Edwin Fizer

January 22, 2016
Part 1
Interviewed by: Brian McDevitt
Transcribed by: Unknown, and Adam Cieply
Edited by: Eric Bradach

McDevitt: Hello, this is Brian McDevitt with the Pritzker military museum and library, today is January 22nd, 2016, and I'm joined with Ed Fizer, a Montford Point Marine, who served during World War II. Mr. Fizer, if you would, when and where were you born?

Fizer: New Orleans, Louisiana.

McDevitt: What year was that?

Fizer: 1925.

McDevitt: And what was growing up in New Orleans in the '20s and '30s like?

Fizer: Bad, but not as bad as some places. There was kind of, a neighborly kind of being around. For instance, there was a guy who had a grocery store on the corner. He was straight out of Italy. He was a very friendly fellow. His son and I used to be, well, we were at the time, real good friends. We were quite young, and Lester was his name, and his father was in America. But, at that time, Hitler was just starting his walk through Europe. And he hated him, and he hated Mussolini really well, and he would be talking about him and swearing in Italian and so on down the line. But I wound up days over at their house having dinner and eating real good Italian, and so was, Lester came to my house the same way. As a matter of fact, the houses are built way up off the ground in New Orleans, so he and I had an office underneath the house on linoleum. And we had cord telephones with the cardboard cups. And so, that's the kind of life we had. And I learned how to play baseball from Italian kids because they were really good at it. And then we had one other thing I'll mention. Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus people used to come to New Orleans at that time, and they would come to a street called Annunciation and Race and if you wanted, we couldn't afford tickets, so if you wanted tickets, you'd go out there and haul water for elephants. And that's a lot of hauling. But before we got there we had to go through the Irish channel. And the Irish did not like black folks. So first of all we used to go through there by ourselves, it was a tough day we didn't make it. But then we hooked up with the Italian kids. And then we formed a union, and we go through there to get our tickets, we'd be bloody but unbowed. I remember

fighting this one Irish kid, and he was calling me the n-word, and I'd knock him down, and he'd get up and said, 'You're still an n'. Anyway, that was a part of the lifestyle. The educational thing wasn't that good. They'd had separate but equal. That was a joke…because I was as dumb as a box of rocks listening to that stuff. But I had to get most of my education afterwards. Anyway.

McDevitt: Yeah, and to that effect, New Orleans has always been kind of its own city, its own pocket. There was a large free black population throughout history. Did you get to travel around the south at all when you were a kid? Did you have anything to compare it to?

Fizer: Oh, no question. My stepfather, not my regular father but my stepfather, had a car. And we traveled quite a bit. But there was a thing called a green book at that time, and if you had the green book you knew where you could stop if you were black, and you would be welcome. So it was kind of that kind of thing when we used to travel. My folks would pack lunches and so on down the line, things that didn't spoil fast, and we would go just about everywhere. We'd go on picnics to Mississippi and Northern Louisiana and then, I was adventurous as a kid. I used to go down to the waterfront because I liked adventure all my life. And there were ships coming in because New Orleans was a seaport. And I would go and, there were people, Japanese and all other nations. I couldn't speak their language, but we could communicate because I had a really sharp bicycle. And it had a horn and lights and foxtails. And they'd like it and I'd let them take a ride and they'd ride the bicycle around the docks and then they'd go find something on the ship. I'd even, when I was a kid, I'd been aboard a French submarine and Japanese ships and so on down the line. And my folks didn't know I was doing this because it wasn't crazy like it is now. No one was going to kidnap you, you know what I mean? The guys were friendly, and so I enjoyed that.

McDevitt: And what did your mom and dad do for a living? This was a depression era, so

Fizer: Well it was a depression era, but my mom was a part-time teacher. And my dad was just a truck driver; my natural father was a truck driver. But he was good at what he did so he maintained the job. I remember my uncles, they all had, well Eugene, he was a mechanic and he worked for a company, and that's what he did as a mechanic.

[Third person coughing in room; related comments.]

McDevitt: So how was the Depression for your family? How did you guys deal with it?

Fizer: I can remember from being very small, that my grandmother owned three or four houses. And when the thing really hit, she couldn't keep them. The bank didn't want them. So they just let people live there. I was always in a house. It

was okay. I lived uptown, 1st Street. I used to go to Lena's market. That's where I learned to like dark bananas. What happened, when I went over there to buy stuff from her for my folks, she'd give me some specks they called them. And I found out they're the sweetest, and I still eat specks bananas today. That was kind of, it was kind of fun…My Uncle Eugene, always, he was a drinker, and he ate soup every Monday. He had to have soup. So I had to go to Lena's market and get a soup brisket and all of the veggies to go with it. Bring it back for my Aunt Laura and she would make soup for him.

McDevitt: And, so you were talking about the separate but equal thing. If you can, kind of just give me an overview of what the schooling was like?

Fizer: In the south there was a law in Louisiana called separate but equal education. And it was a real joke because the Caucasian people had new books and good teachers, etc. We had dedicated teachers, but our books were ragged. They were the hand-me-downs from the school that they could barely, some of them didn't have covers. They had pages missing, and so on down the line. The large segment of teachers were dedicated and they tried to teach you as best they could with what they had, but a lot of people didn't really care, their attitude was, "I got mine, I don't care how you get yours." And I can remember even as far as back as grade school or grammar school or whatever it was, nursery school, there was a teacher called Ms. Alice Duvall. We used drive her nuts. She used to stick her head out the window and scream, "These kids are driving me insane," and then she'd pull it back in and go on teaching. But the education was very poor.

McDevitt: And how about the school house itself? What was that like?

Fizer: They were the same thing. The hand-me-down buildings that other people had vacated. They were in fairly good shape, and we didn't have to worry too much about the weather because the weather was never really bad in New Orleans. The weather was always warm. I'd never seen snow until I went to Carolina.

McDevitt: And what did you, were there any particular subjects that you liked as a child?

Fizer: I guess I liked history, I didn't realize it, but I did because I was always interested in being a part of something that was historical. I remember when Pearl Harbor started, December the 7th, I went with a couple, two of my friends, we we're always interested in airplanes. We built them, we flew them and we saved up one time—nineteen dollars— and bought a motor, which was really phenomenal. We put that in. We went, well not we, but two of us went to the recruiting station for the Army Air Corps, it was called at the time. The guy said, quite succinctly, "Get out of here, boy. We don't have no n's flying no airplanes in the service." So that was kind of leading up to my being in the Marine Corps

because I liked adventures, I told you before, and lo and behold…Mrs. Roosevelt prevailed on her husband and Ms. Bethund Cookman prevailed on her husbands to open up the services. And the way he could do that, because at that time the Marine Corps was an all Caucasian organization, and there were no black in it. Probably back in Washington's day there might have been a few. But up to that time, it was absolutely forbidden, and so he signed Executive Order 8802, and that was the beginning of it and that allowed us in. And so I signed up early and enlisted. Nineteen hundred of us enlisted in the Marine Corps at that time, and there was no place for us to go so they had to find segregated, separate headquarters, and that turned out to be in North Carolina at Camp Lejeune. And I was just telling folks who were coming down, that the way you describe the place where marine bases are, you say, "If it's the hottest place in Hell, the coldest place on Earth, good mosquitoes, lots of mosquitoes, and snakes and other vermin, they say this is going to be a marine base." It's the truth. Anyway, so that's what we were waiting for. And they finally found a place at Camp Lejeune for us. And they had some old huts there left over from, it was called…civilian CCC camp. They had potbelly stoves…and that's where we wound up.

McDevitt: Now, you were, I think, sixteen when you joined, is that correct?

Fizer: Sixteen and a half when I signed in. By the time I got there I was seventeen.

McDevitt: So what did your parents think when you were like, "Hey I'm going to join this"?

Fizer: Well my mother had to sign me in, they wouldn't accept me unless she signed me in. And it started way back. I remember getting ready to report to the recruiter, and he says, "Get a physical, you have to take a physical," so I took a physical. Perfect shape. There was one cavity in my mouth. The dentist could have filled it, "Pull it," he says. I said, "Pull it?" He said, "Get it pulled." Now if there was anything I hated more in the world it was going to the dentist. But I went to this dentist, who was my mother's dentist; this guy was good man. I mention this because he was. I let people just go ahead of me, like, "You're next. Go, you're next," letting them go ahead of me. Finally, he says, "Okay, you can't duck no longer, come on in," so I went in. And I showed him the tooth and told him what I had and he said, "They won't let you fill it?" No. So he said, "Okay." And I'm sitting there, and I'm nervous as hell and I said, "Doctor, will you hurry up and get this tooth out?" I say, "This is driving me nuts." And he said, "Oh you mean this?" He had pulled it, and I didn't even know it. That guy was good man. He made and upper plate for my mother. It was so natural to her that when she took physical exams they didn't know it was false teeth. That's how good he was.

McDevitt: Well, you're lucky you didn't have that done in the military because they're not that nice.

Fizer: Well, I've got a story for that too. I'll tell you that in a few minutes. But finally we did get travel orders. They took us to Louisiana, across Alabama, Mississippi all the way down to the round tip of Florida, picking up new recruits. And finally up the coast to Carolina. And I can remember that guy so well saying, "Take a look back…because it's going to be a long time before you see the outside again. And you're going to wish you'd never come," he said, "Because we're going to see that you do. That you'd be turned back. You're going to hate this place. You're going to hate the Marine Corps. You're not even going to want to stay." And when they said that to…nineteen hundred of us, that hardened our resolve. Let me give you an idea. There was a colonel at the time named Larson. He walked out and he looked at us and he said, and we were in formation, "When I see you women, dogs, and you people in the Marine Corps, I know there's a war going on." Is that the ultimate insult? That was him, but brother, we made him regret he said that because we hardened our resolve, and we broke every standing record in the Marine Corps, from small arms to anti-aircraft. You hear me? Every one. As a matter of fact, President Roosevelt heard about the super-n's, as we were called by that time, and sent down Cardel Hall, Secretary Stitimius and the Secretary of the Navy, who I think was Knox at that time, to come down to see, if they were saying this just to be saying it. And we showed them. They were busy sending all of the armaments and ordinance, to the active duty. And they went to New York City and got four old seacoast guns out of a park from World War I, brought them down there, and we washed them out, cleaned them, and dug them in with a whole lot of sandbags deep down in the ground. They were so old, first you put in the shell, and then there was a nylon thing of gunpowder-…you put that in. Then you closed the breach, and there was a 30 caliber rifle shell without the bullet on it, and you put that in. That was the igniter. Now, we were really a little shy of these guns, so we had a lanyard. Do you know what a lanyard is? We had one that was 100 feet long. We pulled it, you could see it doing this, and boy that thing went off. And when it went off, good gracious, all hell broke loose. We had four of them, so we fired them. Then finally we got a range finder, and we broke records with that. Oh, when they came down we were shooting sleeves and everything down, and they said, "These guys are ready, man, and when they called them super-n's they were right." And that's when things started to happen. Now I'm in what is called the 51st Composite Defense Battalion FMF, fleet marine forces. That means that since we were segregated, we had to have infantry, ammunition, and ordinance to take and hold. In other words, we had platoons of infantry grunts as well as the other things to hold it with. Finally, the first battalion was ready so they shipped them out. Go ahead.

McDevitt: Real quick, before we get too far ahead because I want to get to all of this. So for you, for boot camp and everything at seventeen years old, were you the youngest recruit in there? The youngest recruit in your platoon?

Fizer: If I wasn't, I was among the few.

McDevitt: What was that like? Because you had people from all over the country coming together.

Fizer: Older guys, these guys were in college. They were athletes, pre-med, pre-law, pre-this, pre-that. Some of everything that was fine about black America. I would venture a guess, now this is a guess, that we at that time were the smartest men in the Marine Corps because we came from that kind of good backgrounds. So am I answering your question?

McDevitt: Yeah. How was it, what kind of influence did it have on you? You were just a young kid, thrown in with all these young men who have been...

Fizer: Crazy. And there was a lot of abuse, verbal as well as physical. Nobody was going to complain about it. If we said anything no one was going to take it nowhere, and nobody was going to report them, anyway. I can remember being kicked square in my fanny for a lot of reasons. One time I was holding a guy's rifle and he dropped it, and the guy looked at me and said, "What are you doing with his rifle?" and I said, "I was trying to hold it for him, sir." That night I had to sleep with two rifles, well, with about eight rifles, but they were all 03's. You know that bolt action? With the bolts in them? They were in my bunk, I slept with them. Yeah.

McDevitt: What were your drill instructors like? Who were your drill instructors?

Fizer: Well they were southerners, race haters, and they were slowly…quickly trying to train blacks to be drill instructors as well because when I went down they were starting to count platoons from one. And I was in the 9th platoon. And then there go to be three-hundred and four-hundred and five-hundred and so on down the line. They were, they were tough. But you know one thing about it, they were tough in their hatred way, but they were also making us better marines. They didn't realize it. That's what it was all about because right after the 51st was trained and ready, they took all these guys and shipped them out, and they were on a ship that was torpedoed and sunk.

McDevitt: All the drill instructors?

Fizer: Yes.

McDevitt: So you're going through boot...what do you remember from the training about boot camp? Had you ever fired a rifle before that time?

Fizer: Never. Never. I remember going to the range, and it was cold, North Carolina's coldest winter in eighteen years, according to the papers. Laying down, first of all you had to do is snapping in. Snap in, snap in, snap in. Then after that they brought in twenty-two rifles for us. We fired those. Do they still have Maggie's Drawers?

McDevitt: Mhm, yep.

Fizer: Anyway, if you miss you can see Maggie's drawers. And finally, with 03's. And I said, "You know, if I go to war with these 03 Springfield's, I'm going to die because the Japanese is a hard fighting group." And I had a blessing. The blessing was, out came the M1 Garand. Man, this was the weapon at the time, you could fire eight shots and it would jump out, and you could throw in another one and fire eight more. Just that rapid, as fast as you could fire that's how well it was. But sometimes you used it and sometimes you didn't. I don't want to get ahead of myself, but when I was in some jungles it was so thick that the sunlight disappeared. And you couldn't do that, so I had a Thompson, and I took the back off the Thompson, put a fifty round clip in it, and it had a pistol grip on it. I can hold a 50 round clip and work in the jungles really well.

McDevitt: So what was your MOS and how was it selected? What was your job going to be?

Fizer: At that time, piston aircraft was the thing of the day. And we had, search lights, they came from Sperry and GE. These lights had 800 million candle power, and they could go up quite a ways. I was in charge of a search light battery, G-battery. And this was tied in with regular R, and 90mm anti-aircraft guns. And then at sundown, we would take the North Star, everyone would zero in on the North Star, and then once we were all coordinated, then we were ready to do our firing. Now, we fired pretty well, as I told you before. The drones, not drones but the airplanes, had sleeves on them, on the back of them. And they towed these sleeves, and then we would shoot at the sleeves. Well then we got to the point where we would shoot the rope that was towing the sleeve, and the pilots would say, "That's it, we're out of here," because they didn't think we were good enough to where we wouldn't shoot them down. So…that was the anti-aircraft part of it. But when you go overseas, they don't have time to set up no searchlights, so the searchlights just went [making noises to simulate breaking] and all of a sudden here's what you were trained to do. Back comes the M1. So it was really tough, but you know what, the tougher they were, the better we became.

McDevitt: Did you notice, was there any change as you got near, you know now boot camp you have the three phases and by the third phase you start getting a little bit better treatment from the drill instructors.

Fizer: Not necessarily better treatment, in them days racism was rampant, I mean rampant. Hatred was out there, buddy. Segregation was the thing of the day. So I found ways to give myself some relief. I'll give you an example. One day I went into a lieutenant's office, and he was in his office, and all of a sudden I noticed there was a football on the back of his desk on the credenza, and I asked him about it. He said, "Oh, I was a kicker in college," and I said, "Well, I was a high school quarterback." So I would get together with him and he'd kick and I'd throw. So that kind of game me some relief. Then there was another fellow in the service with us, his name was Robert Troup. Bobby Troup was a composer for a very popular band at that time called, "Tommy Dorsey." And believe it or not, he was our entertainment officer. So he used to put on shows, so I got into that so I could get away from some of that other stuff. And there was a friend of mine name Fines Henderson, who was a dancer and so on down the line. Troup was so good he wrote things like "Route 66" and "Hey Daddy" and a few of those. You ever heard "Route 66?" Well he wrote that.

McDevitt: Didn't he write, "Leaving Jacksonville?" Wasn't there a theme song? Do you remember that?

Fizer: Absolutely! He wrote the song, "Take Me Away From Jacksonville" because Jacksonville was a clap town, clap meaning gonorrhea. You know, you didn't want to be caught there. And it was this big. A little bit about Jacksonville. During the earlier part of the war, Marines were down in Bouganville, Guadalcanal, and the Solomon Islands fighting. And we were just training and finally out of boot camp, and I got a chance to take a trip home. I'm sitting in this bus station in Jacksonville, it was about this big, and there was a guy there, smoking a cigarette, he had an SP on his arm, and he was nervous as hell. And he said, "What are you doing in that uniform?" and I said, "I'm in the Marine Corps," and he said, "Since when?" I brought him up to date because he had just come back from overseas, and he was on a little bit of R and R but still at base camp. He said, "Why are you sitting in the station like this?" and I said "Well, they won't let me on the bus." and he said, "What do you mean they won't let you on the bus? Aren't you a marine?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Wait a minute." He walked over and said, "Who's in charge of this bus station?" This guy comes out and says, "I am sir, what can I do for you?" He said, "Let me tell you something," and he pulled a .45 out, "See that man sitting over there in the green uniform?" "Yeah" He said, "He's a marine. I understand you won't let him on the bus. If he's not on the next bus out of here, I'm going to scatter your brains all over this station." "Yes, sir. Yes, sir." And guess what, he integrated the bus station in Jacksonville because, guess what, on the next bus, I was on it, and I had a seat! Not in the front, but I had a seat. And because you had to take the bus to Raleigh, Durham so on to get a train to go home.

McDevitt: How did the guys from the North deal with it? Because they didn't deal with this segregation on the same level.

Fizer: Oh, it was very difficult for them, very difficult. Oh yeah. They moaned and, there was always tension. Now…one of our guys was playing pool in Jacksonville and had an argument with a white southerner, shot him in the stomach. So when our tanks came, I was in charge of the group to go get the tanks. There were five tanks. Well they were…didn't have any armament or anything because nothing was working but the turret and the motors. Jacksonville had one street. It was blacktop. So I waited until we got right down the main street, came up out of my tank, put my hand up, and gave them the spin. When they got through, there was no street left. We tore it up. We had little ways at getting back at our adversary, and that's what happened there. And there was fights and there was, oh man. And we did a few things that weren't too nice either. When you came back from Jacksonville or wherever you'd been, or Loubern or Raleigh or someplace like that on liberty. We'd take a taxi back to the base, and then when you'd get to the base and walk. Well, we'd found out that if we pooled all of our change, which was hardly enough to pay, we'd give it to him, and then everybody would break on into the base. Well, he couldn't come into the base because that was post number one. So we were not angels, but those were some of the things we did.

McDevitt: Were you getting equal pay, to the white?

Fizer: Oh, oh yeah no question, the Marine Corps I loved. Paid twice a month. 1st and 15th. And I just didn't want my name to be zebra.

McDevitt: So you finish up boot camp, did you get leave? Did you get to go home to New Orleans after boot camp?

Fizer: Oh yeah, as soon as you finish you were given leave.

McDevitt: What did your family say when you came out? What was the community like for you in New Orleans?

Fizer: They thought I was beautiful.

McDevitt: Wearing your dress blues and everything?

Fizer: Not blues but greens. You know, there had never been anyone black in the Marine Corps. People thought we were Canadian pilots

McDevitt: Really?

Fizer: Yeah, because Canada wore dark green for their pilots. They thought we were Canadian pilots. They were all, "No you're not!" "Yes we are!" "No you're not!" All the time…Yeah.

McDevitt: So the war was ramping up at this point in time.

Fizer: No question.

McDevitt: Were you following it closely? Were you following it through the news and radio?

Fizer: Well, there wasn't much communication. I happened to have a five tube radio. That had enough earphones on it to where, when it got to the end you couldn't hardly hear it. Guys would connect to it. I could give you some incidences. I didn't go overseas with the 51st. After we formed the 51st they were getting ready to form the 52nd and they kept 350 of us back to form the 52nd from all of the different disciplines in that. And so I was kept back and promoted, I became a sergeant. First of all, I was a… I'm sorry about the 'I's, but I can only talk about what I know.

McDevitt: Sure

Fizer: I got to be a PFC. and I knew if I got to be a corporal, worked real hard to be a corporal, I'd become corporal of the guard and never walk another post. I worked hard as hell to get that promotion, and I did. Now, funny story with that. We had a young lieutenant. He was dead out of Annapolis. He was the duty officer, and as cold in Carolina, he says, "Fizer." "Yes, sir?" "I'm going to inspect the guard at 1 o'clock this morning." I said, "Yes sir." So now I know some of these guys out there sleeping and hiding in different places. So I said, "I'll go out and warm up the recon sir." I went out and they had chokes on them and I start it up now [start up noises]. This is Carolina 1 o'clock in the morning. And on the base, there isn't nobody awake. And I gun it, gun it, and I choke it, and when I choked it killed the engine. I'd do it again. Now I'm waking these guys up. Now we had one post that had that had live ammo. That was the ammo dump. Finally, I get him and I said, "We're ready to go sir," and he comes out. We check a couple posts, then we get to the ammo post. There's a little short guy there, he was a boxer; [his] name was Smith. He stuttered.

McDevitt: That's a tough post.

Fizer: It is. So we get there, and we get out of the truck. We started to approach him, and he said, "Halt…who goes there?" and he said, "Officer of the day," and we stood there and there was a long silence, and he says, "Alright smith, what do you say now?" And smith said, "I don't remember lieutenant, but until I do you'd

better stand there." Just little funny things like that kind of kept things light. But we were so proud of ourselves, that the man on post number one, when you're going out of the gate and you had your passes and everything. If he looked at you as a black marine and you didn't look right or something was wrong, he'd send your butt back to where you got it together and wasn't going to let you go out there and embarrass us. We were that proud.

McDevitt: Well, I think, you laid the foundation for Marines like myself, up keeping the highest standards. But I don't want to praise you too much, we're still at the beginning of the interview. So after you get out of boot camp, there's huge numbers of black marines joining. Can you tell me how Montford Point; can you describe Montford point for me?

Fizer: Montford Point was at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. As I told you before the huts, they were not barracks, they were just huts. And they held about…eight to twelve men. Potbelly stove. If you needed a potbelly stove, you were warm. Anywhere else, you froze your fanny off. So consequently, none of that was going to change. So we had disciplines, where, for instance, there was one fellow in my outfit, his name was Alexander. He was from Florida. They had held him at nine-years-old and had made him watch while they lynched his grandfather. Oh hey man, let me tell you, things were not good in them days. And so we would make sure that if he went on liberty, three or four guys would go with him because his fuse was that short. You know what I mean? If anybody white said anything to him, it was an explosion, and we knew it. So that's how it was. At first, when we first got out of boot camp, we could take liberty in small towns. Kingston and Jacksonville and so on down the line. These guys were still there, but slowly some of them started to relent when they saw that we were seriously going to be marines and not turn back. So a lot of them started to change their minds. But some of them were hard as nails, and they weren't going to ever change their minds. I can remember, I taught guys how to drive, these guys came in…they started to draft people by then. And they promised us they would give us the best of the draftees. But they came in, and they didn't have no driving experience. I had developed a method for when I was a kid to teach myself how to drive. My aunt lived near a mechanical place, two doors from her, the guy had a mechanic shop. I would sit in the old cars, and they were mostly stick shift at the time, make the noise from my mouth with my feet on the gas pedal. When the time came, they said, "We don't have anyone to drive us," I said, "I can drive," my mom said, "Boy, you can't drive." And I said, "I can mom," and I got in the car and jerked it a couple of times and I drove. That was the method I used to teach fifty guys how to drive. When I was in the Marine Corps I didn't have a driver's license. Didn't have one, I was too young. So anyway, I taught them how to drive. And my point is this, when we would go on missions in the evening, firing missions or practice firing missions, I turned out such good convoys, people from Carolina used to come up from the roads to see them. Yeah.

McDevitt: You know, that kind of leads me into the next question. Why did you think you didn't get selected to be one of the first drill instructors? Because you had picked up rank pretty quickly…

Fizer: First of all, I think it was because I was a little too young. They wanted people I think who were a kind of mature. I can remember, Edgar Davis, looked a lot like Joe Lewis. He was picked because he was a rugged big guy. I remember a guy from Boston, we found him very funny he had the Boston accent. "You can't do that." We thought that was hysterical. He was a drill instructor. A guy named Charlie Gillabol from Evans, Ilinois, he was a drill instructor. And then, oh, there was a guy named Hughes. Hughes was about 6'3" and he had a deep voice. When he put you on the drill field he didn't have to go nowhere. That voice would come out there, boy. You did what Hughes said, if he said, "Platoon halt!" You know what I'm talking about. Absolutely, yeah, oh yeah. It was sharpness. I used to love to drill. And I liked to drill to music. I loved music, man. When that band was playing, we…Oh, by the way, another story. We had a major, his name was Elmo. When we went overseas, Elmo met a girl on one of the islands, whose father owned a bunch of them. And he married her and stayed over there. Yeah. And what we did was, we put all the women in stockades behind barbed wire, and we'd put patches on their legs so you'd know not to mess with them because the ones with patches had some form of disease. And I'm walking by the stockades one day and I hear this [whistles] wolf whistle and I said, "Who the hell did that?" And this girl says, "I did," I said, "You speak English?" and she said, "Yeah, hell, I went to UCLA." I must have stood there talking to that girl for about three hours.

McDevitt: What island was that on?

Fizer: Guam. Yeah, that was really a surprise.

McDevitt: It's really odd to hear an English voice when you're in the middle of nowhere.

Fizer: That's what got me. And I wouldn't leave her, man. I almost wanted to get her out of there. She was very interesting. Very interesting. They eventually let her out so she could function on the island because she was too important not to do that. But she was very interesting.

McDevitt: So did there seem, would you say there was a difference between your wave of recruits that came through that became marines, compared to the second wave that had black drill instructors?

Fizer: Oh yeah, the black drill instructors were tougher than the white. They didn't want no failures. At all. And we drilled everybody from conduct on liberty to the

way you dressed and so on down the line, and oh man, oh yeah. Pride was very important. I was the dumbest one in there, most of the guys were pre-law, pre-med, pre-this, pre-that. Turns out that…old Francois, he turned out to be a lawyer, some guys turned out to be instructors and doctors. Oh man, all kinds of ways. As a matter of fact, I have one friend who became an ambassador, and he and I talk daily.

McDevitt: The sacrifice that those men, I mean you were a kid, but these were grown men who were sacrificing and joining in.

Fizer: Because there was something to prove. There was something to prove. They said that blacks could not be qualified to be marines. Come on, all you got to do is tell somebody they can't do something. That for us that was the challenge.

McDevitt: I mean; you guys were our own unique band of brothers. How did it work, how—because moral must have gotten low at certain times, as an NCO you weren't allowed to command white marines.

Fizer: Oh no, as a matter of fact, I couldn't even go on the grounds at Quantico. Unless I was accompanied by a white officer

McDevitt: So, was it just like joking or working hard or a self-pride thing that kept moral up?

Fizer: No question about it, the determination to prove that we were ready. They didn't even want us to go to combat. We had to fight to fight. Oh yeah. Now, a little bit about this doctor. I needed a little bit of dental work when I was overseas. I think this was in the Marshall Islands, and there was a guy there who was a dentist. He had a field dental thing. Where, to get the drill going he had to pump it with his foot. Now imagine that. And it had the pulleys on the thing when he moved it, so it, and he was hairy. All of a sudden he would be in your mouth drilling and pumping, and all of a sudden his hair would get caught in the pulleys. Now, I'm in pain, and I'm telling you! "Be a man," yeah, be a man, sure. We had one guy there, his name was Rickor. Rickor had just finished med school. And he wanted to practice surgery on people. So he'd be scheduling people for circumcisions. I said, "You ain't cutting on me, brother!" I'm telling you, it had its light moments. You hear me? Yeah

McDevitt: [Laughter] Did anybody sign up?

[46:39]

Fizer: [Laughter] Not that I know of. “Doctor Ricker wants you to come in.” "No, not me." Stay away from the sick bay. And then there was people from different

places who had never been exposed to ladies with venereal diseases. And I remember one guy got up one morning, he looked up and he said, "What's wrong with this?" and it was dripping boy, it was really dripping. We said, "You'd better check in. You need some Pepsi cola." Pepsi cola was the shot of the day. Oh yeah. And then there was one lady, two, one was called boondock shorty. Boondock shorty knew when we got paid. And she would sneak up the back behind the fence, and the guys would go out in the boondocks to give boondock shorty a dollar. That's what she made in those days. Let's see, what else...

McDevitt: Sounds like Jacksonville.

Fizer: "Take me away from Jacksonville!" Man, that song was very true. And he wrote our fight song! "We're the men of the 51st defense battalion of the United States Marines, and though our sergeants call us knot heads we'll wind up on top, bomp, bomp." So he wrote that.

McDevitt: So did you guys have your own band?

Fizer: Oh yeah, absolutely! Man, we had a jazz band that was out of sight. There was a field actress, she was a comedian as well, I can't think of her name now. She came down to perform for us, and I was telling her how much I admired her, she said "Really? I'm very flattered." I said, "Yes, as a matter of fact, will you autograph this picture?" I had one of her in my wallet. And she said, "Well, I'll be" and she did, yeah. And Troup's wife, we used to put on plays, we would borrow her wigs and some of her mops, and that time we were going to pretend we were woman. Nowadays I guess you don't have to pretend, but anyway. We would borrow that and dresses from her and stuff, roll 'em up and the hairy legs would be showing. We would put on a show, what the heck. Yeah. Oh yeah, but old Larson. Speaking of Larson, the one I told you about, the one who said women and dogs…I wound up on an island in the Marianas, Guam. Did so much outstanding work, until he gave me a letter of commendation. I have it at home, from him.

McDevitt: I wonder if he knew you were at that initial thing, where he said…

Fizer: Oh yeah, he was in charge of it! He knew. It was still segregated when I was overseas, absolutely.

McDevitt: I heard that event, when he said that that it almost started like a race riot

Fizer: Absolutely, yeah.

McDevitt: What happened? Can you describe that setting for me? Was he a general or was he a colonel?

Fizer: He was a colonel at the time. He became a general when he was overseas.

McDevitt: He basically just insulted all of you to your faces.

Fizer: He was standing tall and walking and looking, looking at us like we had been bathed in feces. That's when he was making his speech. And when he got through he said, "Yeah, when I see dogs, women, and you people" yeah oh yeah. It really set us off.

McDevitt: Did anybody do anything? Was it just, uh, did people just...

Fizer: Well you can see unrest, by the way people shifted and moved and mumbled and grumble, and so on and on and that. So it didn't start then. But later that night, that's when things began to rumble.

McDevitt: So who did you, were there particular individuals, who you guys looked to for leadership? Were there some of the older guys who kind of took the reins?

Fizer: From within it starts to emerge. People who have, broader educations and everything else. We were…they were so unprepared for us. I've got something I want to show you.

McDevitt: Sure.

Fizer: I designed this vest myself. But here are the patches for the two battalions, 51st battalion and 52nd. I served in both that's why I wear both. But these patches were designed by the men of the 51st and 52nd. They didn't even have a patch for us in Washington. But once we designed them and sent them to Washington, Washington accepted them right away.

McDevitt: So what did you think about Roosevelt? What did you think of FDR?

Fizer: Well, he had to be convinced just like everybody else. The mover in that family was his wife, Eleanor. Eleanor was responsible for these guys. She went to Tuskegee, AL, to see about black men flying. And they had this nice little white pilot ready for her to fly, and she said, "No, I don't want him. I want him." And she was talking about a black guy who could fly. And he walked over and they said [to him], "You're flying Mrs. Roosevelt." He said, "What?" And I know this from a friend of mine. He put her in the plane took her and flew her all around Alabama and Tuskegee and so on down the line. She came back, she thanked him, went straight to Washington and told her husband, "You'd better put these guys in the army." So they formed the 99th pursuit squadron. That's how they got their start.

McDevitt: And some of that was just blatant racism, well, most of that was blatant racism. But did it seem that there were, like, common misconceptions against guys who didn't seem like they had racist tendencies? Because it was really a clash of two cultures coming together, I mean you were thrown in a foxhole together.

Fizer: Absolutely, I had guy from Minnesota, Trottsbur. One of the finest guys you ever wanted to know. He was from Minnesota, never been around black folks his entire life. He was a major, Maj. Trottsbur, and turned out to be a nice guy. Then there were others who just hated their being there, and it showed. I had one sergeant who was kind of funny. He used to look at me and he said, "Fizer, did it ever occur to you that you look like a god?" and I said, "No sarg', I do?" He said "Yeah, a goddamn fool". But you learn to be flexible. If you didn't you'd be nuts. You can't let people; you've got to outlast your enemy. And that's the way you do it. So we had two enemies. Hence this: One overseas, the Japanese, and one here, in America.

McDevitt: And did you stay, obviously since you've got out you've done a lot as far as Civil Rights and everything goes…

Fizer: Oh lord, yeah.

McDevitt: Did you follow the Civil Rights movement at that point in time? Or were you too focused on being a marine?

Fizer: No, no, no, no. After I got out of the service, after, I became a police officer. Law enforcement in Chicago. And I was feeling fairly comfortable by myself. I had a wife, and maybe one kid at the time. And I had a little house that I was paying a mortgage on. I started listening to Dr. King. Oh my God, this man really got to me. I became a disciple of Dr. King. All of a sudden they were arresting people who were marching no matter what and throwing them in jail. And some legally said you're doing this wrong. Under the constitution it says, "If you march peacefully, you had the right to march and be protected by law enforcement." As soon as it came out like that, then let me tell you, the police department had a unit that was only four people in it, called the human relations section. It expanded to fifty people and guess what, I volunteered and was in that unit. So every time Dr. King came to town, we were there to protect him. He never would have gotten killed in Chicago.

McDevitt: That's, we'll touch on that later because…

Fizer: Oh yeah, I digressed. I just happened to remember those.

McDevitt: So you finish up your training you train on the lights. Did you get any training on the radar? Because radar was brand new at the time. Did you have any of that as well?

Fizer: Radar because we had to use it for firing. It had to be connected into what we were doing. And it was the search lights, the anti-aircraft guns, and then the radar itself. It's called tracking. We were in the same azimuth all the time.

McDevitt: Did you have to get any kind of clearance for that? Was there any…

Fizer: No.

McDevitt: How long was that training? Do you remember?

Fizer: Very rapid. You had to be a fast learner. Yeah. We had people so bright, I can remember this one fellow, Gavin. Bobby Gavin. We had a range finder; they just brought it in, for anti-aircraft and for sea-coast artillery. The guy who was supposed to be training us on it, he was stumbling. Bobby Gavin was a brilliant mathematician. Bobby Gavin said, "I've been reading the book, do you mind if I help you sarg?" He said "sure." Bobby Gavin taught us the range finder, that's how bright he was. And oh, he had another quality, he was a marine, I mean a real marine, and never swore a day in his life. Can you believe that?

McDevitt: There's a look of shock on my face.

Fizer: He never swore a day, I did the eulogy at his funeral, and I reminded folks, he was the only man in my life that I ever met in the Marine Corps that didn't swear.

McDevitt: So you had said you started with the 51st, the 51st was constantly being, they were just taking people off of it to send wherever they wanted. Is that correct?

Fizer: Not at first because we were a full-blown fighting unit at first. But they didn't have a place for us. They were kind of reluctant about sending us to a combat zone at first. That's when they would start peeling people off to go to depot companies and ammunition companies and so on down the line. And then they wound up fighting because when you get on a rock, there ain't no place to back up, friend. The Japanese is a fierce fighter, boy. I mean fierce. To the point of not minding dying. When they get done picking you off, they found all kind of ways. Snipers would shoot from coconut trees and wound a guy, not kill him, they wanted to wound him. So two more would come pick him up. You see what I mean? They had, strange incident, well, I'm getting ahead of myself. But anyway, that's how the 51st was. And then they shipped them out.

McDevitt: And you said you were a part of the 350 they kept back. Why did they choose you guys?

Fizer: To train the 52nd. They were drafting by that time, and they started bringing people in, but they had to be trained to do something. At that time, it was open. We were getting supposedly the best of the draftees. That's how we wound up forming the 52nd. And then when the 52nd shipped, I shipped with it.

McDevitt: How was it for you, being so young, training these other guys? Many of whom were probably older than you.

Fizer: I was amazingly mature for my age. Yeah, I had men much older than me, man. And I did everything, I taught them to drive, and we went overseas, I took them on patrols. We were in some of the islands, called the Marshalls, and there was an airstrip there. These guys, we became a part of MAG 31 [Marine Air Group]. And the reason we'd become a part of MAG 31 was because when the guys were coming back from missions, they were out of fuel and tired and out of ammunition most of the time. So the Japanese pilots would just follow them in and shoot them up the end of the strip. Then somebody had the bright idea to put them at the end of the strip, and we were knocking them out like swatting flies. It was a pleasure shooting them, it was like a duck shoot. Yeah. So that was how we got to be a part of MAG 31. Marine Air Group 31.

McDevitt: When did you finally ship to the Pacific? And did you get liberty, did you get to go talk to your mom and dad before you left? Were there any words of advice that they gave you?

Fizer: No, I had been home, I always made that I got home somehow. Sometimes I forged a few papers, but I got home. And so no I didn't, our group shipped out. There was four train loads of us. We were on trains and all of a sudden the trains are air-conditioned and the food is all good, we weren't three-hundred miles from North Carolina when the air conditioning broke down. And everything starts going haywire. But we had a way of storing away the things we needed. We were in Georgia, and there was a guy trying to get a girl to get in his pickup. And some jackass stuck his head out the window and said, "Don't get in that pickup truck, because if you do you're going to be torpedoed all the way home." This guy goes in his truck, pulls out a rifle, and when he did, fifty rifles came out the window. He didn't fire a shot because he knew if he did, but we had a bit of a riotous thing there because we had to fight the people in town. Next thing was, when we got to Arizona, we were out of stores and officer in charge of that particular train went in to get supplies. And the guy in charge of the supplies said, "I ain't giving those N***s no supplies." He said, "Sir I've got 250 marines on that train. They're very hungry. Should I let them come in and get the food?" He changed his mind, he gave us the food. But then I have another one. During the

war, America brought German prisoners of war to these shores. Eleven of us were coming back off leave, going back to Carolina, not all marines but some soldiers and everything because there was Fayetteville and so on down the line. And the local police got on, and some army, what do you call it, MP's? And said, "Alright get off the train". They pulled us off the train so they could put the German prisoners of war on the train.

McDevitt: And how did you, did you hear accents? How did you know they were German? Did you know right away?

Fizer: Oh they announced that they were German prisoners of war.

McDevitt: And then you just had to stand and wait?

Fizer: Oh no, they pulled us off the train. But you turn everything into something good. At that time, since the war was on, there were places in the train station where you could go in case you got short of money, and they would give you fifty dollars or a hundred dollars. or so on down the line. So we went in, I did, to the people who were dispersing it, I don't know what they were called at the time. And told them my story and they gave me three-hundred dollars. I called my CO (commanding officer) back at the marine base and explained to him what had happened. He was enraged man. He was about to blow his top, that Maj. Trottsbur I was telling you about. I said, "I'll try to get there when I can." Well, I've got three-hundred bucks. And I'm in Atlanta, GA. Come on man, there's jazz and beautiful women! I stayed there for a week. And then, I knew when I got back to the base I wasn't going to be considered AWOL. So that was kind of a goodie.

McDevitt: How old were you at that point in time? In Atlanta?

Fizer: Maybe seventeen and a half? Eighteen? Oh man, the prime of my life.

McDevitt: So did you just meet with people and stay with them? Did you get a hotel? How did you work it?

Fizer: USO.

McDevitt: Oh, beautiful.

Fizer: Oh that was always the beginning because nice people came to the USO. Oh, gosh. I remember going to the USO near the base because we used to invite young black women from the colleges; from Johnson C. Smith and Shaw University, so we could meet decent nice girls. We didn't want to meet the street level. You know what I mean? And so I got to the point where I was being

invited to homes, could stay in people's homes because the guys knew that I would respect their daughters. Oh yeah. Oh man, and have a nice date, have somebody who could dance. Then I was dating one girl, she was from I think Shaw University, she was from Jamaica or something. But she was beautiful. I don't think Jamaica, another island. We were staying in a hotel in Raleigh, and the guys said, "Fizer, do you know that's big Joe Lewis's girlfriend?" And I said, "Who the hell is Big Joe Lewis? So what I'm a marine, blah, blah, blah." One day sitting up on the shoe shinning stand was a huge man, big and buff. I mean, he wasn't fat. He said, "Fizer, come here." I said, "What is it?" he said, "That's Joe Lewis." I said, "What?" I didn't bother with the girl no more. But she was gorgeous, boy, yes she was. But that was his lady, and I made sure that she stayed that way.

McDevitt: So you got on the train and you traveled across, did you stop at camp Pendleton? When you got out west?

Fizer: Oh yeah, the troop train? We did some advance in Pendleton. Yeah, because it was a mountainous country. I can remember walking in them mountains, to when you look up to see how high you are, and people look like they're this big, you know you're up there, buddy.

McDevitt: Had you been in the mountains before? You travelled around a bit when you we're a kid.

Fizer: I travelled to Chicago to see my aunts. That was all. There was a tremendous amount of advanced training going on.

McDevitt: Yeah, what did you do while you were there? What kind of training?

Fizer: One of the first things we did was, we leaned infantry. They had the machine guns at zero elevation. So if you brought your butt up, your butt was going to get pierced. So they taught you how to hug the ground. We did a lot of firing. And then they had the Higgins boats, we practiced landings. And you know, Higgins boats were built in my home town.

McDevitt: Yeah in New Orleans, that's right. Did you see them in the early '40s when they were being built?

Fizer: No I didn't see them at home, but I had been training with them in Carolina. Pickles Frasier, one of the star guys from the Virginia Union, and excellent baseball player on our team, fell, head down.

McDevitt: He was the first black marine who died. That correct?

Fizer: Killed him, he died, yeah.

McDevitt: So, you know, I didn't cover it as well as I probably should have. What other kind of training did you do when you were at Montford Point? You had your MOS training. You learned the lights. You learned how to shoot. How many, did you do a lot of amphibious landings at that time? Because that doctrine was starting to…

Fizer: Absolutely. We did a ton of it, man. Yeah. That's how Pickles got killed, on one of those training missions.

McDevitt: Did you like being out on ships? Did you like being out on the water because you loved adventure?

Fizer: Loved every minute of it. Loved every minute of it, oh yeah. And I was always into stuff. If it had a motor, I wanted to be near it. So I learned how to drive those LSMs, man, yeah.

McDevitt: Was it more of the same, when you got out to Pendleton? Or did they ramp it up?

Fizer: Some of that was different. I had never been fired on by machine gun fire before, that was different. Landings, we had done that before. Climbing mountains and taking whatever we were supposed to, our objective, that was a little bit different. But it all amounted to invasion of islands. And I remember the first ship that we took off on, was the *Winged Arrow* was the name of the ship. Boy, it was a brand new troop ship, lord it was fast. It could do sixteen knots. And it was going so fast that everyone on the ship was getting seasick. And what they had to do was slow it down in the daytime and speed it up at nights. The idea with speed was, at that time, submarines could only go but like about nine knots, and so if you could do twelve or whatever on a ship, you felt pretty safe.

McDevitt: How much did you know about, say, Guadalcanal? Or the battles that were going on in the Pacific?

Fizer: There was very little information out. We just knew that they were down in the Solomon's and that they were getting their asses kicked. But they were also doing the same thing. Finally, when they started to reinforce them, from Quantico and all the other places where they were training, we started to win.

McDevitt: So were you and all your guys amped up about going out there? Were you like…

Fizer: We had no thoughts of being there. We knew doggone well they weren't going to send no black troops down there.

McDevitt: So, yeah, I mean. Marines we like to fight. We want to get into the mix.

Fizer: When they get you in there, you're ready to fight.

McDevitt: Yeah, so how, was that the prevailing sentiment? Like, "Hey, we're just never going to get over there, we're stuck in the service platoons."

Fizer: So what happened, believe it or not, we were fighting to fight. We had politicians in Washington, and other people like that, prevailing upon them for us to go to combat. And when we were overseas, I can remember sleeping on the ground so long until we had to get professional help from Washington to get off the ground…Yeah.

McDevitt: So that fights going on, you're headed out west. After Pendleton, was there anything else of note that you remember from being out in California? Being out in Pendleton? Did you see San Diego at all?

Fizer: LA man, good liberty. Great jazz, beautiful women. Oh, they had a deal going. If you went to a factory to work, they'd pay you the same day, at the end of the day. The women were working at aircraft factories, you'd say, "Hey baby, who's your man," and she'd say, "My man is…," what's the name of the, I can't remember the name of the aircraft now...Lockhead?

McDevitt: Lockheed

Fizer: Lockheed! "Lockheed is my man". And it was kind of fun. Lot of things to see. The other thing was, when we left Pendleton, if we stepped out on the Highway 101, and did this [gestures] in five minutes we'd have a ride. People were that sensitive to our being, "Where you going son?" "Los Angeles", "Just hang on, I'm going right that way."

McDevitt: And was it a Marine Corps thing? They were picking you up because you were marines? Or do you think it was,

Fizer: Well, in that area it was predominantly Marine Corps. Like in Carolina there was Ft. Bragg and all the other kind of things like that, and the 82nd Airborne and all of those guys were there. But mostly there it was mostly marines and sailors of course.

McDevitt: So, was it the fast wing? Was that the name of the ship?

Fizer: The *Winged Arrow*

McDevitt: Did you take that to Hawaii?

Fizer: Straight to Hawaii.

McDevitt: Real quick, how long were you in Pendleton? How were you in California?

Fizer: About six weeks.

McDevitt: Good training? Did it feel like it was getting you…?

Fizer: No question. Different attitude from guys in California. People just had totally different attitudes. Training with them was kind of welcome, you know. You didn't have a hidden agenda in the back of their minds. You were just there to train to save your, you-know-what.

McDevitt: Did you notice a different between the white marines in California and the white marines in…?

Fizer: That was I'm referring to, alluding to really

McDevitt: I don't know if you know, at the time, who was sent to, there was no, all the marines were trained on Paris Island at that time, correct?

Fizer: All of the white marines

McDevitt: All the white marines, yes. Do you think it was just the prevailing sentiment of being out west? That…

Fizer: It was the law of the land. Segregation was the law of the land. Every state was segregated. Toilets, restaurants, you name it. White only, white only, white only. Maybe some restaurants would say, "Go around back, we'll serve you out of the back. Out of the back door". Those were liberalized. I remember, funny thing, in North Carolina, it says "North Carolina's most liberal southern state". And two miles down the road was slave square, where they used to sell slaves.

McDevitt: So…California, the training was good. Were you being trained by white marines?

Fizer: It was still white marines. But nevertheless, they focused on training. They weren't focused on anything else. We never got called names or anything like that by anybody there.

McDevitt: Had any of them seen combat? Had any of them come home from the islands?

Fizer: I would gather so because we picked up an officer there, his name was Tiger Terry. He was a small guy, but boy, he had death in his eyes. He had seen combat. He could take you into the jungle, and walk, and they called him the tiger because you couldn't hear it. Even if he stepped on a twig it didn't snap, brother. Yeah. He shipped with us.

McDevitt: So, how was your unit broken down? Did you have a team you were on? Did you have a small unit?

Fizer: Well, what happens, when we got overseas when we got ready to go overseas from Hawaii, they split our group up because the Marshall Isles was a lot of islands. Majuro and Riobi and all the others like that. So they split us up. They put some of us with some parts, depends on the guns. If there were anti-aircraft guns, you went here; if you were seacoast artillery you went here, and so on down the line. But we didn't take no searchlights with us. No.

McDevitt: Left them all in Hawaii?

Fizer: But I'll tell you one thing I did do. I had balls. When we were in Carolina, every man in the navy, black, at that time, was in some form of servitude: cooks, bakers, and so on down the line. Got permission, orders, with the colonel. Woods was his name.

McDevitt: He was, he seemed like a pretty liberal guy, yeah? Or was it…

Fizer: Well, yeah, you know, he, he masked it well. But he was still had a little dirt in his blood. He said to me, "All right, Fizer, come in what do you want." I stood at attention, "At ease," I said, "Sir, I think there's something you should know." I said, "Here before, most people in the navy have always been cooks, bakers, and stuff like that. I joined the United States Marine Corps to fight. That's what I intend to do. If it looks like you're going to send me out to do cooking and baking for them, I'm going to desert colonel." He said, "What did you say?" I said, "I'm going to desert. I'm not going to cook for nobody." He just, kind of tipped back for a minute because nobody had ever approached him like that, and he said to me, "Don't worry, you won't be cooking." And I said, "Thank you, sir."

McDevitt: What prompted you to go in there and say…?

Fizer: Because I had heard about people in the navy, and we were a part of the navy, being cooks and bakers for somebody. And I wasn't going to cook for nobody. That's one thing I had, when I was in the service, and always in my whole life. My mother used to write me about my temper. And then I found out I couldn't whip everybody in the corps, she didn't have to write me no more.

McDevitt: Speaking of that, I just want to, okay. What kind of martial arts training did you guys get? Because that was pretty-

Fizer: Oh, we had two guys in the outfit. One was named Gaslow, he owned a judo school in California. So when Col. Bidel came and started training guys, he very quickly latched onto Gaslow and made him our instructor. I can remember colonel Bidel right away saying, "Remember, if he can't see you he can't hit you. Put his eyes out."

McDevitt: Did you enjoy grappling, and fighting around like that?

Fizer: Man, it was all new to me, I enjoyed it. I considered myself a little giant football player, I loved it. I loved it. The rougher it got the better. We had a guy in our outfit from [Saint] Xavier University, called Edward Anthony Cole, became one of my good friends. He was a track man; he was closing in on the four-minute mile when he was at Xavier. The drill instructors used to say, "Okay Cole, pace the platoon." Man, come on. This guy was thin as a rail, like a gazelle. He never got tired. He could run twenty miles and wouldn't be breathing hard. Some of the guys would come up to him and say, "Cole, slow down!" He was one of our platoon pacers. And another thing, if we were coming in off of a long run, if it said ten, they'd make sure it was twenty. And if you fell, right over. Everybody would be walking and running right over you. I'm telling you, them guys were something else, boy.

McDevitt: Were there a lot of injuries when you were in boot camp? Where there a lot of guys getting messed up? How did you deal with that?

Fizer: Not so much injuries because mostly guys were young and in pretty good shape. Being short didn't help you. When they set a pace, you had to keep up.

McDevitt: Yeah, I liked being tall.

Fizer: Oh, I'm telling you, the taller the better, buddy.

McDevitt: You said, not too many injuries. Were there a lot of, I have to imagine, some guys would just get too frustrated dealing with the racism and just that constant kind of stress.

Fizer: That came up a lot, as a matter of fact, sometimes we'd fight each other. And that's always an end result. There was a small lake running through the property. And some parts of the battalion went on one side and the other part on the other. And a lot of the time we'd fight each other, which was not a good sign. But they didn't care because they didn't give a damn whether we fought each

other or not. They wanted to see us fail, and they made every effort to try to do that. But the more they did it the better we became.

McDevitt: Were there a lot of people who got kicked out of boot camp? Were there a lot of people that couldn't hack it?

Fizer: Not one, not one.

McDevitt: That's incredible.

Fizer: Yes sir…not one. Man, I'm telling you. I got put in the brig because I was working on a truck one day, and this one guy came out there and I cussed the truck. And he said, "What did you call me?" I said, "I didn't call you anything!" He said, "Yes you did. I heard you!" And I said, "If I did, what did I call you?" And he told me, and he said "I'm going in there and telling captain so and so. I said, "Wait a minute, don't go tell him that tell him this," and I crocked him one.

McDevitt: If you're going to get in trouble, might as well.

Fizer: That's what I figured. And he went I,n and I got a court martial, seven days P and P. You know what that is don't you? Prison Punk. Seven days, every third day you'd get a meal. Other than that you would get bread and water.

McDevitt: Was there anyone else in there with you?

Fizer: No, there was nobody, they were outside!

McDevitt: Just you by yourself?

Fizer: Yeah, and I was frustrated! He thought I was talking to him, well, I didn't tell him on that. Hey, man, let me tell you, I said I was given to temper boy. I didn't take anything off of nobody. When they heard I had been in the colonel's office, and told him I wasn't going to ship out to be a cook, they said, "Are you crazy? What did he say? What did he say?" I said, "What could he say?" He could have said a lot. But he didn't.

McDevitt: When I said liberal, describing Colonel Wood, it seemed like he was like, "This is the situation. We have to make the best out of it."

Fizer: Yeah, he was accepting of it. Larson was the one who was offensive. I want to show you this in its entirety. That says, "51st defense battalion. 52nd defense battalion" Now read this one.

McDevitt: Let's get a close up, right here. Wow. And you made this yourself? You guys designed it?

Fizer: I designed it, and my cousin, who's a seamstress, sewed it for me. I picked out the materials, and then I made this other thing that she sewed to the back. We did a speech in Rockford, and I made one of those and framed it because when I got there they had a library, I said, "You don't have anything on the Marine Corps in here? How can you invite marines here?" She said, "Well, we'd be happy if we had something." So I made her up one of those like that on the back, framed it and sent it to them and put a dedication in it. Remind them that each one of those patches were designed by us.

McDevitt: That's incredible. You know, I was going through, when you were in boot camp did you get little books of knowledge that you had to carry around with you?

Fizer: No. I discovered two books in an officer's drawer one day. One said, "How to handle the Negro soldier." That was, it was books like that. We didn't have anything like that.

McDevitt: Because we, as we go through, we have periods of instructions…

Fizer: Well, you remember Gen. Amos, one of the finest men that ever walked the Earth.

McDevitt: Yeah, I actually got to meet him and Sgt. Maj. Kent, when they came out to where I was doing my training, I was doing some training in Monterrey, CA.

Fizer: Let me show you something. Did you know that there's a ship named after us?

McDevitt: I did, I saw that.

Fizer: Would you like to see it? *** That's the ship. And this, is a bunch of originals.

McDevitt: All of this stuff came about, the Montford Point Association…

Fizer: We created our own history.

McDevitt: Yes, and you were pretty integral in that, yeah?

Fizer: No question. I was at the first convention for Montford Point. We, in 1965, I've got stuff to leave you, when the Montford Point Marine Association was formed, we formed it because of adversity. We formed it because we wanted to be remembered in history. I've got stuff written on it.

McDevitt: Yeah, the reason I brought up the knowledge was because we had these god awful little binders we always had to keep with us when we're going through boot camp. I was looking through mine, and the gentleman Chris that you met before, with the slicked back hair, he's a marine as well. I looked through his, and his didn't have anything about the Montford Point. And he went through in the early 2000's

Fizer: Before you.

McDevitt: Yes. And mine, there's just a little blurb. Hopefully, you know, that was right around when I went in. I think Amos took command in 2010 was it? No 2008. He came…

Fizer: And he's the one who started to push it

McDevitt: Yeah, so I think I'm going to try to get my hands on the new one, because I think there is going to be more because, you know, when we go through boot camp now, it's all about Esprit de Corps, you know. You pump, like, our forefathers, the marines that came before us, went through all of these things.

Fizer: Yeah.

McDevitt: How, was that given to you guys at all? Going through and talking about Bella Wood?

Fizer: We were writing the history. Not Bella Wood, of course, but lo and behold, we didn't have anything. When we were discharged, all they said was, "See ya." No counseling, no nothing. For eight years after I got out of the service, you know who my companion was? A whiskey bottle. I drank because I couldn't talk to nobody. Nobody would understand what I'm saying. This is a book that you guys should have in your library.

McDevitt: You said when you were a kid you enjoyed, you played some baseball, what position did you play?

Fizer: Me? Short stop.

McDevitt: So, you know, this is sort of getting ahead of ourselves.

Fizer: No go ahead, we can jump around.

McDevitt: So Jackie, is this the article where…

Fizer: Let me give you some idea. We had a guy on our baseball team, his name was Dan Bankhead. Dan Bankhead could pitch a ball so fast, we had a glass arm catcher. You know what a glass arm is? You can't throw. He could throw so hard to him; he could throw people out at 2nd base. That's how good Dan Bankhead was. Now to make it really good, when Dan Bankhead got out of the service, he played for the Dodgers because I used to talk to him, I'd say, "What's going on Dan?" He'd say, "These damn people want you to shave, you can't grow your hair, you can't have a mustache, you can't do this, you can't do that, I'm sick of it." I said, "You'd better stay there and play that ball. Make that money." He said, "Don't worry, I ain't going nowhere." Because he could hit real good, when his arm started to give out they put him in the outfield.

McDevitt: How did you come to meet, did you meet Jackie when he was still in the Negro League like before?

Fizer: That's when I met Jackie Robinson.

McDevitt: What was he like? Because, for me, he's always been an idol. And honestly, you guys all dealt with the same things, but the pressure that he had to deal with, I know in the article you talked about…

Fizer: Listen, Jackie Robinson was a four-star athlete. He played baseball, basketball, football, and track. He was that good

McDevitt: He was incredible. Heard baseball was his worst sport.

Fizer: Absolutely incredible. And when Branch Rickey picked him, he picked a winner. And if it hadn't been for Rachel he might not have made it because, boy, he was under a lot of pressure. Now there was another guy on that team who I admired when they came overseas, before there was Jackie Robinson, called Pewee Reece. Peewee Reece was a short stop for the dodgers. Peewee Reece embraced Jackie and told him, "If they touch you and you don't fight back," he says, "I'm going to knock your ass off." Yeah. So him and Peewee got to be real good friends. Now, when the St. Louis Cardinals…When the Dodgers were getting ready to go to St. Louis, they said, "We ain't coming on the field. To hell with it, we don't want no n**** playing no baseball." Branch Rickey said, "That's okay. I'll have 9 other men out there playing." Guess what, they played. Now there's another guy, he's a catcher, he's on TV every week right now. Tim McCarver, I think it is? Yeah. Tim McCarver was one of the leading racists on that team.

McDevitt: Really? I didn't know that

Fizer: Oh yeah, I know where all the bones are buried. Believe me. Tim McCarver was. And Red Shandies, and all of these guys, they hated blacks, man, and didn't want

them to play baseball. But guess what? Jackie did just like we did in the Marine Corps. He got on there and showed them that I'm the best that ever did it.

McDevitt: And he was.

Fizer: Whew, man. I remember him stealing home! With the pitcher on the mound. And the pitcher getting so frustrated.

McDevitt: He didn't know what to do with himself.

Fizer: Absolutely. Absolutely. Man, he was outstanding. As a matter of fact, I had seen him play as a kid, but I didn't know he was that good. And Dan Bankhead used to tell me, he said, "this guy is phenomenal, man."

McDevitt: And did you only follow, you know, I just call them the Negro Leagues,

Fizer: That's what they were.

McDevitt: Did you only follow that? Or did you follow the white leagues as well?

Fizer: Well, I'm a southerner. And they had semi-pro ball players then. The New Orleans Pirates, others like that, the Memphis whatever they were. That's the only part because major leagues didn't come down there. When they went to train for summer they went to Florida or Arizona, they never came to New Orleans

McDevitt: Was there a team in Atlanta at the time? I can't remember.

Fizer: Oh yeah, there was a semi-pro league in Atlanta, yeah. Nashville Vols, Volunteers, I think they were called. I've forgotten what Atlanta was called, it's been a long time.

McDevitt: Okay, so we kind of digressed for a minute, went off on a different little topic. How much time did you spend in Hawaii? You went out from California…

Fizer: We never left ship. We stayed on ship because they were ready for us to ship. We stayed there about three weeks .That was it. I went to a club in Hawaii called Waikiki Club. The bartender there said, if you could drink two of his drinks the rest were free. They were called Zombies. It was a ton of rum. I drank my first one and fell flat on my face. Could never make the second one.

McDevitt: So you were there for three weeks, you were on ship. What was a typical day like on ship? Did you have PT?

Fizer: You know what, believe it or not, ships have an unusual amount of storage because there was some special holiday, [and] Thanksgiving I think it was, do you know they came up with Turkeys and all of the trimmings? Yeah

McDevitt: Just, they had them all on ship, just waiting for you? Ready for Thanksgiving

Fizer: It was all in the storage. And when the holiday came they prepared it. Recognize that guy? I brought that for you guys to keep.

McDevitt: Yeah, he seemed like a really good guy, I was really young.

Fizer: Man, a finer human being you will never meet.

McDevitt: I was a PFC when he came out. But I was older, I joined when I was a little bit older. He seemed like an incredibly thoughtful, and just a good officer and a good marine.

Fizer: We made him an honorary member of the Montfort Point Marines. Did you hear me? For our, I can't remember the exact one, but he came to Atlanta as our guest speaker, when we had our convention in Atlanta. And I met him at the reception, and then I had a souvenir booklet. And I wanted him to sign it. So I, we had scooters, so I had a scooter and I rolled over to the dais and I got his wife's attention, and I asked her, I said, "Would you ask the general to sign this for me?" and she did. But when the meeting was over and all the hoopla was over, she came down off the dais and walked over to me on my scooter on the ground and said, "Here's what he said Ed," and she showed me, she said, "But he told me to give you this." It was a medal that he had made when he became a commandant of the Marine Corps. He gave it to me. And she did that. So I said to my buddy, who came up with the idea to make him an honorary member of the Montford Point Marines, I said, "Wait a minute, we have to do something for his wife." So we have a shield...now we have a small one that's a lapel pin. And I have a bunch of them. So I decided that we could do something for her. I took that shield, took it to a jeweler, had him take the pin out, which goes to the collar, and had him put a hook on it. I bought a chain, fourteen karat gold chain, eighteen inches long, and I had him put it on there and I had it mounted in some nice things and gave it to her. To thank her for what she has done for me. So whenever he was made a member of the Montford Point Marines, she could wear that in honor, and they would be together. She thought it was out of sight. Yeah, he said, "Stop giving my wife jewelry!" He's retired now, and he's in Carolina, and every now and then we give him a call necause boy, when we went out for that ship christening, he took off his hat and put on that cap, and said, "I am a Montford Point Marine," brought the house down.

McDevitt: Ooh rah.

Fizer: Yes sir. He's a hell of a man, boy. He had a breakfast for us and everything.

McDevitt: I read a little bit about that. It was mess hall food, right, but it was done really, really nice?

Fizer: The food that he served? Oh no, no. It was, man that food was out of sight.

McDevitt: What am I thinking of? I have a couple of articles, I thought it was like chipped corned beef and…

Fizer: No, no. When we were, for the three days we were up there to get the medal, we were back in the Marine Corps because we were under orders. And they paid for travel and they paid for meals they paid for hotels, everything. He did, man…

McDevitt: They did it right

Fizer: Who, Yeah. You get to know that man, boy. You're knowing a hell of a man, boy. I've got so much respect for that man, boy…

McDevitt: So, you had your time, you drank your Zombies in Hawaii…So did you guys know what islands you were going to be going to, when you went over to the Pacific

Fizer: We had no idea. I used to wonder when I was in the service, you know, if some guy, who's a janitor in Washington, sweeps our name off, our pin off the map, and picks it up and puts it in Alaska, we could wind up there. But it wasn't like that. But, no. We had no idea. You know when you know about an island? Just before you invade. That's when you know about it. First of all, let me tell you, you're on a ship. Then the next thing you know you're on the ocean by yourself. You see a ship way over there going somewhere and you say, "Hey we have company today." Then one morning you come up, and there's about one-thousand ships around you. Your ass is in trouble. Brother, you see your ass pulling out weapons and cleaning them and sharpening bayonets and doing everything, and that's how…I'm a Catholic, and I worried about this for years, until I told it to a priest and got clearance. This guy was a catholic, and he was sitting up on my bunk and we were talking, and he said, "You know, I really would like to go to communion this morning," because they were having it just before we landed, or getting near landing. And I said, "What have you done?" And I started questioning him. I didn't realize I was doing just what a priest would do, asking him to give me all the information. Then I said, "Oh, you're okay, you can go to communion." Then a cold sweat came over me, I said, "I could get killed for doing this, lord! I didn't mean to do that!" He went to communion. Boy, I tore over that for years until I told a priest, oh he said, "No

that was okay." I said, "What?" He said, "Yeah." Well, there you go. I told you, I've done stuff, man.

McDevitt: So, was this on the ship before you made your first landing?

Fizer: What landing was that? No this wasn't the Marshalls; this was the Marianas. This was like about Guam, Tinian. You know, they flew the *Enola Gay* off of Tinian. You know the *Enola Gay* was the bomb.

McDevitt: The A-bomb, yeah. Yeah, I didn't know they flew that off of Tinian.

Fizer: Yeah, that's the sister island to Guam.

McDevitt: When you were headed out, most of the marines…their home island was Guadalcanal, correct?

Fizer: Well, that was the only one that we had fought at the time. But after that all hell broke loose. Every island was fair game.

McDevitt: So did you go to Guadalcanal? Where did your ship take you?

Fizer: No I didn't go to Guadalcanal; I went to the North Pacific. I went into. The first islands we hit were the Marshalls. That was Majuro and Kwajalein and that bunch.

McDevitt: So, headed up there, you said you see a bunch of ships, you know that you're going to land.

Fizer: When you see no ships, you're okay, the next think you know, fifty, one-hundred, two-hundred ships. You're in trouble. That means that you're going.

McDevitt: It seems like the prevailing mentality was, "We're not going to really see combat, it's probably not going to happen." Did you start getting nervous at this point in time?

Fizer: Yeah, because you're not going to see combat and then you see all those ships, somebody's lying. You know? Come on, man. It's like, when we got to Guam, they said, "Well, you know what, this island is secure. However, in the jungle behind us there are 1,500 Japanese soldiers, and they want to survive. So you're going to do suppression patrols." 1,500 Japanese are a lot of Japanese man! You hear me?

McDevitt: And none of them are going to surrender.

Fizer: Surrender my foot! First of all, we had to fight to get up off the ground, then we finally got some tents. The Japanese would come down at night, sneak into a tent, and cut the throat of one man to kill him. Not everybody, just one. So that the others could go psychologically nuts. It worked, sure. Oh yeah.

McDevitt: Real quick, describe to me your first landing. Do you remember the first time you landed on an island?

Fizer: Yeah, we landed in the Marshalls. And it was supposed to be secure. All of a sudden, we're coming ashore, the next thing I hear is *woo*, and I go, "What the hell is going on here? This is supposed to be a secure island?" And I ran into this block house because I know it's going to be safe, and I look up and it says, "Ammo dump." So I stuck my head out the door, and I said, "What's going on?" And the guy says, "Oh the siren?" I said, "Yeah." he said, "That's chow call." It's crazy, man.

McDevitt: So you get, you land in the Marshalls, and you're trying to…

Fizer: Well, most of the things we saw in the Marshalls, was I told you, when they put us at the end of the strip because they were following the guys in, and shooting them down, so we put a stop to that.

McDevitt: What was the situation like, as far as in the air? Were the Japanese doing air raids when you were there?

Fizer: They were bombing! They had no compunctions about that.

McDevitt: So, how did, you didn't have your spotlights with you?

Fizer: There weren't no searchlights. That was over. You had .50 caliber anti-aircraft for low flying. You had Bofors guns which were 40mm, and developed a thing to keep my guys from firing. You fire a Bofors gun like this, with your foot. And so many people are firing, they can't hear cease fire. So I would tie a rope around my gunner's foot, and when I wanted him to cease fire I'd just snatch his foot.

McDevitt: Did you guys practice, was there talking fire between those guns?

Fizer: Oh yeah, what happened was we were gunning placements. And we spotted in different areas. If it was in your area, you could tell by the fire. And if it was another area the same way. But if they came across, they came into a ton of fire, and they never left.

McDevitt: So getting set up, you get on the island, were there white marines on the island as well?

Fizer: There were white marines on the island, and all we had to do was take over their guns.

McDevitt: And there was no…

Fizer: No they were going on, they were going on to another island, so they didn't give a damn. You know. And they didn't have to do much talking to us anyway. Except for, "When did this happen?" They were just as curious as anybody else.

McDevitt: Was there any kind of turnover? Like, them explaining the normal procedures?

Fizer: Well yeah, if there was something unusual about the gun, they'd, yeah. When you get overseas, it's different. Believe me, yeah. Then you have combat Christians. You know what they are?

McDevitt: No sir.

Fizer: People that don't believe in God, until the first rounds start coming in. And then it's, "Oh, Lord." Really? So your question, I'm sorry.

McDevitt: So you fall in on all this gear. What's the normal routine? How do you set up fire watch? Were you going out on patrols?

Fizer: There were no patrols on the Marshalls because the islands were just too small for anyone to survive and live. Whoever controlled the island was the survivors. But, no, it was just anti-aircraft mostly.

McDevitt: Did the Japanese target your island specifically? Or did they focus on other ones and did you support…

Fizer: They didn't particularly care about whose islands they were, depended on what the objective was. One time there was a, this is a strange tale, there was a white sergeant, who was a mortar man. And he was really good at it. And a Japanese submarine came in and came in range of an 81mm mortar. He sunk it. This guy was good, boy. You heard the Japanese could put it in your rear pocket? He could put this one in your nose. I'm telling you. He did. He sunk that submarine, put it right down the counting tower. The reason I know it is because I saw it.

McDevitt: Did you guys see it off the coast? Or did you get radio, someone saying, "Hey there's a sub off the coast."

Fizer: Aircraft, give you warning, because we always had aircraft patrolling. Not only that, the mechanics who repaired aircraft didn't have an air mission, but when

they fixed them, they could fly them. And they would just be testing them out, sometimes they would spot stuff.

McDevitt: You said you guys had broken all sorts of records, were you really successful in defending the air strip?

Fizer: No question about it.

McDevitt: Was there any, how long would you say it took you to get comfortable on that first island, did you ever get comfortable? Did you ever feel like you got into a routine?

Fizer: You're nervous when you first get there. But once you start to fire, it all goes away. Your determination is to get whatever it is that you're firing at.

McDevitt: Did you ever meet any Japanese?

Fizer: Oh yeah. On Guam, we had taken some prisoners. We found out what skills they had. They could take rocks that you'd find on the beach and everywhere, and build a wall with no cement. And nothing ever fell. Yeah. And once in a while, some of them we kept. Listen, the war was half over in the islands, and we only had eighteen-hundred prisoners between all of us. That give you some idea? Yeah.

McDevitt: Were your prisoners, were they all combatants? Or were some civilians?

Fizer: All combatants, all combatants. But you know, here's a funny thing. Once firing stops, people recognize differently. I used to give the guys cigarettes and stuff, and they were very grateful. They'd make some souvenirs. We would take airplanes that'd been shot down, we'd give them the material off of the airplanes, which was aluminum, and they would make wrist watchbands for us.

McDevitt: Did they seem pretty receptive at that point because they were vicious enemies.

Fizer: Well, some people never come around, but a lot of them guys did. They came from families just like ours. I really thought that sometimes, when I went on patrols, they would withhold fire because a couple of times they would say things like, when we got them cornered, that they weren't mad at black folks.

McDevitt: That's interesting. Did you speak to them through an interpreter?

Fizer: Some of them spoke English very well. Now I'll tell you, we did have an island that we captured in that group. And the survivor was a dog. And the dog did not

understand English because you'd tell him something, to go or whatever, and he wouldn't move. You told him in Japanese and he would go.

McDevitt: When did you, from the first island that you landed on, how many times did you hop? What role did you guys play in the greater island hopping campaign, the 52nd?

Fizer: The first islands that we hit was the Marshalls. That was Majuro, Eniwetok, and Kwajalein. And it was okay. Just shooting at a few airplanes coming towards the strip. But then, when we started moving up into the Marianas, that's when things started to get hot and heavy. And then from there we went to Okinawa, and Okinawa, you know is only four hundred miles from Japan. We didn't stay very long on Okinawa. We developed; some of our guys developed a thing called Cat Fever. They didn't know what it was, I guess that's how it got the name Cat Fever. They thought that we might contaminate the rest of the troops, so they pulled us off and took us back to Guam. By that time, you know, the Enola Gay had dropped the bomb, and the next thing I knew I was on my way home. I was discharged from the Marine Corps December the 23rd, 1945. The war was over

McDevitt: When you signed up, what was your enlistment? What was your contract, how long did you sign up for?

Fizer: The duration of the war

McDevitt: You said you went to the Marianas, you said it heated up, did your responsibilities change, as the war went on?

Fizer: Sure, you became a combat soldier, a marine rather. Definitely, responsibilities change. Suddenly you're on schedule to fight all the time. It was one of those things where…you didn't have a say. One time I took a chance, I had a corporal; his name was Tarzan, I called him Tarzan, anyway because he was a good swimmer. He kept saying, "Come on sarge, I can handle a patrol. I can handle patrol." I said, "I am not sending your ass out here for me to go jail for life for you." And then I came up short of people. And he said, "I can still go sarge." And I said, "Ok, Tarzan I'm going to send you out here. But I'm going to tell you right now, don't go looking for trouble, try to avoid it. I'm sending you because I have to." He wasn't gone forty minutes when I hear gun fire, pow, pow, pow, pow, and I thought, "Oh my god I'm going to jail forever." A day later he comes back with the patrol, not a man hurt, with Japanese flags, all kinds of souvenirs, .24 caliber rifles. He said, "We got them." I said, "What?" He said, "Yeah, we killed fourteen," and I said, "What?" and he said, "Look," and he was showing me souvenirs. I had another guy, and he was really crazy. When we killed a Japanese, they all had gold, not all, but most of them had gold in their mouths. He'd take his rifle and knock the gold out of their mouths and put it in a little

sack. He was the one who would sit up, they had brought in frogs to help kill the snakes and so on, [and] he'd sit there and cut off frog's heads to see if his knife was sharp. Hey man, I tell you, when you get overseas, you're crazy. You go nuts. I knew it was time for me to come home when I stopped wearing my steal helmet and was going out in my cap, my dungaree hat. That's a sure sign that you're losing it.

McDevitt: You're not caring anymore.

Fizer: That's right. You don't give a damn what happens because the hat was just too heavy. Then I started using it for a bathtub. I would get some freshwater and use it to wash up in.

McDevitt: How many of the Montford Pointers actually saw combat, would you say?

Fizer: Hard to say. Some guys went in Iwo Jima, Saipan, [and] Tarawa. They would go in with rifle and ammo companies, and the next thing you know they get short of people, buddy, your ass is going up to the line. They would be up there, hauling back deceased and so on down line, for grave registration. And the next thing you know they'd give them a rifle and say, "Don't come back."

McDevitt: Did you or your guys ever have to do that, like the grave detail? Or anything like that?

Fizer: Sparingly, we did. They did have guys on grave registration. What they would do was they would go out and print the bodies, take thumbprint or fingerprints because a lot of times you couldn't find dog tags, they'd been blown away or something like that. But they did. I didn't have to do that.

McDevitt: But you were not specifically trained, you were trained more on the anti-aircraft stuff. What was it like for you leading patrols?

Fizer: Hey, I'm a marine.

McDevitt: But, you know your first one? Do you remember your first time stepping out in the bush?

Fizer: My first patrol? Oh, yeah. Heck, yeah. I was scared as s**t because I didn't know what the hell I was doing. The object with me was, anything in front of me moves after dusk dies because I'm going to shoot it.

McDevitt: Yeah, at nighttime, you said someone had come in and slit a marine's throats. How did you guys prevent that?

Fizer: Well, you don't prevent it, because you're tired, you're dogged, man. You're worn out. When you go to sleep, you sleep. To this very day I don't stay still. Delores says to me, "You're the worst person in a bed I've ever slept with." Because look at this, man, you had to keep moving. If it wasn't that, the next thing you know... I put up my net in the daytime to keep mosquitoes away from me. Sure as hell, when I get in that sack at night, here they come. Man. One time, I wanted to impress my mother with how bad the mosquitoes were, I let one bite me. It was a big one. I let him bite me, he could have given me malaria. When he took off, then he dipped, he had too much blood. So I got him, and I put him in a piece of paper and mailed him home.

McDevitt: Was it comparable to Montford Point, to Camp Lejeune? How were the insects, in the islands?

Fizer: Bigger and badder, oh man.

McDevitt: Bigger and badder? Because the ones in Lejeune are pretty nasty too?

Fizer: I had them so bad, that I didn't want nothing green in my house when I first came home because everything to me was just going to be some kind of insect. Things would just drop out of trees, about that long, and their legs and stuff, crawling around. Oh lord, yeah. But I found some good in that. In the Mariana Islands, it was all kinds of good fruit. Bananas, plantains, coconuts, you could survive. There was a guy, I ever tell you about Tweed? When the Japanese took those islands, on the way back with their march, there was one guy that got left on there his name was Tweed. He was able to survive on that island for three years before we went back. And all of a sudden we saw a flash, "I have information," a light, "I have information," it was in Morse code. What is this? And they were getting ready to blow him out of the water and somebody prevailed on them, no, so they put some sailors down and a few marines, and they went in. And there he was on the edge of the water, and they brought him back, his name was Tweed. He had a lot of information about the island, which saved a lot of lives. And all we could think about was, boy, that back pay must be beautiful. Yeah, because come on, three years of back pay? Plus, decorations and all that other stuff?

McDevitt: So what's your most vivid memory from your time in the pacific?

Fizer: There was a lot of them. First time you get on an island, how you feel. And then after you get seasoned. You firing your gun and you hear people scream…you know what that means. Frankly, it's just one thing after another. We had a grease pit that we could only light in the high noon, for obvious reasons. And we would put, build a wooden thing to cover it over in the day time. But we can hear somebody walk across those planks at night. So what did we do? We set a trap.

Next thing you know it was all gunfire, and it was three guys laying out there in the woods. They were coming in in the night and stealing food. That island was reeking with Japanese, man.

McDevitt: Did you ever, just speaking for yourself, did you ever have any animosity toward the Japanese enemy you were fighting?

Fizer: No, only to kill him before he could kill me. That was the only thing I could think of because when I went out on patrols, I told you I was going in the jungle, I carried a Thompson submachine gun. This clip had fifty rounds in it. I carried two extra ones, so I had 150 rounds of ammunition. And if I was going to be out for a couple or three days, they had some bars, they were chocolate and had some kind of thing in them like raisins or prunes or whatever. I'd carry two of those and a canteen of water. Don't want to be burdened by nothing heavy, heaviest thing I want is ammo. I smoked at the time, but if you lit a cigarette, it could be your last. So I didn't, our guys, if you smoked, you had to bury your head under something, like a poncho or something like that, where it couldn't be seen. Not only that you had to be careful because smoke could be smelled. One time, we ran across a bunch of guys [Japanese], about six of them, and we knocked them down, and the reason we could do that was he had a watch on. It was an American watch and we knew it because it was iridescent. They didn't have no iridescent watches. We took that back and turned it in, they found something to do with it, we don't care, but yeah. And that watch was his undoing.

McDevitt: How many islands in the Marianas did you guys go to?

Fizer: Tarawa, Guam, and that was it for me. I didn't go to Tinian or any of the others. I just know that the Enola Gay flew over it. And they loaded Big [Little] Boy right there. And Big [Little] Boy could have killed us all. But thank goodness it didn't trigger until they did it, and Tibbits, who it was the guy who flew the Enola Gay, had strict orders when he was flying, after he dropped that thing, the trigger was set to go off at 5,000 feet, he had to bank that B-29 out, and put the fire to the fire wall.

McDevitt: Get out of there.

Fizer: Yes, sir.

McDevitt: So when you're in the Marianas, the civilian population in Guam was a lot higher, there was a lot of civilians…

Fizer: No question about it.

McDevitt: How much time did you spend on Guam?

Fizer: Well, I came home from Guam. The people there, you know those islands had been under the tutelage of the Marine Corps.

McDevitt: Yeah we had lost it, it had been taken from us.

Fizer: So when I got to the islands, the people's there's minds had been poisoned against blacks because there were children going behind me looking for my tail.

McDevitt: By the other marines that had come before you?

Fizer: Oh yeah, I guess they though they wanted their women, but I didn't want nothing to do with them.

McDevitt: Yeah I read something about that. I read there were some generals, I think in the Marine Corps and some of the other services that were saying, "Oh, you shouldn't send any of the black marines to any of these islands because of the women." Did you guys get any of that when you were out there? Did you hear any of that crap?

Fizer: Oh it was rampant, man, racism was not a subtle thing or a whispering thing. This was overt. This was overt

McDevitt: Did you see, was there any change, once the people from Guam started interacting with you?

Fizer: If you did some one-on-one contact with somebody, you could see some changes in people. But overall, the people had been poisoned, their minds had been poisoned.

McDevitt: Well, you said you men, had that one woman who spoke English, called out to you, what was her story? Did you ever find out?

Fizer: Well, the only thing I ever found out about her was that her father owned some other islands as well. And because she had that type of influence she was treated rather well. But I told you, Elmo married one of the women, who owned a bunch of the islands, and he stayed overseas. And he had to get permission to stay in Cardel doing that. But it was okay with me, I didn't want to have anything to, any involvement with any of those women. I was afraid they'd have something that I'd bring back that I didn't want. I can remember some guys having some incidents where their testicles swelled up as big as coconuts. Yeah, oh man.

McDevitt: Were there any other common, well not that that was common, but were their common medical problems that you guys dealt with every day? How were your

boots? Did your boots fit well were you able to get resupplied? Could you get the things you needed while you were out there?

Fizer: Boots weren't a problem because it was dry on the islands most of the time. Only when monsoon time came would there be water. But when the war was over, we used to take and load trucks and jeeps on to LST's and take them out into the middle of the ocean, put them in gear, and let them go right over the side to the bottom of the ocean. That's because they wanted to protect the automotive industry.

McDevitt: When did you hear about, did you hear about the Enola Gay, did you hear about the bombs right when they happened?

Fizer: Well, during the war there was always a secret weapon, there was always some scuttlebutt as we used to call it. It was going to be this and there was that, and this, that and the other. Half the time you go, "yeah, yeah." Then they say, "did you know they dropped the bomb that's going to end the war?" "Yeah, yeah, yeah." Then all of a sudden it's, "What? There had been a bomb." If that bomb hadn't been dropped by Harry Truman, we would not be in this room, I would not be in this room. I would be dead.

McDevitt: I probably wouldn't be either because my grandpa was over there, too.

Fizer: Yeah, so you see, there was a whole lot of people that were going to die. I don't know why they let Hirohito go. They should've treated him just like they treated Hitler. Hirohito, he had issued orders to the Japanese people, who are extremely loyal, "When the Yankees come," or the Americans come or whatever they called us, "You kill as many as you can. Then you put a blade on a stick and still kill as many as they can, and when the invasion looks inevitable, you're to slit the bellies of your children, then kill yourself." Plus, the million-and-a-half of us who would have died. Do you know how many Japanese people would have been dead? Over half the nation. That was his orders to his people

McDevitt: Speaking of leaders, do you remember when FDR passed? Did you guys get the news?

Fizer: Absolutely. We were overseas. Uh, uh

McDevitt: Did you have radios you were listening to? Or did you get…

Fizer: Always the radio

McDevitt: Yeah, that's smart

Fizer: A little five tuber, but it was powerful. Sometimes if I was careful I could get Pearl. Pearl Harbor, that is. We were maybe two or three thousand miles from Pearl. But if the weather conditions were right and everything, we would get a blast for a few minutes, and then nothing. Yeah, that's how we heard about Roosevelt.

McDevitt: How did it change the atmosphere?

Fizer: Didn't make no difference to us. Wasn't going to do anything for our lifestyle. But they thought that Harry Truman was going to be a bumpkin, but he turned out to be one of the best presidents they ever had. When he decided to go ahead with that bomb, brother, he was my friend for life.

McDevitt: So what was that like, when you heard, you had all the scuttlebutt, everybody was saying, "Oh, yeah, there's secret weapons, blah, blah"

Fizer: Half the time you don't believe it anyway.

McDevitt: Yeah, you just write it off and go on the next patrol.

Fizer: Yeah, it's just another scuttle. "Oh another weapon? Everybody's got a secret weapon."

McDevitt: So you find out that its real, you find out that Hiroshima and Nagasaki had been hit, and then you find out that the Japanese had capitulated. Was it just immediate elation for everybody, or were you still in danger?

Fizer: Well, the object was, just trying to stay alive because they were firing in celebration, everything on the island. and that was a lot of ammo, boy, a lot of ordinance. And when they were firing it, the best you could do was find you a hole because so much stuff was falling down all around you, you could have gotten killed celebrating. So that was, soon as we, it was true, and they notified us, they did then when the war was over, they said, "The war is over guys, and we're going home," and that was great.

McDevitt: I think that seems like a pretty good spot to take a break.

Edwin Fizer

April 1, 2016
Part 2
Interviewed by: Brian McDevitt
Transcribed by: Unknown, and Adam Cieply
Edited by: Eric Bradach

[0:05:00- Part 2 Begins]

McDevitt: Today is April 1st, 2016. My name is Brian McDevit with the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, and I am once again joined by Edwin Fizer a Montford Point Marine who saw action in the Pacific in the 1940s. He was one of the first black marines, he had an incredible tour of duty, and then afterwards he moved to Chicago and became a Chicago police officer. This is part two of the interview. So, Mr. Fizer, Edwin, you said you wanted to kind of give a recap of the history, we'll start with that.

Fizer: Right. I want to fully define a Composite Defense Battalion. In view of the fact that during that time of segregation and Jim Crow, we had to be an independent organization, even though we were going to fight on the same side, we had to be an independent unit. That means we had to take and hold. So, consequently, we had everything that was issued with regards to ordinance. We had infantry, we had .30 caliber water cooled machine guns, we had .50 caliber aircraft anti-aircraft machine guns, and then it moved up to the 40mm Bofors gun, the 90mm anti-aircraft guns, we had the 155mm long tom recoil rifles, which was for shelling seventeen to eighteen miles and for breaking into caves and etcetera. Consequently, we had two to three-hundred men who were direct infantry. They made the landings first, and after they did that they would take, the Marine Corps always would take, anything that rolled we would use. All of our weapons had to roll, anti-aircraft, seacoast artillery, you name it. Consequently, we could tow them along and bring them along to any operation that we were on, and that was the way the Composite Defense Battalions worked. And then we had the 51st defense battalion, composite, and they shipped out, and three hundred of us were kept back to train the 52nd composite defense battalion, and I served with both battalions and shipped out with the 52nd.

McDevitt: How long did you train the 52nd?

Fizer: War is a hurry up type of thing. The 51st might have taken a little long, because it was a feeling out and getting used to it. But the 52nd we had refined our training and so on down the line, so it took us maybe just nine and half, ten months, and

the next thing you know we were ready to ship out. That was all of ‘43 and we shipped out in late ‘43 and spent time overseas in ‘44 and ‘45.

McDevitt: What was your first action that you saw in the Pacific?

Fizer: The first action that we saw was in the marshal islands. There was not face-to-face enemy, but as soon as we take something, the Seabees, who were the construction people, get the airport landing strip ready so planes can start landing and gasoline is there to fuel them and so on down the line. Well when the fighter pilots were coming back, we were attached to MAG 31, which is Marine Air Group 31, they were being…the Japanese knew that they were tired, low on fuel and things like that. They started attacking right at the end of where the landing strip was. So they put us at the end of the strip, and it was like shooting ducks. They put us there because they knew we could shoot so well, and protect the pilots who were coming in low on fuel and some of the planes shot up and so on down the line. That was our first, first, first, very first action.

McDevitt: Did you immediately feel like, holy crap I could just die here, this just might be the end?

Fizer: Well you don’t know when your numbers up or what bullet has your name on it, but at that particular time, no. We were not afraid of dying as much as we were shooting at aircraft that was coming in trying to down our aircraft. It was kind of a turkey shoot. We enjoyed that. But then when we moved up to the Marianas, where Saipan was and Guam and Tinian, whole other story.

McDevitt: What was the terrain like on the first island? Just a sandy island?

Fizer: Just a sandy, well there wasn't much left, because when the battleships got through leveling them, and shooting all that. All of the palm trees were gone and everything else. Lot of holes in the ground. We had to fill some of them in to get the strips ready.

McDevitt: When you were on the ship, did you ever witness any of the naval bombardment?

Fizer: The first ship I shipped out on was called the *Winged Arrow*. It was a troop ship, it was really fast. It could go up to nineteen knots. It was that fast. It was so fast that everybody on it was getting sick so they had to slow it down in the daytime and speed up at night. Finally, when we got to where we were going, we didn't have to worry about submarines because that ship was so fast that submarines couldn't keep up with us. But what happens is, you go along on a ship and there’s a vast ocean out there. You don’t see nobody. Then you come up on the deck that morning, you look up and you see maybe three-hundred ships. That

tells you something. Then you go back to see if your gun is clean, if your bayonet is sharp. Then all of a sudden you look up and there is the priest having mass and serving you communion, that's the telltale sign that things are going to be a little bit different.

McDevitt: How was your gear? You mentioned that on the one island you had a flak gun from World War I.

Fizer: Oh no, that wasn't on the islands, that was only for training back home. By the time we got ready to go overseas, America was in full war production then, and we took over with us the best guns there were. The 155mm recoil rifle they called it at that time.

McDevitt: So the gear was good?

Fizer: No question, no question about it. A lot of times we would turn over gear to people who we relieved, if we relieved anybody, or if we took over their guns we'd replace them with ours. It was always a mixture.

McDevitt: When you went to the Marians…because your first duty was protecting that airstrip.

Fizer: Absolutely. Absolutely.

McDevitt: How long were you there? How long did that last?

Fizer: I must have been on that particular island somewhere around eleven months, almost a year. Then we start preparing to go to Okinawa, which was another stepping stone in the islands because Okinawa was only four-hundred miles from Japan.

McDevitt: What was Okinawa like?

Fizer: We didn't see much of Okinawa, my group didn't because when we went in with the original landing force, not D-day but shortly thereafter, our guys came down with what was known as Cat Fever. They didn't know what it was so they named it Cat Fever. But it was knocking guys down, so they pulled our guys back and sent us back to Guam because they figured we could contaminate the rest of the troops. So that's what they did. We were there maybe, two or three weeks

McDevitt: What was Cat Fever? Was it like and intestinal thing?

Fizer: Yeah, it wasn't like malaria. Malaria you get an attack and fall down. But cat fever was, all of a sudden you would get weak. You'd start to heave and throw up. You were listless. You didn't want to do anything. Today we'd call it viral.

McDevitt: You said in the first interview the ships were stocked with a ton of food, like you had the Thanksgiving, they had turkeys in the bottom.

Fizer: Oh, listen, yeah.

McDevitt: How about on the island? What were you guys doing for food? Was it like meals ready to eat, that kind of, Meals Ready to Eat, MRE's?

Fizer: We had what were called C and K rations, they were pre-packaged rations, and wherever you would go they were there. Like when I would go on patrol, I would take some chocolate bars that were stuffed with prunes and raisins and all of that, and it was sort of a dehydrated thing, where if you ate part of it and drank water, you wouldn't need to eat no more that day. But we had ample things, but that's because the ships came through. I can remember very well, when ships were not getting through to give us supplies, and food became scarce, we did like the native people and started eating what was available. Plantains, coconuts, breadfruit, and things like that. When we used to train they'd say, "Look, watch what the monkey eats because whatever the monkey eats, you eat. And when everything runs out, eat the monkey." There was another thing, there was some big cows, not cows. I don't know, bulls? But they had horns.

McDevitt: Water buffalo, maybe?

Fizer: Sort of like a water buffalo, right. When things got bad, I killed two of them. Brought them down with some trucks and dragged them over. A couple of my friends were in the chow hall and they gutted them and everything like that. We ate them.

McDevitt: Taste good?

Fizer: It was excellent. It was beef. And then I got called on the carpet, telling me that when I was on the carpet that I could have been causing an international incident because there were some religious aspects tied to this beef, these things. So he said to me, "Well, you know. I'm not going to charge you this time, but I could very well have charged you with an article of war because of this," and when I got near the end of the tent he said, "By the way, it was pretty good."

McDevitt: What did you do for water?

Fizer: For water? We had lyster bags. You know what a lyster bag is?

McDevitt: I don't.

Fizer: Okay, a lyster bag is a big canvas bag. We would bring our water from the ships, we didn't have no desalinization then, from the ships, and fill those lyster bags, and they hung in different places throughout our area

McDevitt: Did you ever have a water shortage? Or was that always pretty well taken care of?

Fizer: It was always pretty well taken care of, once the island was secure, where we could land, unopposed, yeah. We did pretty good. As a matter of fact, we even had some Japanese prisoners of war, and we would give them a fifty-five-gallon drum of water. And then the captain would take a bath, the lieutenants would take a bath, in the same water…and then all the way down, they would just keep coming. They kept a fire under the water. They called it communal bathing, I guess.

McDevitt: What were the prisoners of war like?

Fizer: Just like us. Youngsters, away from home, fighting for a cause they didn't know anything about. We didn't have many. The war was half over in the Pacific Islands, period, and we had only eighteen-hundred prisoners. That goes to show you how serious things were because a lot of lives were lost in the islands. I mean a lot of lives.

McDevitt: And those 11 months that you spent on that island, there had to have been a good amount of downtime. What did you do to occupy yourselves when there was nothing to do?

Fizer: When we had some time, and there was no threats or anything, because most of the time we were working. We were on constant suppression patrols, suppressing because there were fifteen-thousand people in the woods. Guam and Tinian are big islands. It could accommodate a lot of people, and it had a lot of jungle, and you didn't know when you were going to run into these people. But they never showed in the daytime, they would show up in the evening and at night when no one was around so they could steal food or kill people. For instance, I can remember them slipping into tents and slitting throats, but they wouldn't slit one throat per tent. So that the people would be nuts, it would drive you nuts. They had a purpose in mind. Their snipers would only shoot to wound a marine, and that was because two other marines would come to take him, the corps man, you know what a corpsman is, would come to help him out.

McDevitt: What was a normal suppression patrol like? Can you describe the terrain? How dense was the jungle?

Fizer: Very dense. Very dense. A normal patrol was twelve men. If we got word that there was activity in a certain section, each section was sectored off and had a number, and that's when you would go. If you would go in the daytime, the jungle was so thick, that if the sun was shining overhead you could go into the jungle and it would get dark. It was that dense. That's what you had to thread through. If you took a rifle you had to be very careful with your rifle. One of the things I hated was when a guy would hold a branch, and the next thing you know that branch was whacking you right in the face. I carried a Thompson submachine gun at that time because I could take the stock off, and I had two extra clips, but each clip had fifty rounds in it. And fifty rounds is a lot. And since the Thompson was just, had an absolute striking range was like thirty-five yards or less, but it was excellent in the jungle because when you're in that sort of thickness, if you can blast, you can pretty well stay alive.

McDevitt: And it's all pretty close quarters combat.

Fizer: Absolutely, man, it was so thick, it was frightening. You know, if it was nighttime, whew. Best thing we could do, with them was, since they had been away so long in the jungle, we could smell them because they hadn't had a bath in so long that they stunk. There was one time; he had evidently killed some Americans because he had a watch on because it was an iridescent watch. And we knew they didn't have no iridescent watches. But we thanked him for wearing it.

McDevitt: What was your first fire fight like? Can you describe it?

Fizer: Yeah, it was very simple. We were just moving along in the evening, not evening but night, and we could hear voices, and we stopped…and dug in. Just kind of took positions. Suddenly, all of a sudden, it was about eleven guys coming, but they were foraging. They were looking for food or whatever they could find. That was how it started.

McDevitt: Did you worry about booby traps? Were they setting booby traps?

Fizer: A lot of them, there were a lot of booby traps. When you could see, you had to worry about little tiny pieces of wire across. Little pieces of wire were hooked to explosives. That's always been in war. Booby traps. They didn't have time to do a lot of mining because we had cleared most of those, but there were booby traps there were mines, oh man. Just, besides, the other enemy was insects, mosquitoes, all types of poisonous bugs and everything like that. When I first came home, I couldn't have a growing plant in my house for about seven to eight years because it gave me the creeps.

McDevitt: Did you ever lose any guys when you were on patrol?

Fizer: Absolutely. Oh, absolutely. I can remember one time we were on our way to a sector, and there were twelve of us, six in two recons. And the recon we were in hit a tree stump and flipped over. Killed our driver, his name was Birdsong. After we left him there and radioed in, double E8's were what we had in them days, to let them know where he was, but we had to keep going because the sector was still hot, that we were going to, and so that's what we did. Suddenly you're moving along and all of a sudden, a guy yells and falls. When he yells and falls, a sniper's hit him. So it was one thing or another. Yeah. Then they had another thing that the Japanese had that we thought was different, it was called a tree mortar. It was a small mortar. Not like the 81. The 81 is a big one. It was smaller. This one would hold to a tree, that way they could put them in your pocket because they could carry them and run. At first we thought it was a knee mortar. A lot of guys knelt down and put it across their knee, broke their legs.

McDevitt: So you had to use it on a tree? You couldn't…

Fizer: Yeah it was meant for, it was a field weapon for them on a tree. It was theirs. It wasn't ours.

McDevitt: Did you adopt any of their tactics? Did you learn from them?

Fizer: Stealth.

McDevitt: Stealth?

Fizer: Yes sir. Stealth and patience, I learned from Japanese snipers. Boy, if you're patient, you win. If you ain't patient, you'll die.

McDevitt: What were your feelings when you'd come back from a patrol, and you'd lost a couple of your guys and you have Japanese people coming into your tents at night? Did anybody loose it? We call it PTSD now, or…

Fizer: Shell shock was what they used to call it, yeah. Well, yeah. First of all, to this day I don't sleep well. I toss so much until my caregiver looks at my bed and says, "I don't understand how you can screw up a bedlike this." That was because I wanted to move around, at night from lying in a tent. These guys would come; they were desperate men. Desperate men make desperate moves. They would come in to steal food, to steal anything, and steal lives, and so on down the line. So when you ran into them in the evenings or day time, it wasn't just eight or nine guys, it would be fifteen to twenty guys. It was fifteen thousand of them on an island that was supposed to be secure! Ha!

McDevitt: During the daytime did they hide? Did they have tunnels dug all over the island?

Fizer: Oh man, they didn't need to dig no tunnels. The jungle was enough protection because you could just move through it, and as long as you could move through that path you were good. You could just pull leaves and branches behind you to cut off to show where you had been. Except if it was raining or something, then you could see footprints or something like that. They were all over that island, all over it. Every island was the same way. Saipan was the same way. Oh yeah

McDevitt: What position did you have in the patrol?

Fizer: I was the sergeant. That means you lead the patrol.

McDevitt: So I guess the Tommy gun was probably-

Fizer: Oh that was my choice. Yeah, I had the choice, but other guys had to have a carbine which was a shorter barrel, which was their choice, it had about a fifteen to twenty clip, because carrying the M1 was just too awkward, to carry in there. The M1 was that long and eight to nine pounds, and not only that, after you fired eight rounds the clip would jump out and make so much noise it would give our position away. So if you took a clip out it was a little bit different, then the clip jumping out. Eight rounds ding, ding, ding, and it would [ringing noise], and it would ring. No, you didn't want to take that, no.

McDevitt: Who was your best friend?

Fizer: Trigger Bill.

McDevitt: Trigger Bill

Fizer: Trigger Bill was from Carolina, he had a missing finger. But I loved Trigger. Every time I moved I took Trigger with me. You know why? He could shoot so well. Man, Trigger could knock a rat off a cob at a hundred yards man. He could do it.

McDevitt: What was his last name?

Fizer: Bill Thigpen.

McDevitt: Bill Thigpen. What happened to his finger?

Fizer: God only knows. It was that way when he came in. And I never did ask, yeah. But he was a good man.

McDevitt: What else do you remember from the Pacific? Is there anything, because at the end of the last interview we had gotten to the point where we had dropped the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

Fizer: Well some of the things I remember were, the Mariana Islands was American territory from World War I. So we were stationed there a lot, and race prejudice had preceded us there. I remember when I first stepped on that island; the children were going behind me looking for my tail because the rumors were that black folks had tails, and that they were bad for the women, etcetera, etcetera. So that was one of the things I remember form the islands a lot.

McDevitt: When you went on patrols did you ever go into any local villages?

Fizer: Yes, the Capitol of Guam was Agana, and it was kind of like a state because it was that big, or bigger. If I may recall one incident, we used to take the women and put them in stockades because some of them, a lot of them had transmittable diseases and they didn't want us to mingle. They would say something in their own language, which was I suppose Guarinian, or whatever you might call it. And one day I heard a wolf whistle, and I thought maybe I'd been here too long. I went back and I said, "Did I hear somebody whistle," and the girl said, "Yes, it was me," and I said, "You speak English?" She said, "Yeah, hell I went to UCLA."

McDevitt: What's she doing out there?

Fizer: Hey, who knows? American GI's were there, you know, until the island was retaken by the Japanese, then we had to retake it again.

McDevitt: Speaking of women, women were new to the armed forces at that time, too. Did you ever have any interactions with the WAVES or the WAC?

Fizer: No. The only thing that ever happened was, very interesting thing, in them days, you don't go to my church I don’t go to your church and so on down the line. Some very smart Seabee, I told you what Seabees were, we had one Quonset hut where we used to go for mass and so on down the line. And this guy took, he was a carpenter or whatever it was, he took a podium, it was about 10 feet in diameter, and he divided it like the peace sign: Jewish, Protestant, Catholic. In the same Quonset hut, you know round huts like that, whenever you went in there for Catholic religion, he would just turn it, and it would be for Catholics. If Protestants went in there he would turn it, it was for Protestants, and the third part of it was for Jews.

McDevitt: Smart.

Fizer: Brilliant! I thought it was brilliant. He solved a problem. Oh you were talking about women. Well one time I was in Sunday mass, I never forget it; I'm really staying religious because I want to live to get back home. And I smell perfume. Oh, man, that stuff smells so good. Behind me was seven or eight nurses they had brought over to start working in the hospitals to help these guys who were wounded so they wouldn't have to transfer them all the way back to Pearl [Harbor]. After I smelled the perfume, I just got up and left church because my mind was no longer on religion. Just a little story.

McDevitt: Was religion pretty important to most of your guys?

Fizer: Yeah, well, I'm from New Orleans Louisiana, I'm Catholic, Roman Catholic. There was about eight of us who were in the same battalion and no matter where we were, no matter what part of the United States we were in, we always found a church or a chapel to go to on Sundays for Mass. Well by the same token, we didn't have a priest per say, but we had a regular, just a Holy Joe we called him. He was a protestant guy, but he was always there to talk to in case you needed to talk to somebody. So while we were overseas, we didn't have Sunday mass, although they did have them aboard ship when we were getting ready to go in for landings. I remember once hearing a guy's confession, I didn't know I did. We were getting ready to go on a strike, and he said, "Boy, I sure would like to go to confession." So I'm sitting up there I say, "Well what have you done?" He started to tell me and I said, "Well you haven't done this, did you do this or did you do that?" And he would answer me. And I said, "Well you can go to communion." I realized I'd just heard the guy's confession, man. That bothered me for a lot of years until I got back and discussed it with a priest. He said it was okay because of the circumstances, you know. Yeah.

McDevitt: Do you remember, was there ever anything that you experienced that was really hard for you to wrap your head around?

Fizer: Yeah. Race prejudice never left us. Segregation never left us. Attitudes never left us. Now that didn't mean 100% of people because there's decent people everywhere you go. But there was always, in the book and I'll show you, there was always slurs and people who were less than themselves and all they had was white. So they would use that that was their only weapon against us. And wherever they were they would use it. No matter what it was, if it was rations, if it was beer, if it was women, if it was anything, that's where it was. Even overseas when they would show movies once in a while, even the seating arrangements were segregated. It was not good.

McDevitt: How did you deal with that? How did you overcome it?

Fizer: I found ways myself, that's the way I am. I can remember one time when I was in training, I walked into a lieutenant's office, and there was a football on the back of his credenza, and I said, "What's the football?" and he said, "I was a kicker in college," and I said, "Well, I was a quarterback in high school. Come on, let's do it." And he would go out in the evening and kick and I'd pass the ball back to him, and that kind of gave me some relief. The other thing was, I told you about the guy who wrote "Route 66." His name was Bobby Troupe; he was an arranger for a very popular band at the time called Tommy Dawsey. Well, we got a chance to entertain our own troops because we had a band, but it was two kinds of bands. One it was a marching band, to march with the troops, and then it was a swing band to play music for our little entertainment and stuff like that. So I got involved with that. And the fellow we're going to take the medal to, his wife, Fines Henderson, was one of our leading entertainers.

McDevitt: Did you play any instruments?

Fizer: No, I was playing a saxophone, but my lip got busted all the time because there were no bars at the time, and I played football so half the time I couldn't pick it up. My music teacher used to call us heathens.

McDevitt: I forget what I was going to ask. Going back to the islands, how long were you, you were on the one island for eleven months. How often were your patrols? Did you have a couple patrols a day, or was it one a day?

Fizer: Two or three a week.

McDevitt: Two or three a week?

Fizer: Yeah, because there were other people going on patrol as well because there was a lot of territory to cover; a lot.

McDevitt: Had you linked up with the 51st when you got out there?

Fizer: What happened was, whenever we got somewhere the 51st was always just leaving. They were going someplace else because marines don't stay no place. They keep you moving. Yeah, they would be just moving. Sometimes we even had some of their old guns. They were kept well, so we knew when we got the guns it would be okay to use them

McDevitt: Were there any major operations where you fought alongside white marines?

Fizer: Oh yeah, everywhere. Everywhere. Oh, my god, yeah. In Saipan, that's when they really found out that we had balls as well as they did. And you know, when you're on an island. That island gets small. There ain't too much places to run

and hide and so on down the line. Consequently, you'd look up and you're passing ammunition to the guy next to you, you ain't looking at his color. Yeah. Yeah. There was a lot of times, patrols, everything. Oh yeah.

McDevitt: Once they saw you in combat, did a lot of them, did you notice a lot of the racism, like you said, when you're out there there's no place to hide, you're all doing the same thing, you're all trying to get home.

Fizer: No question. We were on our way back one day to be transferred to another section of the Islands, and some white marines had a sign, said "Thanks Montford Point Marines," because we had really helped them out, boy.

McDevitt: How long were you on Saipan?

Fizer: Just briefly. Yeah. When they need you, you're there. The next thing you know, you're not there. You move a lot. In the islands, you move.

McDevitt: What was the process for moving island to island? How much notification did you have before you left?

Fizer: None. Pack and go. You don't know what a Higgins boat its, but a Higgins boat was the landing craft that they would take you from the big ship. It would drop down in the front, and out you ran.

McDevitt: The one's from "Saving Private Ryan?"

Fizer: Yeah, those are Higgins boats. And those Higgins boats were used for everything, from Taxi's to landings to you name them.

McDevitt: How many times do you think you moved while you were over there?

Fizer: Oh lord, phew, I have no idea. Every time you looked up you were moving somewhere. You didn't dig in and stay nowhere, oh God no. Man. Phew. From one island to another island, you go to this island and do this, the next thing I know we're guarding ships that were coming in because we didn't want anybody stealing from those or killing the people on the ships. One time, some ships were there, and my job was to post men to guard the ships to make sure nobody came aboard them and harmed any of the people because, the sailor, you know. So I'm posting the guy on the ship and it's early in the morning, 5 o'clock or so, and I hear what I think is females laughing. And I say to myself again, "You've been here too long." And then I listen again and it was. It was women. This was a Swedish ship, and they had women in the crew. Yeah. We went in there and knocked and introduced us, I couldn't understand no Swedish and he couldn't

speak no English, but it was enough to where they made breakfast for us. I had a cooked breakfast!

McDevitt: What were they doing?

Fizer: They were on a freighter. Not a freighter, but whatever it is, a supply ship. Merchant is a good word. And they came in to drop supplies. But in the meantime, the ships weren't just docked there, there were people unloading them, you know what I mean? Yeah.

McDevitt: When you talk to some of the other Montford Point Marines, a lot of the black marines were given just logistics and supply jobs at the beginning. Was that really difficult for a lot of the guys to deal with, or was it just, "We're here we've got to do our job?"

Fizer: Well, it was somewhat difficult, but the point of it was we just wanted to make damn sure that we didn't wind up, because we were a part of the navy, being a cook or a baker.

McDevitt: Why is that?

Fizer: Well, at that time, it was the only thing blacks could do in the navy. If you were part of the navy you were going to be a cook or a baker, and that's it. I don't care what ship you went out on, you were a cook. As a matter of fact, I went to the colonel's office, and that was unusual because when you're a buck private you just don't go asking for the audience of the colonel. He said, "I don't have much time, what's on your mind?" I said, "I have something I need to discuss. It's going to take about five minutes." He said, "All right come on in. At ease! What is it?" I said, "Here before, you know, that black folks in the navy are cooks and bakers." "Yes, yes, yes, I know that what else, what else?" I said, "I just want to advise you that if I am put in the position of a cook or a baker I am going to desert." He said "You're what?" I said, "I'm going to desert. I didn't come in here for this; I came in here to fight. And fight is what I want to do. If I don't do that I'm leaving." He said, "Well, don't worry, you won't be no cook or baker. Get the hell out of my office." This is the real truth, I did that.

McDevitt: When you signed up to fight, were you more, if you can give a general overview, were you more fighting for Civil Rights or was it for America? Was it a combination thereof?

Fizer: The struggle was on, it's still on. But the point of it is, I figured if I went and distinguished myself as a fighting man for my country that my lot would be better when I came back home. It was hardly the case. But that was the idea. I signed up because of adventure. I didn't know that I was going to war, but that

adventure soon ended. Anyway, yeah, that was what I was doing. Besides that, my family needed money, and that was a job.

McDevitt: How much money were you getting per month?

Fizer: Ha! Maybe thirty-one dollars, twice a week, split.

McDevitt: Was that equal pay?

Fizer: Well you could get an allotment, and that helped. It was a little bit more money that would go home, plus what you would send home.

McDevitt: Is there anything else from the Pacific that you wanted to mention? You mentioned, you thought that when you got out, it would be better for you when you got home, if you distinguished yourself?

Fizer: I did, I really thought that things were going to be better. But like World War I it wasn't any better, not a bit better, not a bit better. When I got on a train from California and was discharged, to come back to New Orleans, my home town, segregated on the train. When I got back, the only place there was that wasn't segregated was the veteran's administration base. And I was there to take my GED because I hadn't finished high school, so that I could take the GED and get one of the high schools to agree to give me a diploma, and then when I got the diploma I could go on to college. I went to college under the GI Bill

McDevitt: When you first got out, segregation still being the norm, did you just say, you know, there were some marines who just got rid of all their military stuff, and they said, "You know what." At that point in time there was no pride in it-

Fizer: Absolutely, when the war was over, it wasn't like today where they have places for you to go and be counseled and do all that. When you got out of the service in 1945 like I did, they said, "See ya." And you had a C bag, oh and I was a member of the 52/20 club. They gave us twenty dollars a week for fifty-two weeks. And that was all that I got. Plus, I was able to go on to school under the GI bill. But no it wasn't any better, it wasn't any better. Everything was still segregated, it was black this white this, and you could see, again a thing I'm going to donate to the museum, I don't know if you have it or not, it's called "Many Rivers to Cross."

McDevitt: Oh, yeah, by Henry Lewis Gates.

Fizer: Yeah, do you have that here?

McDevitt: I don't know if we have that here, but I'm a big fan. You kind of remind me of him, actually.

Fizer: Well, believe it or not, the man in charge of NASA today, the National Space Agency, is a Montford Point Marine. We've come a long way, in charge of the entire space agency. He was a flyer, and now he's in charge of that unit.

McDevitt: When you came back to the United States, did you see all of the atrocities that had been committed against Jews in Europe?

Fizer: Not right away because I tried to look at some war movies, but it affected me so bad it would give me nightmares, and I'd be running in my sleep. When I finally got into a bed I'd be falling out of the bed. I stopped looking. But after that I saw that. I had a friend, he used to have a phrase, he would say, "That happened in Europe, and blacks in America are the shock absorbers for Jews." You hear that? Blacks in America are the shock absorbers for Jews because if there weren't blacks here for them to subjugate, then Jews would be the next item. That just was his philosophy

McDevitt: Do you think that's accurate?

Fizer: It had some merit. Yeah, it had some merit.

McDevitt: You said in the first part of the interview that for the first eight, I think you said eight years, you drank quite heavily

Fizer: Oh, absolutely. I didn't have anything else to do. I didn't have nobody I could talk to. There was no PTSD meeting or whatever. Every door I went to was slammed in my face, I couldn't get a job nowhere. It was just very, very, very demoralizing. You were emasculated, you couldn't show your manhood because you would go to get a job and they would tell you, "We'll take your name, and don't call us we'll call you," and all kinds of things like that. It was very disappointing. You had to take menial jobs. That's how I wound up going into law enforcement because I couldn't get a job, and so I went in law enforcement, and when I got in law enforcement that was prejudiced.

McDevitt: How long did you stay in New Orleans after you came back?

Fizer: Not long at all because I had a football scholarship to Wilberforce University in Xenia, Ohio. But the preacher started stealing all the money and the scholarship was cancelled, so then I wanted to find something so that if the draft continued and I was drafted I wanted to go back as an officer. So I took a course, not a course but I went to the school of optometry, and received a doctor's degree in optometry.

McDevitt: Was the GI bill pretty easy to use for you? Were there any hang-ups?

Fizer: Oh, no, that was not a problem. It wasn't a problem simply because it was money. The bottom line was no matter what college you applied to, and they saw you lined up to pay with the GI bill, they brought you in right away. Tuition was down here. When the GI bill came out…tuition rose to the moon.

McDevitt: Where did you go for optometry?

Fizer: Right here in the state of Illinois. I went to Illinois College of Optometry, which is now located right across from [the Illinois Institute of Technology].

McDevitt: What did your family say when you returned? When you came back? What did your mom say?

Fizer: My mother used to cry. When I first came home, I couldn't sleep in the bed, it was too soft. I slept on the floor. I couldn't hold a regular household cup, she had nice dishes and stuff, I couldn't hold that because it was too small, I'm used to holding a canteen, and stuff like that. And my mother, she used to just cry.

McDevitt: Did you stay in touch with any of your buddies? Did you keep in close contact anybody?

Fizer: Well, everybody was scuffling to try to make it. Everybody came home for a brief time, but went everywhere. I wound up here in Illinois. Some of my friends went to California. I should have stayed in California because at that time UCLA would give veterans free tuition for four years. I didn't know it.

McDevitt: Illinois, at the time, said there wasn't supposed to be any segregation, there wasn't supposed to be…yeah, you laugh, please, can you describe what the reality was?

Fizer: It was as blatant as anything in the world. When I signed up to be a police officer, I wasn't too dumb.

McDevitt: What year is this?

Fizer: In the ‘50s…Oh, I know what I was going to tell you. I was a police officer, and I had transferred down to communications because my voice is pretty good, and then an opening came for- oh Linen Baldy was the flyer at the time who was flying the chopper for traffic. $20,000 a year plus a regular police salary. I wanted that job. I applied immediately, and as soon as they found out that I applied, it moved up from private to sergeant. You had to be a sergeant or better to fly the

chopper. I had fixed wing aircraft experience because I had always wanted to fly, and I had learned. It would have been nothing to transfer my talents to a chopper, just an ordinary civilian chopper, wasn't a GI chopper.

McDevitt: Where did you learn how to fly, fixed wings?

Fizer: Where? Right here in Chicago. See there's a story behind everything. When I was a youngster, I used to put together, me and my buddy; we used to put together balsa wood airplanes and all of that. We even saved up twenty dollars once; it took us six months, to buy an engine. Little bitty engine, little bitty spark plugs. And we flew that. When the war broke out I went straight to the army air corps and said, "I want to fly." And they said," Get out of here boy, we don't have no n****** flying no airplanes." So then when the Marine Corps opened up that's when I went there. But I was determined to fly, and I met a friend, who had one airplane at [Midway International Airport]. And he and I and another buddy we used to go out there, and he would charge us almost nothing and teach us how to fly. And he was an excellent pilot. Did you know that right here in Chicago there is a town called Robbins? You know about that? And eleven US airmen from the…Tuskegee airmen, eleven of them came out of there. And one guy named Crofett put together an engine from a motorcycle engine and wanted to put it in an airplane and he had to get the help of a white guy, who helped him, but they put it in an airplane and it flew. Whole lot of history behind it.

McDevitt: So you couldn't get that job? What was the process? First, did any of your family come up to Chicago with you or did all of them stay down in…

Fizer: I didn't have a family at the time. I mean my mother was here because my aunt was here. And my mother came up to look after my aunt who was ill. So, this was a stopping off point on my way to Wilbur Forest, and when that failed I came back here. And that was when I enlisted, enrolled, in the school of optometry.

McDevitt: And what was Chicago like in the '50s?

Fizer: There were some jobs like teaching, post office, and a few other things like that where blacks were welcome and they could go and get the job, but other than that, when it got to the serious jobs they wouldn't hire you. You would go in there and they would sit you down very courteously, fill out all of the stuff, and then when you left. [Ripping sounds] And right into the trash can.

McDevitt: Did you live in an all-black neighborhood?

Fizer: Yes. Open housing wasn't open then. I lived at 4905 Countrymen Avenue. And that was just the black section of Chicago, and I was in such good shape man that I used to get out of there in the morning and run to 63rd and [Lake Michigan],

swim for four or five hours, and run back. Yeah, I was I shape buddy. I was in shape. And when a job came open at the fire department and the police department at the same time, I took both exams. And then one day, it was cold and I said I'm going to stand out here and see if I can handle this thing. The [Le] Cannaise Brewery was burning and the firemen were out there and ice was all over, man, I'm standing there shivering like a dog. This isn't for me. So, I went back in there and said, "You know that application sitting on your desk? Take it off. I'm not going to apply for that." He said, "What are you going to do?" I said "I'm going to take the policemen's job." He said, "You would rather get shot at than use a hose?" And I said "Yeah, I've been shot at before. So, I know what that is like." But anyway, I got on the police force and that is when all the other stuff started happening. Oh, then after I couldn't fly, I wanted to go into the crime lab, so I made a study. I was kind of smart, and I studied lying and its detection, so I could do the lie detector. That was by Enball. I knew everything Enball ever wrote. I studied and made an application to go to the crime lab when there was an opening. Then guess what? Sergeant or better. They kicked it up again. Oh, yeah, I said, "I need to get the hell out of here."

McDevitt: How many black people were on the force at the time?

Fizer: When I first went on the force, there was a place called Altgeld Gardens. I know you've never heard of it. But it is at the far south end of the city. That is where they send, they sent me to that particular station, the 12th district. It was a project, a project. Now here is the ultimate insult. It's wintertime and I'm dressed warm and I'm walking outside. The sergeant rolls up to me and says, "Fizer, what are you doing out here?" I said, "Walking to my post, sergeant." He said, "Did you pay the operator?" The operator was where you go to the post and you were called in. If you gave the duty sergeant, everybody gave him two dollars; he would take that downtown and give it to the operator's downtown. If you went somewhere at night and gave them a telephone number they would call you. So this guy says to me, "Why don't you get one of these ADC mothers, Aide Dependent Children-Welfare mothers, and shack up with her and give the operator that number so you can stay there?" I was only on six months. I lit into him like he stole something. I was challenging him to a fight because, oh, he really boiled my gut. I said, "I'm a married man, I have a family, and you got the nerve to tell me to go shack up with some ADC mother, just so I can be found by the police department?" He got the hell out of there. So, I'm still aggressive. About six months later, there's a big scandal in the police department and they have a big shake up. They fired the superintendent and brought in a guy from O.W. Wilson, California. He started making some changes. They were calling people down to make statements to the investigators and I told myself, "I'm going to tell them what I know. I haven't been here long, so I'll lose the job anyway." So, I told them morale wasn't worth a damn, so-an-so wasn't worth a damn, and I was confined to frigging one station as a black, and so on down the

line. The guy is walking me out he says, "No, you won't be fired," and I say, "Sure." Well, believe it or not, that summer they brought us some new squad cars because we weren't even in squad cars. We were walking…a beat…in the ghetto. The very sergeant, who, I had told him about him, who said I should shack up and so down the line. They had a roll call, four o'clock in the evening, never forget it. His name was Sgt. Lepper, and he was calling names and I saw those brand new squad cars out there. I had asked him why I wasn't in a squad car and he said, "If you want to be in a squad car you have to transfer to some district where they let coloreds ride in a squad car." And that pissed me off, but anyway. Lo and behold, he called my name and Fred Hailey and they had him hand us the keys to the squad car. That was one of my crowning moments. That was it, man. The police department was very racist in them days.

McDevitt: What was the ghetto like? Cause you talk about project housing. There is Cabrini-Green and the Taylor homes and everything. That is what comes to my mind a lot of times when I think of project housing in Chicago.

Fizer: That's it.

McDevitt: But it was more of a community back then, yes? Was it?

Fizer: Yeah, yeah, but it was still confinement for black folks only, but when [Mayor Richard J.] Daley built these things, he was smart. Those were all votes. He was no dummy boy. I felt like I had come from overseas. They come here and they get in the ghetto and next thing you know they move out. When I first came here, I was living in a certain area in the hood, I soon got out. I went to a place called the Rosenwald building. It was at 47th and Michigan. It was a square block, the whole building, and it was a nice place. Joe Lewis lived in there and some other people lived in there; upper, upper, upper class people. I moved into that building because that was my quest. I didn't want to be like the run of the mill. It was my way of taking care of myself and my family.

McDevitt: When did you meet your wife?

Fizer: I met her when I was in school because I was under the GI bill, and I took a part-time job in the United States post office at 433 W. Van Buren. That was my part time job to supplement my income because about the 18th of the month that GI check ran out and you were S.O.L. if you know what I mean. So, that's where I met her. And we started the dating and next thing you know marriage and children and so on down the line.

McDevitt: What did she do?

Fizer: She was a clerk in the post office.

McDevitt: Did she help keep you on the straight and narrow? Did she help you with your drinking?

Fizer: That started to wane, yeah. And she opened my glove compartment one day and there was a whiskey bottle. Almost broke our relationship, but anyway.

McDevitt: But at least you learned from your time in the Pacific?

Fizer: I was prepared, brother. Yes, sir. You know, in the Marine Corps in them days, it wasn't like now, you spent thirty days in the chow hole in the rank and file and it just so happened that I drew the sergeants' mess. All these old souls, guys that had been to China and this place and that place. I was fascinated just listening to them, you know, and one of them said, "Come here boy," the guy liked me, so I was boy. "I'll teach you how not to get the clap." Do you want to turn that off?

McDevitt: No, we can keep rolling.

Fizer: I said, "okay" I didn't even know what the hell he was talking about. But then finally he told me what that was. He said, "When you get one out there, the first thing you have to do is drink three or four beers and then when you get through and banged away, the first thing you do is go to straight to the bathroom. Lots of hot soapy water wash the old jones and keep washing it, and then you stand up there and wait to take a leak." He says, "It's going to be a while, but you know what, when the beers start to come that's going to flush you out." And guess what I was one of the many who didn't get it. They used to be talking about their women in China. It was totally fascinating.

McDevitt: What was your first relationship? Did you have a girlfriend when you were in Jacksonville?

Fizer: No, that was clap town. My first was in high school. I played ball, and you know, when you play ball. I was dating the head majorette. She was a fox. She had big pretty legs because you got to have them with the boots if you're out front with the band. That was my first. Women are aggressive. I remember when I was in junior high. We use to have theater, and it was to raise money and you'd buy the ticket and this one girl said, "Hey, if you sit by me I'll get some tickets for us," and I said, "okay," We're sitting in the theatre and the next thing I know, she takes my arm and puts it around her, and I think wow, I'm getting up there, and then she takes my hand and puts it on her boob. And I'm doing nothing with it because I didn't know what to do with it. So she starts squeezing my hand, so I said, "This is what I'm supposed to do?" "Ready to teach you, boy" Girls are aggressive. People think there not, but they are. Imagine back then, they were

that aggressive then, yeah. Get that, boy. Woo. Yeah, oh yeah. That was my first encounters.

McDevitt: So then, back to the '50s, you're working, you're a beat cop. You finally get the squad car. What's the atmosphere like in the precinct?

Fizer: Okay, squad car. We're still on that, and hold your guns. The orders were, "Under no circumstances are you ever to take this car from Altgeld Gardens to go into town to Michigan Avenue, to Roseland Area." Now, at night that radio's kicking, boy it's the weekend. It's cracking, it's really cracking. And they call our number, me and Crocket, and they told me. He said, "Go into Roseland, so and so, and handle the so and so." And I said, "Evidently you don't know what's going on out here." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "We are under direct orders form the captain of the district. Under no circumstance are ever to go into Roseland to handle anything." He said, "What? Don't go away, park the car." I parked the car. He said, "Stand there." I went back there and he come back, and he said, "This is captain so and so, you just received an order to go into Roseland and handle a so and so disturbance, blah, blah, blah, and you better be on your way. I'll handle your captain." And that broke it brother because we started going in, and people started calling up saying how good of service they were receiving, and all of the things like that, and oh yeah, and then when we got back in that evening, this captain says, "I hear that you've been into Roseland." And I said, "Yes sir." And I said, "And guess what, didn't have anything to do with it." I said, "You gotten a call?" He said, "Yeah, I just got one from there. I'm going down to a meeting on Monday." They called him down there and chewed his a** out. I mean they reamed him boy. You know, you ever the cartoon with the teeth in the guy's ass, and it says, "What did the boss say to you?" Yeah. Oh, yeah, Amen. I've been through this meal, you hear me?

McDevitt: And was that, those little victories, I mean, did they help just uh...

Fizer: Oh, for me it was like, you know, but people didn't want to hang with me because they said I was too damn aggressive. I was always getting into something. You know, but that's the way I was. I'm willing to do everything everybody else was doing. I didn't want to be white, I just wanted to be like white. You know what I mean, all of the things that you're doing, I want to do it. I want to fly. I want to do this, I want to do that, and that's what I did and I made damn sure I did it.

McDevitt: And how about the bar scene, when you went out after you got off of work, was there any interaction between blacks and whites when you were off duty?

Fizer: No, you were on the South Side, or whatever you were in, the ghetto, that's the bars you went to. But when I did, when I first came home, there were big time

night clubs where blacks didn't go, and black entertainers were coming in, I mean, I loved entertainment. So I told them here one night, "Well I want to go here the next time." And he said, "Yeah, me too." So we dressed up, got really well dressed, made sure we had some dough in our pocket, went over to this big time night club on the North Side and when we walked in, you know what, they didn't say a word. We were ready for... and they didn't say a word. They took our money. But here's where the killer came. We were sitting there with some girls who were there. These were Caucasians, and the girl came around with the camera. "Would you like to have your picture taken?" "Oh sure! Why not?" Click, click, click. Pretty soon she came back and said "That'll be fifty dollars." Fifty f**king dollars. But you know what, we said yes, so we had to pay. It was close, but we made it. Yeah, oh yeah, but I used to do that all the time. I wanted to catch and learn about opera. So I went and I bought a *Victor Book of the Opera* so every time I went to an opera, I could read up on it and know everything that was going on before I went, and I went to the Opera man…I tell you, I just wanted to do things, and I did them.

McDevitt: And leading into, so the '50s we're starting to see… America is starting to change. Things are amping up, um, as far as, was there a lot of animosity in your neighborhood? Could you see that changes were coming?

Fizer: Yeah, but I wasn't happy with the fact that we weren't taking total advantage of everything that was there. Uh, it's just like today. In colleges there are four or five black women to one to two black men. That's disgraceful. That ain't what we fought for. You see this. What I got on there. That means a lot to me because I remember when you were denied the right to vote, then you, when you, did get to vote, they put a poll tax on it so that you had to pay to vote, and all of that was fought and knocked down, brother. I'll give you a good example. I have some friends in some pretty high places, and a friend of my from Commonwealth Edison called me one day and said, "Fizer, I got five openings, I'd like five young black men to fill them as line men. Tenth grade education, not afraid of heights, clean and no drugs, etcetera. Fine. Get back to me in about a week and give me some names." "Sure will." You know how many people I recommended: zero. Do you know why? Everybody I asked about these jobs, when I get to the drug part "Well man, no I just had a little marijuana." "I just had a little coke last week,." I said "Asshole. Do you realize that when you go down there they're gonna make you piss, and if you piss hot you ain't gonna make it. They gonna check ya hair and that's gonna do it. You ain't gonna get no job." And so therefore, I wasn't going to put my reputation on the line, I recommended nobody.

McDevitt: How long ago was that?

Fizer: Oh, six, seven years ago, maybe.

McDevitt: The reason I asked about the projects and the black community at the time is have you seen a transformation in the black neighborhoods in the past thirty or forty years?

Fizer: Definitely. Oh, I saw, I saw a lot. I saw open housing, and don't forget, I was in law enforcement. I was with Dr. King with open housing marching. That was a day's rage. We were confined to certain areas, and couldn't move, and finally when Dr. King started these open housing marches, places started to open up in the city and places started to do this. I've seen American Caucasian's spitting on young kids who were moving into neighborhoods during that. Oh, man, it was bad. I saw some terrible things. A good example; there was a march in Bogan one time, the Bogan area, and uh, the guys were really doing some things, man, throwing rocks, and bottles, and bricks and shooting guns in the air and stuff, and they grabbed this, he was up in age about fifty, sixty, locked him up, put him in the wagon and took him in, and pressed charges. You know what his defense was, his lawyers is, defended him, "If he's found guilty, it'll spoil his chances at citizenship." Did you hear what I said? That, boy, that was the epitome, I'm telling you, because these guys, approaching the cars when we would go on these marches and Dr. King would be in serious jeopardy, and they, I would say to him, I said, "Let me tell ya fellas. He's nonviolent. I'm a violent MF. Hit me with anything and you're gonna die right there on the spot," and I was serious as cancer. Yes sir, and then they would say, "Yeah, fight fair ni***r, fight fair." Yeah, I'm gonna fight fair, just, I'm gonna do the same thing that you want to do to me. Oh yeah, let me tell ya man.

McDevitt: Did you get...being a police officer, did you get guff from the black community. Were you called an "Uncle Tom" or anything like that? Did you ever face that or anything like that?

Fizer: Oh, no, no. I was a good cop. I uh, first of all, I never gave out bullshit tickets, and I didn't stop women cause they were good looking to have a traffic stop and stuff like that. If I stopped you, there was a good reason, and most of the time, you didn't get out of place, and you let me finish lecturing you, I would give you a pass and let you go. I remember one time; it was a guy and his wife in the car. And I stopped him for some reason, and I'm trying to talk to him, and she keeps joining and joining and I said, "You know what, I wasn't going to write you a ticket, but I'm about to write you three if you don't have your wife to shut up in the next minute." He turned and he shut her up. Oh yeah, oh yeah, it was a lot of stuff. But I didn't have any trouble like that. If I went to a women's house, and they were having, she had called for a domestic disturbance and I would say to the guy, "Now wait a minute, there seems to be a little inequity here, you realize you have the right to cross complain?" "I do?" And so all of sudden when he said, "When we get there I'm gonna sign a complaint against your 'blanket-ey' blank." And you know what, I didn't have to do that call, they come on down. Oh yeah. I

just spread, and I remember one time when we got out of the squad car. Beautiful Sunday day, we were sitting in the little mall right there in Altgeld Gardens. This lady came back up to me and she said, "Officer Fizer, here's the five dollars." And I said, "Five dollars for what?" Well, I would go to a house, if I saw a refrigerator empty, I would give them money for milk because she would have three, four, or five kids. And boy, two of the guys at work with me were standing there, and s**t I told her, "Please, go away." They never let me live it down. "You taking money from a welfare mother. You no good SOB." It was a joke, but it was all in fun, but I used to do that a lot. Oh yeah.

McDevitt: Was there a lot of corruption on the force back then?

Fizer: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. If I was riding with you, in traffic, and you come back and put ten to fifteen dollars on the seat and say, "That's your part," that evening I walk in and said to the captain of the district, "I want to transfer. I want a new partner." "Why what's wrong with the one you got?" I said, "Nothing we're just not compatible." I went up on him, because that's not the blue way, you know but I'd get rid of him quick. Yeah. Oh, yeah. Lot of corruption. Oh, serious corruption. Oh man. I remember there was one guy. He was the "Babbling Burglar" they called him, but lordy, man, he was crooked as a rams horn. And when they got ready, arrested him, they were afraid to arrest him because he was an expert in jiu-jitsu. And they were scared to approach him cause you ain't gonna shoot him. You gotta take him.

McDevitt: Now what was he doing, was he robbing people? Was he...

Fizer: He had schemes man. Something, you know. If some people would put their minds to the good part as well as to the bad part, they could make a fortune, but they prefer to be thugs. He was just, some people would club him man. And a lot of the guys would take…money, would take drugs from drug dealers, would take money from drug dealers. I stopped a guy one night. He was delivering what they called policy at the time. It was before the lotto came out. And he said, "Oh, here, I was supposed to give you this." And it was a fifty dollar bill I said, "What are you supposed to give me this? For what? I'm stopping you for a traffic stop." He said, "No, buddy, you're supposed to take this and you ain't supposed to give me no tickets." And I said, "Well, you're going to get a ticket. And you're gonna keep your fifty bucks." Yeah, oh man. There was this temptation from the lower level to the top level. I remember a lieutenant once. His name was Wilson. He had just gotten promoted, and it was to 48th Street station and…these two detectives walked in, and said, "This is for you," and he said "What is it." They said, "Well, you just got here and if you just got in the station, this is your part." He opened it up and it was money and went, "Woah, I don't want this." And he gave it back to them, and they said, "We'll hold it for you." Because they figured one day he would get the need, he'll ask them for it. Man this corruption is all

around, and then when you stop women in the street, they would have their dress up to here. They'd have their boobs to where they're practically falling out and you know. "Officer are you gonna give me a ticket?" Hell yeah, I'm gonna give you a ticket. And I had one guy, he was a lover, Name was Crocket, he said, "You gave that b***h a ticket?" And I said, "Yeah I gave her a ticket, she violated the law. He said, "Next time let me handle it." I said, "Okay lover, you go ahead." Crazy. Craziest things.

McDevitt: And were there ever any investigation of corruption going on? Were there any busts?

Fizer: All the time. All the time. Oh yeah. We had one policeman, he was so bad. His name was Two-Gun Pete. This guy comes in, I was working the desk one day, he comes into me and stands and takes his hat off, and I say, "Sir, can I help you?" And he says, "Yes sir. I am under arrest." I said "What the hell do you mean?" He said, "Officer Pete told me to come in here and tell you, I'm under arrest and I better be here when he got here." He was a cop who done killed of all people. Six people. But he had that kind of reputation. That's pretty good ain't it?

McDevitt: So, leading into, going into the '60s, do you remember when Malcom X was killed?

Fizer: Very well. Oh, yeah. You know when, I, I was disciple of Dr. King, and when Dr. King first started to talk, I was in communications, in the radio room, and I used to listen to him and listen to him and the more he started to talk, the more I started to listen. I was comfortable. I had a wife. I had a house. I had a couple of kids and so on down the line, but I think, I said, "You know you don't have shit." When I started thinking about what he was talking about, and lo and behold, Dr. King made a believer out of me. I transferred to a unit called the Human Relations Section. Just to digress momentarily, at that time if you marched in the streets, you would be arrested, whether you were right or wrong, and then some youngster like you who knew the law said, "Hey, that's wrong. If they demonstrate peacefully and notify you of the route, you have the right to protect them." And that's when I went in and that's when the open housing marches started. That's when Dr. King started. That's how I got to know him.

McDevitt: The open housing marches... do you remember the first time, what was the first speech, what was the first that you heard of Dr. King?

Fizer: The first I heard of Dr. King was the movement was going on in the South. And it hadn't spread quite well then, but segregation in housing was very rigid in Chicago, very rigid. And someone who was in the clergy spoke to Dr. King about it, and he said, "Okay we'll come up and we'll do one march." One march lead to a lot, but then when he did come up, he started moving into these areas that I

was telling you about and that started to call attention to it. He said, "Man there's more race prejudice here than there is in the South." It was that bad. Oh, yeah, and so that what started it there, and that's when the unit that I transferred to started to expand to protect marches.

McDevitt: Yeah, Chicago has always been one of the most segregated cities in the country. What was it like for you? Did you have to go into Italian neighborhoods? Did you have to, when you were on the force, was there a diff...

Fizer: It's not that widespread where you going to different neighborhoods. The only time was like, when I was telling you about we were Altgeld Gardens and we had to go into the city, which was Roseland, which was the south side, and that would be it because your district didn't allow you unless there was a super emergency for cars to move or any place like that. You stayed in your district. And in your district, you had a beat and the beat was just like walking only you were riding. No, no, it wasn't like that, you weren't exposed to that. But on a regular basis, you were exposed to it because a lot of time, white cops didn't want to ride with you for the obvious reasons, and same reasons black cops didn't want to ride with white cops and then finally there got to be some pretty friendly guys. I was riding with a guy for months. One day I looked in the [Chicago] Sun-Times. It says so and so and so has been willed the King Ranch, and I said, "You Son of a B***h. You mean to tell me you've been willed the King Ranch and you never told me." He said, "Well, there ain't nothing to tell. As soon as I get some money I have to invest it back with the lawyer to try and keep it going." I'm riding with this guy and he's sitting next to me and he is practically a trillionaire…This is a whole lot of stories man.

McDevitt: Do you remember when JFK was assassinated?

Fizer: Mhm.

McDevitt: What was that like?

Fizer: I was in the Sears store on 79th street and this young white kid and I used to go in there to buy everything because we got a 10% discount as officers. He said, "Did you hear that the president just got killed?" I said, "Okay, what's the punch line?" Because we told each other jokes and stuff. He said, "No seriously come in here." We went to where the TV room was and they, and all of the TV's were blank and they were announcing it and I couldn't believe it. I was in total shock. I liked that guy man. I like what he stood for, as a sailor, when he was in the navy, and I like his wife because she spoke several languages. And things of that nature, and low and behold. Yes, sir. That really got me. I was no good for two or three days. I liked him a lot.

McDevitt: Was that pretty common in the black community?

Fizer: Oh, yeah. He was well respected, yeah. He had done one thing that kind of shook people up a little bit. When Dr. King got put in jail, he reached out and got Dr. King out of jail and was running for office as president of the United States at that time, and that helped to push him over. He got a lot of black votes.

McDevitt: And what did you think about Johnson? LBJ?

Fizer: LBJ was just a cut below [President Donald] Trump. He was a buffoon, but he was also a good politician because everything that Kennedy had on the books regarding Civil Rights, he got passed. Everything, and believe it or not, he was able to do that, because he was, they say he would kick you and do everything. Did you read that yeah? I uh, he was something else. Until they found out his wife owned a lot of ghetto property. Yeah.

McDevitt: I didn't hear about that.

Fizer: She did, but she had inherited it. But still it was her's. But yeah, Lyndon Johnson, he was something else, but he did pass everything. I can see them going back to Washington from Texas and she still had blood on her pink outfit, yup.

McDevitt: And Dr. King talked a lot, the reason I asked about Malcom X is [because] he said, in one of his speeches he talked about, "Look if we don't identify these problems, you're going to start to have a lot of angry black men that are just going to start fighting the system hard," and you started seeing it. Did you have any interactions with like, black panthers or anything at the time?

Fizer: Oh, lord yeah. When I went into that outfit called the human relations section where I was dealing with them every time he came to town, they assigned us one okay organization that was on the side of the law and everything like that and two hostile organizations, and the Black Panthers were a part of that scope at that time. Them' guys were something else man, but I used to play the game with them. I'd go in and they'd say, "Well, Yeah you a white folks ni**a. Yeah you in here doing so and so, and so and so, we don't want nothing to do with no honkies, and you either." And I say "Well, if you don't want anything to do with honky's, why you drinking the honky beer? That's Budweiser. We didn't make that." And all of a sudden the atmosphere would start to change a little because, you know, even they had some logic about them. But you have to stay sharp man. If you didn't and it did, if you think they could intimidate you, oh s**t, they would. Now, when we used to go to the Lodge of Muhammad, was the head of it then. When we went to go to their place, we had to check our guns, and there was no doubt about it, if you didn't do it, you couldn't come in. So we would let

them check our guns, and we'd go in and sit down, and then we'd go back and make reports because that was one of the hostile organizations.

McDevitt: And you took, to do the human relations you took a pay cut, correct?

Fizer: I did. I was making detectives pay as a communicator in the communications section, but then when I went, when I transferred to the human relations section, then I had to go back to regular pay, patrolman's pay. But I didn't mind because it was exhilarating.

McDevitt: When was the first time you met Dr. King?

Fizer: He had come to town and was meeting on the south...he had several times where he would come into town for different reasons. He'd come into town and then he would meet up with some people from the University of Chicago, and they would go into a private meeting, and that was a fundraiser. It was full of wealthy people. And then he would come into town and they were strategizing for a march, and that's when we really got to talk, and finally, after he got to know our group, and he got to respect our group because we were there to protect him. He never would have gotten assassinated in Chicago. Not with as good as we were, because we were really, really good. And so, I used to, bring a tape recorder with me because that was part of my cover, that like I was a recorder, so that the general public wouldn't think I was on his side, and I asked him one day, "Dr. King, I really enjoy what you say, would you say something to my children.?" He said, "Sure, what are their names?" And I told him, and I wrote it down for him and then he made a little speech right into my tape recorder.

McDevitt: Do you still have it?

Fizer: Oh, yeah. I gave it to my daughter. It's on a reel to reel tape.

McDevitt: So the next question is, what do you remember from when he got killed?

Fizer: When Dr. King got killed, I knew there was going to be hell to pay all over, and I reported to work. And when I got to work that day, you could stand on Madison Street see fires as far as you could see. Believe it or not, it was selective burning. Certain stores, white or black or Jewish or whatever, never got touched because they would pass up those stores because they were okay with the folks in the hood, and burn down all the rest of it.

McDevitt: Do you think it was planned? Do you think the riots were planned out by certain by certain groups?

Fizer: No, it was spontaneous. It was spontaneous, but that's just a way that these people felt; the gangs and so on down the line. It's a strange way of communication that goes on in the hood. Word gets out about certain things, and certain things happen. Oh, yeah.

McDevitt: And the military was called into Chicago. What was your day like? So the riots in Chicago started the day after he was assassinated. What kind of duty do you have that day? Do you remember it?

Fizer: Our duty was just to communicate with the people who we had been communicating with, at this restaurant. The Urban League, and some of the gangs and so on down the line. I took a job for a while with this governor's office and got sent down to East St. Louis. I will never forget it. The first thing I did was I pulled two gangs together, not together, but I met with them and told them there was a park, and I had a serious budget for that park, but the young black mothers couldn't take their children out there because you guys are shooting and carrying on them, and I got them both to pledge that they would never go on that ground if I develop it, and I got the governor to okay it and made it a beautiful thing for little kids; little swings and slides and places where mothers can sit with their children and relax and not worry about anything happening to them. It was like a neutral ground.

McDevitt: What gangs? Was it the Vice Lords or was it...

Fizer: This was down in St. Louis, they were a different type, different gangs. One was a young guy who was a preacher by day and a gang runner by night, and I remember once the governor was supposed to be down there, and we had held this big meeting and…they said, "Well, he is being held up because of the weather at the airport." They came to me, told me and Langston, they said, "You guys just get out of town. We know damn well there ain't nothing wrong with that airport. We're going to tear this MF up tonight." And, s**t, next plane. Lombard Air Field here I come. Zoom out of there. But yeah oh yeah. Them' guys, you know, one of the things that powers that be sometimes make a mistake and think that their adversaries are fools. That they're dumb and don't know what's going on. That's not true. That's not true, man. People are as smart as you can make it. They just don't have the advantages of other people, but they're smart as hell. Oh, yeah.

McDevitt: And after your service after World War II, what did you think about the Vietnam War?

Fizer: Well...

McDevitt: Cause this is all going on at the same time. Yeah, it's picking up.

Fizer: Absolutely, from World War II, Korea, Vietnam, those were the three wars, but…I had a son who went to Vietnam, and he was destroyed. One of the things that, that Asians do is, they defeat each other with drugs and so on down the line, and that was one of the things that they made sure that most of the Americans got ahold of was drugs. A lot of guys came back from Vietnam totally destroyed, and America didn't make it any better because they treated the Vietnam veterans like they stole something, and so it was…I didn't have an opinion about it, but I knew that if you were there, war is Hell. I knew that but as far as what was going on, I wasn't sure today why they were there unless now I see where big business has got its fingers in the pie. If there's a profit to be made, and where ever there's chaos, there's profit.

McDevitt: Did you think it was an unfair war. That they were systematically trying to put more blacks in the field than whites for Vietnam?

Fizer: By that time, Truman had integrated the forces, and if you were in the service, your ass was going to Vietnam, and there were a lot of black marines at that time integrated into the regular corps and lo and behold man, they paid a price, a serious price, wow. Yeah, but it was not, it was rough boy, and them Asians are some hell of a fighters man.

McDevitt: How long were you on the force? How long did you end up serving?

Fizer: Ten years.

McDevitt: Ten years. What did you do afterwards? Oh and real quick, 1965, you started the Montford Point Association.

Fizer: Yes.

McDevitt: How did that come to be? What was your inspiration? [Ruffling noises] We can look at that afterwards.

Fizer: Oh, I have a sheet that tells you how it was formed. That's what I was looking for. We decided that this should not go to waste. That through all the adversity that we had come through and was still going through, that we should form something to commemorate it. So consequently, in Philadelphia, they started a small group and called it just that, and we had the first convention here in Chicago, which was six months later, and that's how the Montford Point Marines get started, but we also had a, a senator here, I can't think of his name right now, who was a former active duty marine as well, and Charles Percy, who was a Senator. He was a Republican, and the two of them joined forces to help us form the organization, and that's how it got started.

McDevitt: How many members were there originally?

Fizer: Oh, there was around two hundred, maybe three hundred. But then we started, Chicago developed a chapter, New York a chapter, California, New Orleans, and so on down the line. Now we have thirty-five chapters and we even going to start up one in Japan.

McDevitt: And did you get in contact with Trigger Bill through that?

Fizer: You know what, Trigger just kind of dropped off the face of the Earth. I never was able to find him, but I had, there were three other guys that would run together; Edward, Edwin, and Eliot. We were the three amigos. Yeah, oh, yeah. We used to steal gum and gas. It was rationed at the time. It was a, it was something else, boy. But there was certain guys, we had one guy from Minnesota, his name was Trospar, and he was a Major. He had never been exposed to black people in his life, never been around them. Yeah, and he turned out to be okay. Oh, what was his name, I just called a name. The guy with the football. He turned out to be pretty good. Bobby Troupe, the musician, turned out to be pretty good. Some people could see the value in us, and we were making some serious contributions and boy we wanted to be so perfect that the guy on post number one, going out the gate, if you came through there and you didn't look right, he'd say, "You don't look right, go back and change that shirt. Go, go back and change." He had that power that we had agreed on, that you were not going to go out that gate and misrepresent us because we wanted to be the sharpest thing on the street. Oh, yeah, absolutely.

McDevitt: And I'm obviously guilty of it, I just glossed over it, they call Korea the forgotten war, and I didn't even mention it, did you have a bunch of buddies, a bunch of Montford Pointers fight in Korea?

Fizer: Oh, a whole lot of them. A lot of them were called back into service and sent to Korea. I have one buddy right now, who just got out of the hospital; he was called back to Korea. Payne, former chapter president, was called back into Korea, man. And the guy asked me if I wanted to re-up and I told him, "Absolutely not." I had taken enough chances on my life; I wasn't going up that ante. Come on you run out of luck pretty soon.

McDevitt: It's a numbers game.

Fizer: You're doggon' right. It was a story about, I read about an Air Force, a white pilot, and a black pilot. The black pilot got hit his engine goes, and he was able to land safely into some rocks on Korea, but he was trapped in this plane and couldn't get out. This other guy crashed his plane so he could get over and help

him, but he couldn't get him out of that plane because he was that jammed in. And a helicopter picked him up, and he went back sixty years later and spoke to the Korean government and they were able to find some remains and get him back to his family. Isn't that something? Some really good things happened man. Among people, man. We had, I remember, one time, we had a guy, he was a lieutenant. He had done combat duty in Guadalcanal. His name was Terry, he was a small guy, but we used to call him Tiger Terry because he could walk and he could walk on twigs and they wouldn't snap. The next thing you know your ass is dead. Oh man, Terry was something else boy. Yeah. A lot, a lot, of people, I remember, boy. I remember, there was a sergeant called Shaw. He was part of our training. He used to crack me up. He'd mess with me all the time. He'd say, "Fizer!" "Yes sir. What is it Sergeant?" "Did it ever occur to you, you look like a god?" I said, "I do?" He said, "Yeah, a goddamn fool." [Laughter] Those were some great guys, and they were a**holes like anything else, but that helped to make up for the times when they was bad, you know.

McDevitt: And I didn't touch on it before, when you were going through Montford Point you didn't have really any interaction with the soldiers on Lejeune at that time. Did you ever see, because now-a-days we just get treated like trash through boot camp; I mean they tear us apart. We're… they getting a lot of the… obviously it was different, and the racism, but how much better would you say their life was day to day than yours going through training?

Fizer: Now, you mean?

McDevitt: No, back then, like in the '40s.

Fizer: Well, I have no idea, but it sure, it was tough, but wasn't as tough as ours because if they said a ten mile run, they'd double ours to twenty. Oh, yeah. But uh, the thing about, the most, it's always what you can't do that always makes you want to know what's over there. What's on the other side because it didn't matter, we knew that they were no tougher than us. We knew they couldn't shoot no better than us. Oh, when boot camp, headlines read, "North Carolina's coldest winter in eighteen years," and we're going out on the rifle range. I'll never forget this man. I was young, I was a kid. I was sixteen and a half, seventeen years old, and you know you're snapping in, snapping in, sitting, standing, prone, and came time to fire for effect, and for a record, and I was telling the guy lying next to me, Davis, I said, "I can't. I'm from the South, I'm freezing. My hands are frozen. I cannot even feel the trigger." He said, "Fizer, relax." He said, "All you got to do right now is think that you're in a lodge with a big fire place, you and your girl. You got your shoes off; you're wiggling your toes. You feel warm, and you and she are stroking each other." It's a nice warm feeling, and that guy took my mind, man. All of a sudden I became warm. I felt

good, rolled over, and fired that rifle. I'll never forget Davis as long as I live. Wasn't that a nice story?

McDevitt: It is.

Fizer: Oh, I'm telling you.

McDevitt: And it's a good thing you didn't go to Korea because it was as cold as hell.

Fizer: Woo, man, am I ever. Oh brother. It was cold, and they didn't have new equipment. Their clothes were World War II clothing and for the Pacific, none of it for winter.

McDevitt: Yeah, what a terrible three years.

Fizer: Yeah, it was it was. I felt sorry for those guys.

McDevitt: Did you trade any stories with any of your buddies? Did you talk to them about their Korean experiences?

Fizer: Oh, yeah, because we have a... for the Montford Point Marnie's, we have a meeting hall at 7111 Vincennes. And there's a whole lot of guys who were in our organization that are Korean. Some guys got really messed up man. One of my best friends, boy, he really got messed up, boy. Yeah, yeah. I'm sorry.

McDevitt: No go ahead, what were you going to say about your buddy?

Fizer: He had plates in his head from being hit and stuff. What were you going to say? I'm sorry.

McDevitt: I was going to ask if— the military kind of lead the way for desegregation, were things already starting to change for your friends in Korea. Were they a lot better for them, treatment wise?

Fizer: They were not a lot better, but they were better. By the way, one of my PTSD meetings the other day, a guy put a tape on, if I don't see you again, I'll send it to you, but you can send it back to me. This is... I've heard a lot of things about doctors and psychiatrists and all that, but this man got up and said, "I am going to tell you something about PTSD that you've never heard before, and that is war is just like everything else. You miss it. You miss the smell of ordinance; you miss the smell of powder; gun powder. You miss the smell of this. You miss the responsibility of this. You miss shooting at people. You miss getting shot at," and I never thought about it like that. That's the clearest thing I've ever heard. You miss it. Are you out of the service now? Do you miss it?

McDevitt: I do.

Fizer: Exactly. I could not believe that man had come up with that, and he hit home with it.

McDevitt: And a lot of guys try to emulate it. They try to find something in their lives to take their space.

Fizer: You can't do it. It doesn't exist, but you miss it, man. Isn't that something?

McDevitt: A lot of the people that I talk to, and myself, as soon as I got out I just had to get into something and I had to get into something else. For you, those eight years, you couldn't find good work...

Fizer: Nothing.

McDevitt: Was it really disheartening? Was there moments of...

Fizer: I nearly went out of my mind. I came that close to being a criminal. Yes, sir. Oh, yeah, I mean it was blank. It was blank, and so I just kept drinking, and I said, "I am destroying myself, I got to stop it," and all of it is self-healing. I had to do it myself. Man alive, but boy that was a terrible period for me.

McDevitt: How did you find a path? How did you find a path out of it?

Fizer: Ah, I never liked being self-destructive. I never did like it even when I was boxing. If I got hit, I fought harder to keep from getting knocked out. That's the same way I feel about drugs. I don't want no drugs. I don't want nothing controlling me, and, and I kept saying there's going be something. I just kept doing things and doing things, and trying things and doing things. I wanted to fly so bad, I used to go out to Midway Airport and pay ten cents and go up on the roof and watch the airplanes come in. That's how bad I wanted to fly, until I met a friend and him and I got together bought an airplane.

McDevitt: And do you think that was to try to supplement to get that adrenaline going to try and get that kind of feeling?

Fizer: Absolutely, because I wanted to fly from the very first day I went over to that Air Core guy, and uh, then when…that was the thing that preceded my being in the police department and wanted to fly the chopper. Leonard Baldy, I never will forget his chopper crashed and he was killed, and that was the job opening for me. I mean it was like service. Somebody gets killed, they get killed, and you want to step right up and fill it up, and that's how I knew a little about flying.

McDevitt: And now, I don't want to touch on too personal an issue, but you said your son had a really rough time in Vietnam, what was that story? What's that?

Fizer: Drugs.

McDevitt: Drugs? Which one? Was there one in particular?

Fizer: This was one of my youngest sons from my first encounter in marriage and, he's alive right now, and he's a functional human being, but he'll never be the man his father was. Believe me. Yeah, he um…totally messed up man.

McDevitt: Sorry to hear it. How many kids did you have?

Fizer: Six.

McDevitt: How many boys? How many girls?

Fizer: Two boys, four girls.

McDevitt: And did any of the other ones serve? Did your other son serve?

Fizer: No. I didn't really want him to go, but he was just trying to follow in my footsteps because I talked so glowingly about the corps. I didn't like it, but I didn't hate it, you know; [it was] one of those things, but low and behold, at all, I concentrated on education for my kid's man. I have a daughter, she's a cracker jack in medicine man, is she ever. Woo! Yes, sir. She's about to take over an entire hospital in Brockton, MA. Yeah, she is that. She's sharp, boy.

McDevitt: When did you start feeling a sense of pride? Because I assume those first eight years after you're out there you're just like...

Fizer: Oh no. I was feeling like a Vietnam vet. There was no difference. Yeah. Oh, theirs was from the general public and mine was just from a certain public, but uh, I've always had a... my mother had a strong sense of family being and that kind of was what stuck with my most of the time, I just didn't want be on the seedy side of life. I wanted to be something and I wanted to be somebody. I remember as a kid growing up, we lived in public housing, a project, and I used to admire the guy who came in to manage that office in the morning. It was black man and he did a good job. I managed to kind of look at him and want to be like him.

McDevitt: So going into the '70s, you talked briefly about the gangs in St. Louis, did you notice…you got out of the police department in the '60s correct?

Fizer: Yeah, yeah.

McDevitt: What did you do after that?

Fizer: Taught school for a while.

McDevitt: What subjects?

Fizer: More than one. The guy who was the superintendent at that time was a friend of mine, and he asked me would I be interested in teaching? And so I told him I'd take a shot at it. So he said, "I'd like to place you at Bloom Trail High School." Which was like Bloom High School in Bloom Trail, and I said, "Okay, fine." Well, when I got there, he gave me what was called the Socially Maladjusted Group. Now, I mean, I'm strong and I'm tough, but you know this is really something else. Their conduct was so bad, socially maladjusted was true. They had us in a trailer on the campus, not in the regular school because it was too disruptive. So I had a trailer with twelve guys in it that nobody else can handle. And I used to have to think of ways to get these guys to be, to educate them. And so I was trying to think of a way to teach them math. So one day I had an idea. I walked in the classroom and I said, "Hey, look out the window to see if anybody's looking." "No Mr. Fizer. It's okay." I said, "Well, let me tell you what. This morning I found a kilo in my driveway." You know what that is?

McDevitt: A kilo of…

Fizer: Absolutely. And all of a sudden it got real quiet in there. And I said, "I don't know what to do with this s**t." You got to talk their language. I said, "So, um, anybody got any ideas." They said, "Well, hell yeah!" Man if you get to the language that people understand, they could do math like you couldn't believe. They showed me how to mix it, how to cut it, how to package it. How I could make this much on it, and that much on it, if I did so and so and so, and one of them said, "Hey, Mr. Fizer, you got us doing math ain't you." I said, "No, no. Hey, man, I'm telling what I got here." "Well, we'll help you out here." I said, "No, I don't want no help. I'm going to do this by myself." And so they taught me how to break that shit down, and I said, "Now isn't that good. Now that you got the money from your drugs, you coming to me, I'm a card dealer, you can't even count the interest rate I'm going to charge you." I said, "Ain't none of you got a damn bank account, you don't know what it is to be inside of a bank, where you're supposed to be," and all of a sudden I got the light going on, and all of a sudden one day I'm going over there to cash my check, two of them coming out of the bank saying, "We got bank accounts." So I was very effective with doing that. Now, here's the other bad thing, they had never been out of that school district. So it dawned on me, what the Hell, I got permission from the museum, I got my bosses permission, and then all of a sudden I went into the kitchen, and I

said, "I want you to pack me—" Oh, yeah, and I got transportation— "some lunches, breakfasts and lunch for twelve people, so and so and down." "Well, you have to get Mr. so and so's permission." "It's already there." I put that stuff together, got myself a bus driver. I got them all the same colored t-shirts and then I told them, and I said, "We're going down here among civilized people. Any shit from anybody, you're going home and you're never going to see this again, but this is the first time that you're going to the museum, you're going to see the museum and you're going to tell them how fascinating it was and so on down the line." You know any trouble I had? Keeping them out of the lunch. They loved it and they were just as obedient as could be.

McDevitt: It's just incredible to think that there are so many kids like that, that never get to leave their neighborhoods. They live in one of the greatest cities in the world, and they're stuck.

Fizer: In the world! And man, but you know what, from then on they could relate to me. They got to respect me and so on down the line because one day I was coming across Lincoln Highway, and I had a little regular car that I was getting ready to give to one of my kids going to school, and I ran out of gas because the gas gage wasn't working. I go into a gas station, on that same Lincoln Highway, Route 30, and I said, "I need to get some gas," and I had this plastic container." And the manager of the station said, "We can't give you no gas in that, it's against the law." And a voice in the back room said "Get a man some gas." And he came out and he said, "Mr. Fizer, you don't remember me, do you?" It was one of my students. Yeah.

McDevitt: Do you think looking at kids nowadays, can you still relate with kids nowadays?

Fizer: Law has taken the ability to communicate from you because before and, if you knocked a guy on the knuckle on his head, it was okay, now you do it, you go to jail, or worse. Girls are coming to school with their chest's hanging out, nipples showing through, pants cut so low you can see the pubic hair. I went into Newball, and I said, "Newball, can't you do something about this?" He said, "Fizer, if we attempted to do anything about it, to legislate it here in school," he'd say, "we'd be in court in the morning." That's how it is nowadays, it's just like when they took prayer out of school man. Look how things are going awry. This women, one women, didn't like prayer in the school, and she sued and they said okay. You don't remember that, but you've heard of it. You know what happened to her? She was murdered, and one of sons became a priest.

McDevitt: Yeah, I don't subscribe to all that. I think if you're teaching one religion in school you got to teach them all. I honestly don't think there's enough time in the day.

Fizer: Yeah, but just some basic respect. Things like, thou shall not kill, thou shall not steal, just some basic things, is what they could still teach, but they don't.

McDevitt: And after the experiences with your son, what do you think about the situation with drugs in the communities?

Fizer: Habits, you know, everybody's different. It's just like me. When I got ready to quit smoking, I quit like that. There are some people who can never quit. Will never ever be able to quit because their system is dictating how they live. These kids nowadays don't realize the danger. When you step across that line, with any drug, and these damn fools out sniffing this and out snorting that, and when as soon as they shut off one avenue, they find something else. They're on a self-destruct case. I don't understand that. That's never appealed to me. Has it ever appealed to you?

McDevitt: No not really. I'm of the same mind as you. Some people are going to do it, and they're going to go. It's the same with alcohol and it's the same with anything like that.

Fizer: You don't know what your limits are and you cannot trust it, because you don't know what the human system is. Everyone is different. Every last one is different. Man, I feel sorry for some of them out here boy.

McDevitt: But I look at the gangs, and I see how much money they make from drugs, from illegal drugs. It makes me wonder if what we're doing is correct. If you look at the prison population, if you look at the...

Fizer: Well, let me tell you what, and I've known this for a very long time. I knew as soon as they found a way to tax drugs, it would become legal. All they've been interested in the whole while is the bottom line. Now the other people are just gonna be thrown onto the tracks, but brother that's what it is. It's all about that. Nowadays, look it, they opened up these places, and there's oh how nice, you opened up a "medical marijuana." Bull****. It's taxation. Money, money, money.

McDevitt: And what do you think about the police department today, in Chicago?

Fizer: Dr. King never would have died when we were here. Never. I guaranteed he never would have died if he had been instead of Alabama, [TN], would have been here. Nowadays, I don't know. These people nowadays are so self-centered. It's a, "Hooray for me, f**k you," attitude is what it is. They don't give a damn about nothing. Self-respect, what is it? It's, oh man.

McDevitt: Yeah I listened to the, [Dr. King] has the speech "The Three Evils of Society" that he gave in Chicago in 1967.

Fizer: Yeah. Yeah.

McDevitt: And, you can just switch names of, you can take Mayor Daley out and throw Rahm Emmanuel in. It's all the same.

Fizer: Yep. It hasn't changed a bit, but hey... it's a... wow. And I have faith in America. I keep saying to myself, we're coming out of this, but do we have to get in so deep before we come out? I don't know. I don't know.

McDevitt: And what do you think about the Black Lives Matter, and movements like that.

Fizer: It's for the times, it's appropriate, okay, for the times, but it's not the solution. It's just right now an answer to frustration, is why they're out there. There's got to be a solution to this thing. Of course, I thought that when Dr. King died, will there ever be somebody, and here's [Barack] Obama. So there's a solution, but what is the solution. I have... I'm not a combat Christian, but I was a Christian before I went to combat, and I believe in it man because I saw a lot of people lose something precious to them in their lives, and the same thing is right now. What's going on? You know, there was a time when a guy would stick you up, he was a robber and that's it, or if they burglarize your house he'd run. Rather than, but not now. These people man. Look at these police men in Park Forest the other day. Goes over to an empty house, and the guy shoots him, and he's lingering between life and death. I live in Park Forest man. I didn't know the youngster, but I've heard of his fathers, father, chief of police somewhere. That is a sad thing boy. Man. Man.

McDevitt: When you look around there's... what do you think of the wars going on nowadays? What do you think about the wars in Iraq, and Afghanistan, and ISIS?

Fizer: ISIS, baffles me. I ain't never seen anybody who would want to take a piece of dynamite, strap it to you're a** and then go kill a bunch of other people, and all because somebody tells you there's fifty virgins on the other side. Get out of here man. Give me mine now. What kind of religion is that?

McDevitt: Do you see any parallels between the Kamikazes in World War Two?

Fizer: There's no difference. Fill their heads full of s**t and they do this, that's what they were. Kamikaze didn't just come from the air, they were on the ground brother, and I mean you had, the only reason you could stop killing them was because you ran out of ammo. Believe me.

McDevitt: Did you ever see a Banzai charge? They used to call them banzai charges where they just all...

Fizer: Not knowingly. I mean, might have been there. But I didn't know it was happening at the time. All I know was get me out of here, hey man. Let me tell you, I would shoot anything that moved, I wouldn't care if it was a dog, animal, child, whatever it is. If I'm in that jungle, you're on the other side. Yes sir, oh man, cause let me tell you because you didn't know who to trust. S**t. Just like my buddy, I talk to him all the time, him and I worked together for a while, Mackenzie. He was with Lt. Calley when they killed all those people, but the point of it is, they would put on black outfits at night and come out and kill your ass. So you don't know who to kill or not to kill. He wouldn't apply for his benefits for years because Calley and them were all under investigation and stuff like that.

McDevitt: What incident was that?

Fizer: My Lai.

McDevitt: Oh yeah, the My Lai Massacre.

Fizer: The big guy and I, he used to work for me. I had a small business at the time, and uh, he wouldn't apply. He was scared to apply, because they were prosecuting our own people. Lt. Calley, and there was another guy. He eventually wound up going to work for a helicopter factory in Wisconsin. And they, when they finally exonerated Calley, then my buddy was exonerated because he was with that group.

McDevitt: And obviously it's totally different, but you were just saying, "Look, if you're on the other side, and I'm on the patrol, what happens, happens." Do you think some of that is just normal to warfare? Do you think some atrocities are just...?

Fizer: Survival. I mean, that's the only thing I can think of. I never wanted to hurt anybody, but I wasn't going to let nobody hurt me, and that was my theory man. I taught my guys all the time to be very careful. To make sure that your weapon is working well. Cause boy, "This is my rifle. There are many like it but this is mine." Do you remember that?

McDevitt: Yeah. "Without me it is useless, without it, I am useless."

Fizer: That's what I'm telling you. Yes, indeed. That rifle, boy. Don't be without it man. However, there was a time where I thought I was going to die. When I first went into service, they still had the Springfield .03's from World War I man. And I said, "If I go to war with this, I'm going to die." And along came Jones; the M1 Garand.

Pow, pow, pow, click. pow, ow, pow, click. I said, "Man, this is it." That was a prayer for me. Oh man. Yes. Oh, God Yes. Woo! Brother. That was a lifesaver man. Whoever Garand is, I love him forever. Him and Harry Truman.

McDevitt: Did you keep up your marksmanship after you got out, did you still shoot for a while afterwards.

Fizer: Oh, yeah.

McDevitt: While you were on the force.

Fizer: Not only that, but before I got on the force. I had brought home several .25 caliber rifles, some Japanese rifles, and there was a place in Algonquin, Illinois. It wasn't all developed like it is now, and this guy had a rifle range up there. You could go up there, pay five dollars, and shoot all day. He sold ammo and stuff like that, and mounts where you could sit and mount your rifle. I didn't to buy that one. Sh*t what do I need that for?

McDevitt: What other stuff did you bring home from the Pacific?

Fizer: Oh, I brought home a Thompson, which I had to throw in the Ocean because they were searching you before you got off the ship.

McDevitt: Yeah, it's tough to hide.

Fizer: Yeah, you just can't hide that. But my rifles, they let me bring home my rifles, and uh, oh, I had a Samurai sword. Let's see, what else. I had a couple Flags, but you know, when you're getting up tight for money, you sell stuff, and man I had some days when that being up tight was being something else. But yeah, oh, yeah, I had a lot of stuff man. I had a gas station at 71st and Wabash, and I had so much armament in my gas station, I was the only gas station along the whole strip, never got robbed because they thought I was crazy anyway. Yeah. That's the same way I was with my kids and school man. I would go up to them kids selling dope and schools and I'd say, "Hey I know what you're doing. The principle may not know what you're doing, but you see that kid over there or that kid over there, if you ever say anything to them about drugs, I'm going rip your ass out." And you know what, never had no trouble. You come and see my daughters, I put you through the third degree. The third degree was simple. My daughters were always perfect, ready to go, sitting there waiting. On the blow, I said, "Don't move." Knock on the door, I said, "Go upstairs, I'm getting the door." "I'm here to see Kathy. I'm here to see Sheryl. I'm here to see Jill." "Come on in son. Have a seat." I'd say, "By now you can guess. I'm the father." "Oh yes sir." I said, "Well, I think there's a few things we should know about each other. Number One, my daughters have all been spanked, so that means you are never

to put your hands on her. Number two, if you acting a damn fool behind the wheel, and it's three o'clock in the morning and my daughters tell you to stop the car and let them out, you'd better let them out, I'll find them." I said, "If you ever put your hands on my daughters for any reason, I'll kill ya before God gets the news." I said, "Do we understand each other?" "Uh, yes sir. Yes, sir." I said, "Fine." I said, "If you treat my daughters with respect, I'll treat you like my own son. Need a few extra bucks for the night?" "Oh, no Mr. Fizer, no, no." They'd get out in the car and say "You know what, your dad is crazy." They'd say, "Yeah, we've been told that." But I never had, not one bit of trouble because I met it before it got into anything. You make sure that whoever is coming to see your daughters understands where you coming from, you never have a problem. Believe me, you never have a problem, but if you one of them mean-y mouth people, whose like "I hope god will do it. I hope that the police will do it." I said, "I'm God and the police man." You understand where I'm coming from? I said, "As long as we know about each other we're going to be okay." I said, "And I'll treat you like a gentleman but if you step across that line, you just died."

McDevitt: Honesty and communication.

Fizer: No question about it. Do you have children?

McDevitt: I do not.

Fizer: Well you will. Oh you going to have some, but now you know what to tell them. Yes, sir.

McDevitt: And did you ever make any trips back out to the Pacific. Did you ever go out to Japan?

Fizer: No. I've had the desire but I didn't, but you know what, I've heard some bad things about Guam.

McDevitt: Really?

Fizer: Yeah, man. That the Federal Government has taken over Guam and the people there don't get dips**t. It's just a foreword base is what it is. And I read that one day on a very confidential note. Yeah.

McDevitt: Yeah, I had some friends who were on Iwakuni, and uh, there's a couple of bases in South Korea for a little while, and they loved being out there, but I've never met anybody, aside from veterans, who have been to Guam. Never.

Fizer: Yeah. It's not good. I don't talk about it because it ain't my business.

McDevitt: Is that why you didn't go out there or did you just not have time?

Fizer: No, no. I would have liked to go on back because being a visitor, you get treated royally. You know. But I just never had the opportunity nor the funds to do it. I had a group that had expressed any desire. Well, we could get a bargain ticket and go, but I wouldn't mind going. I ain't going on no cruise ship. You see where that cruise ship that just kept going on the news.

McDevitt: No I didn't see that. But I saw the one where the captain just abandoned ship when all those people were down.

Fizer: Man. What a punk, man. What a punk he turned out to be. Holy mackerel. But that ain't nothing but a floating hotel man. You see the size of them things. No way in hell are you getting...I will not get on an airbus because they're doomed to fail, all of them. That's my thinking. Here's an airplane that has five-hundred people in it, and you going to get on it and if something happens, you think you're going to get out alive? Get the hell out of here. Come on man. Airbus 320, the big one, and then Boeing said, "Not me." They ain't building nothing that big. No, my God. That's a terrible thing boy. And the same thing with them cruise ships. You don't stand a chance. Buddy of mine, same guy I was telling you about from Vietnam. I was telling him, I said, "Howard, you know the first thing I do when I get aboard anything that's floating…Find me a life-preserver." That's the first thing I look for. If I don't find that, I ain't getting aboard. That's what you better be about. You and your wife. One for her and one for you. And when you do, sleep with them. Do let them put them back in the rack where everybody got to go and orderly get one. Sh*t. Get it now and bring yours into your room. They'll disagree with you for a while, but they'll acquiesce. Survival man, survival.

McDevitt: Do you find yourself, do you always analyze every situation?

Fizer: Absolutely. Only one time I got tricked. We were on a trip, to see Ruby Falls; see Ruby Falls, and my wife, "Come on let's go to Ruby Falls." And, Indians had all kinds of places where they used to go and hide and do stuff, and all that, and there's one right here in Illinois right now, can't think of the name of it, but it was really bad. But this was the place where you go, and you go down an elevator, and the Indian used to go down there and hide, and there was plenty of fresh water, it's cool, it's spacious, and now it's a tourist attraction. I'm down there and I get to the bottom, and I say to the guide, I said, "Now there had to be an exit out here somewhere, how do we get out of here in the case of an Earthquake or something?" He said "There's no other way." I turned to my wife and I said, "Oh, you tricked me, I don't usually get into no s**t like this. The soon as I get out of here, never coming back to Ruby falls again." There's no other way out.

McDevitt: And when there's only one entrance, there's no exit.

Fizer: That's right. Man, alive. I have always been like that. Soon as I look when I get into a theater, I look for exits. Anywhere. Survival man.

McDevitt: Did your PTSD ever manifest itself where you couldn't be around large groups of people? Like when you came back.

Fizer: Oh yeah. Oh, definitely, definitely. Couldn't talk to certain groups of people because they wouldn't understand what the hell I was saying, or what I was talking about, oh lord, yeah. But it's suffering in silence because I never wanted to tell nobody. I never, "Oh, we're going to die all." None of that crap. I just made sure that I could survive whatever it is, but it's not a healthy feeling.

McDevitt: Does it get a lot easier with time? Have you noticed?

Fizer: Everything does. Everything does. It's just, you also know that you're not the man you used to be, so therefore you even have to make even better preparations for survival. Oh, man. Yeah. Oh, yeah.

McDevitt: Because we're dealing with huge suicide rates in the military nowadays, it's an epidemic almost. Do you have any advice for guys who were dealing with that, they come back home from overseas? Do you have anything that you'd tell them?

Fizer: Well first of all, before you left, what was your life like. You got a find a reason for living. Women, adventure, food, something. You don't...Why don't you just go ahead and expose yourself while you're overseas, if you want to die. What's with this death thing? I have no desire. I want to be here for 150. Yeah, and I'm working on it. No but seriously, I've, I have... I can't even identify with people who want to die. My, gosh. What is this?

McDevitt: So you never had ever a suicidal thought ever cross your mind.

Fizer: Yeah, when I had done something my mom told me not to do. I didn't want to home because I knew she's going to kill me. Not really. Uh, I may have had some fleeting moments of that when I was in the depressive state for a very short time, but it didn't last long because I would have asked myself, "What the hell are you thinking?" Oh, yeah.

McDevitt: What do you think, for you what are the qualities that make up a good marine?

Fizer: You go in a boy, you come out a man. In the marines...I think that everybody, every boy should be conscripted into the service. Every one, I don't care if its

army or whatever it is, but I'm talking about where you get some serious training, not fooling around on the ship because that's technical shit. I'm talking about where his manhood is tested, and that's good for you man. It makes you identify with something. Conquest man. You learn to master a rifle. You learn to master a side arm. You'd be able to take it apart blindfolded and put it back together. That is manhood to me, man. Yes, sir. Then you have a good girl game. Yes, sir. You got a good girl game, you're going to be alright because you don't have to show off, just be a real man, and women will find you boy. Yes, sir.

McDevitt: And like you said, that's one of the good things, that's a purpose, that's something to strive for.

Fizer: And then, see, we have been denied so much. I always look to see what's on the other side. I want to see what's on the other side. What is it they don't want me to have? That's what I want. That why I say, "I don't want to be you, but I want to damn sure be like you." Oh, heck yeah.

McDevitt: And do you ever think the kids today are like, they just complain and bi**h too much, about like? I mean you had it rough. The kids nowadays, they're not dealing with the same stuff that you're dealing with.

Fizer: Hell no. Not even black kids anymore. That's one thing I love about my daughter man. She had raised three kids, and she's done a damn good job. I tell her all the time, I said, "You know, you're a good mom. You remind me of my mother, boy. You have taught your kids to be strong and good." But you know, and the last thing that I did for them was when they were getting ready to get off to college. I said, "Sit down. I'm going to teach you the one thing your parents haven't taught you. How to fight. You know nowadays, you get on these campuses, there's danger on the campus. There's all kinds of people, girls and boys, who will take you out in a minute." And she said, "Oh, dad!" I said, "Don't 'oh dad' me! I'm going to teach these kids how to fight."

McDevitt: You have to learn. It's something that every person needs to know.

Fizer: You should know how to survive, how to protect yourself. It's just like when you're in that boxing ring. What's the last thing the referee tells you, "Protect yourself at all times" And that's what I... each one of them, I taught them. I said, "Yeah, I remember Colonel Bittle. If he can't see you, he can't hit you. First put his eyes out." And I said, "When you get ready to punch somebody, you don't just punch him, you try to punch like you're going through him, and when you hit him like that, they know their being hit." Oh, yeah, I said, "That's all you gotta do. Just learn that." And I said, "If you're threatened, you don't wait for somebody to do something to you, you do it first. The hell with the consequences. Pay them later." Oh, yeah.

McDevitt: What do they say, "It's better to be tried by nine than carried by six."

Fizer: Hello. Ha, ha, ha…ain't that the truth, you got that right. My goodness, yeah, man, man, man.

McDevitt: As we wrap up here, were there any questions that you thought I was going to ask that I didn't cover?

Fizer: Well, frankly, no because conversations like this could go on forever. They really could, I mean. There's something I'm probably saying to you that maybe you'll carry forever, and there's 90% that'll you'll discard, but I'm hoping that it'll take its place here, in the annals of this place, and be a permanent part. I want us to have this. I really do, man, I really want us to have a dedicated room like this because if you ever been online with us?

McDevitt: Yeah, I've been to the website a couple of times.

Fizer: Yeah, but make sure you go the Montford Point site, not just mine. Make sure you go to Montford Point Marines Association and hit on that and see what pops up. There's a ton of stuff on there.

McDevitt: That's where I did some of my research for our interview that we're having right now. It's a great site.

Fizer: Oh, yeah, it is. There's a lot man, and there's certain people I'd like for you to meet. Some of our guys have died off. Some of the good lawyers and stuff like that, but there's one guy right now who rose to be an ambassador. I would really would like for you guys to meet him.

McDevitt: That would be excellent. Maybe when we go up, if he could attend the ceremony on the 16th?

Fizer: He won't be there. No because he, he's a busy man. You know, it's a funny thing. In 2011, I think it was, or 2010, we had a function in Carolina where the Marine Corps really is, went out in the big museum, and he and I sat down and was talking for a few minutes while we were waiting for something to happen, and ever since that day, we've talked every day. He thinks that I have a great savvy. For instance…when they got ready to christen the ship that's named after us, he said, "I'm going to…make our Commandant, an honorary Montford Point Marine," and I had remembered that his wife had done something that I thought was special for me, and I said, "Well, if you're gonna do that we don't want to leave her out because she's very special in my opinion." So I said, "I'll think of something." And we have a shield, like this, only it's smaller, and it fits in the

lapel, I took that shield, and it goes through your lapel, I cut out the part that pierces and had them to weld in a hook on it, and I got a fourteen karat gold chain, eighteen inches long, and put it through there, and made a necklace for her, and had it put into a nice case, with a description of what it was and what it meant, and so on down the line. So at the time, he made her…sorry…made him an honorary Montford Pointer, I made her an honorary, women in the organization.

McDevitt: Hang on one second.

McDevitt: So Ed, to finish up, is there a specific message that you would want the future generations to garner from this interview?

Fizer: I'd like to say that the key to anything is education, and especially if you're from the minority community, education is something that you should treasure, and make sure you get as much as you can for where ever you can and nowadays, the United States Marine Corps is a good place for a black man to be. Believe me, it ain't what it used to be.

McDevitt: Well, on that note, thank you again for sharing your time with us today, it was a pleasure.

Fizer: I hope I made a contribution of some type.

McDevitt: Definitely, definitely, thank you again.