RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH LEONARD BROOKS

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Leonard Brooks in Neptune, New Jersey, on June 3, 2008, with Shaun Illingworth. Mr. Brooks, thank you very much for having me here today. To begin, could you tell me where and when you were born?

Leonard Brooks: I was born in the Philippines in 1924, in the Manila area. There's a hospital, Mary Johnston Hospital, in Manila, and I was born at that hospital. …

SI: What were your parents' names?

LB: My father is Cyril Brooks, my mother is Anna, and Dad was born in England and Mother was born in Ireland. So, they met at a Bible school in Brooklyn, New York, and that's where they started their life together. They were married in September 1922, arrived in the Philippines in 1922 in December. … They were going there as missionaries, and they were there from 1922 until they passed away in 1986.

SI: Let me pause for a moment.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Ready?

LB: Okay.

SI: Your father was in the Canadian Army in World War I.

LB: That's correct. … He volunteered, at the age of seventeen, and went overseas to Europe in 1914, '15, and he was in the Canadian Army. … Then, he was a Canadian at that point, but he lost his Canadian citizenship when he went to the mission field and stayed out of the country more than five years. So, I was born into a family that was of British origin and our passport was British, because Dad had lost his Canadian citizenship.

SI: When did he come to Canada?

LB: … When he was twelve years old, he moved to Canada with his mother. His father had died and his brother stayed in England, and his mother and two sisters and he, when he was twelve years old, moved to Canada and they settled in Victoria, British Columbia, after a year-and-a-half. … First year, they were in the middle of Canada, and then, they moved to Victoria, British Columbia, and that's where he volunteered to go into the Army, as a Canadian Army man during World War I.

SI: Did he ever talk about his experiences in World War I?

LB: Well, not really. … What had happened to Dad was that, because of the gasses that were used during World War I, mustard gas, particularly, it had infected … around his lungs and, when he came back, he was very, very sick. In fact, they had to cut one of his ribs out and drain all the poison out around his lungs. … A miracle happened, because they told his mother and

sisters, … one night, that he would not live until morning, and they had a prayer meeting at the church that night and he lived through it, obviously, because I'm here. [laughter] …

SI: Did he ever talk about what led him to become a missionary?

LB: Well, he'd always been interested in mission work, and, after the war was over, he was more determined to go to the mission field, and why? I still don't know, unless it's in his book. I'm not sure why he went to the Philippines, but the Philippines was on his heart and mind and, when they met in Brooklyn, Mother was willing to go with him to the Philippines. …

SI: She was Irish. When did she come over?

LB: … Her parents had come over to the States and were living in New York. … Her father was a builder, carpenter. In fact, her father was the chief carpenter in the big cathedral in Buffalo, New York, and they had gone back to Ireland for a visit when she was born, but they were American citizens at that time, although she was born in Ireland. …

SI: She had lived in the US for her entire life.

LB: Yes. Well, after a year, … they moved back to the States and she lived in Buffalo, New York, grew up in Buffalo, New York.

SI: We should note that your father, Cyril H. Brooks, published an autobiography called *Grace Triumphant*, which tells about his life, and some about your early life.

LB: Right.

SI: What are some of your earliest memories about growing up in the Philippines?

LB: … Some of my earliest memories, I don't have an awful lot of them. I remember growing up after we had moved. … When I was born, they were living in the provincial areas, and then, they moved back to the Manila area, and I don't remember anything as to the provincial areas. I do remember the house that we lived in when I was a boy, probably about ten, twelve years of age. I do remember that house that we were living in, and life was fairly normal, as far as growing up was concerned, nothing spectacular. There was a school that they started in Manila at the time and that I attended, in Bordner High School, when I got to high school. It was a school that was set up for military personnel and those who were civilians were able to come to the school, and so, we had, mostly, military family children. There were some Filipinos in the school, and Bordner High School was the high school I was in when the war broke out. … Not much prior to that time, playing with the Filipino neighbors and all that kind of stuff; an incident of one of the neighbors who my mother almost killed, because he introduced me to a red hot pepper and I had no idea what it was like, but I do remember that. After eating it, I had blisters in my mouth for a week, and so, my mother was very upset. [laughter] … Other than that, the normal thing, getting into trouble and cutting my hand … when I was cutting bamboo, and those kind of things were part of the early growing up, but I don't remember an awful lot of them.

SI: Was this in San Juan?

LB: San Juan, which is a suburb of Manila, just about … five miles out of the center of the City of Manila. It's like New York City; you have a lot of little boroughs. Well, Manila was the same way. They had these little municipalities, and San Juan was one of them and that's where my father started a church. … He lived in that area for most of my life, … until the war, and then, of course, when the war came, things were different.

SI: How large was the congregation?

LB: Probably, it had grown, by the time the war broke out, to a hundred to 150 people. At the present time, that church is still going and has been going since Dad started that when I was a boy of twelve, so, that's seventy years ago, and the congregation today numbers well over two hundred, and they have started other small churches, branch churches, that have moved out from there. So, if they had everybody that was originally in the congregation, probably, close to seven or eight hundred people. …

SI: The Philippines is a mostly Roman Catholic country.

LB: Yes. Ninety percent of the Philippines is Roman Catholic, … and many of those in our churches came from a Catholic background. …

SI: Was there any kind of difficulty in that regard, friction between the Roman Catholic population and your family and the congregation?

LB: No. We had no problems like that in the Philippines. It was true in other countries, but not in the Philippines. … They were very friendly and open to the Protestant message that we were presenting. So, there was no problem whatsoever.

SI: Both your mother and father were very involved in the ministry.

LB: Yes. … As I was growing up, as a boy, I can remember that they had children's classes in the different little towns, or little *barrios* around, … every afternoon. … It got to the point where Mother left me, my brother and I, to make supper and do the cooking and all the rest of it, because, by the time they finished their classes in the afternoon, by the time they get home, it was suppertime. So, we had to have supper on the table.

SI: I was wondering if you and your brother, your sister was probably too young, were involved in the ministry at all.

LB: Not an awful lot, not an awful lot. We were involved in the sense of being part of the young people's group and we're the young people and all the rest of it, but not in the sense of actually doing any of the ministry, because … we were really too young, being under the high school age, because I was in high school when the war broke out. …

SI: I read in your father's autobiography that, before high school, your parents taught you at home.

LB: Yes. We had used the Calvert Course, up until I was in sixth grade. We came back to the United States on furlough, that was probably '37, '38, and I had finished my sixth grade. We landed in Victoria and spent two months there with my aunt and uncle, and they put me in school when we arrived there. So, I had two months of school, but, since I had finished the sixth grade, they put me in seventh grade. … They pushed me on after two months and, originally, it wasn't much, because that was the time that the coronation of King George VI, took place, on May 12, 1937, and a lot of celebrations and getting ready for the coronation. So, there wasn't much school work. … Actually, as far as Calvert was concerned, by sixth grade, you were finished with elementary school and ready for high school. … I finished the seventh grade in Victoria, and then, when we went to Buffalo for a year, furlough, they put me in school in Buffalo, New York. So, I had my eighth grade in the public school in Buffalo, New York, graduated from there, came back to the Philippines after our eighth grade, but school in the Philippines, at that time, started in July. So, by the time we got back here, because it wasn't like it is today; you don't travel by plane, we traveled by boat, and it's a twenty-one day trip by boat. So, by the time we got across the States and got across the Pacific, we were two months, almost three months, into school, and so, they … did not put me in the first-year high school. I went back to the eighth grade and I had to do the eighth grade over again in the Philippines. [laughter]

SI: Were you taught in English or Tagalog?

LB: No, it was all in English. All the education in the Philippines is in English, even in their public schools, because they have … no books for a curriculum in the language. There's actually eighty-seven languages in the Philippines. So, Tagalog is only spoken in and around the Manila area. If you go fifty miles north, it's another language, almost all completely different. So, all the education, even with Filipinos even today, is still in English.

SI: Did you grow up speaking Tagalog?

LB: Yes, and I can converse in Tagalog. I've never preached in Tagalog, but I have conversed in Tagalog and I get along quite well with it. I've lost a lot of it. … I've been in this country now for twenty-five years and you just never use it. So, it's only the few words here and there that I remember, but I can understand a lot of it. If I hear two Filipinos in a store today talking Tagalog, I can understand what they're saying. …

SI: Did you have a lot of interaction with either Europeans or Americans, or was it mostly with the Filipinos, while you were growing up, before high school?

LB: In our school, we had a lot of interaction with Americans and the foreign personnel, because the school was made up of a lot of business people, of embassy people. So, we would have people from these different countries, and so, there was a lot of interaction. … Athletic teams, we would play, mostly, against Filipino teams, because we were the only American school at the time. I was on the basketball team and the track and field team when I was in high school. So, I'm six-foot, and I was six-foot at the age of twelve, so, when I was in high school, I

was six-foot tall. So, that was tall for a Filipino, because Filipinos, you get some good Filipinos today that are tall, but not at that time. Most of them were five feet, and so, they were shorter. So, they were glad to have a tall guy on the team. [laughter]

SI: I guess one thing I am trying to get at is how Westernized your childhood was.

LB: It was. It really was. Manila is a very Western city, modern and all the rest of it. So, I mean, you had the movie houses that had the movies of the current stateside offerings when I was growing up, that would be in the early 1900s, 1940 to '45, and those kinds of things. So, it was all sort of modern. You did do a lot of conversation in Tagalog with people, because you were in there, but the Filipinos were wanting to learn English, and so, you may talk to them in Tagalog and they would answer you in English, because they wanted to learn English. So, the use of the language was not as important. You used it a lot when you went shopping. You used the Tagalog because, therefore, you could bargain with the Filipinos and they would realize it's an American who understands their way of life, and so, … although they put the price way up, as soon as you started talking Tagalog, the price would come down, because they knew they weren't going to get away with it. [laughter]

SI: What was a typical day like when you were, say, in your early or mid-teens?

LB: … Our school day started early in the morning, because school started at eight o'clock and we had an hour's drive to get to school. So, we left home six-thirty, seven o'clock every morning and school went until noontime. It was finished at twelve and Dad picked us up at twelve and we went back and we were home by one o'clock. … The afternoon was spent on homework and playing with neighbors, and so on, or getting involved with the athletic teams in the afternoon. So, your school day was just one period, just the morning. …

SI: Did you have any kind of part-time or afterschool jobs?

LB: … No, no, because it was almost impossible for an American or a foreigner child to get a job, where there were so many nationals that were looking for jobs at the time. So, we didn't have that. A lot of athletic activities were carried on in the afternoon and I was in that. …

SI: I have read that baseball and other American games were very popular in the Philippines.

LB: The biggest sport in the Philippines is basketball, because you can put up a basketball hoop any place, and so, basketball is *the* game, when I was growing up. It probably is changing a lot now. Other sports are coming in. I see there's a lot of soccer being played in the Philippines, too, but, when I was growing up, basketball was *the* game and everybody was going for basketball.

SI: Did you get to travel around the Philippines much?

LB: I was not able to until after the World War. After I went back as a missionary, I did some traveling through the islands, but prior to that time, no. So, most of my time was spent in and around Manila, or going up for our summer vacation up to Baguio. Baguio is five thousand feet

above sea level, cooler climate. So, we would go up there for two or three weeks … to a month in the summertime to have a vacation, but that's the farthest we'd drive. It would be 150 miles, two hundred miles, to Baguio.

SI: How long would you be in Baguio?

LB: Two or three weeks, maybe, sometimes, three weeks, four weeks, but, most of the time, it was about two or three weeks. … At the time when I was growing up as a teenager in high school, they had an Army base in Baguio, Camp John Hay, which was open for the Americans to go into. It was really a recreation type of thing for the servicemen to get their vacation, to get their R&R and we, as Americans, were allowed on the base. … They had a stateside restaurant and we always enjoyed going to the stateside restaurant and getting some of the stateside food. [laughter] We loved the Filipino food, but … it was nice to be able to get a stateside meal. …

SI: Your father writes about how the 1930s were a difficult time economically in the Philippines. The Great Depression was on here in the States and had something of an effect in the Philippines as well.

LB: Right.

SI: Do you remember any of that?

LB: Yes. The thing about it is that most of our income, my father's income, came from the States. … We were connected with a mission organization in this country and the money came through the mission organization to us, and so, consequently, during that time, it was very limited because of limited funds in this country, limited for us. … Yes, I can remember that, … at one point, Dad, I remember, for a month, Dad … went every week down to the post office to look to see if there was any money and nothing there, but, prior, just at the beginning of that month, they had bought, and we'd buy it by the big sack full of flour, a fifty-pound sack of flour. … They had just gotten a sack of flour and I can remember that most of our meals were bread and gravy, and that's all we had, but the Filipinos in the church would bring us some of their produce from their gardens. A couple of times, during that time, Filipinos would bring us a kid, goat, … for meat. So, we were supplied in that way, but there was a period of time when it was very difficult during those years, because of what was happening here in this country.

SI: It seems like your family had a lot of interaction with US servicemen, particularly as we get closer to World War II.

LB: Yes. When we came home … on furlough, in '37 and '38, I was thirteen, thirteen or fourteen years of age at the time, and we were home and, when we went back, Dad started a servicemen's work. It was called Navigators and these men were on the ships, and many of the ships in Manila Bay, and some of the servicemen came from the Army bases that were in and around Manila. … So, what would happen is, that mostly on a weekend, we didn't have much during the week, but, on the weekend, a lot of these fellows would get off for the weekend and they would come to the house for the weekend. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

LB: Just to pick up with those servicemen coming for the weekend, Mother would have us boys, my brother and I, we were thirteen, fourteen years of age, fifteen years of age, bake all Saturday morning, because these fellows would come, there would be fifteen, twenty, sometimes twenty-five of them, there for the weekend. We'd bake pies and cookies and bread and all the rest of it. So, the three of us, Mother and us two boys, spent from seven o'clock in the morning on Saturday until noon doing nothing but baking, and, by Monday morning, we were very fortunate if we could find a slice of bread for breakfast, because these fellows would come in and you'd ask them what kind of pie you would like and they'd say, "Well, we'll start with that one," and so on. … As I say, I was in my early teens, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen years of age at this time, and many of those fellows were just two or three years older than I was, you know, the young servicemen that were on there. The big thing that impressed me with many of them is their devotion to God. There were servicemen who learned Scripture and memorized Scripture, and so on. … This is something that impressed me as a young fellow at the time, … but we'd have a gang of them and we'd have a good time, and then, it came to just before the war in December of 1941. I had just had my seventeenth birthday and, Sunday night, as they were all going back, one of the servicemen was from Cavite, he had his own car and rumors of war had been around. We knew nothing about it … until this fellow turned, as he went down the stairs, and said, "I'm going to get my car serviced and bring it back to you, because, if war breaks out, we will get bombed, but you may not be." Well, he never got back, because that was the night that Pearl Harbor was bombed. …

SI: Before that, you really had not had any inkling.

LB: We had no, any, idea that it was that close to war. I'm sure that some of these servicemen knew a lot more than they were able to say or told us, or whether they couldn't tell us, maybe, because of what was going on, but we found out later that, during those months, probably a year prior to that time, the Japanese were … bringing equipment into the Philippines as farm equipment, but it was really guns and the big guns, that they would … put it together when they got up into the hills, but we knew nothing about this, whatsoever. It all seemed to kind of sneak up on us, and it was a shock to us when we woke up on Monday morning, the 8th, and realized Pearl Harbor had been bombed. It's all brand-new.

SI: Before we get to the beginning of the war, there were quite a number of Japanese nationals living in the area or the neighborhood.

LB: Oh, yes. We had Japanese neighbors, and very friendly neighbors. In fact, during the time of the war, he was glad to stand for me and give me a statement of confidence, so that I didn't have to go in the concentration camp. When I turned eighteen, I was to go into the concentration camp, although my family was out, but he stood for me, because he'd been a neighbor for us for two or three years, and he didn't know what he was doing, [laughter] as you'll hear when I go on.

SI: Before World War II, where did you see your life going? Did you see yourself becoming a missionary? Did you have other career plans?

LB: At that point, my plans were, as soon as I'd finish high school, … to come back to the States and go to school. I wanted to become an electrical engineer, but that never materialized, but that was my hope. … After the war was over, my father and mother wanted me to go Bible school, and so, I went to Bible school instead of the engineering school.

SI: What attracted you to electrical engineering?

LB: I just loved electricity and I loved working with my hands and learning about electricity. I was, before I went to the mission field, an electrical contractor, for three years, had my own business. So, I was into electrical, … but I did not have the training that an engineer would have, as far as electrical work was concerned.

SI: As a teenager, would you make things, like radios or other things?

LB: Not radios, but I would do a lot of electrical work in the house and learned how to do those kind of things by myself, picked them up.

SI: I do not know if you would be able to comment on this, but it was interesting to read in your father's book that he said that something with the mortgage on your house came in very useful during the war, due to the fact that it was switched from whatever bank it was with to a Filipino bank. Could you explain that for the record?

LB: Well, no, I really don't remember any of that myself. I do remember Dad talking about it, but I don't know all the details. It probably, some time, was connected with an income that we had during the war, where we worked with the Filipinos and the Chinese to have income, because, again, all our income was cut off. That came from the States, so, the only way to do it was to get some of the money from the Chinese merchants. Dad worked out an agreement with these Chinese merchants. The money in the Philippines during World War II, when we were there under the Japanese, was Japanese currency. It was still the *peso*, and so on, but it was printed by the Japanese and, for everybody in the Philippines at the time, they called it "Mickey Mouse currency," because it was worth nothing. You could have millions of it when the war was over and you'd have nothing. So, Dad made the agreement with the Chinese merchants, because they were still working and making money, that he would borrow from them at a certain rate. We would get that "Mickey Mouse money," but … he would repay them after the war was over in the currency, and they made some kind of an agreement. It wasn't one-to-one, like it should have been, but it was an agreement that they had come together on, so that they didn't lose a lot of money. They'd lend it out and were able to have income, and repaid, after the war was over, these Chinese merchants.

SI: Did you have a lot of interaction with Chinese nationals before the war?

LB: We did, we did. A lot of the merchants in the Philippines, prior to the war, and even during the war and right after the war, were all Chinese. You know, they ran the economy quite a bit. Chinese are, as so-often by the Filipino, called "the Jew of the Orient," the way they ran things, and so, a lot of the stores, a lot of the merchants, were all Chinese. …

SI: All right. Can you tell us about the day the war began, December 8th in the Philippines?

LB: Yes. … Interesting to me, as I look back now on all of this, I don't know whether Dad had it in his book or not, but the Sunday night, the radio program that Dad was preaching on, … the message that he had had to do with the "Four Freedoms" that Roosevelt had given at his Congress address in January of 1941, "Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Religion," and so on. … [Editor's Note: President Franklin D. Roosevelt spelled out his "Four Freedoms" policy, that everyone in the world should enjoy freedom of speech and religion and freedom from fear and want, in his State of the Union Address on January 6, 1941.] Dad was preaching on those "Four Freedoms" at six o'clock at night on Sunday evening, and that was the same time that the Japanese, at that point, were steaming down towards Pearl Harbor. The time change is such that, in the Philippines, we're eighteen hours ahead of Pearl Harbor. So, when Pearl Harbor was bombed, it was really about two o'clock Monday morning, Philippine time, that they were bombed. So, they, probably, some of them, soon after that, were taking off … with their planes towards Pearl Harbor. So, Monday morning, we woke up and the newsflash was Pearl Harbor had been bombed. So, we carried on as if nothing was wrong; we were going to have a normal day. So, we went to school that morning, but, with all the troop movements through the City of Manila and all the rest of it, the teachers realized they can't conduct school. Kids were running to the windows to watch the trucks go by and see all the soldiers and all the rest of it. So, they finally called school and that was the end of our school for the rest of the time that the war was on. We never went back to school again. … The thing about all of this was the fact that I was a junior in high school at the time, and I was a junior because, as I told you before, I had to repeat the eighth grade. If I had been a senior in December, which is almost halfway through the school year, automatically, all the seniors who were getting good grades were given a diploma, … but none of the rest of us, and so, all my records, as far as school, my school, was concerned, completely gone. I had no proof that I had gone … up to past junior high when the war was over. So, I had to start all over again.

Elaine Blatt: Did you know where Pearl Harbor was when you heard the news?

LB: Oh, yes, … because we had been in Pearl Harbor, yes. You traveled, at that time, to the Philippines by boat and most of the time, unless you went on a freighter, a freighter would take a straight route and not stop between San Francisco and Manila, and it was twenty-one days and you saw nothing but water, but, on the ocean liners, they'd stop at Honolulu. They'd stop in two places in Japan, … Shanghai and Hong Kong before we got to the Philippines. So, we had been in Pearl Harbor. We had seen all of that prior to that, just when we were there in '37-'38. …

EB: Between the time that you heard that Pearl Harbor had been bombed and before the bombing of the Philippines, did you think that you would be next?

LB: We knew we would be. We knew we would be.

EB: You knew, at that point.

LB: Yes. We realized that it wouldn't be long before they started to come to the Philippines and bomb the Philippines, and the first bombing of the Philippines was Monday night. That's the first time they came over.

SI: Was there any talk about evacuating or leaving the Philippines?

LB: Well, at that point, it was almost impossible to get out. … There were ocean liners … with missionaries on them who were on their way to India and they were stranded in Manila. There were some that were on their way back from China to the States and they were stranded in Manila. … What happened was that they had gotten off the boat on Sunday afternoon, and then, when all of this happened, the steamships' captains, … because of the crew, they just picked up anchor and left. They didn't care whether they had the people or not. So, most of these people were stranded and a lot of their luggage was on the boat as it went away, and so, they were stranded. We had a number of missionaries staying with us, because, … in the beginning, from December 7th all the way through until the end of January on, we had thirteen people living in our house, and only five of us are the Brooks Family. The rest were all missionaries that were stranded in the Philippines that Dad had taken in. … There was no way possible that we would have been able to get out. Besides that, even if there had been a way to get out, my father would never have left, because my father said, "We came here to work and serve the Filipinos and what would they think of us, as soon as trouble comes, we run and leave them, abandoned?" So, he would never have gone, even if he could have, but we couldn't have gone out anyway if we'd wanted to, at that point.

SI: Had there been any kind of civil defense-type preparations beforehand, building air raid shelters, that sort of thing?

LB: No, but there had been some talk about the fact, and they'd done it a couple or three times, with the sirens going off, that the bombing was coming. They had done some practice of that, but nothing really organized, because nobody really expected it at that point. We were not figuring that the Japanese would attack, although, … in the back of our minds, we figured, "The Japanese and the Germans were together. The Germans have started a war." Even when we were coming back from furlough in 1938, when we stopped in Japan, we wondered, because that was just the time that Hitler started in Europe and we were wondering if we'd ever get into a war with Japan, but, at that point, they were not prepared to start, the Japanese weren't, in 1938.

SI: It comes out later in your father's book about not wanting to be confused with Germans when you went to the market, but was there a large German population in Manila?

LB: … Yes, there was. In fact, one of my best friends and I worked together during the war. He was of German descent. … We lived just a block away from each other and we started a business together of making peanut butter and selling it to the Japanese Navy. He did the leg work, because he could go out, as a German, and meet with the Japanese, and I did all the preparation, made three hundred pounds of peanut butter every week, and sold it to the Japanese Navy.

SI: How soon did that start?

LB: Oh, probably about a year, a year-and-a-half into it, so, getting money for helping out with the expenses, because, as I say, we didn't have any income coming from the States. So, he and I had this business together.

SI: You were obviously outside of the German community, but did you have a sense of if they were pro-Hitler, anti-Hitler, what their feelings were about the war?

LB: I don't know of all of them, but the ones that I was friendly with were all anti-Hitler. So, we had good relations with those people, and particularly this family.

SI: Let me pause for a second. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: We were talking about General Douglas MacArthur off the record. How was he viewed before and during the war?

LB: MacArthur was revered very highly in the Philippines by the Filipinos. They think the world of him, and so, … it never has been anything but that. … The interesting thing is that, prior to the war, MacArthur was in the Philippines and … he made his headquarters at the Manila Hotel. … I was in high school and, one day, he was coming back from a trip away and he was coming back to his headquarters there in the Manila Hotel, and so, they released us from school, so that we could be part of the welcoming committee when MacArthur came back. … We lined the place where he was there and I had the privilege of standing there and putting my hand out and shaking hands with MacArthur as he walked into his headquarters. [laughter]

Esther C. Brooks: … This is the MacArthur Square Memorial in Norfolk, Virginia.

SI: This is a brochure from the MacArthur Foundation.

ECB: Yes. It's quite a …

SI: That is a very sizable complex.

LB: It is.

ECB: And beautifully done.

LB: And that's where he and his wife are buried, if you look inside and see that in that building where they've made a crypt. Yes, he was in the Philippines for a long time; in fact, his father was in the Philippines. [Editor's Note: General Arthur MacArthur, Jr., served in the Philippines during the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars, then, as military governor of the Philippines.]

ECB: This is the famous picture of MacArthur returning to the Philippines, in the brochure.

EB: What did you think that MacArthur was doing there before the war if you did not expect that there was going to be a war with Japan?

LB: He was brought in by the Filipinos to train an Army. They anticipated it. I'm sure they didn't plan on it, but they anticipated that there would be a war, and so, he was one of the ones that was employed by the Filipino Government to train Filipino soldiers and servicemen.

ECB: And, of course, it was under the American protection.

LB: Oh, yes, yes.

ECB: Everything was American then. … When was it that they actually got …

LB: … They were supposed to get their independence in 1946, but, then, of course, the war came, so, it was after that that they did, but they were working towards it. [Editor's Note: The Philippines became an independent nation on July 4, 1946.] … In the few years prior to World War II, all of the government was under the Filipinos. They had a governor from the States living … in the Embassy, but their government was run by the Filipinos. They had their own president, vice-president, a government setup similar to ours, two houses of congress, … which is still there today, but this was all set up ahead of time and they were preparing for the independence, which was in 1946. …

SI: Can you tell us about the first attacks? What were they like? What do you remember seeing, the chaos and so forth?

LB: Well, our first attack was Monday night and they bombed, and the Clark Air Force Base was in Manila at that time. It was later moved to sixty miles north in Pampanga … and there was a base there after World War II called Clark Air Force Base, but the original Clark was just outside of Manila and that's what was bombed, and they came in and bombed that night. The next day, they came in, and unfortunately … for the Americans was the fact that the Japanese came in and completely destroyed the American … Air Force that first day, which was not Monday, but Tuesday. … From then on, the Japanese could come and bombed whenever they wanted to, because they had destroyed the American Air Force. The Americans had been up all morning, patrolling, they came back for lunch and refueling, and that's when the Japanese struck. … They knew all of this and all the rest of it prior to the war, so, it was very easy for them to destroy the US Air Force.

EB: How quickly did you find out that the US Air Force had been destroyed? Was it immediately or was it something you learned after the war?

LB: We really didn't know that they had been destroyed, except for the fact that we knew the Japanese could fly over and bomb at any time they wanted. … They always came at noontime. I don't know why they picked noontime. We were living one mile away from an Army base, Filipino Army base, Air Force base, and the Japanese came in and bombed that. … Then, they would come down with their Zeros and strafe, and bullets would be flying all over the place.

There was one house across the street from us, just right on the other side of the street, that was hit by bullets … of these Japanese fighters. We, my brother and I, would sit on the front porch of our house and watch these planes flying over and all the strafing going on. … Then, if something happened and they were getting a little close, we'd lift up a flowerpot and hold it in front of our face to protect us. Kind of stupid, we know that now, but I do remember that my dad had told me that if you hear the whistle of a bomb, you know that bomb is pretty close, and so, one day, my brother and I heard a whistle. We were sitting on the front porch, and our house is built up, so, you would have stairs to go down, not a basement type of thing, but just underneath the house, because all the houses were built up high. … We had sort of made a little place down below for a bomb shelter type of thing and everybody else was down there, but my brother and I were up, but, when we heard that whistle of the bomb coming, we ran through the house. … I don't think we hardly touched the stairs going down, but we were flat on our faces when the bomb hit, and it hit in the backyard of our house, and so, after it was all over, my brother and I; it didn't go off. … It was a dud and it went down into the ground. My brother and I decided we'd like to see what it looked like. So, we started digging a hole, to see if we could find the bomb. … I guess we went down about three feet and never did find the bomb, but, probably, it was a good thing we didn't. [laughter]

EB: Yes.

LB: It might have gone off, but that was just one of the experiences we had … during those first few months. The Japanese came into Manila. … MacArthur declared Manila an open city, moved out to Bataan with all the troops out there. So, the Japanese came in to Manila on the 2nd of January, 1942, and that was the first time we see the Japanese, had seen Japanese. … A patrol went through the city and through the place and we had them around us. There was a lot of Americans living near where we were, and so, … from then on, through the next few weeks, they went around and picked up these Americans and took them into camp. They made … Santo Tomas the place for the internment camp. Santo Tomas was a university, the oldest university under an American flag at the time, and it was a Catholic school and it's a big complex, and so, they … put them all in there. Now, our house was built in such a way, my mother had vines all over it to shield from the sun, we could look out through the vines, but people from the outside couldn't look in through the windows. … We would watch as the Japanese would come around and pick up our American neighbors and take them off … to the concentration camp. Along about the end of January, first part of February, the order went out from the Japanese that if you had not been picked up by the Japanese, if you're American, you had to report to the concentration camp. So, we, the thirteen of us in the house, packed up that morning and reported to the concentration camp, kind of disappointed. We had hoped that, by this time, the Americans would be coming back and we'd be free and, when we got to the concentration camp, they were putting all the missionaries off to one side. They had taken the missionaries that were already there and all the other missionaries that came in and put us off. We got there about nine-thirty in the morning and we just sat there until two in the afternoon. We didn't know what was coming. We remembered what happened in China; many of the missionaries were slaughtered by the Japanese, and so, many of us were thinking this was our last day on Earth. The Japanese were probably putting us aside to kill us, but, about two o'clock in the afternoon, the Japanese came out and announced what they were going to do and, as was typical of the Japanese, always, they tell you about what they're going to do all in Japanese and, of course, nobody knows what's

going. Then, you have to wait for the interpreter, but what they were doing was, because they were so religious in the Philippines, they felt that if they allowed … the missionaries to go free that the missionaries would then be their propaganda, … through the Filipino, to tell the Filipino, "The Japanese are here to help you. The Japanese are here to do good for you," and that's what … we were told we had to do. Of course, none of that happened, but that was what we were told we had to do. So, instead of staying in the concentration camp, we all went back home again that night, didn't spend any time in the concentration camp, at that point. We were in house arrest from then on until we went to the concentration camp. … That was in February of 1942 and we actually went into camp in June of 1944. So, we were under house arrest up until that point.

SI: Before the order went out to report to Santo Tomas, what was your daily life like? Did you go out much outside of your home or did you mostly stick around your home?

LB: No, no. We were almost never out of the house. We didn't want to be seen by anybody. Filipinos, the neighbors that we did have, were very quiet, did not tell anybody that we were there. So, no, for those first few weeks, we were pretty well house ridden, and, of course, there was thirteen of us … and all missionaries; had Bible studies, we had prayer times and things like that, all during the day, but most of the time, it was home. … Of course, food, to get food into the house, the Filipinos would come in, … in the night, when things were quiet, nobody was around, and bring us things, … so that we would have food. So, that's how we were kept at that time. After that, of course, we were out all the time, … but the Japanese, soon after we were sent home, probably a month or two, the Japanese realized that we weren't behaving ourselves. We weren't supposed to leave the house unless you were going shopping, you're going to the doctor's or you're going to church. That's the only time you're supposed to leave the house, but they recognized the fact that some of these missionaries weren't doing it, particularly the young people in the family. … Because the Japanese were afraid of the Germans, they wouldn't stop you on the street because they didn't know, by looking at you, whether you were an American or a German, and they couldn't stop a German and question him. So, they just left us alone for awhile. Then, they realized the only way to find out was to give all the Americans a red armband. So, you had a red armband, but you only had one armband per family. So, there are five of us; only one person could go out at a time, … unless we were going as a family to church, and then, your dad, the father, would wear the red armband. So, if any time I wanted to go to Manila, we were living in San Juan, five miles away, and, if I wanted to go down to Manila, I'd have to take the armband and wear it, but what I would do is, I would wear a long-sleeved shirt and roll up the sleeve and put the armband and tuck it down in, so that I could look down and see it, but the Japanese looking at me could not see the armband. So, I could get away with it.

ECB: Did you tell them about the shortwave?

LB: … I was stopped a couple of times that way and the man would ask, Japanese would ask me, "Are you an American?" and I said, "Yes." He says, "Where's your armband?" I said, "Right there," and he says, "I can't see it." So, I always said, "Excuse me, it must have slipped," and I pulled it back up again. … During those … years, soon after that, the Japanese came in and took all our radios away from us. We had no shortwave radios or radios. The only radio we had was tuned to a local Japanese station. So, there were two brothers who … I was very friendly with, they're Filipinos, and they took their radio and put it up into the crawl space in

their attic. … Every night, at eleven o'clock, they would go up there and listen to Voice of America and get the news from Voice of America, and then, they would print it up in a little piece of paper and … two of us would go over there and pick it up. One was a Chinese man and myself, we'd go over and pick up this news, so that we could tell people. He would go to the Chinese people and I would go to the missionaries and the Americans who were out and give the news. At that point, we had no vehicles, aside from bicycles, and so, I would be riding my bicycle and I'd take the handle, the rubber grip, off my bicycle handle and I'd roll the slip up of paper that he'd given to me and put it in the handlebar and put the rubber back on. So, if the Japanese stopped and searched me, they would not find the piece of paper on me. Then, when I'd get home, I would try and memorize most of it, so that I could dispose of the paper. Now, there was another man who was part of the group and he was in the concentration camp, and so, we wanted to get the news in. … He was a radio technician, he had a radio business, and so, he had taken in equipment to put up a loudspeaker, so that they could play music and all the rest of it, and the Japanese allowed them to do that, but, of course, because of his knowledge, he was able to make one of those little sets into a receiver. So, he was able, secretly, to get a lot of the news, although … not all of it, and so, we devised a way to get this piece of paper that I had in to him. At that point, people on the outside could go and visit people in the concentration camp and they had a long table, much longer than this, and two Japanese guards at either end. … You could sit opposite each other and converse, and, if you wanted to give them something, you could do so. We were very careful about what we said, because, although the Japanese guards were there and never said a word, we figured that they must put guards up there that understood some English, otherwise, they wouldn't know what we were doing, and so, we were very careful what we said, but … I wanted to get this piece of paper from me over to him on the other side of the table. So, we took pens, the old pen, where you had the ink in the tube, you take the …

SI: A fountain pen?

LB: … Yes, fountain pen.

ECB: You take the bladder out.

LB: You take the rubber thing out of the pen, so that it had no ink in it, and then, that's where you'd put the paper, and then, you'd start to write. It had a little ink on it, so, you'd start to write and it would run out of ink, and so, you would hand him your pen and ask him if he could give you one, and so, he got the one with the news in it and gave me back an empty one. … That's the way we passed it back and forth. So, this went on for quite awhile, and then, one morning, as I was going to get my news release, I was met … by a Filipino who told me not to go and I thought to myself, "What does he know?" … We all thought this was a secret affair, nobody knew anything about it. Well, the Filipinos knew all about it and the Japanese found out, too, and so, as I drove by the front gate, there were two big Japanese trucks in front of the house of my friends. … So, I just went, hurried on by, and so, they took these two fellows, they picked up the Chinese man, they took the fellow from the concentration camp, and then, one of the brothers, the oldest brother, who was the sort of leader of the gang, they took him out and we never saw him again. We assume then that he was executed, Japanese style, which was the fact that you dug your own grave, then, you knelt in front of the grave and they beheaded you, and then, just kicked your body into the grave. … So, we assumed that that older brother, that's what

happened to him, although … we don't know, but the younger brother was left out and the Japanese would come to him and they'd ask him, and he said, "For two weeks, every day, they would take me out, 'Do you know where this other man lives?'" He says, "Yes, I think I know where he lives," and then, he says, "I conveniently lost my memory." He told me all this after the war was over, that they drove right by my house and he didn't point them out. So, after two weeks, they gave up and didn't pick me up. … The one brother that was left and the Chinese and the American fellow that they got from the concentration camp were all ready for execution. They were going to take them out. Two days before their execution, the Filipino guerillas came in and rescued them and took them up into the mountains, and so, they were saved. So, that happened.

EB: What did you know about the Filipino guerilla network at the time?

LB: Not as much as I have read of recently. I just had another book given to me by a friend on the life of MacArthur and the network that was there was outstanding. I did, we did, know that there was some type of a thing, because what was happening was, we had missionaries that were with us on the little Island of Palawan and they were taken out by submarine. The submarines came in with things and they were taken by submarine down to Australia. We didn't know that until after the war was over. We didn't know that they had been taken out. One of the things that occurred, when MacArthur left, and, if you go to the Philippines today and go to Corregidor, there's a spot where he left … Corregidor, because he was ordered to go and set up in Australia, and so, when he left, he said, "I will return." … The spot where he stood and got on to the PT boat that took him to the southern part of the Philippines, and then, from there, on down to Australia, there's a monument at Corregidor with MacArthur and this saying, "I will return." So, that's one of the things we kept clinging to, … from then on, that was April of '42, right until the end, when we were released, was the fact that we were waiting for him to return. … What would happen is that, every so often, you'd go down to the City of Manila and you'd pick up a *Time Magazine*, brand-new. It hadn't been printed very long, so, you knew right well, some way, it was getting into the country. …

SI: Where would you pick it up, at a newsstand?

LB: Newsstand, but not a public newsstand. You'd know who, … these people who were, you know, very discreet about seeing this magazine, because, if the Japanese got a hold of it, they would be sorry.

ECB: Tell them about the candy bars.

LB: And the candy bars; you'd get chocolate candy bars and, as you opened the wrapper, inside the wrapper, "I will return." So, you knew that these things were coming in. … So, what the network was, we didn't know completely, but we knew there was a network going on, and it was very strong. From the book that's been written, it was a strong network.

SI: The missionary community was not receiving any directions from MacArthur's forces.

LB: No, no, none whatsoever, and, actually, the guerilla forces that were there, the network, they would be very discreet about how much they contacted the people that were there, because they recognized that we were probably being watched, and we were. … I'm sure we were being watched in many ways. I remember, … because of the fact that I was very friendly with Filipinos, I would quite often, in the evenings, spend an evening with a Filipino family. … One night, I was coming home from being with a Filipino family and, when I was walking down the hill, our house was down at the bottom of a little hill and I started down the hill on the road, … I heard the Japanese coming. You always knew when Japanese were coming, because they had cleats on their shoes, and so, you could hear them as they walked, and, also, … one of them, if there were three or four of them, always, one of them carried a sword and it was dangling. So, as I started down the hill, I heard them coming down off the road over there and I thought to myself, "Shall I run?" and I said, "No, because, if … I do that, they'll shoot at me and ask questions afterwards. So, I'll just nonchalantly keep on walking and hope they just ignore me." Well, they didn't and they caught up with me and, for twenty minutes, the officer drew his revolver and he was poking me in the chest for twenty minutes, questioning me about why I was out … at night. … I told him it was a very hot night and I was just out to get some fresh air. I finally convinced him, after twenty minutes, of that, but, there, he was hitting me in the side with a gun all the time.

SI: Was that frightening for you?

LB: I was waiting for the thing to go off any time, I really was, but I did the best I could of trying to persuade him of that.

ECB: And the downtown one.

LB: Yes, and then, the other time, I was down in Manila and, this time, I was wearing my red armband up, because Mother had sent me down to do some shopping. … I came to an intersection and, at the intersection, I didn't stop and a Japanese truck came barreling through and he had to jam on his brakes to miss me, and so, he was very upset. So, he pulled me over to the side, got out of his truck and came to me, and, of course, Japanese were very short people and he was a little, short fellow and he was raving at me and shaking his fist at me and raving at me in Japanese and I, with my knees knocking together, was trying to apologize to him that I'm sorry. Finally, he decided that we're getting nowhere. So, he put his leg behind my knees, and then, pushed my shoulders and knocked me down, and then, swung and gave me a good shiner. As I told my mother, I said, "He had to knock me down flat on the ground, so that he could reach me," but the interesting thing to me, of the whole thing, was the fact that I have seen them when they … get somebody in the way, a child or a young person get in the way, they'd just run them over, and I was spared and he just threatened me and let me go. So, these are incidents that happened during that time between 1942 and 1944.

SI: In that period, the house arrest period, were there other examples of cruelty by the Japanese soldiers?

LB: Not too much, not too much, because we were missionaries and we had been let out for a purpose and they didn't want to antagonize … the Filipinos. The Filipinos were very, very

friendly towards the Americans, and especially the missionaries, and so, the Japanese didn't want to antagonize the Filipinos by doing anything that was harmful for us. … There were many times when I was out, I was with Filipinos and we spoke nothing but Tagalog the whole time we were together. If we'd go to a restaurant, we would talk Tagalog. So, if a Japanese came in, they would hear me talking to a Filipino and they would never hear me talk English. We would always talk in Tagalog, and so, they would leave us alone most of the time and never even bother us, … but there were incidents in the time we were there. I remember, one time, being at the bicycle store, getting my bike fixed, and a Filipino was working on it. A Japanese came in to have his bicycle fixed and they teased him and all the rest of it and, finally, got him to pull out his sword … and show us how sharp it was. … He took a hair and held it up and cut the hair with the sword. Those swords that they carried, double-handed, were very, very sharp and they let us know that they could do a lot of damage with them. …

EB: You said that there had been a lot of Japanese nationals living there before the war.

LB: Yes.

EB: What happened to them during the war?

LB: Well, some, many, of them … were part of the Army and were in there prior to the war as civilians. At least as far as everybody else knew, they were civilians, but they were really Army officers and they were put into the government of the Japanese that were there or they were officers. As I was telling Shaun, … our neighbor was a Japanese prior to the war and I was seventeen and, when I became eighteen, the year 1942, the end of 1942, I was to be put into the concentration camp, and my mother and father and brother and sister were able to stay out. … So, Mother and Dad went to this Japanese neighbor and asked him if he would stand security for me, so that I didn't have to go in the concentration camp, and he did. He signed a letter and that led me to stay, be able to stay with my family. So, we weren't separated at this point. We were all together. … As I said, he didn't really know what … he was signing when he did that, … that I wasn't going to be the good boy that he thought I was going to be. During that time, also, not only was I making peanut butter with this German fellow and selling to the Japanese, but this family that I had been friendly with, the oldest son was a movie director. … After the war, if you go to Corregidor today, you will go in there and there's a movie that they portray of what went on at Corregidor and he was the director of that. … So, he was putting on stage plays in the City of Manila for the Japanese all the time and he would employ all kinds of people and I worked for him, but as a stagehand, with electrical, the lights and all the rest of it, and so, I worked with him that way, and so, I would be down there, against the Japanese wishes. … This was not part of what they wanted us to be doing, but I would be down there and helping out in the movie studio, getting things ready for the evening performance, and very seldom … would I stay there during the night. I'd go home before sunset, because it wasn't really advisable to be out in the streets at night, but I would be there for the afternoon performance, the setup in the morning.

SI: Was the director from the German family?

LB: No, he was a Filipino. He's a Filipino movie director and did many movies after the war was over and, as I say, one of them was that documentary for Corregidor.

SI: Do you remember his name?

LB: Arellano.

SI: What were these plays like, these stage productions that you put on for the Japanese?

LB: Quite similar to a play that you would have, but with a Japanese flavor to it, so that it would entertain them, and there'd be a lot of them there.

SI: Were they performed in Japanese?

LB: Most of the time, it was performed in either English or Tagalog, not in Japanese, a little Japanese thrown in, but not very much, because the Filipino really didn't want to learn Japanese. You know, they hated the Japanese, the cruelties. … As Americans, civilians, we weren't ill-treated, but the Filipinos, many of the Filipinos, were very ill-treated by the Japanese soldiers, particularly in the provincial areas, and they hated the Japanese.

EB: You said you were making peanut butter for the Japanese, but you said your parents were devoted to the Filipinos. Was there any issue over selling something that the Japanese wanted and the Japanese treating the Filipinos so badly?

LB: Well, … it wasn't a Filipino that I was working with, it was a German fellow who set up this idea of selling peanut butter to the Japanese. So, they weren't contacting Filipinos in this sense; they were contacting a German.

EB: I meant, was it okay that you were helping the Japanese get food?

LB: It was as far as the Japanese were concerned. The Japanese didn't know I was involved with it. It was the German fellow that did all the legwork and contacted the Japanese. So, they were dealing with a German fellow, which was perfectly … proper for them to do so, but the peanut butter was made by me, as an American, and I don't know that they would have even bought it if they had known that. I don't think they … ever knew.

ECB: There was no way to get money in. … Did you tell them that? …

LB: Yes. … As I told you before, we borrowed money from the Chinese merchants and paid them back after the war was over. …

SI: Your father makes a point, I think it was in the report, that there was a fine line between not wanting to collaborate with the Japanese, but keeping in accordance with, I think he quotes Romans 13, you have to …

LB: … Be subject, yes, to the government. Yes, you still have to be careful what you do. You don't display the fact that you're against them and not obeying them, but, at the same time, you have to recognize that you want to be faithful to the Scriptures and faithful to the people, Filipino people, and the Filipino people understood that. My father, when he would preach on a Sunday, he would have to write his sermon out and have it approved by the Japanese before he could preach it, so that … there was nothing in the sermon that would be anti-Japanese, and so on, but, as I say, the people knew and understood, while we were there, we'd be an encouragement to them, but they knew that we, as well as they, had no use for the Japanese. … They really recognized the fact that the Japanese would never be favorable to them.

SI: Tell us a little more about the peanut butter making operation. How did you get the material? Was it difficult to do that?

LB: Well, … peanuts are grown in the Philippines, and so, you buy the peanuts by the sack full, and then, you would have to roast them, because they were raw, and depending upon how quickly you pulled them out of the oven when they were roasting, whether you had enough oil in the peanuts themselves, and then, you'd have to grind it. … The grinding was all done with a grinding machine, like a mill, and you put it through three times if you wanted smooth peanut butter, put it through twice if you want chunky peanut butter. So, you learned to work it, but grinding three hundred pounds of peanut butter was a lot of work, [laughter] because … there's no electricity, it's all by hand, … but we did it every week, for awhile. It got to the point where the Japanese did not order any more, and so, we didn't sell any more. …

SI: Your family was being investigated periodically by the Japanese.

LB: Every so often, the Japanese would come and investigate Dad as to what he was doing and his preaching, and so on. … You never knew when they would pop in on you, … but life went on … like it was before, just waiting patiently for the Americans to come back for us, and fully expecting that they would be back. …

EB: How did you feel about the ability of the American Army fighting against the Japanese?

LB: Well, since we were so long waiting for them to come, we were very upset in one sense, that it took so long. We didn't think that, you know, "America was strong, so, why is it taking them so long to get here?" We didn't realize, in many a sense, as you read the books that cover MacArthur, was the fact that, as far as the United States was concerned, at that point, the war in Europe was far more important than the war in Japan, against Japan, so that we were second. After Europe, then, we'd come to the Philippines, … and what was happening with Roosevelt and Stalin and Churchill. … So, it was Europe that they were putting a lot of their thing into, and, in fact, to the point that Roosevelt had told General MacArthur to bypass the Philippines and leave it alone and we'd just go around them and head for Japan, eventually, and MacArthur would not listen for that. In fact, MacArthur said to Roosevelt, at one point, it was an election year and he reminded Roosevelt that it was an election year, and he says, … "What do you think the people are going to do here in the States who have over two thousand people interned in the Philippines and we just ignore them?" and Roosevelt changed his mind.

SI: We can return to the house arrest period, but can you tell us about that transition when, all of a sudden, you were forced into the internment camp?

LB: In June of 1944, by this time, the American troops were advancing and were closer towards the Philippines. They still had not come to the Philippines, but, in June of '44, the Japanese decided that it was time to put all those Americans back into the concentration camp. … So, they came around one afternoon and told us that, "Tomorrow morning, we will be back to pick you up and take you to the concentration camp, for your protection. It'll be safer for you if we have you in the concentration camp." So, they came back the next morning, and so, the whole night was spent, my father and our family, we moved everything out of our house to the Filipinos in the neighborhood. Dad's books, he has many of those books; when the war was over and he went back to the Philippines, the Filipinos had cared for these books and brought them to him, and so, he still had them, but we spent the night doing that, and then, packing. You were told, by the Japanese, that all we needed was one suitcase. They would provide everything else for us. Well, we knew what had happened in the concentration camp, so, we knew they weren't providing anything for us. So, we had a lot of Army cots, the folding Army cots, and so, we brought one of those for everyone in the family that we would take with us. So, when the Japanese truck, in the morning, came and he backed into our driveway, my brother and I just grabbed all the suitcases and all these camp cots and threw them into the truck. … By the time the Japanese driver got around and looked in, he screamed at us, that it was far too much. "You can't take all that," and we just said, "It's already in. Let's go, come on," and he gave in to us, and so, we were able to take these cots with us, so that we had a bed when we came in. We were taken into Santo Tomas. We spent the first night in the gymnasium at Santo Tomas. They had decided that all of us were going to be taken down to Los Banos, which is forty miles south. That camp had been set up prior to that time, because they were getting so full at Santo Tomas, and so, they took people down there and a lot of the people that they had taken down there were the "riff-raff" that were making trouble in Santo Tomas. They moved them down to Los Banos, and so, they added to the Los Banos camp and made it a little bit bigger, had a fence between the two where all the new people were coming. … So, the next morning, they took us by … truck from Santo Tomas to this railroad station and took us down by train for the forty miles, took us all morning long to get down to Los Banos, and they put us in these trains. … Every few minutes, they would come through and count us, to make sure we hadn't jumped off the train in the process of getting down there.

SI: Were there seats on the train or were you all packed in?

LB: Yes. No, there were seats on the train. … So, we were able to sit and be comfortable, fairly comfortable, considering the circumstances. We got to the camp at Los Banos at twelve noon and, as I say, … there was a setup already there and this was all new, but there was a fence between to separate us, so that we wouldn't be able to communicate to them and they wouldn't be able to get any news from us. They were afraid that we might communicate to these people, so, they kept us separate. So, when we got there, the barracks that they made were very long and had a lot of rooms. The rooms were six-feet-by-thirteen-feet, two people in each room, and so, my brother and I tore in and threw our baggage and everything else in one room and Mother and Dad were in another room, and then, … my sister shared a room with another girl, right next to Mom and Dad. So, we threw our stuff in there, and then, we tore around the grounds, because

they'd just finished building all of this and there was a lot of scrap lumber, scrap stuff, around. So, my brother and I went around, picked all this stuff up, so that we could be making tables, because it was bare. There was nothing there in these rooms, and so, my brother and I picked up a lot of this stuff, so that we could build tables and chairs, and so on, make it as comfortable as possible, and so, that's what we did that first afternoon. …

EB: Did you really feel that the Japanese were putting you there for your own safety?

LB: No, we knew they were not. We were sure they were not. We knew that we were being interned because they did not want us out … where they could not get a hold of us. We didn't believe them at all, and it was very obvious, before very long, that this was the case. When we first got into camp, as it is in all of the camps, the running of the camp was done by the Americans, by the internees. A committee was set up as a hierarchy. Everybody over the age of twelve years had to do two hours of work every day, of some type in camp, to keep the camp going. The Japanese, at that point, were bringing you food to the gate, and you could buy it from the Filipinos, and so on, … but everybody had to have two hours of work. … About this time, I'm nineteen years of age. I will have had my twentieth birthday in the concentration camp in November. So, in June, I was nineteen and I decided that, if I was going to get a good meal, the best place to work would be the kitchen. So, I volunteered for kitchen duty and my job was to get up in the morning; … in the kitchen, they had built, in concrete, a great, big cauldron that would hold twenty buckets of water, probably far more than about thirty or forty gallons of water, and my job was to put wood underneath that and get that water boiling, so that they could make the cornmeal mush. … So, I was up at four o'clock every morning to get this fire going and get the mush cooked. So, our breakfast was cornmeal mush. They had the corn that they would cook in these cauldrons, and then, the morning was spent, … for most of us young people, … going back to school. We had been out of school. I had lost all my school records, and so, … they started a school system and some of those teachers were Jesuit priests. There was one fellow there that was a math whiz, and I loved math, and so, I was taking all the math courses I could get under him. He was a great teacher. Trig, calculus and all the rest of it was under him and, of course, … he would give me a piece of paper that I had taken these courses and the grades that I'd gotten in it, but all the other information was gone. So, the morning was spent doing that, and then, the afternoon, young people had spent time playing games, baseball or what-have-you. In fact, we got to the point of playing so much baseball, the Japanese would watch us and they wanted to play against us. So, after the second inning, we were so far ahead, they walked off the field and never played us again, because we were beating them so badly. … Then, in the evening, somebody, again, had done it, as they did in Santo Tomas, bring a loudspeaker system in and had music playing in the evening. So, you'd sit under the shade of the dark and listen to music … to pass the evening before you went off to bed. So, that was from June until, probably, about September. … By September, the Japanese were losing so much and the Americans were now beginning to attack the Philippines, and so, they started cutting our rations and our food supply. From October until we were released in February, we ate twice a day. The morning was the cornmeal mush. There was a cup full of cornmeal mush, but, by this time, the cornmeal mush sacks had been sitting around, and so, there was more than cornmeal in the mush and, when they were cooking, they were cooking it over open lights. Dive-bombing moths and all the rest had got into the mush. … So, by the time you got your mush, you had a little extra in the mush, but, if you started to pick everything out that wasn't mush, there wouldn't

be much left, and so, it is well-cooked, so, the only protein you were going to get for the day was to eat the cornmeal with the bugs in it. The evening was cooked rice. It was just to the point where it was … almost like glue from cooking the rice, but nothing else. The first three months, we had three meals a day, you had morning mush, noontime, you had rice with the *munggo* bean, green mung beans, which is …

ECB: It's got a lot of Vitamin B in it. …

LB: Yes, I know, but I'm trying to think of what we call it. …

SI: Is it like tofu?

LB: … The *munggo* bean is very high in Vitamin B, and so, they would cook that up, and then, you'd put that over the top of your rice, and, in the evening, we did get meat. For the first two or three months, they'd bring in some animals that they had butchered, and then, make a stew and you'd have a stew. So, meals were fairly good, but, … as I say, from October until February, you had these two meals. So, the ritual was that, every Sunday, … after church, you, all of us, walked down and stepped on the scale, to see what you had lost. …

SI: How did your health, and the health of your family and people around you, deteriorate?

LB: Well, we were very fortunate in one way. There, many of the people got beriberi, from the lack of the proper vitamins and all the rest of it, but we, to the point, were losing weight. … [Editor's Note: Beriberi is a nervous system ailment that is caused by a lack of Vitamin B intake.]

ECB: Your mom had beriberi.

LB: My mother had … some beriberi, but my mother weighed eighty-five pounds when the concentration camp was over. My sister was twelve years of age and weighed forty-nine pounds. When I went into the camp, I was six-foot and I weighed about 165 pounds. In February of that year, I weighed 110 pounds. So, we had lost weight, and you would eat, we'd eat, anything that was edible. People had brought in some of their pets and they soon disappeared. You'd eat the cats and the dogs. You would eat any grass, that you'd pick up some leaf and take it and take it down to the doctor and he said, "No, it's not poisonous." So, you would cook it up and eat that, and, in the evenings, you spent your evenings talking, … until you got so tired, you usually slept pretty well, a good ten hours every night, but, before you went off to bed, people would be swapping recipes and talking about the foods that they would eat the first time they got out of the concentration camp. … My brother and I, in the cubicle that we had, had a banana tree right outside our cubicle, and so, bananas come once a year, and the bananas, before they're ripe, they'd practically matured, but we knew right well, if we waited for them to completely ripen on the vine, we'd never see them. So, my brother and I cut them off and they ripened under our bed, and so, we ate the complete banana. You take the skin of the banana and fry that, and then, since banana trees will only produce once a year, we knew we wouldn't be there the next year, so, we chopped down the banana tree and ate all the whole part of the banana tree, take the outer layers, it goes in circles, and you take the outer layers and throw them away and cook the inside, and,

still, the Americans hadn't come. So, we dug out the roots of the banana tree and we cooked that and ate that. So, the Brooks Family got rid of that banana tree all the way through. … Whether it did you any good, whether it was any nourishment or not, who knows? but it was something in your stomach and that gnawing feeling of nothing in your stomach was diminished. You're glad to put something in there. So, that was the last we got. Now, I'm telling you some things that I did not know, we did not know, at the time, we found out afterwards, that in November of 1944, Japanese orders had come down that … they were not to allow any of the people in internment camps to live. They were to completely annihilate them and do whatever they wanted to, annihilate them in whatever way they wanted, and so, this was the order that was on the desk … in our camp. That was there by the first part of December. Why they waited as long as they did, … nobody knows. We do know that, down in Palawan, they had one camp there with civilians and servicemen, there were three hundred people, and they annihilated them. They put them in the barracks and set the barracks on fire, and anybody that came running out of the barracks, they shot them, but that's typical of what the Japanese did. They did that to the Filipinos in Manila. They'd go to the hospitals and, as … Americans were fighting in Manila and retaking Manila, they would go to the hospitals and burn the people, and people would run out, they'd shoot them. That was Filipinos; … that wasn't Americans. We, in a sense, all the way through, … were starved to death, but we were not mistreated, as far as being beaten at all, originally. That was very not true as far as the military camps. They were beaten and they were tortured and all the rest of it, but that was not for the civilians. They did not do that to civilians.

EB: What did you observe about the guards? Were they younger or older?

LB: They were not older. They were more, say, in their twenties, in their early thirties. They were robust men and guarded us well, and we also noticed, along in about December, that we had changed commandants and the one that came in was a very cruel man. The one before that had been; he'd taken food away from us, but he was not really cruel, but this fellow that came in at that point … determined that … we were going to be tortured to death or die of starvation, not necessarily being shot. If you see the documentary that they made, *Rescue at Dawn* [(2004)], the History Channel has put out that documentary, it explains all of this of what was happening, and it also tells of what the paratroopers faced as they prepared to come in to release us. So, we didn't, most of us did not, know this, that was going on. Some of these things, a lot of this that I'm telling you now, is things we've learned after we got out, but … the Americans realized, along in about the middle of January, that we were needing to be rescued. We were surrounded by Japanese. We were really ten miles behind the frontlines at Los Banos, and they had heard that we were going to be executed and MacArthur had told a group that, … "It's your job to get them out of there," and so, the documentary reveals these facts. As I say, we did not know all of this was going on. We knew that we were being cruelly treated and we knew that Americans were coming. We had heard rumors to that effect and all the rest of it, but how much was going on, we did not know, but they planned this and the documentary explains it. Since they knew that we were going to be executed, they planned that … they would come in ahead of that time and they realized that, probably, the biggest and only way to do so was to send in paratroopers and land paratroopers on the athletic field, which was adjacent to where we were, but, then, how to get us out? They had another unit, which was the amphibious tanks, that were to come in … along with the paratroopers. Ahead of all of this, they sent in a small contingent, with Filipino guerillas, to scout out the whole place, know what was going, and so on. … Then, two men, who

were the leaders in our camp, of the committee, they escaped and were able to give information to the troopers, the men. … The man who planned this, he's Brigadier General Murray, he was a colonel at the time and he planned all of this and recognized he had to coordinate. He had to get a group of these amtracs that would come across Laguna de Bay, which is the lake that we were two miles from, and come across and land at the site, … by the camp, at seven o'clock in the morning of the day that they were going to release us. At the same time, the paratroopers would jump at seven o'clock in the morning, and the contingent that had gone in ahead of time, they were alerted, so that as soon as they saw the paratroopers, they would start the fireworks and start shooting the guards. The reason they picked seven o'clock in the morning was because the commandant was a health nut and, at seven o'clock in the morning, he had all his guards, every one of them, doing calisthenics. All their armament was put into the guardhouse and they were out doing calisthenics, except for the three or four that they had around the perimeter, were doing calisthenics in G-strings, and so, if they landed at seven o'clock, they would have … very little opposition, because they would all be doing their calisthenics. So, that's why they picked seven o'clock in the morning to land, which they did, and, as Brigadier General Murray said, "Everything went perfect." He said, "Everything could have gone wrong, but they did not go wrong." …

SI: From your perspective, what do you remember about that morning?

LB: Well, from our perspective, from my perspective, when I remember that morning, was the fact that the Japanese always called us out at nine o'clock in the morning for roll call. We all lined up in front of our barracks and we were counted. So, we expected that, but what happened was that, at seven o'clock in the morning, were these planes that flew over, DC-6s [C-47s], … and discharged the paratroopers, and were marked, "Rescue," on the side, and so, we knew that things were happening. We didn't know what was happening, but we knew things were happening when the paratroopers came in, and, as soon as the paratroopers started to jump, the fireworks began. I mean, by fireworks, the guerillas that were there were shooting the guards and there was bullets flying. …

ECB: The perimeter guards, and the other ones … fought with their pants down.

LB: … Yes, and killed them all; not all of them, unfortunately. … The bullets were flying in every direction and camp had set up a contingent of men to warn people, and so on, and so, they were going around, telling us to lay low and be careful and all the rest of it. … So, everybody was under their beds and laying low while all this firing was going on, and most of us, as to what the first thing that we did was to watch the paratroopers and the servicemen coming in and you'd seen their boots, because you were lying under the bed, and you recognized them, and then, the amtracs came in, and there were 2,146 people in camp. Some of them were elderly, some of them were bedridden, and so, they took all of them first and put them in the amtracs and … took the amtracs down to the lake and across the lake and over to safety. The rest of us had to walk down to the lake. We were ordered, told, we had to walk and … the amtracs would come back and pick us up, and so, our family was part of those that had to walk down the two-and-a-half miles to the lake. One of the girls in camp told me, afterwards, that she was riding in one of these amtracs and, as they were going down, all of a sudden, the driver grabbed her legs and pulled her down and pulled her off this perch that she was on, because he saw a sniper up in the

tree. … He shot and the bullet hit exactly where she was sitting, but he had gotten her down ahead of time. … Again, as I say, we were completely surrounded, but their plan was, as they'd planned it was, that they would send down a contingent of tanks, with a lot of noise, a lot of cans, so that … the Japanese would think they were being attacked, and so, they would pull all of the people away from us and go towards that contingent that was coming down, which was seven or eight miles away from us.

ECB: Diversionary act.

LB: Diversionary act, to get them to pull out of there, so that we could walk down to the lake and be free without the Japanese shooting at us and killing us, and so, they did that and we walked down to the lake. They came in at seven o'clock. We started down there, we were probably down to the lake about nine or nine-thirty and sat at the lakeside, waiting for the amtracs to come back. While we were sitting on the lake, they finally realized that this was a diversionary tactic and they started coming back and they were shelling us and there were bullets dropping … into the lake in front of us, up on either side. … When I tell the story, I said, "They're very poor shots. They missed us all together." So, by eleven o'clock, the amtracs were back and picked up everybody else and got us out. So, now, they had picked it, the 23rd was the day that they were going to execute us. We knew in camp that something was going to happen. What it was, we were not told, we didn't know, but they had dug all the graves for us all around camp. So, we knew that something was going to be happening, and so, we were to be executed at nine o'clock in the morning. They were going to get us all on roll call out there, and then, just shoot us, and the Americans came in ahead of time. … When the thing was all over and we got back into the camp where we were being housed by the Americans, we were in a prison. It was the Bilibid Prison. It was a prison for the civilians, but they had taken this over for us to get there, to rehabilitate us and get us built back up again, because of our condition. That night, the 23rd, everybody was there and we started to count noses and there were 2,146 people. They were all there, nobody injured. Two, three, I don't remember if it was two or three, guerilla men had been killed. One paratrooper had been injured, not killed. So, it was a miracle that took place and they got us out. … This was February, we arrived in the States in May, so, we were there a few months, rehabilitating us, giving us care. … When they started to feed us, they recognized that what they had done in Los Banos was let the people go ahead and eat what they wanted …

EB: Santo Tomas.

LB: I mean Santo Tomas, let them go ahead and eat what they wanted, and they lost people because they overate. So, they rationed the food, so that we wouldn't overeat. Of course, my brother and I, we would go through the line, and then, we'd run around and go through the line again, but, you know, … the food was such that they recognized that … you can't give them solid food, you've got to give them this food that … they can eat. After all, you haven't been using your choppers … for food for a long time, so, to chew anything … was out of the question. I remember that, on the table, that we were there, there was a bowl full of sugar and I hadn't seen sweet food since November, this is February, and that bowl of sugar wasn't there very long. … After, probably, a week, … they started to give us solid food. They gave us some meat. The

meat was so tender, you could break it with your fork, but there wasn't a person that didn't have bleeding gums, because we hadn't chewed anything for months.

EB: Do you feel that your faith and strong religious feelings are what got you through the tough times of war?

LB: No question, as far as we're concerned, and the promises that God has given us in the Bible of the fact that He would deliver us and care for us, and so on, kept us going. The thing about it is, you say this and recognize that that helped us, it helped other people as well, but not everybody, even though they had strong faith and believed, who were those who came through it, you know, depending upon their physical condition, what happened to them. There were three of us fellows that were in camp together, Burt Fongar was one of them, the other one was Smith. What was his name, dear? Is it on that book? I thought it was Stephen Smith.

ECB: Steve Smith.

LB: Steve Smith, that's right, and Steve and Burt and I were exactly the same age and we palled around a lot together. Burt Fongar died in camp. We buried him in camp. Steve came through, he got home and he died at the age of sixty-five, here in the States, later on. … So, yes, our faith kept us going, but you don't necessarily recognize the fact that God's going to deliver every one of you just because you have the faith. It just depends on God's timing. …

EB: What was the death rate in the camp?

LB: We probably had a couple of funerals every day, at least.

ECB: This is the book written by the brother of Stephen Smith, whose parents were in the camp. He was sent home to school, so, he was in California when this happened. He was the older brother, but he had tapes. When his father gave talks himself, they taped everything, and so, … he wrote it, but it's really almost like a transcript of his father's stuff like this. …

SI: Would you mind reading the title?

ECB: *We Survived War's Crucible*.

SI: By Donald P. Smith.

LB: That's available. It can be purchased. I don't know where.

ECB: Yes, he had put an article in one of the senior citizens' papers that go around like this and … a friend in Westfield, my son-in-law's mother, saw, … because he's in one of these retirement homes up in North Jersey. So, we called them and he was on his way down to Florida for so many months, but he said he was going to send us a copy. He was very interested, because, actually, they have his three friends in there, and he says, "Len."

LB: Yes.

ECB: Yes. So, Len's got his name in there, but that's his take on what happened in the camp.

SI: Your father points out, in both documents, that there was an earlier period where the Japanese went away.

LB: Yes, in the first part of January. … For some reason or other, the Japanese left us. They came around one evening and asked for all the digging equipment, all the tools, shovels, and so on, and then, they left camp.

ECB: Then, they were also, according to the one, wherever I read it, they were taking Manila and they needed extra forces.

LB: Yes, that's right.

ECB: And so, they brought them in there to help at that time, but, then, when they didn't need them anymore they sent them back, … but, being in the camp and not knowing if they're surrounded by the Japanese, they said they're safer in camp, and they were expecting the Americans to come and get them. They put up a flag and thought, "This is where we're relieved," and then, all of a sudden, the Japanese came back.

LB: Yes, they left us for a week, but it didn't last, and, when they came back, they were far more cruel, because of this commandant, and the commandant that was there at the last did escape and he wasn't killed when the forces came in. Most of his men were killed, but he was able to escape. … Because of the fact that he recognized that the Filipinos who were in the town had sided with the Americans, he went back and tortured and killed a lot of the Filipinos in Los Banos. …

ECB: Isn't it in the film?

LB: It's in the film, yes, it's in the film, *Rescue at Dawn*, and he went back and they were in a church building and they just slaughtered them. It was terrible, and the final thing for him was the fact that he escaped all of this and, after the war was over, he decided to work for a golf club. … He was a maintenance man in the grounds for the golf club and one of the internees recognized him as he was playing golf and saw this fellow and recognized him and reported to the authorities. "He's the guy that was the commandant at Los Banos," and they took him in. He was tried and executed later. …

SI: It must have been very damaging to your morale when the Japanese came back.

LB: Well, it was in one way, you know. We recognized the fact that they had left us, and we thought, you know, that they'd left us because the troops were getting closer to us and all the rest of it, but, in a sense, we recognized the fact that, you know, this is war. … We didn't know all that was going on, and so, it was kind of hard to take, for those next few weeks, but it was only about three weeks later that we finally were rescued. Three or four weeks later, we were finally rescued.

SI: Did anybody give in to despair?

LB: I'm sure there were a number of them; people that I associated with, not really, but there was a number that did, and, of course, the thing about it is, as you say, even in the documentary, these fellows were saying, "We didn't know what was coming next. We just said, 'You know, there doesn't seem to be any way out and, when you have two or three people dying every day, well, who's going to be the next one, you know?'" So, there is a certain amount of that.

EB: You were a young man during the war, but your sister was only twelve. How did she deal with the war? Was she traumatized?

LB: … Yes, she was. She's a missionary in the Philippines today. It affected her physically. She's very small, because, in her growing years, she wasn't able to get proper nutrition, she wasn't growing. She wears a size four shoe, so, she's very, very small, but, again, the promises that were given to her from God's word was what kept her going, even though she was only twelve, and one of the promises was that He's not going to allow us to be tortured more than we can bear. So, that was one of the promises she had, so, she clung to it. So, she never married. She came back to the States after the war, finished her high school, took nurse's training, went to Pakistan as a missionary for a number of years. Then, when my parents became aged and needed help, since she was single, she moved from Pakistan to the Philippines and took care of Mom and Dad in the last few years of their life, and then, stayed on in the Philippines.

SI: You mentioned that there was a shortage of food in the last few months. Did people start turning on each other or did people band together?

LB: There was no going against each other, no. We all recognized that what we had was ours. … There was, of course, a very strong thing that you kept for yourself, you didn't necessarily share with everybody, but you didn't go against people, to take things away from them, no.

SI: No stealing?

LB: No. Well, there's bound to be a little bit of that all the way through, but not to the point where you would say it was excessive, no. … Of course, after it was all over and we were rehabilitated, then, they … put us on a troopship and brought us back to the States. … We were on the high seas in May when Roosevelt died. [Editor's Note: President Franklin D. Roosevelt died on April 12, 1945.] So, we were traveling to come this way. I think there were two, no, there's just the one ship, but there were two destroyers, that were our escorts as we left the Philippines. … We'd get up every day and see these two destroyers, and so, we would kind of feel good that we had the escort. One morning, we get up and the destroyers are gone, and so, everybody was wondering what has happened and we finally were told by the captain that we had a submarine scare during the night and a submarine can only travel so much and he could outrun them. So, he told the destroyer escort, "You go after the sub. I'm going to outrun them," and so, he just took off and we didn't have any escort after that. What they did, when they brought us in, is the fact that they stopped in Hawaii. You're four days, by ship, from Hawaii to the mainland, and so, they stopped there and picked up immigration and customs, so that they

could process us all for the four days. We didn't have to be processed after we got here. We could get off the ship and we could go, because we were allowed to go, and so, they went through all this processing in those four days for all the people that were … on the ship. So, when we arrived in the States, we just met with our friends, … many of our friends that we knew, and the head of the Navigators, that's the group of servicemen that Dad had mentioned, he was there. In fact, I started to wear his clothes. He gave me suit jackets, and so on. So, we met. … When we arrived there and we were processed, we were just British subjects, … because of my dad being British. So, we had to get out of the States. We were given four days, five days, and we had to leave the country. We could reenter if we wanted to, but we had to go out to Canada and get a visa to come back into the country. So, after we had been there for four days, five days, we went up to British Columbia, where my father's two sisters were living. One was married, and we stayed there for two or three days, and then, got a visa and came back to the States. … The picture that's in the book there shows the family in Buffalo the day we arrived. It was a newspaper picture of when we arrived in Buffalo, and so, we made our home then in Buffalo from then on. Now, Mother and Dad were married in 1922 and they married two days too soon. The law changed … after they got married. When they got married, if you married a person … who wasn't an American citizen, you lost your American citizenship. So, if she'd waited two days later, [laughter] but she didn't know that. So, she lost her American citizenship, but, because we were brought back by the Americans, repatriated by the Americans, she could reclaim her American citizenship, which she could do, she did, and so, she got her American citizenship back. … Then, my father stayed three years in this country, so that, … being married to an American, he could get his citizenship. My sister got it because she was underage. My brother had to apply. I got mine by being in the Army. I was drafted and, because I was drafted and I could just apply, I made the application and got my American citizenship. So, I'm a naturalized American, because of being in the service. So, we got back to the States and, in June 1945, I had to register for the draft. This draft was still on, … both my brother and I, and we were taken down to be processed and had gone through the physical. … My brother and I thought, "Well, you know, after what we went through, and that's only February, … now, it's June, we won't pass the physical." [laughter]

ECB: In fact, when he got finished, the doctor said, "Here are the two best physicals," and it was he and his brother, but I said it's probably because you didn't have any sugar and all that fatty stuff.

LB: So, the count was that I got drafted and was sent off to camp. My brother missed it, because he was in the next count. So, in November of '45, I was shipped to Camp Crowder, Missouri, for my basic training. I had basic training in Camp Crowder until April, and then, in April, I was shipped overseas to Germany, as part of the occupation troops in Germany. …

SI: Can we take a quick break?

LB: Sure.

[TAPE PAUSED]

LB: Okay.

SI: We were talking about when you came back and were drafted. First, why was it so important for your family to get US citizenship?

LB: Because Dad was going to go back to the Philippines and to be working in the Philippines was much easier as an American citizen than it would be any other way. He would have more freedom being an American citizen in the Philippines. So, that's why he took out the American citizenship, and, since I was going to be spending most of my time in the United States, the logical reason would be to become an American citizen.

EB: Your dad was intent on going back to the Philippines.

LB: Yes.

EB: That was his home and he did not want to stay in the States.

LB: No. In fact, they went back in '49. We came home in '45, then, they went back in '49. They left here in March or April of '49. We were married in August, and so, … they were not at our wedding and they were on their way back to the Philippines when we got married, in August of '49. One of the interesting things about when we were getting married was the photographer. We were looking for a photographer and we'd had a lot of people come to the door as photographers. … None of them suited us and, finally, my wife said to me, "Let's go down to the place." We were living then in Westfield, New Jersey, and this photographer, that she knew had taken their high school pictures, was … working in Elizabeth, and she says, "Let's go down and see him." … The photography studio had changed hands. There was a new man in there, but it still maintained the same name, and so, when we got in … inside and told him what we wanted, we said to him, "The reason we want some good pictures is the fact that my parents will not be there. They'll be back in the Philippines," and so, he said, "Philippines?" and then, as we started to talk and recognize, he was one of the paratroopers that dropped in the Philippines for us, taking pictures in photography. He had taken a movie of the whole release. My father had used that movie … when he was speaking, after the war was over, at different churches, and so, this man was the one who took our wedding pictures.

ECB: Yes. That's when you had slides. We wanted thirty-five-millimeter pictures taken at the same time, you know, as he was taking the big wedding photographs. So, that's why. Things have changed now. They take their phone and take pictures. [laughter]

SI: You went to basic training at Camp Crowder. At that time, were we still at war with Japan?

LB: No. … The war was over in July or August, V-E Day first, then V-J Day, and that was over. It was completely over by the time … I went to Camp Crowder, in November, and we call it "Camp Misery." … Of course, remember, I had been, for the last four years, out in the tropics, and here I am, dumped in Camp Crowder, Missouri, in the winter, and it was cold. I mean, there was many a morning when we got up, we had to knock the ice off the faucet, to get the water running. So, we were cold, and then, we finished basic training, and then, … my unit was sent over to Germany. I landed in Le Havre, France, in April of … '46 and we took boxcars from Le

Havre across the northern part into Germany, and then, south in Germany, and I was stationed in the southern part of Germany. We looked out over the Alps, and then, I was a company clerk and, in July, their order came out that anybody who had been a civilian prisoner was eligible for immediate discharge. So, I made an application and came home and was discharged. Looking back on it now, … I probably made a mistake. … I just don't know that, but, you know, in a lot of these bases, they had the schools you could go to and get your high school diploma. I did not have a high school diploma. … By this time, it's '46, so, I'm, what, twenty-one, twenty-two years of age? I still don't have a high school diploma, and so, my uncle worked for a big department store in Buffalo and I worked as a …

ECB: Stocker.

LB: Stocker, and went to the local school, high school, Hutchinson High School, to ask for a diploma, if they could some way work it out so that I could get a high school diploma. Well, they gave you tests and there were many of the subjects, you know, … in math, if you pass this test, then, obviously, you've had all of these, and so, they were able to do that. … So, they said, "There's only one course that we can't verify and you're going to have to take that course and that's freshman science." So, I had to take freshman science at night school before they could give me a diploma, … which I did in '46, end of '46 and '47, got my diploma in June of 1947, high school diploma. …

ECB: And then, he wanted to go to be an engineer, but his parents were worried about him. They wanted him to go to Bible school instead, … but I'm not sorry, because I had finished my nurse's training and I wanted to go for my BS out at Wheaton and all the servicemen were coming home. … I didn't apply until May, so, they said, "No, maybe next year," but I thought I'll find some other school, but they were filled up with all these servicemen coming home. So, a friend of mine who had graduated from Columbia Bible as a nurse said, well, she was going to Emmaus for a year. So, I said, "Oh, well, a year of Bible school wouldn't hurt and I'll quit." So, I went and that's where I met him, and so, I said … I gave up my BS and became an "MRS," but I still had my RN. So, I did a lot of work.

SI: What do you remember about when you served in Germany? It was the other side of the world for you.

LB: It was. We had to be very careful. The Germans were very antagonistic towards Americans. … You never went off base by yourself. There was always at least two, maybe three of you. They did have clubs that we were able to visit, and so on. You spent your day in the office as a company clerk and, in the evenings, you were able to go down to the clubs and enjoy fellowship with the gang, but that's about all that went on and you were very, very careful. You didn't associate an awful lot with the people at the time, … because of the antagonism towards the Americans. … The young people particularly had been indoctrinated by … Hitler and all the rest of it, and so, you know, they were very antagonistic. … You had to be careful, all the way through, but, as I say, I didn't stay there very long. I mean, I was there in April and, by August, I was back home and getting my discharge. … As I say, as you look back, I wondered, if they'd had this program of high school training, maybe I could have gotten my high school

diploma by staying on, but I don't even know whether they did or not. You know, some bases did, some bases did not, but, anyway, I got my diploma, eventually. [laughter]

SI: When you came back to the States and got your diploma, you then went into carpentry and became an electrician.

LB: That was all after Bible school. … I finished and got my diploma, and then, in the fall of that year, I went to Emmaus Bible College. It's now Emmaus Bible College. It was Emmaus Bible School then, a three-year course. … During that three-year course, we met and were married in '49. …

ECB: My father was a builder. So, he worked with my father and my father loved to teach, had three sons that didn't care to learn, but, so, he taught him everything. Then, after we were married, you had a chance to move out.

LB: Yes. I worked as a carpenter by myself after we were married, … for a couple of years, and then, a friend of mine, in the same church as I was, he's an electrical contractor and I was much more interested in electricity than I was in carpentry. … I said, "I'm not versed in it very well, but I would like to learn," and so, he hired me and I worked with him for probably two, two-and-a-half years, and he taught me, basically, what was necessary to wire a new house or make a repair, and so on. So, I learned that from him, and then, he got to the point where he wanted to cut down, not be in business anymore, and so, I went out and bought my truck and started a business of my own, and I had that for two-and-a-half years before we went to the mission field. We went … out to the Philippines as missionaries in 1957 and we're there until 1972, '71, in the Philippines, as missionaries. Mainly, the work that we were doing was with a school for missionaries' children, Faith Academy. It's the largest missionary school in the world. They, at the present time, have over six hundred students in the school. The school has grown. When my oldest daughter was old enough, she started there in first grade and was in the first class that started in the school and graduated from Faith Academy. … They started in a rented building, and then, they realized the school was growing, they needed to get some new property of their own and build their own school, and so on. … I was not only a house parent and helping that way, but I was also on the board and they commissioned me to see if I could find a piece of property, which I did, and that's the property that they have built the school on at the present time, and it's enormous. It's a big, big complex at the present time, but the original property, … I bought it from an American real estate agent in the Philippines. He had received this piece of property, which was ten hectares of land, and he received that as commission and he wanted to sell it. He'd never seen the piece of property, but he needed to sell it, and so, I looked at the property and I saw the potential that they can do for it. So, I went out and picked it. I said, "We don't want the whole thing. We only want part of it." He said, "Well, just remember, don't pick it in the middle, take it to one side, so that you don't chop me up and I can have some property." He had never seen the property, … but a requirement, as we bought the piece of property, was the fact that we had to develop the piece of property. We had to put a road up to the property, which we did, and we developed. There was a great, big hill and I bulldozed that hill, took it down probably about twenty or thirty meters off the top, so that we could level it off to where we could put the buildings. … So, then, finally, once we got the road up there, this real estate agent went up there and saw the piece of property. Most of the rest of the property was all gullies and

all the rest of it. So, when he got up there, he called me in the next day and the first thing he said to me was, as I walked in his office, "You robber." I said, "What's the matter?" He says, "You took the best part of that property." Well, I said, "Didn't you tell me I could have what I wanted?" I said, "I just took what I wanted and that was the piece," but he was left with very little that he could sell, so that he could accuse me of being a robber. [laughter]

ECB: He was a huge guy. He couldn't have walked up those hills.

LB: No, he wouldn't.

ECB: He was huge.

LB: He was a big guy.

SI: What brought about this change from being an electrician to going into the missionary field?

LB: Well, I just felt God was calling me to be a missionary, and so, in the back of my mind, I had been in school for religious training, I had been a missionary's child all along, so, it was not out of the realm of possibility, … so that when I felt very definitely, and my wife the same way, that God wanted us out there as missionaries. … We really went out to help my father in the work that he was doing at the time, but, when we got there, the school was starting, and so, we got involved with the school. So, we were fourteen years with the school, and then, we came back in 1971, '72, and, '72, we moved down to Wall Township, where our mission headquarters is located.

ECB: It was supposed to be for three years.

LB: Yes. … They had been in New York City. They were moving out of New York City and they asked us to set up this building. It was an old building that was owned by the Catholic sisters. There was a training center, had fifty-two rooms in it and …

ECB: Seventeen baths.

LB: Seventeen baths. [laughter]

ECB: My question, when they asked us to come and help set it up, because they were moving out of New York and the missionary guest house from Union City, so, I said, "Well, who's going to clean those seventeen bathrooms?" "Oh, we'll get someone to do that. So, don't worry about that." That was my question.

LB: So, we moved there in '72 and we were there for twenty years. 1992, we moved out of there and moved into this house. …

ECB: Well, they'd keep asking us if we wouldn't stay another three years and, by that time, I had some kids graduating from Wall High School, I had others off in college and some starting to think of marriage, and I said, "Okay, what's another three years?" Finally, I realized that we

weren't going to go back. … We went back to the Philippines and had a garage sale, got rid of all the stuff we had, because we had planned to go back there. Anyhow, so, the three years went into …

LB: Twenty years.

ECB: Twenty years.

LB: But, it was maintenance work. It was a great, big building and it was an old one.

ECB: And hostess work for the missionaries coming through.

LB: Yes.

SI: How had the Philippines changed in the time between when you left in World War II and when you came back in the late 1950s?

LB: Well, it has progressed. The thing about it is that, if you go back to the Philippines now, in comparison with what we had, because of the fact of new vehicles, they've got more cars in the Philippines than they had before, it's almost impossible to get around with the vehicles, … so many vehicles that they have at the present time. … The property that we found for Faith Academy was eight miles from where we were in San Juan and we used to drive up. There were open fields and all. You drive up there.

ECB: Rice fields, caribou out in the fields.

LB: Yes, you'd drive up there in, you know, twenty minutes to a half an hour without any problem. Now, if you make it in an hour-and-a-half, you're doing great.

ECB: It's bumper-to-bumper cars, anywhere around Manila.

LB: Like the Long Island Parkway. [laughter] So, no, the progress, in one way, is tremendous; in another way, they're still very backward in some of their things, and so on, and the government has been one of those, depending on who gets to be president, what happens, and so on.

ECB: Just like the US. [laughter]

SI: Did you have any lasting effects from your imprisonment?

LB: No; physically? no.

SI: Physically or mentally?

LB: No, none whatsoever, very fortunate. …

EB: What about your brother?

LB: No, none of us, really. I think my mother may have had a little bit more than anybody, but not too much, no.

ECB: Physical.

EB: You said your sister was affected by it.

LB: She was affected by it physically, but, as far as … otherwise, I wouldn't say that … it affected her. I mean, she never grew big and she was stunted. That's all there was to it.

SI: Have you kept in contact with people that you were in the camp with?

LB: Very few. They have had two or three reunions of those who were in the concentration camp. We had one, was it …

ECB: San Diego.

LB: In San Diego.

ECB: That was a huge one.

LB: And we went out to San Diego. That was the time when some of the servicemen came and told about their experience as servicemen. We had another one when we went to MacArthur's thing. They had a plaque that they …

ECB: "1945, I Witnessed It: The Memories of Ex-POWs in the Philippines, Fifty-Fourth Anniversary Reunion."

SI: It was in 1999.

ECB: … February 6th.

EB: Did most of the other missionaries come back here? Do you know if they went back?

LB: There were a number of them that went back to the Philippines. I mean, this Smith Family, the father and mother went back as missionaries to continue until their age requirement brought them back to the States. There were a lot of people that did not go back, but there was a lot that went back, you know, continued on in their missionary work.

ECB: As he was saying, he was under the British, but there was one advantage of being that, because, being under the British, … we got some war reparation, whatever they call it, but the Americans signed to the Japanese that they would never ask from Japan any money for settlement, you know, for all the prisoners they had kept, but Britain did not say that. So, we got about fourteen hundred dollars or something. Was it more?

LB: Fourteen thousand.

ECB: It was thousand? It's so long ago, but all we had to do was prove it. We had to write to Ireland and England and get birth certificates of his parents, and then, they gave us money.

SI: Did you ever have trouble talking about what you had been through? When we interview veterans who were prisoners of war, sometimes, they have not talked about it for decades. Did you ever have that trouble?

LB: No. I never had any problems, no. I even, preaching, used that as illustrations of what happened to me. …

ECB: You're right, 14,127 dollars. That's not bad change, and the US ones, they kept fighting and fighting and fighting, but never got it.

EB: When you went back, how was the relationship between you and the Japanese? Were there still Japanese people there?

LB: The Japanese, probably, by now, you will find that they're accepted, but, for many years, the Japanese were not accepted in the Philippines.

ECB: Especially in the rural areas.

LB: In the rural areas, where they were so cruel to the Filipinos, they were not accepted at all and, if they came back as business people, they'd better stay in Manila or they wouldn't be living.

EB: Did you have any interaction with Japanese people after the war?

LB: Not really, not really.

EB: Was this by choice?

LB: No, just because we just never had the opportunity to do it.

ECB: And the modern Japanese person is not the Japanese person that was there.

EB: Did you feel any, not hatred, but perhaps bitterness, for what they did to you?

LB: No, I never really had any of that at all. If we had interaction, I would have had no problem interacting with them, and, especially, … as Esther says, the Japanese today are altogether different than they were then. You've got to understand that during the time, … during World War II, that's fifty years ago, almost sixty years ago, they were indoctrinated, like the Hitler Youth were indoctrinated. They were so brainwashed that, as far as they were concerned, they were doing God a service by killing these other people.

ECB: Because their Emperor was God and whatever he said was divine mandate. I mean, they were so cruel to their own people. …

LB: Yes. … Just to give you an idea what these people were like, I had a Filipino friend who was living next-door to where they cremated the Japanese bodies that were killed in Bataan, because what they'd do is, they'd bring the body back and they burned them, and then, they'd take a few of the ashes, put it in a thing and send it to the family. Whether they got their relative's ashes or not, hard to tell, but he said, at night, when they were burning these people in this crematory, he says the noise from there and the screams from people being burned to death was terrible. …

ECB: Because, if they were injured, you know, they didn't waste time with them. They didn't have hospitals for their wounded. They just killed them.

LB: But, that would not be necessarily what a Japanese would be like today.

ECB: Oh, no.

LB: So, it's completely different. The indoctrination is gone. They don't look at the Emperor as a god, and so, consequently, there's a different attitude altogether. So, young people in the United States today who contact the Japanese can't understand how people who went through what we went through have such an antagonistic spirit, which is true for many of those who were in the concentration camp. They would never; I would say they've probably changed now, because the Japanese are completely different, but, at that time, no. …

EB: It is hard to separate between one person and another. People generalize.

LB: Right, exactly, and that's the way the Filipinos were, as far as the Japanese were concerned, you know. Things have changed. They buy Japanese cars now and all the rest of it, but, as I say, in the few years after the war, that would never have happened, never.

ECB: Did you hear about the Bataan Death March? Have you ever heard that history?

SI: Yes.

EB: My grandfather was one of them.

ECB: Your grandfather was in the Bataan Death March? Okay, I've got a book for you, *Prisoner of Hope*, Jesse Miller, and he was a good friend. … Before the war, when they knew there was really something, they had a lot of servicemen in the Philippines and Dad and Mom Brooks almost had, like, a servicemen's center, an open house on Saturday. That's where Len learned to bake. Did you tell them about that? Okay, well, Jesse Miller used to come and visit Mom and Dad. Now, he was saved before then, wasn't he?

LB: No, yes, he was. He was one of the servicemen that came and he learned a lot …

ECB: From Dad.

LB: Biblical training from my father, and Jesse was in Bataan … and made the Death March and he was in prison, and you know that the prisoners, they divided them up, as far as the servicemen are concerned. You had ten men to a thing. If one of those ten men went out, the other nine were executed before the firing squad. Well, he was before the firing squad, because one of his ten men had gone and they heard the clicks of the gun, they heard the order to shoot and he says, "All of a sudden, they stopped, went out, brought us back in." He said, "I don't know why," had no logical reason, except that he says, as he says, that God had something for him to do and that's why he was saved, but he was in that camp. Another interesting book, if you've never read it, is *Ghost Soldiers* by Hampton Sides. That's about the release of the camp at Cabanatuan.

EB: I read that.

LB: You read that?

ECB: *Ghost Soldiers*.

SI: You mentioned that, at Los Banos, there were escapes and escape attempts. Was there any kind of retribution there?

LB: Well, after that week we had there without the Japanese guards, a number of people went down into town and bought things during that week and came back to camp. When the Japanese came back, a couple of people tried to do the same thing, sneak out at night and get some stuff and come back. Two of them, at least, we know of, they were shot on their way back in. They were killed as they came back in again. So, there was that retribution, so that you get the idea; they did this so that they could deter other people from trying the same thing. You know, they figured, "Well, maybe they'll escape, maybe they won't come back," you know. …

SI: However, there was no case where, say, one person escapes and they shoot somebody else in retaliation.

LB: No, no. There was none of that in our camp. It was all in the military camps.

SI: Is there anything else you would like to say about your experience?

LB: No, I think we've covered it pretty good.

SI: Before the raid, in your father's account, he describes seeing activities leading up to it, bombings, that sort of thing. What do you remember about that?

LB: Yes, the night before the 22nd, in the evening, while we were having our little mush, the American planes came over there and you could see them dive-bombing and the bombs coming off the planes. … We kept saying to ourselves, "Well, they're getting near." Again, that was diversionary, to distract the Japanese at this point for what was going to happen the next day, so

that they did that, but we all thought it, not that, you know, "We're going to be rescued tomorrow," but I woke up in the middle of the night and there wasn't a sound. There wasn't. I mean, it was dead silent and it was purposely that way, I'm sure, as far as the troops were concerned, because these guerillas were all lying in wait, just for what was going to happen in the morning, … but we did see, yes, … on that evening, on the 22nd, see them bombing.

SI: Was that the first time you had seen American forces?

LB: No, we hadn't seen any; we had seen the planes. Planes flew over our camp on their way to Manila. We had seen that for a couple of months. So, we knew that things were happening, and how much was happening, we really didn't know in camp. We knew that they were getting closer and we looked forward to, "Probably be not too long before we get rescued," but we didn't know all that was going on and the awfulness of what was happening. I mean, the Japanese, just, it was a "scorched earth" policy in Manila. Manila was destroyed by the Japanese. See, MacArthur, in the beginning of the war, had moved out, so that he could save the city; Japanese didn't do it. They were going to destroy everything, and destroy the Filipinos.

SI: Manila, I saw some statistics that said that, behind Warsaw, it was the most devastated city of World War II.

LB: It was.

SI: Was it shocking to see that for the first time?

LB: Oh, it was terrible, it was terrible, to see the destruction that had happened because of what the Japanese did, and we all knew, we were all told, when we saw it, it was the Japanese that scorched earth. They were destroying things as they left. They weren't going to leave anything left.

SI: Was your neighborhood destroyed?

LB: Fortunately, no, no, because this was more in the city. We did not have the destruction out where we were living that they had in Manila.

ECB: You know, when we got there in 1957, the pillars down by the pier, … it was just all shot up and all. You could see the bullet holes all over the place, and that was '57.

EB: You had mentioned that you read *Ghost Soldiers* and, actually, we met Abie Abraham at the convention. You said you had read the book.

LB: I just read the book, but I've never met any of the men that were involved in the book.

SI: A lot of coverage has been given to the raid in recent years, but it was not talked about for a long time. Many people did not know about it.

ECB: Well, you know why, because it happened on the same time as Iwo Jima, and Iwo Jima got all the press. So, someone wrote something, it was the most carefully planned, perfectly executed, amazing …

LB: Airborne operation.

ECB: … Well, coordination of everything for a release of a prison camp, and, yet, it was not talked up because of Iwo Jima, which was also very wonderful, but that's why it never did make the headlines back then.

SI: Is there anything else you would like to add for the record?

LB: … Another interesting sidelight of all of this; when I was in the concentration camp, as I said, I was with a Catholic priest who taught all the math subjects and I took math subjects with him. When I went back to the Philippines as a missionary, I went to the southern part of the Philippines, in Mindanao. … I was sitting in the airport one day as I was coming back to Manila and I looked across at another man who was sitting across the way, a Catholic priest, and I looked at him and I thought, "My, he looks familiar." So, I got up and walked over and asked him, "Was he ever in the Los Banos prison camp?" and he said, "Yes," and he was my teacher. [laughter]

SI: There were 2,146 people there. How many people would you interact with on a daily basis?

LB: Probably about a third of them, because a lot of them were, as we said, the camp was divided and, … towards the end, the last month or so, two months, there was interaction, but we're still separated, and so, you didn't associate too much with them. You more associated with the people that you went in with, which was the 640 missionaries. … The headlines in the paper the day that we were taken in was that they had rounded up the biggest spy ring in the history of the Philippines, 640 people. [laughter]

ECB: But, you had your own name for it; was it "Heaven's Something" and "Hell's Acres" or something?

LB: "Heaven's Square Acre" and "Hell's Town," … because of the two divisions. One was all missionaries and the other one was not.

ECB: Was a bit of a riff-raff.

SI: Was there much use of humor to keep everyone's spirits high?

LB: Oh, yes, yes, there was a lot, and, as I say, in the evening, with your concerts of music they played, was also helpful.

ECB: And he was young, he had a nice girl sitting next to him. She was the daughter of a minister, wasn't she, or something?

LB: Yes, doctor, a missionary doctor.

ECB: … So, after the war, he took a bus trip all the way out to California, but too bad, … oh, no, not to me, there was no chemistry with her. He said, "Nice seeing you, Lynn. Bye." [laughter] So, I got him.

SI: Yes, that is good. It worked out.

ECB: And, now, look what we have. [Editor's Note: Mrs. Brooks directs the interviewers' attention to a family portrait.]

SI: Yes, you have a very large family.

ECB: That's the family; there's two missing. … One of my grandsons was in Australia, and then, the other one couldn't get home, he was down in Virginia, … and two more great-grandchildren on the way. They keep coming. [laughter]

SI: Thank you very much for your time. It was a pleasure.

LB: Thank you. …

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Reviewed by Steve Campbell 12/7/08
Reviewed by Greg Flynn 12/7/08
Reviewed by Peter Iodaci 12/7/08
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 8/3/10
Reviewed by Leonard Brooks 8/23/10