

Voices of Veterans Interview with William Wayne Brown

Date: January 25, 2006

Location: VLB Conference Room (telephone interview)

Interviewer: Bryan Hughes

Interviewer: Mr. Brown, in what military branch?

Brown: Army Air Force.

Interviewer: And can you state the place, time, and umm where you were born at?

Brown: Where I was born?

Interviewer: Yes Sir.

Brown: I was born in May, Texas July 14th 1920.

Interviewer: And what were your parents' names?

Brown: My father was named Robert B. Brown and my mother was Elsie B. Brown.

Interviewer: Have you lived in the same city uhh most of your life or did ya'll move around?

Brown: No, he worked in an oil field and moved around some.

Interviewer: Where were you and how old were you when you first enlisted?

Brown: I was 22 when I went in the Army. I was in Monahans, Texas

Interviewer: Were you drafted or did you volunteer?

Brown: I was drafted.

Interviewer: How did you family react to that?

Brown: Well they expected it.

Interviewer: What were the factors that influenced you as far as what type of military career you wanted to do or what type of job you wanted?

Brown: Well I didn't have any choice in that. I think it went according to your IQ where they sent you.

Interviewer: So they did the ASFAB testing back then also?

Brown: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you remember what your score was?

Brown: No I don't. I don't remember.

Interviewer: I know it had to be high just to be into a pilot. Where were you on December 7, 1941?

Brown: I was in Monahans, Texas

Interviewer: And were you with any one? What happened—what was your reaction when you heard what happened?

Brown: Well it wasn't too good. That's been a long time ago. I don't remember what I was doing?

Interviewer: Yeah, 1941 would be a long time (*laughing*). Can you tell me a little bit about your training?

Brown: My training? Yes, I was inducted at El Paso, Texas. And after about two weeks I went to Wichita Falls at Sheppard's Field to go thru airplane mechanic school. From there I went up to Baltimore, Maryland to a B-26 factory. From there I went to Tyndall Field in Florida.

Interviewer: How long was your training?

Brown: Well let's see, I guess about four or five months, something like that—six months.

Interviewer: And so, what was your job—were you an engineer, a mechanic, or...?

Brown: Yes, I was just working on the line, on B-26s.

Interviewer: Did you have adequate equipment? Ya know as far as...?

Brown: Did you what?

Interviewer: Adequate equipment. Did they supply you with, ya know, enough stuff to do your job why you were out in the field?

Brown: Oh yeah, yeah, ya didn't need nothing but tools.

Interviewer: Do you remember what your first duty assignment was?

Brown: Well working on this uh B-26 I guess.

Interviewer: Was it in states or was it overseas?

Brown: No, it was Tyndall Field, Florida. Yeah, Tyndall Field.

Interviewer: When did you first go overseas?

Brown: Oh, it was Thanksgiving of uh '43 or '44.

Interviewer: And where did you go there?

Brown: It was Nab Zab, New Guinea.

Interviewer: Were you there long? What was your deployment like there?

Brown: Well we was assigned to the 90th Bomb group there. But we—after about a month they transferred us to the 43rd Bomb group.

Interviewer: Now at that point you were still just a—you were still a mechanic?

Brown: No, I was a flight engineer.

Interviewer: And flight engineers are—and forgive me, but flight engineers are responsible for what? Maintaining the planes?

Brown: No, not really. Just whatever we had to do in flight: assist the pilot, transfer gasoline, and uh, I kept the logbook.

Interviewer: How was the living conditions and stuff when you were over in New Guinea?

Brown: The living conditions?

Interviewer: Yes Sir.

Brown: I think we lived in a tent. It was pretty hot. (*laughing*).

Interviewer: What kind of clothing did ya'll wear? Equipment?

Brown: Well we had just Army issued khakis. I think I cut my pants off and made shorts out of them.

Interviewer: I wish we could—that when I was in (*unintelligible*). Did you have to carry any kind of equipment? I know like nowadays it almost a have to to carry your cavalier equipment and your belt.

Brown: No, we just uh—wore what we wanted mostly, no body paid to much attention to your uniform.

Interviewer: How about mealtime? What was it like during dinner?

Brown: Mealtime, it was all about the same. Except uh, one time I think I lived about a month on canned peaches, peanut butter, and orange marmalade. (*laughing*).

Interviewer: That's a weird diet. (*laughing*). Why would you do that? Is that cuz you didn't want to eat nothing else?

Brown: That's all they had to eat!

Interviewer: Oh. (*laughing*). Who were you closest to during that time?

Brown: Beg your pardon?

Interviewer: Who were you closest to? Did you have any buddies you hung around most, or...?

Brown: Just crew members mostly.

Interviewer: Did ya'll ever get to go out on any personal time?

Brown: No.

Interviewer: Did you stay together throughout the war or did you shuffle around and had to get up with different crews?

Brown: No we stayed together—same bunch.

Interviewer: Do you have any special recollections of friends, buddies, or anything that strikes you as the most important?

Brown: No, not right now.

Interviewer: Let's see, what were your immediate supervisors like? Did you get along with them?

Brown: Oh yeah, my pilot. He was just I think 19 years old. He wasn't old enough to shave I don't think.

Interviewer: And he was the immediate supervisor?

Brown: Yeah.

Interviewer: How old were you?

Brown: I was 22.

Interviewer: Boy that seems young. Any interesting stories related to your commanding officer since he was such a young age?

Brown: Yeah, he liked to fly that airplane like it was a fighter or something. One time we took up some (*unintelligible*) they wanted to fly and he promised them he'd take them up. But after he got threw with em' I don't think they wanted to go up any more. He liked to get down and fly low on the ground and just cut up like that.

Interviewer: One question I did want to ask is—was regarding the letter and I talked to you earlier about it—this monkey. Where did you get the monkey from and how did he come into play?

Brown: Well I think I traded a pack of cigarettes for the monkey on Leyte Islands in the Philippines.

Interviewer: How long—I was reading he actually went on missions with you—flew in the plane.

Brown: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did he ever get loose?

Brown: No, he act like he was scared most of the time. He stayed right on your shoulder. He was a little bitty monkey. (*laughing*). And I'd take him all the way up to Ie Shima, Japan with me.

Interviewer: What ended up happening to him?

Brown: Do what?

Interviewer: What happened to him?

Brown: I gave him to somebody there on the Island when I left to come home. So I don't have no idea what happened to him after that.

Interviewer: It also said you were in the air when one of the bombs went off. Do you remember what bomb, where you were at and like how far away were you when it happened?

Brown: Well we didn't know what it was until we got back home. Well in briefing that morning they told us it was in 50 miles of Nagasaki I believe it was, yeah, Nagasaki. [Correction: Mr. Brown would like the tape to reflect a correction. It was 50 miles of Hiroshima, not Nagasaki. He said no one knew what it was until they returned. They were told to go on a bombing mission over Japan but not to get within a 50-mile range of Hiroshima. He was on a mission when they saw the mushroom.]

Interviewer: So how far away were you do you think? Around the 50 mile range, or...?

Brown: Well I don't have any idea.

Interviewer: Or can I ask what were ya'll doing in the air at that time?

Brown: Well we was on a bombing mission over Japan.

Interviewer: How often did you write home?

Brown: How often did I write home?

Interviewer: Yes Sir.

Brown: Oh, maybe once a week or something.

Interviewer: Did you have anybody special back home at this time or who were you writing your letters to?

Brown: No, just my mother or my dad.

Interviewer: What were the concerns your family and friends had, ya know, besides the fact of maybe possibly death.

Brown: I really don't know; we didn't talk about that too much.

Interviewer: Did you receive, ya know, enough mail?

Brown: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: Did they ever send you any kinda care packages?

Brown: Yeah I guess cookies once in a while, chewing gum or something.

Interviewer: What did you miss the most during this time while you were overseas?

Brown: Food mostly. (*laughing*).

Interviewer: What was the weather like for the most part where you were at?

Brown: Hot.

Interviewer: So you were in for how long during the war?

Brown: I was in for three and a half years.
So it was three and a half years of wartime?

Brown: Yeah, ummhmm.

Interviewer: Did you ever have any contact with POWs?

Brown: No, uh, I only saw one Jap the whole time I was in there and he was up in the truck and he was scared to death.

Interviewer: What were the Islanders like while you were on the Island?

Brown: Well they was—we called them gooks—an old guy about 5 feet tall with fuzzy hair and women were always in front carrying the packages.

Interviewer: Were they accepting of you, or...?

Brown: Oh yeah, yeah. You'd be walking on the road and they'd come along and say "Hi Joe." That's about the only thing they could say, "Hello Joe."

Interviewer: Did you get to see any of the USO shows while you were...?

Brown: I saw one and Bob Hope and I was about a half a mile from him.

Interviewer: Most difficult period for you while you were there?

Brown: Oh gosh, I don't—it was all about the same for me. I was ready to come home.

Interviewer: What was the most emotional experience you had during wartime?

Brown: Most emotional—well let's see. Well we got shot up pretty bad one time and I had to come in on, I think three engines and a flat tire, something like that.

Interviewer: I also remember talking to you about—didn't you say you were wounded?

Brown: No, not me, no.

Interviewer: Oh, no. Any special memories from this time that maybe we haven't covered?

Brown: Uh, no not really.

Interviewer: Uh, describe your return home—reactions from family or friends.

Brown: We got on this ship Cape Canso I believe was the name of it. And Manila in the Philippines. They sent us down to Manila to come home. And we got on that ship and by then we had to stay on it for about a week and we never left port because it broke down. And I think it took three weeks to get home.

Interviewer: Was it pretty tense at that point? Ya know you are getting so close to going home but ya can't quite make it.

Brown: No, we got word about three days out that—and were suppose to go to San Francisco but they was on strike and they wouldn't let us dock. And they sent us up to ya know, Washington, and we docked up in Washington.

Interviewer: What was it like when you got back? What did you do when you got home?

Brown: When we landed? Thanksgiving, I remember just having a lot to eat. (*laughing*). Cuz, we just got through (*unintelligible*) coming home on the ship.

Interviewer: What did you do after the war as far as employment?

Brown: I went to work for Exxon.

Interviewer: And how long did you stay there?

Brown: About 30 years.

Interviewer: So you're retired from Exxon?

Brown: Yes, uh huh.

Interviewer: Well, I guess that pretty much concludes it. What—umm, there's no—it shows here you ran how many missions while you were overseas?

Brown: About a hundred I guess it was.

Interviewer: Well, I believe that's gonna be it. Well, I appreciate you taking the time to talk to us about it. And if there are any other comments or questions you have or anything you would like to add to it feel free to give us a call back.