

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

**Nimitz Education and Research Center
Fredericksburg, Texas**

An Interview With

Ben G. Schurmeier

Giddings, Texas

April 10, 2018

U.S. Navy

Squadron VD-1

Photo Reconnaissance

Mr. Misenhimer:

My name is Richard Misenhimer, today is April 10, 2018. I am interviewing Mr. Ben G. Schurmeier by telephone. His phone number is 979-366-2268. His address is 1734 County Road 209, Giddings, Texas, 78942. 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.

Ben, 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. Schurmeier:

Well thank you.

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.

Mr. Schurmeier:

You mean to have the information on file or something?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, right. Permission to do it.

Mr. Schurmeier:

No, I don't care.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Alright let me read this agreement to you.

Mr. Schurmeier:

I haven't done anything that I'm not proud of (*laughter*).

Mr. Misenhimer:

I need to read this agreement to you, so let me read this to you.

“Agreement Read”

Is that okay with you?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Yeah, like I say I have a hard time understanding you. But it's not your fault it's just on mine end.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now the next thing I'd like 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.

Do you have a son or a daughter or someone we could contact if we needed to, to find you?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Oh, I've got a nephew.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What is your nephew's name?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Preuss, P-r-e-u-s-s.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you have a phone number for him?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Just a minute, let me look. His number is 979-716-0590.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Let me read that back to you, 979-716-0590.

Mr. Schurmeier:

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Thank you, hopefully we'll never need that but you never know.

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well he's a pretty good nephew. He's taken me to the doctor and done all the things that you know he can do for me. And he's in his late thirties.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, quite young, okay. What is your birthdate?

Mr. Schurmeier:

2/15/23.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And where were you born?

Mr. Schurmeier:

I was born in St. Paul, Minnesota in the Miller Hospital.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And your parents were living in Minnesota at that point?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well I lived in Minnesota until I got about, I guess about ten or eleven years old. And then the family moved to just outside of Chicago, to Wilmette, you know where that is?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes sir, I do.

Mr. Schurmeier:

It's a suburb of Chicago. That was in..., well I guess '35 or '36, somewhere along in there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Yeah, I've got two brothers and a sister. They're all younger than I am, I'm the oldest.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were either of your brothers in World War II?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Both of them were.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Are either one of them still living?

Mr. Schurmeier:

One of them is, the youngest one is still living. He lives over in Charleston, South Carolina.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What were your mother's and father's first names?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well my father's name was Gustave, G-u-s-t-a-v-e. And my mother was Elizabeth.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well we lived in St. Paul at the time and I would say we were reasonably well off. But we used to have lots of people that would come to the back door and looking for some work or some food. And we had a maid that did the cooking for the family, so she'd always given them something if they came.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your father's occupation?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well he was in the insurance business there in part of, I don't know what else happened in that time, I was a little too young to be able to understand exactly what was going on, but....

Mr. Misenhimer:

But you all made it through the depression okay then?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Oh yeah, yeah made it through.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then where did you go to high school?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well I went to high school at first and the high school was with the University of Minnesota, just on the outskirts of Minneapolis. It was a school that the university used for training teachers. And they also took students on the thing, so my brother and I, my next youngest brother and I both went there for a couple of years.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you graduate?

Mr. Schurmeier:

I graduated from New Trier High School which is in Winnetka, Illinois in 1940, '40 I believe it was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

In 1940 you graduated. What did you do when you finished high school?

Mr. Schurmeier:

I started looking for a job and wasn't too successful, so I talked to my uncle who lived in the state of New York. And he had sold his father's business, which was a company that manufactured diesel engines for the railroad. And so he had some connections, so I asked him if he could get me a job there and he did. I worked for about two years in Auburn, New York. Well that's right in the heart of the Finger Lakes district in New York.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on December 7, 1941 Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Schurmeier:

I remember hearing about it, I was working in New York at the time. I only stayed on that job in New York for about another, about a year. And then I was convinced that, well it didn't take much to convince me, I was convinced that if I didn't get into the service that I wanted I'd get drafted and I'd have to go where they told me. So I went back, the family is still living in Winnetka, Illinois, so I went home to the family. And about a week after I'd been there, there was an article in the *Chicago Tribune* that the Navy was looking for cadets for their pilot training. And my father showed me the article and talked to me. So I went downtown to the recruiting thing and talked to them. And by the time I got through down there why they had me signed up (*laughter*). So I went into the Navy as a cadet for the pilot training.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And what day did you go in?

Mr. Schurmeier:

It was early in '42.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Not too long after Pearl Harbor then?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Not too long afterwards, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then where did you go for your boot camp?

Mr. Schurmeier:

The training was kind of unique. The Navy when they recruited, just for cadets, there were two or three guys that I knew from high school, they also were cadets. And we were sent up to Lake Forest College, which is about forty miles north of Winnetka, to Lake Forest College for training. Because the Navy didn't have any place that they could send us, so they made an

agreement with the college and leased part of their classrooms and their housing facilities. And there were twelve of us in the class, went up there and we were there for about two, about two and a half months. And it was a real good deal because what had happened was of course the war it was going on then and all the boys that were in Lake Forest College were either drafted or volunteered, but there were no more boys, there were just girls (*laughter*). So we had the college to ourselves (*laughter*). It was kind of unique, everybody gave us a hard time over it, but it was sure nice, you either saw your classmates or the girls. That's when we did the ground school training. And then the training and the flying was done out at Palwaukee Airport which is now where Glenview Air Station is. But at that time it was Palwaukee and it was just a dirt field.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now back in boot camp, were your drill instructors pretty tough on you?

Mr. Schurmeier:

No, uh-uh. No we had it pretty good, they treated us good. We had, you know, the physical effort that you had to use, they pushed you pretty hard on that. But as far as the rest of it why no, it was real good and you got well fed.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the worst part of boot camp?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Actually after we finished, we went through that course at Palwaukee and Lake Forest College and then after we finished that, that was about almost two months, and then after that we were sent to Iowa City to the college, Iowa College, and go through a physical training. They got you swimming and swimming underwater and running the obstacle course, you had to do that every day. If you did something wrong you had to do it (*laughter*) a second time. We were there almost two months at Iowa City. And then from there we went to Hutchinson, Kansas, which was a primary base where you flew the Stearmans or the N3Ns planes, the bi-wingers.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now was this the first flying you did?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Oh the first flying we did was at Palwaukee.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you fly there?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well we flew with whatever they had running, most of it was either a Taylor Craft or a Cub.

They were kind of hard pressed for getting parts because the war was going on of course. And so whatever they could get running on the thing, why we flew. They were all real light planes, there wasn't anything any bigger than a Taylor Craft or one of those Piper Cubs.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you solo there?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Oh yeah, I soloed and then we had about a month after that before we got transferred someplace else, so I did some additional flying at the time and got my private license. But when the Navy finished with you, you didn't have enough cross country flying to qualify for a license, so I made a deal, worked for the airport for some. And then got enough flying hours to get a private ticket. I've never used it since, but *(laughter)*....

Mr. Misenhimer:

That was at Palwaukee, right?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Yeah. That's just west of Chicago.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then when you got to Iowa City what did you do there?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well that was all physical on the thing. Obstacle course and physical training, swimming, you had to end up swimming the entire length of the pool underwater to be able to qualify, so that took a little doing (*laughter*). And then all kinds of physical things, track meets and other stuff, nothing that was very enjoyable but that was what you had to do anyway.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then where did you go from there?

Mr. Schurmeier:

From there then we went to Hutchinson, Kansas, which is right down in the southern part of Kansas, on the thing. And they had a primary base there and we were flying the bi-wing, N3Ns, or Stearmans, the "Yellow Perils", the Yellow, you know those two-wing planes that were all in yellow. I don't know whether you remember seeing, maybe you're aren't old enough to have seen them then (*laughter*).

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you think of the Stearman?

Mr. Schurmeier:

I thought it was a damn good airplane. No matter what you did, don't matter how hard you landed it, or whatever happened why that thing stayed together. And they managed to be able to keep them all flying. It was a good airplane. The alternative of that was the N3N, which was almost identical except that it was made by the Naval Aircraft Factory. They didn't make many of those after the war started, but they made quite a few of those before the war started and that's what the Navy used for primary training before the war came on, it was a N3N. It looked almost like a Stearman.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How were your flight instructors, were they pretty good there?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Oh yeah. Yeah they were all civilians on the thing, they were not military people on the thing, but most of them were instructors on flying before the war and they went to work for the Navy when the war broke out or after the war broke out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now how long were you there in Iowa City?

Mr. Schurmeier:

I guess pretty close to two months, little better than two months, I think.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then where did you go from there?

Mr. Schurmeier:

And then from there we went to Hutchinson, Kansas.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I thought you flew the N3N at Hutchinson?

Mr. Schurmeier:

That's when we started flying that N3N, right, or the Stearman, yeah. And of course all the ground school that went with it, the weather training and all that, the rest of it. It was classes for about half a day every day. Sometimes it was classes all day.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then when you left there where did you go?

Mr. Schurmeier:

From there we went to Pensacola, Florida. And Pensacola had a whole bunch of outlying fields. And they had them for single-engines, for twin-engines, and for other training. We ended up in a single-engine training unit that flew the SNB, SNB, was similar to, do you know what an AT6 was?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes sir.

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well the SNB was almost the same as an AT6, just had a smaller engine and it was just a little bit smaller plane.

Mr. Misenhimer:

It had retractable gears, is that right?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Yeah, the gears came up on that one. It looked a lot like an AT6, but it had about a hundred less horsepower engine in it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So what all did you do there?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well we went through all the flying things, I guess we got something like twenty-five or thirty hours of flight time. And then of course all the ground school that goes with it, the weather and the radio. In fact there wasn't too much, there was some radio, but not too much of it because they didn't have a lot of radios to use. I think all the radios were going in the combat planes. That lasted about five or six weeks. Then we went on to, that was right in the field just outside of Pensacola, Florida and then I was transferred to another field that was just outside Pensacola, Florida in the opposite direction. And it was for twin-engine, that's training for the SNV, are you familiar with that one?

Mr. Misenhimer:

V as in victory, SNV, okay.

Mr. Schurmeier:

Yeah, and the SNB, as in boy was a twin-engine. It was a real nice plane, they'd made those

where a lot of them in service for private companies at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did Cessna make that plane?

Mr. Schurmeier:

I'll be damned if I know. I don't remember.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was it single tail or twin tail?

Mr. Schurmeier:

It had twin tail.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, that was a Beechcraft then.

Mr. Schurmeier:

Yeah, it was a Beechcraft, yeah. SNB was a Beechcraft, yeah. It was a damn nice airplane, it was a little bit hard to land because when the brakes were the only means you had of steering the thing, once the tail dropped down on to the ground, why you lost all control of the tail on the thing. And you had to steer it using your feet on the brake. It was alright after you learned it but trouble was every damn airplane was a little different. Some of them they were badly worn, some of them were pretty good, and some of them were no good at all (*laughter*).

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was it to adapt to twin-engine from single-engine?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well you had a choice, after you finished the single-engine training you had a choice whether you wanted to go there or go on to further training in the single-engine. And I just elected to take the twin-engine.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So then what happened?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well then we spent I guess almost two months there and we did quite a bit of flying with the training on that. And then we did some cross-country navigating. We had to fly all the way to another city, I think they flew out to Houston a time or two or places like that. And had to navigate on the thing, so they were teaching us navigation as well as flying.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well then from there, when we finished there why then you were transferred, you had another choice on the thing. And I elected to go to Jacksonville, Florida where they had the PBVs. And you had to go through this training school with the PBV. You know what that is don't you?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes sir.

Mr. Schurmeier:

You recognize that one?

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's the amphibious plane, it lands in the water.

Mr. Schurmeier:

Yeah. I think there's only one or two left in the world today on the thing, but it was a nice plane considering that, you know it was designed in the late '30s on the thing. And the Navy was still making some when the war broke out (*laughing*).

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when did you graduate and get your commission?

Mr. Schurmeier:

I got it in in, let's see, I can't remember. In Florida at Pensacola before I went on to Jacksonville. And you got your commission on the thing and then you had another choice whether you wanted to go single-engine or multi-engine.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what were you commissioned, Ensign?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So that's what you did in Pensacola there and then you went to Jacksonville after that?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well then we went to Jacksonville on the thing and flew the PBY on the thing. And that was about another, oh I guess six or eight week course there on the thing. At the end of the training, why the last part of the training we flew down to Guantánamo, Cuba and landed there in the harbor on the thing. And anchored the airplane out there in the water and they came out and picked us in a boat and we went into shore and they had a big party there at the Officer's Club there in Guantánamo that night. And then the next morning why we flew back to Jacksonville.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was it to learn to fly the PBY?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well that was a hard one to fly. It didn't have much in the way of balance controls, so whenever you wanted to make a turn on the thing why you had to really, really put some effort into it on the controls. So most of the planes made after that all had balance controls and all you had to do was just overcome just a little bit of friction to make them fly. But the PBY (*laughter*) it didn't have any balance control so you had to fight it to make it turn. When it came time to taking off you had to grab the steering wheel and pull it against your chest and then lean back in your seat and put your feet up on the wall and give it all the power it had and you'd run almost a mile or a

mile and a half down the water until the thing came off of the water. It was a hell of a tough thing to fly. It would run, but it was hard work.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was it to land on water?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well in the daytime it was okay because you could see and for the most part there was usually just enough breeze that there was just some slight waves, just enough so you can tell exactly where the water was. But the problem was learning to land it at night. And what you'd have to do is get into the area where you were supposed to land at a predetermined altitude and then set your rate of descent, you couldn't see the water, you know there was no waves to see the, you knew there was water out there but you couldn't see it. And then you just set the rate of descent down at so many feet per minute and then just hold on. And then the thing would finally hit the water and make a hell of a noise and then you could relax (*laughter*). But it was no fun flying that damn thing at night.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Then we went from there, we went out to Hutchinson, Kansas. By that time they'd taken Hutchinson, Kansas and converted it to a B-24 base. They'd gotten rid of the training planes and they had a whole bunch of old B-24s out there and we flew those and went to some more navigating school and all the rest of the, as well as the physical training.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you went from the PBY to the B-24 then?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Yeah. Yeah you had to have the PBY stuff if you were going to fly the B-24. I don't know why because there wasn't much in common between either one of those airplanes, but that's the way the Navy had it set up so that's the way you did it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was it like to fly the B-24 then?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well the B-24 was entirely different, it was fairly easy to fly up to a point on the thing. It had four engines I guess you know that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Right.

Mr. Schurmeier:

And of course you had to be able to fly the thing with only two engines on one side, I mean they gave you all kinds of challenges on the thing. And it was fairly hard to fly, it had balance controls only when everything was working. If you lost an engine or something like that why then you had a hard time flying it. And of course in the training why the pilot that was training you, he had to make you familiar with some of those things. So, you'd be taking off and he'd just yank back on one of the throttles or two of the throttles and boy you were on your own to try and keep it going in the air. Of course he was standing there, he wasn't going to get killed himself so, there was still some safety measure, but boy it was a tight fight with a short stick.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now this plane, did it have a single tail or a twin tail?

Mr. Schurmeier:

They were twin tail.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Then let's see, we went from, well then that lasted better than two months on the thing. It took longer to get through there mainly because they had a lot of cadets. And I don't know but for some reason or another they wanted to have the cadets graduate in bunches rather than eight or ten at a time, why they'd try to get twenty or thirty of them, I don't know why but that's what

they did. So from there then you were delegated to a squadron, and you had a bit of a choice on that on the thing. If you knew somebody and one of the, the Navy had a bunch of patrol squadrons and they had them, they were running them in the Pacific and they were running them in the Atlantic. And they had a large number of B-24s. A lot of them were old Army ones that we were using for training, but nonetheless they had them. And when you were delegated to a squadron then you were sent to wherever that squadron was forming up. And I got delegated to go to a Photo Squadron, which was VD-1. And it was forming up in San Diego.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the number of that squadron?

Mr. Schurmeier:

VD-1, Victor Dog 1.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And that was where?

Mr. Schurmeier:

And that was in San Diego.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well then we spent about a month there. We got all brand new airplanes and we had to not only get the pilots, but we had to get all the ground crew people that stayed with us. And then we had all the photographic people that had to be trained and had to go with us. So we did a lot of photography work up and down the west coast, from San Diego north and from San Diego south on that thing. We had to learn, teach the pilots to be able to fly for taking the photographic films. And then of course we had to teach the photographic people how to do their job and then of course we got a lot of green mechanical people and we had to kind of sort those out so we got some good ones when we got out there. So we were there about three months in San Diego. And then we took off from there and flew to Honolulu, Hawaii. And when we took off we had

2,950 gallons of gasoline in the plane. And when we got to Honolulu we had 150 left. And those engines on that B-24 burned fifty gallons an hour, so we didn't have but just about 35 or 40 minutes time left when we got there. And we had to navigate, there was no way to navigate with radio, they had no radios on the west coast at that time. So we had to navigate using the stars and the moon, which was kind of interesting because they taught us how to do it. It was kind of unique to be able to do it and know that's what you had to do to get there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now at this point were you the pilot or the copilot?

Mr. Schurmeier:

I was the copilot. Each crew had two copilots and a pilot, for a plane commander. And you had a plane Captain who was in charge of the maintenance and then we had two mechanics, two radiomen, and anywhere from two to four photographers. All in the crew. And so we had to be training everybody all the time to do something (*laughter*). When we flew out to Hawaii why only the plane Captain, the pilot and copilot and plane Captain and one radioman were aboard, the rest of them all went out by ship to Hawaii.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But you flew over then?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Yeah, we flew out there on the thing. And it was about a thirteen hour flight. We took off just at dark on the thing off the west coast and with that much gasoline we couldn't get over three hundred feet in the first hour. So we had to watch it pretty close for the first hour because if you're only three hundred feet off the water why you've got to be on the ball (*laughter*). So once we burned off some of that gasoline then we could get up to around three or four thousand feet and you felt somewhat safer then. We took off like I say just about dark and when we got to Hawaii why the sun was just coming up, it was daylight but the sun was just coming up over the mountains.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what all did you do in Honolulu?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well we spent about a month there doing some more training. What we did there was, I think my estimate was that it was more psychological than it was anything else. Because what you were teaching the crew, we had a tail gunner, two side gunners in the back, we had a ball turret gunner, and then one overhead gunner.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have a nose gunner?

Mr. Schurmeier:

No we didn't have a nose gunner because we had to use that nose section to direct the flight when we were flying photography. That was the only place you could see down to the ground fairly close under you. You know that B-24 had a long nose on it and you sat back behind the nose and you couldn't see down to the ground until you were maybe either ten miles ahead of you. So they just took the turret out of the nose and put a guy in there to direct the flight.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About what date did you arrive in Honolulu?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Spring of 1944.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Two and a half years?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So it must have been somewhere up in early '44?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Yeah I think so. Actually it was, let's see, the war was over in what, end of '45?

Mr. Misenhimer:

August of '45 was when the war got over.

Mr. Schurmeier:

Yeah. Well we went from, let's see after we got to there, we were there about a month. And then we went out, the war was over in what, in October or November wasn't it, November?

Mr. Misenhimer:

August of '45 was when the war got over.

Mr. Schurmeier:

August it was over?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes sir.

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well then I'd say was probably June or July when we were in Honolulu.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Of '45?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Then once we got through screwing around with teaching the crew to shoot, you know to shoot the .50 caliber machine gun on the thing, why then they figured we were good enough. So they sent us out and we flew on out to Guam. And we went from Honolulu to Johnston Island, from Johnston Island to Kwajalein, and then from Kwajalein to Guam. And our base was there on Guam at the Naval Air Station there. Let's see, I think there were two patrol squadrons were also based there at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now the war was over when you got to Guam, is that right?

Mr. Schurmeier:

No, oh hell no.

Mr. Misenhimer:

War was still going on, okay.

Mr. Schurmeier:

No, no. It went for another, almost a year after. We were out there about a year before the war ended.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you got out there in '44 then, not '45.

Mr. Schurmeier:

Okay. I can't remember those damn dates.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you were there about a year before the war ended, okay. Go ahead, what happened at Guam?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well at Guam we had to patrol, there's a bunch of islands in the Pacific and the Navy had decided that they were not going to try and take all those little islands, that it wasn't worth the effort. So what we were delegated to do was to fly over those islands, at least once a week and photograph the islands so that they could determine whether if there was anything going on. Now there were Japs living on them, on the thing, and they had some of their planes and all that kind of stuff, but we didn't fiddle with them, we just left them alone on the thing. And they for the most part just stayed there on the islands. And was Truk and those. Truk was a pretty good size one, I guess it had an atoll it was maybe a mile and a half across. And they had two or three flyable airplanes on the thing. We never fiddled with them though, we never went down below about twenty-one or twenty-two thousand feet on the thing. We just left them alone. But you could see once in a while they'd take off when they saw us coming and we could see where they went, which direction. But we never chased them or had anything to do with them. We just left them alone. But the unique part of that was that when you flew over the atoll the water was

clear, boy just as clear as it could be and you could see airplanes that had crashed and left in the water. You could see them from up there at that altitude, we were about twenty-one or twenty-two thousand feet when we photographed that island. It was kind of unique because each time it was kind of a contest on the plane, that everybody said, "Well who's going to spot the next one we didn't see the last time." And so everybody was looking out to see if they could see another airplane in the atoll. An atoll consists of a ring of land, oh about a mile or a mile and a half in diameter and then there's usually a couple of openings where the ships can sail in and out of it through those openings.

(End of side one of tape.)

(Beginning of side two of tape.)

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, what happened next?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well let's see. You could see them and we'd sometimes make an extra pass or two over to photograph them to be sure we got, you know that we didn't miss anything. And there were about six places that we had to do this, about six of those atolls in the area that we could cover from Guam. And you'd take turns, one crew would fly it one week and then the next crew would fly it the next week and so on, on the thing. But then we also had to, when we got an assignment from the Navy they were going to do something or they wanted some photographs of some other place, why we'd have a meeting and they'd decide you know what they wanted and where they wanted it. Then we'd be delegated to go there. And the last one was up on Okinawa, I guess. And did have a meeting and they'd indicate where they were interested in and making sure that we got pretty good pictures or got extra pictures on the thing. And we'd fly out of where we were and sometimes we'd take two planes, sometimes three planes. And then the last big thing we had, one of the islands we figured the Japs must be going to, I mean they were gonna try and take was on..., oh boy. We made one pass up to Iwo and then we flew on up from Iwo up to Japan and made a pass across it, then came back. I don't remember exactly what we

were after there, but we were after something on the thing. And let's see, then we were delegated to take the entire squadron and go up and fly the southern island of the Japanese five islands. And I can't think of the name of it at the moment, but, I want to say.... No, it was not Iwo Jima, I can't think of the name of it, but that was evidently the one that they were strongly considering if we had to invade that that's where they'd go. The entire squad, all five of our planes flew up there. And the Army guys, the Army had the airfield there north of us and they were supposed to give us fighter protection. And about ten or fifteen minutes before we got over target why the Army guys started calling in and saying, "I'm about to run out of gas, I've got to go, goodbye." And one by one they all disappeared (*laughter*). By the time we got over the target, back to photograph it, there wasn't a damn Army guy (*laughter*) around, they'd all gone home. They were flying those P-47s and they were pretty hard on gas.

Mr. Misenhimer:

They were, right.

Mr. Schurmeier:

And they were just about, well they were at the end of as far out as they could go and get home. But we photographed it anyway and we got, one plane got shot, they shot like the tail of it, but it didn't fix it where he couldn't fly. And all the planes got back safely. There was one guy pretty badly hurt but otherwise we did alright. I can't think of the name of that island though. Well if you look it up on the map there's five islands and it's the southern most island of the five.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Kyushu?

Mr. Schurmeier:

That's it, that's it, that's it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's the southern island of Japan.

Mr. Schurmeier:

Yeah, that's it, that's the one.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How many planes flew out there at one time?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well we had just five photographic planes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And how many of them went to Kyushu with you?

Mr. Schurmeier:

The five of them, all five.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well then we made several island, we went up to Iwo Jima and then from Iwo we flew over Japan twice. Now that was just single planes doing that though, it wasn't the whole squadron. I think we made two. This was all before they dropped the big one. And then when it came time to, the Army was going to go up there and drop something why we had an officer's meeting at Guam. And the Army guy said, "Well," he said, "We want you guys to photograph this." And we kept asking him, "Photograph what?" "Well we're going drop one," on the thing. They wouldn't tell us what. I don't know whether they knew or not, frankly I don't think they knew. But anyway they didn't tell us on the thing. And the skipper of the squadron, of this VD-1 squadron was a former executive of one of the photographic corporations in Los Angeles. What's the one that made the cartoon movies? I can't think of the name of that either now. Anyway the skipper was an old Navy man and the Army guys were in there to try and get us to be sure that we would photograph when they dropped this big bomb. And the skipper said, "We're not going to do it unless you give us one of your B-29s." Well this was when the B-29s,

I don't think that the Army had but about ten or twelve of those things (*laughter*). And we tried to get just one of them to fly that flight, but the Army said, "Nope, nobody gets to fly it but us." So we said, "Well we're not going to go up and do it." So the net result was that we took our photographers, several photographers, and some other people that worked on it and took them over to the Army base and they flew in the B-29 when they went up and dropped the atomic bomb. And made all the photographs of the first one to go off. And the next morning at the officer's meeting we got a chance to see those pictures. They'd gotten them back to Guam and then got them developed and printed and the whole thing. And it was quite a sight to see. Needless to say why it wasn't long, I think it was the second day after that, it was about the second or third day after that why the war was over.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Actually they dropped the first bomb on August the 6th, the second bomb on August the 9th and August the 15th is when Japan surrendered.

Mr. Schurmeier:

Yeah, well I think it was the 15th that we were talking about on the thing. It wasn't our crew that did, is one of the other crews, we didn't go. I don't know how they delegated who had to go, that was up to the skipper and the other guys, the senior members of the squadron made the decision. I didn't regret it, don't to this day (*laughter*).

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what island were you all flying off of at that point?

Mr. Schurmeier:

We were in Guam.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Could your B-24s fly from Guam to Japan and back?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Yeah. We didn't have a lot of gas left but we could do it safely.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Alright, what else happened?

Mr. Schurmeier:

And after that, well it wasn't..., the thing that happened after that was that when they, after they signed the..., oh whatever you call the paperwork on the thing. They asked us to make a survey of the Japanese islands on the thing. To see what was on the islands. So each one of the crews had to take a couple of islands and fly over them and photograph them and then get the information back to the Army guys, because they wanted to know what was out there. And they wanted to know where there was an airfield that they could land their own airplanes when they were taking over from the Japs. And that was kind of interesting, because you never were real sure whether all the Japanese people knew the war was over (*laughter*).

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now this was the main islands over Japan, right?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well it was one of the five. You had to do all five because they occupied all five of the islands on the thing. You had to, I mean they were all armored and they were all doing the fighting, so.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well, then we went back to where we were and sat around there until we got the orders to go home (*laughter*). But what the Navy decided to do instead of making us get on the boats and go home by boat why they said, "Well the photography guys can all take their airplanes and fly them home." The only sad part about it was that you couldn't take all the crew with you. You could only take six of each crew, which was kind of sad but that's the way they made it, so. And

we just flew back. We went from Guam to Kwajalein and to Johnson Island and back to Hawaii. And then from Hawaii back to San Diego.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About when did you leave over there to come home?

Mr. Schurmeier:

I think it was about, if I recollect about two to three weeks after the war was over.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So sometime in September or October?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Yeah, September I think it was. And we went back, all the way back to Hawaii. And then flew back from Hawaii. We took all the armored plates off of the airplane, for two reasons. One is you could get better gas mileage and number two you could fly a lot higher. So Navy bought all that heavy armor and everything, but we never used it. You just felt a little safer, if you get higher irregardless of what else went on.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then when you go back to San Diego then what happened?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well then they decommissioned the squadron and everybody was given thirty days leave and you had a choice of what you wanted to do. You could get out at the end of that thirty days or you could, best I remember we were given I think it was three months, we were given three additional months if we wanted to stay in. So, I stayed in for the additional three months and then I wanted to, I couldn't see there was any place, anything else to do. Then I decided that it might be a good idea to stay in. So I signed up for photographic school, I'd never been to photographic school but I signed up for it. In as much as I was connected with the photographic squadron why we got the option on it. And I went to photographic school down in Pensacola,

Florida and that lasted about, oh about four months, three and a half months. And then I was told that that was it. They didn't need my services any longer and goodbye.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So when were you discharged then?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Not too long before Christmas, oh just about a week before Christmas (December '45) because it took me almost, about three or four days to get home. It was hard to get some transportation.

What we finally did was, about three or four of us got together and we found a guy advertising in the newspaper that he would drive people to wherever they wanted to go for a nominal fee. So three of us got together and went and talked to the guy. And he said, "Yeah," he said, "I'll do it." And I don't know, I think we gave him two or three hundred dollars. And he drove, let's see the family was living in Chicago at the time, but there was one guy that lived closer. Anyway he went a little bit further east, I think he went west. One of the guys was living in Milwaukee I think, and he took that guy up, there were three us, three or four of us. Then we were out, that was it, I was on my own. You got your hundred dollars and that was it (*laughter*).

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you got out in December of '45 then?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you stay in the Reserves?

Mr. Schurmeier:

No. Well, I didn't, you know they didn't seem like they wanted anybody and they didn't seem like it was, you know you were going to be able to do much on the thing so I just decided that I'd better, you know find a job or do something else. Staying in the Navy wasn't going to get it,

there were literally hundreds of thousands of guys still in the Navy.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the highest rank you got to?

Mr. Schurmeier:

I got to JG.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well, there wasn't much to be doing. I tried first one thing and another but I couldn't find anything that I really wanted to do or that they were hiring. So, I didn't really do much of anything for first about three or four months.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any trouble with PTSD, being bad nightmares or anything like that?

Mr. Schurmeier:

No, I didn't do anything. There wasn't hardly anything going on, I mean on the thing. The automobile companies were trying to, you know get their manufacturing going but they were selling, you know making a few cars each day. But that was the biggest industry and all the rest of the companies were all in the process of converting over to civilian stuff for the first six months anyway.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were over there what would you consider your most frightening time?

Mr. Schurmeier:

What would be the most frightening time was when we were on Okinawa, from Okinawa we of course we flew up over the mainland to photograph the island. But the night, the second night we were there the Japanese tried to retake the island of Okinawa. And what they did, they had

some transport planes that were just a little bit bigger than the SNB and they put about six Japs in it and they would fly over and crash land on the airport there on Okinawa. And the Japs, if they weren't killed when they landed, some of the planes crashed and almost everybody was killed. But there were two or three of the planes that landed and all they were, they were kind of roughed up but they weren't killed. And the Japs got out of those planes and of course they had guns and hand grenades and so on. And they landed on the edge of the airfield on the thing and they got out of the airplane and went around and blew up some of the planes that were there. The patrol squadrons, there were two patrol squadrons there and they lost, I think each one of them lost two planes. And we lost one airplane. And then there was another couple of planes. What they did is they would take these hand grenades and stick them up on the landing gear and then run away from it. And in a few minutes why "wham," off would go the explosion. And of course it was right under where the gas tank was, so that was the end of the airplane. And that went on one whole night there. It started just a little after dark and the Japs were still running around on the island at daylight. But the Marines had been called, the Marines were fighting on the north end of the island at the time. And I don't know exactly how it happened but for some reason they were able to get those Marines back to the airbase. And they finished off the few Japs that were still alive after daylight. But that was kind of a hairy thing because those damn Japs were running around there with guns and you couldn't tell who was who in the dark (Okinawa).

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was the morale in your outfit?

Mr. Schurmeier:

I think, oh the morale was good, we didn't have any morale problems. If we had one I didn't know anything about it, because as far as I could see everybody was, you know everybody wanted out and wanted to get home. But I mean, what the hell that didn't have anything to do

with morale.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Every night we'd go over to the Officer's Club, you know that big club out there on the airbase and they had radio turned on to it and you could hear her talking. And when our squadron first got on to Guam, why the first night that we were in the Officer's Club Tokyo Rose welcomed our squadron to the island. And boy you should have seen the expression on some of the faces of some of those guys. I didn't know it anymore than most of them did being welcomed out there. And I said, "Who is that?" "Oh that's Tokyo Rose." "Well where is she?" "Well she's in Japan." I said, "Well how the hell did she know we got here, we just got here about six hours ago?" "Well that's just the way the war's run." (*Laughter*) Needless to say everybody was a little spooked after that. And then almost every night why she would talk to us about something and then she'd play a couple of songs for the Americans, and then by then they'd shut the club down. About ten thirty or eleven they'd shut the club down.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on April the 12th of 1945 President Roosevelt died, did y'all hear about that?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Yeah we heard about it. I don't remember that there was too much one way or the other about it. But I do remember that, I think everybody was a little on the sad side because I think they thought he'd done about as good a job as could be done. That seemed to be the opinion.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On May the 8th of '45 Germany surrendered, did y'all hear about that?

Mr. Schurmeier:

We might have but I don't, if we did why it didn't register much. Mainly I think it was because

it was so damn far away.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then on August the 15th when Japan surrendered, did you have any kind of a celebration then?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Oh yeah. We had a hell of a celebration there in the Officer's Club. And like I say the skipper was an ex-Hollywood executive and he was always going over to the hospital and gathering up several of the nurses and bringing them back to the Officer's Club. So we had a pretty good party, the nurses were all for the senior officers or he and his buddies. But at least we got a chance to talk to some of them and it livened the place up anyway.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now did you get home with any souvenirs from World War II?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Yeah, I came home with some. I had a Japanese Nambu machine gun that I got on Okinawa. I traded a bottle of Bourbon for it. Hell it looked like it was brand new, it might have been shot a time or two, but it sure was almost brand new. And I got a Japanese .30 caliber rifle and then I got also a Japanese, what they call the sharpshooter's rifle. It was a different caliber, it had a longer barrel on the thing. And then I had a Japanese pistol. Hell almost everybody..., all you had to do was, the Marines were gathering all this stuff up because they were still fighting on the north end of the island. And so when the Marines were off duty why they'd gather that stuff that they'd acquired and they'd come on up to the airbase and you could trade with them. Some of them wanted just money and some of them would much rather have the liquor. And having been an officer in the Navy why we were allowed to have, I think it was either three or four bottles of liquor every month. And the Navy would make sure where we could get them, in other words we'd get them for a dollar or two dollars a bottle. And I wasn't much of a drinker so I just traded mine off for souvenirs.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Schurmeier:

The Air Medal, that's all.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Any battle stars?

Mr. Schurmeier:

No. I don't think anybody in the squadron got anything, any more than that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you in any typhoons over there?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Yeah, we were in a typhoon on Iwo Jima, that's when we were on Iwo Jima. And we'd gone up there to fly from there to Japan. And when we got there why it was raining pretty bad. We got there about the middle of the day and by late in the afternoon why the skipper of the operation there told all the planes, like our planes as well as the other ones that were doing the observations, told them to get out of there because the typhoon was going to hit. So we crawled back in our airplane and we had a hell of a time getting off the field because the field was nothing but dirt and there were a whole bunch of potholes in it. And the potholes of course when it got a heavy rain like that would fill up with water. And you'd start down the runway and you'd give it all it's got and you'd hit one of those potholes and it would lose ten or fifteen miles an hour just instantly. And so what we had to do was we had to kind of line up in line, in other words get one behind the other and when the first plane went, and he'd get all the water out of those potholes as much as he could so the plane behind him would then be able to take off. And our squadron left there and one of the patrol squadrons left. We just went back to Guam and came back again a week later. So flying in that typhoon was a little rough.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Schurmeier:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Didn't go to school or anything like that?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Just traded all my souvenirs off, I don't have them anymore.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you had any reunions of the VD-1?

Mr. Schurmeier:

There's not too many of them still alive I don't think.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But you never had any reunions anytime then?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well, no we didn't as a single unit. But we had a couple where the, well the engine guys got together I think three or four times after the war in various places. You know the patrol squadron guys as well as the ones with the photo outfit. There were three photo squadrons.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were in the service did you have experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Schurmeier:

No, I don't remember much connection with them, heard the name and all that but that's about all.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The Red Cross.

Mr. Schurmeier:

Any connection with them, I think the only time I saw them was when we got back to San Diego they were there on the thing and welcomed us back, that's about all I remember about that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever see any USO shows anywhere?

Mr. Schurmeier:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Not even in California?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Not that I remember. There may have been, they were probably there, but I don't recollect as having been with them or knowing anything about it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you got to Hawaii on your way overseas was there much damage still there?

Mr. Schurmeier:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you been on the Honor Flight to Washington, D.C.?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Yeah, I went up there, let's see, a year ago I guess it is. A year, two years ago. A year ago!

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well this friend of mine that's a CPA on the thing, he has an office in Austin, and he called me. And I was talking to him one time about the war on the thing, and then later on he called me and

he said, "Would you let me take you to Washington?" And I said, "Hell I don't have any use up there." "Well," he said, "I'd like for you to see all the memorials." And the first time around I turned him down but then later on I was kind of encouraged by some others, so I finally agreed to him. And we went up there, I think it was either last year or the year before. And went up on a Friday night, and Saturday, we stayed up there a day and a half. And we went around to see all the monuments, it was pretty worth the effort. I wasn't really enthused about it until after I got back (*laughter*).

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well anything else you recall from your time in World War II?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well, I guess that's about all I can think of at the moment.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah ready, go ahead. Give me the information on your brother.

Mr. Schurmeier:

It's Robert Schurmeier and it's 1-843-795-1720.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And what town is he in?

Mr. Schurmeier:

Charleston, South Carolina.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you know what he did in the service?

Mr. Schurmeier:

He was a crewman on a PBV.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well Ben, I want to thank you for your time today.

Mr. Schurmeier:

Okay, well I want to thank you for being, give me the patience to listen (*laughter*) to what I had to say.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Thank you for your service to our country during World War II.

Mr. Schurmeier:

Well you're entirely welcome, I enjoyed it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

We'll talk to you later, by now.

Mr. Schurmeier:

Okay, give me a call when you can.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, bye now.

(End of interview.)

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