

EI-621

ROBERT MUNSCHAUER

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LEVINE: It's June 2nd, 1995 and I'm here in the Ellis Island Oral History Studio with Robert Munschauer who was billeted here with the Coast Guard and he was a member of the United States Naval Reserve. Was here for one month in 1944, and at that time he was receiving training in Staten Island, and we'll talk more about exactly why Mr. Munschauer was here and his recollections of being posted here at Ellis Island. I want to welcome you and thank you so much for coming. It's a pleasure.

MUNSCHAUER: Very nice being here.

LEVINE: And you are a first. You're the first who is not a Coast Guard who actually spent time and lived and ate food here at Ellis Island during the Second World War. So, why don't we start at the beginning. If you would say your birth date.

MUNSCHAUER September 21st, 1922.

LEVINE: Okay, and where were you born?

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MUNSCHAUER Born in Buffalo, New York.

LEVINE: And did you live in Buffalo up until the time that you volunteered for the—

MUNSCHAUER No, I moved from Buffalo in the depths of the Depression. My dad was out of work for a couple years, I guess, and he ended up with a teaching job in Baltimore in a vocational school system and I think I was about ten years old at the time.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MUNSCHAUER And so it was quite a move because in those days, people didn't move from their own hometown. So it was quite a shock, especially to my mother.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MUNSCHAUER But we moved down to Baltimore, the Chesapeake Bay.

LEVINE: Wow, and then you stayed in Baltimore up until that time?

MUNSCHAUER Stayed in Baltimore until I joined the Navy, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember why you joined the Navy?

MUNSCHAUER Well, I joined the Navy. Of course, everybody was all hepped up with the war and I wanted to be a pilot. Took the preliminary test, passed it and of course I was under age, and I needed my father's signature. I went to get his signature, and he wouldn't sign.

LEVINE: And why did he say he—

MUNSCHAUER Well, he just—he thought it was too dangerous to be a flier, Navy flier. So he said, "But I'll let you join the Navy as an ordinary seaman, and you can work your way up, but you're not going to fly."

LEVINE: And how old were you at that time?

MUNSCHAUER Well, I must have been about nineteen.

LEVINE: So you decided to—

MUNSCHAUER Enlist.

LEVINE: Take what he would offer you that you could do.

MUNSCHAUER Right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and so you enlisted at age nineteen.

MUNSCHAUER At nineteen. Now, just one other thing. My dad was in the Navy, too, World War I, and he served in Europe in France. So my mother wasn't too tickled about me enlisting. She thought I ought to wait until the draft, but I just was anxious. I wanted to get it out of the way so I could go onto school.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you had completed high school at that time.

MUNSCHAUER Right.

LEVINE: And had you done—had you continued on in any way?

MUNSCHAUER I had taken one year of night school in accounting in what was then the Baltimore College of Commerce, which later became the University of Baltimore. I was interested in becoming a CPA. That's why I went.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. So what happened? You volunteered for the Navy and—the Naval Reserve, is that what you—

MUNSCHAUER The Naval Reserve, yes. Right. In other words, you enlisted for the duration, that's what it meant. For the duration of the war.

LEVINE: Oh, I see.

MUNSCHAUER Whereas, if you went in the regular Navy, you enlisted for four year terms.

LEVINE: I see.

MUNSCHAUER So I went whatever it was.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Was there a lot of high feeling about enlisting at that point?

MUNSCHAUER By that time it was, yes. In the late '30s President Roosevelt had a heck of a time getting people lined up for this war. He knew it was coming, but by the time I finished high school and his trips around to the various factories, watching new ships being built,

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people got all riled up about and knew that we had to go over to Europe. Again, because we were over there in World War I.

LEVINE: Now, what was the date you actually enlisted, do you remember?

MUNSCHAUER I believe I enlisted October the 9th, 1942. I believe.

LEVINE: Okay. So then what was your course of naval service?

MUNSCHAUER Well, I was sent out to Great Lakes Naval Training Station, which is just north of, northwest of Chicago and went to boot camp for I believe eight weeks, and it was just basic training. The first four weeks no liberty, no going home, nothing. Just constant training. Getting up early in the morning. Getting out on the field. Getting used to Navy food, which was a big thing. That was a big problem for a lot of people.

LEVINE: Because it was not good?

MUNSCHAUER It was just—I thought it was terrific, but it wasn't something they were used. Maybe there would have been maybe an Irish fellow that was used to certain kind of food at home and here was a big change. And in that boot camp I met some wonderful team mates, crew mates. Even you wound up not on a boat, you said 'crew.'

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

MUNSCHAUER And wherever you were, you were part of ship's company. Whether you were on a ship or on a station, you were ship's company.

LEVINE: Now, can you recall your thoughts or feelings during those first four weeks when you were first away from home and with a contingent of young men who were going to serve the country?

MUNSCHAUER Well, you just had to get used to this regimented life. Up at a certain time in the morning. A fellow would come. The lights would go on suddenly in the morning and the fellow in charge of the floor of your particular barracks would come down and hit a stick against each post. Go all around telling people to get up. "Get up! Get up, and get in and get cleaned," because breakfast and then, of course, then you'd go out in the field and march for at least a half an hour to an hour. In the dark, in the cold because this was October. Chicago is very cold and windy. So it was getting used to that. Getting used to the clothes. Plain

dungarees during the day, Navy blues at night. You had to do your own laundry. That was quite a change. My mother always did my laundry and of course each Saturday we cleaned the barracks, cleaned the latrines and once the latrines were clean or being cleaned, they were roped off. You couldn't use them. So all these things you had to get tuned into this time schedule.

But in the midst of it all, of course, you met good friends and we had good base entertainment. Movie stars, whatnot came to the base. One was Captain Eddie Peabody, the world champion banjo player and on a Sunday evening he'd go from one barracks to the other. He'd come in through a blast of snow, and sit down, prop his knee up and play that banjo. Then move onto the next barracks and that's the way it was.

Of course, the bands used to come to the base, and the movie stars. Jack Benny used to come to the base. Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra, all entertaining you.

LEVINE: Was the basic training very rigorous?

MUNSCHAUER Yes. It was, besides the morning marches, we had the exercises. We had the climbing ropes, getting everybody in shape, and getting people used to each other. This was a big thing, to come into a barracks at night and somebody else would be a little sloppy. Somebody else would be neat, and you had to fit into this whole thing, and that was one of the purposes of boot camp. Besides getting you physically, it was to get you into mental frame of mind so you get along with people, and that was a big thing with boot camp. So that's why it was over an eight week period. After the first four weeks, you had one weekend of liberty in Chicago or Milwaukee, and Milwaukee was the best town in the world.

LEVINE: Why so?

MUNSCHAUER Families used to meet you right at the train station and take you home for dinner, if you wanted to do it. Take you to church. Mix you in with the family and the next time you went on liberty, same thing. You could go with the same family or get another family. This way you met girls, of course, which was a big thing. So Milwaukee especially was a very warm town. Sometimes we'd go down to Chicago in the Aragon Ballroom. The Triganom Ballroom, and wonderful ballrooms with the beautiful skies painted with the stars and everything, and of course the USO girls. So it was a tremendous effort and so many things fit into it.

LEVINE: Yeah. Was that big bands? Were there big bands those places?

MUNSCHAUER Big bands. The Glen Miller Band. Tommy Dorsey and one band after—Dick Jergens, another big band. He was more or less out in Chicago. I had a date with Lawrence Whelk's niece and I dated her quite a bit and went out to lunch with Lawrence Whelk and the niece one day.

LEVINE: This was in Chicago?

MUNSCHAUER Now, at the time Lawrence Whelk was strictly an in between the big bands fill in at the—and I think it was in Chicago. It wasn't Milwaukee, it was Chicago. In other words, when the big bands couldn't make it for that particular night, he fit in with a small combo. This was before he was famous now.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So when the eight weeks were up, where did you go from there?

MUNSCHAUER After the eight weeks were up, we pretty much as a unit were shipped to Camp Bradford and also Little Creek. They were bases next to each other in Norfolk, Virginia. So we all went there as a team. The base when we got there was practically nothing. It was Quonset—just a few Quonset huts, a couple new LSD's, a few small landing craft. In other words, this new amphibious training was just getting started and this was to be the biggest base on the East Coast. There would be a similar base on the West Coast for the Pacific war.

LEVINE: So was this base established primarily to do this amphibious training?

MUNSCHAUER Strictly amphibious training, right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, wow.

MUNSCHAUER Yes.

LEVINE: So what kind of training did you get there?

MUNSCHAUER Now, I wasn't training. We became part of ship's company. In other words, they had to staff this base with competent people in the personnel office, in the supply office, in the dispersing office. So we were dispersed and became kind of ship's company and I was there over a two year period. We got every—it was like coming to a job every day. I was in the Payroll Department, called Disbursing and I was a storekeeper, at that time Third Class, in parenthesis, Disbursing. So I was—now, we were

constantly changing the payroll. People would come in training, and then would be shipped out in three weeks. So we had these payrolls constantly coming through, so we were going six days a week for sure.

LEVINE: And how many would come in at a time for this three weeks?

MUNSCHAUER There were thirty-five thousand people training at a time. Army, Navy and Marines. Now, we just handled the Navy part. Interestingly, also had a secret group called the Beach Battalions. They were fenced off by themselves. No liberty ever. They were working on the Normandy Invasion. In other words, they were working on maps. They were creating these rubber maps that all had the terrain built into the maps, the houses, the roads and everything. That's what they were working on in this Beach Battalion unit.

LEVINE: And they stayed, I assume, longer than three weeks. They were there for a long period of time.

MUNSCHAUER Constant until they got their job done, right. And I don't know that he was the commander of that unit, but part of that unit was Douglas Fairbanks, Junior. He was a Naval Officer and his particular job, I understand later on, was to be the first crew up on the beach before they started gunning it. They'd go in through the night and establish radio contacts with the ships out at sea. So they were these Beach Battalions that went up ahead of time. He used to come in our office in the morning with his big—looked like a big Rolls Royce, and he would come in and sit down and have a cup of coffee with the supply officer there, and it was a regular thing with him. He had his own little special uniform that he had designed. Strictly Navy hat. Regular Navy white hat, officer's hat with a braid and everything, but he had a solid black one piece, looked like an overall made of Milton cloth, no officer's signatures on it or anything like that. So he was rather a unique looking character walking around.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. How was it decided then that you would leave disbursing at Fort Bradford—

MUNSCHAUER Camp Bradford.

LEVINE: Camp Bradford and—

MUNSCHAUER Yes, our training at Camp Bradford had been going along strong for a couple of years, so in time they started to weed out people

who had not seen any fighting. Who had never been to sea, things like that. So they saw me, unmarried, young, so I was moved out with a couple other fellows. Moved over into those Quonset huts I told you about, and I was there about a month and then suddenly I was transferred from there—oh, I understood I was going to end up on the USS Dadelius, which was not built yet. It was being built some place on the Mississippi. We were to meet it sometime at Mobile, Alabama in the harbor there, the bay, and meanwhile this crew was being gotten together and we would be sent to various schools.

So I ended up over in the Brooklyn Navy Yard I think for just a week or so and then bounced over to Ellis Island and stayed here about a month, training at a supply corps school on Staten Island. So every day a Navy picket boat—guess it was Navy, used to come over and pick me up, take me to the school. School all day. The school with handling of material, storage material, accounting for material, ordering material and things like that. Because the ship that we were going to be on was going to be like a head of a flotilla. So we would be doing all the clerical work on this one ship for the benefit of this flotilla. So it was all new work for me. [Coughs] Excuse me. And then so Ellis Island and I was here a month.

LEVINE: Do you recall what month?

MUNSCHAUER It had to be in the spring.

LEVINE: Spring of '44?

MUNSCHAUER Of '44, yes. I can't tell you the month, no.

LEVINE: Okay.

MUNSCHAUER It wasn't listed on my papers as such. It just says USS Dadelius and all the different training locations they didn't go into.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, you were billeted, so that meant that you were housed in the Coast Guard facilities and fed in the Coast Guard dining room. Can you say anything about that?

MUNSCHAUER The only thing, I do remember of course coming in on the ferry, in the slip, and coming near the end. That was the regular ferry from New York. It was a regular ferry.

LEVINE: Well, who was coming on that ferry? Who was using that ferry?

MUNSCHAUER I have no idea, but it was a regular ferry and it made regular runs over here and if I were in New York for the day, I could come, pick it up at eleven o'clock at night or ten o'clock and come here. There was one last ferry each day. You had to make that, but now, as I remember, the little building at the end of the harbor had a little tower on it. Still there. As I remember, we used that building. The Coast Guard used that building, as I recall.

LEVINE: For sleeping?

MUNSCHAUER No, not for sleeping. I think we slept in separate buildings, in other buildings. I'm talking about the Coast Guard offices, but I think we slept some place else and ate some place else. But as I remember, I almost remember going in to check in that I was on the base or that I was leaving the base, as I remember. I slept either in that hospital in a bunk and could look out the window, as I had my head down, and see the Statue of Liberty. Of course, it would be silhouetted against the sky, especially with the moon out. It was not lit during the war, was most things weren't lit, and so that's the comings and goings. And every night I had liberty. So I would come home on the picket boat from Staten Island. Eat, change into my whites, because it was springtime and head up to New York City on the regular ferry. I would take a subway up and go to the USO and whatever they had free tickets, that what I picked up. So I got free tickets to Broadway shows. Got free tickets to live radio shows. In other words, shows like The Shadow Knows, and just—and these were shows where the sound effects were created. A big table—if it was to be thunder, they'd have a big sheet of metal and go like that. So it was all that type of thing. My favorite show was the Perry Como Show. I think it was called the Chesterfield Hour.

LEVINE: Oh, right.

MUNSCHAUER And he would give about a half hour show before his show. Gave a very nice show and he was very congenial and mixed in with the people and everything like that. So that was my favorite show. I remember going to a ballgame and sitting behind Babe Ruth. Babe Ruth was—he wasn't a player. He was a spectator, too, but I was about two aisles behind him. I remember that well.
So every night for a month I was going to different places.

LEVINE: Wow, Babe Ruth wasn't—he was a player at the time, he just wasn't a player in that game, is that--

MUNSCHAUER I don't think he was a player at that time. I think he had stopped playing, retired.

LEVINE: I see.

MUNSCHAUER As I remember, but I do remember him, the hulk of him sitting in front of me.

LEVINE: Now, these ferries, did they run frequently?

MUNSCHAUER Yes, uh-hmm.

LEVINE: To and from?

MUNSCHAUER Yeah. I often wonder, was it the ferry that was [unclear] sunk here for so long?

LEVINE: It could have been. I mean, I don't know how many of them they had running at that time, but it would have been like that one, if it wasn't specifically that one. So you always went to New York. You didn't go to New Jersey for any reason?

MUNSCHAUER No. No.

LEVINE: And were there other people in the hospital buildings?

MUNSCHAUER Oh, yes.

LEVINE: I mean, were there hospitalized people?

MUNSCHAUER Oh, yes. Uh-huh, yeah. Of course, I wasn't here that long. I really didn't establish any friendships because the minute I was here, I was going uptown. There was no one else from ship assigned with me on this training. I was the only one, so I don't—I have no remembrance really of people. I remember checking in with somebody and signing in, signing out, that type of thing.

LEVINE: Well, who would have been in the hospital, do you know? I mean, who would have been a patient there? Would it have been a Coast Guard—

MUNSCHAUER When I say, I think I was in the hospital. It could have been a unit behind the hospital.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MUNSCHAUER So whatever it was, I knew I could see that Statue of Liberty.

LEVINE: Well, you had to have been on Island Two, or probably Three.

MUNSCHAUER Yes.

LEVINE: In order to see that.

MUNSCHAUER Right, uh-hmm. Yeah, I didn't have to move my head around. I mean, I could just see it very vividly.

LEVINE: And you were in like a dormitory with a number of bunks?

MUNSCHAUER Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh, and you mentioned something about the food, the Coast Guard food.

MUNSCHAUER The best food I had in the Navy. First of all, they served it family style. All sat at the table, these platters of meat, platters of potatoes, vegetables passed around, and they were delicious. Everybody enjoyed it. The cook would come out and chat with the people. There were not that many of us around, really. You talked before about other people, there weren't a whole lot of people around. Now, this was a Coast Guard Training Base, also, I believe.

LEVINE: Yes.

MUNSCHAUER I don't remember seeing—which to me means like a boot camp for the Coast Guard. I don't know, but I don't remember that part. But the people I was around, there were not too many people.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Well, of course, you would have only been there in the evening.

MUNSCHAUER That's it.

LEVINE: And how about weekends?

MUNSCHAUER I think I worked Saturday. Sunday I had off. In other words, all this time I was there, I was in command of myself. I didn't have to report to anybody. I knew my crew was up in Lido Beach, Long Island, with the captain going to gunnery school. I knew they were there, but I was in charge of myself. Sunday came along, u

to New York—over to New York I would go. Go up to Central Park, walk through there, safe and sound. No problem, when I compare it to today, and I'm a walker and a hiker and I've always been a walker and a hiker so I enjoyed New York, going all around

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MUNSCHAUER Plus the dances, meeting girls, dating them, taking them home.

LEVINE: Yeah, and you were the only Naval person stationed here at that time, that you know of?

MUNSCHAUER At that time, that I know of.

LEVINE: And there wasn't an Army or Air Force or Marine or any other branch of the service, other than the Coast Guard that you know of?

MUNSCHAUER Right, that I know of.

LEVINE: But there were enemy aliens being housed here.

MUNSCHAUER That's right.

LEVINE: Kept here at that time. What do you remember about that?

MUNSCHAUER Well, when we came in on the ferry boat, came into the harbor here. As we did, we swung around where that park is in the front where the grass is, where the Walls of Honor are. That was, as I remember, all fenced off and these people would be standing. Detainees, prisoners, whatever you want to call them, would be walking, reading, painting, throwing balls, things like that just occupying their time. Of course, this was at the height of the war and we knew they were German and Italian prisoners and we knew mainly the German American Bund, some of the suspicious people in that were housed there. So when we would come back, of course, we would have appropriate gestures and appropriate words and I won't go into that right now, and they totally ignored us, which got us even madder. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So they—how many—just roughly?

MUNSCHAUER Oh, quite a few. Quite a few walking around. Yes, I would say, at a glance at any one time you would say, I'd say thirty-five, fifty, something like that. Uh-huh, yeah.

LEVINE: And so you really never had one-to-one contact with them?

MUNSCHAUER Not at all.

LEVINE: It was more seeing them at a distance?

MUNSCHAUER No. We never went into the main Ellis Island building. Never.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, okay. Now, did you have—well, you wouldn't have had a supervisor. Well, you probably had a supervisor at that time, did you? Or you just—

MUNSCHAUER Not here. I was strictly on my own, yeah. I was assigned to this training course in Staten Island and I knew that I would be there for a month or whatever the period of time was and then I would have to join my crew up at Lido Beach.

LEVINE: I see. I see. So when you left Ellis Island, you went to Lido Beach?

MUNSCHAUER Lido Beach, right.

LEVINE: On Long Island.

MUNSCHAUER Right. Yeah, we stayed in the Lido Beach Hotel, which had been converted into a Navy Training Base and barracks and whatnot. Our whole crew wasn't there, but a lot of our crew were there, especially the gunnery people, and our captain was there.

LEVINE: Now, they had received training there?

MUNSCHAUER They were undergoing training when I arrived and I was a storekeeper. I would not be a gunner, so I didn't have to undergo that training. So I acted as a yeoman, or the secretary to my captain, Captain Carlson. He'd have letters to be done in the morning and when I was finished with that—Yeoman worked for the day. Where would I go? New York City.

LEVINE: How would you get there?

MUNSCHAUER Train. The Long Island Railroad and so I made that a trip almost daily, once I took care of my work. Meanwhile, the crew trained. So I was there-and Sundays, what did I do Sundays? I went to the Lido Beach. The beach that's there.

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LEVINE: Oh, the beach, uh-huh.

MUNSCHAUER Of course, that was crowded. A lot of girls around and I knew my crew members and so-forth, and that's where we'd go. So—

LEVINE: Okay. Let's pause here so we can turn the tape over.

MUNSCHAUER Okay.

LEVINE: And then we'll continue.

MUNSCHAUER Right.

[End of Tape One, Side A/Start of Tape One, Side B]

LEVINE: Okay. So we were talking about when you were stationed at Lido Beach.

MUNSCHAUER Yes.

LEVINE: Then did you rejoin some of the people that you had trained with earlier or—

MUNSCHAUER From Lido Beach, as I remember, we took a train down to Mobile, Alabama, that part of the ship's crew, and we were stationed at a small Naval Station at Mobile, Alabama and it was called the Pea Patch. It was out in the middle of nowhere with a fence around it, and from that moment on, you were really—all those evenings of liberty, that was strictly forgotten because it was all work from that point on down there. Further training. Ship wasn't there yet, so maybe another month went by and finally the ship came in and it was an LST, converted. It was an LST just built converted or re-engineered into a machine shop. So if you can visualize an LST with the big doors that opened up in front, and they would bring wrecked—could bring a wrecked landing craft in and work on them on a machine shop right there, and out they would go and o-forth. It was quite—I mean lathes all over the place. Drill presses and so-forth.

So we had this crew that were experts in machine shop work, plus the ship's company, plus the gunnery, plus the radio men, plus the storekeepers and the yeoman. So it was quite a large ship. I guess we had every bit of two hundred people on it.

LEVINE: And where was the ship dispatched to?

MUNSCHAUER When it was commissioned, as I remember, we went right out into the Gulf of Mexico and spent several weeks out there on a shakedown cruise. Getting the thing all in shape, getting everybody used to it, all the operation, all the gunnery. They had civilians aboard, engineers that were working with the Navy people to familiarize them with the instrumentation and all that kind of stuff. So it was quite a shakedown. I guess it took every bit of a month and we operated out of Galveston, Texas, for that shakedown.

LEVINE: It's called a shakedown?

MUNSCHAUER Shakedown. In other words, you shakedown or get everyone trained and used to the ship, familiar with the ship's equipment and so-forth.

LEVINE: Now, the civilians, they were there strictly for training purposes and then they got off the ship?

MUNSCHAUER They were to train the Naval personnel. In other words, they were civilian engineers working for shipyards and so-forth.

LEVINE: I see. What was the feeling aboard the ship while you were doing the shakedown?

MUNSCHAUER Well, the big feeling was seasickness. That was the big thing. I had never been seasick before. My own experience, I was up in the bow with a couple fellows and all of a sudden a seagull did his business on my hand. Came down from the sky, and the minute I saw it, that turned my stomach like that and so the rest of my time at sea, I was seasick, constant. So I got to the point where I could not go down below to sleep at night. I used to sleep up in amongst the equipment on the deck, in amongst the canvas covers. I'd get right in there and that would be my bed. The only thing I would go down below, when I had to do my work, but I wanted that fresh air because the bunks were one on top of the other with pipes clanging over you and all this kind of stuff. The air, we didn't have air conditioning or anything and it was hot. Gulf of Mexico, Galveston, Texas. The decks were hot, so I just liked that fresh air, so that's where I lived, but worked down in that little cubbyhole of an office about this size taking care of all the records and the payroll, things like that.

LEVINE: So how long were you aboard the ship?

MUNSCHAUER I was—were about, I guess about three months we were heading—after the shakedown we were headed for the Panama Canal and we stopped in the middle of the night to load our ammunition some place in Mexico. We spent all night, the total crew, passing this ammunition down the holds, down the tubes and so-forth, all night long. Headed for the Panama Canal, just almost got there and we got word that Japan was going to surrender. You can imagine the joy that we had, and we were turned around and sent back to Norfolk, Virginia, for the ship to be decommissioned? Can you imagine it? Built, the crew trained, all that done and here it was all going to be disbanded, but the war was over.

So I was a storekeeper, First Class. Never had been in action. So I was what you call frozen. That means that I could not get out while the other people were getting out. That I would have to stay back for a fixed number of months, based on my service, so that other people who had been in action could be discharged. So that's what they meant by frozen. So I was moved. I was transferred up to Boston Navy Yard. There for about a week, every night liberty. Used to go into listen to Vaughn Monroe's orchestra and the theaters, and ended up on a Coast Guard Cutter going to—no, excuse me.

No, it was a Navy—a Coast Guard Cutter going to Newfoundland and I was going to be stationed up there, I think six to eight months in ship's company. That was a tremendous base up there. Cold, windy, only one small town. Placentia was the only place and there was about twenty houses. Closest city was St. John's and that was a little bit too far. So as a result, they entertained us on the base pretty much with entertainment units from New York. USO groups, Sinatra coming up again. Bob Hope and other groups coming up and providing entertainment, and we had civilian help on the base, Newfoundlanders, male and female. So we would have dances and of course these Newfoundland girls were anxious to get out of Newfoundland and these Navy men there, so naturally—so we had a good time and so I was there about eight months.

LEVINE: Why was your unit sent to Newfoundland?

MUNSCHAUER Just me. Just myself.

LEVINE: Just you?

MUNSCHAUER Yes, uh-huh. In other words, they were releasing people from the office there to be discharged because they had been on active duty. I mean active duty, fighting duty. I hadn't, so I had to go up

and take their place and of course, that was being wound down, too, that station. It was a tremendous station, though. I mean warehouses all over the place. Airport, gun emplacements that were down in elevators down in the mountains. You know, that was the last stopping off place for Lindbergh when he flew to Paris, Newfoundland. He went right over the base that we would have come to later on, and the Atlantic Charter meeting with Churchill and Roosevelt was immediately off our base. Of course, that was earlier than when we were there, but that's where the Atlantic Charter was, at Argentia, Newfoundland.

LEVINE: So then do you recall when you got work that you were actually coming home?

MUNSCHAUER I got word that I was coming home and that I would be flown home. When I say flown home, because my trip up there in that cutter, it was the most horrible experience. I was so sick. Couldn't even get out of bed. Everybody else was sick. Vomit was all over the place, in the men's rooms and everything. It was horrible, the smell and everything, you can imagine. When I got up to Newfoundland, I got down and kissed that land. But anyway, to hear that I was going to be flown home was wonderful. So I was flown to New York, a base that's not even—Floyd Bennett Field, I think, was the field that was there at the time, and bussed down to Bainbridge on the Susquehanna River in Maryland and I was there two, three days and discharged and bussed into Baltimore, downtown some place and my parents met me there. And that was the end of the Navy.

LEVINE: Yeah. When you think back on it now, your whole Navy career and also being here at Ellis Island, are there—do you have any kind of, I don't know, feelings or thoughts about having served at that time?

MUNSCHAUER I was very pleased to have served. I was very fortunate that I wasn't injured in any way. I didn't have to go to action, although I would have gone. It was just the way it happened, but to come out in one piece. Met a lot of wonderful men. Met a lot of lovely girls and families, and my memories of this and to see this restored, I just couldn't give my hundred dollars quick enough for my own great grandfather, John Peter Munschauer, who came—didn't come through here, but he's on the Wall of Honor, and we're anxious for my family to go out and see his name in the garden today.

LEVINE: Wonderful.

MUNSCHAUER But I have nothing but good memories of the war. I know some of the fellows that came out of Vietnam, most of the fellows did not come out with good feelings, total bitterness. I had none of that. I didn't have the touch of war at all. I had no touch of it at all.

LEVINE: Was your great grandfather coming from Germany?

MUNSCHAUER He was coming from Hess Darmschadt. Came in probably 1830. This was before Germany existed. Germany did not exist until 1871 as a nation. In other words, it was made up of different states and provinces. Hess Darmschadt and various duchies and kingdoms and all this. About, I guess, close to forty-five various states, not federated into one government. That didn't happen until 1871. So he came over in 1830 and economics was the big coming over. Couldn't own property.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Were you very conscious of that at the time you were stationed here, of—

MUNSCHAUER Oh, yes, because my father was—my father and my aunt put together our family genealogy, and I was always part of that. I was always working with my dad, especially when I got with Continental Can. In our machine shop we had German immigrant machinists who could read German letters, and I would—my dad would give me all these German letters and I'd give them to the machinists and they would write it all out in English for me.

LEVINE: Now, where were these letters from that your father gave you?

MUNSCHAUER From Germany. In other words, old letters from way back that had been found in the attic by my aunt and my father over a period of time.

LEVINE: Wonderful.

MUNSCHAUER They started this back in the Depression and worked on it together and when my dad died, he just passed it all onto me. So I enjoy doing that now, and that's another good feeling I have about Ellis Island. Not that they came through here, but it was all part of the process.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, why don't you briefly tell us for the tape when you got out of the service, then how did you meet your wife?

- MUNSCHAUER Yes. When I got out of the service I went back to the company that I worked for before. It was an old Baltimore banking institution called Safe Deposit and Trust Company. When I got back, I worked about four or five desks away from this young, red head that worked under a grandfather's clock in the office, and I had my eye on her and I was just a little bit too bashful to go up and talk to her, or even introduce myself. I was talking with another girl up in the tabulating unit and I said, "Who is that girl under the clock?" She said, "Well, that's Dorothy Kratz," and I said, "Gee, she's a nice looking girl. I'd like to meet her sometime." "You want to meet her? We're going to have a company picnic and I'll see that you meet her on that picnic," and that's where we met and that's when it all started.
- LEVINE: Uh-huh. How do you spell your wife's maiden name?
- MUNSCHAUER K-R-A-T-Z. Another German extraction and I'm working on her family now.
- LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh, on the genealogy. Uh-huh. So did you marry right away or you courted for a long time?
- MUNSCHAUER Yes, we married, I guess it was a couple of years and we had three lovely daughters. The oldest, Deborah, went to the Trapp Hagen School of Fashion Design in New York, and then my middle daughter went to the Moore College of Art in Philadelphia, and she's a commercial artist now. And my youngest daughter, Robin, she became—she went to school at the Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale. And so all the girls are artistically inclined, either with clothes, home decoration or art.
- LEVINE: Uh-huh, and what are your daughter's names.
- MUNSCHAUER The oldest is Deborah—
- LEVINE: And maybe their last names.
- MUNSCHAUER Deborah Schneider and she has three—ah, two granddaughters, two of my granddaughters. And Joan is not married. Joan Munschauer McCray. She's divorced, and then Robin is Robin Noblock. She has two sons.
- LEVINE: Uh-hmm, and let's see. So then your career, did you stay at the same company?

MUNSCHAUER No, I just wasn't making enough money to get married so I decided to put out a lot of resumes and I put out plenty of them because at that time everybody was trying to get a job. Everybody was trying to find an apartment. It was really quite a rush, all these fellows coming out of the service and everything. So I ended up with Continental Can and in the plant in Baltimore, in East Baltimore and was there for—I became the controller of the plant and continued night school until I had a total of about seven years night school and passed the CPA test and became a CPA, but remained with Continental. In other words, I didn't go into private practice.

About 1980—excuse me, 1964 I was transferred to the plant in Patterson, New Jersey as the controller and I was transferred over—after about four years I was transferred to corporate in New York, Corporate Continental Can and then the whole company moved to Stanford and I had to—I had to go up to Stanford every day, which was about sixty-five miles in both directions over the Tappan Zee Bridge. Terrible traffic all the time. So at sixty-one I decided to retire, which was in 1983.

LEVINE: And how is this phase of your life, your retirement phase?

MUNSCHAUER Wonderful. I enjoy every moment of it. I've been very busy hiking and I'm a bird carver, a decoy carver and I belong to a very active group of four hundred retired men called the Hobbyists, in Ridgewood, New Jersey. We're broken down into twenty-five interest groups. Everything you could imagine. Bowling, golf, tennis, checkers, chess, hiking, whatever you want to talk about, it's all broken down. Investments, things like that. So it's a very active group and I have been very active in it. Plus my grandchildren. We're very fortunate. One set of grandchildren with their parents in Bethel, Connecticut, and the other pair in Goshen, New York. So we're fairly close, but not too close.

LEVINE: [Laughs] Well, looking back, what would you say you feel very proud about or feel very satisfied—

MUNSCHAUER Well, I'm very proud that I married Dot and we have our children, and then I'm proud of being part of the family that I came from and the background and the fact that immigrants came over here, and every time I think about, I fill up.

LEVINE: Well, I think maybe this is a good note to end on. I want to thank you very much for a most interesting interview.

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MUNSCHAUER Thank you very much and thank you for being over at Ho-Hopus for that wonderful talk that you gave.

LEVINE: Oh, thank you. Okay, well, this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. I'm been with Robert Lloyd Munschauer, who was stationed here at Ellis Island for one month in the spring of 1944, and we are always interested in having that aspect of the use that Ellis Island has had in the past, as well as receiving immigrants.

MUNSCHAUER Right.

LEVINE: Also, the military installation here. Okay, this is June 2nd, 1995, and this is Janet Levine signing off for the National Park Service.

[End of Interview]