

Brown, Lewis E. Interview 8-18-93

[Speaker 2]

The following is an interview with Lewis E. Brown, 817 Morriston Road, M-O-R-I-S-T-O-N, Morriston Road, Fayetteville, North Carolina. Interview conducted by Dr. Charles Johnson, Center for the Study of War and Society, University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Interview August 18, 1993. Well, usually I start off by finding out where the person's from, when they joined the service, what their early time in it was like. Where are you from?

[Speaker 1]

Well, I'm from a little town in North Alabama, Florence, Alabama. I know Florence. And I had just graduated from high school, and I didn't even stick around long enough to get my diploma.

My sister got it for me. I enlisted in the Army Air Corps, of course, that time the Air Corps and all together. And I was 16 years old.

What year was that? In 1940.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, before we got involved.

[Speaker 1]

Oh, yes. So they wouldn't let me enlist after I went up there, you know. So I went home and got my brother's birth certificate and went back the next day and talked to the same guy, and he enlisted me.

How come you were in such a hurry to go? Well, I had been going around to these baseball tryouts, and everywhere I go they told me I was a little too small. So I got disappointed.

I really didn't like the type of work that I would have to have done around. Of course, the TVA, you know, was a big thing, and there's a Ford motor thing and a rental saloon and all this, but that just didn't appeal to me. And I've always wanted to fly, so I took the aviation cadet exam and passed it, and I was told I was going to Randolphville, Texas.

So they sent me to Fort MacPherson, Georgia, and I stayed there a couple of days. I went from there to Fort Moultrie in South Carolina, down on the beach in a tent. Stayed there about a week, and the next thing I knew it was really a boat, not a ship, that small.

And I wound up in Panama on the 14th Infantry, and that's where I took my recruit training, back in as a recruit instead of basic trainer. You must have felt that you'd been had right to begin with. Yeah, and I went in and told our first sergeant that I had enlisted in the Air Corps, and he looked at my records, and that's when he said, well, you haven't had any recruit training, and as soon as we finish you come back in, and I'll see if I can get you one of the local fields there in Panama.

So I went busting in the day after I finished, and he had tried, but he couldn't have me. Let's see, it was October of 1940, I was in the day room, and there was a bulletin that the parachute test platoon had finished their training, and it was to ask for volunteers. So I went

in and told the first sergeant I wanted to put up the parachute troops, and his comment was, what the hell is that?

Because they didn't have the regulations, hadn't gotten down that far. So he told the clerk to pack it out, and I hung around there about, oh, maybe two or three weeks, and I came to Fort Benning, Georgia, and I went to the jump school there, and we finished up, we started in December of 1940, and my class finished in January of 1941. What was jump school like?

Oh, to me it was a real bust. I mean, I was young, and I had plenty of vinegar and all that stuff, and majority myself, it was rough. I mean, it was probably the roughest training I'd ever gone through.

[Speaker 2]

Physically demanding?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. If I hadn't finished high school and I was active in all the sports they had there, football, baseball, basketball, boxing, and anything they had, I participated in, and I was in good shape. But then after I got to finish my training and got into the 501st Parachute Battalion, the men there were so much different than what I had known.

I mean, this was a close-knit bunch of men, and I really liked it. We went to Panama, back to Panama, went on the opposite side, and we did a lot of jungle training down there, of course, along with the jumps. This was the 501st?

Yeah, 501st Parachute Battalion. And I stayed with them until, let's see, it was October of 42. Then the 503rd Parachute Regiment was going to the Pacific, and they had lost one battalion that had gone to England.

And then later came the 509th. They jumped to North Africa. That was originally the 2nd Battalion of the 503rd.

So when they came to go to the Pacific, they came to Panama, and they took the 501st Battalion, and we became the 2nd Battalion of the 503rd and went to Australia, trained there for a while, and moved into New Guinea. What was the training like in Australia? It was more or less a continuation of the training we got in Panama, jungle training mostly.

[Speaker 2]

What sort of weapons did you use?

[Speaker 1]

Well, we all, most all the guys, we had basic infantry weapons. Most all of the guys had the carbine, the M1, and then later came the M2. Of course, we had some people who had the M1, they call it, and then we still had guys with the old 03.

And one of the interesting things about that, when we started jumping, we had the 03, and we loosened the strap and held it around our hand, and you'd go out the door. Well, that's all right for the first two or three men. Then they'd start rushing the line, and the weapon would get canted, and the guy would get caught on the door.

So somebody came up with the bright idea of cutting, I think, six inches off the barrel. And that was really the, I guess, the starting of the carbine and the thing. And, of course, the other guys that we jumped with the machine guns, and they held them in the arm and all that.

And then they later came out with a container, a grid wall container, in which you broke your weapon down and put it in that. A tube?

[Speaker 2]

Was it a tube of some kind that you put in there?

[Speaker 1]

No, it was just a canvas thing. It was about this long, and you put it in. It had a flap on it, and then you stuck it down in there.

Before that, we did test these containers, you know, and they would drop them with different colored chutes. One, you know, would signify a machine gun, another, something like that. Did you do much night training, or was it during the day usually?

Well, we did quite a bit of night training in Panama. And when we got to New Guinea, we set up our camp, and we did train there. And then the Australians had a, what they call like a commando school, and most all of us went to that.

And that, you know, consisted of jungle survival and all the stuff like that. It was real interesting. What did you think of the Australians?

I liked them. I always said, if I ever get run out of this country, that's where I'm going. In fact, I am an honorary citizen of Australia.

They really made most of us honorary, gave us a certificate and all this good stuff. And we go back occasionally to outfit, and they really rolled out the red carpet for us.

[Speaker 2]

When did you go into New Guinea?

[Speaker 1]

We went in there in 1943. We had...

[Speaker 2]

Because the 32nd went in there in September of 1942 down around Guna and that area.

[Speaker 1]

Well, we went in there in 1943. It was, of course, still in the parachute. And we went into Hollandia first, but it was a...

landed by LCI, you know, the landing craft. No, not on that. Then we came back into Oro Bay there in New Guinea.

Then we left them there and went into what's called Nadzab, or Laid, New Guinea, really. And that was the first combat parachute drop in the Pacific. Had you had any combat in Hollandia before?

Not on a large scale. It was mostly patrolling. Too much contact with the Japanese?

We had some, you know. Like I say, we went in there after other troops had gotten there, so they... Now, Numenfor, that was what most consider as a unit our first real combat.

[Speaker 2]

Where's that, Numenfor?

[Speaker 1]

I'm not saying Numenfor. I mean Nadzab.

[Speaker 2]

Nadzab.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, that was in what they call Laid, LA, New Guinea. Yep. Okay, and we did have some.

Then our next combat jump was in...

[Speaker 2]

How did that first combat jump go? How did it work?

[Speaker 1]

Well, I say, General Gavin and all of that, it was a perfect airborne combat jump. We had a regiment, and we jumped. The whole regiment landed and was assembling in less than four and a half minutes.

Which is very unusual. Like in Europe, they never really got assembled over there. This was a large valley, and they just spread the planes out.

And went in, and we... Of course, the jump was about 700 feet, too. Oh, C-47s or...

Right, uh-huh. Then Numenfor was... Well, the jump wasn't too bad, really, for some people.

The lead aircraft said his altimeters were wrong. And we came in, and first about three or four aircraft started dropping at 175 feet, which is way below the safety, you know. So a lot of guys got banged up on that.

Then we... That was probably our first encounter with cannibalism by the Japanese. Oh, really?

We had heard rumors that they were cannibalizing the natives there. But we found... First, I guess, was an Australian that had been cannibalized.

Then we later found two of our own men. Of course, that set the spark. So we sent a patrol out, and they followed.

But it took about two days, and they finally caught up with the... I think it was, I don't remember, six or eight Japs. They had rucksacks on their back, and it was filled with human flesh.

So they had cannibalized, you know. I guess they were starving. The guys didn't wait around for that.

They killed them right on the spot.

[Speaker 2]

Once that sort of thing gets started, that sort of problem, then it gets real tough.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. And mostly there, we had, you know, we were on patrol every day. Of course, you'd run into scattered...

It wasn't really, what you'd say, heavy fighting. It'd be just skirmishes, more or less.

[Speaker 2]

The Japanese were withdrawing pretty much, or they just had left?

[Speaker 1]

Well, they were trying, but that was a new one for us now. I mean, it wasn't too far they could go. Of course, they were getting out at night, you know.

They was having these landing crates. I mean, Japanese that were coming, picking them up and all. A lot of them were getting out.

Then, let's see, we kind of had a break. We went back to Australia and trained quite a bit, and then we came back to New Guinea and had another assault landing at Biak, which was a whole thing.

[Speaker 2]

So a hot landing over there from Japanese?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, yeah. Again, you know, New Guinea was being pretty well cleared out, you know. Some of the marches there, you know, these patrols really got kind of...

That's a rough country, isn't it?

[Speaker 2]

What was it like? Describe it for me a little bit. I had never been there, of course.

You mean this? Yeah, what the country was like.

[Speaker 1]

Well, it was mostly jungles. And then there was one side, you know, was pretty mountainous, and the others were there. And at that time, most of the natives had moved out, you know, but it was real rough country.

Snakes, insects, animals? Did you have a problem with snakes or...? No, I guess like most of the places, they did have a lot of mosquitoes, but I don't remember ever seeing a snake. I ain't never heard anybody talk about it.

Some of the guys said that they saw some tigers and things, but I never did. I don't know what that's... Was disease a problem?

The what?

[Speaker 2]

Was disease a problem?

[Speaker 1]

Well, I guess malaria and dysentery was the biggest thing. About everybody had that, you know. But there was a, I don't know, we called it a jungle fever that hit some of the guys.

It was, you know, pretty rough on them.

[Speaker 2]

What did you think of the Japanese as an opponent, as an enemy?

[Speaker 1]

Well, we, I didn't think too much of them, and I don't think much of them because I guess later on, I really gained a lot of respect for them. They were good fighters, but I guess if you look at it in another way, they really weren't good, you know, in their tactics and things. They just, I don't know, they were brave, but that was because of SAC and DOPE and stuff.

I mean, they very seldom ever went into a battle unless they was all what we call gooned up, you know. But they fought to the end. They didn't give up.

We, I guess it was in, Lumen IV was the first prisoner I ever saw. We only got one or two. Our commander wasn't too helpful in bringing back prisoners, you know.

It was one of these deals where you bring a prisoner in, you take care of him. We don't have any place to handle him, you know. Nobody wanted to bring a guy in and have to take care of him.

And let's see, I'd like to say we had a couple more assault landings. Then we went into the Philippines, and our first encounter there, we had an assault landing on Mindoro.

[Speaker 2]

Were you part of a division, or was this...

[Speaker 1]

Oh, no, we fought as a regimental combat team all the way through. We were just an infantry up until Lumen IV, and we got a battalion of artillery, parachute artillery, and one company from engineers. And that made what they call a combat team.

From then on, we fought as a combat team.

[Speaker 2]
That was the 503rd?

[Speaker 1]
Yes. Yeah, 503rd. Yeah.

And then we landed on a post. Of course, we was the... Actually, the first...

No, I'll take it back. It was another group that got in there first, but we was the second, and the Department of Army in later years and they still don't recognize that as a combat assault, but yet they gave a quartermaster outfit that came in after us. They gave him credit for assault landing.

And our General Tokes, and I don't know if you ever heard of him or not, he just died recently. He was the XO, and General Jones at the time, he was a colonel. Anyway, they both fought the people up in Washington.

And then from there, we went in to make the jump on Corregidor, and that was...

[Speaker 2]
Tell me a little about that jump. What was it like?

[Speaker 1]
Well, it was... First, the DZs were... One of them was 300 yards long and about 150 yards wide.

That was a parade ground. The other DZ was 250 yards long and 150 yards wide, which... Your DZ should be at least 1,000 yards long and 400 or 500 yards wide.

You know, that's ideal. And the wind for about 30, 35 mile an hour, which is 15 to 20 miles. We came in, and the first pass, it had two planes that come in the red.

It was a long line. This is as far as you could see. These C-47s, you know, that's been trailed.

And we came over the DZ. First, they put eight men out, but they drifted. Some of them drifted over the cliffs into the ocean.

And we started jumping at 500 feet, so they lowered it to about 400, and they cut it down to six men. And it's still the wind factor, you know, that it was just... So then they finally went down to about 350 and started putting four men out at a time, which I happened to be the jump master on one of the aircraft there.

And what you do is you come in. We had a sand table, which, you know, they briefed us and all, and you pick out a building, a certain building there, you see it. And that was your release point.

But because of the wind, they gave you the... If you wanted to delay, you'd start counting, you know, like 1,000, 2,000, 3,000, 4,000, whatever. And that would put you on pass, but it'd give them, other jumpers, more space to land in.

It looked easy on the sand table. So we got up there, and they'd been... Aircraft had been bombing the ship, throwing bombs in there, and it was so much dust, it was hard to pick out to your goal point.

And the landing was really rough because they had tore that terrain off. And that was a whole bigger-ness house. And there's just metal and big hunks of concrete all over the place where they tore up the buildings.

And that was rough, guys hitting the... The first two or three aircraft, I guess, on each wing, the wind and the terrain was a big problem. And after that, the Japanese did come out, and they started firing, you know, hit a few guys in the air.

[Speaker 2]

And then when you got on the ground, you hit something when you got on the ground?

[Speaker 1]

Well, we formed up pretty fast there. And when we got on the ground, each unit, company, and then within the company, each platoon had a signed target to go to, objective. And we moved out, and pretty well, I think, the Japs were caught by surprise.

In fact, the commander of the Corregidor, a Japanese captain, Ichigachi was his name. And he had been told, and we found this out from his aide later on when we captured him, that he had been told by the commanding general of the Jap forces to prepare for an airborne landing. And he told the people that there was no way that parachute troops could land there.

I said, in the first place, they're not that crazy. They didn't know you. But he, this Ichigachi, and one of the big things that was in our favor, he got killed in the first 30 minutes there.

He was standing up on a high point looking across to Bataan. And I believe it was the 34th Infantry was loading some LCIs. They were going to make a water landing over there.

And he was watching that as the planes come in and guys drop right in front of it. And they killed him right off the bat. And that's one thing about the Japanese.

They don't breed their troops like Americans. You know, I mean, every man in the 503rd, I was a platoon sergeant. And we went to that sand table I don't have any time.

And we would brief other officers and all. We knew exactly where to go. Every man in there, even the lowest private in there, knew exactly what the mission and where to go and everything.

The Japanese don't do that. They just, the commander, and he might brief, you know, the officers, but he don't brief everybody. So when he got killed, even some of the officers, they didn't know what to do.

They just... So they finally started coming out and coming out in small groups and try to infiltrate the lines and all. And it took two weeks.

We still didn't get them out. We found out later, I think it was, gosh, I don't know how many years, several years that they went back in there and they found some still over there in the cave. But when we finally drove the Japs up to the end of the island, which is about a 500-foot sheer drop there, you know, this cliff there, and they would come up to the end there and just run on off.

Some of them made it down to the water and they tried to swim over to Bataan or somewhere. Of course, we had these boats out there that was getting down. But we'd stop there when the Japs, we'd see a bunch of them and they'd start running, we'd start hollering, you know, go, go!

And from there, we went into... Well, at first, before we got to Crater, we went in on Leyte, some of them up at Luzon, you know. But our last battle was the Negroes, and that was the hardest one for the guys.

Of course, by that time, we had a lot of replacements that come in, you know, new guys that, well, not the old bunch. I could have came home in 19... Well, let's see.

In 43, I could have come back to the States. A lot of the guys did, because we got credit for overseas in Panama, you know. And you built up a lot of points, see, we got so many points.

But I didn't... I didn't want to come home. And I stayed over until they finally let the surrender of the Negroes there, when the Japanese came out of the hills and they surrendered.

[Speaker 2]

This was in the Philippines? Yeah. On Luzon?

[Speaker 1]

No, it's a big island, the Negroes.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, the Negroes.

[Speaker 1]

Okay, yeah. Then I got hit, I think it was about three days before the end of it.

[Speaker 2]

Was that the first time during the war that you...

[Speaker 1]

Oh, no, I got... How am I going? I got wounded down at Nad's Ab on New and Four.

[Speaker 2]

What happened at Nad's Ab?

[Speaker 1]

Beg your pardon? What happened at Nad's Ab? Well, I got shot in the leg there, which wasn't too bad.

We was out on patrol, and a batch of the Jap raised up there, and they just hit me in the leg. And I got shot in the shoulder, on New and Four, and then on Craigador, I pulled off a steel helmet and was wearing one of these little T-caps. I still got it up.

Looked like a hand cap off an artillery piece, about that big. Hit me in the head there, sticking in there. So they carried me out and put me on a hospital ship.

And when I woke up, some major was chewing me out because I'd thrown my steel helmet away. Yeah, I still kept all that stuff. And after that, well...

So you got, what, four Purple Hearts? Yeah. Well, three from there, and then I got two in Korea later on.

But, uh...

[Speaker 2]

But you were there for the surrender of the Japanese in August of 45?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, yeah, yeah. And that was, uh... I started to go with a lot of the guys that, you know, when they disbanded us, deactivated, really.

And they left the ones that... The new guys had just come over, and the old guys that wanted to could go with the 11th Airborne. You know, they went in Japan and occupied that.

[Speaker 2]

They were up in Hokkaido?

[Speaker 1]

Well, they left there out of the Philippines, and they went to Hokkaido and different places there, had them, you know, spread out. So did you go with that group? No, I came back home, and I came back to Fort Benning, and got signed as an instructor at jump school there.

You decided you were going to stay in the military, then? Yeah, and then a little funny incident. My buddy and I had been all through the war.

We'd come back, and we got to Benning, and I said, well... We decided we was going to get out. And so we had built up all these days of leave, and we said, well, let's go take a leave and then come back, you know.

So we did, and... He'd already started his process, you know, to get out. And he said, well, when are you going to start?

And I said, no. I said, when I went home, started home on leave, I went down to the bus station, and get on the bus, and they didn't have no manifest, nobody in charge. I said, I'm going to stay in the Army because I know what they're doing.

So I... I stayed in, and... I really enjoyed it because even after the war, you know, well, I started playing out down at Fort Benning, played on the post football team and the baseball team, and did a lot of boxing, and...

One of the colonels that was down there, Jabo Jablonski, I don't know if you ever heard of him or not, he was playing ball, and he came up to the 82nd. He called me one day and says, how about it, do you want to get transferred up here? And I said, no, I got a good job at the jump school, you know, still.

He said, well, we need a running back. And I said, no, I'm not interested really. He said, well, the order should be there by tomorrow anyway.

So I got transferred up here to the 82nd, and I was playing ball then, because there wasn't too much to do, you know, when you're trained. In fact, I got a new company commander, and I was the first sergeant. He called me in one day and says, you're either going to play football or sergeant, I'm going to do both of them.

And I said, okay. So I went up to practice that afternoon, and Colonel Trapnell, he was later made general, he was, I think, All-American at West Point, and he was playing football too, you know. And I told him what the company commander said, and he said, come on.

We got in the jeep, went down, and Colonel Trapnell told the company commander, he said, they called me brownie, he said, he's first sergeant of the company, and also half-back on a football team, he's going to do both of them, and if you don't like it, we'll see if we can find you another spot. I felt bad about it, but then later on I said, oh, you know, he took it in stride.

[Speaker 2]

You played a pretty aggressive brand of football in the Army, from what I hear.

[Speaker 1]

Oh, yeah, yeah. In fact, we had a good football team. We had a regimental team that went up to the time, Winston-Salem, and it was a controlled scrimmage of the Washington Redskins, and we beat them.

Of course, it was controlled, like I say, when they'd make a mistake, they'd stop it and point it out to them, but yeah, we had some good football. A lot of guys went on. In fact, Joe Schmidt, I don't know if you ever heard of him.

Oh, yeah, I know Joe Schmidt. Okay, you know, he didn't get signed out of the University of Pittsburgh at all. He was playing with the 504 down there when he got signed.

Of course, later he was an all-pro for about 10 years, and then coached the Detroit Lions. About as rugged as anybody gets. Oh, yeah, he was a real fine guy.

We had a lot of good guys there. Joey Giardella, the boxer, he boxed on our team here. A lot of good athletes back then.

[Speaker 2]

So that sort of filled your time between 45 and 50?

[Speaker 1]

Yes. In 50, I was the first sergeant there in the 504, the M Company, and they had everybody out on the parade ground there one day, and the regiment said they needed volunteers for the 187, in Korea. So they went to Japan, and they came back to Korea, and then they went back to Japan and come back over, I think.

So I volunteered to go over there. And I went with the 187 and made the two combat jumps with them. Where did you jump into there?

Well, the first one was there was actually two drop zones that were kind of close together. Suchan and, let's see, what the heck was that? Suchan and...

[Speaker 2]

Well, it's close.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, they were right together, just the railroad, I think, yeah. And then the other one was Monsignor. Were there Chinese around then?

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, Suchan and Sunchan, that's what it was, yeah, back then. Yeah, they were...

When we landed, we took off and fighting right then. How did the Chinese compare with the Japanese as opponents? Well, they were the same.

They used the same tactics. It was just mass. They had no, you know, maneuvers or fire maneuvers or nothing like that.

They just massed, come at you and massed. In fact, we filled a little stream up. I guess the stream was a little wider than this room.

We were sitting up on an old, and there was a clearing on the other side about 100 yards, and then the woods in there were pretty thick, you know, and we could hear them all the way. And they were just like Dad and me, they're chanting, you know, and here they come. We stopped that stream up.

I think, I don't want to have me all along, ask them, I said, about 700 or something like that. But they just, you know, they'd come and then we'd beat them back and they'd go back in there and here they come again. That's the same tactics that the Japanese used.

If you've got enough firepower to beat them and enough discipline, then that's a murder. Yeah. That's really target practice for you.

Yeah, I came back from there and went back to the old fort. You say you got wounded twice over there too? Yeah, uh-huh.

Then I got, I come back and I was there until July of 1952 and one of the guys in the company came in one day and said, they're starting some type of unit over on Smokebomb

Hill that's here at Bragg. He said, I don't know what it is, they won't tell you anything. So I jumped in the car and went over and talked to the guy.

It was when they was forming Special Forces. And I put in an application and transferred over there. And I stayed with them up until I retired in 1976.

I stayed 35 years and 4 months. Long term. Yeah.

Well, I'd still be there if it let me.

[Speaker 2]

The Special Forces training, when they started the Special Forces, what was it like?

[Speaker 1]

Well, when it first started, it was just a hit and miss thing. There was no manuals or anything. It was written, you know.

In fact, I've still got a book there on sabotage and that I drew these different drawings, you know, how to set up all these different things. And that's incorporated. I still use the manual today.

[Speaker 2]

I was wondering what they were teaching you to do.

[Speaker 1]

Well, mostly, you know, sabotage, use of foreign demolition, foreign weapons. We had a lot of how to set up intel nets and stuff like this. And it was real interesting.

We used to play a game. We had to keep civilian clothes in the barracks. We'd come in some morning and they would say, OK, you guys are getting serious.

And they'd break us down, you know, into different teams. And they'd take us down to the airfield, put us on a plane. We'd fly around for maybe two or three hours and then they'd tell you to get out.

And, of course, you didn't know where you was at, but hell, it ain't hard to find out, you know. But then they would send another bunch in after you. And, you know, you maneuver around, keep out of contact with them.

We used to play what they called a hare and a hound, which would give a team maybe an hour to start and another team would follow. And you had to be going to some bar or restaurant, you know, and you had a contact man there. But you didn't know who he was and you nice day today and it nice day today and it finally this guy, yes it is, whatever it was, you know.

And he would pass you a note or something telling you where your next contact point was. It was a lot of fun, right? Yeah, real different from...

Yeah, that's one of the reasons I left 82nd because it got repetitious. You knew on the 18th of August of 1994 you was going to be doing the same thing you've been doing today. And

we had a lot of foreign map reading and later on you had to go to everybody had to go to language school.

Language school? Yeah.

[Speaker 2]

What sort of languages did they teach you?

[Speaker 1]

Well, it depended on what area you were... Each group in today and they started has a assigned area operation. Like the 10th Special Forces which is in, part of them is in Europe now.

Of course, Europe is there. 7th and 8th Special Forces to South America and Spanish, so they go to Spanish. And the ones in Germany, you know.

And then if you're older enough you go to you speak Japanese or Okinawan or something like that because there's a lot of that assembly. What one were you in? Well, I was in I was in Germany and then the Far East too.

I took Chinese and Spanish here because I was in the 7th and I learned some Spanish. The guys over there, you know, they were like I say, German or Russian You went to Vietnam? I had four trips to Vietnam.

[Speaker 2]

When was your first one?

[Speaker 1]

In 1961.

[Speaker 2]

Fairly early then.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, we started, we had Special Forces, I was with them. We had troops over in 58, 59 in which they were operating. I came back from there in 61 in the latter part and I was, let's see, I got there and I came home in January of 62 and then March of 62 I was back over, I was over in Laos.

Working with the Montagnards? No, in Laos we were working, you know with the the Laotians. The L.O. they call them. And then we stayed over there until 62 and then they closed it out, we came back. And then I went to Nam again and let's see I was over in 63 I went in 66 and 67 then I went back in 69 and 70 and came back.

[Speaker 2]

What kind of differences did you see? You were there early and you were there fairly late. You mean in Vietnam?

In Vietnam, yeah.

[Speaker 1]

Well other than being in a different area, I didn't really see much. Pretty much the same? Yeah, I didn't see too much.

[Speaker 2]

Working with, were you working with the Vietnamese?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, we were special forces you know, we had our teams and we had our counterparts for them. Then my last tour over there was really interesting I worked with the PRU under the CIA, which is the Provincial Reconnaissance Unit they call it. And we were more or less out on our own.

In fact, when I went there there was a major that dropped in a rice paddy in one of those mud huts out there. So, I went up and checked in and he was in the room there and I said, well, you get time to brief me on what's going on. He said, Sergeant Major, if you want to walk out to the chopper with me, I'll tell you what I know.

I said, what do you mean? He said, I'm leaving. He said, it's yours.

So I left there, I didn't know anybody. We had a captain, two lieutenants, and a sergeant, and about four or five privates that were deserters from the South Vietnamese Army. They had a 50-man contingency and the rest of them were deserters from the B.C. That was really quite a bunch. Yeah, and then we stayed out there for about a week and the chopper came down one day and I said, how about dropping me off? I knew where the CIA had a compound in a little town called Tan-An, they called it, Long-An Province. So I went in there and it just so happened that the agent there was an ex-Special Forces friend of mine.

And he told me, he said, you're supposed to be in here. And he said, that Major, he wanted to stay out there, you know, so I moved in and the P.R.U. didn't have a compound. They just lived all over town, you know.

Of course, we had a net set up when they needed them and got them right together. But nobody ever messed with us. We were on our own.

They were real good, these deserters from the B.C. We'd be flying out on a mission and look down, there'd be a pond and they'd land and they'd dive under, you know, stinking water. They had these large berms, you know, built up there. They'd go down and they'd find a hole and come up and they'd come in and go in there and they had weapons and food and all that stuff where they kept it.

But they knew exactly where to go, which we'd been out there for months looking for. So it worked out pretty well then? Oh yeah, yeah.

And I worked with them out in yards, too, you know, one trip over there. And as far as fighters, I would say, you know, they just, in regular combat, they were the best ones. I didn't think too much of the regular Vietnamese Army.

They was the kind, when you run into something, they all wanted to pull out, you know. But the months in yards were... Oh yeah, yeah.

They'd stay with you. I mean, if you got in trouble, they'd stay with you. They'd let up.

We got on a mission there one time, we got on a patrol and we'd been out about four or five days, it was, and run into some ambushes and they started chasing us. And we'd take off, you know, and go as far as we could and then try to hold them off a while. This went on about two or three days.

And we finally got a chopper in there and they extracted us, you know. But we lost two or three men on that. In fact, one of the guys started hovering, got shot and he was pretty well shot up.

And we tried to carry him, you know, and we carried him out and then finally he just... And we stopped to go back up the trail and put a roadblock up and we went up there and come back, he shot himself. You know, left a note and you know, he was holding us up, all that.

That must have been hard. Yeah. But we brought him out and didn't leave him in there.

Think you might have made it if you hadn't?

[Speaker 2]

No, no.

[Speaker 1]

He was gone, man. He couldn't even... We just, you know, first started we'd walk, hold him up and then he finally just went away.

[Speaker 2]

Did you get wounded in the Pacific and Korea? Did it happen in Vietnam too?

[Speaker 1]

Well, yeah, but I never turned in. I got a punishment for taking that. I was kind of ashamed of that, so I never turned that in.

You had enough Purple Hearts anyway. Yeah, I got three combat after badges.

[Speaker 2]

That's what I heard from Colonel Lee, that you're one of the few.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, that's about... I think it's, they got it up about 300 now. Really?

Yeah. When I got mine it was on 100-something, they found. And they had a big ceremony and put us in the Hall of Fame down at Fort Benning.

Yeah, I got five combat jumps. Yeah. Kind of proud of that.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, I'm sure.

[Speaker 1]

But I enjoyed my life in the service. I've been asked several times, would you do it again? I said, I'd do the same thing I did.

And I would. Yeah, I didn't want to get out when I did. In fact, when I got extended 30 years was the limit.

Then it came up that some general recommended me for the five extra years. So I got called in by General Emerson, and I didn't really like him, but he asked me had I thought about staying. I said, well, yeah.

He said, well, I've already recommended you. I had recommended you to the Department of the Army. And they came back and approved.

[Speaker 2]

So it worked.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, and then I went up to them, put in my papers, and they told me personnel that my records were incomplete. Part of them had been burned in the fire in St. Louis. And I said, well, there's no problem.

I don't think. So I brought in four cardboard boxes. I had kept a copy of just about every order that was cut on me that I needed.

And I said, here. And they took four months to get it out. And they said, well, you just go home and watch.

And I was still on the payroll. So you're living here now in Fayetteville close to Fort Bragg? Yeah, not too far.

And when we retired, my wife's from Memphis, and we went back there and she, they were the same. So I came up to Florence and and one old boy went to high school with. The only one around that I really knew.

He went in the Army and I said, hell, I can't talk to him. And most of the people that you know we knew had retired around here. And so we just came back here.

It's not bad. I mean, they got their ups and downs like every other place, I guess. This one gets more publicity, I think, than a lot of places because of Fort Bragg.

One of the things that we most of the old retirees, I don't care what happens around here, murder, robbery, the first thing they do in the papers are the ex-special forces. And we know that the guy, some of them, there was some of them, but we know they never was in there. I guess the special forces got that reputation of being killers, you know.

Yeah, they used to have a sign, you know, that said kill them all, let God sort them out and stuff like that. I guess that's about the extent of my career, I don't know.

[Speaker 2]

Like I say, I really enjoy it. Sounds like it suited you pretty well. Doing things you could do well and knew how to do and part of it at least enjoyed doing.

[Speaker 1]

Like I say, I guess the type of work around there just didn't appeal to me. I wasn't the brightest student in high school. I could have been a lot more.

My big interest was in sports. And I just, you know, I made my grades and I kept up. I didn't make it cut to any death.

But at times I wish I'd gone back there. I go back there now once a year. A lot of the guys that went to high school are back and we have a reunion of our football team.

I have a sister still living there and my wife has a sister living there.

[Speaker 2]

So you got some ties there but you got ties here too.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. Like I say, it's not bad. The neighborhood I live in we like the only thing we have there is a couple of streets over.

It's kind of a cut through. These guys move fast, slide in somebody's yard. It's not bad.

[Speaker 2]

There are worse things than that. Oh yeah. Well, I thank you for coming in.

[Speaker 1]

Well, I hope I really don't know what to talk about other than just run over.

[Speaker 2]

Is there anything else you, well one of the things I should ask, you've seen a lot of changes in the Army over time. Yeah. It's different.

It must have been a lot different when you got out than when you got in. You seem, you're close enough to brag now still to make a kind of judgment anyway about the current military. What do you think of it now compared to what it was?

[Speaker 1]

Well, one of the big things I noticed, and even the guys in service today, a lot of them will tell you that the big thing is the lack of discipline. They don't enforce discipline like they did when I came in. When he said move, you moved.

They did strike a few guys back in. In fact, I got knocked about 15 yards by a great big old sergeant that won the Medal of Honor in World War I. I was taking finishing my recruit training and I was in the heavy weapons company on a .30 caliber water-cooled machine gun and we had to detail strip it, you know, that's go all the way down and I came to a part and I couldn't think of the name of it and this old sergeant happened to walk up by that time and boy, he hit me and I went and he said, you got five minutes to get back to the barracks and

get you a manual and get back in. And we was about 300 yards from the barracks. I'd say a minute and a half I was back there.

I don't even know where the fire went but I'll never forget the name of it. It was a firing pin, spraying pin, retaining pin and I'll never forget that part. I think that's one thing, you know, I think you would even be amazed if you heard some of the comments that officers receive from guys, you know, they tell you to do something, you know, and I mean, it's filthy language.

I wouldn't say it here on that, but it's real and it's got as important as nothing you do to them. That's their right, you know. And that's a big thing and I think one of the big things that I had a problem with was the long hair.

I just wasn't used to it and an old man called me in one day, Colonel Rudosevich, he was my CO and he said, he said, I don't like it anymore than you do, but we're gonna have to accept it so you're just gonna have to get used to it. And it finally wore off. It didn't affect the guy's work, but just I was used to, you know, a more neat appearance in one day.

It wasn't even back when I it wasn't shaved, I mean, not like yours, you know, they kept it maybe a little close on the side but it wasn't, but to me, then, that was long hair.

[Speaker 2]

And it's what you're used to.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, it's and another thing, it's the Army now is an 8 to 5 job. I mean, when I came in, we was on call 24 hours a day and I've been called out 2 and 3 and 4 o'clock in the morning, a lot of times to come out, you know. They I don't regret the fact that they got these barracks with individual rooms and all that.

That gives a guy privacy. But then I think back and I think how much a man misses the younger soldiers but not living in the barracks with a bunch of guys. I didn't think much of it then.

I always wanted to make MCO because at the end of the barracks they had two rooms down there and that's where they you know, I wanted to do that. But I look back, I think I learned a lot living out there in the squad bay. I learned a lot.

It'd be hard for me to pinpoint, but I mean Yeah, I understand. And I think it's a good experience. And too, I think every young man in the United States should serve at least two years.

Not, you know, it's Army will make a man out of you if you put something into it. It'll make a man out of you. If they had the money in the defense budget to do that.

And I come in and I made \$21 a month and I got \$18.50 over the board time. I took out a quarter for the old soldiers home and all that. I think they fit better back then than they do now.

It seemed like the cooks and the mess sergeants were more you know concerned about the type of food and how it was prepared and all that. And the dress it's they don't you don't see guys dressed like they used to, you know. Of course now a lot of that is the fault of the of the commanders.

I was used to, I mean here in the states to starch fatigues spit shine boots. And when I was the first sergeant I went home I lived on poles. I'd go home at lunch and before I went back to duty I changed uniform.

I put on fresh starch fatigue. But some of these guys looked like they'd come out of a storm ditch or something.

[Speaker 2]

And that's interesting that even here at Fort Bragg it's got a reputation for being a pretty elite outfit.

[Speaker 1]

But like I say one of the things I hear a lot of gripes about I'm on the list out here at Fort Bragg. Every time they have some kind of ceremony or you know a briefing or something I get an invitation to come out. And I hear a lot of these young guys griping about the fact that they just don't blouse in their pants, you know.

They were born proud of their boots. And now they have to blouse it and stick it down in their boots. Just like that.

We were used to sticking we used what we call retaining bands. We used everything. Some of them longer than straight.

But we used to take it and blouse it over like that. But they won't let them do that now. That hurts a lot of the young people.

[Speaker 2]

Those things are important.

[Speaker 1]

Oh yeah, they sure are. And now for the retirees around here and one day I think there's going to be a big rebellion is the medical care. They've just about cut it out out here for the retirees.

You're lucky if you get in there. Now I happen to volunteer down there and I don't feel it as much as the outsiders. But that's another thing.

We've been wrote to all of our congressmen and everything and just here about a week ago one of the guys went over to the recruiting office and got a copy of one of those recruiting posters or folders and they're still promising the guys coming into the service today as far as health and all these benefits as they did when I come in. Still, you know, if you are guaranteed, you know, you'll be given health, medical, and PX and commissary privilege and all that then they're still doing that. Even though you're the retirees aren't getting it.

No, that's right. And, uh, this organization I belong to in fact, Colonel Leake belongs to the Retired Military Association and they are really strong in a lot of these things. They go up to Raleigh and Lobby and all that stuff.

And, uh, somebody suggested that we post two or three of the retirees around the recruiting station to have one over in, uh, Bordeaux to have one. It saves some of the old retirees when a young guy comes up for the recruit and don't do it. You know?

That might get somebody's attention. I think it would. I'm not much on these things, but I'd be willing to do that.

Maybe get a TV camera out there and we'd probably make a story out of that. But that's, that right now is the big, uh, Yeah, you know, we're building a medical center here. And it's the big, I guess, the largest one.

And when they started this, it was all based on the number of active duty and retirees in this area. That's what they're based on building and what they got a lot of their funds. So, that's gonna be interesting to see.

Well, good luck. Well, I hope so. I mean...

[Speaker 2]

The following is an interview with Louis E. Brown 817 Morrision Road M-O-R-I-S-T-O-N Morrision Road Fayetteville, North Carolina Interview conducted by Dr. Charles Johnson Center for the Study of War and Society, University of Tennessee Knoxville Interview, August 18, 1993 University. Well, usually I start off by finding out where the person's from, when they joined the service, what their early time in it was like.

[Speaker 1]

Where are you from? I'm from a little town in North Alabama, Florence, Alabama. I know Florence.

And I had just graduated from high school and I didn't even stick around long enough to get my diploma. My sister got it for me. I enlisted in the Army Air Corps, of course that time the Air Corps and all were together and I was 16 years old.

What year was that? In 1940. Oh, before we got involved.

Oh yeah, so they wouldn't let me enlist after I went up there. So I went home and got my brother's birth certificate and went back the next day and thank God he enlisted me.

[Speaker 2]

How come you were in such a hurry to go?

[Speaker 1]

Well, I had been going around to these baseball tryouts and everywhere I'd go they told me I was a little too small. So I got disappointed. I really didn't like the type of work that I would have to have done around.

Of course the TVA was a big thing and there's a Ford motor thing and rental saloon and all that. But that just didn't appeal to me and I've always wanted to fly. So I took the aviation cadet exam and passed it and I was told I was going to Randolphville, Texas.

So they sent me to Fort McPherson, Georgia and I stayed there a couple of days and I went from there to Fort Moultrie in South Carolina down on the beach in a tent. Stayed there about a week and the next thing I knew it was really a boat not a ship that small. And I wound up in Panama on the 14th Infantry and that's where I took my recruit training.

Back in as a recruit instead of basic trainer. You must have felt that you'd been had right to begin with. Yeah and I went in and told the 1st Sergeant that I had enlisted in the Air Corps and he looked at my records and that's when he said, well you haven't had any recruit training and as soon as we finish you come back in and I'll see if I can get you one of the local fields in Panama.

But so I went busting in the day after I finished and he had tried but he couldn't help me so and let's see it was October of 40 was in the day run and there was a bulletin that the parachute test platoon had finished their training and asked for volunteers. So I went in and told the 1st Sergeant I wanted to put in the parachute troops and his comment was what the hell is that? Because they didn't have any regulations hadn't gotten down that far.

So he told the clerk to type it out and I hung around there about oh maybe two or three weeks and I came to Fort Benning, Georgia and I went to jump school there and we finished up we started in December of 40 and my class finished in January of 41. What was jump school like? Oh it, to me it was a real bust.

I mean I was young and I was you know had plenty of vinegar and all that stuff and I enjoyed it myself. It was rough. I mean it was probably the roughest training I'd ever gone through.

Physically demanding?

[Speaker 2]

Oh yeah.

[Speaker 1]

If I hadn't finished high school and I was active in all the sports they had there, football, baseball, basketball, boxing and anything they had I participated in and I was in good shape. Then after I got finished my training and got into the 501st Parachute Battalion, the men there were so much different than what I had known. I mean this was a close-knit bunch of men and I really liked it.

We went to Panama, back to Panama, went on the opposite side and we did a lot of jungle training down there. Of course along with the jumps and everything. This was the 501st?

Yeah, 501st Parachute Battalion. And I stayed with them until let's see it was October 42. Then the 503rd Parachute Regiment was going to the Pacific and they had lost one battalion that had gone to England and later came the 509th, they jumped to North Africa and that was originally the 2nd Battalion of the 503rd.

So when they came to, going to the Pacific, came to Panama and they took the 501st Battalion and we became the 2nd Battalion of the 503rd and went to Australia and trained there for a while and moved into New Guinea.

[Speaker 2]

What was the training like in Australia?

[Speaker 1]

It was a continuation of the training we got in Panama, jungle training mostly.

[Speaker 2]

What sort of weapons did you use?

[Speaker 1]

Well, we all, most all the guys, we had basic infantry weapons. Most all of the guys had the carbine M1 and then later came the M2. Of course we had some people who had the M1, they call it, and then still had guys with the old 03.

And one of the interesting things about that, when we started jumping, we had the old 03 and we loosened the strap and held it around our hand and you'd go out the door. Well, that's alright for the first two or three men. Then they'd start rushing the line and the weapon would get canted and the guy would get caught on the door.

So they, somebody came up with the bright idea of cutting, I think, six inches off the barrel. And that was really the, I guess, the starting of the carbine and the thing. And of course the other guys that we jumped with the machine guns and they held them in the arm and all that.

Then they later came out with a container, a griswold container in which you broke your weapon down and put it in that. A tube kind of? Was it a tube of some kind?

No, it was just a full canvas thing. It was about this long and it had a flap on it and then you stuck it down in there. Then we did, before that, we did test these containers, you know, and they would drop them with different colored chutes.

One, you know, would signify a machine gun. Another, something like that. Did you do much night training or was it during the day usually?

Well, we did quite a bit of night training in Panama. And when we got to New Guinea we set up our camp and we did train there and then the Australians had a, what they call, like a commando school. Most all of us went to that and that consisted of jungle survival and all the stuff like that.

It was real interesting. What did you think of the Australians? I liked them.

I always said, if I ever get run out of this country, that's where I'm going. In fact, I am an honorary citizen of Australia. They made most of us honorary and gave us a certificate and all this good stuff.

We go back occasionally to the outfit and they really roll out the red carpet for us.

[Speaker 2]

When did you go into New Guinea?

[Speaker 1]

We went in there in 1943. We had...

[Speaker 2]

Because the 32nd went in there in September of 1942 down the Rambuna.

[Speaker 1]

Well, we went in there in 1943. Of course, I was still in the parachute crew. And we went in to Hollandia first, but it was a landed by LCI, you know, the landing craft.

No, not on that. Then we came back into Oro Bay there in New Guinea. Then we left from there and went into what's called NADZAP, Lae, New Guinea really.

And that was the first combat parachute drop in the Pacific. Had you had any combat in Hollandia before? Not on a large scale.

It was mostly patrolling there. Too much contact with the Japanese? We had some, you know.

Like I say, we went in there. Actually, other troops had gotten there, so they went. Now, Numenfor, that was what most consider as a unit our first real combat.

[Speaker 2]

Where's that? Numenfor.

[Speaker 1]

I'm not saying Numenfor. I mean NADZAP. Yeah, that was what they call Lae, New Guinea.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, I know.

[Speaker 1]

We did have some. Then our next combat jump was in How did that first combat jump go?

[Speaker 2]

How did it work?

[Speaker 1]

Well, they say General Gavin, all of it, it was the perfect airborne combat jump. We had a regiment and we jumped the whole regiment and landed and was assembling in less than four and a half minutes. Which is very unusual.

Yeah, usually well, like in Europe they never really got assembled over there. This was a large valley and they just spread the planes out and went in and of course the jump was about 700 feet. Oh, C-47s?

Right. Numenfor was well, the jump wasn't too bad really for some people and for others it was. The lead aircraft said his altimeters were wrong.

We came in and the first three or four aircraft started dropping at 175 feet which is way below the safety. A lot of guys got banged up on that. Then we that was probably our first encounter with cannibalism by the Japanese.

Oh really? We had heard rumors that they were cannibalizing the natives there. But we found first I guess was an Australian that had been cannibalized.

Then we later found two of our own men. Of course that set the spark and so we sent a patrol out and they followed but it took them about two days and they finally caught up with the, I think it was, I don't remember six or eight Japs. They had rucksacks on their back and it was filled with human flesh.

So they had cannibalized him on us. I guess they were starving but the guys didn't wait around for that. They killed him right on the spot.

[Speaker 2]

Once that sort of thing gets started that sort of problem then it's real tough.

[Speaker 1]

And mostly there we had, you know, we were on patrol every day and of course you'd run into scattered... It wasn't really what you'd say heavy fighting. It'd be just you know skirmishes more or less.

[Speaker 2]

The Japanese were withdrawing pretty much or they just had left?

[Speaker 1]

Well they were trying but that was a Newman for us an hour. That wasn't too far they could go. Of course they were getting out at night, you know.

They was having these landing German, I mean Japanese that were coming and picking them up and all. A lot of them were getting out. Then, let's see, we kind of had a break.

We went back to Australia and trained quite a bit and then we came back to New Guinea and had another assault landing at Biak.

[Speaker 2]

Was it a hot landing over there?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, yeah. Again, you know this, New Guinea was being pretty well cleared out, you know. And for some of the marches there, you know, these patrols really got kind of..

That's some rough country in there. What was it like? Describe it for me a little bit.

[Speaker 2]

I was never been there, of course. You mean the... Yeah, what the country was like.

[Speaker 1]

Well, it was there mostly jungles and then there was mountains. One side, you know, was pretty mountainous and the others were there. And for that time, most of the natives had moved out, you know.

It was real rough country. Snakes, insects, animals? Did you have a problem with snakes or...? No, I guess like most of the places, they did have a lot of mosquitoes, but I don't remember ever seeing a snake or anything. Never heard anybody talk about it. Some of the guys said that they saw some tigers and things, but I never did. I don't know what that's...

Was disease a problem? The what? Was disease a problem?

Well, I guess malaria and dysentery was the biggest thing. About everybody had that, you know. But there was a...

I don't know. We called it a jungle fever that hit some of the guys. It was, you know, pretty rough on them.

[Speaker 2]

What did you think of the Japanese as an opponent, as an enemy?

[Speaker 1]

Well, we... I didn't think too much of them, and I don't think much of them because I guess later on I really gained a lot of respect for them. They were good fighters, but I guess if you look at it in another way, they really weren't good, you know, in their tactics and things.

They just... I don't know. They were brave, but that was because of sack-in dope and stuff.

I mean, they very seldom ever went into a battle unless they was all what we call goons, you know. But they fought to the end. They didn't give up.

We I guess it was in... Lumenfuhr was the first prisoner I ever saw. We only got one or two.

Our commander wasn't too hip on bringing back prisoners, you know. It was one of these deals where you bring a prisoner in, you take care of him. We don't have any place to handle him, you know.

So nobody wanted to bring a guy in to take care of him. And let's see. We had a couple more assault landings.

Then we went in to the Philippines. And our first encounter there, we had an assault landing on Mindoro.

[Speaker 2]

Were you part of a division? Oh, no.

[Speaker 1]

We fought as a regimental combat team all the way through. We were just an infantry up until Lumenfuhr. And we got a battalion of artillery.

Parachute artillery. And one company of engineers. And that made what they call a combat team.

And from then on, we fought as a combat team.

[Speaker 2]

That was the 503rd?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, 503rd. Yeah. And then we landed unopposed.

Of course, we was the actually the first. No, I'll take it back. It was another group that got in there before.

But we were the second. And the Department of Army in later years, and they still don't recognize that as a combat assault. But yet, they gave a quartermaster outfit that came in after us.

They gave him credit for assault landing. And our General Tolson, I don't know if you ever heard of him or not. He just died recently.

He was the XO. And General Jones, at the time, he was a Colonel. They both fought people up in Washington about it, you know.

And then from there, we went in to make the jump on Corregidor.

[Speaker 2]

Tell me a little about that jump. What was it like?

[Speaker 1]

Well, it was, first, the DZs were one of them was 300 yards long and about 150 yards wide. That was a parade ground. The other DZ was 250 yards long and 150 yards wide, which your DZ should be at least 1,000 yards long and 400 or 500 yards wide, you know.

That's ideal. And the winds were about 30, 35 miles an hour, which is 15 to 20 miles over. And we came in and the first pass, it had two planes that come in the red.

It was a long line. This is as far as you could see. These C-47s, you know, and trail.

And we came over the DZ with the first couple of passes, they put eight men out, but they drifted. Some of them drifted over the cliffs into the ocean. And we started jumping at 500 feet, so they lowered it to about 400, and they cut it down to six men.

And it still is a wind factor, you know. So then they finally went down to about 350 and started putting four men out at a time, which we, I happen to be the jumpmaster on one of the aircraft and what you do is you come in, we had a stand table, which, you know, they braped us and all, and you pick out a building, a certain building there, you see it, and that was your release point. But because of the wind, they gave you the, if you wanted to delay, you start counting, you know, like 1,000, 2,000, 3,000, 4,000, whatever, and that would put you on pass, but it'd give them other jumpers more space to land in.

It looked easy on the stand table, so we got up there, and they'd been aircraft had been bombing the ship, throwing bombs in there, you know, around, and it was so much dust it was hard to pick out to your goal point. And the landing was really rough because they had tore that terrain off, see, and that was a whole biggerness house, and it just, metal and big chunks of concrete all over the plane where they tore up the building, and that was rough, guys hitting, and the first two or three aircraft, I guess, on each wing, the wind and the terrain was a big problem, and after that, the Japanese did come out, and they started firing, and hit a few guys in the air.

[Speaker 2]

And then when you got on the ground, you hit something when you got on the ground?

[Speaker 1]

Well, we jumped up pretty fast, and when we got on the ground, each unit company, and within the company, each platoon had a assigned target to go to. Objective, and we moved out, and pretty well, I think, the Japs were caught by surprise. In fact, the commander of Corregidor, a Japanese captain, Ichigachi, was his name, and he had been told, and we found this out from his aide, you know, later on when we captured him, that he had been told by the commanding general of the Jap forces to prepare for an airborne landing, and he told the people that there was no way that parachute troops could land there.

He said, in the first place, they're not that crazy. They didn't know you. But he, this Ichigachi, and it was one of the big things that was in our favor, he got killed in the first 30 minutes there.

He was standing up on a high point looking across to Bataan, and I believe it was the 34th Infantry was loading some LCIs, they were going to make a water landing over there. And he was watching that as the planes come in, and guys drop right in front of it. And they killed him right off the bat.

And that's one thing about the Japanese, they don't breathe their troops like Americans. You know, I mean, every man in the 503rd, I was platoon sergeant, and we went to that sand table at Adelheimen time, and we would brief other officers and all. We knew exactly where to go, every man in there.

Even the lowest private in there knew exactly what the mission and where to go and everything. The Japanese don't do that. The commander and he might brief the officers, but he don't brief everybody.

So, when he got killed, even some of the officers, they didn't know what to do. They just... So, they finally started coming out in small groups and try to infiltrate the lines and all.

And it took two weeks. We still didn't get them out. We found out later, I think it was gosh, I don't know how many years, several years that they went back in there and they found some still over there in the cave.

When we finally drove the Japs up to the end of the island, which was about 500 foot sheer drop there, you know, just cliffs there. They would come up to the end there and just run on

on. Some of them made it down to the water and they tried to swim over to Bataan or somewhere.

Of course, they had these boats out there that was getting out. But we'd step there on the Japs and we'd see a bunch of them and they'd start running and we'd start hollering, you know, go, go! And from there we went into well, at first before we got to Crater, we went in on Leyte and some of them up at Luzon, you know.

But our last battle was in Negros and that was the hardest one for the guys. Of course, by that time we had a lot of replacements that had come in, you know, new guys that weren't like the old bunch. I could have came home in 19...

the... well, let's see. In 43, I could have come back to the States.

A lot of the guys did because we got credit for overseas in Panama, you know. And you built up a lot of points, see, we got so many points. But I didn't...

I didn't want to come home. And I stayed over until they finally at the surrender of the Negros there when the Japanese came out of the hills and they surrendered. This was in the Philippines?

[Speaker 2]

Yes. On Luzon?

[Speaker 1]

No, it's a big island called Negros.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, Negros.

[Speaker 1]

Okay, yeah. That's what I know. Then I got hit I think it was about three days before the end of it.

[Speaker 2]

Was that the first time during the war?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, no, I got... How am I going? I got wounded down at NEDS and on New and Four.

What happened at NEDS then? What happened at NEDS then? Well, I got shot in the leg there, which wasn't too bad.

We was out on patrol and a bastard and a Jap raised up there and he was getting in the way. And I got shot in the shoulder in New and Four and on Krakatoa I pulled off a steel helmet and was wearing one of these little T-caps. I still got it up.

It looked like a hand cap off an artillery piece about that big. It hit me in the head there, sticking in there. So they carried me out and put me on a hospital ship.

And when I woke up some major was chewing me out because I threw my steel helmet away. Yeah, I still kept all that stuff. And after that, well...

[Speaker 2]

So you got, what, four Purple Hearts?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. About three from there and then I got two in Korea later on.

[Speaker 2]

But you were there for the surrender of the Japanese in August of 1945?

[Speaker 1]

Oh yeah. And that was I started to go with a lot of the guys that, you know, when they disbanded us, deactivated really, and they left the ones that, the new guys had just come over and the old guys that wanted to go with the 11th Airborne, you know, they went in Japan and occupied that.

[Speaker 2]

They were up in Hokkaido?

[Speaker 1]

Well, they left there out of the Philippines and they went to Hokkaido and different places there. I had them, you know, spread out. So did you go with that group?

No, I came back home then. I came back to Fort Benning, got signed as an instructor at Jump School. You decided you were going to stay in the military then?

Yes, and then a little funny instant, my buddy and I had been all through the war when we come back, we got to Benning and signed and said, well we decided we were going to get out. And so we had built up all these days of leave and we said, well, let's go take a leave and then come back, you know. So we did and he'd already started his process, you know, to get out and he said, well, are you going to start?

And I said, no. I said, well, I went home, started home on leave and went down to the bus station and get on the bus and didn't have no manifest, nobody in charge. I said, I'm going to stay in the Army because I know what they're doing.

So I stayed in and I really enjoyed it because even after the war, you know, I started playing out down at Fort Benning, played on the post football team and the baseball team and did a lot of boxing and one of the colonels that was down there, Jabo Jablonski, I don't know if you ever heard of him or not, he was a general, you know, well he was playing ball and he came up to the 82nd and he called me one day and said how about you want to get transferred up here?

And I said, no I got a good job at jump school, you know still. He said, well we need a running back and I said, no, I'm not interested really. He said, well, your order should be there by tomorrow anyway.

So I got transferred up here to the 82nd and I played, was playing ball and it wasn't too much to do, you know, you trained and in fact, got a new company commander and I was first sergeant and he called me in one day and says you're either going to play football or you're going to be the first sergeant, you're not going to do both of them. And I said, okay. So I went up to practice that afternoon and Colonel Trapnell, he was later made general and he was, I think All-American at West Point and he was playing football too you know.

And I told him what the company commander said. He said, come on we got in the jeep and went down and Colonel Trapnell told the company commander he said, they called me Brownie he said, he's first sergeant of the company and also half-back on the football team and he's going to do both of them and if you don't like it, well we'll see if we can find you another spot. I felt bad about it because later on the CO, you know, he took it in stride.

[Speaker 2]

You played a pretty aggressive brand of football in the Army from what I hear.

[Speaker 1]

Oh yeah, yeah. In fact, we had a good football team. We had a regimental team that went up at the time, Winston-Salem and it was a controlled scrimmage of the Washington Redskins and we beat them.

Of course, there was control, like I say when they'd make a mistake, you know they'd stop it and point it out to them but yeah, we had some good football. A lot of guys went on. In fact, Joe Smith, I don't know if you ever heard of him.

Oh yeah, I know Joe Smith. You know, he didn't get signed out of the University of Pittsburgh at all. Yeah, he was playing with the 504 down there when he got signed.

Of course, later he was an all-pro for about 10 years and then coached the Detroit Lions. About as rugged as anybody gets. Oh yeah, he was a real fine guy.

We had a lot of good guys there. Joey Giardella the boxer, he boxed on our team here. A lot of good athletes back then.

So that sort of filled your time between 45 and 50? Yes. Right up, really, I guess yeah.

In 50, I was the first sergeant there in the 504 the M company and they had everybody out on the prairie ground there one day and the regiment said they needed volunteers for the 187, you know, in Korea. Of course, they went to Japan and they came back to Korea and then they went back to Japan and come back over, I think. So I volunteered to go over there and I went with 187 and made the two combat jumps with them.

Where did you jump into there? Well, it was the first one was it was actually two drop zones, they were kind of close together. Sukchon and what the heck was that?

Sukchon and Well, it's close. Yeah, they were right together. Just the railroad, I think.

And then the other one was Monsignor.

[Speaker 2]

Were there Chinese around then? Oh, yeah, yeah.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, Sukchon and Sunchon, that's what it was. Yeah, they were when we landed, we took off fighting right then.

[Speaker 2]

How did the Chinese compare with the Japanese as opponents?

[Speaker 1]

Well, they were the same. They used the same tactics. It was just mass.

They had no, you know, maneuvers, no fire maneuvers or nothing like that. They just mass, come at you in mass. In fact, we filled a little stream up.

I guess the stream was a little wider than this room. We were sitting up on an old and there was a clearing on the other side about a hundred yards and then the woods in there were pretty thick, you know. We could hear them over there.

And they were just like they'd have me, they'd chant, you know, and here they come. We stopped that stream up. I think, I don't have it all long as I'm going to say about 700 but they just, you know, they'd come and then we'd beat them back and go back in there and here they come again.

That's the same tactics that the Japanese used.

[Speaker 2]

If you've got enough firepower to beat them and enough discipline, then that's a murder.

[Speaker 1]

It's really target practice for you. Yeah, I came back from there and went back to the old fort. You say you got wounded twice over there too?

[Speaker 2]

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

Then I got, I come back and I was there until July of 52 and one of the guys in the company came in one day and said, they're starting some type of unit over on Smokebomb Hill last year at Bragg. He said, I don't know what it is, they won't tell you anything. So I jumped in the car and went over and talked to the guy.

It was when they was forming special forces. And I put in an application and transferred over there. And I stayed with them until I retired in 1976.

I stayed 35 years and 4 months. Long term. Well, I'd still be there if it let me.

[Speaker 2]

The special forces training, when they started the special forces, what was it like?

[Speaker 1]

Well, when it first started it was a hit and miss thing. There was no manuals or anything. It was written, you know.

In fact, I still got a book there on sabotage and that I drew the different drawings, you know, how to set up all these different things. And that's incorporated, still use the manual today. I was wondering what they were teaching you to do.

Well, mostly you know, sabotage, use of foreign demolition, foreign weapons. We had a lot of how to set up intel nets and stuff like this. And it was real interesting.

We used to play a game. We had to keep civilian clothes in the barracks. We'd come in some morning and they would say, okay, you guys get the civvies.

And they'd break us down, you know, in different teams. And they'd take us down to the airfield, put us on a field, on a plane. We'd fly around maybe two or three hours and then they'd tell you to get out.

And of course you didn't know where you was at, but it ain't hard to find out, you know, but then they would send another bunch in after you. And you know, you maneuver around, keep out of contact with them. We used to play what they call a hare and a hound, which that would give a team maybe an hour to start and another team would follow.

And you had the uh, you'd go into some bar or restaurant, you know, and you had a contact man there. But you didn't know who he was and you, it was a nice day today and it nice day today and it, finally this guy, yeah, it was whatever it was, you know. And he would pass you a note or something telling you where your next contact point was at.

It was a lot of fun, right? Yeah, real different from... Yeah, that's one of the reasons I left the 82nd because it got repetitious.

You knew on the 18th of August of 1994 you was going to be doing the same thing you were doing today. And now we had a lot of foreign map reading and later on you had to go to, everybody had to go to language school. Just did they teach you?

Well, it depended on what area you were, each group in today and they started it has a assigned area operation. Like the 10th Special Forces which is in, part of them is in Europe now, of course Europe is there. 7th and 8th Special Forces they get to South America and Spanish, so they go to Spanish.

And if you're over in you go to you speak Japanese and Okinawan or something like that a lot of that similar. What one were you in? Well, I was I was in Germany and then the Far East too.

I took Chinese and Spanish here because I was in the 7th and I learned some Spanish and but the guys over there you know they were like I say German or Russian or something like that. You went to Vietnam? I had four trips to Vietnam.

[Speaker 2]

When was your first one?

[Speaker 1]

In 1961. Fairly early then. Yeah, we started we had Special Forces we had troops over in 58, 59 which they were operating.

I came back from there in 61 and let's see I got there and I came home in January of 62 and then March of 62 I was over in Laos. Working with Montagnards? No, in Laos we were working with the the Laotians the LO they call them.

And then we stayed over there until 62 and then they closed it out and we came back. And then I went to Nam and again and let's see I was over in 63 and I went in 66 and 67 and I went back in 69 and 70 and came back.

[Speaker 2]

What kind of differences did you see? You were there early and you were there fairly late.

[Speaker 1]

You mean in Vietnam? In Vietnam, yeah. Well other than being in a different area I didn't really, you know.

Yeah, I didn't see too much.

[Speaker 2]

Were you working with the Vietnamese?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, we were special forces you know we had our team and we had our counterparts were there. Then my last tour over there was really interesting. I worked with the PRU under the CIA which is the Provincial Reconnaissance Unit they call it.

And we were more or less out of our own. In fact, when I went there, there was a major and dropped in a rice paddy in one of those mud huts out there. So I went out and checked in and he was in the room there and I said, well, you get time to brief me on what's going on.

He said, Sergeant Major, if you want to walk out to the chopper with me, I'll tell you what I know. And I said, what do you mean? He said, I'm leaving.

He said, this is yours. So I left there. I didn't know anybody there.

We had a captain, two lieutenants, and a sergeant and about four or five privates that were deserters from the South Vietnamese Army and had a 50-man contingency and the rest of them were deserters from the D.C. That's really quite a bunch. Yeah, and then we stayed out there for about a week and then the chopper came down one day and I said, how about dropping me off? I knew we had a compound in a little town, Tan An they call it, Long An Province.

So I went in there and it just so happened that the agent there was an ex-Special Forces friend of mine. And he told me, he said, you're supposed to be in here and he said that Major he wanted to stay out there. So I moved in and the P.R.U. they didn't have a

compound. They just lived all over town. Of course we had a net set up when they needed them. Got them right together.

But nobody ever messed with us. We were on our own. They were real good, these deserters from the D.C. We'd be flying out on a mission and look down and there'd be a pond and we'd land and they'd dive under the old stinking water and they had these large berms built up there. They'd go down and they'd find a hole and come up and they'd come in and go in there and they had weapons and food and all that stuff. But they knew exactly where to go which we'd been out there for months looking for. So it worked out pretty well then?

Oh yeah, yeah. And I worked with the Mountain Yards too. You know, one trip over there.

And as far as fighters, I would say in regular combat they were the best ones. I didn't think too much of the regular Vietnamese in the Army. They was the kind when you run into something they always wanted to pull out, you know.

But the Mountain Yards were... Oh yeah, yeah. They'd stay with you.

I mean if you got in trouble they'd stay with you. We got on a mission there one time we got on a patrol and we'd been out about four or five days it was and run into ambushes and they started chasing us and we'd take off and go as far as we could and try to hold them off for a while and this went on about two or three days and we finally got a chopper in there and they extracted us but we lost two or three men on that in fact one of the guys started and got shot and he was pretty well shot up and we tried to carry him and we carried him and finally he just and we stopped to go back up the trail and put a road block up and we went on up there and when I came back he shot himself and I left a note and he was holding us up and all that. That must have been hard.

Yeah, but we brought him out and didn't leave him in there. Think you might have made it if you hadn't? No, he was gone.

He couldn't even we just first started we'd walk hold him up and he finally just went away.

[Speaker 2]

You got wounded in the Pacific and in Korea did it happen in Vietnam too?

[Speaker 1]

Well, yeah, but I never turned in I got a pungee stick in my leg and that that's kind of a shame of that I didn't turn that in. You had enough purple hearts anyway. Yeah, I got three combat after badges That's what I heard from Colonel Leak that you're one of the few.

I think it's they got it up about 300 now. Really? When I got mine it was a hundred and something they found and they had a big ceremony and put us in the Hall of Fame down at Fort Benning Yeah, I got five combat jumps I'm proud of that Yeah, I'm sure.

But I enjoyed my life in the service I've been asked several times when would you do it again? I'd do the same thing I did and I would Yeah, I didn't want to get out when I did In fact, when I got extended 30 years was the limit then it came up that some general recommended me for the five extra years, you know So I got called in by General Emerson I

don't know if they were in or not I didn't really like him but he asked me had I thought about staying and he said well I've already recommended you so I had to recommend you to the Department of Army and they came back and approved and so I Yeah, and then I went up to put in my papers and they told my personnel that my records were incomplete, that part of them had been burned in the fire in St. Louis and I said well no problem, I don't think so I brought in four cardboard boxes I had kept a copy of just about every order that was cut on me that I needed and I sat here and they took four months to get it out and they said well you just go home or what and I was still on the payroll so So you're living here now in Fayetteville close to Fort Bragg?

Yeah, not too far and when we retired my wife's from Memphis and we went back there and she, it wasn't the same so I came up to Florence and one old boy I went to high school with, the only one around that I really knew he went in the Army and I said hell I can't talk to him and most of the people that you know we knew had retired around here and so we just came back here it's not bad I mean they got there like every other place I guess this one gets more publicity I think than a lot of places because of Fort Bragg one of the things that we mostly all retired I don't care what happens around here, murder, robbery the first thing they do in the paper is ask special forces and we know that the guy, some of them there were some of them but we know I guess special forces got that reputation of being killers you know yeah they used to have a sign you know kill them all let God sort them out I guess that's about the extent of my career I don't know like I say I really enjoy it sounds like

[Speaker 2]
it suited you pretty well

[Speaker 1]
yeah

[Speaker 2]
doing things you could do well and knew how to do and part of it at least enjoyed doing

[Speaker 1]
yeah like I say the type of work around there just didn't appeal to me I wasn't the brightest student in high school I could have been a lot more my big interest was in sports and I just I paid my grades and I kept up I didn't really get cut for any and at times I wish I had gone back there I go back there now once a year a lot of the guys that I went to high school with are back and we have a reunion of our football team

[Speaker 3]
so

[Speaker 1]
I have a sister still living there and my wife has a sister living there so you got some ties there but you got ties here too yeah but it's a like I say it's not bad the neighborhood I live in we about the only thing we have there is a couple of streets over it's kind of a cut through these guys turn the corner too fast slide in somebody's yard

[Speaker 2]
there are worse things than that oh yeah well I thank you for coming in

[Speaker 1]

well I hope I really don't know what to talk about other than just run over well I

[Speaker 2]

well is there anything else you well one of the things I should ask you've seen a lot of changes in the army over time

[Speaker 3]

oh yeah

[Speaker 2]

it's different it must have been a lot different yeah when you got out than when you got in you've seen I mean you're close enough to brag now still to make a kind of judgment anyway about the current military what do you think of it now compared to what it was

[Speaker 1]

well one of the big things that I noticed even the guys in service today most a lot of them will tell you that the big thing is the lack of discipline they don't enforce discipline like they did when I came in I mean when he said move you moved they did strike a few guys back in I mean it wasn't a fact that I got knocked about 15 yards by a great big old sergeant and won the Medal of Honor in World War I I was taking finishing my recruit training and I was in the heavy weapons company on a 30 caliber water-cooled machine gun and we had to detail strip it you know that's go all the way down and I came to a part and I couldn't think of the name of it and this old sergeant had me walk up by that time boy he hit me and I went to roar and he said you got five minutes to get back to the barracks and get you a manual and get back in and we was about 300 yards from the barracks and I'd say a minute and a half I was back there I don't even know where the fire went but I'll never forget the name of it it was a firing pen, spraying pen, retaining pen and I'll never forget that part I think that's one thing you know I think you would even be amazed if you heard some of the comments that officers received from guys you know they tell you to do something you know I mean it's filthy language I wouldn't say it here on that but it's real and it's got to the point there's nothing you can do to them that's their right you know and that's a big thing and I think one of the big things that I had a problem with was the long hair I just wasn't used to it and an old man called me in one day Colonel Rudosevich he was my CO and he said I don't like it any more than you do but we're going to have to accept it cause you're just going to have to get used to it and it finally wore off it didn't affect the guy's work but just I was used to you know a more neat appearance in one day it wasn't even back when I was it wasn't shaved I mean like yours you know they kept it maybe a little close on the side but to me then that was long hair

[Speaker 2]

it's what you're used to

[Speaker 1]

yeah it's and another thing it's the army now is an 8 to 5 job I mean when I came in we was on call 24 hours a day and I've been called out 2 and 3 and 4 o'clock in the morning a lot of times to come out I don't regret the fact that they got these barracks with individual rooms and all that that gives a guy privacy but then I think back and I think how much a man misses

the younger soldiers but not living in the barracks as much as a guy I didn't think much of it then I always wanted to make MCO because at the end of the barracks they had 2 rooms down there and that's where they you know I want to do that

[Speaker 2]

but I look back

[Speaker 1]

I think I learned a lot living out there in the squad bay I learned a lot it would be hard for me to pinpoint yeah I understand and I think it's a good experience and too I think every young man in the United States served at least 2 years in the army the army will make a man out of you if you put something into it it will make a man out of you if you had the money in the defense budget to do that and I come in and I made \$21 a month and I got \$18.50 over the board and I took out a quarter for the old soldiers home and all that I think they fit better back then didn't they they seemed like the cooks in the mess yard were more you know concerned about the type of food and how to prepare it and all that and the dress you don't see guys dress like they used to you know of course now a lot of that is the fault of the commanders I was used to I mean here in the states to starch the pigs spit shine boots and when I was first sergeant I went home I'd go home at lunch and before I went back to duty I'd change uniform I'd put on fresh starched teeth but some of these guys looked like they'd come out of a storm ditch or something what did they dress

[Speaker 2]

and that's interesting that even here at Fort Bragg it's got a reputation for being a pretty elite outfit

[Speaker 1]

but like I say one of the things I hear a lot of gripes about I'm on the list out here at Fort Bragg every time they have some kind of ceremony or you know a briefing or something I get an invitation to come out and I hear a lot of these young guys griping about the fact that just on blousing their pants airborne is proud of the boot and now they have to blouse and stick it down in the boots just like that we were used to sticking we used what are called retaining bands we used everything some of them as long as it's straight but we used to take it and blouse it over like that they won't let them do that

[Speaker 2]

now

[Speaker 1]

that hurts a lot of the young people

[Speaker 2]

those things are important

[Speaker 1]

oh yeah sure and now for the retirees around here and one day I think there's going to be a big rebellion is the medical care they've just about cut it out out here for retirees, you're lucky if you get in there now I happen to volunteer down there and I don't feel it as much as you know the outsiders but that's another thing we've been broke to all of our congressmen

and everything just here about a week ago went to the recruiting office and got a copy of one of those recruiting posters or folders and they're still promising the guys coming in the service today as far as health and all these benefits as they did when I came in still you know that you are guaranteed you'll be given health medical and PX and all that and they're still doing that

[Speaker 2]
even though you're

[Speaker 1]
the retirees aren't getting it no that's right and this organization I belong to Colonel Leake belongs to the retired military association and they are really strong in a lot of these things they go to up to Raleigh and Lobby and all that stuff and somebody suggested that we post two or three of the retirees around the recruiting station to have one over in Bordeaux Village to have one some of the old retirees when a young guy comes up to recruit and don't do it that might get somebody's attention I think it would I'm not much on these things but I'd be willing to do that maybe get a TV camera out there and we'd probably make a story out of that but that right now is the big problem we're building a medical center here and that's the big I guess the largest one and when they started this it was all based on the number of active duty and retirees in this area that's what they based it on building and what they got a lot of their funds so that's going to be interesting to see well good luck well I hope so