

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN W. BROWN, JR.

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

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Kevin Bing: This is the second part of an interview with John W. Brown, Jr. in New Brunswick, New Jersey, [with Kevin Bing, Mark Segaloff, and Nick Molnar.] Today's date is May 15, 2004. Mr. Brown, when we left the narrative yesterday, we were talking about Operation Northwind and its effects, so if you could continue the narrative from there we would much appreciate it.

John Brown: All right. I'll be happy to do so, Kevin. Northwind was the wind up of what the newspaper people had labeled the Battle of the Bulge, that tremendous German counter offensive in December 1944- January 1945, which so surprised the Allies. We didn't think the Germans had that much power left and it sure taught us a lesson. You may recall from your reading, General Patton, when Eisenhower called the high command together at a place, near Versailles outside of Paris, and it was a gloomy winter day and in the discussion, about what to do about this large German counter offensive, Patton spoke up first and said, "Gentlemen, we could lose this war." Which was a very unusual thing for Patton to say, he was such a "go, go, tiger," but that reminded everybody of how serious it was. That second big push in the counter-offensive, which the Germans labeled Northwind. Speaking personally, although we got caught up in Northwind, it could have been even worse for Lieutenant Brown and his platoon and his company K and his 3rd Battalion, in fact, the whole 63rd Division because as Hitler himself had thought up this second major thrust, he had picked on the map that they would make the thrust across the Rhine River, aimed at the little French town on the French side of the Rhine, called Fort Lewis, and guess where my platoon was headquartered? Fort Lewis. We would have been, absolutely, the first troops the Germans would have run into, but the German generals prevailed on Hitler to move this thrust a little bit farther along to the west, and, although we were moved over, we weren't as alone there as we would have been, if we'd been the first little group to try to face this onslaught, the last big onslaught of the total German juggernaut. Well, you may know from your reading that the total offensive lasted for about six weeks, December 16th, 1944 right on through into February, I think, about February 6th, or, something like that, for purposes of battle stars and defining the campaign, and it was just a matter of constant fighting, because the Germans would just not give up, and we would surround German units that just, literally, fight to the death, and just when we thought we had things quieted down, they'd come again. We couldn't believe the amount of material that they had to keep throwing into their assaults, particularly, their large, and, really, one of the early uses of their mammoth Tiger tanks, which we so feared, because they had so much armor on them you couldn't knock them out with our anti-tank guns and some of the other tactics that we normally applied against the German tanks. We finally stopped this German assault, this counter attack, and then, we're moving into spring, now, and what we'd been planning to do all along begin to shape up; that was to assault Germany, which meant we had to break through the Siegfried Line ... See, up to this time, the war had been fought, not on German soil, but on French soil, or Belgian soil, or Dutch soil, except, for a little bit, up North, but then we launched, on March the 15th, our major assault. Our division, the 63rd, had the assignment to breakthrough the Siegfried Line. That was quite an adventure. One of the largest artillery assaults during the whole of World War II was the night of March 14th, as we were preparing to move onto the Siegfried Line and attempt to get through it. It's quite an adventure to have artillery shells screaming over your head for hours on end, and hearing them thudding into Germany. Daylight came and we pushed in and through the Siegfried Line. We found out the artillery assault had been so prolonged that we, literally, shocked the troops that were in the Siegfried Line to defend the German border area. They were

just totally stunned. So, we literally had the enemy staggering out of their fortifications and weakly putting their hands on their heads as we instructed them to do so. So the big breakthrough, through and into Germany, took place, and then our particular group, it was just days, and weeks, and months of fighting, day after day. We'd usually, the night before, get an assignment that there's a certain town that we were instructed to assault and take, and come daylight, sometimes with the help of our tanks and so forth, we'd move on into a village, take it, and then find out that we were instructed to move on to the next village. So we just literally began to work our way through Germany.

KB: You mentioned the Germans fighting to the last man; they're fighting to the death. I've read elsewhere there was a lot of resentment toward the Germans, in that they would fight almost to the last man and then when the situation was completely hopeless, they had inflicted so many casualties that were almost unnecessary when the situation was obvious that they were losing, they would surrender, and there was a lot of resentment toward that. Was that your experience, that they fought literally to the last man?

JB: Sometimes we would find the white flag, being shown out a window, or something, and out they come, with their hands over their heads, and be very docile. Sometimes we'd capture some of the SS troopers, because we fought against the 17th SS Division for quite a number of days and weeks. They would fight and then they would retreat, and sometimes they'd be so surly and nasty that we felt that they really didn't mean to give up, and you had to watch them because there was more than one occasion where GIs took prisoners and then had the prisoner turn on them and do them in.

Mark Segaloff: As the war went on, when you captured soldiers did you notice less of the hardened SS troopers and more of the young men and older men fighting that would just give up. Did you notice that as you went along?

JB: I know what you mean, Mark. We called it the "Standard Army," the *Wehrmacht*, they were different than the dyed-in-the-wool SS troopers, sworn to fight to the death, and we always thought they were better trained. Actually, we began to run into situations where we'd literally capture old men, people that we thought, "How come they're still in uniform?" Then we'd run into very young boys, even, as the Germans began to scrape the bottom of the barrel for manpower. So, it was a mishmash of everything from the fiercest fighters you could imagine, like some of those people that had been brought in from Finland, that had been up there, and there was no end to them, they were so tough. But we began to see this, in some cases, and sometimes we'd run into shabby troops, you could tell by their dirty, shabby uniforms and then you would find that another group that were bright and shinny that had been held in reserve.

KB: Another question about the assault on the Siegfried, what was your personal role in that? You described the overall assault, but how close were you to the Siegfried? You heard the artillery go off, did you see the Siegfried? Can you describe it, or anything like that?

JB: We got right up, very close to the emplacements. We had a weapon that we called the Bangalore Torpedo. It was really nothing more than a piece of pipe filled with explosives, and even if someone is in a heavy, fortified position, they have to look out to see where to fire, and

usually American GIs were good with their weapons, so they could fire at a slit in the fortification, with the idea of keeping somebody from looking out and knowing just how to fire, and at the same time as they did that, our brave guys could crawl up with this piece of pipe and put it right against the fortification, sometimes, into the ventilation system of the fortification, and then we'd blow it. So we literally blew our way through the Siegfried Line, but also, of course, the artillery had done considerable damage.

MS: Was breaking through the Siegfried Line easier or harder than you thought?

JB: It turned out to be easier, because of the artillery pre-assault and the fact that it had been so thorough that we just had a bunch of dazed people in there. Early that morning, I couldn't believe it, that one emplacement, the troops literally poured out of it, about thirty of them, they just, they were completely gone. Now, they weren't shock troops, they were just troops to man the Siegfried Line. The tough fighters had already said, "We can't stay here." Their people said, "Let's get out of here, and we'll fight another day." So we did and we had a famous sign that said, "You're passing through the Siegfried Line, thanks to the 63rd Infantry Division." Have you seen that?

KB: I have seen that.

JB: Oh, wonderful. Where did you see it?

KB: I can't remember it off the top of my head, my grandfather showed it to me, in one military history book or another.

JB: Oh, for heaven's sake, great.

KB: There's obviously a difference between attacking a fortified emplacement and these towns that you mentioned attacking. Can you describe the difference with that, what it was like to lead a platoon and assault a town?

JB: All right, I recall an incident that you might like to hear about. By this time I was what was called the executive officer of K Company. I'd been promoted from one of the platoon leaders to what you normally say, assistant company commander; we called it company executive officer, second in command of the company, and the orders that day were to assault a town and take it.

KB: Do you remember what town?

JB: No, I don't. I don't remember the name of that town. In a minute you might understand why. My company commander had said, "Jack, you be with the reserve platoon," and he said, "We'll use our usual attack formation. We'll have two platoons in attack, and your platoon will be back a little bit in reserve, so if you're needed, I can let you know whether to go right or go left." In the meantime, the weapons platoon had moved in with their mortars and their light machine guns and filled in with the two lead platoons. We were lucky that day, because we were assigned a section of Sherman tanks to help us with this assault. Here we are involved in what you've seen so many times in the movies, the tanks moving along with the infantry. Tankers

love that, because they had trouble seeing out of their tanks, and they felt more comfortable with guys outside helping, literally, protect the tank. Of course, infantry loves to have a tank there for their heavier fire. Well, as we approached this town across a very broad field, we came under fire, small arms fire, and pretty soon, we were pretty much spread out and subject to this enemy fire, which obviously was coming from the town. Also, some of what we were quite sure were 88 shells, were dropping, and one dropped right near one of the tanks. Our company commander, who was a real tiger, was riding on top of the tank, which was not unusual, because that put him up high where he could see better and kind of visually control the platoon on the left and the one on the right. This round came in and exploded near the tank, didn't hurt the tank, particularly, but Company K commander Lieutenant Nelson, from West Virginia, it blew him off the tank. Now, I didn't know this until a little bit later on, when I say later on, a couple of minutes later somebody came running back, because I was back, perhaps, oh, a hundred yards, and said, "Lieutenant Brown, you must come up, Lieutenant Nelson has been hit," and so up I went, and there was Lieutenant Nelson on the ground and obviously grievously wounded, but still, he could talk, and he looked up at me and said, "Jack, you've got to take over the company," and I said, "Joe, where is your map?" We folded up our maps so that they formed a square. He said, "It's tucked in my jacket." So I reached in and, sure enough, there was his map and I said to a couple of the men, we did have, I think, we had two first aid men, I said, "Get Lieutenant Nelson back to the aid station as fast as you can," and so, suddenly, I'm company commander. So we continued on to the village, and got to the outskirts of it, and I'll never forget it, the outlying town had a, kind of a shed and I got up on the shed and motioned to a couple of the fellows with me, and we went in through the window, and I couldn't believe it, we're on a second story and here are a lot of packs, all lined up, and then I walked forward, it was a big loft like affair, more than a bedroom, looked out the window and, my God, the street's full of Germans down there. In the meantime, I had told the one platoon to go around one side of the town and the other platoon around the other side, and the platoon that I was with was led by a sergeant, (we'd lost our lieutenant) and by this time, I had about eight fellows in the house with me and I said, "Get your hand grenades," and we threw hand grenades out the front window and killed several Germans, by just throwing them out the windows, because the windows were open. By this time we're into late March, or the first part of April. We took the town, but that's the way it got done. We called that fire and movement. I phoned back on the company radio and said that we'd achieved our objective and the order was to "hold the town until we tell you what to do next."

KB: Were you ever faced with a counter offensive and was that a different situation as well?

JB: Very often, almost a typical German tactic, was to move off if it looks like they weren't winning, but then they'd come back again. They didn't in this town, and we found out why. They had moved on to another town and the next day I'm sure we faced those same troops again. It was one town or city after another as shown on the route of the 63rd Division through southern Germany.

KB: Mr. Brown is once again referring to the Class of 1944 Military History book.

JB: There's where the Siegfried Line was, between, this is France, of course, and this is Germany. Saarbrücken was one anchor of the Siegfried Line. We broke right through it and

then, what we called our famous “left hook.” In boxing, of course, that’s a left hook going left to right. We were somewhere along this routing. Now, this routing took two months to do this, because we got to Landsburg, very early in May, just before the war was over. But that firefight I just described was typical of a day’s activity. Supply got to be a big problem.

KB: Was that something that affected you personally, supply?

JB: Yes, you had to have ammunition, and so, usually, at night we would expect the people behind us to come up with jeep loads full of ammunition and food, and replacement men.

KB: And this continued all the way up to April when you reached Landsberg, outside of Munich?

JB: Yes.

MS: How did you find yourself greeted by the German people, not necessarily the *Wehrmacht* or the SS but the German people?

JB: We, of course, we kept running into civilians. When we were attacking a town, the civilians all went underground. They all had their root cellars and when you first got to a town like we just had taken, you’d wonder where the people were. But then they were hidden in barns, or down crouched under in their beds, and everything else, and gradually they would come out. But timidly, but not aggressively at all.

MS: Did they offer you food at all anytime?

JB: Oh no, no. Interestingly, many times a religious person would appear, almost first, a priest, for example, or somebody garbed, and say, “I’m Reverend . . .” and, in German, would let us know that he was a religious man and that he hoped we wouldn’t hurt his people.

MS: Did you encounter any of the concentration camps or any of the remnants of that?

JB: We did. That’s why I’m glad this map shows Landsburg. We finally got down to Landsburg, which is outside of Munich. There’s Munich over there, and we were the first to overrun one of the concentration camps.

MS: What was that like? Do you know the name of the camp?

JB: Yes, it was the Landsburg concentration camp, a satellite camp of Dachau. Dachau was right up the road. Actually, as you probably in your reading know that there were some five hundred and fifty concentration camps. Everybody remembers Dachau and Buchenwald, but many of the main camps had satellite camps, because in many cases they were using slave labor. Later on, as you know, we found out that the Germans were still producing all kinds of things, right on up to the last minute, in underground factories, and using people that they had brought in, civilians from all over Europe. These slave laborers were penned up in these concentration camps and, when we went in, we found out that the inmates there hadn’t been fed for days and

were in rather pitiful condition. We saw with our own eyes that when somebody couldn't work anymore, through malnutrition, or just literally worked to death, they cremated them, and so we saw stacks of bodies in the crematorium. I've got some rather terrible pictures that were taken by our division photographers of just how bad it was. Would you like to hear a happy story?

KB: I would but I have one question. Were you able to find out what had happened to the guards? What was the condition of the camp when you arrived? You said that the prisoners hadn't been fed in days. Were they being cared for, maybe cared for isn't the right word, but looked after?

JB: The guards had taken off. They would have been shot, of course, as the enemy if we could have done it, but the camp was devoid of any German control by that time. It was quite obvious that the victorious American Army was just making a final sweep in; you're down in Bavaria now, of course. But you asked me about German civilians. Backing up, I guess, this was right at the end of April. Our battalion got orders to take Heidelberg. Heidelberg was the famous university city, Heidelberg Castle, and we prepared to do so. We'd fought down to where we were on the other side of the River, the Neckar River, and we're making our plan to assault the next day and we had lots of support from our artillery. In fact, two hours ago [during the Class of '44 sixtieth anniversary], that General Fritz Kroesen [Class of '44] once said, "You know, we had the best division artillery, I believe, in all of the European theater," and so they were prepared to fire across the river and soften up Heidelberg. Because the only way to get to Heidelberg was to go across the river in little boats, and the engineers had brought rubber boats up for us, and very small pontoon type bridge craft. Well, make the long story short, we were getting ready to paddle across and assault Heidelberg, after it was going to be shelled. I happened to be standing near the battalion commander, getting orders because my Company K was going to be the assault company.

MS: So you were going to lead the assault.

JB: Yes. I was going to be the first company across with my platoons and while we're standing there, a boy came up, and my battalion commander had a good command of German, and the boy talked to him, and then Colonel Shiffman turned to me and said, "Brown, can you believe it, this lad is telling me that I should talk to the *Burgermeister* of Heidelberg, and that he's on the telephone at the *geisthaus*." We were standing in the little village across the river, on our side, and a *geisthaus* is like the CT, a little tavern, and, incredibly, in we went, and they handed the colonel a telephone, and he's talking to the *Burgermeister* of Heidelberg, who said, "The troops have left. There are no troops in Heidelberg and we declare it an open city. There will be no need for any fighting. You can come across anytime you want and we would put bed sheets out of the windows as a sign of our not fighting." He didn't say "Surrender," he said, "not fighting." I get this from my battalion commander, because I wasn't on the telephone. So to make a long story short, we paddled, we had to paddle across the river because all the bridges had been blown, and just walked, literally, walked into Heidelberg. Pretty soon the whole battalion is across the river and the townspeople came out. There was no welcome, or anything, but they stood sheepishly by and nobody waved at us, or anything, but it was plain to see, we were in an open, defeated city. Incredible! I'm happy we did, because I've been back to Heidelberg

several times, and it would have been terrible to chop up that city, one of the famous libraries in Europe, and all that sort of thing.

MS: Did the artillery affect that? What did your artillery hit?

JB: Well, of course, we never fired. Yes, that held off the artillery. But then, a couple of days later, as we left Heidelberg and went farther south, we ran into the troops that had vacated the city, and boy, they had a goal line stand, believe me. We had a terrible time with them. Okay, so German people, we found them docile. There was no nonsense. Later on, when I got to Korea, where I couldn't tell a North Korean from the South Korean. that was something else again.

KB: Maybe we can move into the occupation.

JB: After Landsburg, our 63rd Infantry Division was pulled back, and this was about the 2nd or 3rd of May. On the 7th, the Germans gave up and that was the end of the war. But then the rumor persisted that we were going to, perhaps, move on to the Pacific War. But that didn't happen either, and through a very happy circumstance, a buddy of mine and I got tapped to go to Berlin and play a role in the Military Government of Germany, where we stayed for another year and a half. That was interesting.

KB: That brings us to two questions. First of all, I'd like to hear about that, but, let me just back a little, there was, of course, the no fraternization rule. I've heard that that was not always followed. Do you have any stories about that, that no fraternization rule?

JB: You can't hold young Americans like yourselves down, and it didn't take long for the troops to find solace, and friendship, and willing companions. Maybe it helped in the complete takeover of Germany, but, for a while, at the very beginning, of course, it was all *verboten*, but it didn't last very long. It's amazing how the American troops took to the German civilians, once the war was over, and got along. Not only with the young girls but the whole populace.

KB: Well, then moving on to your experience in the military government. Can you tell us about that, what your duties were, and how you saw that working?

JB: All right, I guess, I have to say thanks to my Rutgers background. When I got to Berlin I was assigned to the Economics Division of Military Government, as an Administrative Officer, and played a minor role in helping do all kinds of things to occupy Germany from a trade and commerce standpoint. One example: we found out very quickly that the Germans would bankrupt us if we kept sending over food supplies to them, because they were starving to a certain extent and we said, "You've got to feed yourselves, you Germans," and they said, "All right, but we need vegetable seeds to plant, and seed potatoes," and we said, "Well, go get them. Where do you get them?" They said, "We bring them in from other countries. Denmark is our major source of vegetable seeds," and so we had to, literally, help the Germans get going again and restore all their activities, economically speaking, and it was fascinating to kind of put postwar Germany back together. I had temporary duty in Denmark to help the vegetable seed project.

KB: Chronologically, was this part of the Marshall Plan or was this before the Marshall Plan?

JB: Before the Marshall Plan. It was before the Marshall Plan, but those efforts in military government were working fine, but then the Russians kind of turned on us, and General Marshall, in his wisdom, because I'm talking '45-'46, General Marshall in his wisdom said, "If we don't help all of Europe get back on its feet, it's going to turn Communist on us." In his famous speech at Harvard University in, I guess it was June of 1947, that's when he unfolded the Marshall Plan, which, you know, was really Truman's plan, but Truman said, "I'll never get this through congress as a Democrat because the Republicans will say, 'Ah, can't do that.'" So he said, "Everybody loves General Marshall," and so everybody backed up the Marshall Plan regardless of political affiliation. At least I've read that, whether it's true or not, I don't know.

KB: In Berlin, being part of the military government, you brought up the problems with the Russians, that was divided into four occupation zones. Can you tell us about the interaction between the different Allied occupation zones? If you had any interaction with the British or the Russians or anything?

JB: At the Potsdam Conference. It was decided by the victorious Allies that Germany would be divided into four parts. The French would get one part, the British one part, the Russians one part and the Americans would take southern Germany, primarily Bavaria. Then, what about Berlin? We didn't want Berlin to be totally in the Russian sphere of influence, in our wisdom as we looked ahead, and so we said, "Well, we'll do the same thing about Berlin. We'll divide Berlin into four sectors and each country will have a part of Berlin." But see, now you've got a problem because you got Berlin with all four powers operating, but they're all in the Russian zone of Germany. But it was agreed, of course, that it would be a cooperative activity, the occupation and control of Germany, and all four countries would get together and do it as they worked things out. It sounded like a great plan, but pretty soon the Russians kind of got nasty, and in the monthly meetings in Berlin, where all would sit down and talk about things that had to be done in all of Germany, the Russians kept causing more and more problems as they became totally uncooperative. But that's the way, originally, Germany was set up to be administered, and it was. You've probably read about the airlift [Editor's note: Berlin Airlift, 1948-49], because at one point, the only gateway to get to our part of Berlin, of course, was to go across the Russian zone, and the same with the British, and the French. So the Russians reached a point saying, "You can't come across except once a month," or something like that. We said, "Now wait a minute, we've got to resupply our people in Berlin. We go back and forth and our people and the only way to get there is to fly over your zone and land at Tempelhof Airport." Thank goodness, we wrangled out air corridors, so when they really closed down the land routes, we were able to fly coal and food into Berlin, to feed Berlin. It all got rather stupid, but it got very nasty, and the beginning of the Cold War is what it was.

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KB: While you're in Berlin, and, of course, throughout the whole war, your brother was serving in the Pacific theater. Perhaps you could tell us a little about your brother and also, if you're able to communicate with him and communicate with your family as well?

JB: All right, a pleasure to talk about my brother, Dave, who was a year behind me here at Rutgers. He came back to Rutgers after the war to graduate as a CE. So when the war came along, although Dave had been in the ROTC, he was not in the advanced course. He was only a sophomore, and he got picked up in the ASTP, because he was a civil engineer, and went and took basic training and then the Army, in their wisdom, picked him up and sent him to the newly formed Transportation Corps OCS, down in New Orleans. As a 2nd lieutenant, he was assigned to one of these Duck companies, the amphibious trucks that can churn into shore, then they become a truck as they go up the beach and inland. All of this happened in the Pacific, in his case. He was sent to the Pacific Theater of Operations. He participated in several of the island hopping activities, Iwo Jima, Eniwetok, Okinawa, and in his case, they were all preparing for the final assault on Japan. When the atom bomb dropped the war was over for my brother, just before he would have been in some of the early stages of invading Japan. That would have been a terrible mess over there.

KB: Were you able to keep in contact with your brother?

JB: An occasional letter, yes. The Armed Forces mail services were wonderful all through the war. V mail, where they reduced eight and a half by eleven sheets, written or typed, to microfilm and flew it over, and then reproduced it again, and you got one of the early forms of facsimile, and also regular mail, quite a bit. So we were able to keep in touch.

KB: Were you able to get in touch with your parents?

JB: Yes, my mother was an avid letter writer. She wrote my brother and I almost everyday, bless her heart. Sometimes at mail call I'd get more letters than anybody else. I'd always say they were girlfriends but they were my mother.

MS: I see that you have a Purple Heart.

JB: Yes.

MS: How were you wounded? Where was that?

JB: It was an 88 that was the troublemaker. That artillery piece that we feared the most, really. It happened when I was a company commander. We were moving down a deep defile and ran into a road block typical of what the Germans were doing to impede us. They would blow trees; easy to do. You wrap prima cord, which is an explosive technique, around a tree and set the charge and make the tree just fall down like that on one side of a roadway and then on the other side and you have a considerable roadblock. One of their techniques was then to zero in 88 artillery on that spot. I said, "Come on, let's go," and I was clamoring over this mess, roadblock of trees, when in came an 88 shell and blew me off of this roadblock that had been created. Thank goodness, it just caught me in the ankle, but the next morning I couldn't walk; my ankle had swelled up. So I called my battalion commander and said, "Colonel Shiffman, I'm afraid I can't walk, I'm going to have to turn the company over to," and I picked one of my lieutenants to do it. He said, "Well, have them get you back to the aid station and we'll get you fixed up."

KB: How long did the process of medical treatment take; was it just a day thing when you went back to the aid station?

JB: No, I went back to the aid station for an overnight, and then back to a field hospital. About a week later I could limp around and reported back for duty.

KB: How long before you rejoined the company?

JB: I didn't rejoin the company because I was still limping, and so I went back to battalion headquarters and was given a new assignment: Battalion Intelligence Officer, where I could ride around in a jeep, because a battalion intelligence officer had a jeep assigned to him with a driver. The war was over shortly after that, so it all worked out rather well.

KB: Were you involved in any juicy bits of intelligence?

JB: Yes, because we, by this time, the war was over, and we were assigned a piece of geography and my job was to make sure there was nothing going on that could effect or hurt the troops and, also, to find out where the mines had been laid, for example. We lost so many people to mine fields, and some of them personnel mines; these little wooden boxes with a charge in that you stepped on and it would just blow your foot off. So many guys just were out of commission with a blown foot, and how would I find out where they were? Many times the civilians knew where they were. We'd say, "You must help us because you don't want your children walking on mines, or our troops, or any of your people." The Germans got considerably cooperative early on. I don't know of any, in our areas, at least where they turned against us, or try to blow us up, or anything like that. One incident, but that was in Berlin, my buddy and I were walking down the street and someone fired at us from somewhere.

MS: After the war? Do you have a date?

JB: We were in Berlin so this would have been in July 1945 and we just automatically dropped to the sidewalk and rolled over into the gutter. Who it was, I don't know, maybe some disgruntled soldier that was hiding out, or something like that. A lot of Germans, not a lot, but some German soldiers deserted and sneaked back home; got in civilian clothes real quick and never said they were soldiers. So I have no idea who might have done it. There was not much of that.

KB: One of the things that I've heard is that you couldn't find the Nazi in Germany after 1945.

JB: So true, everybody was against Hitler.

KB: Well, before we move on, is there anything about World War II that we as interviewers have missed?

JB: There is one episode I'd like to comment on. I had a chance to go to the Nuremberg Trials. It was because one of the fellows, one of the Rutgers fellows that I'd been with, went all through

basic training, OCS with, Bob, ended up as Captain of the Guard Company at Nuremburg. You've seen pictures of the fellows with their white hats standing behind and I called Bob up . . .

MS: What's this fellow's name?

JB: [Editor's note: Robert E Feil, RC '44] It kind of slipped out of my mind. We were talking about him last night at supper. I didn't know him that well, but I knew him of course, and I can find out that name for you. In fact, he'd be a wonderful guy to talk with.

MS: Is he still alive?

JB: I don't know I'll find out tonight whether he's still alive, or not. Well anyway, Bob said, "Sure, come on down, bring your buddy with you." So Captain Hartman and I jeeped over to Nuremburg and it was no problem to do this because I told the people at the battalion headquarters I was going off on a little bit of S-2 work Bob said, "Follow me." We walked into the courtroom and he said, "I've got seats for you right there," and a few minutes later, in marched the whole gang, Goering, Jodel, and they were right there. I could almost reach over and touch Goering, which was an incredible experience, and we spent the whole day in that courtroom. They were indicting them for their crimes in Poland, where they were so terrible to the Polish people. They had films and people that had escaped came in to tell their stories. You're hearing all this on head phones. IBM had channels you could listen in half a dozen languages: French, German, Russian, of course, English, but what an experience, and then later on they hung some of them and Rudolf Hess ended up in Spandau Prison in Berlin. He was ninety-one when he finally died. The last of the lot. That was quite an experience. The point of that story is we did pursue things through to indicting them for war crimes and fairly, in the hall of justice, gave them their day in court, and then declared them guilty and had them pay the penalty.

KB: Maybe we'll move to your discharge, your return to the US and what that was like . . .

JB: It was a quick trip once I got home. Because in the meantime, I'd applied for Harvard Business School. They had communicated with me and said, "You have a tentative acceptance but you must be ready to go into the October class, but we require a personal interview first." It was my time up, anyway, on my duties over there, and so I got back, went straight from New York City to Boston and had my interview, and then back home to New Jersey and didn't hear. September came on, this was in late August. September 1946 arrived and didn't hear and so I said, "I better make some arrangements to get back in college," because the GI Bill thing cropped up. So I came up to Rutgers, my brother was coming back to finish up, and so I came back and we got a room over in Ford Hall, and I said, "Well, if it's not going to be Harvard Business School, I'll finish up at Rutgers." Because, unusual, for Harvard Business School, they had a provision for people that had an appropriate military background, even though they hadn't received their undergraduate degree, and they accepted all that I'd done in military government. I needed nine credits, I think, and so they said, "That takes care of it." I tried to apply that for my degree here at Rutgers and President Mason Gross said, "Jeez, Brown, can't you be happy with an MBA from Harvard? You can't apply the same credit to two places." So he said, "Why don't you to go on and enjoy your Harvard Business School background?" This was after I graduated

up there. But later on the powers that be here took another look, and so, I did get my BS degree from Rutgers, finally.

MS: Your undergraduate or your graduate?

JB: My undergraduate degree.

MS: So you were accepted to Harvard for the graduate MBA Program without graduating here.

JB: Yes, very unusual situation.

KB: I have two questions and they are different chronologically. First, I suppose would be to back up, because I've realized we've forgotten this. Your Bronze Star had two oak leaf clusters, were those both earned in World War II?

JB: Yes.

MS: Do you recall the incidents in which you earned those?

JB: One, I was still platoon leader, when I got the second one. We were going through a heavily wooded area. My scout came back and whispered to me. He said, "Lieutenant Brown, there is something going on up ahead. I saw a couple of them but they didn't see me." So I went up with my scout and I motioned to my two sergeants. By this time I only had two squads left, and we crawled up, and there was no doubt about it. There was some installation up there. So I said to the one sergeant, I said, "You get your guys and follow me." To the other sergeant I said, "We'll go around, and when you start firing, have your guys fire everything they've got, but you've got to all stop at the same time, because when you stop, we're going to come in from the side with the other squad." It was that simple, and so we crawled around, sneaked through the woods, and I could look up and see through some of the trees this building. The first squad did a great job of firing. They didn't know quite what they were firing at and then they stopped and yelled, "Cease firing," and yelled to the squad I was with, "Now is the time," and we rushed forward, and what we'd done was overrun an artillery headquarters. Because we've been advancing fast, they had no idea that there'd be Americans this close to them. The place was not really defended at all, because it was an artillery headquarters, and we ended up rounding up thirty-three people, most of them officers. I gathered up the maps that showed where the guns in the area were, and where their fields of fire were set up. It turned out, I found out later, immensely helpful to the battalion and regiment, and maybe, even farther back at higher headquarters. It was a good example of fire and maneuver. No one got wounded, even, and it was a major capture.

KB: Do you recall your third oak leaf cluster incident?

JB: The third one was for that incident where I took over the company and became company commander.

KB: Going to the Harvard Business School, did you use your GI Bill benefits on that?

JB: Yes, I couldn't have done it otherwise. Most of my class were officers back from the services. I had two roommates, usually the rooms there were for two people, but Harvard Business School kind of let down their bars, a little bit, to give more returning veterans an opportunity. My one roommate was a major in the Air Force, and the other one was a lieutenant, Sonar Officer in the Navy, and I was Army. Most of my class were people like that.

MS: Was there interaction between those that were veterans and the fresh eighteen year olds who didn't experience the war? Was there friction?

JB: There were none at Harvard Business School. It was almost solely military, or people with appropriate backgrounds. There weren't any young people there, really. At my age, I was one of the youngest. My brother, of course, ran into, here at Rutgers, the young group. He was a Theta Chi man and I never heard him say that there was any friction at all. Evidently, the young guys looked up to the guys that had been in the war.

KB: Then I suppose the next thing is to move on to Korea.

JB: All right, because after I graduated from Harvard Business School, I went right to work. For me, it was RCA down in Camden. The year 1948, television was just coming in and I was fascinated by television. I said, "If I'm going to work, what a place to go to work." Because, already, RCA was number one in television and RCA was right down the street from where my folks lived. I stayed in the reserves and was assigned to a New Jersey unit down in Camden. Along came Korea, and they found me again, and I got called back to active duty. The law, at that time, was that reserve officers could be recalled to active duty for seventeen months. How they picked seventeen months I never did find out. So, recalled for duty I was, even though I was married by this time. My daughter was actually born down in the station hospital in Fort Gordon, Georgia, where I was first posted. After going through a military government civil affairs school down there, off to Korea.

KB: As the conflict was developing, how aware were you and, also, how did you feel about it because it seems, in retrospect, far less clear cut than World War II?

JB: It was indeed, as you all know. The President (Truman) even called it a police action to start off with. It didn't look like it was going to be much of thing, at first, but it certainly did heat up, as the North Koreans came down in such force, and we suddenly discovered that there was almost a million Chinese back of them in North Korea. But that's a quick summary, but it was quite obvious that we had to do it. There was no doubt in my mind because we'd seen how nasty the Russians had become. Because, don't forget, the Russians kind of controlled North Korea and we controlled South Korea, that's the way it was. So it wasn't the North Koreans coming down to take over, it was the Russians coming down to take over. So President Truman was right, "we can't let this happen." So the Korean Police Action quickly erupted into a first class war.

KB: Can you tell us about going over?

JB: My orders, when I went overseas, were to go up to the Port of Seattle, Washington, and go aboard a troop transport. It was an old World War II Victory ship and we went, first, to Japan and then off loaded and then on to Korea.

KB: How much time did you spend in Japan?

JB: Three days.

KB: So you didn't get the chance to see much of Japan?

JB: No, not really at all. A couple of nights in Yokohama where the ship had docked, but then, I got orders to fly to Korea. I went over as a casual officer; I didn't go over in charge of a lot of troops, because my orders were to report to 8th Army headquarters in Korea, and so I flew over and that started me in Korea. One fun thing. As I get aboard what we called courier flights, because it doesn't take long to get from Japan to Korea, and we had fleets of DC-3s, the civilian plane but we called them C-47s, the military version, so I went out to Tashikawa Airport, in Tokyo, and they said, "You're going out on the next flight to Korea, so climb aboard." I'm the only person in the airplane, surrounded by mailbags. It was strictly a mail run and the two young lieutenants up in the cockpit said, "Hey, Captain, you want to come up and sit with us?" And I said, "I'd be delighted." So they had a little box, really, for me, and I sat right behind them and we soon took off. They said, "How would you like an up close look at Mount Fuji?" I said, "Why sure, whatever." So with this, they banked that plane and we circled Mount Fuji, I swear, so close I felt I could reach down and scoop up snow off the top of it. It was almost foolhardy, the plane's wings were just so close against Mount Fuji, but I looked down. You know, in your lifetime you have experiences that are unusual. How's that for being unusual? Well, thirty minutes later, we dropped down in Seoul and I started my adventures in Korea.

KB: Well, your first duties were in 8th Army headquarters?

JB: Yes, because of my experiences in military government in Europe and, I guess, my Harvard Business School MBA, my Army records had turned me into a military government civil affairs officer instead of an infantry officer. So when I checked in, the major said, "We're glad to have you over here, Captain, we need company commanders." I said, "Wait a minute, Major, what are you talking about? I'm slated to be a civil affairs officer over here." He said, "We have a urgent need for company commanders." I said, "If that's what you wanted over here from me, you should have sent me to Fort Benning and got me ready to be company commander again." I said, "I haven't fired a shot in anger in three years." Then I stopped talking. Then he said, "Brown," he didn't call me captain, he said, "Brown, you're right, it would be a wrong thing to do to you." He said, "No more talk about making you a company commander again, I'll write your orders to go on to 8th Army headquarters." I wouldn't be sitting here if I'd gone up, because company commanders were getting cut up pretty fast up there on the 38th Parallel at that time. Because you never knew when the next wave of those crazy Chinese would be sent down. They were crazy. Have you read about it? They would send them down in hordes.

KB: Human wave assaults.

JB: Yes, the human wave assault, good for you. I would have gotten caught up in one of those I bet.

KB: Did you have to experience combat in Korea?

JB: Not combat, but I came close to getting killed a couple of times, because after a tour of duty at 8th Army headquarters, and another interesting assignment, they needed people like me up above the 38th Parallel in North Korea and so I went up to X Corps headquarters and had a couple of close shaves up there.

KB: In 8th Army headquarters what were your duties?

JB: As a civil affairs officer, we would have assignments to go out into the countryside, to lower government levels, and we always had interpreters because I couldn't speak any Korean, and just make sure that things were going all right. We always said, "To keep the Koreans from messing up the war," because the Korean civilians learned very quickly the techniques of stealing from us. They'd steal gasoline, they'd steal a jeep, they'd break into a compound and steal whatever they could get their hands on, not all of them, of course, but there were roving gangs and the only way to control some of it, other than have MPs, as guards, was to try to get the local levels of Korean government to keep a lid on things. So we'd go into a village and sit around with the headman, on the floor with his people, and if we were having problems with young people breaking in to something or other, we'd frankly say, "You must stop it."

KB: Did you sense a lot of corruption in the local government?

JB: Yes.

MS: Do you have any particular stories about that?

JB: Just them breaking into military installations and stealing things.

KB: That was the government itself, the local government?

JB: Well, local people. Of course, we always got assurances from the local governor, or mayor, or whatever, that all these will not happen again, "Our young people are unruly." But it got so bad that I had one other assignment because it reached terrible proportions and the Congress began to say, "We're not going to send any more money over to help the Korean people until we make sure the money is being properly spent and not misspent." So President Truman signed an executive order to set up a commission and over came a group from the United States, a special presidential commission, to look into the conduct of our aid to the Korean people, and I was tapped to be the administrative officer, because the Army had to administer this commission. We supplied them with where to live and I had a fleet of jeeps to take care of them. It was a sizable group of about twenty, some congressmen, several high up military people from the Pentagon, and that was a very interesting experience. I was at low level but intermingling with some pretty high level people and they, of course, sat down with President [Syngman] Rhee [Editor's Note: President of South Korea from 1946-60] of Korea and he assured them that the

Korean government would make sure that things were going right. But we were losing huge amounts of money. One example, they claim a troop ship came in loaded with lumber one time and the cargo just disappeared.

KB: When you say that you mean the US?

JB: Yes, for the Koreans to use, and what we called these bad Koreans, "the slicky, slicky boys." They went aboard the ship that night and, literally, threw overboard all the lumber, floated it ashore, and it disappeared into the Korean economy. We discovered where part of the lumber went because it had been marked with, I think it was Portland, Oregon origin. It had been used to construct houses of ill repute for the American troops, which was a thriving business within the Korean economy. We tried to control it, of course, we didn't want our troops doing things like that, but, don't forget, we were operating in a free country. Korean people were not the enemy; we were over there to help them.

KB: Who was your commanding officer, while you were in 8th Army headquarters, who is the commander of the 8th Army?

JB: That would have been General Van Fleet, having just replaced General Ridgeway, who went on to replace General MacArthur.

KB: Did you ever meet General Van Fleet and did you ever have any interactions with him?

JB: No, I'd been close enough physically to have him say, sometimes, "Good morning, Captain." I'd say, "Good morning sir, good morning, General." But that's as close as we got.

KB: What was the general feeling towards all three of those figures that you mentioned, all very prominent obviously, MacArthur, Van Fleet and Ridgeway? Being so high up, in headquarters there, there must have been a real sense of the differences between the individuals.

JB: Of course, I'm a MacArthur fan. I keep reading negative things about him, and something just very recently, but we have to give old Mac great total credit. That book, *American Caesar* says it better than some of the detractors. Who else could have taken over the Japanese situation the way he did? I don't know. His military genius, and the Inchon Landings, for example, saved our bacon over there, really. We would have been pushed out of Korea if he hadn't conceived that, and, I believe, he was the one that conceived it. So he may have had his faults, he was a *prima donna*, and all that sort of thing, but he was one of the best we've ever had in uniform. General Van Fleet, of course, had a wonderful reputation.

MS: And General Ridgeway?

JB: He's one of my favorites, too. I guess those that served under him, feel he was tough and ruthless, and all that. You hear all kinds of words like that. Boy, if you did anything wrong, that was your end with Ridgeway. He would even put a medal on someone but then after the ceremony, he'd say, "But you didn't move fast enough. You should have covered more ground

that day or else you would have gotten a better medal." But Ridgeway was one of our very best, also.

KB: So after you were selected then for X Corps' headquarters, that was directly out of 8th Army?

JB: Yes. We had two commands at that time, 8th Army, and X Corps was a separate command. This was MacArthur's idea. He said, "I'll run the 8th Army up the west side of Korea, and the X Corps up the other side." But by the time I got to 8th Army, in his wisdom, Ridgeway had put it all together, and melded the 8th Army and the X Corps. Does that answer your question?

KB: Yes. So you were really, it was just an extension of serving with the 8th Army?

JB: Yes, it was, yes.

KB: So you had more or less the same duties?

JB: Same duties, yes. A couple of extra duties, because up there we were using Korean Service Corps troops. These were Korean civilians that carried the ammunition and water up on their backs, on what we called A-frames, and at one point, I was in charge of company of three hundred of, I called them "little guys." Koreans aren't all that big, but, boy, were they strong! You could put gallons of water on their backs, in those cans that we used, and ammunition shells, maybe two shells, but they'd go up the hill and deliver it to the site. I had quite an adventure with being in charge of three hundred of those fellows. I had Korean lieutenants to help me, by the way, because I couldn't really converse. I learned some Korean words, "*Bali, Bali*," that means "hurry up."

KB: Within the Korean Service Corps people, was there any corruption, was there any sense of graft, and the Korean officers what was your sense of them?

JB: Well, we were in North Korea, so they weren't in the cities, so they were up at the mountains with us and there was no way for them to be corrupt, really. Now, we paid them, and then we had a PX for them, so they could go spend their money, or gamble it amongst themselves. I always suspected the Korean lieutenants, who I had, who would pay them, got "kickbacks."

-----END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE-----

KB: This continues the second interview with John W. Brown, Jr. in New Brunswick, New Jersey on May 15, 2004. Mr. Brown, you were speaking, briefly, before the tape stopped, about the Korean officer with the Korean Service Corps and your suspicions about them.

JB: All right, there we were, above the 38th Parallel, and I was in charge of these three hundred civilian Koreans, but they'd been conscripted as workers and turned over to us by the Korean government, and their jobs were to ferry supplies up to the frontline troops for us, carrying all these things on their backs. We did pay them in the native currency once a month. Then we had

a little PX set up, they could buy whatever they wanted. They were quite well taken care of. We had them in tents and we had a mess hall for them, kind of rudimentary, and good Korean cooks. I learned to enjoy Korean cooking, including *Kim Chee*, good for you. There was nobody to kiss so it didn't matter that my breath would have been otherwise somewhat offensive. I tried *Kim Chee* a couple of times with my wife, when I got back home, but she said, "No more *Kim Chee*, or no more kissing." Good for you. But I suspected that those lieutenants got some kickbacks from them. I couldn't prove it, of course, because Koreans have a very definite way of authority; those in charge make those below them cringe usually.

KB: You mentioned you had several close calls while at X Corps headquarters, and I was wondering if you would talk about those?

JB: There was a continual problem in the fact that I couldn't tell a North Korean from a South Korean. The natives, the dialects were a little bit different from North to South, but in appearance, of course, they all looked like Koreans, and one time I was in a situation where I asked a Korean for help and he turned out to be a North Korean. He attacked me and I was able to take care of him. It was down on a seawall and I was able to throw him over the seawall. He ran off so I don't think I hurt him too much, but you had to be careful because there was a constant infiltration of North Koreans into South Korea, and some of them with a mission to do harm to us the "enemy."

KB: What were your duties exactly?

JB: Yes, knowing the commission was coming over, General Van Fleet said to one of his subordinates, actually, General Lyman P. Leminzer, later Chief-of-Staff, U.S. Army, "Set up a small army group to make sure that they're supported when they're over here, with interpreters and transportation. They've got to be well housed and, of course, well fed and with accommodations where they could meet with Korean officials, and so forth." So the Army officer in charge of that, a Colonel Brown, no relationship, turned to me and said, "I'm going to be in charge of making things smooth for the commission, in helping them get their job done, and I want you as my administration officer," and so I assumed a number of duties, some as simple as making sure the conference room was well set up, and in other cases making sure that transportation was available to take them to President Rhee's palace, on occasion, and that type of thing. Nothing dramatic, but it did give me a chance to kind of rub elbows, or be in close touch, with some very interesting people who were very pleasant and even kind to me. I got several nice thank yous, in one way, or another. By the way, other than that, I was awarded an Army Commendation Medal, but that was for the work up in North Korea.

KB: What ribbon was that?

JB: It's called the Army Commendation Medal. It was evidently decided that I'd done a pretty good job with that Korean Service Corps group.

MS: Well, then maybe you can tell us about coming home and your discharge and your life after.

JB: All right, I'll cover that very quickly, because it was fun to go home, because I had a young wife and a little baby daughter waiting for me. One of the thrills of my life was as our troop ship came into the Golden Gate, there at San Francisco, it was a very foggy morning and then suddenly, as we passed under the Golden Gate Bridge, somebody said, "Look up," and there bits of the bridge appeared through the mist and we finally realized we were back in the good old USA. Home to New Jersey and to Jean, and daughter, Nancy, and right back to work within a couple of weeks at Radio Corporation of America, and on to my business career. I'd moved on to another company, or two, over the years, but then, finally, an early retirement from Bausch & Lomb, the optical people in Rochester, New York. It didn't take my wife long to realize that retirement wasn't so good an arrangement. She, literally, said, "You can't hang around here for the rest of your life." So I went off and became a college professor and had a whole new career, which I enjoyed until rather recently.

KB: What would you teach?

JB: Business Administration. Marketing was my specialty. In my business career I'd been in marketing and sales work, and so it was fun to become a professor of marketing. I never tired of telling war stories to the students based on things that have happened to me over all those years in the business world.

KB: Certainly enthralling.

JB: Can I make a comment? Here I am on campus because it's the 60th anniversary reunion of our Rutgers Class of 1944, and as MacArthur said at his farewell address at West Point, "This may be my last muster." We were determined to make our gifts to Rutgers as nice as possible. So we announced a couple of hours ago at lunch that we have crested over \$3,000,000.00 to turn over to Rutgers. Some of us have indicated that part of that money should go to this wonderful Archive Project that you people are involved in.

KB: We're certainly grateful.

JB: Please continue it and keep up the good work and God Bless.

KB: Well, thank you very much. We've truly enjoyed this interview and please, any time. This concludes the second interview with John W. Brown, Jr. in New Brunswick, New Jersey on May 15, 2004.

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

Reviewed by Kevin Bing 6/11/04

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 6/21/04

Reviewed by John Brown Jr. 11/27/04