

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
DANIEL A. BAUER

Truck Driver and Communications Mechanic, Army Air Corps, World War II.

2007

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Bauer, Daniel A., (1923-2009). Oral History Interview, 2007.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 50 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 50 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Daniel A. Bauer, a St. Paul, Minnesota native, discusses his Army Air Corps service in India and at Tinian during World War II. Bauer touches on his activities after graduating from vocational school, trying to enlist in the Navy, being rejected due to a perforated eardrum, and enlisting in the Air Corps. He mentions basic training at Goodfellow Field (Texas), training to be a link instructor, and being shipped to India as a truck driver before he could finish training. Bauer describes his 104-day voyage aboard the *SS Athos*, including extended seasickness and a submarine attack. He describes the chaos and destruction he witnessed upon his arrival in Bombay caused by the sabotaging of an ammunition ship. Sent across country on a troop train, Bauer comments on the poor sanitation and bad odors. Assigned to an air base at Kharagpur, he speaks about his uniforms, duty cooking and driving a gasoline truck, and refueling B-29s. He describes being treated in the hospital for jaundice and malaria, encountering a cobra while on KP duty, and disposing of sacred cows that wouldn't leave the base. Bauer talks about the food and the unavailability of liquor for enlisted men. He portrays a Japanese air raid on Christmas Eve: having an outdoor movie interrupted, driving a weapons carrier out of harm's way, and taking cover in a slit trench. He characterizes the Indian civilian he hired to clean his tent. Bauer talks about the closing of the base and setting up communications for a new base on Tinian. He describes the remaining Japanese presence on the island, having temporary duty building desks and Quonset huts, and duty as a teletype mechanic. Bauer tells of returning to Tinian for the 50-year anniversary of the end of World War II. He mentions using military communications to talk to a cousin stationed on Saipan, and he details visiting an uncle whose destroyer escort docked at Saipan. Bauer discusses seeing one of the atomic bombs being loaded onto the plane, the disbelief of the Japanese prisoners at the nearby prisoner of war camp after Japan surrendered, and flying back to the States on a B-29. He speaks of his homecoming and having recurring episodes of malaria.

Biographical Sketch:

Bauer (1923-2009) served with the 58th Bomb Wing, 25th Air Service Group, 35th Air Engineering Squadron from 1942 to 1945. After an honorable discharge, he married Catherine and had a career repairing office equipment in the Twin Cities (Minnesota). Bauer eventually settled in Hudson (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by Jim Kurtz, 2007

Transcribed by Rebecca Berhow, Wisconsin Court Reporter, 2008

Checked and corrected by Joan Bruggink, 2011

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

Transcribed Interview:

Jim: My name is Jim Kurtz and I'm trying to see if my tape recorder works. It's August 27th, 2007 and my name is Jim Kurtz and I'm interviewing Daniel—

Bauer: Daniel A. Bauer.

Jim: Daniel A. Bauer in Madison, Wisconsin, at the Wisconsin Veteran's Museum. Dan is a veteran of World War II with the Viet—excuse me, B-29 service. Dan, when and where were you born?

Bauer: I was born in St. Paul, Minnesota. August 7th, 1923.

Jim: So August 7th, '23. Okay.

Bauer: Yeah.

Jim: And where did you grow up?

Bauer: In St. Paul, Minnesota.

Jim: Okay. And then where did you graduate from high school?

Bauer: Well, I really graduated from, from industrial—

Jim: Okay.

Bauer: —school.

Jim: Okay. So you went to an industrial school?

Bauer: Yeah. A vocational school, yeah. Yeah

Jim: And when did you complete your schooling?

Bauer: When did I what?

Jim: Complete your schooling?

Bauer: Oh, I've been schooling a lot since then, but formal education was at Maria Sanford Junior-Senior High in St. Paul, yeah.

Jim: Okay. And do you remember what year you got out of—

Bauer: It was—

Jim: Sometime in the late '30s?

Bauer: Yeah. Right. It was—because in '41, '42 I went in the service; it must have been about '38.

Jim: Okay. Between the time that you were out of school and went into service, did you have any idea of what was going on in the world, I mean—

Bauer: Oh, yeah. I was a trained bookkeeping machine mechanic by the Underwood Corporation.

Jim: Okay.

Bauer: And I was servicing machines prior to the time I went into the service.

Jim: Okay.

Bauer: Yeah. They sent me to Hartford, Connecticut to school.

Jim: Did World War II have any impact, I mean—excuse me, World War I have any impact on your growing up?

Bauer: Other than from what I heard from my father and his brothers, my uncles?

Jim: What did they tell you?

Bauer: Well, they didn't tell me much.

Jim: What kind of service did they have, what were they?

Bauer: Well, my father was hurt in a commercial accident during his basic training.

Jim: Uh-hum.

Bauer: And my—his two brothers, they were in France and they served there and they were all honorably discharged.

Jim: Okay. And do you remember veterans' parades and the like when you were growing up?

Bauer: Not too many, no. No.

Jim: Okay. Okay. So were you drafted when you got into World War II?

Bauer: No, I enlisted because I didn't want to be in the Marines and I would have been drafted in eleven days, so I enlisted.

Jim: Did you enlist for the Army Air Corps?

Bauer: No, I enlisted in the Navy 'cause my brother and uncles were in the Navy, but they wouldn't take me; I had a perforated ear drum. So I ended up in the Air Corps. I went right across the hall and enlisted in the Air Corps, Army.

Jim: Air Corps. And then where did you—did you go to training then right away?

Bauer: Yeah. I went to Goodfield Field—Goodfellow Field, San Angelo, Texas, where I had basic training and I was studying—I was just about completed as a link trainer instructor for pilots and got just about to the last week of the radio, which was the end of the training, and they shipped me overseas as a truck driver, because I had driven truck in civilian life during the summer vacations at a grocery store.

Jim: So the link trainer is what they taught pilots how—what it was like—

Bauer: Instrument flying.

Jim: Instrument flying?

Bauer: And landing, yeah. Right.

Jim: Which is kind of interesting from the standpoint that that was a pretty important thing for pilots.

Bauer: Oh yeah, yeah. Those officers had a big fight over it because the—I think he was a major in charge of all these enlistees being shipped out and he put me on the list and I was just finishing the school for this and they were gonna use me, you know, as a trainer instructor and they had a fight over the phone. [laughs]

Jim: And they sent—

Bauer: They sent me overseas.

Jim: And where did they send you?

Bauer: India.

Jim: Okay. And how did you get to India?

Bauer: It was a real bad deal.

Jim: Tell us.

Bauer: A hundred and four days. We left off the east coast of the United States, Hampton Roads, Virginia, and a hundred and nine days later ended up in Bombay, India.

Jim: Do you remember what kind of a ship you went on?

Bauer: Yeah. *USS Athos*. It was a free French luxury liner in peacetime and it was in an American port and they converted it into a troop ship.

Jim: Do you remember how they spelled that, by any chance?

Bauer: Athos. A-T—A-T-H-O-S, I think.

Jim: Okay. That would be right.

Bauer: Okay.

Jim: And what were the living conditions like on this?

Bauer: Oh, it was tight and stinky. [laughs] I was fortunate, I was right behind the chain locker on the first deck below the open deck, you know.

Jim: Uh-hum.

Bauer: First deck down.

Jim: Did they have any activities to keep you busy during these hundred and four days?

Bauer: Yeah. KP.

Jim: A lot of KP?

Bauer: KP and guard duty on ship, and I was seasick a hundred and—ninety of the hundred and nine days.

Jim: What did you guard when you were on this ship?

Bauer: Just watched for other ships.

Jim: Okay.

Bauer: Submarines.

Jim: Oh, I was going to ask you, was there any concern about German or Japanese submarines?

Bauer: Oh, yeah. They had—we had a submarine attack and I was seasick and in my bed and I stayed in my bunk. I—

Jim: Okay. So you were seasick during the submarine attack?

Bauer: Oh, no—yeah, I was seasick for ninety of the hundred and nine days, yeah.

Jim: Okay. Do you remember anything about the submarine attack?

Bauer: Yeah. The ship went in circles and because the Athos was about the eleventh largest ship in the world at that time, it was too fast for escort, so they had escort stationed along our path and the ship progressed with a zig-zag, anti-submarine. It was a largest shipment of troops, body of troops in the World War II.

Jim: Okay. Do you remember how many people were on the—

Bauer: Yeah. It was a little over five thousand.

Jim: So did you get to meet anybody interesting on this?

Bauer: Well, I had my buddies with me that were bringing me onions and bread 'cause I was seasick in my bunk but—and there's all kinds of things that happened. A guy that went off his rocker and he came up to me, I was standing at the rail, and he came up to me and he said, “Dan,” he said, “I know you know what I'm thinking,” and he started in talking and he just—he bugged out. They shipped him home, I guess.

Jim: Okay. And when you arrived in India, what was your first impression?

Bauer: [laughs] When we arrived in India we entered—we arrived in Bombay and it was just after the—well, either the Japs or the Indians had sabotaged some of our ammunition ships, so the whole—we went inland. This was one of the eleventh largest ships in the world and we went inland, I don't know how many miles, it was all hand dug by women, by the Indian women.

Jim: What was hand dug?

Bauer: The channel that we—

Jim: Oh, okay.

Bauer: —we went into and—and it was nothing but chaos all around. They had clay brick tile roofs and that was layin' all over and dead bodies, burned out ships; they hit an ammunition ship they blew up in the port and so it was complete chaos there. Stinky and—

Jim: Was that—

Bauer: India. Bombay, India.

Jim: Okay. So were you given any kind of a briefing about what happened?

Bauer: No. Nothing. All we did was we were sittin', we were waitin' for mail for three months, we hadn't had mail, and they brought it in by truckloads and we sat and read mail for two days.

Jim: Was there anything interesting in the mail that you got?

Bauer: Oh, well, sure. News from home; that was the important thing.

Jim: So were you—you were on shore when you got attacked?

Bauer: No, we were on the ship yet. We were still on the ship. We hadn't debarked.

Jim: Okay. So you stayed on the ship until you—

Bauer: For a couple three days until they decided where we were gonna go and they got the trains there and stuff.

Jim: Okay. And so were you told anything about what you were going to do?

Bauer: No. They just—we traveled by rail for—and the train was—the windows were all open and of course, it was beastly hot and we sat and ate bagged lunches and washed our hands from the steam from the steam engine facilities, and the toilets were just a hole on the end of the car.

Jim: What was your impression of India as you were going across the country?

Bauer: I was amazed; I couldn't believe the filth and dirt.

Jim: What about the smell?

Bauer: Oh, bad. You could smell a town five, six miles away. A little village you could smell that far away.

Jim: So was it like the dairy smell that we get from the upper Midwest?

Bauer: It was definitely a bad smell, yeah. It was from a dairy farm smell kind of, yeah. And of course, you gotta remember that the Indians, they go around in the morning with an ox cart and pick up all the dead bodies, the Indians that die from malaria, and then they dump them into the river and they float out to sea and some of them, the wealthy ones or the people that are more educated and stuff, they cremate them and the ashes are dumped into the river. So it's—

Jim: Is that just something you observed? They didn't give you any particular training about what India was like?

Bauer: Oh, yeah. They gave us a book telling us how beautiful the country was and this and that. They gave us a manual on the “Land of Enchantment” was the name of it.

Jim: Did you think it was a land of enchantment?

Bauer: Oh yeah, [laughs] it certainly was not. It was the land of filth and—

Jim: So how long were you on the train until you got to your duty station?

Bauer: Two or three days we rode that rickety old train. They had a big—they had like a hanging basket all the way through the car and all the luggage went laying up there, your duffel bags and stuff.

Jim: What was in your duffel bag, do you remember?

Bauer: Oh, all my clothes, all my clothes and my—all my clothes, yeah.

Jim: So how many sets of uniforms did you have there?

Bauer: Well, you had a winter set and two summer sets. You needed both there, because during the monsoon it gets colder than hell over there after being in a hundred and twenty in the shade in the summer, and it gets down to forty or whatever it gets down to, you put on all your winter clothes.

Jim: Did—where did you end up after this train ride?

Bauer: Ended up in Kharagpur.

Jim: Do you know how to spell that?

Bauer: K-A-R-G-P-U-R, I think it is. [Should be K-h-a-r-a-g-p-u-r]

Jim: K-A-R-G-P-U-R—yeah, that's close enough.

Bauer: I think that's it.

Jim: Okay. And what happened then?

Bauer: And that's about ninety miles southwest of Calcutta.

Jim: Okay.

Bauer: A small village.

Jim: And what happened to you there?

Bauer: That was our—our air base was right outside of that village.

Jim: Location air base, okay. And you were sent to be a truck driver, so what happened to you?

Bauer: I ended up—well, I ended up—what was I doing there? Well, I cooked for a while, but what was I doing?

Jim: You were a cook for a while?

Bauer: Yeah. And then I drove truck, gas truck. They put me on a gas truck, that was it, because—double bottom, two trailers behind the tractor, gasoline, gassing airplanes.

Jim: So did you drive across country or did you just move the gas?

Bauer: No, just around the field.

Jim: Okay

Bauer: Yeah, and go fill the tanks up. That's it.

Jim: Okay. What kind of aircraft were there?

Bauer: B- 29s.

Jim: Okay. So this was like in 1943 or '44?

Bauer: Yeah. '43.

Jim: So they had B- 29s?

Bauer: Yeah. See, we were the first B-29s that came from Europe because they were designed for Europe to begin with, and the European war was over and so they shipped them all to Asia. When we went—we had crews that went to B-29 school. While we were on the way there, they were in school and then they came later, came with the B-29s.

Jim: Okay. So they probably flew the B-29s into—

Bauer: Pardon?

Jim: They flew the B-29s into the base?

Bauer: Oh, yeah. Yeah. They flew them to India.

Jim: Okay. And do you know what the target area for these B-29s was?

Bauer: Japan.

Jim: Okay. So they flew to Japan from there?

Bauer: Yeah. Right. Right.

Jim: Okay. And is there anything that stands out about your experience there?

Bauer: Well, I had—oh, my experience in India?

Jim: Yes.

Bauer: I was unfortunate enough to have malaria.

Jim: Okay.

Bauer: Secret fevers. Jaundice comes first, but that's—you usually get jaundice before you get malaria, but it doesn't matter. I had jaundice, malaria and secret fevers and I was packed in ice in the hospital and wishing I was home. [laughs]

Jim: Yeah, I can believe that.

Bauer: And it was a grass roof hospital with cement floor and wood and thatch sides and a grass roof.

Jim: Did the grass roof keep the rain out?

Bauer: No, it just was a good place for all of the—what do you call the wood worms?

Jim: Okay. All the insects?

Bauer: No. The—they eat the wood, what do they call that?

Jim: Termites?

Bauer: Termites. And then your mosquito net, you couldn't see the ceiling. In the morning it was so covered with the dust from the termites, yeah. Or snakes.

Jim: Okay. What kind of snakes, did you see some big snakes?

Bauer: Ohhh, big ones and cobras. I was about from here to that wall from a cobra. I was on KP and I was—it was a bomb dump that we had for a kitchen, grass roof, cement walls up about four feet and then dirt banked out this way so if they strike they wouldn't hit the bombs, and then an opening on this end and one on this end and they'd drive with the bomb carrier and tractors and trailers and load and then go out. Well, we hadda walk out

there and we had just a tent and stand up counters here at first to stand up and eat. The GIs they'd come and go through the line and I was just ready to take something back out to go onto the tables and there that cobra was, all curled up, ready—and I hollered at Stinky Davis, I forget, the warrant officer, but that's what we called him, Stinky Davis, 'cause he was a character, he was a lovable guy, and he kept up the morale, that guy did, of all the officers, and we had a good commander. But anyway, Stinky Davis come with his .45 and he blew the head right off of it. [laughs] He was a good shot.

Jim: People were happy about that?

Bauer: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Boy, the Indians—well, we hired the Indians to take all the brush and everything away so we could control that, but we couldn't stop the sacred—so-called sacred cows come walking in and around, so every once in a while the Indians would disappear the minute a cow come because they knew we were gonna shoot it because it wouldn't leave. It's always after something to eat, see, because they're all starving to death.

Jim: Did they butcher the cows and eat them?

Bauer: No. Hell, no. They dragged, backed up with the six by six and put a chain around them and dragged them out in the field, and there was nothing but bones out there in the morning. All the jackals and birds devoured it overnight.

Jim: Okay. What was the food like in India?

Bauer: Well, I had fifteen months of C and K rations.

Jim: Oh, that was delightful.

Bauer: We had—we had fresh mutton from Australia towards—just before we shipped out of India. Yeah. We—that was—and we had a big box like this full of coconuts. You could have all the coconuts you wanted, you know. You pick out one and drink the milk and chew on the coconut.

Jim: Was there liquor there?

Bauer: Just the officers had liquor, that was brought in for all the flying. They had liquor; every time they come back from a flight they got a quart of booze.

Jim: Now, what did the EM do? I can't believe they didn't make it or be—

Bauer: Oh, well, you could go to town and some of the guys ended up with losing their stomach because they were drinking the Indian booze. It was so raw, you know. Just—in fact, this one buddy of mine, he wouldn't quit drinking when we got to India and he was drinking it and between our doctors and the Indian doctors they operated on him and he

went home with only about a quarter of his stomach; it just ate him all out. I'm glad I quit drinking. [both laugh]

Jim: I can understand that.

Bauer: Yeah. Yeah.

Jim: Is there anything that stands out about your experience at India that you could share with us?

Bauer: It's about the filthiest, dirtiest country that you ever want to be stationed in. Disease is rampant in India. Elephantitis, it's people walking around with arms and legs that big and big holes where their nose is, black holes from cancer, I suppose, you know, and big sores, open sores on their arms and legs and it's—disease is rampant there. Of course, they all go and wash in the same water that the cows go in and crap in and everything else, you know, it's—how do you expect to—

Jim: Excuse me.

Bauer: Go ahead.

Jim: Did the Japanese ever attack your air base?

Bauer: Oh, yeah. We were bombed on Christmas Eve of '45. We were at [pause]—we were sittin' watchin' an outdoor movie that they set up for us and all at once we seen in the dark a guy coming with a—hollering with a flashlight through the fields and so one of the officers got up to the PA system and shut the film off and said that nobody was to say anything or nobody was to move, they'd be court-martialed if they would, until we found out what it was, and then they found out that we were out already in a red zone, colored zone, that's immediate bombing, and that we should just part and go to our particular area we're supposed to be in in case of a—

Jim: Okay.

Bauer: Well, we had a weapons carrier that we were using that we went to the show with, because this buddy of mine worked in the motor pool, so we took the weapons carrier and we drove as far away from those airplanes and that bomb dump as we could get, you know, out through the rice paddies and everything. And we stopped by a great big banyan tree and we turned around and looked and there's an Indian with five of his wives sitting there. He got away too. And so we all sat under that banyan tree there out a couple three miles from—

Jim: Where the bombing—

Bauer: —from the bomb, yeah, and when we thought it was all over with, or it wasn't gonna happen—we could hear bombing at one of the other fields, but at—but none at our field.

So we started back and just as we started back they started dropping bombs and we went to where we knew there was slit trenches all around the field and the Indians had filled 'em in, we were laying right on the ground. Oh, that was a shock. Then it quit. They got the bomber, only one got through—

Jim: Okay.

Bauer: —to our field.

Jim: So what kind of airplanes did they have for air defense there?

Bauer: Oh, what did we have?

Jim: Yeah?

Bauer: It was just three days before that, they had just pulled the Australian balloon barrage out. They had balloons with cables with bombs attached to the cables so—and they had just pulled out three days before—and just plain saying, all hell broke loose, you know.

Jim: How did the Indian people treat the American GIs?

Bauer: Oh, the Indians boxiesab [?] they would say, give me something, you know. They were all begging, constantly begging. They were—some of them were literally starving to death.

Jim: Did they like the Americans, you think?

Bauer: I hired an Indian to—Abear[?] we called him. I hired one to clean the tent for the four of us, four of us to a tent, Gardjua [?] was his name. And I hired him and it was three months after I hired him I found out he could read and speak English. That's how secret he was, they were, you know. He was reading, I caught him reading the magazines and he started talking one day and so that—but then—then he didn't come to work one day and so when come pay day, I was the one that paid him always, and I asked him, I said, "What happened? You didn't come to work one day." Oh, his wife had a baby. So well, good, you know, we didn't dock him then for that. So I took him and the guys we got some money together and we went up to the PX and he had to stay outside, they're not allowed in the PX because they'll steal anything they can get their hands on. He was a good one. He—well, anyway, we bought him a bunch of soap and rags and T shirts and stuff for the baby. We was gonna give him a camera to take and take a picture of the baby so we could see the baby, you know, and he come back with a camera, he says, "No, his mother-in-law said no, it's the evil spirit the camera would take," so that settled that. But anyway, when we were shipping out to they laid off all of the wogs or gooks, laid 'em all off about a week before we were shippin' out and they took all our animals and killed them all because they'd starve to death, you know, and Gardjua got through and came and visit us, and he was crying. We treated him good, you know.

Jim: So you said you shipped out; was that base being closed then?

Bauer: Yeah. We shipped out from India and went to Tinian Island.

Jim: How did you get to Tinian?

Bauer: By ship.

Jim: And do you remember what kind of a ship that was?

Bauer: Well, I was sent on—I got it in here—on advanced echelon to set up my teletype machines and so on and so everything was operative. There was a whole ship full of us that were—that went ahead to set up the base, so the bombing would never stop. They kept bombing from India.

Jim: Okay.

Bauer: And then we set up camp on Tinian Island, and there was still Japs on the island and we set up camp and communications, that's what I was in, and strung the lines and stuff and then our outfit came a few weeks later.

Jim: Was there—

Bauer: So that they just flew there instead of goin' back to India, they'd come to Tinian.

Jim: Okay.

Bauer: Yeah.

Jim: Was there any problem with Japanese submarines going from India to Tinian?

Bauer: Oh, there was Japanese submarines when we were goin' over there. We had a submarine attack by the ship and we had a bomb as big as this table floatin' out there that they tried to blow up but they couldn't. So it evidently somewhere or another they contacted, I suppose, the ships that were supposed to spot us along the route, you know, to protect us, be there in case we get into trouble, and we had a submarine attack and everybody went to their—got their life preservers and to their life boats and that was about—

Jim: Do you remember anything—does anything stand out about that trip?

Bauer: Oh, yeah. I was seasick and I ate a lot of onions and bread. That's all I could eat for a long time.

Jim: How long was that voyage from India?

Bauer: A hundred and nine days.

Jim: A hundred and nine days from India to Tinian?

Bauer: No. From—no. Oh, from India to Tinian was on a luxury, on a—that was a luxury to me—was on a Victory ship; the *Norton* was the name of it.

Jim: Okay.

Bauer: We were Advanced Echelon that went on the north to set up base and everything so when our outfit came, they could just operate right away.

Jim: Did—you said that there were still Japanese on Tinian. I'm going turn the tape over.

Bauer: Oh, yeah.—[**End of Tape 1, Side A**]

Jim: You were going to tell me about the Japanese on Tinian Island.

Bauer: Yeah. There was a lot of Japanese. They left 'em because they weren't causing any trouble. But we had a Marine division on the island and every time a Japanese would shoot at somebody or something, you'd see two truckloads, six by six, Marines going and they never took any prisoners. There was some Japs living up in the—up in the—in the northwest part—the central part of the island on the highlands. It's a big cliff on that one side and they were dug in up there, and we'd sit in our open theaters at night and watch the show and hear the Japs up behind us laughing, watching the same show. [laughs]

Jim: Had they ever had any sniper attacks or anything?

Bauer: Oh, yeah. Well, that's when you'd see the two truckloads of Marines going out and they used—by that time they had infrared that they were using. They were getting' them at night up there walking around in the hills. They thought they were safe walking around up there at night but—

Jim: Were they building airstrips when you got there to Tinian?

Bauer: Yeah. Yeah. They were building the strips yet when I was there, the U.S. Seabees, and I was detached, on temporary detachment to the Seabees and I built—I was in the lumber—worked for a carpenter and he had me building desks and stuff.

Jim: So you were building desks for the—

Bauer: For the officers. Officer's desk to coming in, yeah.

Jim: How long did you do that?

Bauer: Oh, I just did that for just a few weeks, then they had me on cement and cement slabs for Quonset huts. [laughs] That was a work to death job I had there. I wasn't built for that kind of work.

Jim: I can believe that.

Bauer: Yeah. Well, I tried.

Jim: Then did you go back to your duties with—

Bauer: Yeah. Teletype. Communications.

Jim: So what were your duties with the teletypes?

Bauer: Setting up the lines and setting up the machines.

Jim: Okay. So you were kind of a—you didn't operate the teletypes?

Bauer: Communications, no. No.

Jim: Okay. So you were like the lineman dealing with—

Bauer: Yeah. Right. I was the mechanic on the teletype.

Jim: Okay. Okay.

Bauer: And of course, I did the lines then too.

Jim: Okay. So were the teletypes pretty reliable or did you have to do a lot—

Bauer: Oh, yeah. They were good. They were the same as we had in the States, the same machines.

Jim: Were you familiar with them from the States?

Bauer: Not until they handed 'em to me.

Jim: Okay.

Bauer: And I started workin' on 'em.

Jim: Is there anything stands out about the experience in Tinian?

Bauer: Oh, Tinian was paradise after India, and to be perfectly honest with you, mother and I went back at the fiftieth reunion to Tinian and I couldn't believe it was so beastly hot.

[laughs] Yeah. To me it was paradise after, like I say, after India, but we went back for the fiftieth reunion to place a marble marker there for the boys that died in our outfit.

Jim: Okay.

Bauer: Killed.

Jim: Okay. Let's talk a little bit about that. Is there any reason why you—why is—what was your reason for going back to Tinian?

Bauer: Well, [pause] you have to excuse me.

Jim: Yeah. I don't have to—I understand that, and if you don't want to talk about it—

Bauer: No. That's all right. I just wanted to show my wife what was going on. She went with me. And there was a contingency of all of us from the 20th Air Force.

Jim: Uh-hum.

Bauer: And we went back—in fact, one of our members owns a travel agency. He was the one that arranged it.

Jim: Organized?

Bauer: Yeah. From California. But—

Jim: How many fellows went with?

Bauer: Oh, there must have been about thirty-five, forty of us and most of them with their wives. There was a few of them that had lost their wives and there was a couple in a wheelchair. They had to want to go back pretty bad to be in a wheelchair.

Jim: Sure.

Bauer: But it was the fiftieth reunion of the end of World War II.

Jim: So that's what it was, the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II?

Bauer: Yeah. Yeah.

Jim: And did you meet any—were there any natives there to greet you?

Bauer: Yes, there was. One native come up and grabbed my hand at the airport and started shaking it real dearly. Now I didn't know him from Adam, but he thanked me for being one of the persons that saved his home and his land and he owns a home in California someplace too now, I guess, he told me.

Jim: Okay.

Bauer: So he flies back and forth. But he was so grateful that—and they had dogs—sniffing dogs around, you know, checking everything and—but he just came right up at the airport to me and thanked me, you know.

Jim: How did you feel when you got back to Tinian?

Bauer: Got back out—excuse me. It reminds me of some of the bad times I had in India and how good it was to be there, you know.

Jim: Uh-hum.

Bauer: And oh, I don't know, it was just a lot better living, of course.

Jim: Okay.

Bauer: I had a cousin on Saipan, which is three miles away from Tinian and he came over to visit me, one of my first cousins, and then my mother's brother, my uncle—

Jim: This was during World War II?

Bauer: Yeah.

Jim: Okay.

Bauer: Yeah. He was in communications also.

Jim: Uh-hum.

Bauer: He was a telephone repairman, and I had the telephones, of course, you know, because I had telephone connections for the teletype.

Jim: Okay.

Bauer: And we talked on the telephone around 12, 1 o'clock at night when the lines—on occasion between Saipan and Tinian and visited a little bit and then my mother's brother was there. He was the officer on a destroyer escort and they were based in Japan—I mean on Saipan. And he wrote me a letter and said that the next time he's in port, he'd call me by phone, so I could get together a three day pass, unsigned, so that I could come over and we could visit for a couple days, you know.

Jim: Sure.

- Bauer: So he did that and the first sergeant gave me a three day pass without a date on it so I could fill it in. [laughs]
- Jim: That was nice of him.
- Bauer: Yeah. And then when my uncle called, I went over there and I spent the whole day trying to find his ship. They had moved him from the inner harbor to the outer harbor and I couldn't find him. And then I had to go back to the harbor commander and find out where his ship was. [Jim laughs] So I was riding a ferry boat, you know, LSD, all around, all over, and he said, "Oh, that ship just was moved out in the outer harbor." So I told him, the ferry boat guy; he says, "Oh, no wonder we couldn't find him." [Jim laughs] And so it was dark just about when we found his boat, so I lost a whole day of visiting there. But I slept on board deck, on board the ship that night because it was too late to—
- Jim: Go anywhere?
- Bauer: So we got up in the morning and went—and I had some of my first fresh food that I'd eaten in a good many months that morning. Fresh eggs and bacon and oh man, I just—
- Jim: I bet that tasted good?
- Bauer: Holy smokes, just like bein' home, you know. So that was quite a visit and then, of course, I came back and—I couldn't fly back. There was no planes going back to Tinian, so I had to take a boat and then I got seasick before I got—three miles and I got seasick before I got back to the island, but I didn't upchuck. I—oh, but I had a perforated eardrum, that's why.
- Jim: Okay. How—is there anything else about your time on Tinian that stands out?
- Bauer: Well, other than the Japanese prisoner camp that we had. We had Japs and American both at the same camp, but it was divided by about a twenty foot fence.
- Jim: So in other words, the—
- Bauer: Between the Japs and Americans, the prisoners.
- Jim: And these were Americans that were being disciplined?
- Bauer: That's right.
- Jim: Yeah.
- Bauer: Yeah.
- Jim: How did you feel when the atomic bomb was dropped?

Bauer: I seen it before it was boarded—before it was—I seen it when it was in the pit and before they pulled the B-29 over it to lift it up in there. We never knew what it was, it was—that was secret.

Jim: Okay.

Bauer: In fact, the history of my outfit here, there's no mention of it at all yet, even in that. It was just a big bomb they put down into a pit and it was raised up hydraulically into the B-29 and there's two different configurations, two different bombs that they dropped.

Jim: Yeah, yeah.

Bauer: The first one was the big boy, the round one, and the second one was a long—and so they had two B-29s for each bomb in case one wouldn't work, the other would. And we just happened to be out riding around and we seen—we were up on the north end of the island—Ernie Lamers, my buddy, he's just died here couple of months ago, from White Bear, Minnesota, and Wally Degraw from Queens, New York and Yancy from Waco, Texas, and we were all buddies from the—well anyway, we drove up to the north end of the island and it was a big hill you look down on the runways and stuff and there's this bomb sitting there in this hole in a pit and a big canvas, six foot high canvas, stretched all around it and Marine guards all around and floodlights in there and then camera people. And then they pulled this B-29 up over the pit and loaded the bomb 'cause it was it was too big normally to get it up, so—and it had the B-29, they had two of them that were geared to handle that bomb and the same way with the other bomb. They were separate configurations: one bomb was round and the other one was cylinder-like.

Jim: Okay.

Bauer: I didn't see that one. I seen the round one, the first one.

Jim: Okay. Well, when it was dropped, what was the word around?

Bauer: Well, that—nothin'. We didn't hear nothin'. Oh, we didn't hear a thing. We didn't hear a thing until they—until it was announced that the Japs were gonna surrender and then the prisoners that we had in the island, they wouldn't believe it. They were so brainwashed when they had big PA system speakers out there telling the Jap prisoners that—announcing Tojo's speech to his people, and they said, “Well, that's just propaganda.”

Jim: Did you feel pretty happy when you heard the war was over?

Bauer: Yeah, because we knew we were going to go home pretty soon. Everybody was happy then.

Jim: So what did—what were your last days on Tinian like?

Bauer: Well, I was sweatin' out when I was gonna get my orders to go home. Some of the people were shipped out to Saipan. My Army buddy from White Bear went to Saipan to go by boat to go home, and he stayed there for a week or two driving garbage truck. He was madder than hell because I flew home. Well, I suppose the commander, knowing how seasick I got, they were going to ferry all the B-29s back so they put me on one of those.

Jim: Okay.

Bauer: And so I flew home by a B-29.

Jim: Did you have to land between Tinian and the United States?

Bauer: Oh, yeah. We land—first of all, we went to Guam, and then from Guam we went to Kwajalein and from Kwajalein to Hawaii, and from Hawaii to Sacramento.

Jim: Okay. How did you fare on this trip?

Bauer: Oh, I did good. They put me on the radio aft—in the back radio desk.

Jim: Compartment, yeah.

Bauer: To listen to the signal because this was called the Sunset Project, and we flew only at night and a whole bunch of planes flew together at that time. And I was to sit there with the earphones on and listen for the signal. If I lost the signal I had a key up and talk to the pilot or co-pilot or whoever the hell it was and tell 'em I lost the signal, so they're off track. But I think they gave me that to keep me busy.

Jim: Okay. Had you ever flown in a B-29 before?

Bauer: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Oh, B-29, yeah, sure.

Jim: What was that—I mean, what were you doing? Were they just out testing the planes or—?

Bauer: Well, I flew from Guam to Saipan and then from Saipan is where they gave me the radio. So I—

Jim: No. No. I'm talking about while you were on Tinian, did you ever fly?

Bauer: Oh, no. No. I was in communications.

Jim: Okay. So that's the first time you ever flew was—

Bauer: In the B-29.

Jim: —when you came home?

Bauer: Yeah. I flew in a BT-13A and, you know, some other planes but—

Jim: Did you get mustered out of the Army then in Sacramento?

Bauer: No. I was—I went—yeah, in Sacramento was a—we went through all our physicals and all that.

Jim: Uh-hum.

Bauer: Those that were allowed to leave that didn't have any venereal disease or anything—

Jim: Yeah.

Bauer: —we had our physicals and dentist work and everything at San Francisco and—

Jim: Okay.

Bauer: At John Rodgers Field, I think the name of it was. And that's where it was our first taste of food, American fresh food, you know.

Jim: How did that feel?

Bauer: They warned us not to eat too much, you know, and they were right too. But we had dental work and a complete physical and everything, and then some people had other problems, you know. But the only thing I had was dental work and I was ready to go. I had malaria and that came back on me for about nine years and then finally it wore out, but about every November I'd get sicker than a dog for three, four days.

Jim: I know what that's like. So is that when you got out of the Army?

Bauer: Yeah. Yeah. That was after I was discharged. Then we were in San Francisco and then they put us on a train and the train was horrible conditions. The two train loads, two car loads of sailors who refused to ride it; they got off, I don't know, halfway to Denver, and when we got to Denver we got off, that's as far as we went, and then we took a bus and went to Sioux Falls, South Dakota to the air station. And it was Thanksgiving so we ended up in a hotel. They said, "Don't come out here, we're all closed up at the base," so we ended up in a hotel, put our luggage in a locker there at the base and then we went out and got our discharge papers and we didn't stay there or anything. Just went to the base, picked them up, came back, kept everything we had that they had issued us new from California and went home with that.

Jim: How were you received when you got home?

Bauer: Oh, I got on a bus from Sioux Falls, South Dakota to St. Paul and got into Minneapolis and I was really feeling good then, and then got to St. Paul and had a warm welcome from my folks, yeah.

Jim: How do you feel that your World War II experience affected the rest of your life?

Bauer: Well, outside of the malaria and any damage that it had caused in kidneys and stuff, I think it was—you wouldn't want to experience it again, not India.

Jim: Yeah.

Bauer: Tinian Island was all right, but I wouldn't want to go through that again.

Jim: How did you feel—you had a son that was involved in the Vietnam war; how did you feel about that?

Bauer: I had two sons.

Jim: Oh, okay.

Bauer: My two oldest sons. Tim is here and Terry is at home yet. Well, Vietnam was a different kind of a war. World War II that we had, that was self preservation, but Vietnam we had a different look at that and I think they did too. But I think they were both conscientious objectors so they were in the Medical Corps and they didn't want to carry arms. And it was a different kind of a war. They seen more war than I did because they were, you know, in the thick of it.

Jim: Uh-hum. Did you do—did your experience in any way, you think, affect them?

Bauer: [pause] Gee, I don't know.

Jim: Okay.

Bauer: I really don't know. We did what we had to do during my war, and their war was a little different, so I really don't know.

Jim: Have we covered everything that we should, Dan?

Bauer: Yeah, I think so. Brought me back home and that was it.

Jim: Okay. Well, thank you very much for your time.

Bauer: Okay. Thank you.

[End of Interview]