

Charles Siegel

Interviewer: Today we're at the Nevada State Veterans Home in Boulder City, Nevada. It's May 11, 2006. We are interviewing Charles Siegel. My name is Shannon Berndt and our cameraman is Ed Feldman. Thank you for helping us do this. I've noticed on your biographical data form that you were born in Switzerland.

Charles Siegel: Yes, I was born in Switzerland. My mother and father were over there visiting her parents and I was born while they were there. I came to this country when I was about seven months old.

Interviewer: So when did your parents...both of them are from Switzerland?

Charles Siegel: No, my father was born in Philadelphia.

Interviewer: In Philadelphia.

Charles Siegel: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. My mother was born in Switzerland, a town called [##] 0:01:13 a small town near the Alsatian border.

Interviewer: Oh well, that's pretty awesome to find somebody whose...okay let's jog your memory a little bit and tell me what you were doing before the service.

Charles Siegel: Well, I was working at the [##] 0:01:35 Investment Savings Bank in New York. I was a file clerk there after I got out of high school and then I was inducted into the service October 29, 1942. There I was [##] 0:02:00 Upton Long Island and then we got shipped to the Camp [##] 0:02:08 Kentucky.

Interviewer: And what branch of the service were you in?

Charles Siegel: The Army Infantry.

Interviewer: Army Infantry. Tell me about your first days in the service. Did you have to go to boot camp or...?

Charles Siegel: Yes, we went down to Camp [##] 0:02:27, that was our boot camp in Kentucky and that's where we trained. We were there for about ten months.

Interviewer: Oh 10 months?

Charles Siegel: Then we went down to Alabama, no Tennessee, maneuvers from September 1 until mid-October or mid-November. Then we went down to Camp Rucker, Alabama and there we continued our training. From there we went over to the West Coast to Seattle, Washington. That was the [##] 0:03:13 and then we went overseas to Hawaii. We

were in Hawaii for about sixteen months. We were trained at a Navy base for the mainland invasion of Japan.

Interviewer: So where you on December 7, 1941?

Charles Siegel: I was working in New York.

Interviewer: You were at the bank, working at the bank then?

Charles Siegel: Yes, I was working at the bank.

Interviewer: So you were drafted into the service and you went through all that training. Were you married then?

Charles Siegel: No, I wasn't married.

Interviewer: What did your mother think about your being drafted into the war?

Charles Siegel: Well, I was the only boy after my brother died, after my brother died, so she wasn't too happy about my going into the service. She knew I had to go anyway, so she was more or less acceptable.

Interviewer: Well, how did you feel when you got your draft notice?

Charles Siegel: Well, I was [Laughter] like a lot of my friends. They all wanted to go in to fight the Japs or the Germans. You know we were all young men. I was twenty-two years old when I went in the Army.

Interviewer: So, an infantry man, what does he do?

Charles Siegel: Well, he's a ground soldier you see. He, well, I didn't say "he", I should say "we" we trained for combat duty, but we never saw action combat because my division was sent overseas to Japan, I mean to Hawaii to training for the mainland invasion of Japan. It would have happened had not the atom bomb been [##] 0:05:19 Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Interviewer: So you were trained for an invasion, but the war ended before you were able to?

Charles Siegel: Yeah, see the invasion was going to come in either mid-October or November of '45 and, of course, the atom bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki ended the war. I went over to Japan in the Army occupation. I was in Japan for about three and a half months. I would have been [##] 0:05:53 because they started discharging us fellow [##] 0:06:00, so they had us replaced with other soldiers.

Interviewer: So you said you were in the service for about three and a half years, was that your whole time there or did you get transferred to somewhere else after Japan and Hawaii?

Charles Siegel: No, we came back to the United States and we were discharged from New Jersey on February 1, 1946.

Interviewer: Tell me about your most memorable experience.

Charles Siegel: Well, the most memorable experience was in Hawaii. [Laughter]

Interviewer: Okay.

Charles Siegel: Had a good time there you know in Honolulu and then I...let's see what did they call it... [##] 0:07:00 vacation to the big island of Hawaii. We won a five-day vacation.

Interviewer: That must have been nice.

Charles Siegel: It was nice, yep.

Interviewer: Were you able to, when you were working, did you have off-time? Like were you able to, other than your five-day vacation, were you able to go in town and see the sights or you always had to stay on the base?

Charles Siegel: Oh yeah, oh yeah. We'd go wherever we wanted to go and we landed in Hilo, to the big island of Hawaii and we went out to see the Kilauea volcano. It wasn't active then, so we rode around there on bicycles and we saw quite a bit of the island there and...

Interviewer: Were the people friendly?

Charles Siegel: Yes, yes people were very friendly.

Interviewer: By the time that you went to Hawaii had all the devastation and stuff been cleaned up from when Pearl Harbor had been bombed?

Charles Siegel: Oh yes and that was in Oahu, but the bus...that was 1944 when I went over to Hawaii, but we saw the Arizona super-structure still sticking out of the water.

Interviewer: Oh it was?

Charles Siegel: [##] 0:08:43 bombed.

Interviewer: Let's see, what about the food and provisions where you were? Did you eat in the mess hall?

Charles Siegel: Oh yes, we had a mess hall. Yep.

Interviewer: Was your food good?

Charles Siegel: Yeah, very good.

Interviewer: You didn't have to eat any of those C-rations or K-rations?

Charles Siegel: Oh no, we had it good. The only time we ate C-rations or K-rations was when we on maneuvers or out in the field, but we had a good, we had a good mess hall.

Interviewer: When you were on maneuvers and that did you go out in the jungle-like areas of Hawaii and train or you did all that in the United States?

Charles Siegel: Yeah we did all in the United States and [##] 0:09:35.

Interviewer: Alone, I mean mainland? Hawaii is part of the United States. Okay, how did you pass the time when you had free time?

Charles Siegel: Well, I used to go on day trips to Honolulu, saw hula shows and we had a good time in town.

Interviewer: Did they have US...are they USOs or...where all of the military men would be, would group together and dance and...

Charles Siegel: Yes, we had USOs there yes.

Interviewer: That's what they're called is USOs?

Charles Siegel: Yes. Yeah, we went there to meet girls and dance. They were very friendly.

Interviewer: Did you just do this on the weekends or during the week?

Charles Siegel: Well, the weekends mostly because we didn't have anything to do on Saturdays and Sundays. We trained on a five-day week. [Laughter].

Interviewer: A five-day [Laughter]. How about the people at home, where you able to stay in touch with them? Did you receive letters and packages?

Charles Siegel: Oh yes, we all received letters from family and friends and I used to write back to my family, mother and dad.

Interviewer: How about holidays? Were they celebrated in any way like for Thanksgiving, Christmas, anything special happen?

Charles Siegel: Well, you just had individual...I don't know what to say...well, everybody had their own day room. We set up a Christmas tree there and we sang around the candles and of course, there was a religious services too you know, the Protestants, Catholics.

Interviewer: Did, like on Thanksgiving's been traditionally on Thursdays, was that just a normal day or did you have time off on Thanksgiving Day?

Charles Siegel: Yeah, we had time off on Thanksgiving [##] 0:12:11 turkey and all the trimmings. [Laughter].

Interviewer: For Christmas time and at holiday season did you receive packages from home?

Charles Siegel: Oh yes, we received packages. Many of the boys received packages.

Interviewer: What skills or lessons did you learn?

Charles Siegel: Well, skills we learned to either kill or be killed. You know, we did a lot of training there plus we learned to shoot rifles, throw hand grenades, [##] 0:13:02.

Interviewer: Is that a gun?

Charles Siegel: Well, it's a mortar, it's a, you know, sixty millimeters like weapons. The 81's they had the heavy machine guns and 81 millimeter mortars, but every, I was Company A, 390 Infantry and we trained quite a bit. How to avoid enemy, keep ourselves from getting shot.

Interviewer: Yes, that's an important thing to learn. Did you make lots of friends?

Charles Siegel: Oh yes, quite a few friends.

Interviewer: Do you still keep in contact with them?

Charles Siegel: Well, there's only about one or two that keep in contact with.

Interviewer: Oh one or two?

Charles Siegel: Yeah.

Interviewer: Well, that's good that you still keep in touch.

Charles Siegel: You know over the years, you know, some of them passed away. I'm eighty-five years old and I'm in bed because I went to the Excalibur last night and ate quite a bit of food there. That's why I didn't want to get up this morning for breakfast, so that's why I'm still in the bed.

Interviewer: Sounds like you had a good time last night.

Charles Siegel: Yeah. Yeah they had King Arthur and his Knights of the Roundtable house.

Interviewer: You went and saw the show?

Charles Siegel: Yeah.

Interviewer: That's pretty fun.

Charles Siegel: And that's quite a bit.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Charles Siegel: Quite a show.

Interviewer: Do you recall the day that you left the service?

Charles Siegel: Yes I do. I was discharged from Camp Dix, New Jersey and I got home at night time. My father answered the door, excuse me, and he was so happy to see me, but you know, he wasn't too well himself. He was sixty-three when he died. He was a heavy smoker and he developed emphysema, finally went into congestive heart failure.

Interviewer: I'm sure your mother was really happy to see you.

Charles Siegel: Oh yes, my mother was very happy to see me.

Interviewer: Yes, she was glad you didn't go see battle that you were able to stay on in Hawaii. So, how did you adjust? What did you do after your life in the service, days and weeks and months?

Charles Siegel: Well, at first I was looking for a job. Jobs were hard to find because everybody was getting out of the service, so I went on that unemployment insurance. Then I got a job in a department store in a hobby store in Hampstead where I lived. I was there for about nine months.

Interviewer: And Hampstead is in New York?

Charles Siegel: Yeah. Then I got another job with a man who was looking for workers to help clean floors, wax, polish floors until I went in my own business.

Interviewer: And what business was that?

Charles Siegel: What year?

Interviewer: What was your own business?

Charles Siegel: That was my [##] 0:16:57.

Interviewer: Ohhh.

Charles Siegel: Yeah, he sold his business to four of us. [##] 0:17:06 had a good business, made a good living.

Interviewer: Good. You met someone special one day and got married.

Charles Siegel: Yes, this is my wife [##] 0:17:21.

Interviewer: Beautiful. How did your experiences contribute to your thinking about war and military service?

Charles Siegel: Well, of course a lot of us wanted to get home anyway after the war, some re-enlisted, but I didn't want to re-enlist plus I wanted to get out. I had enough experience in the Army, but most of us got discharged.

Interviewer: Do you, are you a member of any Veterans organizations like...?

Charles Siegel: I'm a member of the American Legion.

Interviewer: American Legion.

Charles Siegel: Post 390, Hampstead.

Interviewer: And do you make it to any of the reunions?

Charles Siegel: Pardon?

Interviewer: Do you make it to any meetings or things like that?

Charles Siegel: Oh yes, I was always very attentive to my meetings. I go to be Second Vice-Commander and then they wanted me to go as Commander, but I didn't want to get up there, so I chose a chair part of the chaplain, so I was Chaplain for many years, many years.

Interviewer: And that was back in New York?

Charles Siegel: Yes, that was back in Hampstead.

Interviewer: Hampstead, New York.

Charles Siegel: Hampstead, New York, Long Island.

Interviewer: You're a long ways from there now. How did you end up out here in the desert?

Charles Siegel: Well, when I retired my daughter had moved out here to Henderson plus her husband got a better job with the Mojave Electric Company, so I came to visit twice and I liked the warm climate out here, so that's how I decided I should come out. She had two rooms built on the house, one for my bedroom and one for a family room.

Interviewer: Well, that was nice. When was it that you moved out here?

Charles Siegel: In December of 2002.

Interviewer: Oh, so you haven't been out here all that long?

Charles Siegel: But then I started getting weaker with my arthritis, falling around the house, so that's how I decided to come here. Plus my legs are, they're getting weaker and weaker, so I now have a electric wheelchair.

Interviewer: Well, that's nice. That gives you mobility.

Charles Siegel: Yes, it gives you a little more mobility.

Interviewer: Well, that's good. Let's see, that's about all I have for you. If you have any other memories or anything you would like to share with us?

Charles Siegel: Well, right now I don't think, my wife died of cancer after twenty-four years of marriage.

Interviewer: She was still young.

Charles Siegel: I have six children.

Interviewer: Oh six!

Charles Siegel: Three daughters and three sons in that order. [Laughter] I have thirteen grandchildren now.

Interviewer: Ohhh, do you have any great grandchildren?

Charles Siegel: No, not yet.

Interviewer: Not yet huh? Well, that's awesome. That's awesome. Do they all live around here or just your daughter live in Henderson?

Charles Siegel: Yes, my daughter is in Henderson. They all live here. My other children, they live in New York, Long Island except one daughter, she's a practical nurse and she lives up about thirty miles south of Rochester. So that's, they all have good jobs.

Interviewer: You see them often?

Charles Siegel: Pardon?

Interviewer: Do you see your family that lives in New York very often?

Charles Siegel: Not anymore because they live so far away and they can't get over to see me that much, but my daughter in Henderson she comes over to see me from time to time. She's active too. She works with the multi-generational center over in the main valley.

Interviewer: Our library is right there by that.

Charles Siegel: Yeah.

Interviewer: Well, thank you so much for helping us with this project. We enjoyed interviewing with you.

Charles Siegel: Well, thank you very much.