

ORAL HISTORY
Brice Ramsay
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Interviewer: Joyce Sullentrop (JS)
Interviewee: Brice Ramsay (BR)
Tape 1 of 2
Side A

JS - How old were you when the war started in 1939?

BR - In 1939 I was 17. I was at a CMTC in Fort Riley, Citizen Military Training Camp. I was up there and I heard that Germany had invaded Poland and I wondered how long before we get in this thing?

JS - What did you, your family, and the community think of the war?

BR - Nobody liked it. Nobody likes war. We were hoping Roosevelt was going to keep us out of the war. Of course, when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, we were really at it then.

JS - Can you explain the Citizen Military Training Corp and how did you get in it?

BR - Well, I was 17 and I had heard that they had this and, you got 30 bucks for going up there. I hitchhiked up there and I hear it was the Cavalry and the Second Cavalry came bringing all these horses out for us kids to ride. I said, "Good Heavens!" Something was wrong with every one of those horses. I looked around and got the biggest horse. She was a big one and her name was Greta. She was a real tame horse and the thing is, she took such big strides that I would always end up there with the captain. The captain would say, "Get back there, soldier, get back there."

JS - Did you hitchhike by yourself or did others?

BR - Oh, by myself.

JS - Was it hard to hitchhike?

BR - No, I liked to go and I hitchhiked all over the countryside when I was a teenager. You wouldn't do it, now, but everybody hitchhiked in those days.

JS - So your training was, mainly, riding horses?

BR - At that time, it was. Actually, I had volunteered for the coast artillery but, that was all filled up or something so they sent me to Fort Riley so that's how I got in the Cavalry.

JS - How long were you in there?

BR - 30 days. I had heard about Hitler invading Poland so I was probably thinking about it.

JS - You had already registered for the draft?

BR - No. I was going up to Kansas City to try to get to be a navy pilot. I didn't get to, I flunked out. Then, I went over to try to get to be an air force pilot but I had a nose obstruction, and they wouldn't take me then, so I went over and joined the air force ground department as a mechanic. I went down to Shepard Field in Wichita Falls, Texas and I went in and had my nose operated on. Then, I passed my examination and I went down to San Antonio to pre-flight school. We went up to Vernon, Texas to flying school and I trained with a pilot and I scared the heck out of him. There were little old PT19s around there and I was up there with him. We came by a little field there and I saw it and thought it was a beautiful field. If he would shut that engine back, I could land there. We got about 500 yards beyond that and he shut the engine off. I just wheeled that plane like that and like that and BONK! He never said a word. So, I took off and went back and, of course, he flunked me out then. Said I had too many dangerous tendencies to be a pilot, which, of course, I did. I was real lucky because all the guys that made it through went to England to fly B24s. All I wanted to do was fly a fighter plane. That was what I was based on later on, the '24. I went back and went to ground school and then decided I didn't want to go to ground school. I signed up to be an aerial gunner—engineer gunner. I learned how to do it and went on to Topeka and got our crew. We went to Boise, Idaho to train and I had a dandy pilot. He was the same age as me but boy, could he fly that plane.

JS - Then this was after Pearl Harbor?

BR - I'll have to go back a ways. I had a job cleaning out the linseed oil mill office and I was down there Sunday morning and Mick McDonald, a chemist came in and said the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. I looked at him and said, "Where's Pearl Harbor?" I didn't know where it was. Anyway, I found out where Pearl Harbor was and we were in the war.

JS - Where were you then? Where was the linseed oil plant?

BR - That was in Fredonia, Kansas.

JS - That's your home?

BR - That's my hometown. My dad got me a job cleaning up the linseed oil office and I'd go down there every Sunday morning. But I had never heard of Pearl Harbor, before.

JS - Did you think, then, that you were going to enlist or wait to be drafted?

BR - I probably knew I was gonna enlist because I would have gotten drafted 2 or 3 months later. I wanted to be in the air force. I didn't want to be in the infantry.

JS - And, you thought, if you enlisted, you had a choice?

BR - That's right. If I volunteered for air force ground force, I was definitely in the air force. I didn't want to slug it out with those dirty soldiers. So, I went on through training, flunked out as a pilot and volunteered as an aerial gunner-engineer and we got our crews together at Salt Lake City and went to Boise, Idaho, where we trained. I was just called the engineer-gunner. You had a little engine down there that you started to charge up your brakes if you were going to land. Then, I was top gunner and could fly the top turret. I also flew as waist gunner, sometimes. Oh, I had lots of experiences during the war.

JS - When you joined, did you go to Kansas City for the induction?

BR - No. I went to Kansas City trying to get in the navy air corp.

JS - But, when you got in the other?

BR - I went to Fort Riley for that. They had a deal they were going to let you join the air force for pilots. I just joined because everyone was going to get drafted anyway so I went on to Wichita Falls, Texas.

JS - Was that basic training?

BR - Basic training. We marched around just like regular infantrymen for quite a while. Then, I was training on the airplane engines and stuff and I thought, "Jiminy Christmas, I don't want to be a mechanic here on the ground." So, that's when I signed up to be an aerial gunner. They sent me to (?) Field, Florida and we were shooting the guns out of the old planes and then I came to Topeka where they assigned me to this pilot's crew. Like I said, he was a heck of a pilot. I never got a scratch all the time I was in the world war. Never got a scratch.

JS - When you joined, did your parents approve of you joining? What did they think?

BR - Yeah, I guess so. They said it was all right. All of us boys wound up in. I had myself and my four brothers and my sisters and we all wound up in the service.

JS - In different branches?

BR - Yes. I had a brother that just died here, lately, Ronald. I don't know if he was drafted or what but he wound up in the infantry and he had it rough over there in France and Germany. They tell stories about him. Of course, Wayne had ear trouble and he never got out of the United States.

JS - What was he in?

BR - He was an air force mechanic. My younger brother, Clayton, was in the infantry and he was over there in south Mindanao and he was over there fighting the Japanese. Of course, he was in Mindanao and I was in China but, I never met any of my brothers during the war. They were all in separate places, there.

JS - They all came home from the war?

BR - Everybody. I remember my dad, during the war, was walking up to the American Legion there, and his good buddy and he were talking and the buddy said "Brook, you've got 4 boys over there, you're going to lose one of them for sure". My dad said " I'm afraid so, I'm afraid so." That man lost his only son. Isn't that the way it goes? All 4 of us came home, you know. Isn't that ironic? All 4 of us came home from the war.

JS - And your sister didn't join?

BR - No. She was too young. My brother, Blythe, went into the Coast Guard. He was in the Coast Guard for several years. He is in Tennessee. But all of us boys all came home.

JS - When you went to basic training, was that the first time you had been away from home for a long time?

BR - Oh, yeah, I was 19 then.

JS - Could you describe the food or the living conditions?

BR - Oh, it was good. Man! I weighed 135 pounds when I went in the service. Everybody was talking about how terrible the food was. I thought it was great. After a year of eating that army chow, I weighed 165 lbs. We were dirt poor and my mom would put a pot full of beans on the table and we were lucky to have enough food on the table.

JS - Did you find it difficult to take orders?

BR - No. Not necessarily. In the air force you didn't really get a lot of orders like you did in the infantry. I didn't find it too hard to take orders. I knew what I was supposed to be doing, anyhow. My pilot never gave anybody orders. He just said we were going.

JS - When you were training to be a gunner, could you be more specific what that meant? I guess you were aiming the gun?

BR - Yeah. When I flew waist gunner, why, I just took that old gun out. It was a 24 Liberator. You raised your window up and stuck your gun out ready to shoot. Of course, we went to China and that was strange because when we were up there at Topeka, and all these brand new B24 bombers were setting there. My pilot and 9 other crews decided they didn't want to go to England and that probably saved my life. Anyway, the good Lord had been looking after me for a long time. So we all got on a troop train, all 10 crews, and headed down to Miami. We flew all the way across Africa, India and flew the hump over to China and we got a 375 plane to fly. If I had my billfold I'd show you my plane here.

JS - You were describing the training. On most planes there were 3 gunners?

BR - No. There were six of them, all Liberators.

JS - There was a top gunner?

BR - That's the top turret gunner. I flew 3 positions on the bomber. I flew the lowest, the top turret and the waist gunner.

JS - W-a-s-t-e?

BR - No, w-a-i-s-t. That's where you stick your gun out the side there. I've got a few stories to tell about that. Can I tell one?

JS - First, give me the three other gunners.

BR - I never got to fly the tail turret because McCabe was always back there. I did fly the ball turret sometimes to take the place of the regular gunner. You couldn't hit nothing there. There was a top turret, two waist gunners.

JS - 2 waist gunners?

BR - One on each side, flying out of each side. The right gunner was an armored gunner. He always wanted the right gun so I had to take the left gun back there.

JS - Now tell your story about being a gunner.

BR - We were flying over China and I stuck my gun out there and this old zero came flying by me and I was getting ready to shoot him. Here was a doggone P40. Chinese flew P40s. It was setting right on his tail pumping him full of lead. That poor Jap was trying to get out of that burning zero. I said, "Git out of there!" He bailed out but he didn't have a parachute. The Japanese didn't have parachutes. If they had a parachute, they had to get it themselves because the Japanese considered the plane more important than the parachute. I seen him going into this lake from 20 thousand feet. You couldn't help but feel sorry for him even though he is your enemy and you are shooting at him and everything. I seen the splash. We shot down those zeros. We shot 'em down right and left. I still remember this one time, we were flying this mission and I didn't know what was going to happen. We found out later on, that they had tipped the Japanese off that we were going to bomb Han Chow and Nan King where there were warehouses. I was flying waist gunner and we were pulling out over this lake. I was just leaning out there looking things over. Pretty soon, I saw flashing going on way up above me. I thought, "What's going on?' way up there. Pretty soon, here came these zeros down and what they had done was brought 15 brand new P51 Mustangs into this field the day before. They had climbed to 30,000 feet. We didn't even know they were up there. Here were the Japanese zeros at 20,000 feet and these zeros were going to drop down on us as we were getting ready to bomb. Instead of that, the P51s dropped down on them. I remember looking out, and they were going round and round and I wondered, "What the heck's going on up there?" Here the zeros came down. They knocked down 20 some zeros, that day. We lost one P40. The Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. They beat us but, every other time we beat the heck out of them.

JS - Where was your base?

BR - Outside of Kunming. Near the hump.

JS - Himalayans?

BR - Himalayan Mountains. We were all based right around there.

JS - Were these bases built by the Americans?

BR - Chinese manual labor. There would be a hundred Chinamen pulling one of these rollers up and down the runway building all these bases. Our pilot was good. We never lost a bomber to the Japanese. We had guys that got lost and had to crash in the mountains. They were almost 100% 24s. But, our pilot was a good one.

JS - Now, were you with the same pilot all the time?

BR - All the time.

JS - Is that unusual?

BR - No. Not necessarily. You are assigned to your pilot and your crew. I had a real good crew. We went to China. All our crew were all German boys. They didn't want to fight Germany. I figured that out.

JS - What is a bombardier?

BR - He was the guy that pushed that button and dropped those bombs. He had his old bombsight there and when the old crosshairs came across the deal, all the bombs went.

JS - How many bombs did the plane carry?

BR - It depends. Depended on whether you had a long mission and had to have your bomb bay tanks and they took up about half your bomb bay so you just cut your bomb load in half. It seemed like we always carried 500 lb. bombs. RDX bombs they were called. You didn't even need a fuse on those things, they were going to go off. We had a lot of experiences there. I still remember Colonel Crockett. He was an eager beaver West Pointer. He was our Colonel. He had heard where there was a Japanese carrier and a cruiser that were hiding down in Indochina at that time. He sent 7 of us bombers down there and we came flying out over the coast. I was flying top turret that day. I said, "Look there, a zero is coming around behind us". Heck, it wasn't a zero, it was an F6, a US navy plane. I told the pilot, "That looks like a navy plane." He said, "Sure is, did you look over on the left side?" Of course, all those planes that were up on deck at that time had to take off. There was something like 350 planes up there. We had run smack dab into Mischner's task force '58. We didn't know it at that time. I still remember one F6 pilot setting right off our wing looking at us to see if we had slant eyes or something. We were waving white flags to get out of there.

JS - There was no radio communication?

BR - No. They had their band and we had ours. We couldn't talk to them.

JS - Could you communicate with your pilot?

BR - Sure, through the intercom. You could just press a button. You always had this deal wrapped around your neck and you could talk to any member of the crew at anytime. It just broadcast over the tube.

JS - Did you fly a mission everyday?

BR - No. We had to wait. I felt sorry for these transport pilots flying these C47s, C64s and C36s. They had to fly barrels of gasoline from India over to China. They were 50 gallon drums. The Chinese would load those up into truck and come and fill our tanks up. Those liberators carried 2700 hundred gallons of regular gas in the wing tanks. That was besides the bomb bay tanks. We had to set around for several days but we didn't mind it.

JS - So, the United State brought the gas to India and then the planes picked it up and took it over to China?

BR - Over the hump.

JS - What were you doing when you weren't flying a mission? Just pass the time?

BR - Writing letters and any old thing there. We just took it easy. We spent a lot of time in the mess hall. They would cook up scrambled eggs. Chinese eggs were small. Can you imagine how many we could eat? We'd set over there and write letters. Mom would send sardines and potted meat. We loved to have that. We were tired of eating that water buffalo steak. Of course, the Chinese were supposed to feed us. My dad said, "You're trying to send food all the way over to feed him from here?" (laugh)

JS - You were able to write home to your parents and you received mail while you were over there?

BR - Yeah, it didn't cost you a thing to mail a letter. All you had to do was stamp a deal on there. Servicemen all over the world could mail letters free of charge in World War two.

JS - Were you able to know where your brothers were and, what they were doing?

BR - Yeah, mom told me. She kept track of where everybody was and it was amazing that we all got home. Ronald was in France, Clayton in Mindanao, I was in China, and Wayne, of course, never got overseas. Dwight was in the Coast Guard. My younger sister has got 12 kids. They are all as healthy as all get out.

JS - How long were you in China? Is that the only place you were during the war?

BR - That is where I did all the fighting. I came back and couldn't get out. Nobody got out. They assigned me to go to Liberal.

JS - When did you come home?

BR - I was in the air when President Roosevelt died.

JS - Oh, in April of 1945?

BR - I got back to Kun Ming and they announced there was a plane leaving for India in a few minutes and I said, "Man, I'm getting on it".

JS - In China, were you always at the same base?

BR - No. I was actually at 3 different bases. I was at Kun Ming, and Lui Yang was out farther, and then we went up to Shantu. It was a B29 base that they had built up in northern China for the B29s. Then they flew on over to the islands of Guam, in Tinian. We went up and took the base at Shantu and flew out of there. That's my last base and that's where I said goodbye to my pilots. I had my 35 missions in and I was going home.

JS - So, once you got 35 missions in.....?

BR - You were through and, I just waved goodbye to 'em all and took off.

JS - Did you keep in contact with them?

BR - No. After I left China I never saw any of them again. In fact, I have never met with any of the crew after that. I got back and flew into Liberal and that was November of '45. I had to see if I had enough points to get out. I went down to Amarillo, Texas. They discharged me and said, "Do you want to join the reserve?" I said, "No".

JS - How did you earn points?

BR - By how many hours you flew and everything. Bombing missions and stuff like that.

JS - When you were at Liberal, you were flying what?

BR - Liberators.

JS - For what purpose?

BR - We were training B29 pilots. One time we got down on this one runway. I had been an engineer a long time and I knew what you had to do in a B24 and this pilot was started down the runway, taxiing along with those throttles. I yelled, "Shove it to the floor, all of them. If you want to get this thing off the ground you'd better go." He just looked around at me. (chuckle) That was about my last memory of the service there. I had my time up and nobody could get out until the

war was over. Then the Japanese surrendered and if you had so many points you could get out.

JS - Do you remember where you were when victory was declared in Europe?

BR - I expect I must have been in China.

JS - Well, you said you were flying home when Roosevelt died in April, and then May was VE day. Do you remember what you felt?

BR - I must have been on the way home. I never celebrated much of anything.

JS - What about when the bomb was dropped in Japan?

BR - I was about out of the service. I was down at Liberal in training and I didn't know a thing about it. It was all new to me. I didn't know how long the war was going to last in Japan but I heard about all that later on.

JS - When you had 35 missions, if you didn't want to get out, could you stay?

BR - Oh, yeah.

JS - Did many stay?

BR - Well, a few did but I didn't want any part of it anymore. I was all through with it. I was out of that place. The war was over and I didn't want anything to do with it. I got out of there.

JS - When you were in China, the Chinese did the work at the bases?

BR - Sure, they did all the cooking for us and everything, all the chow and everything. Spam, you know, they were talking about wanting Spam. They all say they were getting tired of canned spam. If we had had spam, we would have been in Heaven. We had to eat that Chinese food.

JS - You said water buffalo steaks?

BR - Water buffalo steaks. There is a chunk of meat and a chunk of gristle all the way through that water buffalo. It was the toughest meat you ever had in your life.

JS - What else did you have?

BR - Well they fed us a lot of rice. They did the best they could for us. We got the top of the chow. The poor Chinamen, I felt sorry for those people. You'd be

driving along in a truck and there would be a dead Chinaman laying right beside the road. It is about that same way over there, now. Life over there is cheap.

JS - Were you able to get off base?

BR - Oh, yeah.

JS - What did you do when you got off base?

BR - Ride my little motor scooter. I still don't know where I got that little old thing, but I would ride around the town near there and go get some Chinese food at a Chinese restaurant, there. You would get hot tea. You never drank cold tea in China. Those Chinamen knew not to drink cold tea. All their tea was boiling hot.

JS - You were over there in the winter months?

BR - Yes. I still remember Christmas of '44. Oh, that was a bad time and I got drunk. Only time I ever got drunk. (laugh) They had what they called Red Star Rum. Oh, that was rough stuff but I made my way back to the barracks and bed and I woke up the next day and I was sick as all get out.

JS - That's probably why you never did that again. So, Christmas did you have a special meal or something?

BR - I don't remember very much. The Chinese didn't have the right stuff to feed us. I remember this guy across the room from me got a cake and we expected him to share it. When mom sent me a cake it was just crumbs when it got there. I still remember this Jewish boy from Brooklyn, he got in the mail a chunk of homemade balogna, big and round. It was all white on the outside. I said, "It is spoiled." He said, "No, it's not." I said, "I'll take it out and throw it in the trash for him." So, I headed down there thinking there was something strange here. I headed down to the barracks where these Italian boys were, and they smelled it and sat right up. It was salami and they had beer, so we sat there eating that salami. (laugh)

JS - You mentioned that your mother sent you food?

BR - Oh, yes. They could send a package free of charge to us. She sent me sardines and anchovies. Anything canned that she could get hold of. I told her I was eating it all. When I got back home, dad said, "She was trying to feed you while you were in China." I said, "Dad, she did."

JS - Did you buy anything while you were in China?

BR - Yeah, but there wasn't too much to buy. We would go to the PX and once a month they would have Baby Ruth candy bars and Snickers and we would buy

all they would allow us to buy. I got paid a hundred and some dollars a month and there was not much to spend it on so I would buy bonds and send them home to mom. Mom had all those bonds for me when I got home.

JS - You were not close to a large Chinese city?

BR - No, but Shan TU was pretty good sized up there in North China. I was never close to Nan King or Hong Kong or any of those. We bombed Hong Kong. The Japanese were there. We got the presidential citation for missing a target. That was off of Ha Nan Island and we were supposed to be bombing these warehouses along the shore but all our bombs landed in the ocean. Our bombardier moved his sights over. $\frac{3}{4}$ of the bombers bombs were falling in these trees out there. We started turning around and heading back home and here came all this black smoke up. We wondered what in the world we had hit. We found out that it was a Japanese naval district and they had put all these tanks out there for the navy and we burned them up.

JS - That's why you got the citation?

BR - That's why we got the presidential citation and we never told the president about it.

JS - Do you remember every one of your missions?

BR - No, not really. With 35, you kinda get hazy on them. I still remember my first one. I was flying waist gunner and we were flying over this Yangtze River going to bomb these warehouses along the Yangtze River going down from Hong Kong. I looked around and looking out there and there were all these flashes on the other side of the river. I wondered what all that was over there. Pretty soon, right outside the window----BAM! BAM! BAM! I thought I was dead. I sure watched that next time. I never had my head sticking out the side. I was way down low there.

JS - How long would a mission be?

BR- It depended on where you went to. It was as long as 14 hours if you had bomb bay tanks. We had our K-rations we took along with us to eat. Every time we got back, we always went to the mess hall where the cooks were supposed to have a meal for us when we got back and landed. They did.

JS - Could you describe K-rations?

BR - There was a little package of cigarettes in there. They had a can of meat and crackers. You could have fed a whole crew on a C-ration. They fed the C-rations to the infantry guys in the South Pacific. My brother, Clayton, could tell

you all about that. He had plenty of them. Everybody got tired of C-rations and K-rations but I never did. I could eat them all the time. They didn't bother me.

JS - Did you smoke?

BR - Yeah, a little bit. Yeah, I smoked, there.

JS - Was it dangerous to smoke in the plane?

BR - No, not really, you could set back there and smoke. Of course, you had to be careful if you had a tank or something up there. I didn't smoke very much in the plane. Later, I threw all my cigarettes away and smoked a pipe and cigars but in '74, I threw everything away and never smoked again.

JS - 30 some years ago?

BR - Oh, yeah, I never smoked since then.

JS - When you and your brothers wrote back home, were any of those letters saved by your family?

BR - My mom saved almost everything. I think some of the letters were lost but she had saved most everything.

JS - Where would any letters be now?

BR - In a box that we have.

JS - You have a good memory.

BR - Well, I remember a lot.

JS - When you left the United States for the first time and, you flew, stopping at bases to refuel. What were you thinking since this was the first time you had been out of the country?

BR - I don't have any idea what I was thinking. It was interesting because we were supposed to be taking the plane to England and ten crews signed up to go to CBI, China, India, Burma Theater.

JS - So you could do that. You had a choice?

BR - The pilot did. We didn't. We went along. They signed up ten crews so we went on a troop train to Miami. They put us on these transport planes. Of course, the Germans were still in charge of the war in Africa at that time. Casablanca and those places were all in German hands so we had to fly across

the middle part of Africa and across the desert and Cairo and stuff and over to India. They flew us. I have never been on a great big ship. I have been on a cruise but I was never on a great big ship during World War 2. They flew us everywhere.

JS - How many soldiers would have been on that transport plane?

BR - It depends on if it was a DC3 or C54. On a C54, you could get close to a hundred people on it. It had 3 seats on each side. It was a pretty good size plane and they flew those for a long time, even after World War 2, they flew those. Funny thing is, they flew us all the way to China and we didn't even have a plane.

JS - And you sat around for 15 days?

BR - Sat around for 15 days waiting for a plane to fly. We finally got our plane.

JS - Were you sick at all, when you were in the service?

BR - Never was sick. Never lost a drop of blood while I was in the service. I ate all that Chinese food and it never bothered me a bit.

JS - You touched on this a little bit---when you saw the Japanese pilot and his parachute going into a lake. What was your feeling about the enemy and the war in general?

BR - Oh, we hated the Japanese but, not individually, so when I saw this guy going into the lake, I thought, "Oh, you poor son of a gun." We'd shoot the heck out of them if we got a chance. Actually, I never did hate the Japanese or the Germans, either one, for that matter. It was just war.

JS - Did you think the war was going on a long time?

BR - You're doggone right. Man alive, I was wondering if we were ever going to get out of that because it was right after I got out of school. I volunteered and went in because everybody knew they were in for the duration. There was no such thing as you getting out because you wanted out. I had my 35 missions in but they weren't going to let me out so I went down to Liberal as a structural engineer and they weren't going to let me out. Then the Japanese surrendered in August, after they dropped the bomb on them. Of course, that bomb was all new stuff to me. I wanted to get out of the service and I didn't know anything about that bomb. We were getting ready and thinking we were going to have to invade Japan.

JS - Did you think you might have to go back?

BR - I don't remember what I thought. I know buddies of mine that had been in Europe were headed back and thought the ships were going to head right to Japan. They would be pulled right out of the European theater but I didn't think I would be going back but I don't remember what I did think.

JS - Did you ever meet other young men from the Fredonia area?

BR - No.

JS - What about other people from Kansas?

BR - Actually, not very many, I hardly met any guys from Kansas when I was in there. Only one guy from my class, that I knew, got killed and I heard about it. He was a friend of mine and he was in the South Pacific and he was killed.

JS - What was it like to meet young men from other parts of the country? Was that hard?

BR - No. It wasn't hard at all. We were all in the same boat. Like our crew, they were guys from all over the country. Here are some pictures.

JS - R C Bowman is your pilot?

BR - Richard Bowman, yes.

JS - Where are you?

BR - There.

JS - So, you are in the back row, standing the second from the right. This plane is what?

BR - B24 Liberator.

JS - Most of the crew were young. Would the pilot have been a little older?

BR - No, the same age as me. He might have been a year or so older, but not much.

JS - That's a good looking crew.

BR - They were all good looking boys.

JS - And this is your uniform?

BR - That is the flying uniform. See, we had a leather jacket. We never wore army coats or anything. I had an army coat but we always wore flight jackets. All the pilots had their caps on there. This picture was taken at Topeka. That was a beautiful big plane but we never got to fly it--R C Bowman crew.

JS - And this same crew stuck together all the time?

BR - All the time.

JS - That's a great picture. If someone wanted to take a copy of that, would that be all right?

BR - Sure thing.

JS - What's that?

BR - That's a Chinese scarf. That came from China.

JS - So, this would have been something that you would have purchased to bring home?

BR - Sure.

JS - And it is Chinese silk with embroidered dragon?

BR - Yes. Here are my medals. Here is the air medal and the flying cross. These are bars for your uniform but I never wore them.

JS - Did you receive these in a ceremony?

BR - Yeah, I got them when I was down at Amarillo, Texas. Here's my ID bracelet that I always wore. You always had to wear it. I still remember my serial number.

JS - You do? What is it?

BR - 17099050.

JS - So ever person had to wear the bracelet and you didn't wear the dog tags?

BR - Sure, you wore the dog tags. That's why they were on there.

JS - Who selected the name of your plane?

BR - We had no idea. We just flew whatever plane was available.

JS - Were there people that did the painting? Was it their job?

BR - Yeah, those mechanics could paint pretty good. This picture is of a Chinese place to eat.

JS - Did you pick up any phrases of the language?

BR - We picked up quite a little bit. Well, not much.

JS - But you didn't need it?

BR - I have got a picture of a little boy, here, that we liked----- little Chinese boy.

JS - Was this a picture of the barracks?

BR - That was the barracks we stayed in. I was thinking about bringing that little boy home.

JS - Was he an orphan?

BR - He was an orphan and the Chinese would kill him. It was kind of bad.

JS - Why would they do that?

BR - Unless you had somebody to take care of you, why, you were dead. You have to think about China as having different ways than America. There is a picture of my turret.

JS - Which turret is this?

BR - That's the top turret.

JS - Would one of the turrets be more dangerous than the others?

BR - The tail turret was probably the most dangerous area. You get back there and a plane gets behind you and starts shooting at you.

JS - Now, what is that?

BR - That is a B13 trainer. I have a bunch of pictures. There's a big picture of me. I was so proud I was going to be a pilot. I don't know which bomber that was. This is what we wore on our leather jackets.

JS - What is it?

BR - That tells you what we were in case we had to bail out. It told the Chinese that we were Americans.

JS - And you wore that where?

BR - On the back of my leather jacket.

JS - It was issued to you when you got over there?

BR - Yes. Here is a picture when they awarded me my medals. I was what they called a tech sergeant.

Tape 2, Side A

JS - What is that?

BR - You wore it on your jacket. It was a dragon for our squadron. I wore this on the back of my jacket, too. It told them I was an American.

JS - An American flag?

BR - That was great. I wore that symbol for Chinese nationalist on my sleeve. I will show what embarrassed my mama. When I was in India I came across that. They took the bones and carved everything. That was all hand carved and I sent it home to mom. She made a dress for it. (laugh)

JS - Well, she wanted to display it cause you sent it to her. On the other hand, she didn't want a naked woman there.

BR - There is a Chinese cigarette case.

JS - What kind of cigarettes would you have been able to buy, there---Lucky Strike or what?

BR - Oh, Any of them. They had them at the PX there. We smoked American and in '74 I quit smoking anything.

JS - These photographs are great and somebody might want to make copies of some of these.

BR - Anytime. See, I was trying my best to be a pilot. They gave us a pilot log and I kept track of it and how many hours you flew but then I flunked out. The problem was, they assigned 5 students to each instructor pilot. If they didn't think you were good enough, they flunked you out. Like I say, I scared the living tar out of him so he flunked me out. The next day, the lieutenant took me up. He said, "You could fly this plane anywhere", I said, " Sure, I can fly it anywhere you

want". He said to just take off and fly it around. So, I took that old P19 up and flew around and landed there and taxied up and he said, "You can fly anywhere". Then, he found out they had flunked me out because of my dangerous tendencies and I was through.

JS - Do you know why you had those dangerous tendencies?

BR - I was a regular old country flier. I didn't fly by the book. That's what you had to do to be in the air force. You had to fly by the book. I'd have probably been dead if they had given me a crew. All the guys I was trying to make it through with, went to England. They were flying B24s in England and about half of them didn't come home.

JS - So, it turned out well for you?

BR - Oh, shoot, yes. That's why I am still here.

JS - Was there a particular soldier or a particular officer that you had a story about?

BR - Of course, there was colonel Crockett. I always got a bang out of him. He never had a stick of hair on his head and he was an eager beaver. A lot of times he flew a mission with us.

JS - When you went out on missions, were there normally 10 planes?

BR - No, actually, our whole group was 34 planes. I, lots of times, flew waist gunner on those missions. We bombed about every target there was because, like I say, we were all over the Himalayan side of China. The Japanese were all over here. They came down the Yangtze River. There was three-fourths of China that the Japanese were never in.

JS - What kind of targets did you have?

BR - Warehouses and we bombed a dry dock in Hong Kong. We hit that pretty good. We gave the Japanese quite a bit of trouble from our bases.

JS - So, you felt that what you were doing contributed to winning the war?

BR - Oh, I guess. We figured we were going to win the war over there. It was just a matter of time so we were just flying along doing our job.

JS - When you had flown your 35 missions, you came home and were at Liberal for a while. You got out of the service in '45. Did the training as engineer transfer to what you chose to do?

BR - No.

JS - What did you do immediately when you got out of the service?

BR - Well, I went home and tried to figure out what I was going to do. I just sat around there. My brothers decided they were going down to Southwestern in Weatherford, Oklahoma to sheet metal and mechanics training. I went down with them but my dad said you have pretty good nerves, why don't you sign up to be a watchmaker. So I got down there, I signed up for horology school. When I went back down there in January of '46, I said, "Where am I on this list to get into school here?" She said she didn't really have me down there. I told her I was supposed to be down on the list. What I didn't know was, the president of the school was standing right behind me. He says, "Come on with me, young man." OK.

JS - Was this a college?

BR - Yeah, it was a college, Southwestern.

JS - You got the GI Bill, right?

BR - Yeah, I went to school on the GI Bill. They gave us \$375. for tools and equipment and they paid us \$75. a month for room and board. That was plenty because you ate at the mess hall but if you ate at a restaurant down town, it wasn't. I still remember, President Burton was standing right behind me. I didn't know it, and I told them I wanted to go to horology school, and he said, "Come with me, young man." He led me down there and we went into the horology department and said, "Find a desk for this young man." I went over and got my desk and we were ready to go. I was setting there and we had a few watches we were fixing up, there and everything and we thought we were doing great. I had been there about 3 months or so, and they changed instructors. Dr Mitchell retired because he was old. Here comes this new instructor in from Elgin. He was a little fellow and he went around and said, "All you young ones, I want you to come in the next room and sit down. Now, get your bench. I want you to take your file and a ten penny nail and make your tools." We were just sitting there filing making some tools. I still have some of them, the tools I made. After, maybe, 6 more weeks there, we got to go back in there and learn about watches. That guy knew all about watches. Course, I did all my training on windup watches. These quartz watches are all Greek to me.

JS - How long did it take to complete that course?

BR - 16 months. Then, I went to work for Thomas Jewelers in(?). In summer time we had plenty of watches to fix at Thomas Jewelers but in wintertime everything went kaplooeey. So, I headed out. First, I went to Jetmore and I didn't like it there. A firecracker salesman came in and said there was a guy in Cimarron who said

he would sure like to have a watchmaker. I came out there and it was Clark's Pharmacy. I said that they had a watchmaker in town. Ralph Clark said, "He don't know about watches". He sat me down and I had my little space there and I was in Clark's for 35 years.

JS - What year was it that you came to Cimarron?

BR - '48

JS - Did you work on clocks as well as watches?

BR - Oh, Yeah, I worked on anything. Mostly I have worked on watches since I moved across the street. We moved across the street because we wanted to sell handmade stuff. My wife was in there with me and she sold handmade stuff. She is a real good craftsman, too, and we sold the craft things people made and brought in for us to sell. That went on and things didn't go very good with the gal that owns the building so I moved to my daughter's house over here at 205. That is where all my equipment still is. That's where I finished up out there.

JS - So when you had to make the tools, you made them out of the 10 penny nails? Why did he have you do that?

BR - So we knew exactly what was going on.

JS - What were the tools? Did they have names?

BR— Oh, there were a lot of screwdrivers and deals to lift up the hands off the watches and such. All my training was on windup watches, so the business really left me. You don't find many windup watches and the quartz watches don't cost much. Take the watch my wife wears right now. I gave \$4.75 for that watch, made in China.

JS - We will come back to after the war but I have a couple of questions about the war. How did your experience change you or what effect do you think the war had on you?

BR - Aged me. Probably made me an adult. I went in pretty much a boy when I went in. I came out a man. It made a man out of me.

JS - Why?

BR - Age and I was just a young boy when I went in---didn't know anything. When they attacked Pearl Harbor, I didn't know where Pearl Harbor was. I found out. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, everybody knew they were going to be in the service.

JS - Did it change your view of the world? Did it enlarge your world?

BR - Oh, I think so. I wasn't mad at anybody. We just had to do our job. It was sort of a job there. On the missions, I would shoot at Japanese zeroes but I didn't really hate them. I saw that poor old guy going down and I thought, "Son of a gun. He's dead."

JS - Were the Japanese good pilots?

BR - Some of them. Now, the ones that attacked Pearl Harbor were really good but later they run out of first string pilots and later they were the ones taking off from aircraft carriers. Our P40s and P51s were shooting them down, right and left. Later, they weren't training them fast enough. At the end of the war they had kamikaze pilots who had only 5 hours training. They would put them on a plane with a bomb and send them out to try to attack our fleet. Course, I was all ready home by then.

JS - Before you got out, did you keep up with the war news?

BR - Sure.

JS - Through reading newspapers. Were your brothers home when you were?

BR - No, I never saw any of my brothers until after the war. My brothers were all scattered all over the world. My younger brother, Dwight, and my sister were still home. They didn't graduate until after World War 2 was over.

JS - When you and your brothers sat down, did you talk about the war?

BR - Oh, yes. Of course, Wayne didn't have any war experience. Wayne, he liked to talk about over there in the islands. He still does. He's like me. He likes to talk. We talked some, but not much. My mom was glad to see us all. I'll tell you what, she sweated it out during World War 2.

JS - And was it after Pearl Harbor that they changed that rule about families?

BR - I don't know. You mean how many could be in the service?

JS - Yes

BR - I don't know. I remember there was all those brothers killed on a destroyer in the South Pacific.

JS - Sullivan brothers.

BR - But, we were all in the service by then and scattered all around. They really didn't have much of a rule about that. We were in there for the duration.

JS - When you look back on that experience, from another perspective, is there anything else that you would want to say or describe?

BR - I know I was sure glad to get out. They wanted me to sign up for the reserves and I didn't want any part of it.

JS - What would that have meant to sign up for the reserves?

BR - That meant they could call you if they want you. They've still got the reserves now. I've got a grandson that's in the marine reserves. I'm worried about him going to Iraq. He has not been called up yet. He's the only one in the family that is still in the service.

JS - Was there a tradition in your family? Was your father in the service?

BR - Oh, yeah. He was in World War One.

JS - Did he ever talk about that war?

BR - No, not a lot. He never carried a gun. He was in the ambulance crew. All they did was pick up the wounded in their old horse drawn wagon. That's what he did all during World War One. He was a handsome son of a gun and my mother was a rural school teacher. He courted her and she fell for him.

JS - In Fredonia?

BR - Yeah, she taught school outside of Fredonia. They got married and mom stuck with him.

JS - Did he farm?

BR - No, when they married, he worked at the West Brick Yard. Those brickyards in Fredonia closed down and I remember that us kids didn't know what was going on. He was walking the street and probably worked on the WPA. He had a team of gray mules and he would get his wagon out and go ten miles and haul gravel. He worked for a long time at the linseed oil mill there. You talk about a rough deal. That was rough. They had these guys that worked in their shorts 'cause it was hot. They had these presses and they pressed this linseed oil out with presses. They have got it all different, now. They can do it real easy. He worked in there for quite a while. I still remember my mom driving me down in the old Model T. She told me to go in and get dad's check. I had to go get the foreman. He carried the checks around. I went in there and he gave me dad's check for a week's work---\$21.80.

JS - Tell me about linseed oil. It comes from a plant?

BR - Flax.

JS - And that was grown around Fredonia?

BR - Yeah, around Fredonia and different places. It was hauled in there and they would thresh it out and put it in these tank cars. Linseed oil makes a lot of paint. Later on, they went to soybeans. In fact, I think they still are processing soybeans. Fredonia had that cement plant out there and it is still going.

JS - What do you remember about the depression or the dirty '30s?

BR - Not much. I remember going to second grade and Roosevelt was elected. "Roosevelt was going to save us all". Roosevelt didn't save nobody. In fact the depression went right along until world war two. That was the end of the depression. We just went way in debt.

JS - Going back to when you were in the service. Was religion a part of being in the service?

BR - Not really, we had our chaplains. Didn't make any difference what religion the chaplain was, he came out and held his service. Your Catholic chaplains held service for Christians same as Catholics so it didn't make any difference.

JS - When you were in the service, were you interested in politics? Did you know the news of the day?

BR - I voted for Roosevelt and that is the last time I voted for a democrat for president. (Both laugh)

JS - You didn't vote for Harry Truman?

BR - No, I didn't vote for Harry Truman but he won anyhow. First president I remember that I liked was Eisenhower. Eisenhower was one of the best presidents we ever had.

JS - Why?

BR - Because he had such savvy. Smart. He established these state highways. He was a brilliant thinker. He was a deep thinker and he was over there and helped us win World War Two. I think Eisenhower was one of the greatest men that ever lived.

JS - Do you want to comment on any president since Eisenhower?

BR - No, I am still glad we've got the one we've got.

JS - When you came to Cimarron, what was Cimarron like then?

BR - Maybe a little smaller than it is now. When I came out here, I really came out here with my brother who was here. There was a big old house where Presto is. The landlady was Mrs. Egbert. I had a room up there and I stayed up in there. They had this dance at the VFW to open up the new building. That was down where the training center is now. I went and was sitting there and I saw this pretty gal setting up there and I thought she was pretty so I went up to her and I walked her home and we have been together since. We were married in a little church in Wichita that a tornado tore down in '98— a little Methodist Church in Haysville. I'll tell you what, she's been a good one.

JS - Have you seen a lot of businesses come and go in Cimarron, over the years?

BR - Oh, yeah, several of them. When I first moved to town, Fisher's IGA was down there where Clark's Pharmacy is. A variety store was over there. This closing down stores in Cimarron is going to bother me, but I can't do anything about it. I see 84 Lumber is going to close now. I says, "Good Heavens, what's going on here?" They gotta have business and Cimarron is too small. It's too bad.

JS - When did you retire from repairing watches?

BR - Not very long ago. See, I repaired watches for 57 years. If you figure from '48 ;plus 57, you can figure that out. I believe it was two or three years ago. Like I say, the business left me. When you can buy a quartz watch for \$4.75, well, what the heck?

JS - Then, if it stops running, you just get a new one?

BR - Yeah, the Chinese are making those things. Of course, I put watch batteries in and I still have a box of watch batteries around here but I don't know where they are.

JS - Did you have a favorite brand of watch that you liked to work on?

BR - No, not necessarily. Never Timex. I hated working on those things.

JS - Why?

BR - They are cheap built. That's a throw away watch, you know. That's what ruined the watch repair business, these cheap throw away watches.

JS - Was that after World War Two that the Timex came in?

BR - Yeah, I don't remember exactly when the Timex first started coming out but I'll tell you they sure ruined the repair business.

JS - Do you know why you chose watch repair instead of enrolling in what your brothers were doing?

BR - When I went down to Weatherford, Oklahoma to Southwestern, I didn't even know they had a horology department there. I was standing around trying to decide what to do because they were going to take a sheet metal and welding class or mechanics. I just went down there with them trying to decide what to do. My dad suggested I might want to be a dentist. I thought about looking in people's mouths.

JS - What attracted you? When you work on a watch, it is very small.

BR - Didn't bother me. I loved shining my tools and you have your glasses.

Interviewer: Joyce Suellentrop (JS)

Interviewee: Brice Ramsay (BR)

Tape 2 of 2

END
