

When were you born?

Mr. Brinkley: February 10, 1924

Where were you from originally?

Mr. Brinkley: I was born and reared in Montgomery County.

How big was your family? Tell me a little bit about your family growing up.

Mr. Brinkley: I was 3rd down from the top. There were eight children, five boys and three girls. I'm the 3rd one from the top. All of us are living except for one brother that was three years my junior that died of cancer. He was a twin. The rest of us are still closer here except for one brother that is in Michigan. He is the oldest of the eight children. One of my brothers and one of my sisters and their husband and wife they are going to Michigan next week to visit him in Michigan. He has been in bad health. He's got a pacemaker and has emphysema and what not but they are going down to visit him next week.

Can you tell me a little bit about what it was like growing up with eight siblings?

Mr. Brinkley: It was tough. During the depression it was, of course we were reared on a farm and we grew most of our food. We had our corn to make the meal. We had our wheat to make the flour. We had an ox to make our meat and also make the lard and everything that went with it. We had plenty. My mother did a lot of canning, with eight children she had to. She knew how because she was from a big family. It was tough to get a pair of shoes at the time of school when it started in fall and by the last when school was out.

Your dad was a farmer?

Mr. Brinkley: I was on a farm and like I said it was tough. Of course during the depression a dime then was like \$10.00 now. It was altogether different. You could reach in your pocket and get a ___ hundred dollars out and then you couldn't get 15 cents out because it was rough.

You guys grew most of your own stuff?

Mr. Brinkley: We grew most of our food. It was like say when we went to school you had two pair of pants to go to school in. If one had to be patched it was patched and you wore patched clothes to school. In the fall of the year with eight children my dad would carry country hams down to 3rd Street Shoe Store and trade them to Mr. Davis who was related to us too and had the shoe store. He would take country hams and get all of our eight children shod with shoes to go to school in. Now kids would fret to have to walk from here to the highway at the market there when we had to walk five miles to school. Somebody would say, "Yeah and go barefooted?" I said, "No we didn't have to go bare-footed but we walked in ice, sleet, snow, and rain." We got there and we got an education.

Did you graduate high school?

Mr. Brinkley: No. I dropped out of high school and went in the service.

When was that?

Mr. Brinkley: 1942.

You were 18?

Mr. Brinkley: Yes.

You did your training at boot camp in Virginia and California?

Mr. Brinkley: I did my boot training in Virginia. When we got there it snowed and it sleeted and it was so cold and we had tents to sleep in. It was tough, it was really tough.

What part of Virginia were you in? Do you remember?

Mr. Brinkley: Norfolk. When I finished boot camp we had five days of leave. I was so sick that the doctor didn't want me to come home. I was on the verge of pneumonia. I said, "I am going because I don't know if I am going to come back or not." He allowed me to go. He gave me my medicine. I took a day and a night to come home was home three days and go back. Of course when I got here I was so sick my dad took me to the doctor here and he got me some more medicine and I survived. I was still sick when I got back to Virginia. I enjoyed the three days that I had at home. I didn't know when I was ever going to come back or whether I would come back.

How many was in your boot camp with you?

Mr. Brinkley: There were about 300 and they were all southerners. A lot of the boys that was with me were from Tennessee. We had a good outfit. The Marines trained us. I, of course, being a farm boy and country, I was born tough. The Marines they didn't have no pity on me. Some of the boys, even though I was tough, I thought I was tough, I wasn't tough. I wasn't tough with the Marines training because they were tough. Some of the boys being city boys were something that never had to do anything; it liked to have killed them.

Do you remember how many of the 300 completed boot camp and went on into the Army?

Mr. Brinkley: Only two or three had to get out because of health or other reasons.

You enlisted, you weren't drafted?

Mr. Brinkley: I enlisted.

How many of your siblings enlisted? You said there were five boys.

Mr. Brinkley: There were five boys and three girls and all five of us then four of us went into World War II. The oldest boy went into the Army. The three of us, the twin brothers and myself, went into the Navy and transferred into Seabees.

You then went out to California for more training?

Mr. Brinkley: We went out to California for more training. It was cold out there in northern California. We were jumping off of barges and your clothes would freeze on you before you got back. Back then they issued us sheepskin jackets, clothing, and all heavy clothing. 10 days later they came around and took all the winter sheepskin clothing up and gave us mosquito nettings and we knew then that we were headed to the South Pacific. We didn't know where but we knew we were going. I could say that being young and never being out of the state of Tennessee when I went in the Navy, it was something else because it was a lot of things going on with the war and ships being blown up all the time. Luckily we had several close

calls that they thought they were submarine sightings but we were lucky. We didn't have any problems what-so-ever. When we got to Hawaii we got into Honolulu and we thought we were getting off at Honolulu and our Captain told us that we weren't, we were going to Maui. We were then put on a smaller ship and went around to Maui.

How long was your training between the two, Virginia and California?

Mr. Brinkley: After we left Virginia we was there for three months and went to California and we were there for a month before we shipped out. Like I said, we didn't know where we were going. They issued us winter clothes and it wasn't 10 days and they took those up and issued us mosquito netting and repellants and all this stuff. We knew then that we were going.

What made you decide to go into the Navy as opposed to the other forces?

Mr. Brinkley: At that time I had a cousin that went in and he went in to that. The Seabees had just started during World War II so he had gone in and transferred into the Seabee and he had told me and my brothers and all that he wouldn't trade it for anything. He was really satisfied. Of course even though we were trained to fight we didn't really get in hand-to-hand combat like the Marines did. We went in to Maui and of course Maui was beautiful then. Then and now it is altogether different. It's all commercial now. My brother and his wife went to Maui three years ago and it is all commercial. They saw our naval base that we had built the seaplane base while we were there. They saw it but that was about all.

How long were you at Maui?

Mr. Brinkley: We were there 11 months and then we didn't know where we were going.

Tell me a little about _____, the air base. I was told that you first hand built an air base down there. You were part of that effort down there. Tell me about that.

Mr. Brinkley: Back then with all the machines and stuff they kept me operating a bull dozer to have me put in a what we call _____. They had this scraper that you hooked on to the bulldozer. We had to dig all the sand out and bring in dirt to make the C-plane base there. It was beautiful. We didn't have too much to worry about there. At nighttime we could go out to town. The natives would go out in the ocean and fish for these turtles, a five or six hundred pound turtle, bring it in and sell it. They would sell it to the Navy. It was some of the best meat that you would ever want to put in your mouth. You could get chicken, steak, all pork, eight different kinds of meat out of the turtle. They would dress it and bring it in. At that time I wasn't a drinking person, not that I am a drunk today but I mean I do like my beer. Back then I rarely ever drank a beer when I was in the Navy. They would sell this meat and a lot of times we had a chance to buy it ourselves and we would have cookouts and a bunch of eight, twelve, fifteen of us would cook out. We had a wonderful time.

How many people were at Maui in your unit with you?

Mr. Brinkley: The whole group that left San Francisco or Oakland or wherever we were at, they were all with us. When we left Virginia only about three or four that didn't go with us, they were out on medical reasons. To save my soul it seems like there were 300 something of us in the 39th Battalion. We lost one person on Saipan. We built the C-plane base and all of that on Maui before we left. From there we boarded a ship and we went to the Marshall Islands. We got there and we didn't have to go in on that island. We went from there on down to Saipan. The Marines were already there when we got there and they had already taken Saipan. They were mopping up when we got there. Of course we unloaded bull dozers and our equipment there and started building mess halls for the Marines. We took bulldozers and

just dug long trenches and pushed the dead Japanese in the trenches and buried them away from the beach.

You were part of the island hopping campaigns going back and forth through the different islands. Tell me a little bit about moving back and forth through the different islands.

Mr. Brinkley: A lot of times we would go to an island and we were supposed to go up to this island. We got there and they had already secured it so we would go to another one. We went to three before we finally wound up in Saipan. We never got off the ship on those other islands. By the time we had got there the Marines had already been there and it was already secured. When we got to Saipan it was one of the bigger islands. We got off there. Like I say, we came in behind the Marines. Mr. Bill Sanford who lives right down Excel Road, he was one of the Marines that went in there and of course we didn't even know it at that time until later on. He said, "You'll were right in there behind us. You cooked for us." We had some of the greatest cooks; people that you would ever want to meet in our outfit. The Marines were having a lot of trouble with the tanks. They had the mines out and a lot of trouble with the tanks being blown up. One of the commanders came and asked our chief "Is there anything you could do to help us to where we can get our tanks in to the other part of the island where they were still fighting." He said, "Yes." They brought the tanks in to where our personnel were that did the welding and all. They welded like a ____ that came out on both sides of the tank, 12 or 15 feet out. They put chains and medal on it to drag the ground to blow up the mines out ahead in front. They would blow up before they got back to the tanks or back to the Marines. It saved many lives and many, many tanks. Until they came back and asked our chief what he could do to help him and he said, "We can do it." That is one of the slogans that the Seabees had "Can Do." They can do just about anything that anybody can do we can do. It was some of our outfit that could do anything.

So you guys were sort of the engineers; the ingenuity behind all the bells.

Mr. Brinkley: We had people in our outfit that had been in construction for 30 or 40 years before they volunteered for the Navy Seabees.

When the United States first got in the war they first concentrated on the war over in Europe. Were you all aware of that? Could you tell? What were the feelings about that?

Mr. Brinkley: We knew that we weren't going to Europe. We knew that. We knew that we were going to the South Pacific. We never knew where we were going until we got there.

Right but there wasn't a ____ because you guys weren't the first priority of ours beating the Japanese was put on the back burner compared to beating the Nazis in Europe.

Mr. Brinkley: Well we were put on the back burner but they were after the Japanese just as much so or more than the Germans at that time after they bombed Pearl Harbor and destroyed and killed so many people and destroyed so much property there. They were bound and determined that they were going to get the Japanese.

Right, I knew they heard as much that there was more hatred toward the Japanese first of all because of Pearl Harbor but then they were harder to identify with because there were so many German-Americans living the ____ thing at the time.

Mr. Brinkley: Well it's just the same thing it was. You could hardly tell the Japanese as far as the Hawaiian people. They looked a lot alike. A lot of them were bred to Japanese or Hawaiians. It was hard

to distinguish. Of course when we got there we knew and they knew who, you were always told that you didn't divulge anything because you didn't know what or who was listening.

Was there ever such a thing as a typical day on a ship over in the South Pacific? What was the routine like on a day to day basis?

Mr. Brinkley: Usually we had something to do while we were aboard ship even if it wasn't nothing but cleaning the ship or washing it down. Like I said, we had some of the best cooks in the country. We had people that cooked in hotels and restaurants before we went in the Navy. We had some of the best cooks in the country that was with us. Just like engineers, we had people that had been in business for years that was in there. They could tell you how to do anything in the world that had to be done as far as doing a mechanic builder; whatever it was, they knew what to do and how to do it.

What was your main job on a day to day basis?

Mr. Brinkley: Usually when we were operating a machine I was operating the bulldozer or bringing sand out and bringing dirt in to build the bases. It was just routine. When we weren't doing that they had us doing other things, cleaning up or whatever.

What was the feeling on V-E Day over in Europe?

Mr. Brinkley: When we came back to the states I was on Saipan when we came back to the states. We had a 30 day leave. We came in to California and we had 30 days from California. We came in here for 30 days and I got married while I was here, and then went to Providence, Rhode Island. My then wife, she came up later. We were prepared to go back overseas again when the war ended.

Was there ever any concern that you would be part of the invasion of Japan as that had come about?

Mr. Brinkley: No, it never was. We only knew from month to month where we were going or what not. We stayed on Saipan longer building mess halls, barracks, and C-plane bases to where the ships could come in and unload and do whatever they needed to do there.

How much information once the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, how much information did you all know about that afterwards? I know that there was nothing known beforehand but what were the feelings after those two?

Mr. Brinkley: We knew that when the atomic bomb was dropped we knew that the war was over. We knew basically that the war was over. We were in Providence, Rhode Island, and were already prepared to leave to go back overseas and they said no.

No need to go.

Mr. Brinkley: No need to go. You can either go home to be discharged but since my wife was there in Providence, Rhode Island, they let us go to Boston, Massachusetts, to be discharged there and we came home from there.

How long had you dated your wife, you obviously met her before.

Mr. Brinkley: She was my girlfriend before I went in the Navy.

How hard was it for her for you to be gone like that?

Mr. Brinkley: Well, we got our mail. Sometimes it was a week or two before we got it but we got our mail and pictures and things from home and from my family. When we got back in 1945 on leave and we got married. From there I had to go back because I didn't know what was going to happen. After we got back to Providence, Rhode Island, we found out that we were going to be there for a time. We didn't know if it was for a month, two months or what but we did know that we were going to be there for awhile so I called her and she caught her a bus and came on to Providence, Rhode Island. I had a friend that was in my outfit and he was from Paris, Tennessee. His wife drove up there. They had a car so she drove up. When the war was over he went to Boston, Massachusetts, and got discharged too. He said, "Why don't you and your wife just go with us and they would pay the expense?" I said, "That would be great because we were planning on catching the bus back." After she got there with the car and everything we were able to come back with them. we had more time on the road and we could do things and see things and stop at motels and stay overnight to where I wouldn't have been able to had I caught a bus back.

What was it like when you and your brothers got back together all after the war?

Mr. Brinkley: We had a reunion. It was so wonderful that all of us were back. There were four of us in World War II. My youngest brother, he was in the Korean War. After he got out of the Navy he stayed in the regular Navy. When he got out he went to work at Fort Campbell as a weapons personnel. They sent him to the factory to where they made the weapons. He was there at Fort Campbell until they sent him to Germany and to Asia and different places where anytime they had a problem with a weapon they would send him even though he was a civilian. They would send him because he was only two in the United States that did his job. I believe there are seven or eight now. They had a big write up about him at Fort Campbell when he was there because then like I say there were only two in the United States that did his job.

When you go back to Montgomery County were there any parades or anything for the Veterans; celebrations or anything like that?

Mr. Brinkley: We didn't have any welcoming committee or anything like that like they do some now at Fort Campbell especially since the fort is so close to Clarksville now and part of Clarksville, Montgomery County, that they do have welcoming ceremonies with them in Afghanistan or wherever you know not.

Speaking of Afghanistan can you compare September 11th with December 7th Pearl Harbor Day compared with what happened?

Mr. Brinkley: If you go to think about it, it's the same difference only they just hit two places in New York and one in Washington where during Pearl Harbor they did it right then and kept doing it until they just ran out of places to hit I guess.

Was the feeling of patriotism the same?

Mr. Brinkley: It was the same there as it was I'm sure at September 11th.

Okay. Sir, Mr. Brinkley, I greatly appreciate it.

Mr. Brinkley: You are just as welcome as can be. I hope it turns out for you.

It's fine. I greatly appreciate it.

Mr. Brinkley: I can say I have been interviewed but nothing like this. I've been to grade schools and Junior High's to talk to the students....

(End of Interview)