of us, the regular radioman and me and the fellow that ran that, oh I'll think of it in a minute. Run that new

Mr. Misenhimer:

The radar?

Mr. Huffman:

The "Mickey Crew", they called it a "Mickey" thing. It was a powerful radio that he could look down and detect things in the water. And that was a strange thing, you know here we were, you know every airplane had to have somebody to guide it around and that was me. And then they had a guy, let's see, anyway there was three of us like that. Anytime you see a big plane it's got a wire hung out the back so he can get to just about any place in the world with that big antenna, and you heard about that I guess?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes sir, uh-hum.

Mr. Huffman:

Yeah. And all the time the "Mickey" man had that fancy radio, the navigator who led it had to talk to any and everybody and keep you on, where y'all were and what were you doing and all that. And let's see the third one, but we were constantly fighting over that damn wire hanging out the back of that plane about a hundred yards. Of course if you can't get an airplane antenna, you're radio won't work. So three of us were fussing all the time. I remember on a, last time we were at the base out of Virginia, I wish I could remember those names, and the instructor said, "Well that's it boys, but I want to give you one word, one caution." Said, we were B-24 as you know. He says, "Anybody that will fly over a Jap convoy full of cruisers and things like that," says, "Anybody that will fly over those in a B-24 deserves to be shot down." (*Laughing*) And so, he was just making light of it. But it was more truth than he wanted to expand on. Oh I don't know I don't think I've done you any good, but....

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the longest flight you ever took in your B-24?

Mr. Huffman:

Well yeah, you know you have to think about all that stuff. When we were stationed on the coast of California and when we were practicing night missions, we'd fly from near the coast of California. You'd start off in California and it goes over the coast, I can't think of the name of that little old island but we'd turn on that then south and head down on way off of Mexico down in there and then come back and you know do all that stuff and be graded on it. But it was easy enough, unless a plane engine quit or you know something like that. And if I could remember all that stuff I could tell you, talk all night I guess, but I can't remember that much.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you were in the B-24 what outfit were you in? Was it a certain group or anything?

Mr. Huffman:

No, we never did get that, we first learned to cope with, go on a mission with daylight or night. In that B-24 you go out in the Pacific, say it may last all night. Okay and then you come back and land at the ..., but yeah I remember when that happened there's always a, hotter than hades then in that country. And when they'd get back there was a thing, I think it's Headra or something like that, an airfield that was not used much anymore, but people would land there when they had trouble or anything. And when we got off of a long mission all night and land, we came towards that thing, we'd land there. And then *(laugh)* the Air Force won't allow you to swim naked or in your shorts or anything like that but we would swim in our suits, our flight suit *(laugh)*. And that was funny to see ten guys horsing around and swimming in flight suits. But easy enough when you got back in that plane at night, as hot as it was, they would be dry before we got back to March or anyplace like that, March Base.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now this outfit you were in with the B-24, how was the morale in that outfit?

Mr. Huffman:

Pretty good. We knew it wasn't any fight or anything like that, but with the jillion of them and they all flew. It was too bad, the nose that me and the navigator and the bombardier had to be in.

It sometimes got pretty nose-y and bad, but we lived through it. I'm not much help.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Huffman:

No I sure didn't, uh-uh. I've seen it on the radio and things like that, not at that time but since then.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Huffman:

No, we never saw anything about the Red Cross. Oh you'd see something, but not for us, we'd see it on the base or something like that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Huffman:

My dad was a carpenter of sorts. He did in, in civilian work there was insulating things. Mostly he handled things that would, like ice houses, all the things that, he put up slabs of cork, what do you call it? Anyway he was always, and anytime I had any time that (*laugh*) wasn't government bound well he wanted me to be doing his kind of work. You know there's always a shortage in the Army, and you know in the service.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Huffman:

Oh I don't know, I wasn't, it was interesting, but I didn't shake up or anything.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on August the 15th of '45 Japan surrendered, did y'all have any kind of a celebration?

Mr. Huffman:

No. I can't remember what we did that day. The first thing I really remember is I think we saw,

it was a movie, that movie of it of standing up on that ship. We sort of, we knew what happened and got word of it. It was a little bit of this and that and first thing you know it was over. It wasn't any

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you had any reunions of your outfit since you've been out?

Mr. Huffman:

No and I feel sad about it. We were out in Idaho and we'd been there several months waiting for the thing to be over with. And it was all so gradual that we didn't, one day there was a thing on a memo there, it said that so and so can be discharged and a train will be available at so and so. So it wasn't any whoop and holler and you know just sort of like going home. I'll never forget the, you know as long as you're in the service you sort of

End of side 1 of tape.

Beginning of side 2 of tape.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you got out did you use your G.I. Bill for anything?

Mr. Huffman:

Yeah, to go back to college I did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go to college?

Mr. Huffman:

Let's see, I went in December of '45 I guess, I guess December of '45 I started back to college and finished not too long after that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go to college, which college did you go to?

Mr. Huffman:

I thought everybody got that.

Mr. Huffman:

If I did, I don't remember when I got it, I don't know when. I didn't know anything about it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Of the various bases you were stationed at which one did you like best?

Mr. Huffman:

Golly, Army base I liked (*laugh*). I guess March, March out in California. And if I thought awhile I might change, but that's the first thing that popped in my mind.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And how long were you there?

Mr. Huffman:

Less than a year, probably six or eight months I guess, I'm just guessing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything else you recall from your time in the service?

Mr. Huffman:

Well no, not really. The way they did in pilot school, I sure as hell didn't enjoy that. But since they sent me to another school and I got to fly and all that still so. But no one likes to get ejected like that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now I'd like to get a phone number, how many sons and daughters do you have?

Mr. Huffman:

I've got, I had four, a daughter and three sons but one son died.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I'm sorry to hear that. I'd like to get a phone number for one of your sons if I could. What are your sons' first names?

Mr. Huffman:

Well Mark, M-a-r-k, is the oldest one. And the second one is Scott.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Are these sons or grandsons?

Mr. Huffman:

They're sons.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where do they live?

Mr. Huffman:

Scott lives down around South Texas, he just bought a home down there. And my oldest son, Mark, he's twenty-five, no not twenty-five, sixty-five I guess. And Scott is about sixty-two, something like that. And Susie, the girl is, I'm not sure what she is. She's moving to Europe right about now. Her husband works for a company and he goes out and decides all over the world to see where they're building things to see if his company wants to indulge in it and bid on it, and you know to go and stuff, it's interesting to be involved in it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where does Mark live?

Mr. Huffman:

Mark lives here.

Mr. Misenhimer:

In Houston?

Mr. Huffman:

He lives here in Houston, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well Bill that's all the questions I have unless you've thought of anything else about World War II.

Mr. Huffman:

Well I'm sorry that I couldn't remember so much. But when you think about it, that's a long time ago. I hope I meet you some day.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well thank you for your time today and thank you for your service to our country.

Mr. Huffman:

Well if you're ever in Houston and want to have a good time give me a call.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Will do, I'll do that, okay.

Mr. Huffman:

Very good, take it easy.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, good-bye now.

Mr. Huffman:

Bye now.

(End of interview.)

Transcribed by:

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