

Transcription: Allen Brown

Today is August 8th, 2012. My name is James Crabtree and this afternoon I'm interviewing Mr. Allen Brown. This interview is being conducted in person at the Tyler Veterans Home in Tyler, Texas, and it is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to let us talk to you. The first question that I always like to start off with and Ray now has heard a few of these, so he knows this is right, is just tell us a little bit if you would, sir, about your childhood and your life before you went in the military.

Allen Brown: Well I was born in Panama, up in the interior of Panama, in Cherokee. The province of Cherokee is the last province before you go into Costa Rica. It's the bread basket of Panama. Everything grows very large because there's a volcano down there that's 11,000 feet and it's been dead for 600 years, and you get up to 11,000 feet to the peak of it, it's cold. My mother and dad had a farm in Rovita, Chilaqui, that's about 20 miles northeast of – it's a big province, and when I took my wife up there to see my father's farm, he made sure, and he got mixed up with Jorge Domingo Arias, not the same Arias that's presidents down there, he was from the Conquistadores that killed all the gold, people down there in Peru, the Incas. We lost our farm. When my dad died, we got kicked out.

Were your parents Americans?

Allen Brown: Yeah, Americans.

When did they move to Panama?

Allen Brown: They went down there in 1950. My dad was down there in 1919 or something like that. He and his brother flipped the coin to where they were gonna go, and my dad took Panama. He was a bridge builder for United Fruit. And he built all the bridges, big bridges from just past Mexico. It was Honduras, Nicaragua, Salvador, and built all the big bridges there. They're still there, some of them.

Where was your dad from originally?

Allen Brown: He was born an American citizen. He was listed as an American citizen.

Where was he born? Where was he from in the United States?

Allen Brown: North Carolina, Raleigh. And he was 1 year old in the 1870 census when we were trying to prove ourself Americans, because Torrejos, the dictator down there, said that any American kids born in the canal zone or anywhere in Panama, they are Panamanian citizens, and they had to have something to prove it that they were born in Panama. My first language was Spanish until I was 6 years old, my dad died, and we had to be going back to the States, so I got into school in Waco, Texas. They threw me in grade school and I flunked kindergarten so I had to repeat it.

Because you didn't speak English.

Allen Brown: I didn't speak English. I understood it because my dad talked to me in English, and I would talk to him back, but my mother had to translate. I stayed down there until 1930. We left Panama in 1930.

So you were born in '24?

Allen Brown: '25, September the 8th, 1925.

Do you have any siblings?

Allen Brown: Yes, when I got out of the Navy, I joined the Navy down there, and you didn't have to prove that you was American citizen. They just took you. And I was in military school in Island Academy in Bryan, Texas, for one year, and I learned all their – it was infantry, they taught you infantry, and that made it easy when I went and took my apprenticeship, when I joined the Navy, they wanted to know if you'd had close order drill. I said yes, I was in military school and I didn't have to participate where they send you off for three months – boot camp – I had to, they said you can take it easy. I thought they were gonna have drilling a little bit.

After your father died, your mom and yourself, did you have any brothers and sisters?

Allen Brown: Yes, I did. I had one brother, one sister, and we had a sister, this sister, she got drowned, she fell into the creek. This was my dad's sugar cane that he grew.

In Panama.

Allen Brown: And he was 6 foot 6, and the sugar cane that goes clean up here.

Yeah, that shows how tall that was. We're looking at a photo where it looks like it was 12 feet high or more.

Allen Brown: He was standing on a big rock, and yet the sugar cane was 6 feet above him.

Now are those your sisters?

Allen Brown: This was my sister. She was in that age, she was in the, I was just born when she was born. That was 1927 is when she came into that. This was my dad's refinery and it had all the sugar cane out there, the gas pop pile.

Did your dad speak Spanish?

Allen Brown: No.

But your mom did.

Allen Brown: Yeah.

How was it that your mom came to know Spanish?

Allen Brown: She was in Baylor and she was a teacher, and she took Spanish there and knew it very well.

So she would translate for your dad when you would talk to him as a young boy.

Allen Brown: Yes. And we lost our farm because my dad wanted \$40,000 to buy new machinery, and me as a 4-year-old kid, I looked at all the machinery that he bought and they looked like big rollers, but when I went up in 1960 when we had lost the farm for 30 years and kicked out, the people that owned the thing again, Farias sold it to Charrie, which was a president, and Charrie used our estre azul, the blue star, we had so many toe sacks for the sugar, 100 pounds of sugar, and he used the blue star, my dad's name of the plantation, and he went and Charrie sold it to a German magnet that had chips and he went and turned it into, he planted 20 million orange trees in 1929, and I was 4 years old in '29, and then my sister was 4 years older than me, and there was a little girl that my mother adopted unofficially, and she knew everything that I was doing, and we'd catch parakeets and everything, and I was 4 years old, in 1929, and I would go out there and get the parakeets. I remember it real well as if it was yesterday. And my wife scoffed at it. She said I don't believe a darn thing that he says. How can a kid 4 years old remember that far back?

I believe it.

Allen Brown: She was 9 years old when I was 4, and she says, called him, talking Spanish, she said tia cella – my wife was Mexican American, 4th generation, and she was born in south Texas, an American citizen.

She couldn't believe it that you could remember things from that age?

Allen Brown: She couldn't believe it.

I can remember stuff from when I was 2 years old, so I can believe at 4 you can remember stuff.

Allen Brown: When I was 2 or 3, I remember playing in the sand, but that was nothing to what I was doing. I was climbing mango trees at 4 years old and catching these little green parakeets. There's three kinds of parakeets in Panama – the big tall birds, and they would be male or female until they died, and I used to practice shooting them with my shot gun, and I was wrong to kill them, and the male or the female, I don't know which one it was, they would hang around for a long time looking for their mates. We would catch them with the mangoes and a little stick wrapped up in cloth, and there's two trees, the same family – one is a female tree, one is a male tree of – you remember Mutiny on the Bounty?

Yes sir, I'm familiar with it.

Allen Brown: Yes, well there was the bread fruit tree, and this -

Did you eat bread fruit in Panama?

Allen Brown: Oh yeah, we ate bread fruit. It was a big fruit – you're gonna have another one saying it.

I heard bread fruit doesn't taste very good, is that right?

Allen Brown: Well I liked it.

You liked it?

Allen Brown: Yes, and the bread nuts was like eating the same things up here, I forget what the name of the nuts up here, but the bread nut was the tree that we would cut to get the juice, the sap, and put out all around those, put it on those little sticks that we would put this cloth on it and tie them up there, and the birds would get on it, about 7 of them on a stick and they would be stuck, they would grab them, and they were eating the mangoes, and they were caught. So then before we'd let 'em go, we'd cut all their wings off, the feathers, just about to the quick, and Juanita was the 9-year-old. That was the girl that my mother adopted. She and my sister were about the same age. When I was 4, she was 9, and Selia's soft about it, she's my wife, and she said I don't believe anybody can remember back to 4 years old. She said I can't even remember when I was 6 years old. Because she had to be taken out of school to pick cotton.

Some people have better memories than others I guess. So when your father passed away, the Panamanian government then came in and made your family leave, that's right?

Allen Brown: Not the government, it was this Jorge Domingo Arias. He was of the Conquistadors.

Was he kind of a land baron down there?

Allen Brown: He was a lawyer, and he was a smart lawyer. I remember him looking with his hair back like that. He looked like a bug.

But why was it that your family had to move then, because your mom couldn't run the farm?

Allen Brown: No, we lost the farm.

I guess my question is how did you lose it, your father died, but how did that cause you to lose the farm?

Allen Brown: Well, he had borrowed \$40,000.

OK, so you couldn't repay it.

Allen Brown: And he couldn't repay it, and he made out the contract, they talked the contract over one day, and the next day Arias wrote it all up in Spanish where he had to pay compound interest on the interest, and he had to sell all our sugar, and there's no telling how he robbed all that.

Was it hard for you to leave Panama and come to the United States? I know you said you didn't speak the language.

Allen Brown: It wasn't hard for me. It was hard for my mother is the main thing. She had to come back up to Texas and -

Support the family?

Allen Brown: No she didn't, she stayed in Panama. She got a job with the Panama Canal for 11 years working making these commissary books.

So how was it you came to Waco?

Allen Brown: Well she took me up at 6 years old, and I was given to my aunt. She's got a picture in here of her.

So your aunt lived in Waco.

Allen Brown: We lost this little girl.

Is this your sister?

Allen Brown: That's my oldest sister. She was after my brother, and this was our farmhouse.

Is this your sister that drowned?

Allen Brown: Yes, she went out, my mother was hanging up clothes in the back of this house, and this house here, my dad was here, and my mother had me in her arms right here in the rocking chair, and he told me one time, I'm going to go in the kitchen and get me a glass of water. And I took the glass, and I had to go through the bathroom to get to the kitchen, and I saw the toilet, there's water, took it out of the toilet, and I was right back there in five minutes. He said how did you get this, where did you get this water? I says in Spanish, I said in le les susal, that's the toilet. And he never asked me to get him water anymore. My mother told him les susal means in the toilet, and it was too fast. I went in there and come right back out with the water instead of going into the kitchen. We had fresh water from the, we had where the rain came off the houses, we had water there.

Let me jump ahead a little bit, sir, to your time in the military. So when the war started, you mentioned you'd already gone through -

Allen Brown: Military school.

So were you drafted or did you sign up to go in?

Allen Brown: Everybody in the canal zone, when they brought the draft down there, everybody that worked and had jobs and things jumped into the Navy. I joined to join the Navy at 18 years old.

So you were back in the canal zone when you went into the military.

Allen Brown: Yeah, I took my, I wasn't in apprenticeship, so I didn't have a job, and I couldn't be made a chief in the Navy, but all the people that did have a job, all the guys that was carpenters and all that, they made chief. They pulled them in as chiefs, and I went in as a buck private, well not a private, third class seaman. And then after a year, I made second class seaman.

Did they put you on a ship?

Allen Brown: Well I got mixed up with the cooks. They sent me to Nicaragua and I learned my Spanish in three months.

But you had already had Spanish up until you were 6 years old.

Allen Brown: 6 years old. And then I took in the 7th grade, I took Spanish for one year, and that taught me I should have done the grammar, and it made me where it was easy to pick up that Spanish up there in Nicaragua. I learned how to talk the barbot language, give me a kiss, give me a beer, all that came to me real quick. I realized that I could understand those people up there and understand their Spanish, and one year later I was speaking the Spanish. It didn't take any time with that 7th grade Spanish course that I took. The first place they sent me – I got mixed up in Corintal, Nicaragua, I found out that you had to -

Was there a Navy base?

Allen Brown: Yeah, Navy base 213. U.S. Navy.

Did they service ships there?

Allen Brown: It was for the sea planes.

During World War II they had a sea plane base in Nicaragua?

Allen Brown: Yes, 213, and -

How long did you end up spending there?

Allen Brown: About 7 months. Yeah, I was there 7 months, and they wouldn't let me get out of cooking. I struck the cook because they burned my sunny side up eggs. I said well dadgummit, I'm going to get into the cooking, so I struck for cook, and when they told me I had to take sea man first class, it's a book about that an inch thick, and then actually the rules and regulations says that a third class cook can skip taking first class sea man and they go right into third class cook, and when they pulled that on me, I said I'm not going to take that test. Said well you're just going to stay second class sea man then. I said well, I asked my real good friend that went up to, he was a first class signal man, and he and I got together, and he said Allen, the only way you can get out of that base is to sign up for sea duty. He said we could sign up for sea duty and both of us will be on the same ship, hardy-har. He went to the Aleutian Islands on an LST and I got on a ship, that little ship right there. That was the PC616. And they were made by the same people.

173-foot steel hull patrol. So did your ship have a name?

Allen Brown: PC616. And I got a picture of it coming off of the -

Where were you stationed out of on that?

Allen Brown: In Cocosolo.

Where is that? In Nicaragua?

Allen Brown: No, that's in the canal zone. It was a big Navy base for 5,000 sailors and 1,000 Marines.

So your ship's job then was to help secure the canal zone.

Allen Brown: No, it was to look for subs.

That's what I mean by securing it, because the canal was, well it still is, but even then it was a very vital shipping –

Allen Brown: The Germans were right outside in U-boats, right outside of the mouth of the canal. This ship is to, I found a picture of this ship being launched. It was only, I thought it was older. It was only two years old when I got on it.

Sure, they built a lot of ships really fast at that time.

Allen Brown: Yes, and those PC's -

What was your job aboard that ship?

Allen Brown: My station when we had an alarm, that alarm was when you was asleep.

General quarters?

Allen Brown: General quarters was so weird. They had two clocks that was out of tune and you couldn't possibly sleep through it.

Sure, that was the whole point!

Allen Brown: That's right. I went back to canal zone and they put me in receiving ship. That's our group of men, anybody that was, I was just a sea man second class.

Did they give you a specific job though aboard that ship?

Allen Brown: Yes, I had to take care of – I gotta see a picture –

You weren't a cook though aboard the ship, were you?

Allen Brown: No, I was striking for cook, and this has my Navy years. I don't know where that ship is. But it was just being launched and it's in this deal.

Yeah, that's a neat picture. Like you said, your daughters found that on the Internet?

Allen Brown: Yes.

Actually launching his ship.

Allen Brown: And it was floating in 4 feet of water. I mean it was floating up. I don't see it in this deal here.

This is great though. You've got a whole bunch of, you've written a whole bunch about your time in the service.

Allen Brown: Here it is. Yeah, that's this book here that I'm writing.

I see you were at Guadalcanal?

Allen Brown: Yes. This was the ship.

Oh, that's a great photo.

Allen Brown: It's just even the sunshine is underneath the bow and this is the waterline, so we didn't have the -

Yeah, that's a small vessel.

Allen Brown: Yeah, 173 feet. It's same like the one you saw here, this type of PC. Now this gun wasn't even on there.

Yeah, I noticed that.

Allen Brown: Missing that, and this launcher for the 70-pound, they're not torpedoes -

Depth charges?

Allen Brown: Depth charges was way in the back, but this here, 70-pound – it was a rocket that would go up ahead of the ship 200 feet when we were, the sole reason for this ship was to sink subs and we had way back here in the stern right there, even they weren't on the ship.

Mousetrap racks, is that what you're talking about? The forward firing rockets?

Allen Brown: Yeah, and they weighed 75 pounds and they would just go up ahead and then we were shooting if we was in contact with a sub, they had a holder with a 4-inch to go into the cage launchers, and it depended on if you wanted 200 feet out, those things weighed 300 pounds, to throw them out 200 feet, they had this handle that you would throw it out and it went into the K gun, and if you wanted to go 200 feet, you put in a charge and the short charge would shoot it out only 20 or 30 feet, but we're going 35mph, and my position was back there pulling the handles to let the depth charges fall. We had an accident. The first lieutenant up on top of this -

In the bridge?

Allen Brown: Yeah. He said set the depth charge to 300 feet, and I was lucky that there was two sailors heard up above, heard him say 300 feet, and by the time the guy with these telephones to tell me, he said set it for 30 feet. And I said for 30 feet, and when it got to 30 feet, my ship went up in the air 6 feet and the bow went underwater. They were going to try to hang me for it. And there was two guys up on top side in the bridge up here, heard him say 300 feet, and I don't know how he went and said it, but 30 feet the guy received, and I set it 30 feet, and boy it no sooner fell that it blew up and just about sunk us. I had a court marshal and it's called a captain's mast, and they forgave me for that, but they took me off the, to let them depth charges

come off. He put me up on this picture with the, right here, you can see they had 20 mm, 50 mm guns up here.

They moved you up to that?

Allen Brown: Yeah, they put me up on 50mm guns. That was safer.

I guess then when they were transmitting that order, they must have been saying 3-0-0 feet, and somebody just read it as 3-0 feet. Because you wouldn't hear 30 out of 300, but I could see where a 0 could get dropped, and they'd say 3-0-0, and some guy just hears 3-0.

And down power phones, too, weren't they?

Allen Brown: Telephones.

Yeah, they were not real reliable.

Yeah, I could see where that would happen.

Allen Brown: Yeah, and I was forgiven for that.

Well that's good.

Allen Brown: Boy.

Did you stay aboard that ship the entire time you were -

Allen Brown: January of 1944 when I got in the Navy, no sooner was I out of boot camp then they sent me to Nicaragua.

But when you got on this ship, were you on that ship when you went to Guadalcanal?

Allen Brown: Yes, and that ship took me down to Guadalcanal in 1944 when I got on it, we were stationed to take two barges, complete machine shops, to Borneo. We didn't know where we were going, and that was in September of '44.

OK, so you were there before a lot of the real big sea battles took place at Guadalcanal.

Allen Brown: Yes, we were following right behind them.

Yeah, Sago Island, and Cape Esprits and all that.

Allen Brown: When I got to Guadalcanal, it was secured.

OK, they had secured Henderson Field?

Allen Brown: Yes, and my ship was down there because we took these two tugs, seagoing tugs, they had radar, and our radar went out, our sonar went out, and then what cooked the cake, one of our big generators quit, and I put in here my memoirs, here's a ship, a Navy ship with no sonar, no radar, and the generator's out, I said I wonder what's going to happen next. So then

went and told us not to go to Borneo, but I didn't know where Borneo was. We were going as the protector of these two big barges. They were two complete machine shops just lifted out of nowhere and put on those barges and I found out that Borneo was just right smack underneath the Philippines, and it's a big, big island. They were still eating people there. They said they were still eating people when we were down there. But they stopped it, and when I got relieved to go down to Guadalcanal, the reason for that, the only reason we went to Guadalcanal was to fix the generators. There was a ship named the USS Tutweela. It was an APA boat, a ship, APA is big enough to bring all kind of food and everything down to the people there, and we got on that place. We had taken a whole bunch of, four cases of whiskey. We were going to sell it. We heard that you could get \$75 for a bottle, and so all the guys that was on the PC616 donated the money to buy four cases. And we got down there, we left the other tug boat, heck we were right there where we got to Borneo, I didn't know we were there, and they just dropped us off. We passed the, where I was going, to Tulagi. We passed that and just stopped off and we didn't have to go anywhere. We were already past it. So we went back and they put another PC to take them on in, and I found out when I was in Vicksburg in the house I was living like this, they had, my niece's husband put a big picture of the whole world, opened up, and I looked up there and I saw Borneo, a big, big island. I said man, no wonder we were so close. It was there. We didn't even have to, ___ dropped us off. And they had radar.

What did your ship do with all the alcohol you brought? Were you able to sell that?

Allen Brown: It was Christmas Eve. We got into this port, I mean Tulagi. Tulagi is a little island 24 miles east or west, I don't know, I can't place it, it's probably west of Guadalcanal. Guadalcanal is a big, long island. And 24 miles from where the big invasion was. And I got to Tulagi, and everybody figured well we're gonna -

Sell all that.

Allen Brown: No, we opened 'em up.

OK, I thought you all had bought it as an investment.

Allen Brown: Yeah, we were gonna sell it, and I didn't drink, and there was about six guys went and slept on a little refrigerator ship that was first at Tutweela, and then this little ship, and we were next to it, and they were going to fix our engines and stuff. And so we pulled out all this doggone liquor, and the captain got drunk, everybody was drunk, and he was gonna wash out where the officer's quarters were, he was going to, with a fire hose.

He was out of control.

Allen Brown: Yeah, so he had to go up and stand before the senior officer class on the float onto Tutweela for a captain's mess for our getting drunk, and I put in this little book, says here was a Navy ship and everybody was drunk on the thing, and the Japs was coming up the slot.

The Tokyo Express coming into Guadalcanal.

Allen Brown: So I said here's this little PC and everybody is drunk, I said what if we'd have had an attack?

Yeah, it would've been bad.

Allen Brown: Oh, I mean tell you, we'd have been busted. And we got fixed up and then the first thing that the captain did when we were going to get our orders, they were going to send us up, they was just starting to fix the time for the invasion of Okinawa, and that's when we got our orders to go north, and we landed in Iniweetok.

OK, that's another small, little island.

Allen Brown: Yes, and when I got up that morning when we got there, we were already dropped our anchor and everything, and I'll be darned, I got up there and I looked and I turned a full 180 degrees, I mean 360 degrees and there was ships. My nephew, my first cousin was a commander on a ship, APA200, and I remember seeing the APA200 close to us, and I didn't know he was on that ship and he didn't know me, and they gave us permission after three months over there, we could tell where we were three months before. And I told him, and he said heck, you was in Iniweetok, and we were in Iniweetok, and I remember seeing the APA200, but I didn't know my cousin was on there. He was a commander. He was on a big ship, and so then they gave us orders there to go north, and 24 hours later, they said Iwo Jima. That's why we went to Iwo Jima. But we had to get fixed in Guadalcanal.

When did you arrive at Iwo Jima?

Allen Brown: February, oh it was still in '44, wait a minute, no -

The invasion was in February of '45.

Allen Brown: That's right, '45. I was there a couple of months after the invasion, and that made it we had to do ping duty there, and I was there when they dropped the bomb, and I put in my book, I said Iwo Jima went wild. Boy they started selling those little old guns you can fire 14 shots, the M1's, the sailors had them -

The Marines started selling them to the sailors?

Allen Brown: Everybody on our ship had a gun with 1,000 rounds and a little suitcase box.

I guess the guys didn't need 'em anymore and they must not have been serialized year or something.

Allen Brown: Well they didn't take 'em away from us, but they told us, they always read the rules and regulations in the Navy, anybody caught with any stuff in your sea bag that belongs to the government, it's an automatic 20 years in Portsmouth. Well, I didn't get drunk on our party, and I still went to church on Tulagi to keep out of work. They made us work on Sunday morning. So I would go to church and I didn't have to do that work. So I was afraid that I was gonna get caught with my gun and they finally put me on a PC570, and it was going to get decommissioned, and that's when I got out of the Navy, I mean from that ship they put me on a, to go back, I had enough points to get out, and that was in '46, about April of '46.

Wow, so you were out there a long time then even after the war had ended. Were you able to bring home the rifle?

Allen Brown: Heck no. I got over to where the Japs sunk all those ships -

Pearl Harbor?

Allen Brown: Yeah, we were at Pearl Harbor, and my ship was tied up to a merchant ship, and we was on this merchant ship watching a movie, and I said anybody know anybody that wants to buy a brand new M1 rifle, and I had 700 rounds left. How much you want for it? I said \$15. And you get the bullets free. And boy I sold that thing right now. And you know I never did get inspected, I bet you I went through five different, they looked at your bags.

I'm surprised they told you that because I talked to a lot of World War II vets and they brought home all sorts of stuff and –

Allen Brown: I didn't get to, I was afraid.

Yeah, that's too bad.

Allen Brown: I wasn't about to stay in that place there, 20 years in Portsmouth.

I doubt they would've put you there that long.

Allen Brown: Heck no, it was to scare us. You know they read that, and I was one of them that believed all that.

I guess at least you got \$15 but it would've been neat if you could've kept the rifle.

Allen Brown: Even in Cocosolo they didn't inspect my bag. I could've gotten there with that thing, flying colors. One guy on Iwo Jima was sending home a Jeep, and he couldn't figure out how he was going to get the body up.

He was going to send home a Jeep?

Allen Brown: Yeah, in pieces. And when they found out he had a body to sell, they wanted to find out and he got in trouble for it.

Oh I bet, yeah, that's a little bigger than a rifle. How much did he send home?

Allen Brown: He had sent all the small parts.

OK, when you start talking about tires and things, I would imagine it was getting a little hard.

Allen Brown: No way, he couldn't make it. So he lost his Jeep and everything. But I didn't get nothin'. I only came back with rings we were making. We would make rings out of 50-cent silver piece, and you would hit it with a spoon and it would turn it over just like a wedding ring, and then you would drill it out. I had a bunch of them for my girlfriends, and we got back off over there and they sent me down to New Orleans and I got kicked out of the Navy, but I had to be in the Reserves for 10 years. So I had 8 years, I was going to make the 10 years in the Reserves count time, so that's why I got so much civil service. I had all the time in the Navy and the extra time.

Did you get recalled during the Korean War?

Allen Brown: No, I was just over the edge. I talked to these guys, we had a Korean party.

I heard about that.

Allen Brown: It was nice. And I got pictures of that. They gave me that. So I'm gonna send some home.

So when you got out of the Navy, you moved back to Texas at that point?

Allen Brown: Yeah, I went to Texas. No, I went straight to the canal zone, and they had 50 apprenticeships open, and I took one and I got out of high school in the middle of the 10th grade and I didn't finish school, and you had to have a certificate of graduation for this apprenticeship, so I took the first GED test that they give. Everybody couldn't take it, just guys that was over in the Pacific, and my score was very good. It was within 20 of the top down, and they gave me my diploma. All it was, what did you learn? And then I took this apprenticeship and I hadn't taken physics, I hadn't taken what's that other one -

Chemistry?

Allen Brown: I took chemistry, but the one that you figure out -

Calculus?

Allen Brown: Calculus is one that I didn't take, and we had to learn it in there, and the other one was the other hard one, and I flunked that one. Says that if a ship is going away so many ergs or something, going so many feet per second per second, says what would it take it for a locomotive, how much time to stop it? And you figure it out with that - not physics -

Algebra?

Allen Brown: Not that, there's another one. Anyway, my brother-in-law when I flunked it, that cost me \$500 for my next jump in my apprenticeship. I had to spend three more months to pass my apprenticeship and it cost me \$500. That's what I lost.

How long did you end up living in the canal zone? When was it that you finally came to the United States?

Allen Brown: I took that apprenticeship and they had a big argument with the hiring, and somebody in a high office in Washington said, they insulted the hell out of us. They said, I forget how they stated it, but we was considered no good, and I went and, I don't know, I forget how, I didn't want to stay in the Panama Canal and I quit. Everybody was going to quit the Panama Canal. Me and another guy got sent to the States.

Who were you working for at that point? So you'd gotten out of the Navy -

Allen Brown: I was working for the Panama Canal company, and they didn't like you to quit. They said you're sure you're gonna leave? I said I don't want to, everybody's gonna quit, and me and another guy was the only ones that quit. So I had to quit, and the Panama Canal would let you go away, and then maybe in 10 years you'd get called back when they needed you. Well

they needed somebody in an overhaul and they called me and asked me if I wanted to come back 9 years later. So I'd been working in all these machine shops in Beaumont and Houston. They were all oil work, and what they want you to do is get experience. So they let me wait 9 years and finally they said if you're still interested in coming down to the canal and go to work, fill out this thing. I filled it out right now, got an appointment to work the Panama Canal.

So then you went back down there.

Allen Brown: Yeah, I went back down there and worked for them. I didn't make lock master. I found out I would get mad too much. I got mad so much that my duadnal shrunk down smaller than my little finger and they couldn't put a light in my stomach, I'd get that mad. But every time something happened, call Brown, he knows where there's stuff at. Even the locks got flooded and I was on leave, and the guy that was in the submarines with me, we both had our apprenticeship together, we were the only two on the Atlantic side that knew where a certain valve was, or a switch, to start the dewatering pumps when these pumps were 40 feet up in the air, and it had a bell over it, and that keeps the dewatering pumps, no water gets in there. I had just come off from leave and they called a guy from the Pacific side to tell them where that switch was. I knew where it was, but I wasn't back yet. Bob Thompson, he was there, and he had just gotten back from leave. We were the only two guys who was on leave that knew where that switch was. It was down in SIP-7 in the funniest place. You had to go to a corner and find it. And when that happened, they had to bring a guy from the Pacific locks to find that switch to turn on the dewatering pumps to get that water out of that, down below the cross-unders. It was all, you go down 40 feet and then another 40 feet, and you cross underneath the locks to the other wall, you climb up the other wall, but you've got all sorts of oil lines and everything down there. And all that was underwater. They had flooded everything. Oh, I tell you -

We could have a long interview just talking about that. It sounds pretty fascinating.

Allen Brown: Yeah, it's really something. But I finally got, they wanted everybody to quit the Panama Canal so they could give it to Panama, so they came up with a good deal. I had 20 years of civil service and my time in the Navy and everything, that added up, and they said if you can have your civil service and your age be 80 years -

The rule of 80?

Allen Brown: You can be 50 and retire. Well I had 86 years, and I retired at 58.

Yeah, so you were pretty set then.

Allen Brown: And I quit. I told my wife let's go home.

And then went back to Texas.

Allen Brown: And went back to Texas, up to Houston, and I got a good job over there, and that makes it more or less where we're at now.

That's great. Well sir, I want to thank you for letting us come and talk to you today. It's an honor for us and on behalf of Commissioner Patterson and everybody at the Land Office, we want to thank you for your service to our country.

Allen Brown: I thank you for having this place, I'll tell you. I was so mad when my niece told me that there's a place down here and I was up with her and she was taking care of me and everything, and trying to get me into this place.

We're glad you're here, I'm glad you like it.

Allen Brown: Yeah. The only reason that I can get into this thing because I have a house still, in Fort Worth. My wife died three years ago and she left me holding the bag, and so I went and -

Well we hope you like it.

Allen Brown: Oh yeah, when she said I found out a place down in Tyler, I said I don't want to go to no nursing home in Tyler. I said that's no place to go. She said oh no, it's for veterans. She found out in the computer that you all had, she said Uncle Allen, it's brand new.

Yeah, that's right.

Allen Brown: And this is the third house and they've got seven more houses to put up.

A whole bunch more to fill, yeah.

Allen Brown: And I came down here with the idea I'm going to say no, I'm not interested, and I loved it.

So she was able to get you to at least come down and look, that's good.

Allen Brown: Yeah, and I fell in love with it. I says well see if we can get in today. I don't want to come back, and I joined up then.

That's great.

[End of recording]