

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
DANIEL H. NEVIASER
Airborne Infantry, Army Airborne Division, World War II
1999

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Neviaser, Daniel H. Oral history interview, 1999.

Approximate length: 55 minutes

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

Daniel Neviaser discusses his World War II service as a 1st lieutenant and a paratrooper in the Philippines and his occupation duty in Japan. He talks about enlisting in the Army, memorizing the eye exam chart in order to pass, and volunteering for paratrooper training at Fort Benning (Georgia). Neviaser comments on the changes in parachutes as the war progressed and the problems caused by smaller parachutes and low altitude jumps. He touches upon Officer Candidate School, difficult trip overseas to Manila, and overseeing troops assigned to guard a Japanese prisoner of war camp. Assigned as the officer for a unit of combat veterans, Neviaser touches upon his decision to defer many decisions to the non-commissioned officers. He talks about the attitudes of the Filipino people toward the Japanese prisoners and hearing stories of Japanese war crimes against the Filipinos. Transferred to Japan, Neviaser tells of the War Crimes trials held in Tokyo and playing on the Army baseball team against other service branches throughout Japan. Briefly involved in the Reserves he mentions resigning his commission when he was declared physically unfit for service and also speaks of watching Naval operations off the coast of Puerto Rico.

Biographical Sketch:

Dan Neviaser was born in Washington, D.C. and grew up in Arlington (Virginia). He enlisted with the army reserves during college and began active duty in 1943. Neviaser attended the Army Specialized Training Program at Clemson University in South Carolina and then began training as a paratrooper. During World War II, Neviaser ran a prisoner of war camp in the Phillipines and also served as a reporter and spectator in the Japanese war criminal trials. After the war, Neviaser played professional baseball in Japan with an American army team for several years before returning to the United States to finish his degree in chemical engineering.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 1999

Transcribed by Travis Schwartz, 2010, and Emily Behrend, 2012

Reviewed and corrected by Amanda Axel, 2012

Interview Transcript:

McIntosh: Off and running. I'm talking with Dan Neviaser. It's the 19th of October, 1999. Where were you born, Dan?

Neviaser: I was born in Washington, D.C., but at the time we lived in Arlington, Virginia.

McIntosh: Right, and you entered the military, it was 1943, you said?

Neviaser: 1943. I volunteered for the enlisted Reserve a little earlier than that while I was in college and we went active duty in the early part of 1943.

McIntosh: Right, and where'd they send you?

Neviaser: To Fort McClellan, Alabama, for basic infantry training despite the fact that I was in my junior year of engineering.

McIntosh: Well, that's typical.

Neviaser: Typical.

McIntosh: Yep. And then after that you were diverted to some special training?

Neviaser: I was very surprised to be diverted to Clemson College, which at that time was a military college for men only. And there, I did one semester of mechanical engineering and, of course, with the discipline they had, I was able to get very good grades. And then from there, I volunteered for the glider troops because I found you got fifty dollars a month extra, which I thought was a fortune. So I went to the 13th Airborne Division at Camp Mackall, North Carolina.

McIntosh: You were in the ASTP [Army Specialized Training Program] program at Clemson?

Neviaser: Yes, that's right.

McIntosh: But you didn't continue at that?

Neviaser: One semester only.

McIntosh: Yeah, oh then you just opted out.

Neviaser: Well, no, they told us that was the end of it. And people were being signed here and there, and I don't recall exactly how but you had to volunteer for either glider troops or paratroopers. You weren't just automatically signed.

McIntosh: So you went to what camp?

Neviaser: Camp Mackall in North Carolina.

McIntosh: And that was, do you recall the month and the year?

Neviaser: That would be, uh—

McIntosh: '43?

Neviaser: No, that would be in early '44. I finished basic training in the end summer of '43, so that would be in the early part of '44.

McIntosh: And how long did that training last?

Neviaser: Well, I was there for several months, but I did not like the glider troops after flying around and they kept crashing all the time, jeeps would come loose or something would happen and I decided it was too dangerous, so I opted to volunteer for the paratroopers.

McIntosh: Now the glider that you were on, was it a standard glider that they'd use during the war?

Neviaser: Mm hmm. [affirmation]

McIntosh: The ones that they used usually had fifty men?

Neviaser: The one they used in the invasion, they didn't use it much in the war because they had so many captured, it just was not practical.

McIntosh: And how did they train you to be a glider pilot, roughly speaking?

Neviaser: Well, I wasn't a pilot, I was a passenger.

McIntosh: Passenger.

Neviaser: There really wasn't any special training just buckle down. I'd sit there looking at a jeep or a piece of war material like a cannon or something.

McIntosh: So they'd take you up to about 3000 feet and set you free?

Neviaser: That's right. And it's kind of eerie just hearing just the wind going past you. Didn't like it.

McIntosh: Right. And the training like that, would you do this once a day or more often?

Neviaser: No, you wouldn't go up very often. I don't recall exactly how many times, but it'd be very rare because you know, you'd go up when they had actual exercises. You know, practice landing exercises for the invasion, so it's not a regular thing. The rest of the time you had the regular training, physical training, and military training. At this time I was a PFC [Private, First Class]; I had progressed to a PFC.

McIntosh: I see. So the instructions were, when the glider hits the turf, was that you get out as fast as you can?

Neviaser: As fast as you can.

McIntosh: And you grab that piece of equipment, whatever it was and hit the ground?

Neviaser: War games.

McIntosh: War games. You opted out of that and into something else?

Neviaser: I decided to join the paratroopers. And so I went to a parachute school at Fort Benning in the summertime of '44. In those days the training, I think was—I can't remember if it was four or six weeks, I understand today it's only two weeks. And it was almost all physical other than the part they did to train you to jump from an airplane. And they had these towers, they were 250 feet high, they would take you with the straps holding you up to the top of the tower and the chute above you; when you got to the top of the tower, the chute, it would release and the chute would open up and you'd come down. The other thing they did was have you to jump out of the high tower, as you would jump out of an airplane and then you fell, got a sudden jolt 'cause you were connected to a line, and you would slide on down maybe another hundred feet or something to the end of the line. So that was training. Besides the physical training, almost every few days you'd go into a mock airplane and practice sitting there in a long line because the seats were all along of the plane not facing the front but just facing the middle. You'd practice standing up, hooking up, standing in the door and jumping out. So after you do this about ten or fifteen times or twenty times, you hooked up, standing in the door and jump out, the first time you go up in an airplane you hook up, stand in the door and jump out, it's only when you get out that you realize it's different than what you've been doing. All the sudden you're not on the ground, you're floating in the air.

McIntosh: So tell me about your first jump, was there any sensation that you hadn't anticipated?

Neviaser: The first jump is the easiest, because as I just said, you get so used to just hooking up, and everybody stands up at one time, hooks to a static line so the chute comes off your back, you don't have to pull a string. However, there is an emergency chute here, because we're only jumping 600 or 700 feet; you've only got about seven or eight seconds. And if you should count, "One thousand, two thousand, three thousand," and if you're not open you need to grab this one and shake it out. But anyway, the first one's easy because you're so used to just standing up, shuffling down and standing in the door, just go out the airplane. It's after that it becomes a little more difficult. I know that when my chute opened the first time I remember floating down singing, "Look Man, Keep Those Mouths Quiet." Why I selected that song, I don't know. But after that, people vary with this you know, Jim. I'm not a courageous person. I did everything I was supposed to do but I'm not courageous. But there were a lot of guys who really loved this and they volunteered all they could do to jump out of these airplanes. I didn't volunteer. I jumped a number of times.

McIntosh: Were a lot of guys hurt in those training actions?

Neviaser: Every time our division jumped, guys were injured, uh, some killed. Because when we first started we packed our own chutes. I'd pack and repack my chutes a couple times. Those chutes were much smaller than what you see when these people you read about, these jump groups here just for pleasure. Those chutes were much smaller, they didn't have the same—they weren't as stable, and of course when you're jumping 500 or 600 feet you don't have much time to think. It was very little time to think if anything goes wrong. So we had injuries and we had deaths.

McIntosh: Was it hard to learn to pack the chute correctly?

Neviaser: Well it wasn't hard, it's simple enough. But still, when you first start, you worry about it.

McIntosh: It's no place to make a mistake.

Neviaser: You don't want to make a mistake there.

McIntosh: No, I understand. A lot of guys broke their legs, I assume?

Neviaser: There were broken legs.

McIntosh: You know you practice how to fall, sometime the wind would--

Neviaser: Yes, I forgot to mention, one of the things we did was we jumped out of about a second floor because the chutes were small and there's a jolt when

you hit the ground. And as soon as you hit the ground, you learn to turn and roll over your shoulders. Now today, when I saw President Bush jump out of an airplane, they just hit the ground and they're still vertical. These are big chutes. So we had to practice hitting and rolling over not be injured.

McIntosh: Did you carry a pro-pack in your [inaudible]?

Neviasser: Oh, yeah. All that stuff.

McIntosh: That hindered too, didn't it?

Neviasser: Sure, that exacerbated—

McIntosh: It's a lot of weight there.

Neviasser: You bet, a lot of weight.

McIntosh: So, then, now you're ready to go to war.

Neviasser: Nope, not ready. But—

McIntosh: Well anyway, you finished the training.

Neviasser: Yeah, but on the last jump which was at nighttime, on a windy night, the parachute was swinging back and forth and every time, it's like if you drop a plate in the water and it goes down like this. Uh, every time we'd go up and you'd slip, and you'd lose some, you would drop, and you'd go up and you drop, and drop, and it's dark and I didn't even see the ground, but I'd go up like that, and dropped and then came back slammed against the ground. And I did not break my knee, but severely damaged it, so I ended up in the hospital for a couple weeks and I remember that very well because a lot of my buddies from there were shipped overseas to prepare for the invasion and I skipped out.

McIntosh: So when you finally got out of the hospital, what'd they do with you?

Neviasser: Sent me back to the 13th Airborne Division, to a military police section for some strange reason. And by the way, going to town and keeping order for a bunch of unruly paratroopers for the weekend is no easy job.

McIntosh: It's a chore.

Neviasser: Oh, it was a chore. Because they had a certain [inaudible] like the marines do, and like the rangers do and you had to make sure you didn't get yourself smashed.

McIntosh: I'm sure that they didn't tolerate much independent of whatever they want.

Neviaser: I had to be very diplomatic.

McIntosh: Using the term, "We don't want to do this—"

Neviaser: Right, that's right. Not my idea. [laughs]

McIntosh: I'm sure that was difficult. But the feeling in the paratroops was gung-ho all the way.

Neviaser: Tremendous feeling, I tell ya Jim, in those days, course that was a popular war, you know 'cause you were in it. In those days, when you got your parachute wings and you wore your paratrooper boots, in those days no one else could wear paratrooper boots but you, and I remember coming home on furlough with my paratrooper boots and my parachute wings I was treated like a king. And when you walk down, even when you met other soldiers, you know, you were something special and that's a nice feeling, it's a good way to boost your confidence.

McIntosh: I'm sure, I'm sure it is.

Neviaser: Furthermore, we were in great physical shape. You had to do fifty-two push-ups before get out and you had to do ten on one with each arm. I probably couldn't do one with each arm a day.

McIntosh: You did that every day?

Neviaser: Every day. I mean, in the paratroopers, every time you did anything wrong, "Give me thirty," "Give me twenty five." The physical training approach of this was the most extreme I've ever been through.

McIntosh: Someone said that the officers who applied to the paratroopers had to give up their commission to do that, or at least temporarily. No?

Neviaser: Yeah, well—

McIntosh: Just while they were in training?

Neviaser: I don't know that they gave up their commission, but they were relieved of any command responsibilities. They couldn't exercise their positions, if that's what you mean.

McIntosh: Probably during training they were treated as a—

Neviaser: Everyone was treated the same, like dogs.

McIntosh: Like dogs, yeah.

Neviaser: And by the way, when I volunteered for the paratroopers I had a hard time getting in. My eyes, I couldn't even see the big "E". My eyes were read 2400. And I did everything I could to cheat it. You know, if you are near sighted you can put water in your eyes or you can squint. Finally, the medical physician who was attending us said, "Look I'm sick and tired of seeing you in here. You want this so badly, I'm going to pass you." At that time I was the only paratrooper in there who wore glasses. And they made me tape my glasses—I put tape here and tape here because if I was coming down, I wouldn't know where I was landing, on a river or a road. That's how bad my eyes were. I did get in, but I did have to fight to get in there.

McIntosh: I'm sure that's because they were short of material and if anybody really wanted to—

Neviaser: Yeah, and believe it or not at that time they were just starting us—at that time, I also exceeded their height, um, I think they had a limitation at that time of six feet—

McIntosh: They don't have it anymore.

Neviaser: And many of these guys who volunteered were ne'er-do-wells.

McIntosh: Oh really?

Neviaser: Yeah, they weren't—I was in line one day when I was in jump school to go to the movies and I was talking to the guy in front and he told me he just got out of prison and I said, "What for?" and he said, "Murder." He said, "I was convicted of murder." I said, "Oh my gosh. Well, who really did the murder?" He said, "Me." [both laugh]

McIntosh: Yeah, they emptied the prisons during the war. They gave these guys—they volunteered for service—

Neviaser: Yeah, all of them—a lot of them went into paratroopers in those days. I remember—

McIntosh: So they could continue their behavior just like they did before.

Neviaser: Yeah, I remember laying on my bunk and reading poems by Robert Frost and some guys came by, and I'll tell ya what, I never heard the end of that. They didn't know who Frost was.

McIntosh: Well so, from this point, what did they do with you?

Neviaser: Well, uh—

McIntosh: You stayed in the MP's [Military Police] for just a brief time?

Neviaser: Yes, because all of a sudden I, uh—I had applied for OCS [Officer Candidate School], don't know why I did that, and I interviewed and all that sorts and all of a sudden I got a notice to go off to candidate school. And so now once again, I'm saved because a lot of those guys were—this was acting as—the 13th Airborne was acting as like a repo depo, replacement depot, where people were being taken out to go to the 101st Airborne or 82nd Airborne, wherever there were replacements. And I'm suddenly sent to OCS. And because I'd been studying chemical engineering I was sent to the chemical engineering OCS program at Edgewood Arsenal, which was seventeen weeks.

McIntosh: Where was that?

Neviaser: It's up in Maryland.

McIntosh: Okay.

Neviaser: And that's seventeen more weeks in which I was able to, not my fault, able to avoid the war, the combat.

McIntosh: You had a lot of training.

Neviaser: Lot of training. Tough seventeen weeks because the idea was to—the objective was to break about twenty percent of you.

McIntosh: Oh, and on the mental stuff? Yeah, I mean the school work was hard school work.

Neviaser: Well, it wasn't hard for me but you know, you have to pay attention to it. They had a rating program where about once a month, everybody rated all the other people. You did it anonymously. You rated them on leadership skills, you rated them on everything you could think of—a list of about fifteen things and then the bottom twenty percent, I think, of these ratings were kicked out.

McIntosh: Well besides the school, what were you doing? What physical work, for instance? Marching?

Neviaser: Oh you had the runs—by the way in the paratroopers, we ran all the time, that was nothing compared to this. Four miles in the hot sun—

McIntosh: Piece of cake.

Neviaser: Piece of cake. And so it was a piece of cake for me, I'd been through all this stuff—

McIntosh: Tougher training.

Neviaser: Oh yeah. But there was a lot of running, lot of forced marches, and a lot of situations where you were commanding—your turn to command the platoon or the company.

McIntosh: That's where you were supposed to develop your leadership?

Neviaser: That's right. And that is--leadership, I think, Jim as you probably know, is not easy to describe. It's almost something that is there. I know when I went into basic training and I was assigned to a hut of a lot of soldiers I didn't know, each hut was told to elect a squad leader and I got elected. I don't know why, I didn't know a single soul.

McIntosh: One thing I can suggest is you're tall.

Neviaser: That's a big factor.

McIntosh: For those of us of average height, I think we are subconsciously intimidated by a person who is tall. I'm just—previous experience.

Neviaser: [inaudible] I'm positive that was one of the factors. No question about it. Course at that time, I was also thin. [both laugh].

McIntosh: Everybody was thin. So, now you got through that school. Now they had to have a job for you.

Neviaser: Well then, they gave me leave, course I went home. Now, I'm a paratrooper with boots and bars. Now I'm a bigger hero. Furthermore, the girls are very lonely so, I had a very busy ten days at home. Then I went back and was assigned to the command and, uh, it was a training program for officers now, advanced training. And then all of a sudden after a couple months of that, I got notice to move to California for a shipment to—all I knew was to a tropical climate.

McIntosh: Tell me where we are, time-wise now.

Neviaser: This is now uh, let's see—

McIntosh: '45 sometime? Early '45?

Neviaser: Yes, this is early '45. You've got the timeline better than I have.

McIntosh: Well I assumed, thinking how long ago—okay.

Neviaser: So we hopped a ship and I was a little disappointed to find that this massive ship, that even we officers were down at the very bottom of the hold on one of three bunks high. We went across the Pacific in the summertime, the hottest it could be in southern Pacific, zigzagging and not knowing where we're going. It took thirty days to get to the Philippine islands.

McIntosh: Did you know that's where you were going?

Neviaser: Did not know.

McIntosh: And no one would speak a word?

Neviaser: No, even as an officer I didn't know. It was so hot we tried to—some of us officers were allowed to sleep on deck.

McIntosh: Did you have a lot of personnel, I mean a lot of troops there? Were there about 3,000, 4,000 men? Something like that?

Neviaser: I don't know that. Certainly a large number.

McIntosh: Was this a regular, what we call AKA [Attack Cargo Ship] in the navy? A big troop ship? Or was it a converter?

Neviaser: You know Jim, I don't remember.

McIntosh: Okay, not important. So, where in the Philippines were you lined up?

Neviaser: We landed in Manila, and I decided that wherever I landed, I would learn the language. So I carried a piece of paper around with me and every time I met a Filipino, I knew a few words and I'd ask—I'd say a few words and when he gave me another word that I thought was typical like [inaudible], not like constitution or invincible. I'd write it down and gradually fill up my paper, which may have had something to do with being appointed to the prisoner of war camp.

McIntosh: So, but your duty assignment there was—

Neviaser: Well actually, we landed in Manila and I was assigned to a company in Alabang, south of Manila by twenty miles and unfortunately for me, these people had been all through the combat, South Pacific combat area. And

they were veterans and they weren't too interested in a young second lieutenant coming over from the United States. You'd think they would have saluted an officer--

McIntosh: Don't count on it, forget it.

Neviaser: And I wouldn't be so dumb as to—

McIntosh: Right. What were they doing there?

Neviaser: Well, the Japanese—the war was still going on outside of Manila now—

McIntosh: It was a ways away from Manila now—

Neviaser: It was up north more and they were acting more as a supply base and it was there that they had the Japanese prisoners.

McIntosh: It was a big prisoner camp?

Neviaser: No, about 300.

McIntosh: And so then you became involved in that?

Neviaser: Well, much to my surprise, after a few months I one day received orders from the commanding officer—and I don't recall the rank of that officer--I have it somewhere indicating that I was to be appointed commander of this Japanese prisoner of war camp. And I believe that the officer who turned the camp over to me was a major. So, evidently they were transferring some of these veterans back to the United States and filling these positions—

McIntosh: With some of the younger guys.

Neviaser: Younger guys. It was quite a surprise; I was about twenty-two years old and really had not been out of Virginia. So to suddenly have that responsibility, it was a little bit daunting.

McIntosh: Oh, I'm sure it was, sure it was. So, this is about April or May of '45 now?

Neviaser: No, it was earlier than that. It was more like February.

McIntosh: February?

Neviaser: January. Early '45.

McIntosh: So, how did you learn about running a prison camp? From this major?

Nevasier: No, I didn't learn anything from him because I had not really been involved. I had been there and doing many other things. I had six or seven different jobs as you know, platoon leader and training officer and uh, mess officer and recreational officer and finance officer, you know I had all those jobs. No, the good news is that the cadre, as is so often true of the military services, the uh, non-commissioned officers really were the ones that run the camp. They knew--every one of those guys knew more than I did. I just had the overall responsibility administration.

McIntosh: You had to sign the paper?

Nevasier: Yeah, sign the paper. And occasionally make some decisions that came up.

McIntosh: But your responsibility. I mean, you reported to someone in Manila?

Nevasier: Yeah, I reported to, uh, I actually reported to the commanding officer of Manila through his regiment, but you know I don't recall—

McIntosh: You didn't have a lot of contact with him?

Nevasier: No, there was not a lot of contact.

McIntosh: So, you're just sort of trying to make sure everybody stays put?

Nevasier: Yeah, well the problem was that um, the Japanese had committed so many atrocities in the Philippines that the problem was not to keep the prisoners from escaping, but from to keep the Filipinos from killing them.

McIntosh: What Filipinos? I mean—

Nevasier: The Filipinos, citizens in the surrounding areas.

McIntosh: The civilians?

Nevasier: The civilians. You see, because I didn't—at that time I didn't realize that forty percent of the Americans who were captured by the Japanese died in the prisoner of war camps. I lost one prisoner of 300 in a work detail going out of a truck. Uh, the Filipinos were still in the truck and one of them was hit in the head. I lost one, and it wasn't because of any [inaudible]. But the Japanese, um, I had learned about so many atrocities but I didn't know about what they were doing to our prisoners and I didn't know they were chopping off heads of American officers, which I have pictures of, by the way. They were great on chopping off heads. As you know, the bushido

code of the Japanese said that if you're captured, you are a disgrace, you are not a person. So they thought it was okay to do anything you want with the prisoner. And also, the Japanese armory, the officers struck the enlisted men. They'd hit them with their fist, they slapped them; so this was passed on to anyone who was subordinate to them. But when they became prisoners, they suddenly became the most docile people in the world, obsequious in every way just as they are today. I've been to Japan many times afterwards, I assume you have too, the Japanese people as you know are fairly polite and they love art—

McIntosh: [Laughs] Just the antithesis.

Neviaser: The antithesis. But I know, and I will never forget, and I will always remember and I can never feel the same about them because I know the things they did. Anybody who has read *The Rape of Nanking* or just recently, two years ago they published a book called *Prisoners of the Japanese*, and what was done to them—and it was specifically a tank group from Janesville around Bataan that had suffered from the Bataan Death March.

McIntosh: I've interviewed—

Neviaser: You've interviewed some? Which—was one of them Forrest Knox by any case?

McIntosh: No.

Neviaser: Well, when I took over my prisoner of war camp, right across from my camp was what the Filipinos called a hospital. I wouldn't call it a hospital and neither would you. It was a two story semi-circular building, very, very—how should I say it—Spartan, would be one way to describe it. And it was an obstetrics hospital, might have handled twenty patients or something. Hard to believe, but not after you read about these other things I told you about, but the Japanese went in there, took all the babies out in the courtyard, made all the mothers stand at the windows, threw the babies up in the air and practiced catching them on their bayonets through their tummies. Now, I know that sounds incredible, but it's true and I know it's true, I've known it for all these years. I had first-hand interviews with those people and I only saw it recently confirmed in some uh, documentary, some publication recently. There was another case that I'm very familiar with. And these people now live in McLean, Virginia, a few miles from where I grew up and I've seen them since then. She's—the woman is now of course a mature adult but when she was a child, all the children were called into a church in Manila and told that they had to go to the center of the church because there was this big uh, what is it? Mexican--

McIntosh: Oh, those things that hang down—

Neviaser: They hang down, beautifully packaged with presents in them. And she had a feeling about that, instead of going to the center of the church, she went over to a window. And in the Philippines, most of the windows are just open, you know with big sliding panes, not glass but just sliding panels. And uh, they dropped this beautiful package down and it exploded. Now that sounds incomprehensible, incomprehensible. She jumped out the window, ran, didn't get home for two days. The Japanese raped and bayoneted her mother. When Hirohito died and we sent the Vice President to the funeral, I happened to be in her vicinity and we were having breakfast together, she was furious that America would send anyone to Hirohito's funeral. Now, the reason why a lot of these things happened, that sort of thing, is that when we landed in the Philippines and started towards Manila, there was an admiral who was in charge of the Japanese forces and he was really was one of the prime factors behind these terrible atrocities as they went about murdering the citizens and the prisoners. Although General Yamashita, who was known as "The Tiger of Malaya," really bore the brunt because he was in charge of all the Filipino forces during all of this, uh, all of these atrocities.

McIntosh: Is it time to explain this now?

Neviaser: Yes.

McIntosh: Why don't you describe what that is?

Neviaser: I have a magazine here published by the guerillas who fought the Japanese behind the lines. It's called *The Liberator*, the only guerilla magazine during the Japanese occupation. And on the cover here is a picture of Sergio Osmeña, who at that time was not the President but who was considered to be a presidential aspirate and who later on became the President of the Philippines. Now, in this magazine is a description of the hanging of General Yamashita which was sometime in 1945. He was convicted and he appealed to Douglas MacArthur, but Douglas MacArthur could find no reason to abstain the execution. I want to read a little bit of this description written by a Filipino reporter, because in reading this to you, you'll get some feeling for the depth of their anger and their hatred towards the Japanese. "The [inaudible] General Yamashita, tiger of Malaya, crowded his ancestors in a heathen heaven, was sprung at 3:02 a.m. the dawn of Saturday of last week at the city of Los Baños, site of the number one prison war camp and it was swarm of decorations. And dressed in a G.I. suit, Yamashita, not at the thirteen jet black steps without emotion, up to the scaffold that exacted his miserable life, as insufficient payment for the long list of atrocities perpetrated by the blood-thirsty men

upon a civilized world. Before he dangled between earth and sky, Yamashita was allowed to bow at the direction of the imperial palace. The bushido that corrupted his morals were evident in his last words. ‘I’ll pray for the emperor’s long life and his prosperity forever.’” The imagery created there tells you the emotion that was felt. Now there’s a new generation of Filipinos and there’ll be a new generation of Filipinos and now that—

McIntosh: It’d be diluted.

Neviaser: It’d be diluted. And forgotten. But I, I can’t forget. And I only told you a couple of things.

McIntosh: I understand.

Neviaser: That I know.

McIntosh: So, back to work. How long were you in that camp?

Neviaser: Only a couple of months because all of a sudden, one day, again for no apparent reason, and I don’t understand this to save my life, I got notice that I, a first lieutenant, should act as a courier, to take some important papers to Baguio, which is a site of Camp John Hay, for years a rest camp for American military forces and Philippine forces. First of all, I don’t know why they would pick an officer to be a courier. I don’t know why they would pick me. They told me I would be armed. They gave me a pistol and a submachine gun, and I took a train from Manila that went around the mountains up to Baguio, that no longer—this train no longer exists today.

McIntosh: How far is this from Manila, roughly?

Neviaser: Oh, I’m gonna guess 150 miles, maybe 200 miles. And it was a nighttime trip and I was the only passenger on the train. And the train consisted only of only a couple of flatbeds. On the flatbeds, were some park benches. You know, that’s all. And so I’m sitting on a park bench, going around the mountains and there were two concerns, but I’m too dumb—too young and too dumb to worry about them. One was the fact that there were many, many Japanese guerrillas—

McIntosh: Who didn’t give up.

Neviaser: Didn’t give up—all through the north, which is why they wanted me armed. The other one was we had Hukbalahaps. The Hukbalahaps were very—were emerging as a very strong force. They were the communist Filipinos. It wasn’t until sometime after the war that they were actually

defeated and became an inept force. But dumb as I was, I didn't realize the danger and I was told that if I made it, I could spend three days at the rest camp. **[End of Tape 1, Side A]**. I did that, and while I was up there, a couple of interesting things. I danced with the daughter of the future president Osmeña, I fell in love with a Filipino girl—I was only there for three days, but it only took me a day to fall in love with her. [laughs] And I had my first game of golf up at Camp John Hay and probably on about the third hole, I hit the ball into the woods and walked over to get my ball and found it right up against the head of a Japanese soldier because his head had been chopped off by the Igorots, who are head hunters in the northern Luzon.

McIntosh: Tell me about this camp here, what was it like? Who was there and what were they doing?

Neviaser: Well, the people who were there were soldiers who'd been through combat and were up there for a rest period. You know, it was a rest camp. And, of course—

McIntosh: G.I.s, not officers?

Neviaser: Uh, both. But there weren't a whole lot, weren't a whole lot.

McIntosh: This is what was available to them for recreation, golf and uh—

Neviaser: That's right. You were only there for a few days. I don't know why I went there. I wasn't in combat.

McIntosh: Who'd you report to up there? A general or a major?

Neviaser: No, I think it was just a major, maybe a colonel I reported to. And about forty years later, I took my five children back there with a couple of husbands, eight of us, back to Philippines to where I had my prisoner of war camp and also up to Baguio and found the actual room I slept in and took a picture with the kids in the same location where I have the same picture fifty years before, forty years before. And while I was there, General Carlos Rómulo, who was a very famous Filipino general, and who has also been the ambassador to the United States, and who was one of those, incidentally who wanted Hirohito tried as a war criminal, which MacArthur did not allow. He was there, and when I tried to get into the camp—as I was going to Camp John Hay with my family, I was told by folks, "You can't get in today, there's heavy security because General Rómulo's here." And I said, "I'll get in." So I walked up the guard and spoke a few words in Tagalog and told him I had been there during the war, and of course we went right on in. And went in to see—and I saw General Rómulo. So it was quite an event.

McIntosh: Oh, wonderful.

Neviasser: Very lucky.

McIntosh: So after you're up at this rest camp, you had to get back on the train and get back?

Neviasser: Yeah, now I went back to a repo depo.

McIntosh: Where was that?

Neviasser: It was back in Manila. And I was shipped to rejoin the 11th Airborne, was shipped up to Tokyo and from there to Sendai, Japan, and in Japan was where I was to stay the rest of the occupation. But in Tokyo again, something very unusual happened to me, Jim. I don't understand it, but one day I got orders to report and be a spectator at the Japanese war criminal trials. They were held in Tokyo, and started I think in November and this was now about February. It was a very small court room. If you can picture a basketball court of a high school here in Madison, there were spectators on each side like you have there. And I don't know how many spectators you have had there, maybe 300 or 400. And then down where the basket was, was an elevated platform with the judges. There were judges from eleven allied nations, as a matter of fact. And let me read them to you: the Philippines, New Zealand, France, Russia, China, Australia, America, Great Britain, Canada, Holland, and India. And then we had the defendants down front where the basketball court was, with their attorneys in front of them. And there twenty-six of those.

McIntosh: Twenty-six defendants?

Neviasser: Yes, including [Hideki] Tojo who was, as you know, the prime minister. We had [Kenji] Doihara, who was head of the army in China. We had [Akira] Muto who headed up some of the forces in Sumatra in the Philippines. We had [Iwane] Matsui who was responsible for the Rape of Nanking. We had a fellow named [Heitaro] Kimura in Burma, [Seishiro] Itagaki, chief of staff and POW commander, and then we had [Koki] Hirota who had been a prime minister in the 1930s; I don't know how he got in there. I was twenty-three years old, and as I sat there with this program in my hands, I made notes in pencil of my reactions to these various defendants and judges. And I've since read a book about the Japanese war trials and many of the things that I—notes that I made here, are corroborated in the book. For example, I made a note here that the judge from India was ignoring all the cross examinations where the book says he actually slept, and was totally just bored with it. Tojo was very

interested; as a matter of fact, he made a very articulate defense but he never, ever admitted any remorse whatsoever.

McIntosh: How did you know what he was saying? Was there an interpreter there?

Neviaser: Well you would pick up ear phones and get any language you wanted.

McIntosh: I see. This was in the spring of '46?

Neviaser: Yeah. And then we had [Akinosuke] Oka, who was very worried, almost crying as a matter of fact. We had uh—

McIntosh: No naval officers?

Neviaser: Oka was—were the naval officers there? Well, I only named off a few that I knew, but there probably were. There had to be because the navy also was guilty of charges—

McIntosh: There were—

Neviaser: They took prisoners of some of our ships and chopped their heads off, onboard ship. So there had to be some there. I made a note about [Naoki] Hoshino, who slept most of the time. Kimura was very interested in the spectators; he was the one that was in charge in Burma. Shiratori slept, Shimada slept, Sato seemed kind of amused—let's see, Matsui was the one, he had the Rape of Nanking—I didn't make a note about him. Well, all these twenty-six defendants we hung in December, two years—in 1948 we hung Tojo, Doihara, Muto, Matsui, Kimura, Itgaki, Hirota. We hung two, four, six, seven of them and the rest of them went to prison. Eighteen of them went to prison, I think one got off.

McIntosh: So, after that was over then were there—your duties left? Tried to get home?

Neviaser: Well, I didn't make any effort to get home—I felt so guilty about not having done anything, I was never going to make any effort to get home. I went up to Sendai and found they were setting up an American league of baseball in Japan, so I went for the baseball team. I had played baseball in the 13th Airborne Division; I had a baseball scholarship to the University of Maryland as a baseball pitcher. I went out for the team and I was the only nonprofessional to make the team. We had a couple of big leaguers, minor leaguers, AAA and so on. So I made the team and spent the rest of my time traveling all over Japan as a baseball player.

McIntosh: Going to army camps?

Neviaser: Well, yes. But we were based in Tokyo.

McIntosh: Only playing the Japanese civilians?

Neviaser: No, we played other American teams. There were many good athletes over there, you know. My team had a guy named Fitzpatrick, catcher for Pittsburgh Pirates. We had a guy named [inaudible], pitcher for the [inaudible]. We had a bunch of guys from Montreal, AAA, and so on. We played in Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, Yokohama, Yokosuka, probably a couple of others I can't remember. The only problem was we took the trains and with sleepers and of course, with the sleepers they are about five foot six—

McIntosh: Japanese size.

Neviaser: Terrible time.

McIntosh: Now, what was your duties other than that? Nothing?

Neviaser: Nothing, it was incredible. I was forced to practice every day.

McIntosh: And then at nights, you're free for whatever?

Neviaser: Yes. And contrary to what we were told, we were told when we went into Japan not to fraternize; we might get a knife in our back because you can't trust a Japanese. But the Japanese, as is typical, when they're subordinated—

McIntosh: They reverse to the—

Neviaser: Reverse. Became totally obsequious; you'd think we had liberated them. Each one of us was also assigned a Japanese girl to message every need, not sexual. I have a picture of me and Yoko who was my assistant. We were treated like kings. I did watch the Japanese start to rebuild their cities because Tokyo was rubble, and they worked twenty-four hours a day. Twenty-four hours a day, rebuilding these buildings. They were like a bunch of ants.

McIntosh: I arrived in 1950.

Neviaser: So you saw that?

McIntosh: Yeah.

Neviaser: The only thing that happened of any consequence there was that the army in its own incredible—

McIntosh: Stupidity?

Neviaser: Stupidity, yeah. [both laugh]

McIntosh: It's harder to find an easier word.

Neviaser: Picture this: we suddenly get notice we're going to go home, it's now like October. And they decide that we've been drawing jump raids only right and proper that we have one more jump.

McIntosh: You're kidding.

Neviaser: I'm not kidding. Now what—tell me, the war's been over for a long time, we're going home—

McIntosh: I can't believe it.

Neviaser: --but some idiot decides to have one more jump. So I go in for one more jump and they tell me, "Now listen this parachute is different from the one you used to have. There's a little button here, so if you're stuck in a tree or something you just push this button and your chute falls off." I said, "Uh well, um—

McIntosh: "Let me ask you something—

Neviaser: Yeah. [laughs] "Let me ask you a question. Suppose I accidentally hit it on the way up?" He said, "Well then pull your other chute." Okay, I'll try and remember that. He said, "Also, you can guide the chute." But you know one of the reasons the paratroopers make you do all the push ups, you know why that is? Because when you have a chute with four lines, if you want to go left you grab these lines and you chin yourself on the line and the chute dips and slips like a dish in water. You chin yourself this way so you can avoid water, I mean winds and so on. You do this, believe me when you jump you very rarely have no wind as I found out at nighttime. I went up in this airplane for this last jump with frankly some concern. And, in the paratroopers an officer leads each stick out. A stick is a group of enlisted men. And so there was a colonel leading this stick of guys, he was a senior officer so he sat next to the open door—the door is off the airplane. He sat next to the open door with his stick of soldiers down here, and I sat exactly opposite the door with my stick of soldiers. And of course, every time the plane turned left and banked left, I could just look right out the door and right down on the ground and I'm thinking to myself, let's get this over with. [both laugh] And so when we made a pass over the landing field, the jump master said to the first team, "Stand up, hook up, stand in the door." Well, the colonel went up to the door, stood in

the door with both hands on the door and the jump master, as this is one, tapped him on the shoulder, “Go!” The colonel went out like this and came back in. And the jump master says, “Go!” The colonel goes out like this, and comes back in. And I’m watching all of this really closely. And the jump master takes his foot and puts it into Carl’s rear end, “Go!” and boots him out. The guy goes, “Pffff.” [Jim laughs] He actually looks back.

McIntosh: Who, one that pushed?

Neviaser: The colonel.

McIntosh: Must have done that falling, then.

Neviaser: Yeah, so the rest of the soldiers of course, boom boom boom. And then the jump master said, “Well, I’ve got bad news for you. We’ve overshot the landing. We’ve gotta go around again.” So now we turn around again, and I get to look out the door, keep in mind that I’m not a hero, I’m a coward. I’m looking down again at this going around and I said to myself, when that guy taps me on the shoulder and says, “Go,” I am going. [both laugh]

McIntosh: You had a lesson.

Neviaser: I said, I’m gonna show these guys. So anyway, stand up, hook up, stand in the door, he taps me and I was gone for my last jump. But everything was okay. But I do think that it was typical of the army in those days. I don’t know if they’re still that way or not, but there was no justification for this whatsoever.

McIntosh: These are usually made by middle level people, who have another agenda.

Neviaser: That’s right.

McIntosh: So after you survived the last training exercise, then what?

Neviaser: They put me in a troop ship to come home that was a luxury liner. I’ve never had such fantastic food in my life that I almost didn’t want to get off.

McIntosh: You were up higher this time?

Neviaser: Yeah, much higher. We had decent bunks and everything else, it was fantastic. It was one of the—I guess it was—Jim, I don’t remember the ships really, I guess it had been—

McIntosh: One of those general ships?

Neviaser: Yeah.

McIntosh: They call them AKAs [Attack Cargo Ship], but they're big cargo ships. They fit about 650 people on there, they're very nice.

Neviaser: That's what that was, a big one. A real big one.

McIntosh: Alright. Usually they're after some general. Yeah, that's super. Well that brought you back to San Francisco?

Neviaser: Yep, and then home, of course. And then back to—

McIntosh: You were quickly discharged following that?

Neviaser: Went back to Fort Benning and was discharged.

McIntosh: After you got out of the service, did you participate in the G.I. Bill?

Neviaser: I certainly did. I gave up my baseball deal because I was more serious and I wanted to finish, and the G.I. Bill of course really helped me. I also stayed in the officer's reserve corps. And when I had been out working for a couple years and graduated, I was called back for the Korean War because they were looking for paratroopers to jump into Inchon. And I went over to the Pentagon for my physical. And I had decided, I cheated—I forgot to tell you about we also cheated to get into OCS, my eyes were not good enough for OCS.

McIntosh: I see.

Neviaser: So I went into the Pentagon for my physical and they had a different way of testing eyes that I had never seen before. Instead of sitting there, asking you to read the top line, they said walk forward until you see the first letter. Well you know if you have bad eyes you might walk three feet and say, "E." I walked up with about two feet of the wall and said, "E," and the guy said, "Oh, ha ha ha that's really funny but we're serious and we've gotta get going here." I said, "No, that's what my eyes really are." He said, "Look, I've got your record. You went through jump school, you went through OCS. Your eyes couldn't be like that, you would have been out a couple years." I said, "Well, I'll tell you what you do, take these glasses and go test them."

McIntosh: Well sure, have some oculus look at them.

Neviaser: Yeah, so they took the glasses into their oculus and I waited for about an hour and finally I was called into colonel's office and the colonel says, "Lieutenant Neivaser I've got some pretty bad news for you." I said, "What's that?" He said, "You can't pass the eye test, we can't take you back in. [Jim laughs] I'm going to have to ask you to resign your commission." I said, "Well—

McIntosh: "That's the way it goes."

Neviaser: "That's the way it goes." So I resigned my commission and my friends were jumping into Inchon.

McIntosh: Yeah, I was there.

Neviaser: You were in Inchon?

McIntosh: Yeah, that's where the hospital ship was.

Neviaser: Oh my god. Well that was a brilliant piece of tactics by MacArthur, but you must have seen a lot of wounded soldiers, Jim.

McIntosh: Thousands. Tell me about—did you keep track of your people you trained with?

Neviaser: I did indeed. And uh, my best friend in the basic training went on to become a great war hero in May, right after—

McIntosh: NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization]?

Neviaser: NATO. And my other best friend who I was in the paratroopers with ended up jumping behind enemy lines to reduce prisons. He's dead, been dead for years, [inaudible]. And my other friend, the big hero who was the best soldier I ever knew, he's down in Florida in a wheelchair and with Alzheimer's disease. So I survived—those guys, those two guys were better than soldiers than I would've—good looking guys, great physical specimens. One's dead and one might as well be dead.

McIntosh: Sure. Did you join any veterans organizations after you got out?

Neviaser: For a little while, I joined in Vienna, small town Vienna, I joined the American Legion. I have not done that up here.

McIntosh: And most of them haven't.

Neviaser: I have one more military experience.

McIntosh: Oh.

Nevasier: Because you were in the navy, I'll have to tell this additional experience.

McIntosh: Okay.

Nevasier: I graduated from college in 1948 and went to work with [inaudible] in '47 and so on--and survived the call back to Korea. But in 1956 I think it was, I was very active in the Republican Party in northern Virginia, I was chairman of the Republican Party as a young man of thirty-four years old. And we won the election for Eisenhower and we elected the first republican congressman since the Civil War. So one day, I got a message from the White House that I had been selected, along with a couple of people from every state in the union, to be special guests of the navy. And my assignment was this: that I was to board a LST [Landing Ship, Tank] to go down to [inaudible] on the island of Vieques, just off of Cuba. And then after the [inaudible] of Vieques we would go off to Guantanamo Bay to have cocktails and meet the commanding officer of Guantanamo Bay. And there was an ascender, one of the other invitee ascenders from Maine, old guy, somebody much older than I am. So I got on this LST, which I'm sure you're familiar with, and we started down towards Vieques. Well, the first thing that happened—there were a couple of LSTs out there and one day the captain comes to me and says, "Listen, we're going to a little special exhibition today—we're going to shoot a line across to the other ship and have it transferred by sea. I see here you were a paratrooper, you were an officer, and so we'd like you to volunteer to be the one to go across."

McIntosh: It's Jacob's Ladder.

Nevasier: Yeah, is that what they call it?

McIntosh: In the chair.

Nevasier: In a chair. So I said, "Well how about the ascender domain, the senior domain?" He said, "Well he's too old for that." I said, "Okay." So they strap me in this chair, and they shoot—well they shoot the line across, strap me in the chair, and I suddenly realize, wait a minute here—this is not too smart, these things are going like this you know. It's like being on a spool of thread or a wire. I mean, what happens if they go apart? I'm gone! But there seems to be no way out. So I get on this line and I start across, and there was a lot of give here, up and down, up and down. Touched the water a couple of times, you know. How could they do that, ask a civilian to do that? Anyway, I get across to the other side, get out of the chair and the captain says, "Do you want a cup of coffee before you go back?" And I said, "I'm not going back." Oh, he says, "You've gotta go

back—you've gotta go back. We're still going to be a little more time here." So back I go across. I got a lot of picture of this; I just found these pictures the other day. That was a dumb thing to do. Well, a couple of more days goes by, Jim, and so we're having another drill. We're gonna throw this dummy overboard and then we're going to lower a lifeboat and go get the dummy. So, we practice rescue at sea and since you did such a great job—

McIntosh: You can be the dummy?

Neviaser: [Laughs] Not the dummy, thank God, not the dummy! Because we never found the dummy! [both laugh] The waves were very high, see, so they throw the dummy overboard and we all run and jump into the boat, right? Me, the only civilian, board the boat, the waves are high! My God, they've got to be eight to ten feet high. We can't find the dummy! Finally, we give up, the dummy drowns, we come back to the ship, the lower—what do you call it? The hook—

McIntosh: To pick up the boat?

Neviaser: Pick up the boat—what do you call that? Whatever it is, they lower that, trying to hook it up, it's smashing the boat to pieces. The boat is bouncing up and down, side to side, smashed the boat to pieces and finally—

McIntosh: Is this a wooden craft?

Neviaser: Yeah. And finally, the command for the boat comes, "Abandon the boat!" I said to the guy, "What's he mean 'abandon the boat'?" He said, "Just what he says!" I said, "Well, there's no other boats around." He says, "No, see that netting over there? On the side of the ship? We climb that." Well, the ship was curved like this and then it comes down curved like this. And we're down below here and the boat is bouncing up and down and he says, "Well, you're a civilian, so you can go first." And I said, "Well I don't really care about going first." And he says, "Nope, you go first. Now, be careful because this boat is bouncing up against so you could get your foot mangled. As soon as you grab that rope, get up a few." Well thank God for my paratrooper training.

McIntosh: I was gonna say, you need those arms then!

Neviaser: Boy, you need those arms then. So I'm telling you, the boat is going like this and we're going like this. And so one of the high—well I says, you know, I grabbed this thing. But my—actually, I was back this way, it was on a slant. And I climbed up on the boat. I said to the captain, "Will there be any more drills?" I can't believe they did this! And I have pictures of all this which I just gave to my kids. So we finally get to Vieques of

course, and we do a bunch of maneuvers there and then we went over to Guantanamo Bay. We got to go through Cuba which, as you know, at that time Havana was beautiful. And then I came back home and everyone said, “Well how was your trip as secretary—as a guest of Secretary of the Navy?” And I said, “Not that great, not that great. I wouldn’t do it again.” That’s the last of my military service, Jim.

McIntosh: Oh, that’s a punch. Do you think, in looking back, were you impressed with the training?

Neviaser: The training was fantastic in those days, it’s not as good today.

McIntosh: You felt that they adequately trained you for the job they asked you to do?

Neviaser: Yes. The discipline was incredible.

McIntosh: Yeah, you were impressed by that.

Neviaser: Oh, As a matter of fact, even when I went to Fort Benning for induction, there was a PFC [Private First Class] there who drilled us mercilessly and really, you know, really came down hard on us. And I remember [inaudible] face because I thought, if I ever met this guy after the war, I’m gonna kill him.

McIntosh: Right. [laughs]

Neviaser: But I didn’t. No, the training was terrific, they instilled discipline in you. You separate the men from the boys in a hurry.

McIntosh: I’m sure, I’m sure. A lot of guys washed out, I’m sure.

Neviaser: Well, infantry training, actually a couple guys couldn’t make it through infantry training. Basically, there were a couple guys—I’ll tell you an interesting thing about infantry training. We had a bunch of boys from VMI, Virginia Military Institute students. All of us boys from Virginia were put—were given grey fatigues and put in two platoons. There was a whole bunch of boys from New York, they were given blue fatigues and put in two platoons.

McIntosh: Why?

Neviaser: I don’t know why. This is down south and there were four platoons. And we had two platoons of the New York boys and two platoons of the Virginia boys. The Virginia boys were ten times better soldiers. The New York boys were intellectually smart, and they couldn’t handle some of the physical work.

McIntosh: Yeah, right.

Neviaser: That was how the war was—

McIntosh: In between the North and the South that pervades—

Neviaser: And so it does, yeah the war between the states. Yeah, still going on.

McIntosh: It's a way of life that's different in both, and really hasn't changed.

Neviaser: That's right. It hasn't changed. I don't know how it is today, but I know that when they blow that bugle or whistle at 4:30 in the morning, you get out of the hut in a hurry and rush on down. The first time we did it, I remember this sergeant saying, "When I blow this whistle, I want to see a cloud of dust, and when that dust clears away, I want to see four rows of corn." Boy, he meant it. And then I learned my first lesson. "How many you people in this company are studying engineering? Ok, all you engineers go down to the latrine, for latrine duty. We're gonna engineer a clean up down there." That's where I learned never volunteer for anything.

McIntosh: Anything else we missed?

Neviaser: No, I would say this to you, and you probably already know this, if it were possible for young men to have a military training in any branch of the U.S. Armed Forces, and not be injured or hurt in any way, I think it would be very beneficial.

McIntosh: No question about that. This is generally what young folks lack, is discipline in their lives.

Neviaser: That's right. And I wouldn't be who I am today, not that I'm anywhere, but whatever I am today, I wouldn't be there without this—

McIntosh: This background?

Neviaser: These four years. 'Cause I went in there with an inferiority complex and a lack of self-confidence and a lot of other weaknesses that were changed because of the steps I took upward—forced to take upward.

McIntosh: Well I think you developed a certain seriousness and purpose.

Neviaser: Absolutely.

McIntosh: If you never get that, you may never be able to reach that point.

Neviaser: That's right.

McIntosh: This sort of forces you to take everything seriously.

Neviaser: It does.

McIntosh: Take care of yourself.

Neviaser: It does; behavior and all that.

McIntosh: The value is immeasurable.

[End of Interview]