The National Museum of the Pacific War
(Admiral Nimitz Museum)

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. David Braden
September 30, 2000

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(B-29 Navigator - Saipan)

I'm Kepper Johnson, a volunteer with the Nimitz Museum. Today is September 30, 2000. I'm interviewing Mr. David Braden. This interview is taking place at the Fredericksburg High School in conjunction with the Pacific Operations Symposium sponsored by the National Museum of the Pacific War. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Parks and Wildlife, for the preservation of historical information related to this site.

Mr. Johnson: May I ask you Mr. Braden just to identify yourself, give your name, address, date of birth, your parents' names and where they came from.

Mr. Braden: I'm David Braden. I was born November 10, 1924. I live at 3310 Fairmount, Apartment 17E, in Dallas, Texas. My parents were Lois and Darrell Braden and they were natives of Dallas also. They are both deceased.

Mr. Johnson: Do you have brothers and sisters.

Mr. Braden: No, I am an only child.

Mr. Johnson: What was your educational background prior to entering the Armed Forces?

Mr. Braden: I had a year and a half of junior college at North Texas Agricultural College, now the University of Texas at Arlington. I was studying to be an aeronautical engineer there and planned to go

on to Texas A&M to finish my degree program, but it didn't work out that way. World War II came along. The day I was 18 years old I signed up for the Air Force Reserve and was called up the following February.

Mr. Johnson: What date was that?

Mr. Braden: February 1943.

Mr. Johnson: 1943 was when you enlisted?

Mr. Braden: I signed up in '42 and then in '43 they called all Air Corps College Reservists to go to Aviation Cadets.

Mr. Johnson: That was in Dallas?

Mr. Braden: Yes, in Dallas.

Mr. Johnson: Where were you on December 7, 1941? Do you remember?

Mr. Braden: Yes, sure I do. I remember exactly. NTAC was an all-ROTC school for the male students. We had two battalions of infantry cadets. On December the 7th, 1941, we were having a parade for all our parents, teachers, and people in Arlington. They were all invited. While we were on the field, as we marched down and stood before the audience that had gathered in the grandstands there at the football stadium, they announced that America was at war, that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. You could hear the mothers in the audience gasp because we all had rifles on our shoulders, we were all in uniform, and they thought we would just march off into boxcars and be gone. It didn't happen quite that

quick.

Mr. Johnson: Your joining the Army Air Corps was the way you entered the service? You did this because of your love for flying? Had you ever flown?

Mr. Braden: I had never really flown and I had only had a ride in an airplane one time. When I was 12 years old I had an uncle that was in the old Army Air Corps at Randolph Field. He took me out and they were flying those little pea shooter planes. From that day on I always wanted to fly. When the opportunity came along, I was really studying aeronautical engineering. I hadn't gotten very far in school, but that is what I was planning to do with my life. I had always planned that I would go into the service and learn to fly; have that as part of my career.

Mr. Johnson: Would you describe your training that you received after you first entered the service?

Mr. Braden: The first thing that happened to me was that they sent me to the University of Tennessee. I had completed almost two years of engineering so they didn't keep me there but two months. The Air Corps called up every college trainee in the Air Force Reserve all at once all over the United States. They didn't have any place to put them, so they sent us to Basic Training at Sheppard Field and then

they deployed us to College Training Detachments all over the United States. So they sent me to the University of Tennessee and kept me there for two months. I left there and went to Nashville, Tennessee, to be classified as a Navigator, Pilot, or Bombardier. It almost broke my heart. I was classified as a Navigator. That is because I've got problems with my eyes. I'm nearsighted in one eye and farsighted in the other. Essentially they said that I was cock-eyed. They needed pilots badly at that particular time because they were all getting killed in England that they sent me back for another examination. It was lengthy, but they said that I couldn't fly an airplane with the kind of eyesight that I had. So, all my buddies shipped out to Maxwell Field for training and I had to stay there at the classification center taking PT two times a day and tearing up coal boxes for two or three months; then I went to Selman Field, Monroe, Louisiana, Navigation School, preflight. I finished preflight and then went to Aerial Gunnery School at Fort Meyers, Florida. I came back wearing gunners wings and went into Advanced Navigation. I don't recall exactly how long the course; maybe three months or so. I graduated there and became a commissioned officer. I was one of the top people in my class, probably because of my engineering background, which meant I could add and subtract well. They sent me to Boca Raton, Florida, for a month in Top Secret training to become a radar bombardier

and use that radar for navigation. When I say “Top Secret,” they really meant it. Our classrooms were surrounded by a barbed wire fence with armed guard on duty at the entry to the compound. Training flights were out over the ocean. At this time I had a month’s leave. After that they sent me to Clovis, New Mexico, where I joined the combat crew of Lt Norman Westervelt. We trained there in B-29's. I had never seen a B-29; didn’t even know anything about it because it was a secret airplane at that time. Anytime you flew a B-29 anywhere, the crew was armed and posted a guard on it if they had to make an emergency landing or anything. We trained there until mid-November 1944 and were sent to Kearney, Nebraska, to pick up a brand new airplane and fly it overseas to Saipan. We arrived in Saipan in January as the 1st Replacement Crew for the 870th Squadron of the 497th Bombardment Group, 73rd Wing. The 73rd Wing had been there since November. They flew the mission to Tokyo on November 24, 1944. The results they were having were very, very poor. They had discovered the jet stream. The B-29's always flew across the target from the west to the east because they couldn’t fly into the jet stream upstream. The jet stream was 220-250 knots. I flew my first mission, which was a high altitude mission to Tokyo in very early February and the jet stream was behind us and we were scooting across Tokyo at 500 miles an hour and the Norden Bomb

Sight wouldn't keep up with it. We not only missed the target, I'm not even sure we hit Tokyo. That was the beginning of my career as a navigator.

Mr. Johnson: It sounds like you got some pretty high tech and advanced training because you were going into the B-29's.

Mr. Braden: Well the B-29 was a high tech airplane. It was a superb airplane, but it had a lot of problems initially with over-heating engines. Toward the end of the war that problem had pretty well flattened out, but they had to redesign the cowel flaps on it because losing engines was very common. Our results were awful insofar as high altitude, strategic bombing was concerned.

Mr. Johnson: You talked about the Norden bomb sight and its limitations, etc. Was speed the problem?

Mr. Braden: Speed was the problem.

Mr. Johnson: Went too fast?

Mr. Braden: Just to show you how big a problem it was, everybody said, "Well why don't you fly toward the target from the east to the west." One photo observation plane tried that one day and they found out they were going 3MPH backwards! Obviously, that didn't work either! That all changed when Curtis LeMay was appointed General of the XXI Bomber Command. He located his

headquarters on Guam. He saw the poor results we were having and tried some experimentation. He was a very innovative guy, and he was a tough guy. On a particular mission he mixed incendiary bombs with high explosive bombs. He liked the results he saw and decided to try a low altitude mission. They called the crews in for briefing — 197 planes. They briefed the crews that were going to fly in at 5,000 feet. They were not going to carry any ammunition in their guns. It was going to be a low level, surprise attack, probably around midnight, and we were to carry ten tons of incendiary bombs. It was the first incendiary bombing raid on Tokyo. This was the start of winning the war in the air over Japan. That particular mission was a huge success. The crews were groggy when they came out of the briefing saying, "You know, we are going to be the American kamikazes and they are going to shoot us down like crazy." Overnight the airplanes had been painted black on the bottom so they wouldn't reflect search lights. We carried ammunition for the tail gunner, but no where else. The gunners were issued what was called "rope", which was an inch wide strip of aluminum foil anywhere from 100-400 feet long, which when dropped, would confuse the Japanese radar and search lights. It also confused us because the search lights were all over the sky. When we got to Tokyo, some 6 ½ - 7 hours after taking off at dusk, we were in for a very exciting time. As we approached the

city we could see that it was on fire because the Pathfinders flew in an hour before us and set fires on four corners of the bombing area. Everybody came in and dropped into that, but as we got closer, as more and more planes would drop their bombs in there, a fire storm started. Before it was over 16 square miles of that city were reduced to ashes. It was like looking at the "Mouth of Hell." It was very frightening because all airplanes took off and flew singly, and we were all up there in the dark together. Nobody had any lights on, so search lights were catching aircraft right next to you and you didn't even know the guy was there. Every once in a while two of them would run together. Collisions were inevitable. Damage from fighters or flak was minimal. We flew into huge, black clouds of smoke. Within the airplane you could smell the smoke because the aircraft weren't pressurized. The updrafts from the heat of the fires threw the airplanes all over the sky. One guy even got a B-29 turned upside down. To show you how low we were flying when we got back home one plane had a Tokyo newspaper in an engine nacell that had drifted up and been scooped up as we went over the city. This first fire raid on Tokyo killed 83,000 Japanese. One million were left homeless and they really flattened 16 square miles of the city. LeMay was ecstatic. He ordered six more of those missions immediately to Nagoya three times, then Osaka, Kobe and Tokyo. Each got the full treatment.

At the end of those six missions we were out of incendiary bombs and we had to take a break while we got more in. We flew some missions to Kyushu, then we started the fire raids again. We flew 24 of those fire raids in all. I flew on 17 of them. We burned out 165 square miles of the major industrial cities. By June, we had just about obliterated any opposition that we had from the ground or from the air. The planes from the 313th Wing on Tinian started an operation called "Operation Starvation" mining the coastal waters in the harbors of Japan. They did it up right. They did it great. They just about stopped all of the shipping that took place in Japan. The Japanese couldn't get any raw materials at all, and very limited food or medicine. In the meantime we were going up in daylight and dropping leaflets on ten targeted cities which said, "we advise you to plead with your rulers to capitulate and unconditionally surrender, and we also advise you to evacuate your town because we are coming up here Sunday afternoon at 2 o'clock and we are going to burn it to the ground." We did exactly that. I don't whether they evacuated or not, but we performed as scheduled!. Strangely enough, two cities that were missing from these targeted cities were Nagasaki and Hiroshima. We didn't know why. By the end of August we were approaching the capability of thousand plane raids on Japan.

Mr. Johnson: End of August or the end of July?

Mr. Braden: Well, by the end of July. By the end of July we had almost that capability, but President Truman said drop the "A" Bomb. We didn't' even know about the 509th Composite Group on Tinian where the Enola Gay was. When the dropping of the Atomic Bomb was announced our crew had progressed to the status of being a Pathfinder and lead crew. We were flying over Truk on an afternoon practicing bombing, dropping one 100 pound bomb at a time. I think there were about ten Japs left down there on that island and they were shooting at us with rifles. While we were doing all this, we got this announcement over the Armed Forces Radio that they had dropped this new weapon on Hiroshima and had wiped out the city. We didn't believe it, but it turned out to be true. One or two days laterwe flew our last mission. On August 6th, I believe it was, the 509th dropped the bomb on Nagasaki. The Japanese capitulated. Flying home on this last mission, the 35th, which completed my tour, we were very low on gas because it was a long mission to Yawata, all over water. We were coming home and the Flight Engineer said, "We are not going to make it. We don't have enough fuel." The pilot said, "this is our last mission and we're going home." Everybody on this crew had survived a ditching. I didn't tell you about that, but we had survived a ditching and people had been killed, wounded, and that sort of thing.

We were members of a crew that had been assembled out of ditching survivors. We passed Iwo, our only mid-point landing field, and the Engineer's knuckles were beginning to turn white. As we got closer to Saipan we realized that we were going to run out of gas. We took a vote and everybody said that we had ditched once, we'll bail out this time. We kept flying. We got close enough to Saipan that we could see it and we got permission from the tower to come in and make an emergency landing, which we did. We bypassed every one, landed, got half way down the runway and all four engines quit. They had to haul the airplane off with a tractor. I got out and kissed the ground — that was the end of my war!

Mr. Johnson: I would like to go back and maybe pick up on a few other things. You mentioned you had picked up your new B-29 in Nebraska. Is that right?

Mr. Braden: Yes.

Mr. Johnson: Now did you fly that aircraft to Saipan?

Mr. Braden: Flew that aircraft to Saipan.

Mr. Johnson: What kind of route did you take?

Mr. Braden: We flew to Hawaii first. On the next leg to Kwajalein, we had an engine problem so we landed on Johnston Island, a tiny little speck out about 750 miles from Honolulu. I think we were the first B-29 that ever landed there. We landed OK, but we were worried

about being able to take off. The runway was very short. Anyway, we got our engine repaired and we did take off, cleared it, and flew on to Kwajalein and then on to Saipan.

Mr. Johnson: So it was done in a few legs, not like in the later days with air refueling.

Mr. Braden: No.

Mr. Johnson: What was the range that the plane was designed to have?

Mr. Braden: I think it had a ferry range of 4,150 miles, something like that. When it was loaded you could make a 3,000 mile round trip and that was just about it, or maybe they weaned us on gasoline. I don't think we ever had more than 20 minutes of extra gasoline.

Mr. Johnson: Now you were in Saipan from January '45 until the end of the war.

Mr. Braden: Yes, until the end of the war.

Mr. Johnson: What was it like, living in Saipan. That has been the subject of some pretty bad battles.

Mr. Braden: If you judge it by England, it was pretty primitive. The officers lived in Quonset huts and the enlisted men in tents. But they were floored tents. We had a mess hall. We didn't have any refrigeration. We got our beer ration, but no ice. The first beer I ever drank in my life was hot, so when I got a cold one I really like it. It was very warm there and we dressed in Khakis. I had some cutoffs and cut off my shirt sleeves. All of us, were told, and it proved to be true, that if we were shot down over Japan we would be

declared war criminals and executed. I had friends that had that experience and didn't get executed because the war was over by then, before they got around to them. We wore no identification indicating as to whether we were officers, except our dog tags. On missions we dressed informally because our planes were heated and pressurized, but when we got to the target we put on flight suits and flak jackets, etc. We put on goggles, oxygen masks, and depressurized the aircraft. Our living conditions were crude, we had no running water. The hot water that we had for shaving was from a Lister bag hung out in the sunshine. Your shaving kit was your G.I. steel helmet. We had trench latrines. One thing we didn't have was the terrible weather they had in England.

Mr. Johnson: For the eight months you were there, did things get any better after you had been there a while? Did they have any more refinements?

Mr. Braden: No there were no refinements. I'll tell you one thing, in our mess hall we had a big stack of powdered ice cream mix, but we had no way to freeze ice cream. The mess officer would give it to you. So we would take it and borrow an ammunition can, or something like that. On the way home, still at altitude, 40° below outside, we'd mix that ice cream up, depressurize the aircraft, put it out in the bomb bay and freeze it. That was probably the most expensive ice cream ever made in the world, but we had an ice cream feast!

Mr. Johnson: Was your food pretty crude too?

Mr. Braden: Food was terrible. When I got there I weighed 220, which is about what I weigh now. When I left I weighed bout 170 pounds, just from not eating. Nobody played any sports or anything like that because it was just too hot, but we swam a lot. We were on the side of the island where the wind wasn't and we had made a raft out there and anchored it off a reef. So every afternoon when I didn't have any flying duties, and I had no duties except to fly, we would swim out there in the ocean and that was our recreation.

Mr. Johnson: You didn't have organized PT in those days?

Mr. Braden: No, didn't have any PT at all.

Mr. Johnson: To keep people in shape, or anything like that. Did your crew have any special assignments? Were you with that same aircraft that entire period?

Mr. Braden: The crew that I went over there with, our third mission, we got shot up over Tokyo at high altitude and we turned off the target and were coming back. Had a little camera hatch that we could take pictures of the bombing run, and the radar man would close that hatch. He called up to the pilot and said, "Sir, we've got gasoline streaming all along the bottom plane," so we knew that we were going to ditch for a long time. We were losing fuel at a rapid rate.

I heard them talking this morning about self-sealing tanks. We had self-sealing tanks, but ours must have been ripped by the anti-aircraft fire. Anyway, we knew that we were going to ditch, and we always left the target, even a high altitude mission, always left the target and flew home alone. So we started to lighten the plane. We threw out everything that we could to make the plane lighter so we could increase our gas mileage. We threw out the Norden Bomb Sight. Due to the jet stream it wasn't worth a damn anyway! About every 20 minutes we would radio our position, so we always knew exactly where we were and everybody back in Saipan knew where we were. They had charted our course. Then when we did get ready to ditch we waited too long, the engines started fluttering and the pilot said that we were going down, we landed into the waves and when you come across you lift your nose to skim the top of the wave and drag your tail. Well, we waited too late, we had no power to lift, engines were dead. We ran into a wave about 15 feet high, going about a hundred miles an hour, it just crushed the nose of that B-29 and killed the Airplane Commander and the bombardier, broke the back of the Central Fire Control gunner. Everybody got beat up a little bit. We got out and nine of us got in two life rafts. Another plane from our squadron had heard our distress call and they came over and found us and gave our position a double check and dropped us a Gibson Emergency Radio.

We managed to get our rafts together. We lashed them together, but every time we would go over one of these waves the rubber would rub and it would make a noise. We knew that we were going to rub a hole in the rafts if that continued. Night was coming on. Just when it was getting ready to get dark, we heard this noise, looked up and it was a Navy PBY aircraft. They were Air Sea Rescue and these Navy guys had been flying out there for 18 months and had never found anybody. They decided they were going to come down and get us. They did come down and picked us all up. We had a devil of a time getting the man with the broken back in the plane. I was seated up between the pilot and the co-pilot. We got ready to take off. My day had been kind of rough. I had been up about 24 hours and I was in a state of shock. I was cold and hungry, been shot at and hit, seen two best friends killed, but I was handling it pretty well. I was kind of proud of myself. All of a sudden I looked up and I was scared to death. The plane was getting ready to take off. It had windshield wipers and they were working! I had never flown in an airplane that flew so slow and had windshield wipers on it. The pilot bounced that thing all over the ocean and we got off. It was almost as bad as the ditching, but he flew us back to Saipan. Took us into the hospital in ambulances. They gave us cigarettes, steak and eggs — nicotine and cholesterol! Maybe that said we didn't get you killed today, so maybe we will set up for it

later in life. I spent a night in the hospital and the next day they sent me back to the squadron. Two days before we ditched our aircraft, another replacement crew that arrived on Saipan the same time we had, had also ditched. We had become Squadron mates and good friends. They lost their navigator, their flight engineer, and one of their gunners in the ditching. Three of us filled those positions on that crew, the crew of Capt James Buckheit. Two others, the tail gunner and the radio operator, went to another crew. The airplane co-pilot went on another one. So, within a week I was back in the sky flying with Buckheit's crew as navigator, and flew 32 more missions together and became fast friends.

Mr. Johnson: You were with them the rest of your time?

Mr. Braden: Yes, the rest of the time. Most missions in the same aircraft, A-32, "Stripped for Action."

Mr. Johnson: What kind of memories do you have the buddies you made in the overseas location? Do you have experiences that have been retained in your memory?

Mr. Braden: I have a lot of memories of things that happened to us there and I have a lot of regrets. Until General LeMay got there, really until March, we didn't have any limitation as to the number of missions that we would fly like they had in Europe. They started out flying 25, and then you could go home at 30 as the odds got better. We didn't have any of that and were very demoralized

because of that and because of the fact that we weren't hitting anything. We didn't have a bombing strategy. I don't know what it was, but it was like we had an attitude that we are going to keep going back to Target 357 in Tokyo, which was an aircraft factory that we kept missing – we are going to keep doing that until we are killed. A lot of our losses were during the months of January and February – heavy losses. That is demoralizing because we only had eleven planes in the squadron. I came home and I didn't have a single guy's address. Maybe we didn't think we would need them. I just had my memories, and I didn't even have their hometowns. Once the computers came in I made contact and found my engineer, the original co-pilot, one of the gunners and the CFC man that got his back broken and the co-pilot on the second crew and the airplane commander that I flew with the second time. I have visited with the first tail gunner and I visited with my airplane commander of the second plane, who is now deceased. I made that contact and we've talked on the telephone every Christmas and keep in touch with each other by doing that.

Mr. Johnson: So, you were able to get in touch, years later.

Mr. Braden: Yes. Our flight engineer is a cranky old guy that was 28 years old and the rest of us were 20, I think. He was Regular Army. He had ben in the regular Army Air Corps before the war as an enlisted man. He was trained as an airplane mechanic, and he was

good at it. He is the only flight engineer that I know that became a commissioned officer by virtue of the fact that he was that good. He really knew his stuff. He is still "bitching" about that last mission when we didn't land on Iwo and the engines kicked out on the runway. Every year at Christmas time he writes me a letter complaining about that.

Mr. Johnson: You mentioned General LeMay and how well he was thought of. He was perceptive about strategy and tactics.

Mr. Braden: Well, we called him "Old Iron Pants" because he was a tough cookie. General Curtis LeMay was the George Patton of the Air Force, but we respected him tremendously. He put us on the path to winning the war, no question.

Mr. Johnson: He was what – two-star general at the time?

Mr. Braden: Yes.

Mr. Johnson: What about your other senior officers? Your squadron commanders....

Mr. Braden: We were close to our squadron commander, Lt Col Trickey, but I don't know what happened to him. I never had any contact with our group officers as a 2nd Lieutenant, or as a 1st Lieutenant before I left. Brigadier General Rosie O'Donnell was our Wing Commander, we had a lot of respect for him. He was a good man and tried to take care of us.

Mr. Johnson: You don't feel as though there was animosity about the senior

commanders because you were being ineffective for a long period?

Mr. Braden: No. We figured it out pretty quick, just didn't know exactly what to do about it. Never occurred to anybody that an airplane like the B-29, which had been designed to do high altitude strategic bombing, taking a bomb load 2,000 miles, would not be able to hit the targets, but there was a reason. As long as that jet stream was there we would miss. It was very erratic; it wasn't always at the same altitude and always the same speed. We did fly some altitude missions to around 12,000 feet that were successful. I think General LeMay figured out that there were only seven days a month that we were able to do visual bombings, so we had to bomb by radar on many missions, which is not nearly as accurate as visual bombing using a bomb sight. The low level incendiary raids were what worked.

Mr. Johnson: The Japanese defenses that you ran into were strictly high altitude anti-aircraft, you didn't have fighter?

Mr. Braden: No, actually, we had a lot of fighter attacks. On April the 7th the Marines had secured Iwo Jima and we got P-51 fighter escort. On that particular mission we had a real air battle. We had fighter attacks and one engine was shot out and they shot out our gun wiring. Also shot part of our control cables out and we were in kind of bad shape and the Bombardier looked up and here they came in to ram us. When they had shot up all of their ammunition they

were ready to dive into our aircraft. So we snuggled up as close as we could to our wing man. If you know anything about a B-29, it had a central fire control gunner, who could control every gun except the tail gun. We had a series of switches up there. Our guns were out, but with three other guys in our formation there, they were able to level thirty 50 caliber machine guns and fire on this plane coming in. We were looking at him, and all of a sudden there was big "poof" and he was gone, disintegrated. On April 7th the B-29's and P-51's shot down 101 Japs. After April we didn't experience much fighter opposition. The flak that we got in those fire raids was not that effective at all. There was a bigger danger of running into each other.

Mr. Johnson: Because of the lack of visibility?

Mr. Braden: Yes, lack of visibility. You couldn't see very well, it was midnight and the sky was full of smoke.

Mr. Johnson: And you didn't have air-to-air radar available?

Mr. Braden: No, only air to ground. As a matter of fact, the first missions I flew, up until about March, every time we would come back at night I was doing celestial navigation and that is hard duty. Celestial navigation then was is like Christopher Columbus did it, except we were going 250-300 miles an hour. This meant that maybe after you took your celestial shots, about an hour later you'd find out where you might have been. So, there's judgement in that

you might have been here or you might have been there, and you kind of draw a line between them. It is a judgement call. The navigator was working all of the time. You know, I liked that; I enjoyed that because next to the pilot I was the most popular man on the aircraft. I was the only one eon the crew that knew where the hell we were!

Mr. Johnson: Just because you got them home.

Mr. Braden: See all that water for 14-15 hours, you'd know that you got home somehow or other. It was the Navigator that found the way. That was kind of the way it was until we got LORAN, which is a method of radio navigation. I felt like I'd died and gone to heaven, but there were some times when if I could have gone to Radio Shack like today and bought a Ground Position Indicator for $150, I'd given my right arm for one.

Mr. Johnson: That was before satellites.

Mr. Braden: Yes, right.

Mr. Johnson: In the two years (approximately) that you spent in the service,

Mr. Braden: Nearly three. Two years, nine months.

Mr. Johnson: Most of that in the States?

Mr. Braden: I think my training was a year and eleven months.

Mr. Johnson: Part of that was because of the sophisticated equipment that you were operating.

Mr. Braden: That, and I had a delay in getting into Navigation School.

That delayed me two or three months.

Mr. Johnson: As you reflect back, and I'm sure you have many times, do you have a "most memorable" moment of your time in the service?

Mr. Braden: Yes, I guess I remember the ditching more than any other moment. It was a real experience – the shock, and then to be found, best friends dying.

Mr. Johnson: Did you ever see a USO Show? Did they send them there?

Mr. Braden: Yes. On Saipan we had Dennis Day one time. He was with the old Jack Benny Show. He was very funny. He was a comedian as well as being a singer. We had others. I don't particularly remember any of them. We had a theater for movies. Went to the movies every night. It always rained about the first 15 minutes of the movie so you brought your raincoat. The movie theater was called Goat Gulch and it was down the side of a hill. You sat on oil barrels on your raincoat and brought your helmet to wear during the rain and a flashlight so you could find your way home. While you were waiting for the movie to start it would be getting dusk and all the B-29 mine layers off of Tinian would be taking off to do their night flying, and inevitably one or two of them would go in the drink and so we had "the entertainment" of seeing other guys getting killed while we were waiting to see the movie. But we did have a little entertainment in movies.

Mr. Johnson: Your only experience with hospitalization was simply an overnight,

kind of check you out, make sure....

Mr. Braden: Clean sheets, one night. I still remember that.

Mr. Johnson: Was that at Iwo?

Mr. Braden: No, it was on Saipan.

Mr. Johnson: Was there a Field Hospital there?

Mr. Braden: No, it was a regular base hospital, wooden building. The mission we were on where I told you about the P-51 escort. We got shot up and we landed on Iwo the first time. Before the war was over we landed there three other times. Landed on Iwo four times. Every time in a life-threatening condition, either shot up or knowing we were not going to have enough fuel to make it home. I owe my life to the United States Marine Corps, and to the Navy for picking me up out of the ocean.

Mr. Johnson: What kind of treatment did you get in the hospital? Good care?

Mr. Braden: Oh yes.

Mr. Johnson: Experienced people?

Mr. Braden: I was just cut up a little bit. They gave me steak & eggs (cholesterol) and cigarettes. They always gave you a shot of whiskey. I don’t know whether that was traditional, or what, but it didn’t seem to help anything much.

Mr. Johnson: I think you mentioned earlier that you were on a mission or were returning from a mission, or a practice bombing, when you heard that the bomb had been dropped on August the 6th on Hiroshima.

Mr. Braden: Yes.

Mr. Johnson: Where were you when the Japanese surrendered?

Mr. Braden: On the 14th of August? I was awaiting orders. They began to ship us home immediately. Of course, since I had completed my missions before the peace was declared, my papers were being processed and I was assigned to fly a "war weary" B-29 home. This was one that was just worn out and they were sending it back to the States, and they put me on there. Strange pilot, strange co-pilot, flight engineer, and me. The four of us were to fly this airplane home. On the way to Kwajalein we lost an engine. We did make it to Kwajalein and got a new engine. We flew to Hawaii with another engine out and we got another new engine. Flew it to San Francisco and a third engine was out. Got another new engine. Then we flew into Tinker Field, Oklahoma, and somebody came out and said, "Is there somebody here that wants to go to Dallas?" I said, "Yes." He said they were going to Love Field in a C-47. So, about two o'clock in the morning I got home, knocked on the door. My parents had no idea I was coming home. That was it.

Mr. Johnson: A little earlier, back in May, when the war in Europe ended, were you aware of that?

Mr. Braden: Oh yes. We were very celebratory. I remember. There was some kind of Regimental Band or something, they piled into the back of a pick-up truck and had a bottle of whiskey and they went

around everywhere on Saipan pulling into Squadron areas and they would play "California Here We Come." Then they would have another swig of whiskey.

Mr. Johnson: So you had quite a party complete with a brass band?

Mr. Braden: Yes. It didn't last very long, but we were elated. We knew we were doing good. We expected all kinds of reinforcements and that sort of thing, and we knew we would have the ability to do the job. As a matter of fact, none of us could see how Japan could hold out much longer.

Mr. Johnson: Did you see European units coming out to your area?

Mr. Braden: No, not as units, but a lot of our senior airplane commanders had flown a tour in Europe. For example the first mission the 73rd Wing flew, Major Morgan, who flew the "Memphis Bell" was co-pilot for General Rosie O'Donnell. We had some very experienced airplane commanders, and then we had a bunch of kids like me that made good grades in school and thought they could handle it.

Mr. Johnson: What date was it got to Dallas?

Mr. Braden: I don't remember, it was in September.

Mr. Johnson: Your parents weren't expecting you when you got home, but I take it they were there to greet you?

Mr. Braden: Oh, they were delighted and they loaned me the car at two o'clock in the morning and I went over to my girl friend's house in

Arlington, about 25-30 miles away. She was having a slumber party with a bunch of girls and they all had their hair in curlers. I still remember that. She was terribly embarrassed, but she married me. We've been married 54 years.

Mr. Johnson: What was her reaction?

Mr. Braden: Well, she was ecstatic of course. I looked good because I had slimmed down. I was as brown as the baseboard over there from the tropical sun. I probably never looked better in my life.

Mr. Johnson: That covers the things that I was particularly interested in finding out about. I don't know if you have any other recollections that might be of interest. You understand that the purpose of this is to get people's memories and recollections, and even opinions, about their service and about the conduct of the war into our archives for future research.

Mr. Braden: I have one thing that I learned mostly by reading, and only some exposure to, and that was that the B-29 had a lot of engine trouble. We aborted maybe three or four missions, but caused a lot of crashes for others in early training and that sort of thing. The 58th Wing bore the brunt of that and they were the Wing that was sent to India and then into China. They had horrible living conditions and were never very successful and they located in India until they could move them to Chengtu, China, which gave them the

opportunity to hit Kyushu and to bomb there. This is a story that is in books, but it has been very impressive to me because we later had one of these crews come into our squadron and I had a lot of respect for their navigator because the navigational problems in China were awful. He talked about flying the "Hump." They moved to China and then found they had no way to get gasoline to the airplanes except to fly it over the "Hump." They didn't have enough ATC planes to do it, so they equipped B-29's with tanks in each bomb bay. They would fly over to India and get gasoline and then fly it over the "Hump" to Chengdu. The problem was that they figured out finally for every gallon of gas they could haul over the "Hump" in a B-29, it took two gallons of gas for the plane to fly, and if they had headwinds sometimes they would spend 12 gallons to fly one, so that didn't work very well. The story of their famous first mission to the home island of Japan was to bomb the Imperial Iron and Steelworks in Yalata, and they flew this mission and it was a mess. They started out with 97 planes and only 47 of them found the target and seven ditched, and seven crashed, one got shot down. It was a mess, but in the United States the press was ecstatic that we had at last reached the mainland of Japan. This was a year and half or two years after the Doolittle raid. General Arnold was so enthused he wired General Wolf and said, "fly missions the length and breadth of Japan." General Wolf wired back to General

Arnold and said, "General, we've flown 700,000 gallons of gasoline over the "Hump" to fly this mission. It takes 8,800 gallons of gas to fly a ten ton bomb load to Japan for one airplane and 20 hours." He said, "I've got 5,000 gallons left. You've asked me to run the hundred yard dash when I can barely crawl." So General Arnold called General Wolf back to Washington, promoted him, and put him in a desk job and sent Curtis LeMay. That is how we got Curtis LeMay. In the Spring of 1945 he moved the 50th Wing to Tinian. That is a true story. So, that is a thing that amazes you – the cost and expense of all of this. A lot of it didn't work and they just had to find out the hard way. Just like they didn't know, from what I understand, that the infantry didn't know about the hedge rows when they landed in Europe.

Mr. Johnson: When you were on Saipan, did you hear news of yourselves? Did you get Stars and Stripes coverage of your missions?

Mr. Braden: Not anything much.

Mr. Johnson: Did you get Armed Forces Radio? Anything like that?

Mr. Braden: Well, we had Armed Forces Radio, but I don't remember them reporting on our missions.

Mr. Johnson: So you were kind of local heroes, yourselves?

Mr. Braden: Well, we didn't think of ourselves as heroes. We thought of ourselves as guys that had to get a job done and fly 35 missions and then you could go home. As a matter of fact, when you are 19 or 20

years old, you don't think about stuff like that. I don't ever remember being particularly scared or frightened. I guess you worry a little bit. Going on a mission was an opportunity because it was another one. You know, it was like a convict marking an "X" on the wall. It was another thing behind you.

Mr. Johnson: You've had a pretty distinguished career since you came back after the war in the civilian world. Have you done any writing?

Mr. Braden: Yes.

Mr. Johnson: About your experiences?

Mr. Braden: Yes, in a book I called "Lifelines - a Retrospection," I've written all of those war experiences. One thing about my parents and how little I knew about them, but my Father had done some genealogical research and I didn't want to do genealogy, but I did read this and found out a little bit about his background. I knew that my Mother and Father had known each other since they were babies and I knew about their marriage. I knew they went to California and came back in a Model T, but I decided I would leave a record for my grandkids, so I started writing a lifeline with never any intention to publish it. I just wanted to leave a record for my family. I started writing about my parents and what I knew about them, then brought in my own childhood. By the time I had gotten to World War II and I was 21 years old I had written 357 pages. I went down to Kinkos. That is my publisher. I had three copies

bound for each one of my daughters families and gave to them at Christmas. I started on the rest of my life and I think I am now in the ‘60's, but I can’t do this regularly because I’m still working in the capacity as an Construction Arbitrator, which means I don’t work all the time, I just have cases. I think maybe I’ll get through this year and then I guess I’ll be ready to check out.

Mr. Johnson: Have you discussed your experiences with your children?

Mr. Braden: No. We’ve never talked about this in the family until I started writing this. I got called down here in 1994 and participated in a symposium then. I enjoyed it. I came back for the one when they had the Prisoners of War Symposium. I enjoyed that. Then they had the parade in Fredericksburg in 1995. My whole family came down, grandkids, all of my sons-in-law, my wife. Another B-29 guy and I rode in a truck down main street. He said, “Look, look, Dave, there is your whole family.” They were holding up this huge sign that said, “Dave Braden – Our Hero.” It was on the front page of the Fredericksburg Paper.

Mr. Johnson: That is a nice experience.

Mr. Braden: Oh, it was terrific. Took my kids out to the airfield. They saw all of the airplanes. There was a PBY there and they got to see what a PBY looked like that picked Grandpa up out of the ocean. Then I kind of got on a mini-speaking circuit. That is the reason that I have a little bit of it in my mind.

Mr. Johnson: Well, I think your recall is amazing.

Mr. Braden: Well, it is amazed me that I had no notes or anything, but as I wrote I was able to put things pretty much in chronological order. I forgot to tell you that after the war I went to UT Austin and got a degree in Architecture and practiced for 42 years. On retirement I became a Director and then Chairman of the Board for Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport.

Mr. Johnson: Well, it all gets there. All of the information is there and the people that will use this are people doing research and studies.

Mr. Braden: People that are interested in history. That was the thing that amazed me. The first one of these I came to there were a lot of young people there and they are interested in history.

Mr. Johnson: Well I want to thank you for participating with us.

Mr. Braden: Well thank you Kep. You know, if you are an amateur at this, well you know, you just got me started talking.

Mr. Johnson: That is largely what we want to do. Just to prompt people to tell their story.

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