

Interview with Charles Fabian at his home. 769 Bennett Rd., Fairbanks, May 22, 2002.
The other voice is Bruth George.

B: You were in the military. When was that?

C: In 1938, my dad's house burnt down in Waukesha, Wisconsin. It's a little town. I thought I'd join the army. I'm eighteen years old and they said no, we got no room for you. Then the next year, things were different. I got a letter from the army, now they say, we've got an opening. Lot of BS, they had an opening to begin with but they didn't want an eighteen year old kid. Anyway, I ended up in Spokane, Washington in the 4th Infantry. I wanted to get in the cavalry and I'm damn lucky I didn't because that horse had to be taken care of before you did. I got into E Company in the 4th Infantry.

B: This was in '39?

C: Yeah, there was a unit that was in China that was sent back, I don't know why, but they didn't want this unit there. Japan and China were at war.

I might be getting ahead of myself. On the Fourth of July, when I wasn't even in the army for a year or just about a year, I was down in Anchorage and they had a little parade, for the Fourth. I had a date with a girl, her name was Nina Alexander, so I went back to the company to get rid of my rifle, and I just got back into Anchorage and here they come and they said, get back to Fort Richardson, and they took us all back and gave us live ammunition, then that night they said, this is just a maneuver. They don't run a maneuver that way. It was quite awhile before we could get back to town.

B: You don't know what this was all about?

C: No, but I know they expected an attack. That was a foul up.

I ended up here at Ladd Field. They had an outfit they called L Company, it was from the 4th. It was stationed at Ladd Field and it was made up of drunken non-coms and recruits so you can imagine what kind of an outfit it was. So after one year, they sent them down to join their company and they sent C Company up here. That's how I ended up here. That was 1940. Then I heard that Roosevelt told Japan to get out of China. Roosevelt was a regular dictator.

Then Russia went to give them some gold for those airplanes that they got Lend Lease. Well if they were Lend Lease, the rent was pretty high. I was put on as a guard. I'll show you my medals. They give you a medal for just going to sleep.

I was never in combat, but see that blue one? To start off with, Churchill and Stalin, them guys old Roosevelt wanted it sent to Nome. Old Churchill said, put it in a British man-o-war. Guess what, the Germans sunk the GD thing. So then they went by Nome and Russia didn't want to _____ this gold. Now, there was quite a bit of gold and I got that blue medal for being one of the guards that went through Canada.

Well, now, I had to get my discharge recorded. It's a good thing I got it recorded in Wisconsin. Wisconsin, to me, was the dirtiest, rottenest state in the Union. People had given them a sales tax to give to the vets and they gave it to their highway department.

B: So you were discharged up here, though?

C: No, I went back to Wisconsin. I should have stayed here.

My company commander was named Gaffney and I got permission from him to get married. They didn't want us to marry native girls and my wife is part native. Anyway, one company commander we had said, the next one that marries a native girl he's gonna shanghai to Timbuktu. I had to get up and shoot my big mouth off. I said, I'm already married to a native girl. Where do you want to shanghai me to?

(Looking at pictures) This is my wife. This is my mother and here's my grandfather in Scotland.

B: I should have realized that Fabian is a Scot's name.

C: My dad said our relatives were German Jews and the name was changed to Fabian to get away from that. Here's my mother-in-law and Aunt Louise. She was a Harper. Here's my son George. He just retired from the city. Here's George when he got married. And my wife.

B: What prompted you to homestead out here?

C: My company commander says, you guys want to homestead. He knew that down in the states it was rough at that time. So he says, go homestead. So I homesteaded 160 acres. Then they come along with this statehood, so I had to go along with statehood. Biggest mistake I ever made. The only tax we had was the school tax, one dollar a year.

B: Who was out here when you homesteaded? Mr. Bennett must have been here.

C: Oh yeah. He ended up back in the states. See there'd been a forest fire through here and Mr. Bennett built this road to get the wood. There was another guy came in and he built a log cabin right where this house is. He put the logs straight up and down. We tore it down.

My dad had a chance to go to Matanuska and my mother said, no she wouldn't go to Alaska. He missed the biggest chance in his life.

B: Who else on this school district map do you remember?

C: Dr. Fitz was a missionary from China. He came up here and was the one that built the road to Steele Creek. I think Dick Loud's dad was a sheriff or something, a police officer.

B: Did you farm?

C: No. Raised potatoes. Had a John Deere tractor, paid \$1000 for it. It was a small tractor. Now you couldn't buy a back tire for it. Just raised a garden.

B: What kind of work did you do?

C: Well, I was in the army till 1945, then I went to work at a place, a delivery outfit. I decided I didn't want to do that. Then I went to work for the A&P.¹ You know that sign, "Take that job and shove it!" Well, I was the guy told A&P that.....

B: You say you worked as a fireman on the Nenana?

C: Yeah, there had to be 200 lbs. of steam pressure and that's a pretty good-sized boat. It popped off at about 210, so there you are. It burned four cords an hour. I ended up on that. Instead of leaving my wife here, I took her with me down to Tanana then I figured I can see her. It was a free ride for her.

B: How many years did you do that job?

C: It was months. I made one trip down to Galena then back to Tanana.

B: What was your next job.

C: I got transferred to the National Guard and anyway, they drafted these natives into the guard. They worked for an outfit that was putting in the Eielson runway. They'd haul this stuff up to Ladd and the native guys would load up the trucks. They were in a hurry to get it done, so they got a little money from PK.² They paid us, but we just kept it quiet.

B: This was the National Guard that was helping? So, you worked for the National Guard? How many years?

C: Well, I ended up going back to Wisconsin after discharge. I homesteaded before discharge. Got discharged at Camp McCoy.... I bought a '52 Ford pickup and paid \$1800 which is a pretty nice price for up here. My wife and I went back to Wisconsin to please my dad

B: How many kids do you have?

C: Gotta count 'em. Five kids, all living around here.

B: Bennett Rd. goes through your property, doesn't it? Almost in the middle.

¹ In Wisconsin

² Peter Kiewit Construction Co.

C: Up here's my sister-in-law, Audrey Fowler, this side of the road. Her maiden name was Audrey Mayo. When I gave the kids five acres, I charged them for the survey so they still got a pretty good deal.

B: Was the property across the road where they're putting in the new subdivision some of yours?

C: Yeah. Louds had a potato farm started. He gave me \$4000 for what was across the road.

B: How long was it before Bennett Rd. connected up with the Hot Springs Rd.?

C: There was a guy named Farkas where the horse farm is now and he was the one that had the road from here to CHS Rd. He adopted a kid that was mentally retarded. The kid got involved with the farm machinery and instead of shutting the tractor off, he tried to stop it with his hands. I don't know what happened to him.

....Those Russians, they lost that first (shipment of gold) on that British man-o-war. You don't send one boat by itself, you know. The Germans sunk it and in the end, they salvaged the gold. The second shipment of gold, we're talking about tons, not Troy ounces, the university says it was lend lease. I won't argue with them but ton and a half of gold, there should have been four C-47s, they carry one and a half ton apiece. One didn't make it, they overloaded, the others they put two guys on each plane, a civilian pilot, NW airlines. He says, what have we got here? This partner of mine says, it's a military secret. They took it down to Denver. We landed there at midnight. Our first sergeant, his name was Howard, now he'd been a marine in W.W.I so you know that he's no young chicken. He was one of the guards. We didn't unload the gold. They just told us to get out of there and they'd unload it. No change of guard or anything. I was about to shoot that SOB. Old Howard says, let 'em have it. We don't know what happened to the gold after that. It's not because I'm a Russian, it's the truth. Call it lend-lease if you want to but it was a lot of gold.

....Oh, Dr. Fitz. He was also a medical doctor. My wife said, look at the pregnant woman. He said, that's not a woman, that's a man. He's got a tumor. Then he showed us another picture where he took this tumor out. He started the Nazarene Church. He was up in years. He had a daughter, Ishman. Old Gaffney, he wouldn't let anyone be married here and he³ was Gaffney's driver. He was the commander of Ladd. My aunt says, I wish I'd known that. I know his sister. I says, I'm damned glad you didn't.

Bert Stimple and Fitz didn't get along too good. Fitz ended up going back to Montana or someplace....

³ "he"—Fitz's son-in-law?

(Added by telephone) Did you know that Paul Elbert used to be Jack Dempsey's sparring partner? Paul used to underbid everyone on the price of potatoes and Jack Dempsey backed him.

I agree to share this information with other interviewees and others interested in local history.

Name _____

Date _____

Ruth Zozula wrote about Mr. Fabian: I don't know if he homesteaded or not, but he used to do our spring work, getting the ground ready.