

# Oral History Interview

Lt. Col. Robert Brown

U.S. Army Air Force

11<sup>th</sup> Air Force

World War II

Aleutian Islands, Alaska

February 8, 2014

Aleutian World War II National Historic Area  
Oral History Project

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**February 8, 2014  
Woodland, CO**

**Interviewed by Joshua Bell, Volunteer Oral Historian and Researcher,  
National Park Service**

*This interview is part of the Aleutian World War II National Historic Area Oral History Project. The interview with Col. Robert Brown was recorded with his permission on a digital recorder. Copies of the audio file are preserved in mp3, wav and wma formats and are on file at the offices of the National Park Service in Anchorage, Alaska.*

*The transcript has been lightly edited.*

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**Joshua Bell:** Today is February 8, 2014. My name is Joshua Bell, volunteer oral historian and researcher for the Aleutian World War II National Historic Area. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for the oral history project.

**Robert Brown:** I'm glad to be here, particularly at this age.

**Joshua Bell:** For the record, could I have your name please?

**Robert Brown:** Okay, I'm Robert Brown.

**Joshua Bell:** And when and where were you born?

**Robert Brown:** [00:00:30] I was born and raised in Bayonne, N.J. And my birth date has been December 19, 1922. And my family is four siblings, and I stayed there until World War II, at which time I entered the Army and took infantry training and then transferred to the Army air Corps. And from there I went on to become an aviation cadet, and I was commissioned as a navigator.

**Joshua Bell:** Excellent. I forgot to ask, what were your parents' names?

**Robert Brown:** They were Brown – William and Augusta.

**Joshua Bell:** And what did they do?

**Robert Brown:** [00:01:27] My father was a blue-collar worker in the actuaries in Bayonne, which is heavily industrialized. And my mother was purely a housewife in those days.

**Joshua Bell:** What was it like growing up in the '20s and the '30s?

**Robert Brown:** [00:01:46] Well, it's something else. I've written a number of articles pertaining to that. Back in the '20s and '30s it was, of course, the depression. And work for the parents was hard to come by. But my father was able to hold on to a job – not a high paying job – but nonetheless we were able to eat. We weren't on the soup line or any such thing like that. But then the depression was pretty rough around the area. But as I have written in the past, because it was an industrial town it didn't dry up like the Midwest with their drought problems on the farms. So all in all, we worked our way through that. I graduated a little early out of high school. I had just turned 17. In those days the classes – at least in the elementary and middle schools – had been divided. And I skipped a grade. I think I skipped 6B. I don't even call them semesters, but each year was broken into two parts, like 6A, 6B, 7A, 7B. And I skipped 6B, and then unfortunately left high school and had to wait six months for the graduation.

So in the meantime, in January I started out. I peddled a bicycle for a kosher meat market. And I worked on an ice wagon or a little bit. And then I worked on a public swimming pool until I got a job with what was called the ELCO Naval Boat Works in Bayonne, which made the famous PT boats. And then after that ... that was 1940, and I stayed with them until March of '43 when I entered the service. And after that I went through the usual military routines, and I came out in July of '44 – not came out of the service – but I was commissioned in July of '44, second lieutenant navigator.

**Joshua Bell:** It sounds like you did a lot in those early years before joining the service.

**Robert Brown:** [00:04:32] Well, that's the way it was pre-World War II. As I look back on it, I'm surprised I ... we hacked it because of the big events. And I had written in this one article I think that's, "The depression and World War II made our generation at least more flexible and able to bend with the wind."

**Joshua Bell:** Where were you when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

**Robert Brown:** [00:05:10] I happened to be home that afternoon. We had a radio, and I heard it on the radio. And I didn't have a clue as to where Pearl Harbor was. In fact I wasn't quite sure where Hawaii was. And they mentioned the Japanese. We had the mental attitude then that they were a bunch of people over there on some island that wore kimonos and shuffling around in sandals. So it was in my mind at least that this wasn't going to last; although over there in Europe things were really getting hot. But a lot of the guys jumped right in and went into the service, but at that time I didn't see a real need for it. Then as time went by, about May of '42, I thought the war is going to continue. So I

went over to Church Street in New York, in Manhattan, and they were only taking Seabees, Seabee enlistments. Heck, I was in the defense factory, and I felt the Seabees weren't any different than the factory. So I let it ride.

And then I think it was the next month or two I went back over there and I wanted to [00:06:40] sign up for the Naval Air Corps because I had a cousin who was in the Naval Air Corps. And that was on a Friday, and they said, "Well, you'll have to come back Monday. And then it was shortly after that time when I wound up with the flu. And I was in bed for about three or four days. But the thing was that was the time when they stopped all enlistments, and everything was handled by the Selective Service. So if you wanted to go into the service, you had to go to the local Selective Service people. We didn't know that at the time; we were just kids. So finally it reached a point in early '43 when I decided nothing was happening here, so I went down to the public library where the Selective Service people were hanging out. I told them to move me up the line. So they moved me up. I let my friends know that evening that I had effectively signed up for the service, and they said they had just gotten notice in the mail that they were going to go. That was March 19 of '43.

So after that I just did what we were told to do. Finally, after I graduated from navigation school I went home on leave, and my next assignment was in Lincoln, Neb. And that was sort of a processing center. I spent maybe a week or two there, and I was sent up to Boise, Idaho for combat crew training. And that's where I joined up with our crew, and we trained in the B-24 until ... I think it was close to three months. I can't swear to any of the numbers nowadays. But by the time we finished there were 52 crews that were ready to be shipped out. And so they put us on the train, and we wound up in Topeka, Kan., and nobody knew why we were in Topeka, Kan. because everything was secretly. But then we heard that we were going to Langley Field, Va.

So all 52 crews went to Langley Field, Va. We got there in the middle of the night and found out that nobody knew we were coming. And they had an old ... I can't remember if it was an old CCC area. The area had a name, and it was common in those days, but I can't remember it. And we had to go and take doors off the barracks, doors and windows. We went in there, and these old rusty cots were there. Then over to supply – now mind you this is in the middle of the night – walking with a mattress on our back and the assorted linens. So that's the way we started out there.

[00:10:10] Like I say, we found out later that we had been sent to Langley Field by mistake. While we were there our crew when we left Boise, Idaho – our bombardier was named Buddy Maroon. He was from Louisiana, Godfrey Maroon. So they decided as long as we were there in [00:10:40] Langley that the crew should undergo low-level training. Well, there wasn't much to the navigators to do, but it was primarily for the bombardier's and pilots to get acquainted with low-level bombing. And the upshot of it was they took away our bombardier and gave us another guy.

We figured he was the old man of the crew – nice beard! He was 26 years old, but he had joined the Army, and he was back there in the horse cavalry. And the funniest thing about him was – I shouldn't say funny, poor guy – but when Edgar – leaving the cavalry, he went into aircraft maintenance. After he graduated from that class he was shipped to the Aleutians to maintain an old ... it might have been a P-36 or some crazy claim that never saw combat. But he had enough of the Aleutians that he signed up for the aviation cadet program, went through the whole routine, became a bombardier, went to Langley Field for the low-level training, and he wound up on our crew.

Okay then [00:12:10] we were all shipped back to California. We were seeing the country through the shades in the train. But we got up there to California, and we were at Hamilton Field. And so we didn't have any clue as to where we were going. But they gave us a new plane, and then we found out we were going up to the Aleutians. That's when old [unintelligible 00:12:39] practically had a heart attack. Here the guy, who had been up there in the Aleutians, signed up to fly and to be a bombardier and right back up there in a worse condition.

But nonetheless, so we took the B-24 and went on up through Great Falls, Montana and there they winterized the plane, so we stayed there a couple of weeks and then went on up into... we stopped off at Fort St. John and Watson Lake and then finally up into Fairbanks. By now it was November. And we didn't make the decisions, but we were going to bring the plane out to the Aleutians. But the plane wouldn't start because it was 56 below. We didn't have any sense, and we weren't shoppies and all that sort of stuff. But we had the heavy winter flying clothes. So we were walking around from what we called the PX and the mess halls and the like, and we did this for about two days and then found out that there were tunnels, heated tunnels, that went from one base to another. And then we wised up.

But we got the plane [00:14:10] going one morning and went on to Anchorage, Elmendorf, and then we wound up with ... the pilots had to undergo some specialized instrument training to be prepared for the Aleutian weather. And then a buddy and I, Moose Dolling – he was on another crew – we went down to Adak Naval Base. So we took a naval course down there on the use of loran. We finally all joined up down there in Shemya and started the fun.

**Joshua Bell:** And I forget if you mentioned this – were you in the Navy or in the Army?

**Robert Brown:** [00:15:12] I was Army, Army Air Corps. I guess I didn't make a point of that. That's where it was. So we were B-24s, the Army. The Navy had to B-24 model, but it was called the privateer, and that had the single vertical stabilizer.

**Joshua Bell:** What did you think of the Aleutians when you saw them?

**Robert Brown:** [00:15:44] I can say I cried a lot. We were really not sharp about all those things. So okay, we're going to the Aleutians – again, had no real idea about the Aleutians. And then we felt disappointed because we had heard it was just a reconnaissance outfit. That's how dumb we were. [00:16:14] So when we got out to the island than we knew that we were in someplace that shouldn't have been allowed. It was just kind of a miserable flat spot. I don't know if you've heard about Shemya.

**Joshua Bell:** [00:16:34] No, go ahead.

**Robert Brown:** [00:16:36] That's a small island, and it's about ... actually it was the furthest island out there. And we were about 90 miles east of Attu. But it was flat, all tundra, no trees, and I think it was about 90 feet off the sea level, off the sea. And the huts were dug in. At least [00:17:06] the Quonset huts were dug in underground, or at least halfway underground, to halfway stop the weather. The first places in Shemya where we stayed were called stout houses. And those stout houses were made of sort of a pressed cardboard or some sort of composition type of thing and easily erected by those construction crews that were out there. And you could poke a hole in the wall. They were that flimsy. But we lived with it, and eventually there was an engineer Battalion that had been out there, but they moved out because by now it was the beginning of 1945, and they figured they weren't going to use those people in that area. When they vacated their area, we were in pig heaven. They had so many Quonset huts ... we were a squadron, and they were a battalion, and basically we lived four men to a Quonset hut. If you've ever been near one of those Quonset huts then you know that four was great living.

Originally people were moving out of the stout houses into the Quonset ... we didn't have any toilets except [unintelligible 00:18:53] three holers. And you have to go out there in that blowing wind and rain. Mostly in the wintertime [00:19:06] people didn't go more than two feet away from their stout house for that evening pit stop. But once we got into the Quonset hut area, they had nice showers and toilets. You could sit down and not freeze to death – hot water. It was living. Nobody told the Japs about that.

Then [00:19:36] after that we started on a combat tour. I can't say it was nothing. Actually our first mission, being a new crew, we were given the oldest plane. The oldest plane of course is a bucket of bolts that you hope will get you back home. And the standard routine for - our [00:20:06] squadron was the 404th Bomb Squadron. And squadrons of those days were around fifteen airplanes. But our missions generally were just four planes. So our first mission we went on over and ... let me backtrack there. The pilots had a recon mission, and the navigators had a recon – meaning that [00:20:36] you flew along with someone else to get the feel of what you were going to go through.

So actually our first combat mission as a crew we were tail end Charlie in a four-man formation. And as we were going over the target area, boy the flak started, and then the one plane to the right, Brodock's crew, [00:21:06] looked over and he was on fire from the front to the back. He slipped out of formation and I'm trying to keep an eye on him

and keep something in the log. But to me, when the plane got way down there it looked like it had burst and flaming parts were going down there. What I actually saw apparently was parachutes because Brodock's crew got back to the United States by way of [00:21:36] Kamchatka. The Russians were kind enough to intern our people and then gradually move them back around. I guess some of the others were up at Kamchatka Peninsula over to Taiwan, and then out of Taiwan eventually found their way back to the States.

**Joshua Bell:** That's a long way to go to get home.

**Robert Brown:** [00:22:04] What's that?

**Joshua Bell:** That's a long way to go to get home.

**Robert Brown:** [00:22:07] And how! And of course on meager rations. The Russians fed them but they weren't gourmet meals.

But on that particular mission the bomb bay doors stuck, and the bombardier were trying to say "bombs away," and the bombs were going away. And he had to hustle back to the bomb bay, kick the doors open, [00:22:37] and then salvo the bombs. I don't know if they hit the island or hit the water, but the name of the game was to get out of there and get home. And unfortunately that was in January, which up there in the north there is very little daylight. It was black and all of that cold ocean, and we weren't able [00:23:07] to transfer fuel. So the engines started to cut out. And the engineer was trying to transfer fuel from ... these planes were fitted out with the bomb bay tank. We had four bomb bays, but in this case because of the length of the missions they put in 500 gallon [00:23:37] tank in one of the bomb bays. And then that could be used to get us back home. But unfortunately we weren't able to transfer the fuel from the bomb bay. And the pilots were going crazy keeping the engines going cross feed methods and the like. But the engineer and the assistant engineer they worked out something. And here they butted [00:24:07] up a couple of gasoline hoses – just butted them up and holding them with their fists. The fuel was pumped out of the bomb bay tank into the regular tank. But those poor guys out there in that bomb bay ... and that was the day when the temp gauge [pegged] out at 72 below.

It was a miserable flight, a miserable [00:24:37] introduction into the glamour of warfare. So those guys, they were out in that bomb bay transferring that fuel, and the plane is so full of fumes, but we didn't have any long-range transmissions. And we kept our intercom to a minimum because of any stray spark that might have [00:25:07] occurred.

But one little sidebar on that was that we started to finally get the engines going properly, but the pilot radioed back to home base, Shemya, that we were in trouble and needed help from Air Sea Rescue. The kicker was the Air Sea Rescue had two PBVs, [00:25:37] and that day was one couldn't fly, and the other couldn't float. We got back but we took so



long in getting back that they considered that we were probably gone – at least those who weren't listening in on the radios.

When we did get back and everything [00:26:07] settled down, one of the enlisted men, a staff sergeant – he was a photographer – found out his uniforms were missing. Apparently what had happened was that while we were gone why let those uniforms go to waste? But once the word got out that we were back home safely, the uniforms were returned.

[00:26:37] In fact, when we finished up – and I have to go and mention this – the tour of duty in the Aleutians was basically a one year tour. If you were lucky and you had a blizzard every day you would get home with a whole skin, but that wasn't to be. [00:27:06] We weren't counting missions; we were counting days. My pilot and I discussed this after the war. I had figured we had 26 missions. He figured we had 33 missions. But it was a [so what] that during the course of this event we had wound up [00:27:37] shooting down three and a half Jap Zeros. And I know that the half sounds strange.

**Joshua Bell:** [00:27:43] That is interesting, yeah.

**Robert Brown:** [00:27:46] Well, when you're flying in formation everybody's firing. And apparently our plane and another plane were shooting at the same Jap when he went down. So we had no way of positively proving it, so each crew got half credit. But we never did hit being an ace crew.

It was July 23, [00:28:16] 1945 when we were on another hot one, and we got shot up pretty good. [Unintelligible 00:28:27] was hit and some of the radios. The radio operator was wounded. And that was a strange thing because he and the ball turret gunner they were on the waist guns. There were times when the planes [00:28:46] didn't have a ball turret, and they filled that spot with a radar, which helped in that kind of weather. So the turret gunner was on one waist gun, and the radio operator on another waist gun. And when there's a 20 mm shell exploded in between the turret gunner's legs, [00:29:16] but he didn't get wounded. The radio operator on the other waist window he got wounded in the leg.

We got home all in one piece, but like I said, all the fuel cells were hit, and in those days the planes, instead of having what they called wet wing, they had self sealing fuel cells. And I guess [00:29:46] the Jap ordinance wasn't explosive. And so those tanks were all hit but none exploded. But they did once we landed. There's a story attached to that where the operations officer ... he was a ... I guess [00:30:16] in those days you call him a glory hound. After they took the radio operator out to the ambulance this ops officer he got in the pilot's seat. The runway was lined with people because this was the first time I wounded crewmember had been brought back in a year.

The rest of them all went into Siberia. But my pilot, Korpanty [00:30:46] he was in a sweat because of trying to get that plane back in one piece. But the thing was that as they started to taxi back, and the ops officers waving to the crowd, the fuel tank started to leak. It looked like a sieve. While we were over the target, [00:31:16] and I think on that day we had just four planes but 10 Zeros. And they were coming at us from all angles. In the bombardier had already dropped his bombs, that he was shrewd. He used to make a little tent out of flack so that nothing would hit him.

The navigator [00:31:46] and the bombardier were up in the front of the B-24. There were three of us up in the front of the B-24 – the navigator, the bombardier, and the nose gunner. He was in a turret right up at the nose of B-24. In this particular mission I tapped the bombardier on the shoulder and I pointed out because I was looking out to the left, and there was a Jap fighter there [00:32:16] just flying a little high and a little high. And then he started to turn in, and that's when the bombardier stood up. And the two of us, like jerks, were looking out that little plastic window kind of peeking out, hiding behind the aluminum which is thinner than your mother's coffee pot. This Jap came screaming in. [00:32:46] He came... We were nervous then because we had been hearing about the kamikazes down in the South Pacific. And this guy just bore in on us. And he passed so close that we could see the dirty oil streaks on the bottom side of his plane. I don't think he was the one that put the shells into our wing. I think it was some guy [00:33:16] who came out of the sun. But that bombardier he said some rude words to me, and he said, "Don't you ever do that to me again." That was the extent of that particular deal.

I wanted to touch on one thing. On that earlier mission when we had those fighters and that old plane [00:33:46] the nose turret gunner – who's a little Jewish kid Dave Struckman from Brooklyn. In fact we were all from either Brooklyn or Jersey. But the thing was that he got into his turret, just prior to going over the target, and he was testing all of the actions. And that turret got stuck over pointing to the left. [00:34:16] He could not swing it around in the horizontal. Now he could move his guns up and down and fire them, but he had to wait until the fighter came into position for him to hit them. And boy, he was very nervous. We had an emergency set up there, and it was a crank. And we couldn't get him out – or I couldn't. It was my job. I couldn't get him out [00:34:46] while the action was all going on. But then finally when it started to cool down I got the crank in there and cranked his turret around, so I could open those two little doors and pull him out of there. Boy, I didn't envy him. I didn't envy any of those turret gunners, and particularly he in the nose and the ball turret. I got [00:35:16] into that ball turret one time, and I stood in there for about two or three minutes, and I told them, "Get me out of here."

You had to be about 5 feet tall and as thin as Don Knotts to really get in one of those things. I'm a little taller than average. I was 6'2". Little Dick Korpanty, the pilot he was 6'4", [00:35:46] but I don't think he ever tried to get into the ball turret. Some of those things you think back – man, how did we ever make it? It was in July when the radio operator got wounded. And it was time for us to go on an R&R. So it was around the

beginning of August that they sent us up to Anchorage for rest and recuperation. [00:36:16] Unfortunately, we got there one afternoon. The next morning the base commander calls Korpanty in, called the pilot in and said, "You get that crew out of here or I'm going to send you all back down to Shemya." The thing was that a couple of the enlisted men [00:36:46] they were getting swacked and they down in the red light district in Anchorage with a bottle of zombie under their arm and making a ruckus, and the military police nailed them and took on in. They didn't make an official arrest, but it was enough [00:37:16] for the word to get to the base commander who in turn told us get out of there or we're back down to Shemya. Then we started to scrabble around, and finally was able ... we stayed there another couple of days until a C-47 was heading over to Fairbanks. And we got over to Fairbanks, and I woke up that one morning and heard something on the radio [00:37:46] that we had dropped the bomb on the Japs and blew away a city. So I guess that was August 6.

**Joshua Bell:** [00:37:59] What did you think about that?

**Robert Brown:** [00:38:03] That was manna from heaven. It's difficult to describe the inner feelings when you're in combat. And the relief was out of this world. It's a wonder we didn't kill ourselves getting drunk or disorderly or just doing stupid things. But they dropped the second bomb two or three days later, and then we knew [00:38:33] that things were going ... I think they declared the surrender, but it took us a long time to get back down the chain. But he didn't make much difference.

But when we got back down there we had to fly another mission. The guns were loaded, no bombs, and do not fire unless fired upon. And so [00:39:03] when we got over there one of our own ... it was a Russian fighter, and I think it was the old either P-39 that we had given them under the lend-lease program. He came up to check us over, but no harm done. We went over to the island which we had been constantly bombing, [00:39:33] and the Russian landing craft were going in there. And we were just a little pushed out of shape on that because we've been doing all the work and then they just go on in with their boats and take over. But that was one of those agreements between Roosevelt and Stalin on that. They had that great meeting and gave away the things. No, not Taiwan –

**Joshua Bell:** [00:40:00] Yalta?

**Robert Brown:** [00:40:02] What's that?

**Joshua Bell:** [00:40:03] Yalta.

**Robert Brown:** [00:40:05] Might have been – one of those big four meetings. But nonetheless, just to see the Russians going in because they ... I heard one story, and I never was able to verify it. We had B-25s over there in Attu. There was the 77th bomb squadron, and they used to hit the islands. And it was my understanding that [00:40:35]

one of them was pretty well shot up, and he was going over to Kamchatka. Kamchatka was the Siberian, Peninsula. The main area was Petropavlovsk.

So the one plane was heading over Kamchatka, and another B-25 joined up with him to protect him. And the story I got was that when they got over Kamchatka, the Russians fired, [00:41:05] hit one of the planes. It blew up and blew both planes out of the sky. But I never did verify it, so I never really repeated it.

Like the day when we found out that they were giving up and all that then we went back to military routine. Ranking officers would come around and inspect [00:41:35] our barracks. We kept them neat because they were big. You can keep a big place clean. So after that my own personal deal was that we went to... lets see... took our leave and then down to Greensboro, North Carolina. And that was for our discharge. [00:42:05]

Our crew was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal with cluster, the Bronze Star Battle Star. But I got out, and I was out for two years. I stayed in the reserves, and then I went back in for the Berlin airlift. And I went back in September '48, and October '48 [00:42:35] I was over there in Germany and didn't have a clue what I was doing. But I was still a second lieutenant, and that was a great operation over there in Germany. And we held the communists back on that one. And then I got back to the States and went into navigation upgrading and joined the 28<sup>th</sup> bomb group at Rapid City, [00:43:05] South Dakota in B-36s.

One little interesting thing about that the squadron, actually, when we were up in the Aleutians it was the 28th bomb group composites. That's because we had a squadron of B-24 and a squadron of B-25s. So it was all around the circle, and a couple years [00:43:35] later I wound up back in the same organization, the 28th bomb wing, and they had these monsters planes called the B-36. I don't know if you're familiar with them. They weren't in the active inventory very long. But they had 10 engines.

**Joshua Bell:** [00:43:55] Wow.

**Robert Brown:** [00:43:57] Yeah, six pressure recipis and four jets. But the thing was they did not have the speed, and they didn't have the refueling capability. They kept the Russians that they for a while until the B-47, the smaller jet bomber, came in. And then finally the B-52 came in. And [00:44:27] I joined the B-52 outfit at Westover, Mass., the 99<sup>th</sup> bomb wing. So we flew our airborne alerts 24 hours. We go out to the [H line] aiming at Russia waiting for the go code, which fortunately never came. But I do feel that it was a good contribution to keeping [00:44:57] the communists at bay. Then later on in my career because I was inadvertently grounded, but then I went into communication, and I was stationed in Turkey for a year and a half. And then my final assignment was here at the Air Force Academy near Colorado Springs.

**Joshua Bell:** [00:45:23] And what did you do there?

**Robert Brown:** [00:45:25] I had a squadron for communications, communications squadron, and provided the various communications for the Air Force Academy.

**Joshua Bell:** [00:45:38] Excellent. You had a full career then.

**Robert Brown:** [00:45:42] Oh yeah, and I enjoyed it. When I went back to civilian life, right after World War II ... again pointing out that combat had some activities in your psyche that drive you up the wall. But I started to go to college, but I lived in Bayonne. I started to go to [Trident] over [00:46:12] in Brooklyn, and that was such a drag. I would walk about five blocks, take a train over to say Hoboken or Jersey City, take a ferry across the bay to lower Manhattan, take the subway to Brooklyn, take a trolley car down to [unintelligible 00:46:33] Avenue, walk over to the university. And then I turn around in the afternoon and just [00:46:42] do the reverse back to Bayonne. I lasted about six weeks there. I knew I wasn't going to do that for the rest of my life. Then I hit a couple of the factories in Bayonne, and that didn't appeal to me. And then when I got an offer from the Air Force for recall, I just pounced on it. After that it was [00:47:12] great.

**Joshua Bell:** [00:47:15] How did you finish? What was your rank at the time you finished?

**Robert Brown:** [00:47:20] Lieutenant Colonel.

**Joshua Bell:** [00:47:22] Lieutenant Colonel, okay.

**Robert Brown:** [00:47:26] Like I say, it was a good life. My immediate family they weren't long lived. The average was 69 years old. My one sister was 59, and one older sister was 74, and the others in between. And so I figured that's what I would wrap it up somewhere around the low 70s. And here I am 91. [00:47:56] I figure, boy, even the devil won't take me.

**Joshua Bell:** [00:48:08] You mentioned your family. How did your parents feel about you signing up?

**Robert Brown:** [00:48:21] I don't know. Is the word ambivalence? The thing was that everybody was going into the service. I mean in our town I think a couple of hundred guys were killed. And of course that weighs heavily on parents. But it was just a fact of life that there was a tremendous war going on. My father-in-law and he joined the Navy when he was 15. [00:48:51] And when his father found out about it ... in those days they could buy them out. So his father bought him out of the Navy. They didn't think too much about it. My brother had gone in before the war started. And so they were accustomed to a child being in the service. And then when I went it was so-so. Not that they didn't love me or anything like that, but [00:49:21] it was a simple fact of life at the time. One of my closest friends ... there was a family on 47th Street, nine boys, one girl, and one adopted

girl. And actually every one of those boys ... one was killed. Denny was killed in a B-17 over Arnhem, in Holland. And the only one who didn't go was Nicky who [00:49:51] had a mental problem. But he wasn't all that rough. And then after the war a couple of them went in. But just imagine when you have nine boys and war was last thing going on, and one had been killed. Mrs. White, she was just torn to pieces.

**Joshua Bell:** [00:50:20] Where did your brother serve?

**Robert Brown:** [00:50:25.2] He wound up in [weather], and he wound up his service as a master sergeant in the weather service. He was smart. I think he was valedictorian of his class in Bayonne. Yeah, it was a good life. I can complain now. The weather up here is as bad as you guys are getting it back east. [00:50:55] Are you getting it out there? You're in Rhode Island, right?

**Joshua Bell:** [00:51:00] Yep, that's correct.

**Robert Brown:** [00:51:02] Yeah, and did Rhode Island get hit like the rest of the area?

**Joshua Bell:** [00:51:08] We got maybe 6 inches in this last round.

**Robert Brown:** [00:51:14] We keep getting these 2 and 3 inches, but they don't melt. The other night I was going to bed, and we were expecting a rough night. And it was 16 below. And the next morning I got up and here I had slipped on my longies, and I went out on the porch to check the temp, it was 2 above. We were having some sort of an [inversion] here.

**Joshua Bell:** [00:51:38] Having a heat wave.

**Robert Brown:** [00:51:40] Yeah, I told my son who lives down in Colorado Springs, "Hey, come on up here. It's the banana belt."

**Joshua Bell:** [00:51:54] I wanted to ask you – had you traveled a lot before you joined the service?

**Robert Brown:** [00:52:00] No, that was the thing. I was born and raised a Democrat, and in Hudson County, N.J. ... Hudson County compares to Cook County in Illinois, no ethics. My father was deeply involved in politics although he was, like I said, blue-collar. I never understood why the heavy-duty politician came to him. But [00:52:30] when you live under circumstances like that you don't question it. I drove my father around. He'd be in the back seat along with his friend Mike Donovan who was real political power broker in Bayonne. And Bayonne was all Democrat. And at that time it was the Irish that held the power. It was Bailey, Donovan, Donahue, [00:53:00] Keenan – the whole [thing]. The thing was they'd sit in the back and be discussing this, that, and the other thing. I could not hear them talking, but I do remember on our windows we lived on the main street,

[Broadway], and we can't what I call the precursor to the bumper sticker. These were stickers that you stuck on your window [00:53:30] – “honest government,” this, that, and the other thing. But the problem was Bayonne was all Democrat, so factions were too ... one Democrat faction against the other. That's the way things worked.

When I was 13 in 1936, I organized the kids' parade one night in October. [00:54:00] “Vote for Roosevelt! Vote for Roosevelt!” We had a bugle, and we had a drum, and we made enough noise to attract attention. And so we marched from 47<sup>th</sup> Street to 41<sup>st</sup>. At that time I was living on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. And of course the parade had to pass the building where we lived. And then we started up 41<sup>st</sup> Street, and some guy [00:54:30] – he knew we were coming up the street – he threw us a couple of packs of Luckies. We smoked our way back home from 47<sup>th</sup> Street. Then later on I worked at the precinct. And my father asked me if I'd haul some voters. [00:55:00] I got my instructions from the [unintelligible 00:55:04.0]. And he'd tell me where to go, and I'd go and pick up a couple of these people who had no transportation, bring them down to the building place, the poll, and bring them back. The problem there was as a result I didn't have much to do, but it was still time-consuming.

The next day my father [00:55:30] said, “What did they give you?” And I said, “\$2.” My father was from the old school, so he used some salty words. He said, “He was supposed to give you \$5.” Maybe that's what triggered me to drop the Democratic Party 60 years ago because I just never could see any honesty. I'd been in contact [00:56:00] with some friends back there by phone, of course, and I'll tell you the jersey taxes were driving the people nuts. And Bayonne, which used to have a population of to 77,000, the last I saw on one of those maps or something on the internet they were down to 66,000. And the taxes ... I was talking to her [00:56:30] ... I think her home was valued at \$140,000. When I was a kid I heard the roadway was going to be repaved. And they decided to paint it with concrete. Asphalt was the choice of the day at that time, and a lot of people said, “What the devil are they going with concrete for?” [00:57:00] And the gagsters were saying, “The commissioners are getting a nickel a bag.” But the thing was that the job was halfway finished, and where they began it was already cracking. It was a standard political routine. In fact the police and the fire departments they used to be up for sale. [00:57:30] And when I was a kid I think they were \$250 a copy. If you could come up with \$250 you could get a policeman's job, which would last you for the rest of your life. They finally went to civic service, but still it's a gamey set up.

**Joshua Bell:** [00:57:53] Was there a sense of optimism during Roosevelt's administrations?

**Robert Brown:** [00:58:00] Say again?

**Joshua Bell:** [00:58:01] Was there a sense of optimism that Roosevelt brought to the office?

**Robert Brown:** [00:58:08] Well, again being in a Democrat environment you start thinking this is great. But most of us never got outside the city limits. It's like a lot of our urban people. They don't have a clue as to life beyond their neighborhood. So if the local [00:58:38] word says, "This is great. Vote Roosevelt in and there'll be a car in every garage and a chicken in every pot." But the thing was we didn't have a political sense. I guess it was a sense of [owning]. Maybe we owned the country. But that's about it.

**Joshua Bell:** [00:59:08] Did you travel much before joining the service?

**Robert Brown:** [00:59:15] Not really. We didn't have an automobile until I was about 14. And by then my older sister and my brother had gone to work. By virtue of some extra money coming in the family bought a '32 Dodge. And I forgot the year that ... about '36. But the thing was we finally got [00:59:45] an automobile and then my brother was the one who drove much. He didn't like driving at all. So we made one trip to Montréal. That was my mother and my brother, of course, and my older sister, and I. But that was a trip up to Montréal and back.

And [01:00:15] I can't think of any trips outside... We used to have excursion boats going out of Bayonne. And the Democrats... Where did they go? Rockaway. But then the Republicans have a boat ride, and we went to what we call Rotten Point, Conn. Because [01:00:45] the people – like I say blue-collar – they were drinkers. And up there in Rotten Point, Conn., they learned that there weren't any watering holes. But the one Democrat party train ride from Bayonne to Asbury Park that was lulu. The Asbury Park boardwalk they looked forward to Bayonne, [01:01:15] the Democrat party train ride. I heard these estimates way, way back that it would be 20,000 people going to Asbury Park on the excursion. That sounds a little strange in a city of only 77,000.

But the thing was that the policeman would be selling the tickets. And they [01:01:45] would go into Sam [Catches] candy store. Each of those tickets cost \$5, and Sam would be pretty much obliged to buy five tickets. In fact just about every storekeeper along Broadway felt an obligation to buy tickets or else. So in fact we used to [01:02:15] climb on board those trains and not even think about having a ticket. That's the way it was. The conductor would come through, and he'd want the ticket. Don't have a ticket ... and the last car on the train was reserved for people like us who didn't have tickets. And then we would go back there, and we would sit.

And there was a Bayonne cop on board, and right prior to getting to [01:02:45] Asbury Park he would leave the car. We got the clue, and we raced up and joined whoever else was on the train. And that's the way we lived.

And when we got in to Asbury Park we'd climb under the Boardwalk, change into our bathing suit, and have a fine day. And in those days people who could afford it, [01:03:15] when they went into a bathhouse, they would rent the towel for \$0.10, and all of those towels were marked, "Asbury Park 1933." And as a kid in one of my



[unintelligible 01:03:33] said that I think every house on 47th Street had a bath towel from Asbury Park because [01:03:45] people who could afford it they'd just leave the towel on the beach. And we'd snap them up and stick them in our bag. And we always had some bath towels.

**Joshua Bell:** [01:03:58] You mentioned riding on a train. What was the train ride to basic training like?

**Robert Brown:** [01:04:07] Yeah, they picked us up in buses in Bayonne and drove us over to Newark and then they put us on the train from Newark down to Fort Dix, N.J. And all those trains, Pennsylvania Railroad and the like, they all got out that [unintelligible 01:04:28]. And those trains they had wood-burning stoves in the end, [01:04:37] and then the seats were woven straw. So that was the type of transportation we had on our first military ride.

**Joshua Bell:** [01:04:55] What do you remember thinking when you showed up at ... was it Fort Dix you went to?

**Robert Brown:** [01:05:03] Yeah, again because there were so many you were just a number. And you didn't have a clue as to what was going on.

We had a friend, Pauly Fox, he eventually was killed over in Germany, but he was at the bus station with the rest of us. He was home on leave. And he's teaching us how to salute [01:05:33] and all that. We didn't have a clue what the salute was.

Then when we got there in Fort Dix, and we lived in tents. I remember they threw this stuff at you so fast that you just didn't absorb it all. Every time I heard a whistle ... we'd be in the tent and I'd hear a whistle I'd grab my mess kit. [01:06:03] Until somebody advised me, "No, this is for something else." And we were in Dix for about two weeks, and that's where they fitted us out with all our uniforms and the like.

Like Joe White, my buddy said...he told me one guy from Bayonne, Whitey Jones, he had been in the Merchant Marine. And I don't know; he was a wiper, or a deckhand, or whatever – but I'm either a tanker or just a cargo ship. But the thing was that he had been torpedoed twice. And he didn't like that. So he accepted going into the Army. But he didn't have a great feel for the discipline. My buddy Joe said, [unintelligible 01:07:00]. He was walking off [01:07:03] the base at Fort Dix with some of the tags still hanging off his overcoat. At Fort Fraser they started tacking up these assignments on the board. Did I say Fraser? At Fort Dix, I'm sorry.

And I went to the bulletin board, and there I was going to Fort Eustis down in Virginia. [01:07:33] And the train took us down to Fort Eustis, and then we marched from the train. This was at night. The moon was out; it was balmy. Now here we were up in Jersey

in March, and it's kind of clammy about that time. So here we are in Fort Eustis, Va. Virginia, that's down south somewhere.

And we marched from the [01:08:03] train to the barracks. And in between I guess we passed where they were drinking beer. Soldiers were sitting out there in the beer garden drinking beer and hearing music coming. Wow, this is great.

We got to the barracks and naturally we had [01:08:33] to go through the whole ritual of getting bedding and the like. And then we had barracks bags loaded with stuff that we didn't have a clue as to what it was and with the initial B for Brown. The first thing some sergeant came in – again this was at night – “Brown, who’s Brown?” “I’m Brown.” “You're on guard duty in the morning.” What? [01:09:03] “What am I supposed to do?” “Put on your leggings and uniform and get out there” at I think it was some oddball time. Leggings?

I put on these leggings the next morning, and then I got it there, and then the sergeant was laughing until tears came to his eyes. I had them on backwards. And instead of the [01:09:33] holes or whatever being on the outside, I had them on the inside. And I guess I started to march with them, and I got all kinds of looks. But that was when I first deal with Fort Eustis. And that was the transition period. It had been [coast] artillery base for whatever. And then because they knew coast artillery was out for the duration then they were going to ... they made it an [01:10:03] anti-aircraft training base. But there wasn't all that much need for antiaircraft. But the commanding general on that base was pure infantry, right down to the marrow. And then we had everything was infantry.

Periodically they'd show you how to use antiaircraft guns, and they give you a lecture on this, that, and the other thing. But [01:10:33] the obstacle courses and 20 hikes ... it was a 13 week basic training, 20 hikes and up to 24 miles. I missed the 24 miler because I was being transferred to the Air Corps. But all the others ... boy I didn't miss one. But then I saw [01:11:03] ... I was in what they called the DEML, detached enlisted men's list, and I was in some crummy barracks awaiting transportation to wherever they were going to send me in the Air Corps. And there was a graduation parade. I think there were 13,000 in that parade. I felt sad because I had gone through the whole routine but didn't enjoy the parade but [01:11:33]. But that's about when I was transferred ...

**Joshua Bell:** [01:11:38] I've got to ask – how did you get tangled up with the Air Corps?

**Robert Brown:** [01:11:42] Well, there was a guy on our battery, Battery B. In our battery this guy was a washed out naval cadet. He had been in the Naval Air Corps and washed out as a pilot. And I guess they had some deal that they would be released from that assignment. [01:12:12] And then he wound up in the Army. We got to talking about the Air Corps. Now I have this cousin in the Naval Air Corps, but the Army Air Corps ... we kidded about it and said, “Well, I guess we couldn't shoot them down with our anti-aircraft, so that's a good place to be.”

And I joined the Air Corps as a cadet, with the intention [01:12:42] of being a cadet, but I didn't have a clue. So I just drifted along, and they sent me to Greensboro for Air Corps basic training, and boy that was a piece of cake after the infantry training. Then from Greensboro to Nashville, Tenn. for evaluation and assignment, and [01:13:12] you go through a whole battery of physical tests, mental tests, mental or physical acuity. And then they would reach you as being eligible for pilot, navigator, or bombardier. And fortunately I was good for all three, but I didn't have any great desire to be a pilot. So I just asked for navigation, [01:13:42] and I got it.

And the next assignment was to Munro, La., Solomon Field. That's where I completed my navigation training. There's one thing I missed though. When I was accepted as an aviation student, and because the pipeline was really getting backed up they were sending us to college. And I went to Gettysburg [01:14:12] College for three months until there was an opening in the pipeline for the rest of the deal.

**Joshua Bell:** [01:14:21] What did you do at Gettysburg?

**Robert Brown:** [01:14:23] Gettysburg, Pa., yeah.

**Joshua Bell:** [01:14:26] What did you do there at the college?

**Robert Brown:** [01:14:30] I was in some minor military ... we had the usual PT, marching, running, and the like, but it was more college oriented. And we took a lot of math and other courses that were college accredited. And it was a way of keeping us corralled until they could get us into the regular [01:15:00] Air Force.

**Joshua Bell:** [01:15:05] What did you learn in Nav School?

**Robert Brown:** [01:15:10] Well, that was pretty good because you went from a standard type of ... one thing was called pilotage. That's where you look out the window, and you could see a town and you'd say, "There's Bayonne," or "There's Manhattan," or something. That was pilotage. DR, which was dead reckoning – you do some calculations; you measure the distance and course from point A to point B. Then [01:15:40] you put it on your chart and then try to follow it. The time thing - there was the solution navigation. That was really the core of the training – to learn the stars, to learn how to shoot them, how to plot them on your chart, and to use those what we call [01:16:10] celestial fixes to navigate. And so in conjunction with that we got clear up to spherical trigonometry, which was pretty sporty. And that was a good solid course. A lot of it stayed with me. When I was up there in the Aleutians, in those dead spots between the island groups, I [01:16:40] used to shoot the fixes and sun lines to keep us headed in the right direction.

**Joshua Bell:** [01:16:50] How did you pass the time on the islands in between flights?

**Robert Brown:** [01:16:57] I tried to think about that. About the only diversion was maybe to go to the O Club which was a bigger Quonset hut. My buddy Moose and I ... Moose and I went clear through from cadets to graduation, to Boise, over to Topeka, over to Langley Field, over to [01:17:27] Hamilton, up to the Aleutians. We were together for a long time. He was the navigator on [unintelligible 01:17:34] crew. He and I would take our 45s and get down on the beach. And whatever head popped out of the water out there we'd take a pot shot at it and missed every single time. I guess it was seals or otters or a walrus – those strange things that are up there in those cold waters. [01:17:57]

**Joshua Bell:** [01:18:00] What can you tell me about your crew – personalities and where they were from?

**Robert Brown:** [01:18:06] My parents?

**Joshua Bell:** [01:18:07] Your crew.

**Robert Brown:** [01:18:11] Well, Dick Korpanty the pilot, he was from Brooklyn. The copilot Willy Flanery was from Brooklyn. I was from Bayonne. The bombardier, the crew bombardier – the last one we had – was from Philadelphia. Then we had six [01:18:41] enlisted men. The nose gunner was from Brooklyn, tail gunner was from Georgia. The ball turret gunner was from Texas. The upper turret it was from Mississippi; engineer from Michigan. And Michigan, Jim McKay, he was the only married person on the crew. In fact when we [01:19:11] got that plane at the Hamilton Field to take up to the Aleutians, he was going to name it ... well, the truth of the matter is we didn't get to name it because the plane was taken away from us, and it turned out to be the Whistling Shithouse. I won't say it over the phone. But the thing is those [01:19:41] pictures ... I gave all those pictures to Korpanty, both the planes that were up there and also crew members. He went to one of the conventions, and apparently all the crewmembers snapped up their own pictures or the pictures of the planes that they were happy with. That's right. The plane was going to be Lady in Waiting in respect to the [01:20:11] engineer – he was a staff sergeant – in respect to his wife. But they took it away.

**Joshua Bell:** [01:20:21] Did you name the other planes that you were on?

**Robert Brown:** [01:20:25] No, because like I said when we got up there, and we were the brand-new crew [unintelligible 01:20:34] rotten, old, stinking plane. And eventually of course we gain some sort of seniority, and we have some planes that were good. But as far as [01:20:55] some experiences are concerned, that low-level stuff, that bothered me because we were on one particular mission and to avoid radar some 250 miles out from the Jap islands we were to go down to 100 feet. And there we were down at 100 feet and skimming over that water, heavy-duty [01:21:25] cloud cover. And I'm trying to take a wind drift on the waves, and it was impossible. And I'm trying to do some dead reckoning. We had no clue as to where we were. We were going to head between two

close islands. The narrows going between those two islands might have been about let's say [01:21:55] 10 miles. So that was a pretty narrow corridor. And I swept that thing, and then finally when we were maybe about 50 miles out we had a radar [Ricky] operator on board. And it started to open up. He looked at his scope, and there we were headed right between the two islands, just like I was supposed to. [01:22:25] So I said, "A walk in the park, no sweat." I about died 1,000 deaths.

**Joshua Bell:** [01:22:40] You mentioned that on your first mission things were kind of hairy. What do you remember thinking about all those situations – seeing the guys jump and being under fire?

**Robert Brown:** [01:22:53] That's one of the things I've always had a difficult time ... I can't remember any great fear – apprehension, yes. And once you hit the combat line, so to speak, you're busy, and you aren't too concerned about the problems that might come up. Once he left the target area, [01:23:23] and you're going out to sea, the fighters would try to follow you, but then they had to turn back to get to their home base. Then you began to worry because in some cases the engines were not working properly and being shot up. You began to think if we hit the water ... we used to hear various estimates of [01:23:53] 5 minutes to 30 minutes in that cold water up there. But you would think about it. Then I think you would become a little fatalistic, and say, "What the heck – what can I do about it? If we go in, we go in." I hope that I lived a clean life.

**Joshua Bell:** [01:24:17] At any point did you want to be assigned to a different theater of operations?

**Robert Brown:** [01:24:25] No, not really because the situation at the time – and we were talking about time in the theater rather than number of missions. It was kind of six of one, half a dozen of the other. And it was as rough as any of the other theaters as far as survivability [01:24:55] because the weather was so bad.

There was one instance when one of the planes – it was before our time – he radioed he was coming in. It was at night. It was murky and every other thing. And then they didn't hear from him, and the next morning when it got light the only thing they found out in the water was the navigator's briefcase floating, and that was about it.

So the weather really [01:25:25] was the deciding factor. That's of course why they assigned or said you'd be out there a year. They didn't use numbers. Like over there in Europe 25 was the magic number – at least in the beginning of the war. So I think only about one third of the crews were making that 25 number. In our case it was hard to determine. [01:25:55] Maybe if they had said 25 we might have completed it before the war ended. I don't know. But we weren't really involved in all of the peripheral stuff. Here's our job. We go drop the bombs and shoot down the planes, and let's get home safe.

**Joshua Bell:** [01:26:22] Did a lot of planes come back shot up?

**Robert Brown:** [01:26:27] Not really because they generally would land, if they were still flyable, they'd land in Kamchatka, the Petropavlovsk the Russian, Siberia there. They just weren't coming back with a lot of battle damage. And that's why we had such a big [01:26:57] crowd when we got back with the plane shot up and the radio operator wounded. It was something new for the majority of the people on our home base island.

**Joshua Bell:** [01:27:13] I forgot to ask – how long was the flight from your island to the target location?

**Robert Brown:** [01:27:23] The total times generally ran from 8 to 10 hours depending on which island we were hitting and what we were going to do. But we used to use 8.5 as a rule of thumb for the standard hitting the Navy base, or the staging base, or the Army base over there. But [01:27:53] I think you could use 9 hours as a round-trip.

**Joshua Bell:** [01:27:59] That's a long time to be up in a plane.

**Robert Brown:** [01:28:03] Oh man, it was at the time. The maintenance of the planes was a tough thing. We had a lot of young men – a lot of them had never even touched an engine in their lives. And then all of a sudden there they are, after some quick training in a maintenance school, up there maintaining those planes. You had a little apprehension on that. [01:28:33] There were times when we had to abort, come back to base. Of course we always had a gag. "You're back?" "Yeah, avoid the rush." We just would kid somebody ... if he had more than one abort in a couple of months they give you the razz.

**Joshua Bell:** [01:29:03] While you were there were you optimistic about the outcome of the war?

**Robert Brown:** [01:29:10] That again is another area that I just had [unintelligible 01:29:15] the whole time. We really were discussing the end of the war. We were discussing our own little school of activity: when are we getting home? The big picture ... we used to see the pictures of fighter carriers in Europe or fighter carriers here. Some of the [01:29:40] snippets of videos would show what was going on in various theaters down the South Pacific, over there in Europe, Italy, and the like. But we were just pretty much concerned with are all little bailiwick. It wasn't selfishness; it was just a case of ... that was the times, the events. [01:30:10]

**Joshua Bell:** [01:30:13] Did you stay in contact with your family?

**Robert Brown:** [01:30:17] Oh sure. We had the post set up and we used to use that old V-mail. I don't know if you've ever seen the V-mail. They take your letter and then photograph it and then reduce it in size. And then that saved a lot of volume in the Postal Service and the like. But yes, we stayed in contact. The family would be sending [01:30:47] regular mail. Our mail would be going out both censored and V-mail.

**Joshua Bell:** [01:30:55] Did you ever get homesick?

**Robert Brown:** [01:31:03] Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that the United States was my home. I wanted to get back to the States. But sure, family was there, friends were there, and my childhood, and the like. But also I was interested in the fact that there was life in this world beyond Newark. [01:31:33] What was that expression? What was the greatest thing in your life or something? Newark in the rearview mirror.

**Joshua Bell:** [01:31:45] What was that?

**Robert Brown:** [01:31:48] I said there was an old joke about what was the most enjoyable moment of your life? I said, "Seeing Newark in my rearview mirror?"

**Joshua Bell:** [01:32:04] Oh goodness. Well, I think I'm out of questions for now. Just a follow-up – have you stayed in touch with any of your fellow veterans from the Aleutians?

**Robert Brown:** [01:32:21] The only one was Dick Korpanty, and he's the one I mentioned. I got a call from him. He'd been living up in Fairhaven, Conn. And I got a call from him. He had suffered a stroke. He lived alone; he was a widower. And he had a stroke, didn't know it, but his son lived in [01:32:51] Iowa. So after the initial treatment for the stroke he was transported to Iowa to a VA facility. I think what he said was that it was a civilian facility with a VA contract.

**Joshua Bell:** [01:33:21] Have you heard from him since?

**Robert Brown:** [01:33:24] No, unfortunately, he was on a cell phone, and I'm sure he doesn't have a hardwired phone. And I didn't catch where this facility was located. I thought perhaps if he was to call back again I could get the basic information. I went on the Internet and I tried to dig out something for the state of Iowa [01:33:54] and VA facilities with no results.

**Joshua Bell:** [01:34:01] Interesting. I'm going to check into that and see if we can't track him down.

**Robert Brown:** [01:34:06] And he's probably 89 now.

**Joshua Bell:** [01:34:11] Do you know his son's name?

**Robert Brown:** [01:34:14] No, I don't. But the name George ... I think he had two sons, and I think one of them was named George.

**Joshua Bell:** [01:34:27] Okay, I'll check into that.

**Robert Brown:** [01:34:30] Yeah, that'd be nice.

**Joshua Bell:** [01:34:33] Well, is there anything that I didn't ask you about that you wanted to share about your experience?

**Robert Brown:** [01:34:40] Well, I can't think of anything right now, but I can say this. We have each other's e-mail. If I think of something maybe I can e-mail it to you. Where do you think of some pertinent questions you could give me a phone call. Now, I can hear slightly regular for a short period of time, [01:35:10] but with questions like, "What? What? What?" I should get something. But if anything comes to mind that might be of interest to you and to set up I'll drop you a line.

**Joshua Bell:** [01:35:29] Excellent. Thank you so much. And I've got to ask – what are you most proud of about your time in the service?

**Robert Brown:** [01:35:38] I guess it was the combat, being able to do my part – the whole setup. Also proud of the [unintelligible 01:35:50]. It's just one of those things. I was proud when I was in the B-36s and particularly proud of the B-52s. I was one of the top crews in the setup. [01:36:08] I was one of the earliest members of the B-52s. I checked out in a B-52 in 1957. That's a long time ago, and they're still in the inventory. Just to keep the Russians and the communism at bay was important enough to me. That was my political [01:36:38] view that if they got a stronghold somewhere they'd really ruin our country.

**Joshua Bell:** [01:36:48] And I've got to ask – well, you obviously think that oral history is important because you're taking some time to talk with me. Could I have you say a couple of words about why you value collecting oral histories?

**Robert Brown:** [01:37:10] Well, because our lives revolve around our own history and the peripheral history [unintelligible 01:37:21] to have my own setup, my own little circle of friends and family and the like. And then it expands to the surrounding area and neighborhood. And then it eventually winds up to country. So from the historical standpoint [01:37:40] I am interested in somewhat ... now I'm not a scholar by any means. But the history of our country and the manner in which it has come along and is able to sustain the freedoms of our people, and the like, that's where I am interested in proud to be able to say that I helped support [01:38:10] our historical nature in the United States.

**Joshua Bell:** [01:38:17] Well, I appreciate your participation in the oral history project here. And I thank you immensely for your service in the Second World War and since.

**Robert Brown:** [01:38:28] I'm glad to see that there's interest shown because it was called the forgotten war. Of course they called the Korean War the forgotten war. But up there in the Aleutians it was forgotten. So this helps maintain the Aleutian history.



**Joshua Bell:** [01:38:52] Absolutely, and I appreciate that so much.

**Robert Brown:** [01:38:55] Well, Josh, it's been nice talking to you. Because I live alone I talk to myself a lot. Talking to someone else – it's been very nice for me.

**Joshua Bell:** [01:39:09] Well, I'm happy to help and happy to listen – especially given your interesting stories. And I might be in touch again to talk about the Berlin airlift a little bit at another point.

**Robert Brown:** [01:39:22] That was something else again.

**Joshua Bell:** [01:39:25] Well, all right.

[End of recorded material 01:39:29]