

**The National Museum of the Pacific War
Fredericksburg, Texas**

**Harold Gibbons
Sergeant Okinawa**

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is July 11, 2001. I am interviewing Mr. Harold Gibbons. This interview is taking place in his home 2018 Boulevard in Rochester, Indiana. This interview is in support of the National Museum of Pacific War Studies for preservation of historical information relating to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer: Mr. Gibbons, I want to thank you for taking time to do this today.

Mr. Gibbons: OK

Mr. Misenhimer: Let me ask you first off – where were you born?

Mr. Gibbons: In Marshall County.

Mr. Misenhimer: OK, near Plymouth, just north of here.

Mr. Gibbons: No, yeah. It's southwest of Argos. About half way between Argos and Leiters Ford.

Mr. Misenhimer: When were you born?

Mr. Gibbons: 1 – 4 – 23.

Mr. Misenhimer: OK and what were your parent's names?

Mr. Gibbons: L. J. and Mildred Gibbons.

Mr. Misenhimer: And where were they born?

Mr. Gibbons: Marshall County.

Mr. Misenhimer: What did your father do?

Mr. Gibbons: Farmer.

Mr. Misenhimer: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

Mr. Gibbons: Four brothers and one sister. No, three brothers and one sister.

Mr. Misenhimer: Are they all still living?

Mr. Gibbons: Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer: Were any of those in World War II?

Mr. Gibbons: We was all in except my sister.

Mr. Misenhimer: Where did you go to school?

Mr. Gibbons: Richland Center. That's where I finished up. I graduated from Richland Center.

Mr. Misenhimer: When did you go into the military?

Mr. Gibbons: 1 – 22 – 43. I got my draft notice on my 20th birthday. So, I went to Fort Benjamin Harrison and from there I went to Camp Walters, Texas and took eight weeks of infantry basic training. Left there and arrived

in Los Angeles April Fool's Day '43 and got off the train and waded water to the top of my shoes. And that's the only rain we got all the time we were in California and I was there till the 15th of September. Left there to go to Fort Custer, Michigan. Took police training and judo and left there the 1st of November and went to Atlanta, Nebraska for a German Prison Camp. We didn't get any prisoners till 26th of November. They give us something to do; we hauled coal five days a week. Got all the coal in that we needed for the winter. Guarded those German prisoners – we got 1500 of 'em, the first one trainload came in out of Rommel's outfit. We had some purty tuff looking characters. That hadn't changed clothes since they left Germany or France where they were brought in here out of and some of those guys couldn't stand up in here.

Mr. Misenhimer: Very tall, huh?

Mr. Gibbons: You bet and rough. We had some real good boys in that bunch and when we got them in there and in the spring we started in with them planting potatoes and sugar beets and doing work for farmers. Take them out anywhere from 10 to 40 in a bunch and they give you 15 rounds of ammunition. That's all they give you. German prisoners, you know that. They worked real good. They had a couple of 'em that gave us problems, but a lot of them wanted to stay right here in the United States. They were good workers.

Mr. Misenhimer: Were they enlisted men or officers?

Mr. Gibbons: Both. We had just about as many officers as we did enlisted men. They all done their work. The officers didn't have to work, but if they wanted to they could go out and go with the boys. The rest of them did and we worked out there till I run a group of 40 picking up potatoes from July until September. That's when I got my transfer to Camp Clayburn, Louisiana for heavy equipment repair mechanic. Course I worked road construction a year and a half before I went in service and it took me a long time to get my transfer into the engineers. I was there

from September till the first of May. That's when we left to go to Seattle, Washington to overseas.

Mr. Misenhimer: That would have been May '44.

Mr. Gibbons: Yeah, May '44, we went down there September '44. May '45 was when we went overseas. We left there and got in Okinawa June 1st and the place to set up camp was as bare as this tabletop. We had to pour our own footers for our shops and truck mechanic and machine shops and everything. We hadn't been there but about two weeks, maybe three and we had our tents all set up nice, you know. We had one of those hurricanes that blew everything down. So, the next day we spent everybody was fixing their tents and we didn't have solid coral. We had to take and drove steel posts in there. Everybody put a double tent on. We built it up this high and made a board bed high.

Mr. Misenhimer: About four feet above the ground.

Mr. Gibbons: You've seen 'em and everybody tied them off. We went through four typhoons and didn't lose nothing after that. So we was out there to help get the place set up and we just about, oh, I had to pour the concrete and get them started at that. Get the coral for the cement and run a shovel to load that up and got 4000 ton of raw cement come in on a boat and I had to unload that with a crane. So we was getting pretty well set up, I'd say about $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{2}{3}$ set up and they come and got me and got me down to the office. I thought I was in trouble. So this Lieutenant said to me, "Did you run that crane out there?" I said, "Yeah, I can run that crane." He said, "We want you to run the 3rd shift to unload equipment, unload trucks." So I go to work at midnight and get off at 7:00 in the morning, ate breakfast and then I had to go out there and work with them guys till noon or 3:00 in the afternoon helping them out. Then go eat supper, go to bed, get up at midnight and they worked my fanny off. I didn't get no glory for it. So when the war was over with I worked I think about a week or two weeks after the war was over with, they put me back there working on

equipment. Then I got into it with our company commander, well there were 17 of us all together, got into it with our company commander. We didn't belong to the Masons and course he knowed it and Masons are master mechanics didn't know a monkey wrench from a crescent wrench. That's how much he knew about equipment and our First Sergeant was the same way. He got one of them enlistments where he got automatic promotion. Same with that company commander, when he got in service, he was a salesman for a Caterpillar dealership in St. Louis and he got a direct commission. Him and I got into it, well there were 17 of us all together. So we decided to get out of that outfit and we went over to the headquarters, unknownest to him and we all reenlisted for 18 months to get out of the outfit. We was loading up a truck, getting all our gear on the truck to get on the boat. Here come a colonel. He said, "Sergeant Gibbons, I want to talk to you." "Now what have I done? He said, "I'll let you know. You should have got a hold of me before you reenlisted." I said, "Why?" "I was going to give you a new company commander. You'd got a raise in pay and got in another outfit." I said, "Too late now." He said, "No, you just go home and get your 90 days and come back and you automatically in 90 days, what do you call it?"

Mr. Misenhimer: Staff Sergeant?

Mr. Gibbons: No, the highest rating you can get.

Mr. Misenhimer: Master Sergeant?

Mr. Gibbons: Higher than him.

Mr. Misenhimer: Sergeant Major?

Mr. Gibbons: Sergeant Major. He said 90 days, in three months or less, you'll be Sergeant Major. OK. Well, I went home and I had been writing to her and we went and got married. That put a stop to all of that going back overseas. But I should have went, I imagine. But, I made depot over there running motor grader and I made the depot that covered about 20 acres lining cats up and all kinds of equipment and trucks and

everything that was good. A lot of stuff that wasn't any good or fit to overhaul, we took it down to Naha Harbor and shoved it over the bank into the ocean. Truck load after truckload. How deep that hole was, I don't know. I was down there that one day they took a beat up tractor down there and shoved it off. It just went rolling down there and it went out of sight. So I don't know how deep that water was. But,

Mr. Misenhimer: When did you build baseball diamonds?

Mr. Gibbons: In the spare time. I built seven of them. Six, plus ours and built a basketball court for us and nobody else could run a motor grader. I wasn't the best in the world, I knowed how cause I worked road construction a year and half before I went in service. I run about everything I could get my hands on.

So I come home, got my 90 day furlough and went back down to Camp Atterbury and they said, "Sergeant Gibbons, you're supposed to go to Okinawa. Did you get married?" I said, "Yes, I did." Go in that room. So I went in there and I set there for two weeks. Oh, I don't know, there were 25 or 30 of us. Four or five of us got sent to Fort Knox, Kentucky, 2682nd U.S. Disciplinary Barracks. That's where they brought all them guys back that steal and got in trouble overseas and had a lot of time to serve. They brought them back and put them in those barracks and we had to do their mail for 'em and get their supplies. I ended up being in charge of quarters and company jeep driver. Then I drove the jeep for the Service Officer and drove a school bus for a few days. Decided I didn't need that. So I ended up driving the Service Officer.

Mr. Misenhimer: This would have been when?

Mr. Gibbons: That would've been '47.

Mr. Misenhimer: '47?

Mr. Gibbons: '46 and '47. I come home from Okinawa the 2nd or 3rd of January '46 and took us five days from Seattle to Camp Atterbury on a World War I train. This is comical now.

Mr. Misenhimer: Tell me about that train.

Mr. Gibbons: We got on the train at night and come through there. We were only running about 2 or 3 miles an hour. It was just beginning to get daylight and you couldn't see nothing. It was in the mountains in the snow. All we had was a path to go through and the heat went out in our car. First little town we stopped at we asked, we had colonels, you name it in that bunch of guys, all reenlistees. This colonel said to the train conductor, you hold that train right there till we get back from that liquor store over there. About seven or eight of us went over there and we carried beer just for that one car and we didn't have no heat when we got out of that mountain. That old World War I train, I'll never forget this as long as I live, we tore all those old wooden arms off of them seats and built a fire on the floor of that train. We finally got heat in, can't think of that town in Minnesota right off hand, finally got us back heat.

Mr. Misenhimer: Didn't the fire make a lot of smoke?

Mr. Gibbons: We didn't care. I think it had enough ventilation on that old train, it didn't make much difference. It sucked the smoke right out through it. Them old seats set

Mr. Misenhimer: Were all you guys smoking?

Mr. Gibbons: We didn't worry about that. We was waiting for the first time we could get heat.

Mr. Misenhimer: You were getting happy, too. Weren't you?

Mr. Gibbons: We didn't care. We was all reenlistees. We had seven guys in that outfit that lied about their ages and they got on the ship, they was only 17 years old. I didn't tell you that part of that on the ship coming back. We left Okinawa 12 hours ahead of a typhoon. The ship that left ahead of us that morning got out there and anyway; it broke half in two. There was boat with them and they salvaged every man – never lost a man off that. We got out there on the third day and one engine went out on us. We only ran three knots and they come there and they said

there's three master mechanics up here and I was one of them. We need you to help on this engine. Down in the hole we went and you know, they wouldn't let us touch a wrench. All we got to do was wash parts. I told that one sailor down there, I said, "Why don't you let us help you guys. We'd get along faster." "We don't want you guys touching a damn wrench". I said, "Well, we're heavy equipment mechanics." That don't make any difference. Got the parts all washed and put together, built a fire in it, threw that thing in full gear and it still didn't make any difference. We done it that way all the way till we got in, I suppose, within a half a days run to Seattle. They sort of simmered down a little bit, but that's awful. We had to sit on the deck to eat. They didn't have any tables set up. No chairs, no place.

Mr. Misenhimer: Were did you sleep on the ship?

Mr. Gibbons: They had beds clear to the ceiling. I think it was four high and you had a strap to tie yourself in when you got to sleep. It just rocked you to sleep. We had a colored captain of the ship in charge of us GIs and he had some crooks on there. How they got on there, I don't know. But everyone had their mustering out pay and them guys was taking them to the cleaners. So I was in there watching'em one day and I went to that captain and I said, "Captain, them guys are playing with marked decks and loaded dice." "How'd you know?" I said, "Everytime they get the deck, everytime they deal, they would win the hand." He went in there and stood behind them a little bit and said, "Let me see that deck of cards." He stuck them in his pocket and the guy said, "Those are my cards." They ain't anymore. He went over to the dice game and the guy had two or three set of dice. He had a set in one hand and a set in the other hand and he'd shoot these and then get the other pair out. They had better than \$10,000 of them guys money and they had to pay every bit of it back. That tickled me. I didn't get involved in it. I did get involved to get the captain to watch what was going on. He didn't know what was going on.

Mr. Misenhimer: Now, this was on the ship coming back?

Mr. Gibbons: Yeah. That was after we got the boat fixed. We got back two days before Thanksgiving, no, two days before Christmas and we stayed on the ship till New Year's Eve. They got us off the ship and fed us a big meal. Soon as we got done eating, we put our fannies on the train and we headed east. Colder than the devil in those mountains. I got out, supposed to be 18 months with the reenlistment and we had too much rank and they just discharged us all, let's see, six months ahead of time. Course, that didn't bother me. I got home one day and I went to work on the road the next day. I don't know how they found out I was coming home, but they did.

Mr. Misenhimer: From your rating, ? three.

Mr. Gibbons: RA – regular army serial number. 35581315RA

Mr. Misenhimer: What day did you get out?

Mr. Gibbons: It was March, if I remember right, it was March 17th.

Mr. Misenhimer: Of what year?

Mr. Gibbons: '47. Went in in '43 and got out in '47. Four years, one month, and seven days. My one brother was in one year and the youngest brother was in two years. My brother Bob was in four years, the same as I was.

Mr. Misenhimer: What areas did they serve in?

Mr. Gibbons: Gene was in the Navy and my youngest one was in the Navy in China during the Korean War, then brother Bob was in the Philippines.

Mr. Misenhimer: Bob was in the regular Army.

Mr. Gibbons: My brother Roy was in just one year. He was in Missouri, just stayed there. When he had his year up, they sent him home.

Mr. Misenhimer: This would have been after the war or when?

Mr. Gibbons: Yeah, he got out 'fore I did. Well, the war was over with. Bob and Gene went in the '50s and Roy went in '45, I think, maybe '46. He got out 'fore I did. I got out of there and worked road construction for 45 years.

Mr. Misenhimer: Let's go back to the time when you were in basic training. Where did you say you took that?

Mr. Gibbons: Camp Walters Texas. At Mineral Wells, Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer: How long were you there?

Mr. Gibbons: Eight weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer: Was that infantry basic?

Mr. Gibbons: Yeah, I had that wrote down here. Basic training from February 1st to March 24th of '43. Left there and got to California April 1st '43 till September 15th '43. Went to Fort Custer Michigan. Was there till November 1st taking military police training and judo. I was the smallest brat in the whole bunch and they made me take that judo when all the rest of the guys were great big characters. And I threw those 225 pound men on the ground so quick it could make your head swim. I was fast, I guess.

Went from there to Atlanta, Nebraska where we had them German prisoners.

Mr. Misenhimer: Back when you were in basic, do you remember any incidents that happened? Anything funny?

Mr. Gibbons: Well, the only thing in basic training, we went on a 30 mile hike and there was a battalion, we was in D Company and everyone of our guys in D Company, about 25 or 30 men, and everyone of us made the 30 mile hike. I was carrying another guy's pack and another guy's gun, a Browning automatic rifle, which weighed 17 pounds and a couple other guys carried their field pack, but they all made it back. Well, these were the only ones that did. For the A Company, they had to get the ambulance to carry two or three of them back to camp. Sergeant Dunn said, "We ain't going to do that with this bunch. We're all going to make it." And we did.

Mr. Misenhimer: How long did it take you to make the 30 mile hike?

Mr. Gibbons: We left about 8:00 in the morning and we got stopped for lunch for 30 minutes and we got back in there around 3:00 in the afternoon. A lot of

that we went on double time. They double timed us for a ways and then you would walk a way and then they would double time you.

Mr. Misenhimer: What was the weather like?

Mr. Gibbons: Hot, about like it is today.

Mr. Misenhimer: 70s, low 80s?

Mr. Gibbons: Yeah. But we did have, I was going to put that in here and I forgot it. We went out on maneuvers when we was down there and we left that morning. Back in the northwest there was a big old cloud hanging back there. It was 75 degrees and they said everybody that wants to can leave their overcoat to home cause I don't think you're going to need it. I said I was going to take my overcoat along and both blankets so I have something to sleep on. Some of those guys didn't and at 4:30 in the afternoon it was down to 4 above zero. That Texas wind was blowing about 50 – 60 miles an hour and down there they hadn't been in business very long. They only had 4 or 5 trucks. There was four battalions of us out there. The ones that couldn't make it, they would load on the trucks. We had to walk that 18 miles back that night; cold, I'm telling you.

Mr. Misenhimer: That's what they call a Blue Norther down there.

Mr. Gibbons: Blue Norther, you bet it was a Blue Norther. Two days later it rained in the morning and that afternoon the dust was blowing so hard you couldn't see from here to that tree there. That's the way it was down there. Parade field down there was as flat as this table top and it was probably two or three acres. Might have been a little bigger than that, I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer: When you took your 30 mile hike, did you have to take those backpacks and your guns?

Mr. Gibbons: You bet. You took everything with you. Your canteen, your lunch, it all had to go with you.

Mr. Misenhimer: Anything else happen down there that you recall?

Mr. Gibbons: At Camp Walters? Well, when it was over with, when we got our basic training, see they wouldn't let us go into Mineral Wells cause that town was loaded with VD. They wouldn't let any of us go in there. So Sergeant Dunn and Corporal Johnson went and made arrangements at a tavern and restaurant. We're going in for supper and we're buying. You're going to get two beers and that's it. Well, we all went in there and they had four buses. They had us all jammed in four buses. But, anyway we ordered a round of two beers and they shut the doors so nobody else could get in. We ate our supper and drank our two beers and come back to the barracks. Two days later we were headed to California.

Mr. Misenhimer: That's where you took your MP training?

Mr. Gibbons: No, I took my

(back of first tape)

Mr. Misenhimer: Ok, when you left Camp Walter, you went to California and what was your training there?

Mr. Gibbons: We wasn't in training there. We read them balloons up on a big cable. When you have an air raid. We didn't have any air raids, but we had to practice. We run'em up once or twice, each shift would run it up and so they didn't forget how to do it. They took them down and took everything included in our outfit. Put it in storage and we left for Fort Custer Michigan, Military Police training.

Mr. Misenhimer: What was the purpose of the balloons?

Mr. Gibbons: Air raids.

Mr. Misenhimer: How long were you in California?

Mr. Gibbons: From April 1st to the 15th of September.

Mr. Misenhimer: You worked on the balloons all that time?

Mr. Gibbons: Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer: Every day you put them up and took them down.

Mr. Gibbons: Yeah, we had three shifts running 8 hour shifts. You'd be on for 8 hours and then you go off for 36 hours, two days, whatever. The rest of the time you were either running uptown or sleeping.

Mr. Misenhimer: What town were you near?

Mr. Gibbons: Wilmington, right next to San Pedro. We was right at the harbor where they went to Catalina Island to load the ships. You wouldn't believe what they put on them ships. Lumber, ammunition, and guns. They brought everything in there, truckload after truckload, 24 hours a day.

Mr. Misenhimer: Plus all your food.

Mr. Gibbons: Yeah, food went on there too. We was right across the street and they wouldn't let us in that gate when they was unloading that stuff. Those big guns, the barrels of them was 35, 40 feet long and they had to bring a crane out there and unload them. Put'em on a cart and bring'em in.

Mr. Misenhimer: How much do you think they weighed?

Mr. Gibbons: 15 - 20 ton, maybe more than that. They was coastal guns.

Mr. Misenhimer: They based them there in California?

Mr. Gibbons: No, they were going to ship them overseas. Every so often they had one and you could walk over them and you didn't know they was there in the ground. Whenever they pressed that button, that automatically opened up and the gun came up out of the ground ready to fire. They had a couple false air raids to make sure everything was still running. We run those balloons up and down; they let us run them up, once on each shift. Unless you were told otherwise.

Mr. Misenhimer: What rank did you have at that time?

Mr. Gibbons: Private. Out there in Nebraska when I got transferred from Fort Custer Michigan, I was put up for PFC. Me and three or four other guys went to town and come back and woke everybody up in the barracks. Four times. We was all up for rating and we all four got busted before we ever got it.

So finally, Captain ? said, "I'm going to make all four of you guys PFC. Will you behave from now on?" "Yeah." So we did.

So then we went down to Camp Clayborn and went down there to heavy equipment school and made T5 (corporal), then T4 (sergeant). Then about a month before I went overseas, I made T3 (technician 3rd grade Staff Sergeant).

Mr. Misenhimer: When you were there where the balloons were, anything else comical or anything interesting happen there?

Mr. Gibbons: Well, not really cause we were pretty well restricted. They'd let us go to town. Oh, I forgot to tell you about the zoot suiters. You heard about them? They was awful. They wouldn't let you go to town unless there were three or four in a bunch. If you were going on a pass, you had to go either three or four of you together or they wouldn't let you go. They wore those big chains down their leg, all carried knives and nightclubs. Ray Holmburg's brother worked out there in the shipyard and we was up at his house. We went downtown about 3:00 in the afternoon and we was walking down the street. Ray's brother said "You guys walk on ahead. There's some zoot suiters following us. So he just stopped and he was a pretty good sized man. He grabbed that one character, he grabbed him and he threwed him around in the air and just knocked the other two down. Beat'em in the ground with that one and just left them lay there in a pile and about that time, here come the MPs. The MPs said "Thank you."

Why, if Ray and I'd got in that, they'd have cleaned both of us. Good thing his brother was with him, cause his brother weighed about 250 and Ray weighed about 160 and I weighed about 135. We didn't have no business with zoot suiters.

Mr. Misenhimer: Now, the zoot suiters, were these white boys?

Mr. Gibbons: They was a combination, Mexican and everything. Colored people, Mexican, Chinese, they was all mixed. Guys that should have been in service, but wasn't. 18, 19, 20 years old, maybe some of them older, I don't know. That was quite a town. They'd let us go to town up in LA once a month. But you go any other place, Culver City and Santa

Monica; our neighbor to me lived right up the road from us, lived in Santa Monica ran a taxi cab. I went up there to his place two or three times and ran around with him at night in his taxi cab. Otherwise we just stayed right at the barracks and meals out there. That was another thing. All we was getting was mutton, billy goat we called it, for breakfast, dinner and supper. The officers was getting steak. So somebody went to the Inspecting General there was 4000 of us in this big parade field, 114 in the shade. We was all lined up and he started down there at this end and he come up and I was about the third one. He said, "Little one, what'd you have for breakfast?" I said, "Billy goat." That's the words I said and he went on down the line. "Sergeant, what'd you have?" "Lamb or billy goat, I don't know which." Lieutenant, what did you have for breakfast?" "Steak." "Captain, what'd you have for supper last night?" "Steak." "How come these enlisted ain't getting nothin but goat or lamb?" "Well, we don't know." That captain said, "We will know." He told our Master Sergeant to get your crew, go up the base where you get your supplies and he'd be there. Boy, we come back there and we had the biggest steaks for supper that night you ever seen in your life. They made those officers eat lamb for about three or four days. From then on we got good meals.

Instead of going up to the mess halls to eat, about a half block from where our balloon was at, was a Chinese grocery store. We'd go up there and they would fix us sandwiches and stuff out of their meat. Ham, had macaroni and cheese and all kinds of stuff for us guys if we wanted it. They didn't charge us for it, but if we had any money, we give'em some. Back then we didn't have too much money.

Mr. Misenhimer: There around 4000 of you in that balloon barage thing?

Mr. Gibbons: Yeah, about that many. That was all over, well, clear from San Diego clear up to I don't know how far north. They had'em in Frisco too, down the whole coast. We was in the 305th and they had a 306 and a

307. We was in 305th and that took in San Pedro, Long Beach and Santa Monica, LA.

Mr. Misenhimer: About how many balloons were there?

Mr. Gibbons: Oh, God, I don't know how many we had. We had a mess of'em. Unless somebody'd get wild and fly one in the daytime, you didn't know where they was at anyway. The only time you could fly them was at night. That's when they predicted the Japs would make their runs anyway. That one we had could go up 5000 feet, but the one about two blocks from us, could go up 7000 feet. Boy, it didn't take very long when they blowed that whistle siren, you just turned'em loose and let'em go. Then you just brake'em down, slow'em down so you didn't break them in two when you stopped them. Boy, that was a job getting that stuff, all that hydrogen gas all taken care out of them balloons and out of the tanks. Getting it up there to that base.

Mr. Misenhimer: How did one guy get a balloon down?

Mr. Gibbons: On winches. Just like a bomb shelter. The only thing that was out that they could see in the daytime was a balloon. Our shelter was just, oh, I'd say was about this high above the ground.

Mr. Misenhimer: Around three feet?

Mr. Gibbons: Yeah, then it had dirt all the way around it and had bombproof top on it. There was 17 of us in that barracks that took care of that one balloon.

Mr. Misenhimer: Now, when you got to Michigan, tell us some more about things up there.

Mr. Gibbons: Military police training and judo. It was 220 of us in that outfit and 50 of us had to take judo training and we took it for eight weeks. When we got done with that eight weeks, you spent four hours, one day in the morning and the next day in the afternoon. When you got done with that, you was ready for the dead. I'm telling you they worked you over and I'm the littlest one in the bunch. They had those big bruisers in there with me.

Mr. Misenhimer: How many did you throw?

Mr. Gibbons: I threw everyone of'em if I had to. Frank Robinson, who weighed 240 pounds and he was always making a pass at you, know. One time he made a pass at me and he had his thumb up like that and I grabbed him by the thumb. When I got done, his thumb laid back here.

Mr. Misenhimer: You broke it.

Mr. Gibbons: You're damn right. He didn't mess with me after that neither.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you feel bad after you did that?

Mr. Gibbons: No, cause he was always picking on me.

Mr. Misenhimer: Had he had judo training too?

Mr. Gibbons: He was having judo training. I was a little quicker that those big guys was. I was pretty quick when I was a little snot. I weighed 129 pounds when I went in the service and got out at 139. I ain't going to say what I weigh now.

Mr. Misenhimer: What were the accommodations like there at Fort Custer?

Mr. Gibbons: We had pretty good meals up there and I got to come home, let's see I was there for eight weeks and I got to come home four or five times on the weekend. Late Friday night and you had to be back in there Sunday evening. My aunt and uncle and Dad and Mom took turns taking me to South Bend getting me on the bus to go to Fort Custer. My Uncle O.C. and Aunt Frieda took me sometimes. Uncle O.C. never had any children and they adopted a daughter. Anyway they treated me like I was their own kid. When I was ten or eleven, I had scarlet fever then I got diphtheria on top of that. Then my tonsils swelled up and I run a fever. They wouldn't let me around other kids, so I lived with my grandpa and grandma and aunt and uncle from March till August. That's when they finally got my temperature so they could get my tonsils out. I lived with my grandpa and that was the winter he had his stroke. He was County Commissioner. Him and I had a 1929 Chevrolet, pert near brand new and I was nine years old and I'd drive. He took three pillows out of the house and put'em on the seat. Back

then they had the hand emergency brake. I'd slide off the seat and hit the clutch and the brake both and he'd pull the emergency brake and stop us. We'd go to Argos. I'd get purty close to town, I'd stop and he'd get over and drive. We' go to Rochester. He let me drive till we got almost to town; I'd stop and he'd drive. Go to Culver, Plymouth, same difference.

Mr. Misenhimer: Grandma didn't allow any liquor in the house. Who put it back in the creek?

Mr. Gibbons: Grandpa did. He'd put it back there. In the spring that water was so cold you'd pert near freeze in it. It wasn't very big, it was only about that big around. The water just boiled out of it all the time.

Mrs. Gibbons: Grandpa may have been commissioner, but he was an ornery cuss.

Mr. Gibbons: Not to me.

Mr. Misenhimer: Now, when you were in Michigan, how long was this training?

Mr. Gibbons: Eight weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer: Then you went to Nebraska.

Mr. Gibbons: Got out there the 1st of November and we hadn't been there two days and they brought in them dump trucks. Here come a whole trainload of coal, chunk coal and you had to throw it off by hand into the dump trucks. Take it down there and dump it in the coal bin. That's all we done.

Mr. Misenhimer: This was before the prisoners got there?

Mr. Gibbons: Yeah, the prisoners didn't come there till day after Thanksgiving. It was dark and cold; wind was blowing about 40 miles an hour that night. You could smell them people. They hadn't a bath or nothing since they left overseas and everybody out there we just lined up. Led'em down to the main gate where they went in the barracks and then they split up and went wherever they wanted to. The officers in one section.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you spray some of them that needed a bath with water?

Mr. Gibbons: Why, I don't know if they did or not.

Mr. Misenhimer: I think I heard that kind of story.

Mr. Gibbons: I imagine we did. Well, no. The guy we sprayed with water was one of the guys guarding the prisoners. One morning I was about half way down the barracks and I come back this way some reason or another. I smelt something and this guy was a jockey at one time and I just grabbed his bed blankets and his sheets were black. He'd never washed them. He wasn't very big and I said, "Boys, we've got to take a bath. We've got a bath job here." We took bedding and all out to the showers. We had seven or eight shower stalls. We turned them all on. Blankets, sheets, everything and we scrubbed him till we had blood coming on him. Boy, from then on that boy was spotless. Another thing, we had black snakes. Up there in Nebraska it was loaded with black snakes and our barracks would get loaded with mice and rats. Some farmer told us to take those black snakes and put'em in your barracks. Our coal bins set up about that high off the floor, it was as long as from here to that wall and probably as wide as this table. They'd crawl under there and you'd never know they was under there. But at night if you got up, you'd almost step on one of those snakes. But we'd never had any mice or rats after that. We had two coal bins and we had black snakes under them. They'd go out that door and it was cold so they came right back in. In the summer time, they'd go out and be gone all day and that night they'd be back under the coal bin cause it was cooler in the barracks than it was out there in the sun. Out there in that part of Nebraska there wasn't a tree from here to up town. Snowed.

Mr. Misenhimer: How many German prisoners were there?

Mr. Gibbons: 1500.

Mr. Misenhimer: How many of you people?

Mr. Gibbons: 200 and some counting the officers. We had a headquarters outfit and in the hospital there was a doctor and a nurse from Etna Green, Indiana in that outfit. I don't remember where the rest of'em was from.

Anyway, we had two or three doctors and nurses and a lot of those German prisoners had to have medical attention and they was busy till the weather got good in the spring where we could take 'em out and put 'em to work. As soon as they started planting potatoes and one thing and another, they went out. You'd take a crew anywhere from 20 to 40, depended on how much the farmer wanted. Them farmers out there were all Dutchmen. They'd speak just as good Dutch as what those German prisoners could.

That one farmer's field was a mile long and I had 30 prisoners. Start 'em out, line 'em up and they would go this way and go half way and turn and come back this way. I rode the potato planter cause they didn't have nobody to run it. I rode the potato planter with my rifle setting across my lap. We only had two boys that every attempted to run. We had an old school house where we had the prisoners. We had 120 of 'em up there and they had the windows boarded up. How they got the boards knocked off them windows, I don't know. Nobody heard them, but they did. They was going through town headed for the train tracks and the officer from the air base out there recognized that they were jabbering German. He just went up behind 'em, stuck his finger in their back and said, "You're under arrest." Brought 'em back to the gate and we put 'em in solitary confinement for 15 days. That eliminated that.

So, we had a German First Sergeant. He could speak as good of English as I can right now. He weighed about 280 pounds and I had problems with two or three out there that I had to watch 'em purty close. They'd talk and the potato digger had to wait till they got out of the road. So, I said "Sergeant" and they was using him to put the bags of potatoes up in the boxcar cause he could handle them 150 - 200 pounds of potatoes without any trouble. So I went to him and asked if I could have Sergeant for awhile and he was wanting to get out there in the worst way anyway. So we went out there and he said, "What'd you

got?" He always called me Gibby; well, everybody does anyway. "See them two guys up there?" "They're doing just what they been doing for the last week – nothing." "I'll take care of that." He just eased up there behind them and he kicked one in the hind end and he lit from here to that chair. He grabbed the other one and he shook him and said, "This is it. You want same thing he got, just keep on talking." So, they started in and picked up potatoes for about an hour. Same thing again and he worked them over that time. We never had anymore trouble after that. I don't know if he ever got it done or not, cause I left got that part taken care of. He was wanting to get so he could stay in the United States cause he didn't have no family at home. Whether he got that done or not, I don't know.

I finally got my transfer to go to Engineers in September. Went to Camp Clayburn and went through Engineer Basic Training or Repair Equipment School October till March. Then I got my PMO furlough for 15 days and came back. Got on the train to Fort Lauder, Washington and got on the boat and got to Okinawa the first of June.

Mr. Misenhimer: Tell us some more about your experiences there in Okinawa. What outfit were you in there?

Mr. Gibbons: 1572nd Heavy Equipment Repair. Start out with, we didn't have duties. It was just a pile of ground out there and a shipload of cement come in down there and nobody there to run the crane. I went down. I never run one before in my life. I unloaded all that cargo, it was all in cargo nets. The guys had to be careful, make sure got the right net, lift them out there and put'em in a truck. Then take'em up there. They just dumped them.

Mr. Misenhimer: They were in bags? Was that right?

Mr. Gibbons: Yeah, they just dumped them up there in a pile where we was goin' to use it. We had 4000 ton raw cement. Then I had to take and run a shovel to get the coral out of the bank to mix the cement with. I got all that done and then they decided it was time for me to go run the crane

on Detached Service. I told that Company Commandeer, "You worked my fanny off. How much credit do I get for it? Finally when I went over to Detached Service, I still have to come back and help finish putting the building up.

Mr. Misenhimer: In the 1572nd how many men were in it?

Mr. Gibbons: 220. Anything to a cook to a carpenter. We had welders and we had mechanics.

Start of 2nd tape

Mr. Misenhimer: Ok, so there in your outfit you had master mechanics and other people?

Mr. Gibbons: Yeah, all kinds of people, welders, machinists, we had every trade there was in the construction business. When I cement all unloaded up there and a big pile of gravel, I had to get gravel two or three other times. But anyway I laid out the footings for our main shop which was 200 foot square and the inside of that shop we had a dust proof room where we worked on injectors diesel engines. We had an anteroom where you went in there and changed clothes. Take your dirty clothes off and put your clothes that you wore in the injector room, fuel pumps and you name it. Anyway then we just, I don't know, probably had all the concrete poured for that shop there and that's the time they come got me to go on detach service. I still had to come back and help set up a lot of the other footings and stuff for the other buildings. And help get some more cement and some more coral out of the bank for them. Then in the meantime when the war was over with, well to go on with the story, the nightshift had a crane. We was unloading everything, barbed wire entanglement, barrels of antifreeze come in on those ships and they would go out there and get'em and bring'em in. Whenever we had an air raid, we had to shut the crane off and shut the light off and only had one little light up on the boom. They had five Puerto Ricans, one foreman and four laborers. So we had that one long air raid that night and it lasted almost an hour. So we got blowed there and we couldn't find our riggers, our laborers, whatever you want to call

them. So the boss of that bunch said he would hook it for us. So he got up there and unhooked it and unloaded that first truck. We had them Army ducks, you know they only clear the ground about that far. Just far enough for them Puerto Ricans to get up under them. Well, they did and that truck driver ran over all four of them. Killed all four of them, right there. That stopped that. He went and got word back to his company and they sent us four more. From then on when we had an air raid, they all got under the crane and we knowed where they was all at.

Mr. Misenhimer: How many companies ??

Mr. Gibbons: Why, I don't know how many times.

Mr. Misenhimer: You had quite a few air raids then?

Mr. Gibbons: Yeah, one evening I had just ate supper. After supper I always went to bed and I was sound asleep. I had worked my fanny off, when a bomb went off 500 feet from our area. I never even heard it. I worked with them for about a week after the war was over with unloading stuff. Then they took me off that and brought me back in the shop. By that time they had all the buildings all up. We put a lathe in there that was as long as from this corner to that corner and a nine foot reel. Hold something nine foot in diameter and we had all kinds of other lathe machines in the machine shop. But that didn't bother me. I never got over there very often. We had a truck shop, a carpenter shop. Let's see, I guess that was about it.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did the bombing raids do much damage?

Mr. Gibbons: Not around us, they didn't. Where we was at, we wasn't close to where the ships come in. We had seven airstrips and they bombed them. That one when they was making them runs to Japan and Wantan was up on the highest cliff on Okinawa. That one pilot came in too low and he run head first into that bank. That made a great big explosion. It just lit the sky up. He never knew what hit him.

Mr. Misenhimer: What kind of plane was it?

Mr. Gibbons: P47 or P51 or one of them.

Mr. Misenhimer: A fighter plane?

Mr. Gibbons: Yeah, they were all making runs to Japan at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer: Were there any Japanese soldiers at Okinawa when you were there?

Mr. Gibbons: Oh, yeah. When we got off the ship there, I forget what day that was, they were taking Cherry Hill. Either ninth or tenth time. They had to take Cherry Hill 13 times before United States got it took. They had a D8 up there and we had to have parts. It had one track blowed off it and they sent me and a truck driver and another mechanic up there. We got that big 25 ton winch truck and we winched that tractor on that trailer and hauled it back to barracks and got parts off of it that we needed. They was still fighting right down there over the side of the hill when we was up there getting that. Captain Cling said, "You guys leave your guns here. You ain't going to need your guns." I looked at him and said, "What do you think we are? Nuts?" No way, we all took our guns with us. → 75

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you have to use them?

Mr. Gibbons: No. But out there in that field there was a sweet potato patch. It wasn't rice. It was too high for rice. I expect if you stood up there and wanted to count, you could count 4 or 5 hundred bodies laying out there across that whole field. Bodies laying everywhere. How many were Americans, I don't know. I never asked nobody. → 90

The caves, all them mountains and hills in Okinawa had caves in'em. It was hard to get them out of there. All them caves had American made lathes, gas generators and stuff in them caves. Corporal Rader, we called him Chaplain Rader. He didn't amount to a hoot, but he was a conniver. They was still fighting up there. He went up there and he come back and said he knew where there were a couple of good lathes if I can get some help. I didn't answer him. I said to go talk to the Master Sergeant. So he got some help and a truck and went up there

and got them pert near brand new lathes. What else he got out of there, God only knows. He was hauling stuff back there every day. → 109

Mr. Misenhimer: Anyone from your outfit get wounded?

Mr. Gibbons: No, we was lucky. The Puerto Rican outfit who was doing the rigging for me, it was a big outfit. There was 2 or 3 hundred of them. They pulled in off the line of what they were doing. They didn't amount to two hoots and a holler, but anyway they got into the methanol alcohol in the barrel. So they, I forget how many of them died from that. They got too much of that alcohol. They put 100 or so in the hospital and that's one thing our Captain Davis said, "You guys cannot drink any of that methanol alcohol. That'll kill you in a minute." But nobody ever did. Course, we had Sparky, who was a bootlegger before he went in service. So we took a crate and made a whiskey still, a winery. Made orange wine, grapefruit wine, you name it, he made wine out of everything. They stole all the cracked corn the signal corp had up there for their pigeons and made whiskey out of that. Me, I didn't have time to mess with any of it. They kept me too busy.

So the war was over with in August and I worked two weeks after the war was over in detached service. They brought me back to barracks and I worked there till November. Me and the Company Commander got into it, two or three of us got into it with him and he just kept dragging us. So finally it came up to that reenlisting, so the 17 of us went up to the guy at headquarters and reenlisted and never said a word to him about it. Till the day we all had our bags packed and here come a truck. "Where you guys going? If you'd told me you were going to reenlist, I'd raised your rate in rating." I said, "We didn't want a raise in rating out of you." That's just what I told him. Captain Coleman.

Mr. Misenhimer: Where were you when the war in Germany got over in May '45?

Mr. Gibbons: I was in Okinawa.

Mr. Misenhimer: Do you remember anything, a celebration or what did they say about it?

Mr. Gibbons: We didn't have time over there to celebrate when that was going on.

Mr. Misenhimer: How about when the war in Japan got over?

Mr. Gibbons: Yeah, they shot 100 and some bullet holes through the Company Commander's tent.

Mr. Misenhimer: Where they aiming at him?

Mr. Gibbons: No, they were just putting it right over the top to scare him to death. And he sneaked out of there, nobody seen him go and got in his jeep. He was gone for four days before he cam back.

Mr. Misenhimer: I understand the ships out in the harbor shot a lot of ammunition in the air.

Mr. Gibbons: Oh, they did.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you see any of that?

Mr. Gibbons: Oh, you bet. We was right on the bay. I took and made a D7 dozer extended the breather for the oil filter, and the air cleaner and everything that would take on water. Extended the controls all up about six feet above the seat and when the tide was out and that coral we dug a channel for LSTs. It was probably 50 feet wide, oh, we went out there I suppose 250 feet in the ocean. We got it all done, put the cap back in there and it was junked when we got done with it. They never used it. That's when they were bombing hell out of Japan and never used it. But they was unloading ships out there, that Japanese suicide bomber, went into the side of a shipload of beer. Just above the waterline, it was taking on some water, not much and they said they was hauling beer. We had taken a Japanese boat and put a jeep motor in it. That was a long time before that ever happened. Two guys get out there and go out to that ship and put that beer on the duck. They take it off the duck and put it on our ship. They could haul 20 some cases on that boat, bring it back and unload it right quick and go back out and get more. Everybody who wanted beer, had beer for two months. I know I had six cases under my bed. I don't know how many cases of beer they brought in there that night. Just as fast as they could haul them in there. I expect they got 2 or 3 hundred cases.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you see many kamakazies hit other ships out there?

Mr. Gibbons: No. Most of that was on north of us and then down to Naha Harbor. United States hit the harbor hard. United States had a lot of ships there and on the west side at the Marine base; I worked on caterpillar sea pool one day building runways out of coral. They called two of us and we was over there about four hours, took our tools and everything. Worked on that Cat and while we was doing that, they brought another over there and we adjusted it up. On another strip, they was doing some more work on it and we had to work on a dozen.

Mr. Misenhimer: How many ball diamonds did you build over there?

Mr. Gibbons: We built seven ball diamonds in my time I had time to build them. This Lieutenant General, one star general, and he was over there. I built a basketball court for us and a baseball diamond for us. Put the mound in it for the pitcher and he was over there and he asked somebody who built that? He said Sergeant Gibbons. Well, where's Sergeant Gibbons at? He run me down and found me and that was right after the war was over with and he said, "I got two baseball diamonds I want you to build." I told him to go talk to Captain Coleman and see if he can let me loose 'cause I'm awful busy. He said, "That don't make any difference." I build them two and I just got them two done and here they come. They got another one. I ended up with seven of them all together. Didn't have nothing to build'em out of except coral and sand. You'd get it all leveled off and then you'd bring it in and build your pitcher's mound as near as you could do it with that. Do the rest of it by shovel.

Mr. Misenhimer: Did you get any of it by shovel or just the machine?

Mr. Gibbons: No, I didn't touch the shovel. Wasn't my department. I was the heavy equipment man. That's the same way when we was pouring that concrete. I'd poured a little concrete when I was a kid at home and when I went out on the road, they was pouring concrete for Ed Waltz and one thing and another. I got into a little bit of that, but why they

got me in charge of pouring them floors in those big buildings, I do not know. I was in charge of all that till they got me on detached service and let the rest of the guys do their own from there on.

Our main shop was 200 feet square and the machine shop was 100 feet by 150, the truck shop was 50 by 75, something like that. Then we had a crane shed; we made it 40 feet high and 20 feet in depth. It was 100 feet lengthways and poured a concrete floor in there so they could put jacks under it. Built it high enough we had a crane we had taken and took all the boom out of it. We only had 30 foot of boom in the crane and we'd pick up a lot of heavy weight with no bigger crane than we had. We had a 3 quarter ton crane and we could lift a lot of weight with a 30 foot boom.

Another thing I did over there on Okinawa, they brought a barge load of these marine truck cranes and six of'em on a barge. Well, the dummies, they took two off of each side and they took the front one off of here and didn't take that back one off when they started off with the front one. The barge just upended. The truck put the crane in the water and they called me. The divers went down and hooked the cables and I said just hook onto it wherever you can find a place to hook. I showed them on the one that was setting there; there's where the loading hooks was at. We can do it if it ain't upside down or something. But it didn't. It went off and was setting upright. I had a heck of a time getting close enough to where I could pick it up with that big crane. But I got him out of the water. Took him up there and the crane engine, we didn't have any trouble with it. But the truck engine, it had a six cylinder engine in it and we could only get it to run on four. We done everything to it. I said it would run all we want it to run. They just kept that there for us. The others went where they was supposed to have went.

We worked on a lot of equipment over there. The officer in charge of the supply yard, we made that about 40 acres and just put the equipment, each kind in a row and trucks in a row, everything, tanks. Everything that was any good and anything that wasn't any good, they either cut it up, junked it or if they could get it on a truck, they just shoved it over the bank. I'd like to know how much stuff was junked.

Mr. Misenhimer: When did you leave Okinawa to come back?

Mr. Gibbons: December 8th '45.

Mr. Misenhimer: Well, I think we pretty well covered most of the things, haven't you?

Mr. Gibbons: I think so.

Transcribed by Carlene A. Snipes
Rochester, Indiana
August 14, 2001