



Fredericksburg, Texas

Center for Pacific War Studies

Presents
An Interview with:
A.D. Brunson
9th Patrol Boat Squadron
Combat patrols

The interviews for this oral history were conducted on 8 and 22 February 2008 in Orange City, Florida. The subject is Petty Officer Second Class Atys Daniel Brunson U. S. Navy. The interviewer is RADM Oakley E. Osborn USN (Ret.), hereafter identified as OEO.

Abstract

Atys Daniel Brunson was born in Atlanta, Georgia on April 2, 1924 and resided there until he commenced college in 1942. He was the product of strong, Christian parents who instilled the best of personality traits. As a schoolboy and young man during the depression years he learned how to cope with adversity and hard times. The onset of World War II inspired him to join the Navy in January 1943. His introduction to the Navy was at Bainbridge, Maryland where his previous Boy Scout and ROTC experience brought him a leadership role as student commander of the radio service school. That position allowed him to select PT boat service. He completed PT boat training at Melville, Rhode Island in November 1943 and was transported to New Caledonia aboard USS West Point, formerly the SS America. There he served with PT Boat Squadron NINE operating from several different bases until April 1945. Petty Officer Brunson served as radio, radar and gunner on over seventy-five combat missions. His compelling description of PT boat life in the combat environment offers the reader a good picture of a unique and valuable part of the Navy effort in the Pacific campaign. He was discharged as a Petty Officer Second Class in January 1946. A short time later he gained employment with Kraft Foods and retired from that company in 1986 as a Vice President. He lives in Orange City, Florida with his wife Sara. They have a daughter and son. Sara Brunson was an executive secretary in the office of General Hap Arnold at the headquarters of the Army Air Force during World War II and was one of the first to occupy the new Pentagon in December 1942.

History of Atys Daniel Brunson, Petty Officer Second Class, United States Navy

OEO: Dan, lets talk a little bit about your parents, their ethnic background and where they lived.

Dan Brunson: My father, Atys Daniel, was born and lived in south Georgia in a little community called New Hope which is in Bullock County, about 40 miles from Savannah. His parents came from South Carolina about 1895. Their parents on the Brunson side of the family had come from England in the 1600's and settled in Connecticut. At some point they migrated to Georgia. Over in South Carolina I have visited my great great grandfather's site and some of his family. His name was George Washington Brunson, born in 1775 and passed away in 1853. He was married more than once which was somewhat customary in those times. Women died in childbirth or from diseases at an early age. One of his sons, my great grandfather, John James Brunson, came along about 1831 and served in the Civil War. He is buried there in Bullock County in this community of New Hope. He was married three times. I think there were about 10 in that group which includes my grandfather. He is the one who came over from South Carolina to Georgia in 1895. My father's mother, whose parents had come over from South Carolina at approximately the same time, also settled in the New Hope community. She had 8 or 10 brothers and sisters who all died before my time. She passed on in 1934

and my granddaddy Brunson passed away in 1936. My father was born in 1893 and moved to Atlanta when he was 20 years old. He went to Draughns Business School for one year and joined Southern Bell Telephone in 1914 where he worked for the rest of his life. He passed away at age 60 as the result of a malignant brain tumor and is buried in Atlanta. My mother's people, as best that we could find out, came from Northern Europe, perhaps Germany. Their name was Hymer. She was one of four sisters and spent most of her life in Texas. My daddy always told the story that she was born in Alabama, raised in Texas, lived in Arkansas and married in Georgia! My mother did not keep many records or pictures. I happened to be the first grandson on either side so I got a lot of attention from my grandfather who was 6'2" and weighed about 220 lbs. As a little fellow, I sat on his knee and watched him roll his cigarettes from Golden Grain tobacco. I thought that was really something at 5, 6, or 7 years old.

OEO: That is good stuff. I was thinking about George Washington Brunson living to around 75 years old. That was something for that time in history. You were born on what date?

Dan Brunson: I was born April 2, 1924 in Atlanta at St. Joseph's hospital and lived in Atlanta until I went off to college in 1942. Atlanta was a wonderful city at the time, 250 to 300,000 people. Atlanta probably owes its growth to three factors, one being the railroads. The early name for Atlanta was Terminus. Another industry contributing to the growth of Atlanta was the Coca-Cola Company. The third factor was Delta Airlines which, before and after the war, had great growth. Atlanta prospered from all that.

OEO: How would you characterize your father, his personality, and his influence on you?

Dan Brunson: My daddy was an engineer with Southern Bell Telephone Company. He had gone to work with them in 1914. By the time I came along he was making \$200 a month so I never had to work to eat. I worked because I wanted spending money and he encouraged me to do so. In those days when a lady walked into a room you stood up. Those were different times. I think honesty and integrity were things my father was known for and imparted to me. My father, unlike myself and my mother, told you something only one time, never raising his voice. He was a man of great integrity and a great leader among young boys, having spent many years with Boy Scouts. He started with the Scouts when I joined at the age of 12. He enjoyed working with the boys and, because of his temperament, handled them quite well.

OEO: Was he the leader of your scout group?

Dan Brunson: He was what was known in those days as a Committeeman. There were about three Committeemen who assisted the scoutmaster. In those days I had to sign up at least six months prior in order to get into a troop. Boy Scouts was a very active organization back in the mid thirties. My Dad and the other men worked closely with the scoutmaster and the church that sponsored us. When he passed away that troop sat as a group in tribute to him.

OEO: Did your father give you leeway to go on your own without a lot of direction?

Dan Brunson: Yes he did. Like many boys in those days, I did a lot of odd jobs trying to earn some money. He never worried about how much money I was making. He was more interested in what I was learning. He gave me a lot of leeway. Of course, that didn't cut down on the belt whipping because I was very hard headed. One time I had been working and came home on a Saturday night. My mother asked how much money I made that day. I said "that's none of your business". About the time I got the back of his hand across my mouth. I'd always been taught you don't ask people how much money they make. I found out there was an exception to that rule. Yes, I had a lot of leeway. By the time I was 15, I was driving the car up and down the driveway, back and forth, back and forth. On the day of my 16th birthday my mother drove me over to Confederate Avenue to the license bureau. Of course, I passed that thing hands down. He let me make decisions. My daddy asked where I wanted to go to school. They wanted me to go to the University of Georgia. I had some boy friends that were going up to North Georgia College, a two year school in Dahlonega. That's where they first struck gold in America. That school had a fine reputation and is still one of four senior military colleges in the country, aside from the academies. When you went there you were automatically in their corps. You got the proper initiation with the back of the sword and everything. The tuition was \$300 per year. The reason I know that is because I have a good friend down here in Maitland who we lunch with quite often who was a dentist. He graduated there in 1943. Looking in his yearbook I discovered the \$300 tuition. I got a job in the dining hall for \$12.50. It was great because I got tired of eating those square meals as a freshmen. All I did was serve the tables which was no problem. I enjoyed North Georgia College and learned a lot. It took a while for me to realize it but, like all freshmen who go to college, you do pick up a few things. We had a thousand boys and a hundred girls. It was a fine school. No automobiles were allowed and you could only leave the campus every six weeks. A couple of friends and I rented a car for about \$5 and drove to Atlanta for the weekend and there was my draft notice. That was the first notice and the second notice awaited me when I went home for Christmas. On that first six week trip four of us took the Naval Air Corps exam. All four of us failed, three of us on eye issues and one on blood pressure. The doctor said my right eye was jumping off the dot. I told him I had good eyes so he told the corpsman to do it one more time. When he did the doctor put a big X and said that was it. After I got to the Pacific, I was just as glad that I didn't get into Navy flying. I lost several friends. The Pacific is so big – if you ever go down out there, unless there is some ship or boat around, you are in trouble. PT Boats picked up some of those pilots. That pretty well brings me up to the time that I left home in January 1943 and joined the Navy. I guess I asked my father. I don't recall a whole lot of the conversation but I do remember asking if he thought I should go into the Army or the Navy. He said he expected that the Navy would be a lot cleaner, and I found how true that was later on.

OEO: Let's go back to the Boy Scouts. What did you carry away from the scouts that served you later?

Dan Brunson: Our scoutmaster for many years was Mr. Birdsall. He also had two sons in the scouts. I think that scouting is a great foundation. We learned responsibility and discipline. I think these are things that kids today would do well to learn. Scouting gives you a great foundation for later life. One time I went to the candy store to get some penny candy. I was probably about 13. I don't know how it happened but when I left there I owed Mr. Freeman a penny. He said that was alright, I could just bring it next time I came in (everybody knew everybody). When I got home I told my mother that I owed Mr. Freeman a penny. It was five blocks back to the store. She said to go back and pay it now! And I did. I think a lot of that kind of upbringing changed after World War II, possibly because a lot of the mammas were not at home any more. If you got in trouble in school you were in real trouble by the time you got home because somebody had already called. I loved scouting. I stayed in it from 12 until I went off to college at 18, ending up as a junior assistant scoutmaster. That is pretty much my feelings about scouting.

OEO: That was quite a time in history, really hard times, depression, etc. What do you remember of the environment regarding the depression? How did that impress you?

Dan Brunson: It left an indelible impression on all of us growing up at that time. There was no money. As I mentioned, you could go to college for \$300 tuition. I remember the soup lines in Atlanta on Edgewood Avenue. They would extend two blocks, men waiting for food. I remember one time a man came to the house and said he was hungry. My mother always gave them a sandwich. She never turned anyone down. He told her he had three children and if he didn't soon get a job he was going to have to go to stealing. There were a lot of people in that situation. She, of course, tried to talk him out of doing that. They would come through the neighborhood wanting to know if we had any work to be done. We weren't paying for any outside work. My daddy was one of the fortunate ones in that aspect because he had been with the phone company since 1914 and that was a number of years. I would take a guess that he was making about \$200 a month which was pretty good money. Kids would come to school with cardboard in their shoes and a light sweater on. The boys' hair would be frozen in the winter time. They didn't have a cap. But you know, nobody complained because there just was no money. They would come to school with a sandwich made with homemade mayonnaise, sometimes with sugar on it, and that was their lunch. I would take about four sandwiches, being a big eater, and my good friend, Francis Bridges, who is Dr. Bridges, retired from Georgia State University - he and I would swap sandwiches. It was a bad financial time in America.

OEO: We talked about your father and what he meant to you. You have already said that your mother made you take that penny back. She was apparently a very strong influence. In what way?

Dan Brunson: I never heard my parents argue, I'm sure that they did. I never heard my parents argue about how I was to be reared. That was all behind the scenes. My mother, Vivian, was a musician, played the piano and organ at church. Between her and my father, she was certainly more outgoing. She was very challenging to me. She would say

“why don’t you do this?” She would say “don’t you think you can learn something from that”. I said “Yes Maam”. You said “yes maam” in Georgia in the mid 30’s. My mother was a very strong willed person. She was the oldest of four girls growing up and worked outside the home. She indicated that when she got married she couldn’t boil water. She later became an assistant school teacher. I can assure you she didn’t put up with any guff from the kids. When daddy died she was only 51 years old so she went back to school and got whatever degree was required to be an assistant teacher. She taught for eight or ten years. She made a lot of friends around the city through her music. When I told her I wasn’t going to take any more piano lessons because I had a chance to get on a baseball team, she was not pleased. They talked it over apparently and decided it was time for me to leave the lessons. However, I have always regretted dropping piano lessons because I think it is a wonderful thing. No matter what the instrument, if you can sit down and play, music is a great thing. When she moved to Texas, the hot tamale man, pushing his cart down the street, would stop in front of her home. She would play a tune and he would give her a hot tamale. She was about 12 at the time so she had been playing the piano for several years.

OEO: I know this is a long time back but do you remember anything that happened during your grade school years, what the environment was? How many students would you say were in the school?

Dan Brunson: There were probably 450-500 students and the classes were large. My daughter, a retired school teacher, saw my class pictures from kindergarten to 6th grade and remarked that there were 42 kids in one picture, a lot more than the maximum class in a Texas school which was 21. I assured her that the teachers had a lot less problems with 42 than she did with 21. The teachers at that time in grammar school were all women. I don’t know how much money they made, probably \$100-125 a month. They would help you after school and had the patience of Job. I had one teacher in the 5th grade, Ms. Wheeler. I would come busting into class and slide down the aisle to my desk. She would say “Atys, now you come back up here and you walk to your desk, don’t slide”. About the 4th grade, my friend Francis Bridges and I liked to draw football players with the pads and Vikings with swords and battle axes. We also had great athletic programs in grammar school. I have some buttons that I won in those days. We did this in the school and had meets with other schools. This is in the 4th, 5th and 6th grades. We did running and jumping and ball throwing and whatever the athletic programs were. Also, back in the 3rd and 4th grade the teacher would take us to the playground and she would keep a record of your monkey bar capability. We also had the standing broad jump and we competed in who could throw the ball the furthest. They always encouraged us to do more. But they kept score. I think a lot of that came right on down to World War II. It made the kids competitive. Man, there wasn’t anything I liked better than beating Francis Bridges and Walter Savage and those other boys. Those are some of the things I remember in grammar school. I was a pretty good student. I don’t think they gave A’s and B’s. I think it was S’s. Grammar school was a great time for me.

OEO: That is a pretty important time in your life, graduating and going to high school. Tell me about the things you were involved in, sports, outside jobs – any memories you have of high school.

Dan Brunson: In Atlanta, grades 10, 11, and 12 were high school. Grades 7, 8 and 9 were junior high. When you got to high school you were about 15 years old. Perhaps I should have mentioned before – all these boys I knew had some kind of a job. The administration would work with you in high school so that you could align your classes to fit the job. As a senior I got out at one o'clock because I had a job to go to. They did that because of the hard times and lack of money in the family. I was on the track team. My buddies and I ran the 440 which is a killing race. We also did the high jump and running broad jump. We competed with other Georgia high schools, Valdosta, Macon, and Richmond High in Augusta. We also had Tech High Lanier and GMA. It was an elective thing. I always liked it because I figured I could beat the others. High school was great. I was in ROTC for two of the three years. I worked my senior year so I dropped out of ROTC. It was a continuation of Boy Scouts. It taught a little discipline and responsibility, a good program. The girls' school was across Atlanta with about 1800 girls. High school was a great and memorable experience. We still have reunions and will have another one this April. Boys High was a college prep school with and enrollment of about 1400.

OEO: What do you remember about December 7, 1941?

Dan Brunson: My next door neighbor and I were sitting by the radio listening to the Redskins and the Giants play football. They broke in and told us about Pearl Harbor. Nobody ever heard of Pearl Harbor. That's the way I found out about it. That was a Sunday. We had senior boys in high school that were so mad and upset about Pearl Harbor that they left school on Monday and Tuesday to join up. One got his GED after WWII and was a manufacturer's representative in Arkansas.

OEO: You decided the Navy was the place to go so you enlisted and went off to Bainbridge, Maryland in January of 1943. What was that like? What do you remember about boot camp?

Dan Brunson: Well, it was a mud hole. Bainbridge had been open about 3 months. It was an experience in the mud. No pavement. We had a lot of snow and ice. They gave us these overshoes and the mud would suck them off. So we took what they called clothes stops and you tied them on your feet to go to the mess hall. What classes we had were held in the mess hall. I was only there 5 weeks. It was the first time most of us had been away from home. I was thrown in with a bunch of guys that we chose to call Yankees. As strange as it may seem to a lot of people, there was a distinct difference between the south and the north. Boys up there had never been south and we had never been north. I asked one fellow who later became a friend "what are you, boy, from the south or the north"? He was from Maryland. Well, he says, "I can be either one". I later told him "Paul, you are so wishy-washy, you don't even know where you come from. It was a great experience. Most of us were 18, 19, 20 years old. We had one fellow from

South Georgia who was 29 years old. Bainbridge had no service schools at that time. I went into the outdoor training unit (OTU) and spent 7 weeks there. They opened the service schools on May 1, 1943. There must have been about a dozen schools. Because of my background in ROTC, the service schools Lieutenant picked me out to be student commander of the service school. We had formation several times a week and we had 1900 students out there on the drill field. I enjoyed that. The Lieutenant gave me the opportunity of selecting my specialty and picking the men to go with me. In September I left for PT boat school along with 9 other fellows.

OEO: That officer obviously recognized your leadership ability as well as your experience in a structured environment. That was quite an achievement for you. I'm surprised that he didn't get you handed off for some kind of officer training at that point.

Dan Brunson: I don't know how our relationship would have developed because he had a mishap. One night a student went to sleep on watch and the barracks burned down. So, of course, the Navy relieved him of his job. A fellow by the name of Lewis relieved him. That was about 3 weeks before I finished radio school. So I can't say what would have happened if he had still been there.

OEO: Radio school was right there at Bainbridge? What were they training you for when you started radio school? What were they getting you ready to do?

Dan Brunson: To be a radioman on a ship you had to go to radio school, learn to type and learn Morse code. Most of us didn't know how to type. They were getting us ready for sea duty. When I went to PT boats all that was out the window. I never sent a CW message in my life because of radio silence. We used semaphore and blinker. On the boat, that responsibility was kind of shared between me and the quartermaster.

OEO: Where was PT boat training?

Dan Brunson: Melville, Rhode Island which is on Narragansett Bay about 4 miles from Newport. I went there in late September. We were there for 9 weeks, 9 weeks chock full of everything. We spent a lot of time on navigation, gunnery, boat operations, radio, and had some exposure to engine room duties. My strongest memory is of Japanese ship and aircraft identification. You had to pass that. They would flash these units up and you had to write down the answer. If you didn't pass, you were restricted. I really began to appreciate that training when I got to the Solomon Islands and New Guinea. We had Quonset huts at Melville. There were 10 of us to a Quonset with a stove in the middle. I left before it got too cold.

OEO: What was your mode of transportation to the Pacific Theatre?

Dan Brunson: We went on the USS West Point. Before the war she had been the SS America which, at that time, was the largest U. S. vessel. When we loaded in San Francisco it took something like 15 hours to load because she could carry 10,000 service people. Being a Navy ship, the 2000 of us who were Navy got the upper decks. Those

Army boys that were down 6 or 7 decks below probably were pretty hot. We didn't have an escort for the transit because the ship was so fast. We made it to Noumea, New Caledonia in 11 days. We spent 4 or 5 days at Noumea before we moved up to Tulagi. The trip across was very routine. We didn't do anything except get initiated when we crossed the equator.

OEO: Was the PT boat Navy established at the first part of the war? Had PT boats been operating in the Pacific for quite a while when you became involved?

Dan Brunson: Yes, Squadron No. 1 was at Pearl Harbor. Squadron 2 was down in the Solomons at the time that the Tokyo Express was running from Rabual to Guadalcanal. Seventy-seven foot PT boats made up those early squadrons. The squadron I was in had its first engagement in June 1943.

OEO: What kind of engines did this first model of the PT boat have?

Dan Brunson: Packard Marine 1350 horsepower engines. I believe all the boats had Packards. There may have been a few English made engines. The boat had 3 engines. The center engine was straight drive and the starboard and port had V drives. Shortly after I got there they begin to have 1500 horsepower engines.

OEO: How many torpedoes did you carry?

Dan Brunson: We carried four MK 13 torpedoes. In those days there were a lot of problems with those torpedoes. You might shoot one and it would come back to get you. That was true of submarines and other ships. We had one instance where a PT boat sunk one of our own ships. The USS McCalley was being towed by a destroyer in the Solomons. Our information was that there were no friendlies in the area. One of our sister boats sunk the McCalley. Our squadron commander was called on the carpet but was able to confirm that the "no friendlies" had gone out. Torpedoes got better in late 43, early 44. By that time, PT boats were operating as more of a gun boat. When they first went out to the Pacific, the Navy was so lacking in Destroyers and Escorts that PT boats were doing escort duty out of Tulagi, Rendova and other locations in the Solomons.

OEO: What offensive armament did you have?

Dan Brunson: By the time I got there we had a 37mm out of a P-38 fighter plane. We also had a 20mm and twin 50's on the bow. Squadron NINE was the only unit that had 20mm in the forward turret. We also had twin 50's in the after turret. Along the wings of the cockpit we had 30mm that we used when the Japs got in the water. We also carried two ashcans. We tried quad 50mm on the stern of the boat, but they nearly shook the boat to pieces plus you couldn't carry enough ammunition. We then got a 40mm which made us think we were really something. That weapon could put a dent in those barges! We also had a smoke screen generator which we used a lot. We were more afraid of our own aircraft than we were the Japanese.

OEO: What was your primary mission? What generally was your employment?

Dan Brunson: Our employment was to stop the Japanese movement of troops and supplies. There were no charts of the waters around those islands. A PT boat only drew 5.5 feet at the stern and 2 feet at the bow, so we could get into places within 3 or 4 hundred yards without getting on the coral. That coral would just eat you up. We ran aground one time and did major damage to the bottom. Our mission was to stop the barge traffic. The Japanese would run those barges from point A to point B. We would take a bulldozer and make a road and use trucks to transport goods and personnel. The Japanese didn't do much of that. That was when we worked with the "Black Cats", the PBV's. They would help us by dropping flares so we could see the camouflaged barges. There were four classes of barge, A, B, C and D. The A, B, and C barges were lightly armed. The D barge was a gunboat and carried much heavier armament. Sometimes you would just have one barge, sometimes two. During this time we sank several barges on one patrol, machine gunning a number of the enemy and finishing off with a depth charge as we left the area. We would go up the rivers too. Most of our operations were at night, probably 95 percent of them. We would leave sometime around 2 or 3 in the afternoon to get on station about dark. In Navy or war films you don't often see PT boats because our operations were at night.

OEO: You have indicated that you were at Tulagi, Rendova, Treasure Island, Green Island, Mois Woendi and Morotai. Was there a PT boat base at each of those bases? How many PT boats were out there?

Dan Brunson: Probably around 200. A lot of squadrons. The Navy had 45 squadrons with 12 boats to a squadron. Of that, 32 squadrons had Elko PT boats out of Bayonne, New Jersey. Thirteen squadrons were Higgins PT boats out of New Orleans. They sent one of those to the Aleutians, two or three to the Mediterranean. The Higgins was not as comfortable as the Elko, but they were good boats. There were bases at each location.

OEO: Would you shift between bases on patrol – start out at one base and end patrol at another?

Dan Brunson: No, when we moved, we moved the whole squadron along with the ground support. When we left Rendova for Treasury that ended operations out of Rendova. Treasury was not far from Bougainville. Shore batteries were extremely heavy from Buka and Choiseul Islands whenever we moved against barge traffic. When we left Treasury we went to Green Island which was the northernmost in the Solomon chain. We operated out of there and went into Rabaul. By that time, most of the action at Rabaul was over. About the middle of June 1944 we went to Dregor Harbor, New Guinea

OEO: The bases must have been pretty rudimentary. Describe the environment and daily living part of duty.

Dan Brunson: When we would come off a patrol we would tie up at a pier, which we had at Mois Woendi, the best place we operated from. They had everything there. We could even take a shower; we didn't have to take baths in salt. We had large canvas canopies with poles that we put up to keep the intense heat off us. A few times, we had to refuel from a barge by siphoning off the gas into 55 gallon drums. Then we had to hand pump from those drums into our three gas tanks. It took a long time to get 3000 gallons from 55 gallon barrels into those tanks, about 8 hours as I recall. Those of us who smoked in those days were having a nicotine fit. It was a hard job. That process didn't happen too often. I think maybe about 3 times in the 16 months I was there. Normally we would go to a fuel station and fill up like at a gas station. I will mention Treasury because there we tied up amongst the trees. On the beach, most of the boat crews built some kind of a hut and were able to get screen wire or netting to go around the sides. For the most part, you spent your life on that PT boat so we felt good when we had an opportunity to get off and go to a mess hall. They put up showers for us and made it reasonably comfortable. We had pretty good living conditions considering everything. We were able to get off and into those huts. However, in several places we just tied up in the trees. The cook would go to the mess hall and bring back meals. One time we had noodles and more noodles. I'd guess that we had noodles twenty straight days. We had noodles with spam and tomatoes and with everything. We would see the boat's cook coming down the ramp with those food canisters and ask him what he had. He would say "Got a surprise today". We said "what is that". He'd say "Noodles"! We didn't starve to death or anything like that. He had gone to cook school and did the best he could with what he had available. Elwood was his name. We had it a whole lot better than the Army fellows, that's for sure. By the way, the last time I heard of our cook, he was a policeman somewhere in Indiana.

One of the most devastating parts of service in the South Pacific was the weather. It is hard to explain to people how you go along day after day in 110 degree heat, fighting bugs, malaria, and fungus. Many of us got fungus, and those of us who did, spent years and lots of money trying to find a cure.

OEO: You mentioned earlier that you did a lot of scrounging. Was that kind of a way of life there?

Dan Brunson: Yes, you might say so. We had Plexiglas in the portholes of the boat. They had been painted over. At Treasury Island they had a B-25 base and SeaBees. Those SeaBees were a little older than most of us having been in construction, etc. We found out that they made ice cream. We took the Plexiglas out and sealed the portholes with wood. Then we traded Plexiglas for a lot of ice cream. They took that Plexiglas and made knife handles, beautiful handles. One time we took a motor off a motor boat down in New Guinea. We wrapped it in a canvas hammock and buried it till we were ready to move. Of course, it was rusted and useless. Everybody was doing a little bit of "midnight small stores". I remember one time at Dregor Harbor we were getting ready to go somewhere. We stole a native outrigger and put it on the bow of our boat. As we were motoring out, the natives were having a fit. Turns out we had stolen the chief's outrigger. So we had to offload it. We would take anything that was not nailed down. One time another fellow and I went up a board to the hatch on a ship and talked a fellow

out of a crate of eggs. We slithered down the board with that crate of 30 dozen eggs and enjoyed them for several days. At that same location a supply ship came in one day. I went aboard the supply ship and said to the fellow that we needed supplies, anything that was not refrigerated. Bear in mind that nobody had insignia on to identify rank or rate. So they brought out a cargo net and loaded it with all kinds of good stuff which they lowered onto the bow of our boat. I signed the document "LT Rex Anderson" (he was our skipper).

OEO: What kind of action did you experience on your patrols? What were you doing and what incidents do you remember?

Dan Brunson: We would go on patrol anytime from 3 o'clock on, depending on the time we needed to get on station at dark. Intelligence and the coast watchers would tell us that certain kinds of activities were going on. As the Japanese barges came down the island waters we would move in, usually two boats, but sometimes three boats, at a time. The Captain would call General Quarters. The Captain and the Executive Officer were at the helm. We would move in against these barges and make a starboard run. We could put out an awful lot of ammunition in a minute starting with the 37mm, as we came around, the 20mm and the turret, then my turret with the twin 50's and finally the 40mm stern gun. As far as return fire, we were fortunate that the Japanese thought the PT boat was a larger vessel than it was. They did put in self-sealing tanks which was a blessing. We were in and out a lot of times before they even knew we were there. We attacked them as they were moving along the shore, coming down through the islands. We had radar, a scope about 8 or 10 inches in the chart room. In the Pacific you always had to be alert to radar return from schools of fish. The blip would come up about the size of a match head. Sometimes there would be three or four of them, sometimes one or two. The quartermaster or I would be on the radar. When we detected barges we would move in immediately and try to get the first one in line. We ran several patrols in early July to Geelvink Bay New Guinea. These were long patrols beginning around 2 p.m. The Japanese were evidently trying to leave this area of New Guinea so barge traffic was heavy. On one particular night we were making a starboard run with all guns firing when they opened up with their heavy mortars and barge guns. We sank one Class D that night. We found a number of barges one night in Geelvink Bay that were beached, and sunk perhaps three on two runs. We always tried to take one prisoner. We had this crewman from Buffalo, Missouri who had the habit of always hitting the captured Japanese on the head with the butt of his .45 before we pulled him out of the water so that he couldn't toss a grenade on board or pull some other trick.

OEO: Did you have any encounters with destroyers?

Dan Brunson: No. we did not. Of course, a Japanese destroyer ran over Jack Kennedy's boat one night. People have wondered why that was possible. Unless you have seen the Pacific in the black of night, nothing is blacker. Even though you get your "night eyes", it is so black that you just don't see anything. We operated with the Squadron FIVE that he was in but we never ran across his boat. That squadron had been shot up so bad that they integrated some of the boats into other squadrons. We had some of those former

FIVE boats in our squadron. A lot of them had run onto coral where the Japanese would blast them. We never operated against any big Japanese ships. By late 1943 we were operating mainly against barges and gunboats. We got to where we didn't use the torpedoes at all. In fact, we drained the alcohol and mixed it with grapefruit juice.

OEO: How many crewmembers were in a boat and how were your duties divided?

Dan Brunson: When the boats left the states there were twelve, including the two officers. Later on, that was increased. Most of the time we had a crew of 15 to 17. We added the 40mm which took four men to operate. We rotated positions quite a lot because you needed to know what the other fellow's job was. We never rotated to the engine room because we had four motor mechanics on board. They had a hot job. It would get 140-150 degrees down there. Navigation, working with the charts, gunnery positions, it didn't make any difference. We had to know all the guns, taking them down, putting them together, and firing them. My primary positions were radio, radar and gunner. My primary general quarters position was in the aft turret on the twin 50 caliber machine guns.

OEO: Your crew no doubt enjoyed a high degree of camaraderie and esprit de corps?

Dan Brunson: Very definitely. If you are on a PT boat 15-18 months you get to know everybody's Aunt Mary and the rest of the family. It was a very close knit organization. You would go a long time with the same crew. I kept up with the fellows for years. Most of them are gone now. Some of that was through the PT Boat Association and the frequent reunions around the country. We had one in Orlando in 1988.

OEO: What was the quality of the crewmen in your boat? Did you have very many disciplinary problems?

Dan Brunson: I don't ever recall us having any discipline problems. Everything was very informal – until you went on patrol. The skipper would give us a turn at the helm if we wanted. It was another Navy, no question.

OEO: What was the reliability of the equipment on the boats? What did you have the most trouble with?

Dan Brunson: Always, you had possible trouble with the engines. The engines would get 500 hour checks. We did have a few instances where we went into dry-dock to scrape the bottom of the boats, sand them down and put on red lead. Everybody, including the skipper, was involved in that task. The hull picked up everything out of the sea, barnacles and all kinds of stuff built up. All of that had to come off because it greatly affected the speed of the boat. The first time I got involved in that was at Tulagi. The boat would hang in a sling. Working toward the bow end was fairly easy but as you worked toward the stern you ended up in a squat position which would wear you out pretty quick. We had to be towed off the reef by another boat. Our shafts were monell which was a quality metal. The brass screws were 19 inch. The shafts had to go to the

machine shop. In the meantime we were doing the bottom of boat. Coral was a deadly thing. Hanging up on the coral reefs was not an unusual occurrence. We didn't have any charts that showed that kind of detail. When you get up into the central Pacific and the Philippine Islands it is an entirely different ocean. PT boats operated very effectively in that shallow water environment but there was constant worry about coral.

OEO: Did those big engines generate a lot of noise?

Dan Brunson: It was noisy in the engine room and on the stern. We kept the mufflers closed when we were idling just before an attack run. When we sped up we had to open the mufflers. You got so accustomed to the noise that soon you really didn't notice it.

OEO: What kind of a man was your skipper?

Dan Brunson: A great person – a super athlete, particularly track and basketball. When he went back after the war he was a high school coach and teacher. He was a fine fellow and kind of an all-American boy. He did drink coffee but didn't smoke or chew. He graduated from Columbia University Officer Candidate School for his commission. A few years back at a reunion I asked him how old he was at the time. He said "twenty-three - we got back didn't we"! Usually, today, we don't give much credit to someone that age. Rex returned stateside in the fall of 1944. Our Executive Officer became skipper. This was Hardy Miller, a graduate of Southern Methodist University in Dallas. Hardy or "Slick" was a great guy.

OEO: During the time you were in the combat zone and experiencing those 75 plus patrols there must have been some humorous episodes.

Dan Brunson: We had a lot of boys who played cribbage and hearts and those kinds of games while we were sitting around. We had one boy from Charleston named Smith. A native Charlestonian has a lingo of his own. He was kidded a great deal about the way he talked. You had to have some kind of humorous stuff running to keep from going nuts or becoming a "jungle bunny". We had boys who tried to be practical jokers. The head (toilet) in a PT boat was as far forward as you could get in the forecabin. If a crewman went up there and sat on the pot when we were out running along at about 30 knots, someone would tell the helmsman who would cut the engines and the poor guy would hit his head on the bulkhead. We only did it for the guys that we really wanted to get to. A sort of amusing thing happened to me on a particularly rough water night. I had posted a pin-up of a model by the name of Chili Williams, wearing a polka dot bathing suit, in the chart room. This time I looked at that picture and the polka dots were going around in circles. That was the closest I got to being seasick. If you got sick they put you on the base force.

OEO: You spent some time in Australia on R&R.

Dan Brunson: I spent about 3 weeks down there on R&R at Coolangatta. It was quite an experience. One thing I remember, we went to a big Red Cross building to attend a

dance. We met this man and his wife; he had been away for three years in maritime shipping. He introduced us to his family, one being a very attractive young lady. I asked her if she would like to dance. She said "Well I'm all knocked up, why don't you jazz my sister"? I stepped back, not knowing that her words had a different meaning. My friend told me that she was saying she was tired. That was one of the funny things that came up. We would go over to his house. He brought out his Blue Boy rum. His wife was as gracious as she could be and would put out some nibbles. We would sit and talk and thrash over this, that, and the other. I couldn't understand why he would spend any time with us since he had just come home from sea duty. That was an interesting and nice experience. We checked into what we would call a motel right on the beach. It was in August so was kind of their winter, fall at least. We checked in with this nice master-at-arms for the Navy. He said "I'm going to tell you, you can do whatever you want but two weeks from today be back here for muster". We would go back and forth to different places from our "motel". One thing caught my attention. When you traveled from Queensland to New South Wales there was a swinging bar gate at the border. It seemed odd to me because it was like going from one state to another. Coolangatta was about 60 miles south of Brisbane. They would not let us go to Sydney because they were having some racial problems. This was in August of 1944. I saw a car, probably a taxi, which had a stove mounted on the back to burn coal or wood for power. We spent two weeks there and then went to Brisbane. It took another week to get a ship back to the islands. The last night we were there we had a steak with two eggs on top. That cost a one pound note which at the time was \$4.16.

OEO: Did you have any African-Americans in the PT force?

Dan Brunson: Only in the base force, the mess hall, etc.

OEO: Earlier, when we were talking about boot camp and the "back and forth" between northern and southern boys, was that related to African-Americans, or in another vein?

Dan Brunson: No, it was not about blacks, it wasn't at that point in our history, maybe. We ribbed back and forth about lingo, accents, and north/south differences. Really, almost none of us southerners had ever been north, and vice versa.

OEO: When did you leave the combat zone and head back to stateside?

Dan Brunson: April 27, 1945. We had been at Moratai from the fall until the first of April. We were three days underway to get to the Palaun Islands. We refueled there and went on to Samar Island in the Philippines. Our patrols in the Philippine area were mostly to put scouts and natives in key locations and then return for them at a designated time, maybe 2 or 3 days later. The natives worked with the Australian coast watchers who were extremely valuable people. Anyway, we picked up a group of natives one night and when they got on board they stunk really badly so the Boatswain's Mate put them back on the fantail and told them not to move.

The PT base at Samar Island was pretty active. We later learned that it was intended as a jumping off point for the invasion of Japan. Coming up to Samar we got the word that President Roosevelt had died. We had been on Samar for three or four days when the yeoman from the office came down the boat and called my name. He said that if I could get to the airfield in 20 minutes I could fly back to the states. I was there in ten! It took 56 hours to get to Pearl Harbor because we island hopped our way across. They then put us on a ship for four days to San Francisco. The World Alliance Conference was having its first meeting in San Francisco which meant that you could not get a train in or out of the city. We went down to the bus station and ten of us caught a bus out at midnight Saturday which we rode all the way to New York, arriving the following Friday. We were a tough bunch, nothing but muscle and bone. We each had a bottle and the ten of us settled into the back of the bus with no air conditioning and no heads. Well, the bus driver motioned me to the front of the bus. He said "I've been on a party for three days. You sit behind me and if you see me nodding, hit me in the back". I know his back was black and blue by the next morning. We pulled into Reno about 8 o'clock on Sunday morning and he said "I really appreciate you keeping me awake" and I said "I've been dodging Japanese bullets for some months and you know I'm not going to let you run off into the ditch". We had a short time in Reno, finally went on and stopped in Chicago where we got our first shower in three days at the USO, got back on the bus and went to New York. You just think about that. There is not a 21 year old today that would get on a bus in San Francisco without air conditioning and ride across the country.

OEO: What thoughts did you have knowing that you were safely back and that your life was going to change forever?

Dan Brunson: When we got to San Francisco the ten of us got two rooms and a suite at the Mark Hopkins Hotel. I spent \$248 in 48 hours. I had never spent that kind of money before. The thing you thought about, if you gave any serious thought to anything, is that you just thanked God that you did what you were sent to do and you got back. We were just so glad to be back. It was a different life all of the sudden. I had 30 days leave and went down to Washington D.C. where Sara was. I stayed 2 or 3 days in Washington and then got a train for Atlanta to see my folks. I lost two of my old buddies. One, a B-25 pilot, went down off the Philippines. The other, a P-47 pilot, went down in Germany while on a strafing run.

OEO: You went to DC to see Sara. Where was she while you were overseas?

Dan Brunson: She worked at the Pentagon as a civilian secretary for the Army Air Force. She had taken the civil service exam and was given three days to report for a salary of \$1440 a year. She went to DC in April of 1942. The Pentagon opened around April 1943. When I went to visit her in DC she invited me over to the Pentagon for lunch so I went over and called her on the phone. She wanted to know where I was and I said that I was at the cafeteria. She asked which cafeteria. The place was huge!

Sara Brunson Insert: During World War II I was employed by the Civil Service in Washington, D. C. My job was as stenographer and clerk, salary \$1440 per year in the

office complex of General Hap Arnold, headquarters of the Army Air Force. The first few months of 1942 we were in old buildings on Constitution Avenue awaiting completion of the Pentagon. We moved into the Pentagon at the end of the year. That building was a sight beyond belief, beautiful both inside and out. There was lots of walking to be done delivering important papers up and down long halls and corridors. We girls always wore heels and dressed in our very best. My job was a great experience. I met interesting and important people including high ranking officers reporting for duty such as Clark Gable, Jimmy Stewart and others. One great memory I have was the day in April 1945 that I stood on the sidewalk and watched the funeral procession of our beloved President Franklin Roosevelt. One Easter morning at sunrise service I saw Mrs. Roosevelt. I will always remember the beautiful cherry blossoms and public parks. I remained on the job until I resigned to marry a handsome sailor I fell in love with. We left D.C. together in February 1946 and were married in Atlanta on June 9, 1946

Dan Brunson: After my leave was over I reported back to Boston. They sent us from there to DeLand, Florida to an R&R facility at the College Arms Hotel. Jock Sutherland, the football coach at Pittsburg, was the commander of the place. Most of us had malaria and had lost a lot of weight. I got to be good friends with Dan Milmore from Ranger, Texas. He was the pharmacist mate at the facility. He came to me and asked if I would like to stay an additional two weeks. Well there was good chow, a swimming pool and a small golf course so I said that would be great. After the two weeks I reported back to Boston on August 1, 1945 only to find out that all my buddies had been sent back to the Pacific. Before they got there the war was over. I was so fortunate that I got that extra two weeks. In Boston I contacted some friends I had met back in 1943. They took good care of me for the approximately two weeks I was there. The Navy was going to send us back to Melville, Rhode Island but, by that time, Melville was full. So they sent us to Newport to a barracks of PT sailors. We stayed there until after the war was over. I left Newport about the first of November and went to USS Tarawa at Portsmouth, Virginia where I was on the commissioning detail. I was the division petty officer for the Communications Division. You asked me earlier if anyone had encouraged me to go to officer school. Well the Lieutenant of that division tried to get me to ship over and told me he could probably get me Chief Petty Officer. I was a Second Class at the time. I told him I had decided to go home. I didn't know at the time but everyone was being reduced in rate. I left the ship just prior to its shake down cruise in late January with orders to report to Bainbridge, Maryland where I was discharged February 4, 1946.

OEO: That was a critical chunk of your life. You then marched off to a civilian career. Would you take us through that?

Dan Brunson: I went to work for a little outfit selling merchandise off a truck. I didn't care much for that. It was hard to get things to sell. I had candy bars, pocket combs, cigarettes, anything they could get to sell. The man was paying me \$35 a week. During this time I went over to the telephone company where my Daddy had been for many years. Down the hall was the fellow who was in charge of the construction department. He had just moved up from Miami. I didn't tell him my Daddy was down the hall. He said the best he could do was \$32.50 a week. I told him that I couldn't quite make it on

that. Then I went with Staton Sales Company. I developed some good accounts, one being a grocery store out from Atlanta, Hogans. I would go there and get my order, go out to my truck and bring everything in. On this particular day it was raining and slippery. As I was carrying the order in I slipped and hit my head, dropping all the stuff in the mud, which made me mad. When I took the stuff in he gave me towels to dry it and said "why don't you go to work for a good company"? He pointed to a salesman who happened to be there and said I should go talk to him. The salesman was from Kraft Food (he later became one of my best friends in the company). I asked him who I could see in the company about a job. He told me and said the man was in his office by 8 o'clock in the morning. Next morning I was there bright and early and we talked for over an hour about everything but Kraft. He had been in the Navy in World War I. He had been on battleships and, of course, wanted to talk about the Navy. He was probably about 62 or 63 at that time and nearly ready to retire. He said that if I was interested in coming to work he would offer \$175 a month and furnish a car. He indicated that I needed to fill out an application as a formality and asked when I could come to work. I said I would be here in two weeks. He said okay and told me I should go by the name "Dan" from then on.

I never had any problems getting around and meeting people so they started me by doing some vacation relief work on various routes. I did that from April until June. At that time my boss said he noticed on my application that I would be willing to work anywhere. He wanted me to go down and relieve Chester Green at Albany, Georgia. Chester Green retired in 1980, is now 93 and a good friend. He ended up being in charge of Marketing for the whole Kraft company world wide. Anyway, I got down to Albany and Chester was living up over a grocery store, paying \$12.50 a month rent. He had been there for quite a time because nobody moved during the depression. We lived in Albany for about three years. I didn't contribute a whole lot but I learned a lot. I called on grocery stores within a hundred mile radius of Albany. The company was growing and we were getting some new products. This was 1947 to 1950. The company then transferred me to Atlanta to work chain stores like A&P and Kroger. After about 8 months my boss, who was the head of the southeast region, called me in and said he was going to send me to New Orleans. We were there for over two years. The city had 1900 small grocery stores. New Orleans was a very, very unusual place. In 1950 New Orleans didn't care if they ever had any visitors. They didn't care about you or where you came from. I was there 90 days before many of the people in the operation would even speak to me - I was an outsider from Georgia. Finally I won them over and got along fine the last two years I was there. Sara and I were invited to a Mardi Gras dance. We sat in the 4th balcony in our best finery. The only people who could actually go to the dance floor were the socialites of the city. One nice thing was the availability of all kinds of fresh seafood at the fish market. You could get a pound of fresh shrimp for 60 cents. One time we went over to Morgan City to watch the blessing and departure of the fishing fleet. They would go out for 4 or 5 weeks and it was a big deal in western Louisiana.

Next, I went to Birmingham to a supervisor position. There I met a man who was to become one of my best friends and supporters. He was a good fellow to work for. If you were the number two man, you just had to take the reins and go with them. He didn't get

in your way. We were only there about 8 months and came back to Atlanta. We were in Atlanta for a year in a staff job. One day I was 5 minutes late for a staff meeting. At the break, the man in charge brought up the fact. I told him that I got caught at a railroad crossing. He said maybe next time I should leave early enough to allow for those kinds of things. Lesson learned! During that time my Daddy was diagnosed with a brain tumor and passed away in 1953. We then went to Jackson, Mississippi where I was the manager for two years. That was the last place of the colonial south. If a man said he was going to do something, you didn't need it in writing. He was going to do it. We enjoyed Jackson. Our daughter was 3 or 4 years old and our son was 1 year old. I then got promoted to Greensboro, North Carolina which was, at that time, the 3rd largest operation we had in the southeast. That was at the time when it came out that cigarettes were damaging to your health. Greensboro was a very nice city to live in. There are several colleges there. In fact, the state is full of colleges. Any town you pass by has some kind of college. We were there for two years. Raleigh was next where we spent a year. There were a lot of problems in Norfolk, Virginia, that is, they were losing money. The boss told me to go up there and get the place straightened out. That's all he said. Norfolk had 10 or 12 salesmen and about a third of the business was military. My boss came up from Texas and the first thing he said was "well these people do wear shoes, don't they". If he hadn't been signing my paycheck I would have hit him! He thought Texas was the world. I carried him all around, trying to kill him with kindness, and get rid of him. In 1962 I was transferred to the southern office in Dallas for 5 years. One of the great things about business experience is your exposure to others. You see how they do it and then decide whether you want to do things that way, or another way. At least, that was my business experience. I traveled all over the division, from Norfolk to El Paso, Texas. Our daughter finished high school there. During her junior year they wanted to transfer me to Memphis. I asked my boss if I could stay there for one more year to get her out of school. The day she graduated they sent me to Chicago. In those days, companies seemed to transfer a lot. They don't do that so much any more. After about 2 and a half years in Chicago, in 1969, the company restructured. They offered me the job of Vice President of Sales for the southeast headquartered in Atlanta. I had that job for 14 or 15 years. That was pretty much my career with Kraft.

OEO: That is certainly a career to be proud of. We haven't mentioned your children yet. When were they born and what are their names?

Dan Brunson: Carol was born in May 1949 when we were in Albany. I had been on a fishing trip with two other fellows. We had gone down on a Saturday morning, fished all day and only caught 11 fish. The next day we caught 242 speckled and white trout in the same place we had been the day before. The next weekend we were going to have a fish fry. When we got home Sara said it was time to go to the hospital. I have never gotten over being mad at the hospital because they charged me for a whole day when it was only 20 minutes. Of course, they only charged \$100 for the entire week. Anyway, Carol was a wonderful girl, very easy to take care of. She was in 6 or 7 schools and did very well in all of them. She graduated from Texas Christian University with very good grades in elementary education. Her husband also graduated from TCU, as did their two daughters.

David was born in June 1954. He was a good student when he wanted to be. He was good at mathematics, the sciences and he tolerated English literature. In fact, he failed it twice in college, Georgia Southern University. I told him I would pay for it one more time. But I couldn't say much, he never gave us any trouble. Biggest trouble we had with him was he let his hair grow to his shoulders. One day my Mother asked me why I didn't get David to cut his hair. I said "Mother, if that is the only trouble we ever have with that boy, so be it". He went on through school and kept knocking on doors until he found something he wanted. He has done very well. He has four horses within the city limits of Lee's Summit, Missouri. One of our granddaughters is a horse lady. He's the quiet member of the family – takes after his Momma and not his Daddy. If you want to know anything from Dave, you almost have to pry it out of him. He's a good man and he has helped raise three great children.

OEO: Let's go back a little bit. What impact did the Navy have on your life?

Dan Brunson: Oh, I think I grew up. It matured me. I learned a lot about people in the Navy, from the skipper of the boat on down to the seamen. I have always thought that if you give folks their head, as long as they have had some kind of guidance, they won't go wrong. They may get off the path now and then, most of us have at one time or another, but they will get back. I found out that things won't all be done my way. My ROTC experience helped with that but the Navy cemented the relationship which I have today with other people. I think there are a lot of boys today that should be in the service. I think there a lot of boys that would benefit a lot from being in one of the services for two years. I have always felt that way. They have got to learn responsibility somewhere. Many don't seem to be getting it. The service teaches you to grow up and deal with responsibility.

OEO: That leads to the next question. If you found yourself talking to a young person about to finish high school and that person asked the most important thing they should think about, what would you answer?

Dan Brunson: I told my 19 year old grandson that the first thing to realize is that you owe other people for what you have. You come from a good home. You need to assume responsibility for your actions. What you learn now will be with you for the rest of your life. Take advantage of your opportunities and take responsibility. You must like what you do, enjoy your work. If you don't like what you are doing, quit, and do something else. An example – you go into a department store looking for a shirt. The young person points you in the right direction and that's it. That person should be taking you over there and helping you, including suggesting a necktie, etc. Too many young people do only the minimum, waiting for quitting time and their paycheck. It goes back to being responsible, taking interest, and taking pride in what you do. One time I had as a dinner guest a division manager for Winn-Dixie, we were talking and I asked if he liked what he did. He say yes, if I didn't I would quit. You can't make it any plainer than that. The enormous salary that sports figures receive is very misleading to a lot of young people. It gets some kids all mixed up.

OEO: That is all good stuff. You have started to answer my last question. What has been your life philosophy?

Dan Brunson: You have to enjoy your work, keep your family out in front, and be honest. When somebody asks you something you have to give an honest answer. You do the best you can at what you do. If you don't like your work, quit and do something else. God, family and country. I have felt that way for 84 years.

OEO: Dan, those are really golden words and I can't think of a better place to stop. Thank you for sharing a glimpse of your life for the record. This document will be valuable to many people.