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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with William T. Brown
Conducted by Laura M. Calkins, Ph.D.
March 23, 2006
Transcribed by Laura Darden**

1 Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
2 University conducting an oral history interview with Mr. William T. Brown. Today is
3 the twenty-third of March 2006. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the campus of Texas Tech
4 University and Bill is at his home in Ft. Worth. Good morning, Bill.

5 Bill Brown: Good morning, Laura.

6 LC: First of all, sir, I want to ask, where were you born and when?

7 BB: I was born in Alabama the nineteenth day of September 1919 in a log house.

8 LC: Tell me a little bit about your family, about your parents.

9 BB: Well, I had a momma and a daddy and I have two sisters. There were three
10 of us in the family. I was the oldest and then my two sisters.

11 LC: Now what did your dad do for a living? Where in Alabama was this?

12 BB: Pardon?

13 LC: Where in Alabama?

14 BB: A little town called Hartford, Alabama. It's over in the peanut section just
15 south of Ft. Rucker.

16 LC: Tell me about your dad. What did he do for a living?

17 BB: Oh, he was a farmer all his life.

18 LC: Hard work.

19 BB: Yes. In fact, after I was born, I was born in the same log house that he was
20 born in. Then we moved in another log house. It was on forty acres of land that he

1 bought. My two sisters, I talked to them last night, and they were at home in momma's
2 kitchen eating supper.

3 LC: In that same house?

4 BB: In the same house. Us three kids still have that old home place.

5 LC: No kidding? That's quite remarkable. Your dad, he was a farmer. What
6 kind of crops did he farm?

7 BB: Cotton, corn, and peanuts, basically. Then he got into cows a little later. Of
8 course, with forty acres, you couldn't have a ranch.

9 LC: No, that's right, yeah.

10 BB: But we had our milk cows and we grew our hogs for meat and had our
11 chickens for—and we survived the Depression, that's for sure, in that state of living.

12 LC: Now you would've been a young man during the Depression. You were
13 what, thirteen, fourteen, around that?

14 BB: Well, I was—see, when I was born in 1919, we moved over onto the farm in
15 the same year. So I grew up in that log house.

16 LC: I see.

17 BB: Then I went on to school and graduated from high school in Hartford,
18 Alabama.

19 LC: What year did you graduate?

20 BB: 1938.

21 LC: Tell me a little bit about the high school. How many kids in your class?

22 BB: Oh, probably about twenty-five.

23 LC: What kind of a student were you, Bill?

24 BB: Well, I suppose I was okay in everything but math.

25 LC: Is that right?

26 BB: I got a whipping for failing an algebra test. That was in the days when the
27 board was the extra help.

28 LC: Yes, sir. Well, did you like your other subjects?

29 BB: Pardon?

30 LC: Did you enjoy your other subjects besides math?

31 BB: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

1 LC: What was your favorite?

2 BB: Oh, I don't know, really, if you want to know the truth about it. I just took it

3 as it came, you know. I suppose English I suppose was the best.

4 LC: Did you play sports?

5 BB: No, I was not in football or baseball. We just had athletics. That's all.

6 LC: Oh, sure, yeah. Now did you have to work, as well, as a young man?

7 BB: Oh, my gosh, yes.

8 LC: I thought you might.

9 BB: Every Thanksgiving, we'd strip cane. That's how we made our syrup.

10 Daddy would wait 'til the holidays so we could dig sweet potatoes and strip the cane.

11 LC: Bill, for someone who doesn't know what that means, can you describe what

12 stripping the cane was?

13 BB: Well, cane has a blade on it. It goes all the way up to the top and it's in

14 joints. You have to pull the fodder or the blades off and then you have the bare stalk of

15 cane. You take that and put it in a mill that is pulled by a mule going round and round

16 and round and that crushes the juice out of it. Then the juice is cooked and it finally

17 comes out as syrup.

18 LC: That's an awful lot of work, isn't it?

19 BB: Oh, yeah.

20 LC: Hard work. Well, you said that your dad would save up the sweet potatoes,

21 as well?

22 BB: Yeah. Yeah. We took the sweet potatoes, we dug those and we put them in

23 a hill, like if they were making charcoal, it's mounded up and put pine straw or fodder,

24 corn fodder on there to protect because we'd put a layer of soil over that, sort of like a

25 teepee, you know. Then all during the winter when we'd need some more potatoes, we'd

26 scratch a hole in the side of it and take those potatoes out and use them.

27 LC: I'll be darned. Well, I mean, there's so much worked involved in that. Did

28 you ever work off the farm? Did you ever work for cash money in town?

29 BB: The first work that we did living on a farm, there's no machinery to harvest

30 the corn or the cotton or the peanuts, thing like that.

31 LC: No machinery at all.

1 BB: No, it was all done by hand and that's labor.

2 LC: Yes, sir.

3 BB: If we caught up with our work and I went over to a neighbor's and helped
4 them, maybe they would pay us minimum amount to help. Then after that, we got a
5 peanut mill in Hartford, Alabama, where you take the peanuts and they run them through
6 a sheller. I got a job. That's the first job I ever had, really. That's when my Social
7 Security number was given to me. After that, it was—well, see, when I was in high
8 school, I was in the National Guard.

9 LC: Oh, really?

10 BB: I liked the National Guard. One time during the year, we'd go on, I say, a
11 two week cruise, not cruise, but you know, in the forest.

12 LC: Like out on an exercise or something?

13 BB: Yeah. We had the guns and everything like that. I liked that. Then after I
14 graduated from high school, I could see I could never make it on farming. So I decided
15 to join the Navy.

16 LC: Now what year did you decide to join the Navy?

17 BB: In 1940, eighteenth day of April 1940.

18 LC: Now do you remember, did you talk to a recruiter or how did this come
19 about?

20 BB: Well, I had to find out where a recruiting station was. There was one in
21 Marianna, Florida, and a cousin of mine and I, we thumbed our way to this post office
22 recruiting station. My cousin was so tall, they said, "We can't use you." They said to
23 me, "You go back home and eat some peas and cornbread and put some weight on and
24 then come back." (Laughs)

25 LC: Is that pretty much what happened, you had to go back?

26 BB: I had to do it. Then I went back another time and they took me in.

27 LC: Now what about your cousin? What happened to him?

28 BB: Well, not then but later on the war got such that he went into the Air Corps.

29 LC: Oh, sure, okay.

30 BB: They'd take anything after the war started.

31 LC: Well, that's right. Yes, sir.

1 BB: See, all this was before we were in the war.
2 LC: That's right, yeah, 1940. Well, what made you pick the Navy?
3 BB: What made me pick it?
4 LC: Mm-hmm.
5 BB: Well, on a rainy day back home on the farm, we couldn't work. We'd get a
6 box full of pictures and start looking at them. One picture in there was my uncle in a
7 naval uniform with the old flat hat that they wore at that time.
8 LC: Sure.
9 BB: I said, "By gosh, that's nice. Wouldn't it be nice if I could have a uniform
10 like that?" So that's why I did it.
11 LC: Wow. Well, once you'd fattened up a little bit and they decided to let you in
12 there in April of 1940, did they swear you in right there or what happened?
13 BB: No. I went to Marianna. Me and two other fellows got on a bus, two other
14 recruits got on the bus and went to Birmingham, Alabama. That's where I saw my first,
15 what do you call it, the train that goes around like in New Orleans. It's your ride in a
16 town, years ago.
17 LC: Oh, like a tram or a railway or something?
18 BB: Yeah, it is a railway, yeah.
19 LC: Yeah. That's the first time you saw that, was at Birmingham?
20 BB: Yeah, that's the first time I ever saw one of those or ever rode one. Anyway,
21 that's where we took our allegiances of the United States and the flag right there.
22 LC: Okay. After you were sworn in, did they take you to a training facility
23 somewhere?
24 BB: Yes.
25 LC: Where did you go?
26 BB: Norfolk base. Boot camp was in Norfolk, Virginia.
27 LC: Well, how did you get up there?
28 BB: By bus.
29 LC: That's quite a ride.
30 BB: Yes.

1 LC: Had you ever been out of Alabama much before? I mean, you'd been over
2 to Florida.

3 BB: I went to Florida, that's it.

4 LC: That's it. So this would be one of your first trips out of the—

5 BB: Oh, yeah, I was seeing the world then.

6 LC: Yes, yes, sir.

7 BB: You know, the sign says, "Join the Navy and see the world," well, that's
8 when I started right there.

9 LC: Well, what did you make of Norfolk when you got there?

10 BB: What did I—?

11 LC: What did you make of it? What did you experience? How did it look to
12 you?

13 BB: Oh, a lot of people, all the other boots already there. They'd see the new
14 recruits coming in and they'd stick their head out of the fence and say, "You'll be sorry,
15 you'll be sorry."

16 LC: Did they really?

17 BB: Nah, I wasn't sorry, I stuck right in with it. Of course, I was born and raised
18 to obey and to do the right thing. I made it fine right along with the recruits and fell in
19 right in with it.

20 LC: Now when you say that you were born and raised to obey, are you talking
21 about your family and your father?

22 BB: Yeah, yeah.

23 LC: Would he have kind of set that tone that—?

24 BB: Yeah, yeah.

25 LC: Yeah. What about your sisters, the same way?

26 BB: Yes. Both of those went through high school and made nurses.

27 LC: They both became nurses?

28 BB: Uh-huh.

29 LC: Where did they study? Do you know?

30 BB: Well, we had a hospital. We had a hospital in Dothan, Alabama, which is
31 about fifty miles from the farm.

1 LC: Yes, sir.
2 BB: They had a place to keep the girls there.
3 LC: A dormitory or something.
4 BB: Uh-huh. They got their training and then cleaned the halls and the bedpans.
5 They got the natural experience, you know.
6 LC: Oh, yes, sir, on the job training. Did they serve in the wartime?
7 BB: No, neither one.
8 LC: But they remained there in Alabama?
9 BB: Yeah.
10 LC: They're still living at home now?
11 BB: Yeah. Well, you know, both married.
12 LC: Yeah.
13 BB: And had their families in Alabama. Both of them lost their husband, it was
14 in a seven-month period.
15 LC: Oh, dear.
16 BB: They never married anymore, so.
17 LC: So now they are just taking care of each other, my guess will be.
18 BB: Yeah. They have the joy of going home and sitting on the front porch.
19 LC: Well, it sure sounds nice.
20 BB: Yes.
21 LC: Do they come out and visit you much, sir?
22 BB: Very seldom.
23 LC: Have you been back to Alabama?
24 BB: After I came to Texas, I would go home every year. I called it my safari
25 back to my holy land. Then I had to take it less and now it's been quite a little while
26 since I was there. My sisters have been out here since I went over there.
27 LC: Now, because it's hard work getting back and forth, I'm sure.
28 BB: Yeah.
29 LC: Yes, sir.
30 BB: It gets worser all the time.

1 LC: Well, and I know that, I believe you, and it does get harder. Well, let me ask
2 you about your training there at Norfolk. What did they put you through? Do you
3 remember?

4 BB: See, we were in quarantine for, I think, it was two weeks.

5 LC: Now why was that?

6 BB: Well, that's behind the wire fence.

7 LC: Oh, I see. Yes, sir.

8 BB: The dormitory is within that. We marched, everything that we did outside
9 that we marched to it. Just to chow every time, you marched, and then you came back.
10 We washed our own clothes and hung them up there. We cleaned the barracks and made
11 our own beds and kept our clothes. Then after that, we got down to the drill fields, you
12 know, with all the drilling. By the way, I had the joy of going to my baby
13 granddaughter's graduation from the boot camp in Great Lakes Training Station.

14 LC: What year was that?

15 BB: That was last year.

16 LC: She's in the Navy right now?

17 BB: Yes, she is.

18 LC: Where's she stationed, sir? Do you know?

19 BB: It's up north. It's the only one that's left now. All the others are closed.

20 LC: But here in the States, she's in the States?

21 BB: Huh?

22 LC: She's here in the United States?

23 BB: Yeah, oh, yeah.

24 LC: What is her specialty?

25 BB: Well, right now, she's working on a computer. At the Navy station, at the
26 Navy station there, they have a place for the submarines.

27 LC: Oh, yes.

28 BB: They can't go to it and go in it, but she's working outside of that on a
29 computer. I talked to her yesterday.

30 LC: Did you really? Well, you must be just as proud as you can be of her.

31 BB: Yes.

1 LC: I would imagine.

2 BB: Yes. You know, we couldn't even go home or call home and it took a long
3 time to get a letter, but now with these cell phones, my granddaughter, she's just calling
4 me off and on all the time. I say, "I joined too soon."

5 LC: That's right. You should've waited a couple of forty years or so.

6 BB: Yes. (Both laugh)

7 LC: Well, it sounds like they put you through a lot of marching.

8 BB: Oh, yes.

9 LC: And a lot of drilling, but how did you take to it?

10 BB: Well, I took to it real good because I have a picture, I was picked—the
11 whole platoon, forty-eight, I forgot how many is in there, but I have a picture on the wall
12 in the little house I was talking about with all of us. I was the—the platoon picked me as
13 the number one man.

14 LC: Is that right?

15 BB: Yeah.

16 LC: Okay, wow.

17 BB: It's got a word for it, but right now, my eighty-six years keeps messing
18 around with it.

19 LC: That's all right. If it comes to you, you can just pop it in.

20 BB: Yes.

21 LC: But you were the head man, essentially?

22 BB: Well, yeah. There was four platoons and each one had a number one man in
23 it. Sometime during the graduation, we were invited over into Norfolk, Virginia, to some
24 kind of dinner. It might've been some kind of league or something like that and was
25 recognized as the four of us.

26 LC: Now were you paying much attention to the development of conflict over in
27 Europe and so on at this time?

28 BB: Come again?

29 LC: Were you watching the news and were you aware that war was ongoing
30 already in Europe at this time?

31 BB: Then, at that time?

1 LC: Yes, yeah.

2 BB: Lord, no.

3 LC: No.

4 BB: See, that was something. I don't know if you'll get to it or not or what, but
5 when I left the training station at Norfolk and then I went to California. I went—the
6 *Louisville* heavy cruiser was anchored outside San Pedro.

7 LC: Yes, sir.

8 BB: I went in after dark. They came and got us off the dock out there after dark
9 and I took my sea bag and all on my shoulder and went up a long gangway up to the main
10 deck of the *Louisville*. The next morning, we pulled anchor and started on a goodwill
11 tour to South America.

12 LC: Now tell me a little bit about that. Did you know where you were going to
13 go or did you know it was a goodwill tour?

14 BB: Not until the next morning when we pulled out, I didn't know. We went
15 down and went through the canal and went into South America and went up and down
16 different cities. This is called a goodwill trip.

17 LC: Well, Bill, do you remember going through the canal?

18 BB: Oh, God, yes.

19 LC: Tell me about that because that's pretty exciting.

20 BB: Well, you know, you had to go up or down, whichever ocean is—it's like
21 going through a channel. On each side is the high banks. If you've read about the
22 mosquitoes and the malaria and all that kind of stuff, you can see how it was. That was
23 on the trip to South America. We made it through fine at that time. After our trip to Rio
24 de Janeiro and all the Brazilian coast stations along there, we wound up in Bahia, Brazil
25 and it was Christmastime.

26 LC: What happened?

27 BB: That's where a lot of the coffee and everything like that. So we were in no
28 hurry. I didn't know nothing about the war, heck, we were just having a good time going
29 up and down there and showing our ship to the people in there.

30 LC: Now, Bill, let me stop you for a minute and ask you, how did you show them
31 the ship? Did people get to walk on or did you dock it?

1 BB: Yeah, we tied it up to the dock. The people would go along the dock in the
2 afternoon and the flag's raised in our area. In the morning, the flag raised, but mostly in
3 the afternoon when the Marines, we had some Marines on there. They did the flag and
4 blow the bugle, you know, and everything like that. Then we'd have a day when they
5 could come aboard, the people there in that town could come aboard. We had to have
6 that ship spotless, you know.

7 LC: Oh, yes, sir.

8 BB: Because we were making a good show, you know.

9 LC: Now did people come by the hundreds to see the ship?

10 BB: Oh, yeah.

11 LC: I mean, you must've been overrun with people wanting to see it, I'm sure.

12 BB: Oh, yeah. That's right.

13 LC: Well, did you get out and about in any of the towns that you visited?

14 BB: Yes, yes. We had liberty. We'd have, in bonus areas we had open, I have
15 pictures of it, like a bus, but there's no top on it. We'd sit in there and we went all around
16 sight seeing, sight seeing.

17 LC: Sure.

18 BB: The *Graf Spee*, the British had knocked out the *Graf Spee*, the German ship.

19 LC: Now this was at where, Montevideo or somewhere?

20 BB: Yeah.

21 LC: Okay. Tell me a little bit about that.

22 BB: I think that was Buenos Aires.

23 LC: Oh, is that right?

24 BB: Uh-huh.

25 LC: Okay. Tell me, what did you see of the *Graf Spee*, what did you see of it?

26 BB: Well, we could see part of it sticking up, the bow. Then, of course, there
27 wouldn't be any caskets on the beach, on the docks, but we got pictures of that. That's
28 all we saw of that. Then after we made up and down the coast of South America, we got
29 an announcement that we was going to go to sea. We didn't know where we was going.

30 LC: Now this is a new mission that you were—

31 BB: Yeah.

1 LC: Well, where were you when you found out about it that you were going out?

2 BB: Tied up to the dock in Bahia, Brazil.

3 LC: Okay, so that's where you were.

4 BB: Yeah.

5 LC: Let me ask you, Bill, the war was clearly on. You could see the sunken *Graf*

6 *Spee* there. You knew the war was on.

7 BB: Yeah.

8 LC: Did you have worries? I mean, the *Louisville* was a heavy cruiser.

9 BB: Yes, that's right.

10 LC: She'd make a good target for a submarine. Did you have any worries at all?

11 BB: Well, not really because I wasn't that far ahead of it.

12 LC: Understood.

13 BB: When we left, got out to sea, the captain announced where he was going,

14 that we was headed for South America, I mean, Africa.

15 LC: South Africa?

16 BB: Uh-huh.

17 LC: Now did you really know where that was?

18 BB: No. I didn't. I wasn't that good in geography.

19 LC: I would have to agree with you. So what did he tell you—well, first of all,

20 Bill, let me clarify—

21 BB: He told us that's where we was going.

22 LC: I see.

23 BB: Okay, we got in there one afternoon.

24 LC: Now you mean you arrived in South Africa?

25 BB: Yeah. We tied up to the dock.

26 LC: Do you know what port it was?

27 BB: Uh, oh, yeah.

28 LC: I'm going to go out on a limb and say was it Simon's Town or—?

29 BB: Yeah, that's where it was, Simon's Town. When we got out, they put a net

30 under the gangway. We started lining up. On the decks, we had a mess table and there'd

31 be an officer there. There was stacks of gold over on the dock. There was one guard

1 over there with a rifle. I don't know if he was one of theirs or what. But when we got
2 there, we put the Marines over there to guard it. We marched from before daylight, we
3 marched all day long going back and forth up that gangway, with only one brick of gold,
4 that's all we could take.

5 LC: Each man had one.

6 BB: It had a number on it and when we got to the first officer at this mess table,
7 he would record that. Then we'd take it up to another deck and another table and they
8 record the number and it went on down into the ammunition rooms where they had a
9 Marine outside the door of that. It was stored in that. We did that all day long until late
10 at night. Then the next morning, we shoved off coming to New York. Then that's when
11 I realized the war because the sail makers made big flags, United States flags, and put
12 them up where they could be seen from a long distance on the portside and on the
13 starboard side in midship. That's so that they'd know if we were not in the war, that
14 submarines were somewhere then, you know.

15 LC: Yes, sir.

16 BB: We headed for New York. When we got to New York, the armored cars and
17 guards and everything and here we had picked that gold up with one guy watching it.
18 The record is it's in the naval history. At that time, it was the largest shipment of gold
19 that had ever been moved.

20 LC: Now how heavy was the bar you had to carry, Bill?

21 BB: We carried it from Simon's Town to Brooklyn Navy Yard.

22 LC: Yup. Each of those bars, how much did they weigh, any idea?

23 BB: Oh, gosh, I don't know. I don't know. But I wrote a story about the gold. In
24 that story, it was published in the *American Heritage*. Of course, they edited out some of
25 the most important parts because we got in a storm between Simon's Town and
26 Brooklyn. One man was washed over side, but thank God we rescued him.

27 LC: How did that rescue happen? Do you remember it?

28 BB: Yes.

29 LC: Can you tell me about it?

30 BB: It was late in the afternoon. An albatross, a big bird, had been following us
31 the time we left Simon's Town and was just going low over the water. About sundown,

1 the storm was so bad, the ship was rolling everything. A whole body of water just come
2 across the quarterdeck and this one man was washed over the side.

3 LC: Did you see that happen, Bill?

4 BB: I was standing, me and one of my shipmates and was watching. I can
5 remember seeing that wall of water coming and I saw something go off on the starboard
6 side. It came from the port side. We hollered, "Man over board," and then, of course,
7 man on watch, they sounded the call. Then one of the yeomen, he got up on the topmast
8 with a long telescope and kept looking. The captain was backing down and moving and
9 everything. The waves were so tall. Finally we located him and he was going up and
10 down and he said the worst trouble he had, there was that albatross striking at him out
11 there as he'd come up on a wave.

12 LC: The bird would come after him?

13 BB: Yeah. He said he'd already took his shorts off and his shoes. He thought he
14 could see the smoke from the stack on the *Louisville* and he says, "Well, they'll never see
15 me," but we did and we put a whaleboat out there. The storm was so bad, it beat against
16 the starboard side of the ship. So they had to give up. Well, we kept maneuvering. It
17 was lucky. In fact, the guy's name was Lucky. We called him Lucky Lucas.

18 LC: Lucky Lucas?

19 BB: Yeah, and finally got him on deck. After that, still on the way to Brooklyn,
20 had a little show on the quarterdeck one night to pass the time. He told us all about how
21 he felt and the appreciation for us getting him.

22 LC: How did they actually retrieve him?

23 BB: We got close enough, just threw a line out to him and he took hold of it.

24 LC: So they actually got the ship over close enough to him.

25 BB: Uh-huh. Yeah.

26 LC: What about those guys that were in the little whaler that tried to go out?

27 BB: Oh, well, there was about four in there. It had a motor in it. They saw they
28 couldn't handle it, so they got it back upside the ship and hooked a line on it. It just
29 pulled it up, you know, the long way, not broad side, but the long way.

30 LC: Just right up from the end.

31 BB: Yeah.

1 LC: Well, you could've lost those four guys.
2 BB: That's right. That's right.
3 LC: That was extremely brave of them.
4 BB: That's one of the things they left out of my story when it was published in
5 the *American Heritage*.
6 LC: Right, right. Well, we've got it now. We've got it here. It's an incredible
7 story. Well, what else did Lucas tell you about? What did he think about when he was
8 out there? Did he tell you?
9 BB: Oh, yeah.
10 LC: I can imagine.
11 BB: Yeah, I can only imagine, you know.
12 LC: About how long was he out in the water, do you know, Bill?
13 BB: Oh, maybe an hour or so.
14 LC: Oh, I just can't hardly believe he survived.
15 BB: He just didn't give up. He was just trying to stay afloat and hoping that we
16 would. It's hard to imagine what thoughts he did have.
17 LC: Well, it is hard to imagine. It's hard to imagine him in the cold water being
18 able to stay alive. Maybe that pesky bird was actually the key to the whole thing.
19 BB: Well, he said that if we'd a known that he was trying to get a hold of him,
20 well, it'd been easy. We could've kept track of him.
21 LC: You could've watched the bird.
22 BB: Yeah.
23 LC: Isn't that a strange thing? Well, were you one of the guys who actually had
24 to carry the gold?
25 BB: From the dock over to the ship?
26 LC: Yeah.
27 BB: Oh, yeah. No telling how many bricks during the day, it was just back and
28 forth, one man behind another, you see.
29 LC: Bill, what did you think when you had one of those gold bars in your hand?
30 BB: Oh, my God. That was better than that little bit of money that I kept from
31 helping a man pick his cotton, you know.

1 LC: Oh, I'll bet you. I bet you thought, "This is a lot of cotton right here."

2 BB: That's right.

3 LC: Well, tell me about arriving at New York at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Do
4 you remember that, Bill?

5 BB: Oh, yes. We had been at sea so long, you know, and everything. We was
6 glad we saw the, what's the girl, the first thing we saw almost was that, the one with the
7 torch.

8 LC: Statue of Liberty.

9 BB: Statue of Liberty. When we got there and a number of armored cars and the
10 policemen and everything like that. We went in dry dock there after we got rid of the
11 gold.

12 LC: Now, was that because the ship needed some maintenance?

13 BB: Yeah, uh-huh.

14 LC: What did you do during that time?

15 BB: Well, I went on liberty one time in Brooklyn, the first time I'd ever been
16 there. I saw my first snow there. I tell you, I couldn't stand that stuff going down my
17 collar.

18 LC: It's pretty cold, huh?

19 BB: Yeah.

20 LC: For an Alabama boy. Was that the first time you'd ever seen snow?

21 BB: Oh, yes.

22 LC: Well, now what can you tell me about your liberty time there in Brooklyn,
23 what did you do?

24 BB: Well, I was by myself. I was just walking around and gazing like a country
25 boy would do.

26 LC: Oh, sure.

27 BB: I remember, I went by a barbershop and I stopped in and asked him, did he
28 have any Lucky Tiger hair tonic. I think he said, "There's a flatlander." He said, "No,"
29 he says, "the tiger died." I think he was making fun of me, you know.

30 LC: I think he might've been. He probably heard your accent.

31 BB: Yeah.

1 LC: And thought he'll have a go. Well, you said you were by yourself.

2 BB: Yeah.

3 LC: Were you in uniform all the time?

4 BB: Oh, yeah.

5 LC: Since that was something that had attracted you to the Navy in the first
6 place, did you like wearing your uniform around?

7 BB: Yes, I did. Later on, I got me a tailor-made dress blue uniform that I wore
8 on liberty.

9 LC: You had that made.

10 BB: Yes, by a tailor on the beach.

11 LC: Oh, yeah. Was that the only kind of dress uniform that you did have?

12 BB: No, we had our whites. We had a dress white uniform, also, had to be for
13 summer, you know.

14 LC: Oh, sure.

15 BB: The thirteen buttons on the front of our dress blues, you know.

16 LC: Did that have significance, the thirteen—?

17 BB: Yes.

18 LC: What was the significance of it?

19 BB: Okay. I remember one time, we had been at sea and I hadn't had any milk
20 for a long time.

21 LC: You hadn't had any what?

22 BB: Milk.

23 LC: Oh, yes, sir.

24 BB: Well, I'll say that this is after I got on the subchaser. I was riding the bus to
25 come home. When we got to Key West, Florida, I rode another ship there to get to the
26 bus depot. I drank a lot of buttermilk. Well, we get on the bus heading across the Keys
27 to head for Miami and I had to use the bathroom. I kept going and I said, "Well, gosh, I
28 can't hold this much longer." I went up to the front of the bus, which was packed with
29 people, and I said to the bus driver, "I got to go to the bathroom." He said, "Well, there's
30 not one around here because of the water on each side of that highway going up there." I
31 said, "Well, I'll tell you, if you can stop and let me get off," and I said, "I'll catch the

1 next train," and he says, "Is it that bad?" and I said "Yes." He said, "Well, let me get
2 over this bridge here." He says, "There's a little shack down by the waterline," and says,
3 "You can use it." Okay, I left my ditty bag on the bus and I went out, went around the
4 front of it, down the side of that highway to that little room. On the way down, I
5 unbuttoned thirteen buttons and when I got there to open the door, the wind was blowing
6 and it was blowing it shut, I said, "Well, to heck with that." When I got back on the bus,
7 my seatmate which is a sailor, he says, "Boy, you sure look funny." I said, "I don't care.
8 If the Queen of Sheba had been on here, I still had to go to the bathroom."

9 LC: That's right.

10 BB: I was telling an old farmer friend of mine back home when I got home on
11 liberty about it. He says, "Look, son," says, "Don't ever hold it. This old world is too
12 big." (Laughs)

13 LC: Well, I think that was probably some good advice.

14 BB: Yes. But you know, you remember things like that.

15 LC: Well, you sure do.

16 BB: It's just a part of the game.

17 LC: That's right. It's part of life. Let me ask you about getting onto the
18 subchaser. Now this was the 1302, is that right?

19 BB: 1302.

20 LC: Yeah, 1302. Did it have a name?

21 BB: Okay. After I got on the *Louisville*, I was a gunner's mate striker.

22 LC: Okay, yes, sir.

23 BB: Well, I was planning to take care of the guns, you see. I had a five-inch
24 twenty-five that I worked on. Then somebody put my name in the pot to go to the
25 gunnery school in Washington, D.C. So that's when I left the *Louisville* and went to
26 Washington, the Navy gun factory in Washington. I started my schooling there and I'd
27 go for one factory. The next one was Long Island, New York, where they manufactured
28 parts for the gun. The next one was, I don't know, there's about four of them. It wound
29 me up in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

30 LC: You had to go to some training at each one of these places?

31 BB: Yeah, each one of those towns that I went to. Detroit was one of them.

1 LC: Sure, that sounds right.

2 BB: About four of them and one was in Minneapolis, then Long Island.

3 Schenectady, New York, the other was the other one. After I left Minneapolis, I went to
4 the receiving station in California waiting for a ship. It seemed like I'd never find one.

5 LC: How long were you in California waiting?

6 BB: Oh, I don't know, must've been a month or more. Finally I wound up at the
7 Terminal Islands Federal Prison. I was living not in the prison, but in the houses that
8 they'd taken away from the Japanese, you know, the fishermen.

9 LC: Yes.

10 BB: And put them in a wire cage, I'd suppose you'd say.

11 LC: In a what, in a cage?

12 BB: Yeah.

13 LC: Yeah.

14 BB: You know, where they put them.

15 LC: Yeah, they interned them.

16 BB: So I got my instructions while I was at that Terminal Island post. We got on
17 a train and went to Miami, Florida.

18 LC: All the way back over the country?

19 BB: Yeah, huh?

20 LC: All the way to Miami?

21 BB: Yeah, all the way to Miami. When we got there, we went to the subchaser
22 training school, which was on Biscayne Boulevard. We went through the training school
23 there. When we got finished with that, we went up to Jacksonville, Florida, where they
24 manufactured the 1302. A crew of us went up there. We borrowed the Subchaser 1302,
25 which is an all wooden ship, 110 feet long, about 14 feet wide. A crew of twenty-five
26 people, officers and men. We came back to Miami and we were commissioned there.

27 LC: Were you at the commissioning ceremony?

28 BB: Yes.

29 LC: What can you tell me about that?

30 BB: Well, there were some officials there, you know.

31 LC: Some big shots?

1 BB: Yeah.

2 LC: From Miami or from the Navy?

3 BB: In the Navy. I got on my note here, Subchaser 1302, commissioned
4 Tuesday, March the 30th, 1943. I kept my diary during the war, don't tell nobody I did,
5 but I can document everything that I'm saying.

6 LC: Yes, sir.

7 BB: After it was commissioned, my place, special sea detail was on the wheel,
8 taking orders from the man up above, telling me where to turn and where not to. But we
9 did so many in and out stuff there and checking out some of the construction and
10 everything.

11 LC: Now you were going in and out of Jacksonville?

12 BB: After we brought it back to Miami.

13 LC: Oh, I see, after Miami.

14 BB: Then when they got it ready for us, well, we was ready to—we didn't know
15 where we went, but we went south. I went to Guantanamo and right on down, San Juan,
16 Puerto Rico, and all the way down to the Caribbean and to Trinidad. There was a body of
17 water between the island of Trinidad and the country, Venezuela.

18 LC: Venezuela.

19 BB: Yeah. It's called the *Bocas*, that little part of the water. Well, I was on the
20 wheel, like I tell you, that was my job. The water was so rough going through there, the
21 captain took me off the wheel because I couldn't keep it going straight. He knew the
22 channel was mined. He put the boatswain's mate on the wheel, but we got through and
23 there's a little cove in the island of Trinidad with some docks there, piers. We went in
24 and tied up that. That was our home port all for the rest of the war.

25 LC: Was Trinidad?

26 BB: Yeah, and the Gulf of Paria there and big ships would come in there on their
27 training and everything. Our job was to search for German submarines that started out
28 sinking everything we had on the East Coast.

29 LC: Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

30 BB: We didn't have torpedoes. We had a mine.

31 LC: Depth charge or what did you have?

1 BB: Depth charges and one 40-millimeter gun is the biggest gun we had. Can
2 you picture us facing a submarine that had a three-inch gun on it?

3 LC: It's not a happy thought.

4 BB: Thank God we never come face to face, but we bombed a lot of fish, I
5 suppose, because we thought we had a submarine under there. It didn't work out that
6 way.

7 LC: Excuse me, Bill, did you have a sonar capability or how were you locating
8 subs?

9 BB: Yeah, had the sound gear.

10 LC: Yeah, sound gear, yup. Did you lower it over the side or how did you—?

11 BB: No, no. It was some kind of a machine that would pick it up.

12 LC: O, okay. You said that there was real rough water in that channel there near
13 Venezuela and that it was mined?

14 BB: Yes, it was. Part of our job on as the war went along and everything was
15 when we found, when a floating mine in the Gulf of Paria was found, then we would go
16 out and blow it up with the twenty millimeters or the forty millimeter.

17 LC: So you'd get some gun practice shooting at the mines?

18 BB: Huh?

19 LC: You would get some gun practice by shooting at the—

20 BB: Yeah, that's right.

21 LC: Shooting at the mines and blowing them up.

22 BB: Yeah. We'd rather shoot at that than the submarines.

23 LC: Well, yes, sir, I can well imagine. Now, Bill, I've got to ask you about one
24 of the members of your crew who was shorter than everybody else. That was Queeny.
25 Now I want to ask, how did you come by Queeny?

26 BB: Well, we was in San Juan, Puerto Rico, tied upside of another subchaser and
27 they came in. They had a big dog onboard.

28 LC: A big dog?

29 BB: Yeah, a bigger dog. They said, "Look, we've got a little puppy over here.
30 Would you like to have it?" Our captain says, "You can't have but one dog on here." So
31 then I had to go and I asked the officer, the captain about it. He said, "No, it would be

1 too much mess." I said, "Well, we'll take care of that." To make a long story short, well,
2 he decided to do it and he became a fan of Queeny also. In fact, I'm looking at that
3 picture right here and Captain Scott, in another of the little picture, he's got Queeny in
4 there sitting on an ammunition box.

5 LC: I'm actually looking at a copy of that picture now, too.

6 BB: Yes. That's how we got Queeny.

7 LC: She's sitting on the ammo box. Who's that with her? Is that the captain
8 with her?

9 BB: Yeah, at that time.

10 LC: What was his name? Do you remember?

11 BB: Scott. I'm looking at the big picture and Mr. Morgan that I kept contact
12 after—I got contact with him after the war and it was the most enjoyable thing. He
13 seemed to enjoy talking on the phone to me and sending me books and everything. Of
14 course, he died and that was a loss to me.

15 LC: Well, sure. Yes, sir. Well, let me ask you, did Queeny kind of, was she sort
16 of special to you particularly?

17 BB: Yes, and I would take her to the vet. They had a vet in Trinidad, the town.
18 She had a disease in her ear. I'd take her on the bus and take her over there. I taught her
19 because I'd always had pets.

20 LC: Yes, sir.

21 BB: She took to me. Pete Losiere in this picture, he was an old woodcutter. She
22 loved him and he loved her, but when Pete would go on the beach and get a little tanked
23 up and come back and he'd call Queeny and she'd go to him. When she smelled his
24 breath, she'd start turning her head away from him. He'd start talking in a, "Oh, baby,
25 don't worry about me. I'm all right." But that dog—and you know, when I started to get
26 in touch with some of my shipmates on there, one of the first things they'd do is say,
27 "Bill," they called me Brownie on there. They'd say, "Brownie, what happened to
28 Queeny?" I'd have to tell them that she stayed on the farm. Queeny in one of these
29 pictures as you turn the page, she's standing up on the box.

30 LC: Yes, sir, I see her.

1 BB: Okay. Well, I made that box. I put her name on it. In Charleston, South
2 Carolina, where we decommissioned the subchaser, I took it and put it on the train with
3 Queeny in it. I was on the train. I told the people back there to take care of her, I had
4 water in there. Do you know that box is still in the barn on that forty-acre farm over
5 there?

6 LC: Is it really?

7 BB: Yeah.

8 LC: I can't imagine how you managed to get her with you, to keep her with you
9 while you were decommissioned and get her home. How did you manage it?

10 BB: Oh, it was easy.

11 LC: Was it?

12 BB: Yeah. Every time the train would stop, I'd go back to the car, baggage car
13 and put my hand in there and let her smell of it and everything.

14 LC: So she would know that you were there.

15 BB: Yeah. We rode the same little boat over to the beach in Charleston. She was
16 right on in there with me. Then we got down to the station.

17 LC: Well, Bill, was she happy on the farm?

18 BB: Oh, yeah.

19 LC: How long did she live Bill?

20 BB: Oh, let's see, she died—I went to Auburn University and got a degree in Ag
21 Science. Then I was working in two different, three different places in Alabama. She
22 was there with Momma and Daddy. She just loved it there.

23 LC: Oh, sure.

24 BB: Had plenty of room to march around and everything.

25 LC: She was as good a dog on land as she was on sea, I gather?

26 BB: Yeah.

27 LC: Now you said she—I'm reading the article which—

28 BB: Yeah, I know.

29 LC: Which is in *Pet Life*. It says that she had good sea legs. Did she ever hit
30 water where it kind of did upset her or she would manage it, no problem?

31 BB: At home?

1 LC: Well, actually back on the ship?

2 BB: On the deck?

3 LC: Yeah, on the deck. Good sea legs?

4 BB: If she had to mess up the deck a little bit, I swore to the captain that I'd clean

5 it up and it wasn't that bad. When we left Trinidad coming to Miami, we was all worried

6 about her because we didn't think she was going to the bathroom. When we got there

7 and tied up to the dock, the first thing we did, we put the leash on Queeny and took her

8 on the dock. Everybody conscious about her, you know.

9 LC: Sure, sure. What happened?

10 BB: Well, you know—

11 LC: She was okay?

12 BB: Yeah.

13 LC: Well, there you go. Well, dogs are funny that way sometimes.

14 BB: Yeah, that's right.

15 LC: Well, I'm so glad that you got to keep her. Bill, if you can, would you say

16 something about what she meant to the guys on the ship?

17 BB: It was almost like they was petting one of their children. They'd wash her,

18 give her a bath and stuff like that and take her. When they were on watch, Queeny

19 would—at night, you know, and there was a seat on the starboard side and on the port

20 side up on the lookout tower. They'd take Queeny up there and put her in the chair. If it

21 was raining, they'd take a raincoat and take it to cover her up, just not to disturb her.

22 They loved that dog. Like I say, "Brownie, what happened to Queeny, after it was over?"

23 LC: Yeah, that's what they cared about.

24 BB: Yeah.

25 LC: Sure. Well, they must've all been very glad to know that you got her home.

26 BB: Yeah. Another thing, it's funny that I would happen home, like this article

27 said, and Momma said, "Well, Daddy's out getting ready to bury Queeny." We put her in

28 a good box and covered her up out there. That's right there where my sisters are right

29 now.

30 LC: Right there in the yard somewhere.

1 BB: Yeah. I wrote on the concrete while it was wet that she was there and when
2 she died and she's on the ship and everything like that.

3 LC: Yes, sir. Yes, sir. It's still there on the farm?

4 BB: Uh-huh.

5 LC: Bill, let me ask you about going to school. You went to Auburn, you said.

6 BB: Yes, I went on a GI Bill, the best thing that ever happened to me because I
7 would've never been able to make it otherwise, you know.

8 LC: Now tell me about that. How did the GI Bill work?

9 BB: How much longer you got? Can we have a little break?

10 LC: Oh, sure.

11 BB: How what, Laura?

12 LC: Bill, can you tell me how the GI Bill actually worked?

13 BB: Oh, okay. There was three of us from the same community there in that
14 peanut section from Alabama that went on the GI Bill and went to Auburn. Then there's
15 another guy that was in another county in Alabama and he was there. We all lived in the
16 same dormitory.

17 LC: Now did you all study the same thing?

18 BB: No, one was studying engineering and one of us was studying dairy, cattle.
19 Then the other fellow, we had Agricultural Science.

20 LC: Is that what you did, Ag—?

21 BB: Yeah. We didn't take a break. We was on a quarter system and we just
22 steady all the way through.

23 LC: Right through.

24 BB: Yeah, and finished in three years. Then I got a job with the Soil
25 Conservation Service in Alabama and went to work in Cullman County, worked there for
26 about a year and nine months. Then I went to another county, Lauderdale County, it
27 joins Tennessee. I worked about nine months there and then I was transferred to Mobile,
28 Alabama, where I was the district conservationist down there, had the whole county.

29 LC: So they promoted you?

30 BB: Yes, this was steps to being promoted.

31 LC: Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

1 BB: I worked with farm people on conservation, conserving the soil and the
2 timber and the grass and stuff like that.

3 LC: Yes, sir.

4 BB: Some of the most likeable people you ever wanted to work with. The first
5 thing they always offered you was when you got there to help them, "Let's go have a cup
6 of coffee."

7 LC: I absolutely believe you. Well, they're good people in that part of the world,
8 good people there. You know, your GI Bill paid for your whole education, did it?

9 BB: Yeah.

10 LC: You said it was one of the best things that ever happened for you.

11 BB: Yeah, because I don't know if I'd have ever got a job, or if I'd had the
12 ambition to go to college. While I was there to begin with, it was in July, June, yeah. It
13 was hot and I was taking American History. Most all the class was boys and some girls
14 in the old GI uniforms that they'd wear.

15 LC: Were they really?

16 BB: Yes. That place was swamped with the ex-military people.

17 LC: Sure.

18 BB: I remember when we went through the gate to the campus, there's the little
19 girls there and what they called the Rat's Cap for the new students to take. One of the old
20 guys ahead of him, I don't know what he'd been in, they'd been in the military. She said,
21 she put the cap on his head and he took it and put it on her and he said, "Honey," he says,
22 "You wear that. I don't need that." In other words, "I've come not to fool around, but
23 I've come to get an education."

24 LC: I'm here to get my degree.

25 BB: Right.

26 LC: Well, somewhere in here, you must've met your wife, sir.

27 BB: Well, yeah.

28 LC: Where did you meet her?

29 BB: Do you remember when I was going around to these gun factories making
30 parts for a gun?

31 LC: Yes, I do.

1 BB: In—

2 LC: Long Island, when you were in Long Island?

3 BB: Yeah. But when I got to Minneapolis, Minnesota, there was an Italian lady,
4 Mama Cario. She took in us Navy boys that was going to this school and she had a sister
5 that lived in Brooklyn. Ann, my wife, was working somewhere over there in Brooklyn.
6 She was at the same place and they was talking and Mama Cario asked Ann, "Why don't
7 you write to some of the service people?" She says, "It would be patriotic." She says, "I
8 have some names here." She gave her, one was a Marine, I believe, Ann said and one
9 was a sailor, that was me. Ann picked me, got my address. I was on the subchaser. I
10 was painting on the side subchaser in Trinidad. The guy on watch come over and looked
11 over at me, he said, "Brownie, who's this broad in Brooklyn that you know?" I said,
12 "Look, I've never been to Brooklyn but one time in my life and I didn't see no broads
13 while I was up there."

14 LC: Good for you, good for you.

15 BB: That was the letter. I wished to my soul I had saved that letter. She started
16 out making all kinds of excuses for doing it and everything.

17 LC: Oh, sure.

18 BB: Well, we kept—

19 LC: You wrote her back?

20 BB: Wrote her back, naturally, you know, nothing else to do on the submarines
21 but write somebody. She sent me a picture and I liked the picture and I still have that
22 picture.

23 LC: Oh, how sweet.

24 BB: We kept writing. Then when the war was over and I had more points than I
25 needed to get out, but they wouldn't let me out because I signed up for six years and
26 that's what they said you're going to stay.

27 LC: Yes, sir.

28 BB: So I went in on the eighteenth day of April in 1940 and I got out on the
29 eighteenth day of April 1946, almost the same time of the day at the air station in New
30 Orleans. So when I got my discharge, I took my ditty bag, that's the little thing you

1 carried your shaving gear in and stuff like that, and got on the train and headed for Staten
2 Island, New York. Of course, you went into the city.

3 LC: Yes.

4 BB: I got there and I was walking down a walkway there at the railroad station. I
5 saw this girl by herself coming up. I kept looking at her. I said, "Josh, that looks like the
6 one I've been writing to." So she recognized me from my pictures and that. We met
7 right there, you know. Then later on, I met her family there and later on while I was in
8 Auburn, she came down to Auburn and stayed in a hotel there and went with me to the
9 farm and met my family on the farm. On December the 26th, 1946, we got married. I
10 said that if I ever get married again, it won't be the day after Christmas.

11 LC: And Ann is there with you now?

12 BB: Oh, yes, she was sitting over here on the end of the table until she went—
13 Maggie, she's on her sleeping bed.

14 LC: Yeah, you've got the dog there.

15 BB: So there's nobody in here but me now.

16 LC: Well, I couldn't be happier that you decided to write her back. But the fact
17 that she wrote you in the first place, that's quite something for a gal in the 1940s to do
18 that. You know, that probably happened more times than we think.

19 BB: I know.

20 LC: She did something wonderful and it worked out terrifically, it sounds like.

21 BB: Yeah.

22 LC: You've been happy all this time?

23 BB: Oh, yeah. She loves Mobile more than any place we went.

24 LC: Really?

25 BB: Of course, while I was in Auburn, our first child was born while I was in
26 school. After I got out a little while, you know, I went to Staten Island and saw my first
27 child, my son. They're coming up, he and his family is coming up for Easter here.

28 LC: Oh, just here in another couple of weeks or so?

29 BB: Yeah. He graduated from Auburn, too, in engineering and he lives, his
30 office now is in Houston, Texas.

31 LC: Oh, so he can come up and visit you in Ft. Worth.

1 BB: Yeah. Then when we got to Mobile, my only daughter was born down there.
2 LC: What's your daughter's name?
3 BB: Her name is Lois Ann.
4 LC: Now did she go to school, too?
5 BB: She went to a clothing like school, yeah. She got out of that and then she
6 worked some in stores.
7 LC: Does she have her own family?
8 BB: Yeah, she has two boys.
9 LC: So your granddaughter, who just came out of boot camp last year up at Great
10 Lakes, now is she your son's daughter?
11 BB: She's Sue's daughter.
12 LC: Oh, she's Sue's daughter. So how many children—?
13 BB: No, not Sue, Lois Ann's daughter.
14 LC: Oh, Lois Ann, okay. So how many kids do you and Ann have, how many?
15 BB: The two grandkids is my—
16 LC: Those are Lois Ann's.
17 BB: My boys.
18 LC: Oh, I see, okay.
19 BB: And Lois Ann had two girls.
20 LC: Had two girls, okay.
21 BB: Yeah. One is a Navy and the other one works with a wine company in
22 California.
23 LC: Well, that sounds like a pretty good mix.
24 BB: Yeah.
25 LC: You got both ends covered there.
26 BB: Yeah, that's right.
27 LC: Well, Bill, tell me how you came to live in Texas. Did you move to Texas as
28 part of the soil conservation?
29 BB: You see, I'm red headed. I was, now I'm white headed.
30 LC: Yes, sir.
31 BB: All my work was in the field with farmers and stuff like that.

1 LC: Sure.

2 BB: I was having trouble with my skin and the skin specialist, I call him skin
3 scrapers, he says, "Why don't you get you a job as a night watchman and get out of this
4 sunshine?" That was down on the coast where the rays of the sun are terrific, you know.

5 LC: Yes.

6 BB: So I got a chance. They asked me would I like to come to the training center
7 out here in Ft. Worth, which is a government thing that trains new employees to work
8 with the Soil Conservation Service. I said, "Yeah, are you going to give me a raise?"
9 They said, "No, we can't do it." I says, "Well, I love Mobile County and so does my
10 family and we'll stay in Mobile County where I have so many good friends." We rocked
11 along and later they came back and said, "We'll give you a raise if you go to the training
12 center in Ft. Worth, Texas." So we talked it over and we came. Ann said we should've
13 never done it and should've stayed in Mobile because she loved it down there.

14 LC: Now what year did you move out to Ft. Worth?

15 BB: '67.

16 LC: Yeah, it's hard to leave a place you've been all your life.

17 BB: Huh?

18 LC: It's pretty hard to leave a place that—

19 BB: Oh, yeah, yeah.

20 LC: Hard for you, but she had taken to it. Now she's a New Yorker and she
21 loves Mobile.

22 BB: Yeah, that's right.

23 LC: She loved Mobile.

24 BB: Uh-huh.

25 LC: I'll be darned. Well, she's got good taste. We'll say that. But are you both
26 happy now, happy with your job?

27 BB: Yeah, I'm looking out the window here at the Carolina jasmine in bloom.
28 I've got a big backyard and got hedge, call it Red Top and it's red now. I've got a big
29 yard and I just love it because the space. We built a little house in the backyard after we
30 came out here because Ann's mother and father needed help.

31 LC: Sure.

1 BB: They didn't have any kids up there. She was her main, their main aunt. So
2 we built a little house. I can see it through the window where I'm sitting now.

3 LC: Now, and that's where her parents lived for a while?

4 BB: Till they passed away, yeah.

5 LC: Sure enough, sure.

6 BB: Now it's my hideaway.

7 LC: It's your hideaway.

8 BB: When Ann gets too hot on me here, I go back there. (Both laugh)

9 LC: You've got a retreat right there.

10 BB: Yeah, and my garden's back there. When I finish here, I'll be putting some
11 of those tomato plants I got yesterday there. I got two pecan trees in the front yard. Last
12 year I didn't make any, but the year before last, I had a record crop. We put them in the
13 deep freeze.

14 LC: Wonderful.

15 BB: Yeah.

16 LC: Yummy, yummy.

17 BB: So yeah, we're on a corner lot, got plenty of space. Maggie, she can get out
18 there and chase squirrels.

19 LC: That's right. She can handle the security issues out in the yard.

20 BB: Yeah.

21 LC: Well, Bill, let me ask you a couple of questions as you think back on your
22 service to the country during World War II. This is kind of a big picture question I guess
23 you could say. Are you proud of what the United States did during World War II? Was
24 it the right war?

25 BB: Oh, gosh, yes.

26 LC: Should we have fought that war?

27 BB: Yeah. You see, a man, he did a copy machine. I wanted him to make a copy
28 of something for me and he knew in some way that I was in the service during the war.

29 LC: Yes, sir.

30 BB: He said, "What do you think about when they dropped the bomb on Japan?"
31 I says, "I was happy." He said, "Why?" I says, "Because I wanted to go home."

1 LC: Yes, sir.

2 BB: It's a bad thing, but you put an end to it so everybody can do. Look how
3 Japan is right now. I didn't do anything great. I did what they told me to do to the best
4 of my ability.

5 LC: Yes, sir.

6 BB: I was proud that I could serve and I've got a flagpole back here. The flag is
7 flapping in the breeze right now. I look out the window and I can see the wind tossing it
8 there.

9 LC: Well, I'm very proud of you for having the flag flying today. It's always
10 important that we do that I think. Bill, I want to ask you, as time went on, and I know
11 you were busy, you had a family and you had your job, when the Vietnam War came
12 around, what did you make of that? What did you think of that?

13 BB: Well, I thought we'd win it.

14 LC: Really?

15 BB: Yeah.

16 LC: Yeah.

17 BB: And was disappointed when we didn't. One day, I don't know whether it
18 was Veteran's Day or what, I was taking my morning walk. I walked by a man's house,
19 we was shooting the bull with each other. I found out he was in the service and I was too.
20 I said, "Well, we've never lost but one war." He says, "Which one was that?" I said,
21 "Vietnam." He says, "Listen man." He said, "We didn't lose that war." Boy did I start
22 backtracking then. I says, "I've done said the wrong thing," and I agreed with him. They
23 didn't win it. They just didn't get enough gear to win it.

24 LC: They didn't have enough time or something.

25 BB: That's right. I felt for them and I never said anything else about it because I
26 agreed with him. If they had left the wars alone, they'd took them over there, you see.

27 LC: Yeah. Do you think that that's what the problem was, that maybe the
28 politicians got in the way or—?

29 BB: Yeah, that. I read someplace where they didn't have enough money. It was
30 costing so much money and they decided they'd pull out.

1 LC: Yeah. Well, what did you think of President Johnson? I mean, you moved
2 out here just about the time—well, he was in office in 1967.

3 BB: Yeah.

4 LC: You know, big Texan, what did you think of President Johnson?

5 BB: Well, I suppose I agreed with him. I didn't know that much because I'm not
6 in politics that much.

7 LC: No, I know that, yeah.

8 BB: I'm glad somebody does those jobs. I asked Ann lately, I wonder how
9 President Bush sleeps at night.

10 LC: Well, how do you think he sleeps?

11 BB: I don't know.

12 LC: Yeah.

13 BB: I just can't. Now I woke up at midnight last night. Maggie and I went to
14 bed at eight o'clock and at midnight, I woke up. Then I laid there wondering about this
15 and on the hour I get the news on the radio and think about all the things that are bad
16 that's happening in this world. If I had the responsibility of what's going on now, I don't
17 think I'd ever go to bed.

18 LC: Does it worry you, the war in Iraq?

19 BB: Yes, it worries me.

20 LC: I mean, of course you've got a granddaughter who's in the service and
21 hopefully she won't be impacted by this too directly, but it's possible that she may do a
22 tour or something, but how do you see it coming to an end? I mean, you've seen a lot of
23 wars, sir, and you participated in the biggest one of the last century. What do you think it
24 looks like there in Iraq? Is it a winning proposition? Do you think we're doing the right
25 thing?

26 BB: It's hard. You know, all these talk shows and the Democrats and the
27 Republicans and I wish we could join.

28 LC: I agree. Yes, sir.

29 BB: And do the job, you know?

30 LC: Yes, sir.

1 BB: But not everybody, but people have ambitions to feather their nest and make
2 a name for themselves. What we're doing here is not to make a name for me, but to just
3 tell you the part that I paid in the whole show. Maybe when I left the *Louisville*, it was in
4 the heart of war. It was _____ by two times and I still have friends. We have a
5 *Louisville* convention you know and everything.

6 LC: Now do you go to reunions and—?

7 BB: No, I haven't been able to go, but I've been in touch with some of those that
8 do go.

9 LC: Now you keep in touch by telephone with them or—?

10 BB: Oh, yeah, yeah. In fact, I'm in touch with four of my shipmates on the
11 subchaser. We have an organization there too. We call and talk to them on the phone.
12 One is in an assist place, like a nursing home.

13 LC: Oh, sure, assisted—

14 BB: Assisted living.

15 LC: Assisted living, sure.

16 BB: Yeah. Captain Morgan that was in that picture where all of us together, he's
17 over on the left next to the captain. You got two officers on the end.

18 LC: I see him. What is his name?

19 BB: George Morgan. I'm in touch with—I've been in touch with his family, his
20 wife and his stepdaughters ever since I got in touch with him.

21 LC: No kidding.

22 BB: Yeah. I've sent them tomatoes and pecans and they send me things and
23 everything.

24 LC: Now where do they live?

25 BB: Well, they live in Colorado.

26 LC: Uh-huh. Sure, sure.

27 BB: Yeah. George, he died.

28 LC: Now when did he die?

29 BB: Oh, about two years ago now.

30 LC: Oh, okay.

31 BB: So I keep in touch with them and it's nice, you know.

1 LC: Now on one of the papers that you sent in, Bill, you mentioned the Small
2 Craft Association, the Patrol Craft Sailor's Association. Is that one group or are those
3 two different groups?

4 BB: No, no, it's different. Anybody on the Coast Guard on a small craft could be
5 a member of that. They have destroyer escorts, the Navy's got the name DE, they're a
6 member of that and stuff like that.

7 LC: Yes, sir. Now do your friends from the associations that you kind of keep in
8 touch with, do you guys talk about the current war or not so much?

9 BB: Not too much.

10 LC: Do you kind of shoot the bull about what's going on now? I'm just
11 wondering what—

12 BB: Can you put that on hold?

13 LC: Yes. Bill, I wanted to ask you another couple of questions if you don't mind.

14 BB: Okay.

15 LC: One of them has to do with the fact that in the letter that you sent me, you
16 noted that you served in the National Guard and the National Reserve for a while after
17 your active duty service was over.

18 BB: Yes.

19 LC: How long was that?

20 BB: I was still in Auburn. See, and that was three years that it took me to get
21 through Auburn. I started out with the Naval Reserve. They would fly us from Opelika,
22 which is a little town near Auburn.

23 LC: Yes, sir.

24 BB: To Atlanta and we'd drill over the weekend.

25 LC: Right.

26 BB: Then they'd bring us back. One day the captain over there said, "I'm going
27 to have to tell you fellows that we're afraid to bring you over on this plane anymore
28 because they're not that good."

29 LC: Yikes.

30 BB: "If you want to continue with the Naval Reserves," he says, "And you can
31 get over here, well, you can stay here," you know.

1 LC: Sure.

2 BB: So I had no way of getting over there, so I got out. Then at Opelika,
3 Alabama, it was the National Guard unit. So I says, "Well, I'll get in the National
4 Guard." One day a guy at the National Guard unit says, "I see here that you're in the
5 Naval Reserve and National Guard too." I says, "Yeah." He says, "You can't do that." I
6 says, "Well, okay." He says, "You got to pick one or the other." I says, "Well I won't
7 pick any one."

8 LC: "I'll pick neither."

9 BB: So that's how I got out.

10 LC: Okay. That would've been what, about 194—?

11 BB: I'd say I went up there in '46.

12 LC: So '49 or so?

13 BB: Yeah, maybe '48.

14 LC: Oh, '48. Just a year later or so, the Korean War broke out. Did you ever feel
15 that they might call you back in the service?

16 BB: No, I didn't know much about that.

17 LC: Is that right? You never felt like that they might come and impress you back
18 in?

19 BB: No.

20 LC: Of course, you were older than some of the other guys who had served in
21 World War II. You were born in 1919, so you were a little bit older. That probably
22 helped out in that. Also, you had children by this time too. Well, I just wanted to ask
23 another question, Bill. Now folks looking back on World War II, younger people like
24 me, I'm in my forties, we look back and we think about the people who served in World
25 War II. We tend to call you now the greatest generation. I'm sure you've heard that.

26 BB: Yes.

27 LC: What do you think of that? Were you the generation that did your duty or
28 was there more to it than that?

29 BB: Well, you see, one of my uncles died in the First World War

30 LC: Is that right?

1 BB: Yeah. My great-grandfather died in the Civil War and one died in the Indian
2 War. But it's something you have to do when you're there. I suppose they had the
3 same—maybe some of them were drafted in, like even in World War II.

4 LC: Sure.

5 BB: I sometimes ask myself, "If I hadn't been in the Navy when the war broke
6 out, would I have volunteered?" and I know I would because I had kinfolks that did, you
7 see. I don't know. If we could all get along together, it'd be wonderful.

8 LC: It sure would.

9 BB: But it's not going to be that, it never has been.

10 LC: I know.

11 BB: Now we're faced and we thought maybe we could help other people. I think
12 we helped Japan out.

13 LC: With what we did after the war?

14 BB: Yes. We put them on their feet.

15 LC: Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

16 BB: We sent our scrap iron over there to them, for them to send back on Pearl
17 Harbor Day, but now it's worked out fine. We helped those people. We could help those
18 over there, but they're fighting among themselves you see.

19 LC: Meaning the ones in Iraq.

20 BB: Yeah.

21 LC: Yeah.

22 BB: How can you help somebody when they can't even get along together?

23 LC: Well, you mentioned that you had a great grandfather who was killed in the
24 Civil War?

25 BB: Yeah.

26 LC: Now, would I be right in saying that he was on the Confederate side fighting
27 from Alabama?

28 BB: Yeah, yeah, you know he was.

29 LC: Yes, sir. Do you know anything about the story? Have you researched
30 where he was killed or what the circumstances were?

31 BB: Yeah, yeah.

1 LC: Because that's real interesting too.

2 BB: I can't remember now, but that's one thing that's showing up with me is
3 remembering something. I'll remember it a little later.

4 LC: Oh, sure. Well, I'll tell you. We'll have another chance to, if it does come
5 to you, to include it in the record. But you had a grandfather who was killed in the Civil
6 War?

7 BB: Yeah.

8 LC: What about your uncle in World War I? What do you know about him?

9 BB: I didn't know him, but I have pictures of him, even with the things that he
10 had to carry with him and all. I know that he was wounded in France.

11 LC: Was he in the Army then?

12 BB: Yeah.

13 LC: He was in the U.S. Army?

14 BB: Yeah. Then he was a mason. There's a doctor that was a mason, people in
15 these groups stick together.

16 LC: Yes sir, yes.

17 BB: Even if it's college today in time.

18 LC: Yes, that's right.

19 BB: So they shipped him back to New York and he died. Then his wife went up
20 there to stay with him in New York, but he died while he was in New York from the
21 wound that he got overseas, but was able to get back to the States.

22 LC: So his wife did see him before he died?

23 BB: Pardon?

24 LC: Did his wife see him before he died?

25 BB: Oh, yeah. She was there with him.

26 LC: Okay. Well, that had to be some comfort to her.

27 BB: Yeah.

28 LC: But as you say, the United States has been involved in a number of conflicts
29 over time.

30 BB: Yeah. I have pictures of him in his Army uniform.

31 LC: Well, I bet he cut a fine figure.

1 BB: Yeah.

2 LC: Well, Bill, is there anything else that you'd like to add to the oral history

3 interview before we wrap it up, anything I haven't asked you about?

4 BB: I don't know. You could head down and go back over and reminisce and go

5 a little deeper in the thing, but we can't do that. But I think we've pretty well covered it.

6 LC: Okay. Well—

7 BB: I'll say one other thing.

8 LC: Yes, please.

9 BB: About Queeny.

10 LC: Yes, sir.

11 BB: She has covered and you've met—personally, did you meet Claude Crowley

12 personally?

13 LC: I did meet him personally, yes, sir.

14 BB: I'll tell you right now, it's good to live right within walking distance right

15 down the street. In fact, I think it was the day before yesterday, he dropped by here and

16 brought me something. I give him something from time to time.

17 LC: He's a fine gentleman.

18 BB: Oh, and he helped me take my wife out to the monogram examination here

19 recently. He told me, he said, "Bill," said, "I want to tell you, I appreciate you asking me

20 to help you." He said, "I want you to know that anytime you need any help, you can call

21 on me."

22 LC: He is a fine gentleman.

23 BB: Yeah. I have his autobiography, a copy of it and I've read it twice. See, he

24 was in the Soil Conservation Service.

25 LC: Yes, that's right.

26 BB: And had the same job I had until he got promoted to the information outfit

27 out here you see. Then I got here.

28 LC: You two were practically separated at birth.

29 BB: Yeah.

30 LC: Because he served in the Navy of course as well.

31 BB: Yeah, he was on a destroyer.

1 LC: Yeah, he was on the *Richard B. Anderson*.
2 BB: Yeah.
3 LC: A finer gentleman I will never meet I'm sure.
4 BB: Oh, he's perfect.
5 LC: And his wife as well, very sweet.
6 BB: Oh, yeah.
7 LC: Very sweet.
8 BB: I was glad they went. He told me all about it and showed me some pictures
9 and everything. We share about everything. I got a mustard patch growing in my garden
10 now and he loves mustard. So I keep him supplied with mustard.
11 LC: Well, there you go. Well, you two guys have got it pretty much worked out
12 and I'm very pleased for you.
13 BB: Yeah. We've got a lot in common now.
14 LC: Yeah, and to have a great friend like that nearby is always a comfort.
15 BB: Yeah.
16 LC: Well, Bill, I want to thank you for taking the time today to participate in the
17 oral history project.
18 BB: Well, it's my pleasure and—
19 LC: I appreciate it, sir.
20 BB: I'm like you, you're doing now. He and I, I get the *Naval History Magazine*
21 and always pass it on to him.
22 LC: Yes, sir.
23 BB: They have a new head of that thing now and it looks like—in fact, there's a
24 little dog story in the last issue. Neither one of us could remember that those admirals
25 that write in that magazine and then when another one writes, they argue about whether
26 he was right or wrong. So we think that it's in a better way by writing some things,
27 people that were out there on the ground fighting too that don't get much publicity.
28 LC: Yes, sir. That's exactly why we're interviewing you and Claude and the
29 other folks. That's exactly why we're doing it.
30 BB: Well, it's because of Claude now that I got this interview.
31 LC: Yes, sir. I'm going to write him a note and tell him what a good job you did.

1 BB: Well, I appreciate it. I told him I was scared and he said, "Bill, don't
2 worry," says, "She's going to take care of it."

3 LC: Well, thank you, Bill.

4 BB: Well, thank you.