

JOSEPH GIESKEN

Amthor: This is a portion of the *Oral Histories of Northwest Missouri in the 1940s* program. The Nodaway County Historical Society is sponsoring this program in partnership with the Missouri Humanities Council and with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Today's date is November 4, 2008, and this interview is being conducted at the Nodaway County Historical Society Museum, located in Maryville, Missouri. The interviewer is Joni Amthor, and assisting is Margaret Kelley. The interviewee is Joseph Giesken. His birthday is November 10, 1917. He lived during the 1940s and this interview is his story of life during this time period including World War II.

Amthor: Okay, first thing we're going to talk about is just a little bit about your background, your biographical information. We'd like to know where and when you were born.

Giesken: Parnell, in rural Parnell, Nodaway County.

Amthor: Tell us about your parents, their occupations, and if you had any brothers and sisters.

Giesken: There were nine of us kids, and I was the middle one, and my mother was the oldest one of the Hawk kids at Parnell, and my dad was one of the older Giesken kids, and there were nine in his and twelve in Mom's, so I've got a lot of relation.

Amthor: What did they do?

Giesken: Everybody about was farmers back at that time.

Amthor: Tell us about your life in 1940 before you entered the military; your concerns your joys, what did you do?

Giesken: Well, I was a south Missouri corn hauler for a couple of years, trucking and then I went to work for Lake City at Remington-DuPont, and that was when Pearl Harbor happened. So I - like I said Japan is a little bitty country, he said, let's just go whip them and get it over. Then I tried to get into the Navy, but I couldn't, so I ended up about three months later was drafted into the Army and went to Camp Roberts, California for eight weeks and shipped out to Honolulu and was there for about six months and spent a little over three years overseas.

Amthor: Did you have any other family members who participated in the war?

Giesken: A brother, John, John Giesken.

Amthor: We're going to talk a little bit about propaganda. What did you know about the war in Europe, or in China?

Giesken: Nothing, really. After we left Honolulu and went to Guadalcanal, we didn't have any contact with a radio or newspapers or nothing for almost two years. It was just - we didn't have any contact with the outside world at all.

Amthor: How did the U.S. portray the war, and how did portray Japanese?

Giesken: Pardon me?

Amthor: How did the U. S. portray the war and the Japanese?

Giesken: Criminals.

Amthor: Were you aware of the propaganda here and abroad?

Giesken: A little bit. We captured a new Plymouth car when we was over there, and took the radio out of it, and got a little bit, hardly none that you could understand, but you got a little bit of what Tokyo Rose played on the radio, and I'm sure you know what that ordeal was about. She just said you're girlfriend's going out with somebody else, and this and that, and that went on and on, but we didn't have that for very long.

Amthor: How did you learn about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Giesken: Well, my folks didn't have a radio, and that was on Sunday morning, and then Sunday afternoon we heard that somewhere, and then that was the beginning of wanting to go do something about that which we thought was going to take six weeks, you know.

Amthor: How did you learn about the progress of the war?

Giesken: I just lived it. We didn't know a whole lot about the progress of it, period.

Amthor: Now we're going to talk a little bit about your early days in service, your basic camp, your basic training camp memories. Of course, you talked about that you tried to enlist.

Giesken: Yes.

Amthor: And why weren't you able to enlist at the time?

Giesken: I was color blind, and the Navy wouldn't take me.

Amthor: You said something about you were also were working for the government?

Giesken: Yes, Remington-DuPont, and went to join the Navy, and this guy said, "Well, we can't take you because you're working for the government." And I said "Well, I'll just quit." The next day, then I went back to Remington-DuPont at Lake City and quit and then after that I couldn't get in the Navy, so I just come back home was just working at home and went from there and then in March 15, went in the Army then.

Amthor: So you were drafted.

Giesken: Yes.

Amthor: And what was the branch of service again?

Giesken: Army.

Amthor: Army. Okay. Tell us a little bit about your basic training.

Giesken: Just went to Camp Roberts, California, for eight weeks, and shipped out to Hawaii, and that was it.

Amthor: Did you spend any time at Fort Leavenworth?

Giesken: Was just there like one or two nights, got on the train and went right to California, and done that eight weeks, and then went to Frisco, and was there waiting for a ship to take us across and was only in Frisco about a week or two then.

Amthor: Did you have any specialized training?

Giesken: No.

Amthor: How did you adapt to military life? The duties, the physical regime, the barracks, the food, social life?

Giesken: That wasn't bad for me. There was a lot of guys that was really homesick, and really just couldn't hardly take it, you know, but it didn't bother me in the least. We just went right on about our business because principally we was so busy all the time, and then when we got to Hawaii, we was just so busy that it was unreal, unloading ships and everything, and whatever you was going to do, you had to do it before dark, because there were no lights: positively no lights in Hawaii – or anywhere else where we ever were except for New Zealand.

Amthor: Well, next, we're going to talk about your actual service time

Giesken: Okay.

Amthor: Just kind of tell us what, where you served, and tell us about the places in your duties in these places, and some of the combat duties.

Giesken: Well, I won't be able to remember these dates, but when we were at Honolulu for – I'm just going to guess – about six months or so, we were loading ammunition on ships, artillery ammunition, and training and guarding of a big ammunition dump, and a lot of guys that come in there that had never drove a truck in their life, trying to teach them to drive a truck, you know, and so then along in the fall of 1942, they shipped us to Guadalcanal, and it took us 36 days. We was there for about maybe six months, and then we went to Russell Island, and we waited on Russell Island about a month or two, to meet an outfit of Marines, and an outfit of Australians. Then we invaded another island, and that took us like three months or so. The first Christmas we

were in Guadalcanal, and the second Christmas we were in New Zealand, then we came back from New Zealand to New Caledonia, and was there maybe like two or three months, and then from New Caledonia we went to New Guinea, and was there a while, and then we had to wait until all the ships got loaded, and got ready to invade the Philippine Islands, and we landed in the Philippine Islands the 9th of January, in 45. I was overseas three years, three months and 27 days. I can remember that part of it.

Amthor: How did you handle emotion in combat, when witnessing casualties and destruction?

Giesken: Well, it was a problem, you know, but we just had to do it.

Amthor: Did you form friendships and camaraderie while in service?

Giesken: You bet. You bet. Met some awful nice guys.

Amthor: How did you stay in touch with your family and friends back home?

Giesken: Just with letters – they made that little v-mail. You know, didn't need to put a stamp on it, and it was a real little. . . . Do you know what I'm talking about or not? It was a little tiny envelope thing, and it was somehow another you could write on that, and then mail it for nothing, and just folded it up. But we'd go for a month or two without getting any mail, and then we'd get like six or eight or ten letters at one time, you know, because the mail didn't go like just only on ships, or airplanes, principally on ships. We'd get our mail like – well, once a month, or something. My mother and my oldest sister wrote often, and so I might get ten or fifteen letters at one time, you know, if I didn't get them for a month. Then we never got paid one time, for six months. It just wasn't anything else going on.

Amthor: What entertainment did you have in the service?

Giesken: We didn't.

Amthor: You didn't have any USO or Red Cross?

Giesken: A little bit in New Zealand, but nothing to amount to anything.

Amthor: You did say you listened to Tokyo Rose; how about Axis Sally?

Giesken: No, I never heard her. No.

Amthor: What did you do for recreation and leisure?

Giesken: There wasn't any.

Amthor: Was there any one battle that you can think of that you'd like to share with us?

Giesken: Well, when we landed in the Philippine Islands, we spent 165 days right there. We never changed clothes, just; we were just from daylight to dark. Then Pala Vandalia was real rough.

Amthor: It took you that long to go across the island?

Giesken: It took 165 days to go across Luzon.

Amthor: At the end of the war, what about D-Day? Do you remember anything about D-Day?

Giesken: No, I don't. D-Day in Europe? No, I don't, but then they dropped the atomic bomb, and we had gone this 165 days and we came back to Clark Airfield in the Philippine Islands, and we just got back there, and in a big tent city, so to speak, and they dropped the atomic bomb, then, and of course that ended that, and we just was there just like a month or two after that, then. We were billed to go to Japan to invade Japan in October. That would have been – that would probably would have been in July. Well, no, it was August 6, wasn't it, when they dropped the atomic bomb? Is that correct or not?

Amthor: Yes.

Giesken: We were in the Philippine Islands then. Yes, the Philippine Islands, then, of course that stopped everything when they dropped that atomic bomb, you know.

Amthor: Do you think President Truman should have ordered the bomb to be dropped?

Giesken: Quicker. [laughter]

Amthor: Where and what were you doing when you got news that the war was over?

Giesken: We were at Clark Airfield in the Philippines, and it was just a place where they had a lot of tents and when the outfits would get off duty, they'd go there and stay in those tents, you know, and we was back there in those tents from the end of the war in the Philippine Islands, and that was when they dropped the bomb and those guys stayed up all night, they hollered, they sang, they done everything.

Amthor: How did you get home?

Giesken: We came on a brand new troop transport: 5,000 troops on it, and it was all lit up. The war was over and had lights, you know, and the ship was all lit up and it was just a glorious trip home.

Amthor: Were you given a reception by your family, friends, and community?

Giesken: The family. Just my family; big family had a dinner.

Amthor: How did the people treat you when you returned home?

Giesken: Oh, fine.

Amthor: How did you adjust back to civilian life?

Giesken: Oh, alright. Dad was feeding cattle, and I was single, living there at home, you know, so I just went to work helping him, and went on right from there.

Amthor: Have you ever contacted or stayed in touch with the people you served with?

Giesken: Yes. This Randall came from New York, like Jolene mentioned, and he would come like today, tomorrow, and the next day he would leave. Every time he did that same thing. We tried to figure up one time that we think that he came 40 times from New York, and we went back to visit him three or four times. We went to Niagara Falls on the way, you know, and made a good trip out of it. About six weeks ago there was a guy; a lady called me and wanted to know if I wanted to talk to K. B. Cook, and I said, yes I would. She said that he had a little book that had my name and address in it. Just Joe Giesken, Burlington Junction, no rural route or anything. I said yes I would. He had a little book when he left over there and he wrote several guys' names and he found my name in that little book, and he called me and he calls – we call each other every Sunday, now since he called me three months ago. I am probably the only person that you know that has the same address sixty five years later than when I did when the war started. And he is about six months older than I am, but he's in real poor health. Really, really poor health.

Amthor: Did you join the American Legion or the VFW?

Giesken: The American Legion.

Amthor: Are you proud to be a veteran of World War II?

Giesken: Yeah!

Amthor: After the war, were you concerned about the Soviet Union or the spread of communism?

Giesken: I wasn't very much because I wasn't in to a lot of news and a lot of things like that, and I went to farming as soon as the war was over, and I was busy and just didn't pay much attention to it, you know. We knew that they talked about the – what do they call them, the super powers, you know, and now they're starting to talk about that again. Needs to be some serious thought given to it, but I didn't pay a whole lot of attention to it.

Amthor: Did you take advantage of the GI Bill for education?

Giesken: Yes. Yes I did. Went to GI school I think for four years.

Amthor: How about did you use any of the mortgage loans?

Giesken: No.

Amthor: What do you think are the differences between the WWII and the wars of today?

Giesken: Well, they're totally different. I don't know a whole lot about what's going on today, but back then there was just a sort of a cut and dried pattern. What I mean by that is we had those artillery guns, and of course we had our rifles, and the bombers bombed, bombed, bombed; just continuously where they needed to be, and it's different now, I think, though I don't know a whole lot about it. What we see on TV is all I know about it, you know.

Amthor: Now I had spoken to you earlier, and you had talked to me about monkeys. Could you tell us any funny stories about the monkeys that you saw?

Giesken: Well, just if you could get – the Philipinos would catch a monkey, you know, and trade it to you for a carton of cigarettes, and you had to keep him on a little leash, you know, or he would just run off into the woods. You got to bear in mind that that jungle that we was in over there for two years was thick, thick jungle, and it never did frost, never did killed it in the winter time, it never did freeze or anything, and it was thick, you just couldn't see through it. You could teach a monkey to peel a banana or open an ----- and that was the extent of that. It was kind of interesting to have one, and have him on a leash, and put him in the truck with you and keep him a day or two and then turn him loose.

Amthor: How was it over there in the jungle? Was there a lot of struggle? What was life like having to live in the jungle like that?

Giesken: Well, we slept on the ground for over two years. We'd dig fox holes and if we needed to, we'd get in those fox holes, but if we didn't, we'd just sleep there beside them, you know, and I was with Charley Gray, up at Clearmont. Went in together, and came home together, and he and I would dig fox holes, usually of a night, we'd dig one together and if we had to we'd dig it big enough for both of us and then if we had to we'd get in it, and if we didn't we wouldn't you know. If that fox hole had water in it and we needed it, we just got in it.

Amthor: We had talked earlier, too, and you had mentioned that you were at Luzon, and you also had seen the Baton Death, is that correct?

Giesken: Yes.

Amthor: Is there anything more that you'd like to talk about those occasions?

Giesken: No, I don't – I don't think so. When the war was over on Luzon, which that is Manila, you know, is the capital, we blew that city down level. You could just look across it, and of course, it looks like New York, or Kansas City, or something like that. But we just totally destroyed that place.

Amthor: Well, is there any other funny story or any story that you'd like to tell us?

Giesken: No, nothing that I can remember. Just made some really, really good friends.

Kelley: You only used 23 minutes.

Amthor: Didn't you say you talked about how the sky was just black when you were on the ship.....? How you didn't want to go down stairs; not downstairs, how you didn't like to go inside the ship, and you'd stay upstairs no matter what the captain said? [laughter]

Giesken: I didn't want to be down in the ship and have the doors locked and be locked down there, and especially in enemy waters, and so I would sleep out on deck. They had some little boats, little life boats, in case the ship did go down, and when it would just start to kind of get dark I'd just go up there and get in one of those and sleep up there. We got on the ship in Frisco to go to Honolulu and Charley Gray got seasick, and there was a great huge roll of cable there. You can't imagine how big that cable was on that ship, you know, because it had to be real big. He just got in that roll of cable and lay down, and he laid there for six days and nights and he never moved. I didn't know that you could do that, but he did and I didn't know him very good at that time, you know, we'd just been in recruit camp together and he spent six days and nights laying in that roll of cable. Then they took him to a doctor or something on ship, you know, and just one more day; it just took us seven days to go over there.

Amthor: What kind of a ship was it when you went over there? Was it a transport?

Giesken: It was an old British luxury liner that they had made a troop transport out of it. It had china dishes. Well, we slept in hammocks hooked to the ceiling, you know, and this ship – we ate out of china, you know, dinner plates, and we'd drop those dinner plates out of a port hole and watch them go down. You could see them in the water, and they would just go down real slow, and then when they got about the size of a golf ball, they'd just disappear. Something that we shouldn't have been doing at all. [laughter]

Amthor: Did you have malaria?

Giesken: Yes, I had malaria three or four times.

Amthor: How was that?

Giesken: You're sick if you've got malaria. It don't make any difference what they do with you, you're. . . .When we landed in New Guinea I had malaria and I just laid down and it was evening, and there was a doctor ; there was a dentist with us, and he said "I'll give you something," and gave me a little tiny pill; a little tiny pill, and I woke up the next morning in a field hospital. I had malaria after that two or three different times. Then I did after I came home for a while. But you just got a real high fever and you're real sick and that's all there is to it.

Amthor: Did you get any other diseases while you were over there?

Giesken: No, I didn't.

Amthor: Just malaria.

Giesken: Just malaria. We waded around in the mud. The mud was terrible in Guadalcanal. You just was – it was just so muddy that the trucks was stuck and the artillery guns, you couldn't move them, and just everything. The mud got in our shoes and socks so bad, and we just had that – they called it Dobie itch; it's around your ankles, and it just looked like your feet was going to maybe come off. When you'd take your socks off then, your feet got kind of rotten, you know, and when you'd take your socks off they'd just be a layer of hide that would come off with them each time. Well, then, later they made about a six inch leather deal, and sewed it to your shoes, and it had two buckles on the side of it, and that made you a kind of a boot then which was much, much, much better than those just regular shoes, you know. But I don't ever remember it raining when we was in the Philippine Islands, but it sure did down when we was down in the Guadalcanal. It just rained every day. It would rain four or five inches and then the sun would come out and the humidity would just be terrible and the equator runs through New Guinea and would be nothing for it to be a hundred and twelve degrees. That was just every day, and you just got use to it and just stayed that way.

Amthor: Wow. You said you didn't see any snakes around there.

Giesken: No, I didn't, but I heard those guys talk about it. The snake weighed two hundred and fifty pounds and would be twenty-five feet long, but I never did see one.

Amthor: Probably a good. . . .

Giesken: I would have fainted if I had!

Kelley: Would you ever get new shoes and socks?

Giesken: Once in a while we'd get new ones; like we never got anything new as long as we were in the 165 days, we just had what clothes we had. We had a little pack that we had a change of clothes in, but principally we had socks, extra socks, we'd keep extra socks so we could throw the old ones away, you know, but we couldn't do that very often, because we're going to run out, you know.

Amthor: Now you mentioned earlier, what was your age when you went into the service?

Giesken: I? Twenty-three I think; twenty-three or four.

Amthor: What was your rank?

Giesken: I was a buck private for over two years.

Amthor: Did you ever get anything else on top of that?

Giesken: I got a sergeant stripes after the war was over, because all of the guys that was ahead of me went home and so they had to give somebody those stripes, and I become a sergeant just about a month before we came home.

Amthor: What was the name of your infantry? Your division?

Giesken: 25th Division, 35th Combat team.

Amthor: How many people were involved in that?

Giesken: Around three thousand. It was the engineers, and the artillery and the infantry and all were about three thousand. There is about – there's 9000 troops in the triangular division and we was about a third of it.

Amthor: What was the – you were in a smaller group when you were in Luzon?

Giesken: Luzon? Yes.

Amthor: And how many were in that group?

Giesken: There was oh, there would have probably been around a hundred of us in the vicinity of a hundred of us.

Amthor: How many of those are still living?

Giesken: There is Cook, the guy that called me just the other day, he's in Atlanta, Georgia; there's a guy in Cleveland that I haven't heard from for a while, and myself. There's three of us left yet.

Amthor: Anybody have any other questions?

[can't hear person talking]

Giesken: Like what?

[question]

Giesken: An airfield? Oh! We'd lay those just cut poles and trees and lay them across the swamp so that you could drive across them and they wouldn't settle down then. One time, they old man said, "There's a bunch of guys got killed," and he said "they've taken the bodies away," and he said "I like to have you go up there and pick up all their packs, you know, and their guns and stuff. They had M-1 rifles and that was a really top killer gun so I just took one. I didn't steal it, I just took it.

Amthor: How did you get the Samaria sword you were talking about?

Giesken: We were up in the mountains on Luzon, and those Japs were in those caves, you know, they just had those caves just on each- we were going up between two mountains in the valley and they'd just have the sides of that mountain just full of caves, and they had artillery guns in there, and they'd run them out and fire on us, and then they'd move them back in there so you couldn't see them, see? So if they wanted something done, they could hire those Philippinos and they made money. They just had a little machine; they made money. There was just so much money. I had a million peso, or whatever it was, and it was just totally worthless, but they'd hired those Philippinos to do that with that worthless money. So this guy in my outfit went up there and in one of those caves, and when he came back he had that sword. He said, "Would you like to have that?" And I said, "Sure!" And he never did tell me how he got it, or nothing. He just gave it to me. I thought afterwards that he just wanted rid of it, because may be he used it.

Amthor: Were there any other souvenirs that you brought back with you?

Giesken: No. Just a whole bunch of that money that was worthless. Yes.

Amthor: Did you still have your uniform?

Giesken: No, my uniform burnt several years ago when Jolene was about 7 or 8 years old, the house burnt; a bunkhouse burned when we lived up here north of Maryville, and I had my uniform and everything in a real nice suitcase, and it burnt.

Amthor: That's too bad.

Giesken: But I couldn't wear it now, anyway!

Amthor: It would still be nice to look at it!

Giesken: I wouldn't have taken nothing for that uniform, because I had; You got a chevron on your cuff for every six months and I had six of those sew on there.

Amthor: Wow.

Giesken: Every six months overseas, not in the states.

[unknown] What did you eat?

Giesken: Pardon?

[unknown] What did you eat?

Giesken: We ate an awful a lot of just World War I rations and they wasn't bad. Everything was canned; just a little can was a meal. It was potatoes, and beans and meat and peas and you could eat it cold, or you could put a fire under your mess kit and heat it a little bit if you ; in the

daytime, you know, and eat it and it was pretty good. Then they made a big chocolate bar that was a meal, and you could eat one of those. We actually ate pretty good.

Amthor: How was the water over there? Did you have to boil it or anything?

Giesken: Well, they put an awful lot of chlorine in it. When we landed on Vella Lavella, we were just wandering without water, so we went ashore, and we just got ashore, and just a little ways, and we found this little river and we thought we got water, but will it be any good or not? I'll be darned if it wasn't a spring right there, and you could just hold your canteen under that thing; fill it full of absolutely pure water. It just worked so good.

Amthor: Was there a way of testing the water?

Giesken: Not that I knew about. They just put so much chlorine in it that you could really taste that chlorine. It purified it.

Amthor: If there's no more; unless there is any other stories that you can think of.

Kelley: When you came back home, where did you come back to the U. S.?

Giesken: Frisco. And I had a World War I aluminum canteen and it had some names that they made; took a knife blade and kind of made some names and numbers and that, and we got off the big ship and got on a barge. And was sitting there and I was tired, and my belt was too tight, and I just unbuckled my belts, and I would have absolutely would have taken nothing for that canteen, because they gave it to me the day I went into the Army, and I carried it all through the war. We was just sitting on that nets, and I just unbuckled my belt, and I was just sitting there. Well, when we got up, I just never buckled my belt back up and left it right there. I really felt bad about that.

Amthor: Well, if we can't think of anything else, I think that will be good. I'm glad you came in today.

Giesken: Well, I am too.

Amthor: I enjoy all these memories.

Giesken: Well, there a lot of good ones. Awful lot of good ones, as well as some bad ones.

Amthor: Sometimes it is the bad ones that you don't want to talk about, and that's okay. There are things you don't want to remember, probably.

Giesken: Yes. Yes! Louie Race is this guy in Cleveland, that's the name, and I talked to him a while back and he said, "You and I were the first two guys to set foot on Vella LaVella Island."

Amthor: Wow.

Giesken: And of course, we was right up against – we went to take the island right up against Bougainville; Bougainville was Japan's headquarters. Big main island, and we was going to have us an island airfield right up by that, and they were just bombing us continuously to keep us from doing that, you know, but we done it anyway!

Amthor: How are we doing?

[unknown] . . . killed on Luzon and you were close to. . . .

Giesken: Yes. Right just before the war was over, this guy got shot and I was standing right by and [silence] he said, Oh, God, I want to go home." He knew he was. . . . He knew he was hit. And so later then he was from Waynesburg, Ohio and later then I told my old sister – told her this story and she said, Well, I bet his mother would like to know about that. So she wrote to her, she wrote to Mrs. Shinin, and they came here and visited us and she wanted to know exactly what happened. Everything. Which you can understand.

[can't hear question]

Giesken: The Japs cut the trail in to that we was – the old man sent us after a big gun sent us with a big truck to get a big gun and they had fired it so much, it fired all the rifling in the barrel out of it and so the old man asked me to go get another – go back and get a new gun. Well, by the time we was gone most of the day, to go back to get that new gun, and we got back up there, the Japs had the roads cut off. Charley Gray and I was just sitting there for two days and nights waiting to get back. He was really a good soldier.

Amthor: Sounds like it to me. You have a lot of memories with him.

Giesken: You bet, Yes.

Kelley: So you were with him from the very beginning; you went the same time?

Giesken: Went in the same day and came out the same day.

Amthor: Stayed together pretty much?

Giesken: All that time.

Kelley: I bet you knew him a lot better at the end than you did in the beginning when he used to live at Clearmont!

Giesken: That's right! Did you know him?

Kelley: You bet!

Giesken: Yes. I would almost dare to say he was one of the best soldiers that I ever met. You could just depend on him.

Amthor: You keep referring – three times you said the old man. Now who's the old man?

Giesken: The captain. We had two – we had Captain Flatberg and Lieutenant Walters, and they was both from Salt Lake City, and they were both Mormons, and they were both West Point officers and really good officers.

Amthor: Were they old?

Giesken: No, they were five or ten years older than we was, you know!

Amthor: Were there any women over there from the United States?

Giesken: No.

Amthor: No? No nurses?

Giesken: No. When I was in that field hospital in New Guinea, there was nurses there, and that field hospital was just a big tent with a lot of mosquito netting around it so the mosquitoes wouldn't eat you up, you know, and it was just a whole bunch of beds in there, like, oh, fifty or little cot things, and of course, everybody that was in there was sick, or you wouldn't been in there.

Amthor: Didn't you have an unexplained. . . .

Giesken: When we was in Honolulu, they had those big three story barracks. It's a new - was called Caulfield Barracks; it was new. One of the most modern barracks in the United States Army. So we slept up on the second floor, and the lower floor which had the mess hall, had a marble floor. Where our bunks were was marble. You could just take a wet mop and I mean, man, you just mop it and it would just shine. There was a guy, his name was Morgan, I don't remember where he was from, but he snored like you couldn't believe. One night I was out in front, walking duty in the dark, you know, by myself and scared to death and I could hear Morgan snore in the top of that barracks, and every time Morgan would snore like that, well of course somebody would wake him up to get him to quit snoring and then he'd say, "I don't snore!" Then they'd get into a real good argument and wake everybody up in the middle of the night. There'd be sixty or seventy of us sleeping on this one story, you know, and have everybody up. Everybody. Or have then awake at least.

[background talking]

Giesken: They said they didn't let him go with us because they couldn't take him into combat, you know, with him snoring like that, so they just left him right there. Or sent him back to states, you know.

Amthor: You did mention that you did want to join the Navy, but you didn't like sleeping in the bottom of the boat. So how did that work out?

Giesken: Well, I just thought that when we was going to go join the Navy we just thought this was just going to be real fun, and this will be over in two or three months, you know, and that would just be the end of that, and we'll get out and that's the size of it. Well, it didn't pan out to be that way.

Amthor: A little different experience

Giesken: It was. It was.

Amthor: Were you ever on a submarine?

Giesken: Only – No. Only as a tourist attraction. We went through one in New York.

Amthor: It would be a little bit more confining.

Giesken: Yes! Oh, yes. And then we went on the battleship Alabama is in Mobile, Alabama, and we went down there right after the war to see the guy that called me a couple of months ago and went on that ship. It is a tourist attraction. He told me just recently that it has rusted out and it's just sitting there. Just iron. And it's almost a quarter of a mile long; it's like 800 and some feet long. It's a really a big monstrosity of a battleship.

Amthor: Wow. Where was it during the war?

Giesken: It would have just been all over the Pacific.

Amthor: Anybody have any more questions? I'm sure there is a lot of memories, it's just hard to pull one out of there.

Giesken: Yes.

Amthor: How are we doing on time?

Kelley: We've got a couple of minutes left on. . . we could go and get another tape.

Giesken: There was a Captain Compton and a Private Corley and so of course, they're right up in the top of the alphabet, you see, and so when the war was over, well, this little Corley was a real little guy, and he was a little older than the rest of us guys, and he would get a lot of odd duty, you know, KP and all that kind of stuff, and so he probably said to me a thousand times, "Do you think we'll make it? Do you think we'll get out of here alive?"

"Oh, yes, that's no problem. We can handle this. Nothing to it." So when the war was over, Captain Compton and Corley was like I said was the top of the alphabet so they sent them; they got to come home before we did and they left the airport at Manila, and they shot the plane down. I felt real bad. I'd lied to him a thousand times.

Amthor: You said he had a lot of KP duty. What was your duties?

Giesken: Oh, I was principally driving the truck and carrying a rifle and doing guard duty. It was just soldiering. Yeah.

Amthor: What was the gun that you had?

Giesken: My M-1 rifle that I took. Yeah, I just felt that it would take care of me, and it did.

Amthor: Did they have grenades back then yet?

Giesken: Yes, they did. Oh, you bet they did, and flame throwers and that's how they got those Japs out of those caves you know, was with those flame throwers, and of course one time they had a cave up there and they just couldn't find it. They couldn't detect it; they couldn't hit it or anything. So they brought in some twelve inch guns up there, brought a battery, which is four twelve inch guns and brought them up there and they had some guys then go up and find out where it was so they could hit that cave and stop those artillery shells; stop those Japs from firing on us. Those twelve inch guns were pretty big guns. A battleship has fifteen or sixteen inch guns on it, you know, real, real big guns. Fire a shell twenty miles it would weigh a ton. The guns that we had that would shoot about seven miles.

Amthor: Only seven miles? That's pretty far!

Giesken: Yes, it is. We had one-oh-fives, and one five-fives, and they were good. Now a 155 rifle would fire about fifteen miles, but the guns that we had would only fire seven miles.

[Kamikaze planes]

Giesken: I don't remember the name of that ship that we had – we were getting ready to go ashore in the Philippine Islands and this Randall from New York that came to see me so many times he and I was waiting on the freighter, and they had probably about forty trucks down in the hold and when a certain number of truck came up, we were assigned to it, so we got in it and when the stevedore let it down in the water then we got on it then and took that certain number of truck ashore, and then we was assigned that truck, you know. We heard this groan. A different kind of a sound. It was a Jap airplane, and it flew right directly into the top of the deck of the ship right next to the one we was on.

Kelley: Nine minutes left.

Giesken: Okay.

Amthor: Okay, we have time for one last story. So if we missed one that you'd really like to talk about.

Giesken: Not that I know about.

Amthor: One that has special meaning to me.

Giesken: No. When we went to New Zealand about three months, when we went there Japan was building this airfield in Guadalcanal and that's what we had to take back. We couldn't let them have it because they could bomb Australia and New Zealand from Guadalcanal, see, so we had to take it; we didn't have any choice, we had to take it back. They had bombed Australia, a few times from there and New Zealand knew that they was going to be next in line to be bombed. The people were so friendly, they were just tickled to death that we were there, you know, and ask you to come to dinner, and just meet a guy on the street, and he'd ask you to come home with him for supper, and things like that. Those people knew that they was coming up next for Japan to hit them, so they were tickled to death that we were doing what we were doing.

Amthor: So were you on any of the islands that were the enemy had already taken over and you were fighting against then at that point; I mean like oh,

Giesken: Vella LaVella, the Japs had; Guadalcanal, the Japs had;

Amthor: They had all those?

Giesken: New Guinea- they had all of them that we had to get those Japs off of all of those islands. Russell Island didn't have any Japs on it; it was a small island and we just waited there to meet up with some Australians and some Marines to go to Vella LaVella and invade and take it away from the Japs, in other words, and build that airfield there. It had great big huge mahogany trees on it, like five or six feet through, and when those Japs bombers would come in, we could sit in between those roots on the side of those big trees and just sit back in there and we could hear those Jap bombers a comin', we knew which side of that tree to get on, you know, for protection.

Amthor: Well, I think that will be good for now. I am really glad you came in today.

Giesken: I am too.

Amthor: Thank you for

Giesken: You're welcome. You're welcome. Good to see you again. It's been what? A couple of years?

Amthor: Four years.

Giesken: Four years?

Amthor: It's been four years. And I may want to use some of that interview to add to this if that's okay.

Giesken: Oh, it is, it is. Yes, I've still got that one.

Amthor: Good!

Giesken: Yes. I do have.

Amthor: Okay, because you had some more stories that you told on that one that was exciting.

Giesken: Okay.

Amthor: We do appreciate you coming in. Did you find the pictures that you wanted to show us?