

**Farron P. Benjamin
Veteran**

**Mike Russert and Clarke Wayne
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on October 15, 2003, 9:30 AM
New York State Military Museum
Saratoga Springs, NY**

KEY:

Q = Interviewer's question

FB = Farron P. Benjamin

DB = Dorothy Benjamin (spouse)

Q: Could you give me your full name, date of birth, and place of birth please?

FB: My full name is Farron P. Benjamin. I was born in Burlington Flats, New York in 1920 December 26.

Q: What was your educational background prior to entering service?

FB: It was just through High School.

Q: Do you remember where you were and your reaction to the bomb dropping on Pearl Harbor?

FB: I was out looking for a Christmas tree and I heard the news on the radio. I knew that that was going to be war, and that probably I would be drafted into it. I mean there was not much doubt in my mind.

Q: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

FB: Drafted.

Q: When were you drafted?

DB: March 23rd, 1943.

FB: Yeah.

Q: How old were you when you went into the service?

FB: 22

Q: Where was your induction Center?

FB: Camp Upton.

DB: They went to Cooperstown first.

FB: Yeah, but I went to induction down in Camp Upton, down in Long Island.

Q: Where did you go for your basic training?

FB: Miami Beach, Florida

Q: Was this the first time you were really away from home?

FB: Oh, I've been away from home some, but not a lot. It was quite an experience after being around and we were just married.

Q: When were you married?

DB: June 25th, 1942.

Q: Okay, so newlyweds then.

DB: Yes.

FB: Yep, I was a little homesick.

Q: Now did you both write to each other quite a bit?

DB: We wrote everyday.

FB: Everyday.

Q: Did you ever keep your letters?

DB: I have some of them, but not all of them.

Q: Right, now what did you do while he was gone? Where did you live?

DB: I lived in our home in East Springfield at the time, New York, and I worked some at Beechnut. They were doing work for the Navy at that time until he was moved up to Virginia. Then I went to Virginia to stay with him as long as I could.

Q: Now what kind of training did you have in Florida?

FB: Basic, the most basic training.

Q: Okay, where did you go? Did you get any other specialized training?

FB: Got some more training in Camp Lee Virginia, and I trained there for about 3 months. It was a little more rigorous training because we went out on bivouacs and did a lot more strenuous training.

Q: Now were you enlisted into the army or the Air Corps?

FB: I was in the Air Corps.

Q: Okay, what other specific training did you get to be in aviation?

FB: Well nothing there, but I went onto Salt Lake City air base and was there a couple days. Then they moved me to Camp Curt, Utah, just north of the City of Salt Lake, and there we got some training, and we was there about 6 months at Camp Curt. Then I was moved to Wendover Field, and there I was put on the atomic bomb group.

Q: Now did you know this was the group that was training to use the atomic bomb?

FB: No, no, we had no idea it was all secret.

DB: It was the biggest secret our country had ever done.

FB: After a while we were told that we had a large bomb, and that was all, nothing else.

Q: What was your assignment?

FB: I was assigned for materials, handling bombs, and stuff like that, and loading bombs in planes, and all that stuff.

Q: Now did you always work with B-29s?

FB: Yeah, with all B-29s. Yep.

DB: There were 24s when he first came into it.

Q: Now you went to Virginia with him and then what happened after he left Virginia?

DB: He left and I went back home and then after he was in Salt Lake awhile he was approved and came home and I went back with him and we lived in Salt Lake.

Q: How did B-29s load the bombs?

FB: We had to dig a pit to put the plate over to load it on and we had to change some of the bomb bay stuff because they were big.

Q: What type of changes did you make to the bomb bay?

FB: Well, I don't remember. I think we made the doors bigger, and the lift to bring it up

bigger

Q: Now, were all these changes made just for the atomic bomb?

FB: Yep.

Q: So you knew the bomb was larger than normal?

FB: Right, but we still didn't know it was the atomic bomb.

Q: So you just knew it was a larger than normal bomb?

FB: Yeah, larger than normal.

Q: Now that you know the crew of the Enola Gay?

FB: Oh yeah.

DB: We all knew them.

Q: Now, did you work almost specifically on that plane or on others also?

FB: The group had 5 or 6 planes. I think it was 6 planes and I worked on all of them, but the 2 that took the atomic bombs was Enola Gay and the The Great Artiste I think it was.

Q: Do you know how those planes were named at all?

DB: Yeah.

FB: Well yeah. Colonel Tibbets plane was named after his mother. That was his mother's name Enola Gay. The other ones they just names -- whatever they wanted I think.

Q: Can you tell us any stories about working with the crew?

FB: Colonel Tibbets is around there all the time. I knew him real well.

Q: When you were still in the United States did you have any stories?

FB: Not too much there. No, because it was everything that was secret. None of the enlisted men knew only ones that knew were I think, Colonel Tibbets and the other big officers.

Q: How did you get out to the Pacific?

FB: I went by boat.

Q: And the planes themselves flew over?

FB: Yep.

Q: Did the maintenance crew go by boat as well?

FB: Yep, yep.

Q: What was your unit?

FB: 10 27th material squadron.

Q: Did you go on a convoy or a single ship?

FB: Single ship.

Q: Where was your destination?

FB: We sailed out of Seattle, Washington and we went to Hawaii. We was there for a few days because we waited for them to take Tinian so it would be safe for us to go in there, and then we went onto the Marshall Islands and stayed there for a couple days and then from there onto Tinian and that was cleared.

Q: So all the plants in the squadron were there?

FB: Yeah.

Q: Okay, so you were going to relate some stories, then about while you were out on Tinian. What kind of places did you live in on Tinian?

FB: Well, when we first got there, it was tents guarded and we stayed there in tents till well after we got some barracks built so we could stay in them.

Q: Who arrived first? All of you on the ship or the planes?

FB: We was first then the planes come in couple days afterwards.

Q: So the airfield was constructed for the B-29s?

FB: Yeah, well the Airfield was big. In fact, the whole island was airfield they had. I don't know how many. Hundred airplanes on that island.

DB: Yeah, but it was a small island.

FB: The marines cleared the island first. That whole island was build up with runways. When we got there, they had runways and I forgot how many plane was there. I mean when they took off on raids, you'd hear airplanes start in the middle of the afternoon and go till midnight before they got all off, and then you'd hear them come back. Planes took run with the other planes that was there. They get used to going the distance they were supposed to go. So they went on a lot of bombing missions with the regular bombs first.

Q: Now how did you load the regular bombs into the B-29?

FB: Just like you would with any.

Q: So your job was to load the bombs?

FB: Most of the time yeah.

Q: Do you remember the day the Enola Gay took off? Can you tell us about that day?

FB: Yep, I was there in the morning when they took off.

Q: Were you with the crew that loaded it?

FB: Right ,we was there, yup. We watched Colonel Tibbets wave goodbye out of the plane.

Q: How long did it take to load the bomb into the plane

FB: Not an awful amount. After we had them all fixed we had to put them over the pit and load it, but it didn't take a long time.

Q: Is that when you realized it was something unusual?

FB: We knew it might be a little something big but we still didn't -- it was the atomic bomb. Now after Tibbets got back later that day or the next day. There he said that when he took after for sure whether he was going to make it or not. I'm glad he did, because if he hadn't made it, we'd have been blown up too but it had to be a lot heavier than what they practice with. But that night he radioed back that he wanted the whole outfit at headquarters squadron. So they took us all to headquarters and when we got over there they had all the hot dogs and hamburgers and beer and soft drinks you could drink.

DB: But that night you was on alert.

FB: Yeah, we was on alert and Tibbets got up gave a speech, and said "We saw a city, then we didn't." In other words he blowed it up. Then two nights later they took a second bomb. That first one the Japs just said that all it was, was just a small plane that dropped a small bottle bomb that didn't do any damage. Well, when the second plane went, then they radioed back to us on the island. We was all issued carbines and everything because the Japs had started for Tinian. They never made it because that

second one blew up another city, then they wanted to surrender.

Q: What are your feelings about dropping the bombs?

FB: I think it was a great thing.

Q: Why?

FB: It saved millions, thousands of lives, because if they had to of gone in there fighting like they would have killed up all of them. This way it ended it in a hurry.

DB: That's what Tibbet said to one of the interviews. A lady got up and asked that question. He said it saved many lives, there wouldn't have been a Hiroshima if there hadn't been a Pearl Harbor and I thought that was an excellent answer that he gave her.

Q: Now where were you when you heard about the night?

DB: I was home with my parents when I heard over the radio Colonel Tibbets. I said to my mother that's Farron's outfit, because I knew that was his colonel. That's how I recognized it.

Q: You have no idea what he's doing?

DB: Nope, there were big signs in Wendover that said "What you see here, what you hear here, leave here!" It was a big secret. They were a complete unit by themselves.

Q: How many were in the unit?

DB: 1800, it was 1800.

FB: It tells in the book there, but I can't remember. It was quite a crew.

Q: How well did you know Colonel Tibbets?

FB: Well enough so we could personally speak to him.

Q: What kind of person was he or is he?

DB: Very outspoken.

FB: Very outspoken guy.

DB: Very much.

FB: How it was kept so secret, he says "It was secret cuz there wasn't any god damn politicians in it."

Q: What did the men think of him?

FB: Oh, they liked him. He was good. Everybody liked him.

DB: And he made the remark that won the reunions, they never lost a plane or they've never lost a man in all this business.

Q: After the dropping of the bomb, what happened to your unit?

FB: We was put on alert to head home. They wanted to get us back to the states just as fast as we got there. They out to reorganize, so we was brought right back. It didn't go over too well for the guys that had been there 6 to 8 months or 2 years. They took us right back.

Q: When were you discharged?

FB: Discharged in...

DB: November.

Q: Do you remember where you were when you heard about the death of President Roosevelt?

FB: Yep, I was on board ship and Roosevelt died, and everybody felt bad about it.

Q: Did you ever get to see any USO shows while you were away on service?

FB: Yeah, I got to see a few.

Q: Who were some of the celebrities if you know?

FB: Bob Hope, yeah.

Q: Obviously, you've attended unions. Which is one of the questions I usually ask, how long have you been attending these?

FB: We went to a union in Ohio and one in Washington DC. One in Wendover Field and this year was Louisiana.

Q: Was there a strong bond between the men in the unit?

FB: I think there was yeah, yup.

Q: When you left the service, did you ever use the GI Bill?

DB: No.

FB: No.

Q: How about the 5220 Club?

FB: Nope, nope, no.

Q: Did you join any veteran organizations?

DB: Oh, yes.

FB: The Legion

Q: Are you active with the Legion?

FB: Oh yeah.

Q: How do you think your time in the service changed or affected your life or lives?

FB: I think it affected both of our lives. It made us always on the road. It made a difference in our lives because we traveled a lot.

DB: We grew up fast.

FB: Yeah, we did and she was out there with me. And when I came out of the servies next thing you know we was heading for Salt Lake there for Tucson Arizona, and we bought a place in Tucson and sold it after a while.

DB: We went there in the winters.

FB: I made a difference because none of my brothers were like that.