

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

The Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With
Lewis I. Brinson
Fitzgerald, GA
April 15, 2014
6th Bomb Group
40th Bomb Squadron
Crew Chief, B-29
Tinian

My name is Richard Misenhimer: Today is April 15, 2014. I am interviewing Mr. Lewis I. Brinson by telephone. His phone number is 229-423-4249. His address is 214 Walker Avenue, Fitzgerald, GA 31750. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Nimitz Education and Research Center for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I got your name from the 6th Bomb Group newsletter that goes out. You know Bill Webster, do you?

Mr. Brinson:

I don't really know any of them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK, do you go to the reunions?

Mr. Brinson:

We haven't been in probably four or five years.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK, So that agreement was OK with you?

Mr. Brinson:

Yes, that's OK.

Mr. Misenhimer:

First question: What is your birth date?

Mr. Brinson:

I got one coming up in a week. It's April 23rd, 1922.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you born?

Mr. Brinson:

I was born in Emanuel County, Georgia.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Brinson:

Oh, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How many of each?

Mr. Brinson:

One brother and four sisters.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was your brother in World War II?

Mr. Brinson:

No, he was in the Korean War.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Brinson:

Emanuel County Institute, D.C.I.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What year did you graduate?

Mr. Brinson:

I graduated in 1941.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on December 7, 1941 when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Brinson:

I graduated from high school and I got a job in Savannah and the very first day I was down there, the Japs attacked Pearl Harbor. I worked there one year and then I was called to the military.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you go into the military?

Mr. Brinson:

I graduated from high school in May 1941, then I went in the service in 1942.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Which branch did you go into?

Mr. Brinson:

The Army Air Corps.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you drafted or did you volunteer?

Mr. Brinson:

I was drafted into the Air Corps.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any choice of the branch?

Mr. Brinson:

No, I was drafted and had a good friend who was drafted with me and they put me in the Air Corps and put him in the Army.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go for your training?

Mr. Brinson:

I went to Texas for four months I believe I was in training for airplane mechanic.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where was that at?

Mr. Brinson:

Amarillo, Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you finished that, where did you go?

Mr. Brinson:

I went to airplane mechanic and from that I went into the job of flying as a crew chief. I went to

Utah after Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Brinson:

After that I went to Grand Island, Nebraska.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do there?

Mr. Brinson:

I was training as a mechanic.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What kind of plane did you work on there?

Mr. Brinson:

I worked on B-17s first. Then when the 29s came out I was just right to go overseas.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So when did you go overseas?

Mr. Brinson:

I went overseas.

Mr. Misenhimer:

It probably would have been 1944.

Mr. Brinson:

I think it was December of 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go to overseas?

Mr. Brinson:

Went to the Marianas Islands.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Which island did you go to and how did you travel over there?

Mr. Brinson:

I went by boat to Pearl Harbor and I went by boat to Tinian.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that boat trip over there?

Mr. Brinson:

The boat trip was a freighter and they had bunk areas, three sections of it. We had a few stopovers that were very brief.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do when you got to Tinian?

Mr. Brinson:

I got on Tinian Island, it's a chain of Guam, Saipan and Tinian and it was sugar cane that was on Tinian and the Seabees dozed that out and put in four runways. I was crew chief on a B-29 airplane.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you fly on the plane?

Mr. Brinson:

No, I was crew chief and I did a lot of flying of airplanes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What bomb squadron were you in? Were you in the 40th Squadron?

Mr. Brinson:

The 38th and the 39th and I was in the 40th Squadron.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was that the 6th Bomb Group?

Mr. Brinson:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The plane you were working on, was it ever damaged?

Mr. Brinson:

Yeah, it was damaged several times but it made it back.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What kind of damage did it have?

Mr. Brinson:

It was hit with flak.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was it hit by anti-aircraft?

Mr. Brinson:

We had to do little patches. It made it back.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever go on the plane to a bombing raid?

Mr. Brinson:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You did?

Mr. Brinson:

I was sent out to Iwo Jima for a couple of weeks, flying, looking for downed aircraft.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You went to Iwo Jima?

Mr. Brinson:

Yes, for two weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Working on aircraft there?

Mr. Brinson:

Yes and I flew there, looking for downed aircraft and I was crew chief but I was still able to fly with them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you find some downed aircraft?

Mr. Brinson:

No. I didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened? Did your plane ever lose any engines?

Mr. Brinson:

Oh, yeah. We replaced three engines at one time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What happened to the engines?

Mr. Brinson:

They were worn out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you ever attacked by Japanese airplanes?

Mr. Brinson:

No, I was not but the airplane that I was a crew chief on, they were. They were attacked many times.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you anywhere near the Enola Gay airplane?

Mr. Brinson:

I was stationed on the same island but I was in there for a good while and this was a new group that came in and they flew with us. Their plane was built with no guns, nothing. It was built for speed. I watched them leave. They were all flying with another group, taking off flying with it and they had something special because they was built for speed more. Anyway when they dropped their atom bomb and they gave us a striker's report after they dropped it and we got it and we were able to go out and watch them come back. We saw the Enola Gay plane come back to Tinian and it landed there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then how about when they dropped the second atomic bomb?

Mr. Brinson:

That was three days later but the same. It took off from the same island and landed there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you see that plane come back?

Mr. Brinson:

Oh, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you think when you heard about an atomic bomb?

Mr. Brinson:

I thanked God I was coming home.

Mr. Misenhimer:

In April of 1945 President Roosevelt died. Did you all hear about that?

Mr. Brinson:

Oh, yes. I was working on the flight line and we got a report on the radio about his death.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What reaction did people have to that?

Mr. Brinson:

Well, he was our President so it hit us pretty hard.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on May 8 Germany surrendered. Did you hear about that?

Mr. Brinson:

We were in touch pretty well with the military.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any kind of celebration then?

Mr. Brinson:

Again, we knew we were going to be coming home pretty soon.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When Japan surrendered, did you have a celebration then?

Mr. Brinson:

Yeah. We were able to fly up there to Japan after the atomic bomb had been dropped and we were able to fly over the Battleship Missouri there in Tokyo Bay and we were able to go...first we went over to Japan and they had been bombed out. We had dropped fire bombs and burned Japan and we were able to fly over it you know and look down on anything that was...like a

bridge or anything that would have...they burned everything that would burn is what I'm trying to say. We flew over all that burned stuff and then we flew over the Battleship Missouri out in the harbor and we were able to get down low and I could look down and see the people who were signing it there. Those G.I.s on top of the deck, enjoying it all.

Mr. Misenhimer:

After the war did you stay over there or what happened?

Mr. Brinson:

I left as soon as I could get out. With us, we knew the war was over.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you come back to the States?

Mr. Brinson:

Quick as I could get there. I got on an LST and I got back to Pearl Harbor on an LST and the traffic bringing G.I.s home was real. In Pearl Harbor we stayed for two weeks before we could get a ride home.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So about when were you discharged?

Mr. Brinson:

I came in to Atlanta. They were dismissing us in Atlanta. I was getting dismissed.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About when did you get out?

Mr. Brinson:

I caught a ride from the Hawaiian Islands. I got out New Year's Eve I was sent home and that was the end for me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you got out, did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Brinson:

Well, I took a bunch of time off to get reacquainted at home and then I went to the Georgia Teachers College and got a degree.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you use your G.I. Bill for that?

Mr. Brinson:

Yes, I did. I probably would not have been able to go to college without that. I got my B.S. degree and I taught too. I also went to summer school and went to Raleigh, North Carolina and got a Master's degree.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK, good. Now did you get home from World War II with any souvenirs?

Mr. Brinson:

I can't think of any.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Brinson:

The Red Cross came in while I was on Tinian and the nurses came in.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were on Tinian, what was your most frightening time when you were there?

Mr. Brinson:

Well, we got bombed and we were being bombed and there was no place to hide. The only thing

we had was a sugar cane patch behind but they came over Saipan and we were able to shoot them down.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How many reunions have you been to?

Mr. Brinson:

I think we have been to four probably.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything else you recall from your time in World War II?

Mr. Brinson:

Not really.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You wrote a letter to the 6th Bomb Group for the reunion. I think I'll read this letter and this will be in the report. Is that OK with you?

Mr. Brinson:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

This is the letter he wrote: I arrived at Tinian on the Sea Marlin. We were greeted by Tokyo Rose who assured us we would be welcomed by Japanese bombers. Thankfully they were devoted to Saipan and we were able to shoot down those that got through. I was with the 6th Bomb Group, 40th Squadron. My plane was Gravel Gertie. My training was as a mechanic and later I became a crew chief. Two things happened while I was on Tinian that made history. Colonel Tibbetts and the Enola Gay dropped the A-bomb on Hiroshima and I was privileged to fly over the Missouri in Tokyo Bay during the peace signing. When I got out of the service, I went to college and got

my B.S., Master's and six-year degree, something that would not have been possible without the G.I. Bill. I spent a very rewarding 39 years in education, first as a teacher and later as a tech school president.

That's a real nice letter that you have written there.

Mr. Brinson:

(wife) Somehow or other we missed that when it was published. That will be good to have that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Mr. Brinson I want to thank you for your time today and I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II.

Mr. Brinson:

I'll be 92 years old in two weeks. So I'm 92 years old and I'm thankful to still be alive.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, sir, that's good. OK.

Mrs. Brinson:

Lew Brinson is our son.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you have a phone number for him and the address?

Mrs. Brinson:

229-423-3717. He lives right next door to us.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Next door?

Mrs. Brinson:

202 Walker Avenue.

Mr. Misenhimer:

All right.

End of Interview

Transcribed by:

Janice Conner

Winamac, IN 46996

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Oral History by:

Richard Misenhimer

P.O. Box 3453

Alice, Texas 78333

Home: (361) 664-4071

Cell: (361) 701-5848