RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALBERT N. BROWN

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

HERNDON, VIRGINIA
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TRANSCRIPT BY

ANDREA BLATT

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Mr. Albert N. Brown on April 14, 2007, in Herndon, Virginia, with Shaun Illingworth, and also in attendance are …

Peggy Dottie: His daughter Peggy Dottie

Anne Brown: Daughter-in-law, Anne Brown

SI: Okay, and thank you very much for being here, and this is the second day of the ...

Albert Brown: Well, they said we would be paid when we came here to the interview.

PD: Oh, Dad ...

AB: How much do I get?

SI: Your agent has to negotiate that ...

AB: Oh, well. We'll just drop it.

SI: Well, we appreciate that ... [laughter] To begin, can you tell us where and when you were born?

AB: North Platt, Nebraska. Buffalo Bill was my Godfather.

SI: Really?

AB: Really? [laughter] Yes, really.

SI: What year were you born?

AB: 1905.

SI: 1905? Wow, well, you look a lot younger then that.

AB: I am 101.

SI: Wow, that's very impressive.

AB: Not too impressive

SI: Did you grow up in that area? Did you live in that area for a long time as a child?

AB: North Platt?

SI: Yes.

AB: Until, my father was an engineer on the Union Pacific in North Platt, and the engine blew up and killed him. Then we moved to Council Bluffs, Iowa.

SI: Is that where you went to school?

AB: That's where I went to school.

SI: What kind of activities were you involved in in Council Bluffs? Did you do a lot of things in school? Were you involved in Boy Scouts or the church?

AB: Athletics.

SI: Athletics. What was your sport?

AB: I got four letters in athletics in high school.

SI: Wow.

AB: Baseball, football, basketball, track. Not too many do that.

SI: No, that's very rare, a four-letter man. Four-letter men are very rare.

PD: Tell him which high school you graduated from.

SI: Yes

AB: What?

PD: Tell him which high school you graduated from.

AB: Abraham Lincoln High School in Council Bluffs in 19 -, when did I graduate from Abraham Lincoln?

PD: You graduated from Creighton in '27 ...

AB: '23.

SI: Creighton, is that a college?

AB: Creighton University, College of Omaha. I went there for, studied for dentistry.

SI: Okay. Was that unusual for somebody to go to college in that day and age? Or did most of the people in your class go to college?

AB: I was only seventeen when I went to college.

SI: Okay, was that unusual, though? From what I understand, most students didn't go to college in the 1920's.

AB: I don't know about that.

SI: Why did you want to study dentistry at Creighton University?

AB: I don't know, I just wanted to be a dentist.

SI: What do you remember about your days at college at Creighton University?

PD: What did you do at Creighton, Dad?

SI: Were you in any fraternities, or was it all studying?

AB: Just athletics.

SI: Okay, so you continued, with the basketball?

AB: I became the captain of the basketball team later on.

SI: Did they have an ROTC program a Creighton? Or any other kind of military program?

AB: I took ROTC at Creighton.

SI: Was it army?

AB: I took ROTC at Abraham Lincoln High School, first, for four years, that's how I got in the army.

SI: I was curious about that, so you received a commission after you graduated from Creighton?

AB: First Lieutenant.

SI: Were you a dentist in the army, or was it a different designation? Were you in the Medical Corps?

AB: I was in the Medical Corps, yes.

SI: So, you graduated from college in 1927, and did you go into practice as a dentist?

AB: Yes, and then in 1935 I was called into the army.

SI: So, did you practice dentistry in Council Bluffs, or somewhere else?

AB: In Council Bluffs, I practiced dentistry in a building with twenty-one doctors. It was quite a set up.

SI: Okay. So was it difficult for you to leave that practice to go into the army?

AB: Very.

SI: Okay, and why did they call you up in 1935?

AB: I don't know, just got a call one day and they said to report. Report and go to Minneapolis.

SI: What did you do in Minneapolis? Were you assigned to some place there?

AB: We were assigned to a, what's the name of that outfit in Minneapolis?

PD: I don't know.

SI: Was it an army base?

AB: Yeah, it was a massive army base, I reported there.

PD: Fort Robinson?

AB: No, it is a very usual name, very, everybody knows it. Minneapolis, Minneapolis. [laughter]

SI: Oh, yes.

PD: It was in St. Paul, I think.

{Al, WAS IT FORT SNELING?}

AB: Beautiful Minneapolis.

SI: Okay. The army base was also Minneapolis.

AB: They had the big base there in Minneapolis.

SI: You were working as a dentist; you were assigned to dental medicine there?

AB: All we were doing then was teaching recruits how to learn the drills.

SI: So, you were taking the raw recruits and training them in how to march.

AB: I had eight years of marching, so I was very good at that.

SI: How long were you at the army base in Minneapolis?

AB: About two years, I think.

SI: Okay.

AB: Then I had to go to, what's the southern outfit?

PD: Camp Robinson.

AB: Right. I had to go to Camp Robinson.

SI: Did you do the same thing there, training people?

AB: Training people. … We went through all the motions of war. One group would be on one side, one on the other, and then they would start shooting at each other, sometimes with real bullets, so be careful, you had to cover. [laughter]

SI: So, you had a lot of maneuver training.

AB: Yeah.

SI: How well equipped were you at that point? Did you have rifles? I have heard of people training with broomsticks instead of rifles.

AB: Everything was scarce. Cars, automobiles, trucks, tanks, everything was scarce.

SI: Were you assigned to a unit there? Or were you part of the base cadre?

AB: Oh, I was assigned to a unit, yes, company.

SI: Which unit?

AB: Oh, I have no idea.

SI: That's all right.

AB: Too long.

SI: Was the army growing at that point? Did you notice a lot more recruits coming in at that point?

AB: A lot of recruits coming out of the hills and they hadn't been very well educated. It was really a comedy with these kids up there that came out of the hills.

SI: Can you give me an example of something that they wouldn't know how to do, or something that you had to train them in?

AB: Well, they couldn't keep step, sometimes it took weeks just to get them to march. It was quite an experience.

SI: Where did you go after, what was you next assignment after Camp Robinson?

AB: I went to the Philippines.

PD: No, you didn't, you went to Fort Leonard Wood.

AB: Oh, that's right. I went to Fort Leonard Wood.

SI: In Missouri.

AB: Yeah.

SI: There were you training more people, or did you have a different assignment?

AB: Fort Leonard Wood was training one division of men. Now, in this great country of ours, we did not have a division of men for war. That shows how lax we were, and Fort Leonard Wood was the first time they ever had a division ready to go to war, so it was a busy, very busy area.

SI: Do you remember which division that was?

AB: Nope, too long ago.

SI: That's all right. You were again training the men how to march and that sort of thing?

AB: Close order drill.

SI: Did you do maneuvers there at Fort Leonard Wood?

AB: A lot of maneuvers. They were getting that division ready to go to Europe.

SI: So, was this during the years between the time when Hitler invaded Poland and before we got into the war? Had World War II started in Europe yet?

[TAPE PAUSED]

PD: He said it had probably.

SI: I guess what I'm getting at is ...

AB: Now, who was president then, in WWI?

PD: Woodrow Wilson.

SI: Yes, Woodrow Wilson in WWI.

AB: Now, Woodrow Wilson got elected didn't he? How do you think he got elected? He was keeping us out of war. He got elected and what was the first thing he did? Start sending boats to Britain. That was committing ourself to war.

SI: Did you feel like Franklin Roosevelt was doing the same thing in WWII?

AB: Pretty much.

SI: Did you agree with that, or disagree with that?

AB: I don't know. Every war we fought we've always helped, whoever we fought. The last time we fought Japan. We favored Japan. How many Japanese cars are in America?

SI: A lot. Millions.

AB: That's the defeated nation. So do you think we are quite smart?

SI: Well, some might not say so. [laughter] So, did you feel like America was going to go to war in those years, before you went to the Philippines?

AB: No. I didn't think the Japanese would come into the Philippians because we had parts of our army in Australia.

SI: Okay, so, after Fort Leonard Wood, is that when you went to the Philippines?

PD: Yeah.

SI: Can you tell me how you got to the Philippines, how you were sent there?

AB: By boat.

SI: Okay.

AB: And every night, when we got close to the Philippines, the Japanese submarines were in the water, and the boat had to be dark, all the lights shut off on the boat, and it was pretty hard to operate in the dark, but that was the way we got to the Philippines.

SI: These combat conditions were even before the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor?

AB: Oh, I was in about six months before it happened.

SI: But, you still had to run in black-out conditions even though there wasn't a war?

AB: Yeah, just about six months in the Philippines before they ....

PD: You didn't trust the Japanese even before the war even started.

AB: No. We put all our airplanes in Clark Field. They had all been in little areas, all over, nicely defended, defensive, defending the thing, and then … General Clark …

SI: MacArthur

AB: MacArthur. Oh, who was the famous general of WWI?

SI: Black Jack Pershing?

AB: No, yeah, no, but anyway he was in the Philippines with MacArthur.

PD: You mean Dwight Eisenhower.

AB: Eisenhower.

SI: Okay.

AB: They took Eisenhower out of there and made him General of the whole army. MacArthur couldn't stand it, that they didn't take him instead of that numb brain. He called him a numb brain because he …

SI: So, MacArthur didn't like Eisenhower, he was jealous of him?

AB: Well, he liked Eisenhower until he was appointed head of the army. MacArthur thought he was going to be it.

SI: What did you, as someone who was serving under MacArthur in the Philippines, think of him, think of MacArthur?

AB: He was kind of a magical character. When he held officer groups, he dominated the whole picture. He was it. Nobody else usually said much.

SI: Did you ever attend any meetings with General MacArthur? Any officers meeting?

AB: [laughter] Oh, yeah, I attended several meetings with MacArthur, where all the officers in the group came in.

SI: Had you been to assigned the 24th Pursuit Group yet, or did that come later?

AB: The 17th Pursuit.

SI: Oh, okay, so, when you were an officer with that group, you would have meetings with General MacArthur.

AB: Yes.

SI: Okay, and he dominated these meetings?

AB: Yes, he did. He did all the talking.

SI: What did you think of his strategies? Did you have confidence in his plans?

AB: It was all wrong because he put all the airplanes in one place. When the Japanese came in there, they destroyed those thousands of airplanes. Three airplanes were left, that might be fixed up to fly. They were all injured, so they eliminated all the real defense, in one blow that took about four and a half hours. That started at about twelve o'clock that day.

SI: That was December 8th when that attack took place.

PD: Yeah, a few hours after Pearl Harbor.

SI: So, that was the day the war started.

AB: That was the day the war started.

SI: What had been your duties leading up to that day with your the pursuit group?

AB: Oh, we had about three separate units. Yeah, we could have bombed any airplanes flying in there, if they had been available. They were all armored. They were all in good shape, and they all went down the drain. They were all just destroyed at the same time, and, of course, a lot of pilots were killed at the same time.

SI: What was your duty within the unit? Were you an ordinance officer, were you a flying officer, what did you do?

AB: I didn't have much to do. If there was medical or dental I handled that.

SI: So, they switched you from training, back to dental, which was your specialty.

AB: Right.

SI: How much of a medical staff was there in your unit or your base?

AB: Just me. Yeah.

SI: How well supplied were you? Did you have things you needed?

AB: At that time, all the officers, all the flying officers, they all had monkeys. Every officer had a monkey. It was quite interesting just to work your way through the compound and see those little darlings. They'd train them, you know. Then just before the war broke out, some commanding officer came through there and eliminated all the monkeys.

PD: What were your chores, Dad? He asked, "What did you do?"

AB: What did I do? I didn't have too much to do.

SI: So if somebody had a dental problem …

AB: There was no dental equipment. There was just medical. If somebody got injured or broke an arm or a leg, we took care of it. Put a splint on it, yeah.

SI: So, you were the only doctor there?

AB: I was the only one there at first.

SI: Did you have any enlisted medics? Any medics?

AB: We had medics come in.

SI: Later on?

AB: Yeah.

SI: So, when the Japanese attacked on December 8th what do you remember about that day?

AB: Where was I that day?

SI: What do you remember seeing and doing?

AB: I was within two blocks of the air force. We all went into a tunnel, a culvert was there, and we all went in there while all the bombing was on. Then when we got out, we went over and did the best we could to get these people from the field into the hospital there. There were a lot of injections to be made to these officers that were wounded. In front of the hospital, they had a row of officers that had been injured. They were all laying side by side and all their guts were out. Then they finally took them away. Inside, they treated all the officers that had been injured during the bombing.

SI: So, you were in the hospital helping to treat all of these men.

AB: I was making injections into most of the officers that had been wounded.

SI: Did you have antibiotics at that point?

AB: Antibiotics, yeah.

SI: So …

AB: It was quite a busy section there afterwards.

SI: I can imagine. How long did that initial operation take? I mean, were you in the hospital for days and days afterwards taking care of all those guys?

AB: Most of, a lot of those officers were there for a week or so, after the shelling, after the bombing.

SI: Were you still the only medical officer, or did others come in at that point to help?

AB: Yes, yes we did.

SI: So, at the hospital, roughly, how many medical personnel were there to deal with all these casualties?

AB: I never saw the amount. But, I would imagine there was probably one hundred and fifty.

PD: Were these the doctors or the victims?

AB: These were the flyers. Did you ask about the flyers?

SI: I was asking about the doctors and medics ... and nurses.

AB: I have no idea. But, there were a lot of them.

SI: Did you feel it was adequate? Or were you struggling to deal with this crisis?

AB: No, there seemed, to eventually take care of all of them.

SI: Were there nurses there?

AB: Oh, yes.

SI: Were they army nurses or were they civilian nurses?

AB: Army.

SI: After that first attack, what happened after that? How did you deal with the aftermath? What were the next orders?

AB: Oh, I forget now what happened.

SI: Were you withdrawn to another area?

AB: I forget.

SI: What is the next thing you remember about the war in the Philippines? Was there a lot of chaos and confusion at that point?

AB: No, nothing like that.

SI: Did you withdraw further south from Clark Field?

AB: I forget now.

PD: What happened, Dad?

AB: I don't know where all those units went.

PD: Where did you go? He doesn't expect you to know …

SI: Yes, you don't have to tell me about everybody, just what you went through.

AB: I forget now what happened after the bombing. Where did we go from there?

SI: Did you keep treating people during that time?

AB: I just don't remember what happened after we got everybody well there in the hospital.

SI: Okay.

AB: I have no idea now. It's just blank.

SI: That's all right.

AB: Where did we go from there?

PD: Well, you were up north, so you would have had to go south.

SI: Did you withdraw toward Bataan and Corregidor? Were you ever in Bataan or Corregidor?

PD: Yeah.

SI: Did you eventually wind up there?

AB: I was on Corregidor once.

PD: You were on Bataan most of the time.

AB: I was on Bataan all of the time. Except when I went over once to Corregidor, and they were in a mess. All the walkways at Corregidor were filled with money.

SI: Filipino money?

AB: American money. Money wasn't worth anything, so, all the money was dumped there. The bulk of the money was taken off shore, put in a keg, weighted, and all the gross money was in this garbage can with a weight. Later on, the Japanese found out about it, and they were searching all along the waterway between Bataan and Corregidor. They never found it. But that was one of the strangest things I ever walked on.

SI: All of that money, just all over the place.

AB: Everybody emptied their pockets. Just gave it away.

SI: What do you remember about Bataan? Being on the peninsula? What were you doing there? Were you treating people who were in combat?

AB: No. I was with my 17th Pursuit Group.

SI: Okay.

AB: And, eventually, when we had to do the Death March, we were all together on the Death March.

SI: Do you remember anything before the order came down that the peninsula had surrendered?

AB: We all met with General King. He was the top commander. We all met with General King. He said, "I am going up tomorrow and I am going to surrender Bataan," and he said, "MacArthur wants us to fight to the last man." General King said, "I'm taking the responsibility," and that morning he got into the little cart and drove into the Japanese headquarters and surrendered. Then the 17th Pursuit Group that I was with, and the 24th Group, most of the 17th, I don't know what happened to them, but the 24th we were all together, and we, the Japanese laid us out on the ground and then they came along with tanks and said for all of us to get on the road and start walking, marching, and that was the start of the Death March. At one time, I got exhausted and I fell to the rear of the column and a Japanese came up behind me, and I didn't know he was there, and I was at the back of the group, and he jabbed me in the ass with the bayonet, and he yelled, "Speedo." Well, that got me going pretty good then. I never was at the back of the line again, and, finally, got into [Camp] O'Donnell and I couldn't eat rice, so somebody on the 24th had a bit of oatmeal. They fed me that oatmeal, with that oatmeal I got started, rice was fine. I just had to have something different, I guess, and, from then on, we were real prisoners.

SI: When you finished the March did you have any kind of diseases? Like malaria, or beriberi, or anything like that?

AB: Oh, yeah. I was full of malaria and I had, what do they call these things? Well, anyway, this stuff was all over my body.

PD: Melanomas.

AB: The thing that kills you. I've had, I don't know how many operations. I just had a couple on my nose not too long ago.

SI: Were you ever put into the hospital in the camp, or did you try to avoid going into the hospital at Camp O'Donnell?

PD: Is that where you got your back broken?

AB: No. I got my back broken up in ... no, it wasn't, it was the big camp, Cabanatuan.

SI: What do you remember about Camp O'Donnell and being there?

AB: Do I remember being there?

SI: Yes, what do you remember about your incarceration there?

AB: I don't remember much about anything. After I was injured I was, I'd just lay flat.

SI: Was that after you broke your back in Cabanatuan?

AB: And neck. They cracked me in the neck with the butt of a rifle. They loved to injure you. They take a little guy and have him hold his hand out and take the samurai sword and break it. That wasn't once, that was many times. Once, he broke this arm; on this little kid, and I stayed around there, and this Jap came back with this full load of rice for this kid. He broke his arm, then he went and got a bowl of rice for him. Compensation. What else you want to know?

SI: What about the food and living conditions, can you describe those?

AB: The food was a little ball of rice three times a day, about a little bigger than a quarter, not much, and then, the general that was in charge of the camp, somebody suggested to him, "Why don't we see if we can get all the brown rice that they make?" and the Japanese were so happy to see, they only eat pearled rice, so instead of having our normal quota, they gave us more, and the little ... covering of the rice ... the husks, so, everybody in the camp became a little more strong from eating that, so, it was a good break. Then after two years, I got, another officer and myself, we got on a little boat and we went to Japan.

SI: Do you remember the name of the boat?

AB: I know the name of the boat but I'd have to go back to my notes. But, it was very small, and when we got to Taiwan, all the boats in that convoy were attacked by American submarines. Then the area, water, around Hokkaido, where all the ships come in and land, had been bombed by the bombers from China the day before we got in there.

PD: Was this at Taiwan or Hokkaido?

AB: Taiwan. They came in and bombed us in Taiwan and they eliminated all the ships that were in the harbor there in Taiwan, so we had to spend another week there. We were hoping to get out on our boat, and, as soon as we got out of the harbor, we didn't head north we headed straight for Japan, I mean, for China. Because, the captain said, "We are not going north because all the submarines are hidden there," so he went directly to China first, and then back to Japan.

SI: What were the conditions like on the ship?

AB: We just lay in the bottom of the boat, on the iron. We had a little walkway up, a little stairway, a ladder, to get up on the main deck and go to the john, and you had to have permission, all of the time, to go anyplace.

SI: Were there a lot of people packed into the ship?

AB: Not too many. But, in the hold of the ship, it was pretty well covered with people.

SI: Did they give you water, or food at all?

AB: None.

SI: None. Okay.

AB: None until the last day, then they gave us a little ball of rice.

SI: How did you survive? Did anyone sneak food in?

AB: I don't know how we survived. But, we finally got to China and we went back up to northern Japan. What was the name of the place?

PD: Hokkaido.

AB: Hokkaido, up there they did a lot of mining. All of those troops were on some kind of a daily maneuver to work.

SI: Was it coal mining?

AB: Yes, we had coal mines up there, and other minerals, and ...

SI: Where did they put you once you got to Hokkaido, did they have another camp?

AB: Yes, they had a little camp there for prisoners, and you had a little duffle bag that you slid into at night. It was very cold up there.

SI: What about clothing, did they give you anything warmer to wear?

AB: They gave us an overcoat of some kind to wear. We just wore the same equipment that we had on. While I was there they had a dental problem with the British, where, Peg? about twenty miles from our main camp so they wanted a dentist over there to do something, so they finally got me to go over there. While I was there, one of the British men had gotten out of line and the officer came around and he said, "Say, Major, do you want me to, would you like to see how we handle our men when they get out of line?" I said, "Yes." So they took me in there and he lined me up with all the people. The guy was already on the table, naked. One big officer came in and he said, "Twenty-five lashes," so they had some kind of rope or leather, or something, and they whacked his doneker twenty-five times. I bet he never did anything wrong again after that.

SI: I would assume so.

PD: Tell him about the Dutch guy and the radio.

AB: Oh, the air force was over in that area and he came in and established himself as a radio man. All the Japanese officers in that great big camp there would bring their radios in there and he would fix them and he would always take a tube out. Eventually, he had a little radio himself that he could operate with. That day there was a big war, battle, and the Japanese said they won that war, in that naval battle. That night we sat and he tuned into San Francisco with his little radio, and we found out the Americans had won. All during that day, the Japanese were drinking and celebrating their victory. So we found out it wasn't true. But how did he ever make a radio to go to San Francisco? Pretty smart kid.

SI: Yes, obviously.

PD: Tell him about the officer who had the little dog.

AB: Oh, one Japanese officer came in with a cute little dog, and the dog disappeared. The guy that I knew real well absconded with this little dog, hid him. That Japanese officer went all around for hours looking for his little, little dog. He knew he was in there some place, and he was in there some place. [laughter] But he eventually left, and the next day they had roast dog.

PD: Tell him how much heat you had, warmth.

AB: Oh, nothing.

SI: Did they have any way of heating the barracks or wherever you were housed?

AB: Your only hope was to get into that little sleeping bag that they furnished, and, it was hard to work your way into that, and then once in a while the Japanese officers would come around

and call, for roll call at twelve o'clock at night or three o'clock at night, whatever it was, and you had to work your way out of that thing, and go out and stand there to be counted. Then you had to come back and try to slip into that thing again, and that was a hard job, and that's the only thing that kept you warm.

PD: You told me they had a stove some place in your house.

AB: Oh, yeah, they had a stove in the little; I don't know what they called it, but once a day you got a few lumps of coal to have a nice, little fire and it was great. Now, ... a lot of the Americans were on work details that went down to the Japanese ships. They swept and cleaned the Japanese ships. They were quite busy, I guess. Now, on the way back what do you think happened?

SI: What happened?

AB: Everytime they passed horse turds, they always picked up all the horse turds they could, brought them back to camp, took all the corn out of them, and, while the stoves was hot, they put the corn on the stove to sterilize the corn and then they would eat it. Now, that's food conservation. [laughter]

SI: It is a sign of how desperate the situation was.

AB: Oh, yeah.

SI: Did they give you any more food in Hokkaido than they had in the Philippines, where you only had three rice balls a day?

AB: No, it was quite sad over there, little ball of rice every day.

SI: Now, when you were in Hokkaido at that point the US Air Force was starting to bomb Japan more, were there ever any air raids where you were?

AB: Well, every morning, I was in charge of two-hundred Americans, and every morning we had to go up with the girls in the front office and tell them how many meals to prepare for. This one day we went up there, the girls were tearing up pages out of their books and stuff, and throwing it into a garbage can that was burning. So, I thought they're not going to take their, everything that they had in their books and throw them away, so I decided the war was over. So, I went back, and went over to the British general and I said, "You know, General, the war is over." He said, "Let me tell you one thing, this war is not going to be over till ten years from now." "Well," I said, "All the indications that I see, up there, they wouldn't be tearing their books of what they've done and throw them in the garbage and burn them." He said, "Don't forget, ten years," and I said, "Oh." I left him. He was set for a ten year romp there. But, I guess, they eventually found out. [laughter]

SI: How soon after that were you liberated?

AB: Oh, one day the Americans came, from over on the west side where we came in, to, the admiral, he wanted to know if it was safe to fly in to rescue all these men. I said, "Yes, everything is all right now." They had already bombed the prisoner of war camp from Guam, and we were pretty busy for a week trying to get these, some of these men that were injured from our own bombs, so, they dropped a walkie-talkie to me and they said, "Go over to see Admiral Nimitz," or whoever the admiral was over there, and so I took five men [Editors note: Mr. Brown is showing a picture now]. I took those five men and we boarded a train, and it was full of Japanese soldiers, and we had to go about two-hundred miles, in this round-about-way, to get to over to where the admiral was and ...

PD: You got on the ferry and, and the Japanese moved his soldiers over, so you guys could go up the gang plank.

AB: Yeah, we had to get on a ship to go around here so, the Japanese were all lined up on this ship. We five guys, some Japanese officer said, "Get over," and they all got over, and we walked up there. Then they took us around there, and we got over there and they gave us quite a welcome.

SI: The Americans?

AB: Yeah, these were all Navy, and so this admiral and I worked out a deal to get the planes up from Guam. I think it was the most rapid elimination of men. In two days, they came in, flew them all back to Guam.

PD: This was your two-hundred Americans, right?

AB: Yeah.

SI: So, you took care of your men and made sure they were evacuated?

AB: They flew us out of Guam, eventually, back to San Francisco. Now there was one other story I wanted to tell you about. Oh, that morning admiral said, "I'll have an aviator come in and fly you back," and I was sitting there and I look over, here was this young kid. The Admiral said, "Here's your flyer." I said to the Admiral, "He's too damn young." [laughter] He said, "He's smarter than you are." [laughter] So I got on the plane with him and flew back to our unit, some of the people that I knew, and, in about two weeks, we flew out of there to San Francisco. There was one other little item that was so clever I wanted to tell you but I can't think of it now. Once I was assigned to miners. The Japanese only used two-by-fours instead of two by eights.

SI: To prop up the mine.

AB: And those damn things were always popping, you know. When they popped everybody ran as fast as they could out of that area, because they knew something was going to drop.

SI: When you were in captivity in Japan, did you do anything to try to sabotage whatever you were working on?

AB: Well, when you were in the prison camp, they had a barb wire fence. If you escaped, you were condemned to death. But first, they did all the *Ju Jutsi* with all these boys. Well, five came back, and then I saw what they did to those kids, *Ju Jitsu*. Then they took them over and made, to dig their own graves. Made them stand at the end of the graves, shoot them, and then dump them in. So, it really didn't pay to leave the camp, and most people didn't leave the camp.

SI: When you were leading these two- hundred men, what did you try to do to make sure that they all survived? What was it like to be the leader of these two-hundred men?

AB: There wasn't much you could do. You had nothing. You didn't even have a drop of peroxide. They either survived, or they didn't. When they got so bad they went to the K dock. When they were ready to die, they put them in this K dock, and, when they died, they took them out and buried them. Now, there was one that apparently had died and they took him out and they were ready to dump him into the grave, and, then, he yelled something. So then he goes back to the K ward again. Now, that's saving yourself.

SI: Is there anything else about your time in the prison camps that you would like to talk about?

AB: Well, in Hokkaido we just tried to keep warm at night.

SI: Did you lose men to hypothermia, or that sort of thing, or frost bite? Were those big problems?

AB: Oh, some of them got frost bite, but not too often. If you are walking, if you're going to a job, as long as you are walking, you are not going to have frost bite.

SI: Were the guards any different in Hokkaido? Did they treat you worse?

AB: They were better up there, yeah. Oh, Hokkaido, that was probably the worse place to be. They just loved to jab you, cut your arm off, or break your arm.

SI: Was that in the Philippines or Hokkaido, in the Philippines where were the guards were most cruel?

PD: Was that the guards in Philippines or in Hokkaido where the guards were most cruel?

AB: Oh, in the Philippines. They were rough.

SI: Since you were an officer, do you think they were extra hard on you?

AB: Oh, yeah. They loved to batter up the officers.

SI: I also noticed you're pretty tall. I've also heard the taller guys were singled out.

AB: I don't know about that.

SI: Okay.

PD: Who did they single out?

AB: I don't know. I saw several, many arms had been broken. They loved to get young kids and just tell them, "Hold your arm out," and then they'd take the samurai sword and just, "bop," and break their arm. Now, some of them didn't break their arm, but they had a bad bruise. Oh, they were lucky.

SI: When you were in Cabanatuan, you were beaten to the point where your back was broken and your neck was broken.

AB: Yeah.

SI: Were you taken to a hospital after that? Or did you just have to recover? How did you recover from that?

AB: Nothing. I just layed down. No braces. Nothing.

SI: How long were you down for?

AB: Till the end of camp. Till we decided to move from there. You mean, from there to Hokkaido?

SI: I was just wondering how long you had to lie down before your back and neck healed to the point where you could function?

AB: It took quite a while before I could operate.

SI: That must have affected you pretty seriously when you were in Hokkaido and dealing with these injuries that had never been properly treated.

AB: I never had any real treatment on my back.

SI: Did that bother you later on, particularly in the cold weather?

AB: It still bothers me. Cold is bad for your back. My neck only bothers when I try to turn it. Otherwise, I am in perfect shape.

SI: Can you give me any idea of what you would think of, to keep going, to try to keep going? Were you very spiritual? What kept you going?

AB: We had lots of preachers. But I don't remember too much about preachers. I knew one quite well, but I never saw him too often.

PD: Didn't you also say you used hypnosis, you hypnotized each other?

SI: Oh, really?

AB: I don't understand.

SI: Would you hypnotize each other? Try to use hypnotic suggestion, put each other in a trance?

AB: I don't ...

PD: You told us once how you hypnotized each other.

AB: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, we were very good at hypnotizing.

PD: It just didn't work on the Japanese.

AB: We just hypnotized our own men.

SI: When would you do that?

AB: In the big camp.

PD: In Cabanatuan.

AB: Yeah.

SI: How did that idea get started, that idea of hypnotizing?

AB: I don't know how it got started, but it lasted a little while, hypnotize them.

PD: Did it work?

AB: I don't know, I forget now how avid we were at that particular part.

SI: You were using hypnotizing to help people deal with the hardships.

AB: Yeah. Let them get into a different trance. Anything else you can think of, Peggy?

SI: Did you ever have any communication from the outside world? You got some news from the Dutch radio guy, who could pick up San Francisco, but did you get news?

AB: The Dutch came in there, and somebody came in there from America, and they had boxes of chickens and they'd have us take two roosters and hold them up like this, and they would take our picture. That picture went to Japan to show how lenient and nice they were to the prisoners in ...

PD: You mean, they sent the pictures to America?

AB: No, they sent the pictures to Japan to show Japan how great they were treating the American prisoners.

SI: It was propaganda.

AB: Well, they probably sent it to America, too, but I heard they sent it to Japan.

SI: Who was the American who came in? You said that an American brought in the chickens.

AB: That was the famous outfit from America that does things for people that are in trouble.

SI: You mean, like the Red Cross? Was it the American Red Cross?

AB: No, it wasn't the American Red Cross. It was, now, the American Red Cross sent in something, maybe chickens or something else the one time.

PD: Rubber boots one time.

SI: Rubber boots.

AB: Yeah. [laughter]

Ann Brown: That's all they sent was rubber boots?

PD: Well, that is all they got.

AB: A lot of things have happened in four years there.

SI: Are there any others that you would like to share with us on the tape?

AB: Anything else, Peggy, there might be of interest?

PD: Your lovely stay in Denver in the hospital. Your two-year stay in Denver at the hospital getting you well again.

AB: Oh, that's right.

PD: At Fitzsimmons, that was a plus.

AB: I went to Fitzsimmons. I was blind, didn't, heart wasn't working. Well, everything wasn't working very well. After a couple of years, they got the intestinal tract, the intestinal track was like the outside. One morning the doctor came in and he said, "Get ready, tomorrow at ten

o'clock I'm sending you up to the heart surgeon," and I said, "Oh, that's nice. He's going to do my heart." He wasn't doing my heart; he was giving me injections of poison.

SI: Why?

AB: Poison, to clear up the intestinal tract.

PD: Parasites.

SI: Okay.

AB: So I went up there, and he injected me, and nothing much happened. But, apparently, they cleaned up the tract. At least that's what they said. So, when you take poison, you want to die, don't ya?

SI: Well it sounds like they gave you something for the parasites that helped you.

AB: Well, they watched me all morning. They had a thing on my arm for my blood pressure and everything, and then, around twelve o'clock, he said, "Well, you are acting all right." Then I'd be gone. I had to do that, I think, three times. So, the intestinal tract must have been in pretty bad shape.

SI: Had you been married before you went over to the Philippines?

AB: Yes.

SI: Okay. Do you think that helped you find the strength to stay alive, the idea to get back to your family?

AB: You don't think. You just lay there. You don't think outside of where you are. Your mind is gone. You are in transit.

SI: When you came back, did you think the care you received was adequate? What did you think of the care you got when you got back to the States?

AB: I thought it was pretty good. We landed in San Francisco.

PD: How did you travel to Denver?

AB: I don't remember.

PD: On a train?

AB: Probably.

SI: Okay. Were all the survivors kept together after that, or were you separated?

AB: I was the only one I think in Denver. I never met any prisoners that were in Denver. I don't know where they went. Prisoners usually went to their area, Philadelphia, or whatever little town.

SI: Back to their hometown?

AB: Yeah, hometowns.

SI: So you were in military hospitals for at least two years, or was it longer?

PD: Two years, at the same place.

SI: Then after that, did you, were you discharged from the military? How did you get back to civilian life? Were you discharged, after you got out of the hospital, from the army?

AB: They discharged me from the Denver hospital. Yeah, I was in there about two years, a little more, and they discharged me from the army. I was out, gone.

SI: Did you return to Council Bluffs? Where did you go next, after you were discharged?

AB: Council Bluffs.

PD: For a short time, then you went to Hollywood.

AB: Oh.

SI: What did you do in Hollywood?

AB: Oh, I met a lot of Hollywood stars that were in a lot of Hollywood shows.

PD: You went to school.

AB: Pardon?

PD: You went to school.

AB: Oh, I forgot about that.

SI: Okay.

AB: While I was there, I decided I wanted to be a government agent. So, I went to USC's, what did they call that school? … It makes government officials. You get a certain degree, so, they could go down to any little town and become the government of the little area.

SI: So, like public policy?

PD: Diplomatic Corps.

AB: So, I graduated from USC in four years and then they assigned me to some little state down there. Then I was reading in the paper, they're all engaged in battle.

SI: When you say little state, you mean, another country?

AB: ... Yeah, like Cuba.

SI: In the Caribbean?

PD: During the revolution.

SI: So, during the Cuban revolution, Castro's revolution?

AB: Yeah, so I sent a letter and said, "I'm not ready to go there. If you want to send me to Europe, fine." I never heard anymore from them, which was just as well. But, anyway, I spent four years, enjoying the great football at USC and basketball at USC.

SI: Did you play, or were you just a spectator?

AB: No, I played at Creighton.

SI: Oh, you didn't play at USC?

AB: No, that was later. But I got to know all the football players and all the basketball players, and we, USC had some girls come in there, that had been wips, and they had that on their paper, and that was funny.

SI: What did they say they were, wips or wicks?

AB: Whores. Now, they let all those people come in and become students.

SI: So, how did you make your career after you declined to go to the Caribbean during that revolutionary period?

AB: I just stayed in, I bought a home in Hollywood. Just stayed, lived there.

SI: When did you become involved with the American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor organization?

AB: When she got me interested.

SI: Was it immediate?

AB: Had I done anything at all?

PD: You said you had been to meetings in California, before I had anything to do with it.

AB: Well, those meetings didn't mean too much. Nothing like this.

SI: Okay, that was more just getting together with friends.

AB: Yeah, I know quite a few people who were in the same area as I was. They were working.

PD: Were they people you had met in the Philippines?

AB: No, they just, I just knew them from, that they were in my area during the war.

SI: Did you find it difficult to talk about and think about the war after you came back?

AB: No. I didn't worry too much about it. Sometimes we would talk about it, but not too much.

SI: You never went back to dentistry at all?

AB: No. Oh, yes. Oh, I've never been back to dentistry, but, I've thought about it. At one time, I could have got back to dentistry in California. One of the big shots at USC, because I was a graduate from USC, I could get a job with one of the top men. But I don't know, I never got that done.

SI: Is there anything else you want to put on the record?

AB: Now, the one thing you've established, those two lovely girls know I am a bastard.

PD: Really?

SI: I'm sure they don't think that.

AB: You got that down?

SI: Yeah. [laughter]

PD: He's just stubborn.

SI: It seems like you have a very good sense of humor.

AB: I love humor.

SI: Well, thank you very much for talking with me today.

AB: I enjoyed talking to you. It brought up some things I had forgotten about.

SI: I am happy you shared them with me. Thank you very much, I know it is very difficult. Let me just say that this concludes my interview with Albert N. Brown. Thank you too, you two ladies, for bringing him in.

PD: You are very welcome.

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

Reviewed by Elaine Blatt 6/21/2007
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Approved by Albert Brown 9/6/2007