

Dr. William Bradt
WWII Veteran

Hector Allen
Interviewer

Interviewed at Little Falls, NY for the
Herkimer County WWII Veteran's Video Project

Hector Allen: **HA**
William Bradt: **WB**

HA: Well, this is our last interview for this series. This puts the cap on it and we've saved the best for last.

WB: [Chuckles]

HA: This is Dr. William Bradt, superintendent of schools in Little Falls here, and he's been in town for probably about 12 or 14 years now, right Bill?

WB: I would say around 11. I came here in '75.

HA: '75, ok. Well you were a WWII veteran also. Now were you a draftee or did you volunteer?

WB: No, I volunteered.

HA: How old were you when you volunteered?

WB: Well, I volunteered when I was 17, but they didn't call me up until I reached my 18th birthday.

HA: 18?

WB: Yeah, that's when I went in.

HA: What branch were you in?

WB: Army Airforce.

HA: We've had several Airforce veterans. Charlie [Cateri] was talking with us earlier and John [Frasier Sr]. and Bob [Wilburg], we've had quite a few Airforce people. Angelo [Inaudible], all people like that. It's good to have another Airforce person anyway.

HA: Now, where did you go for basic training?

WB: Shepard field, Texas.

HA: Shepard Field, Texas. Ok. What was Shepard Field like in those days? Hot, dusty, dry?

WB: Well, that was the panhandle, and when you're out on the golfing range and the wind came up, you couldn't see the end of your rifle...I mean, golfing range...the rifle range, you couldn't see the end of your rifle [Smiles]. It was that dust and dirt and sagebrush. [Laughing]

HA: Just as you see Texas in the movies?

WB: That's right.

HA: It's got that reputation from some television shows now a-days. How long were you there in basic training?

WB: Oh, I'd say maybe 5 to 6 weeks. Somewhere around there.

HA: So you're from Buffalo, NY?

WB: Yup. It's a village called East Aurora, about 20 miles outside Buffalo.

HA: And did you go in service with any friends, a group of people, or did you just go by yourself?

WB: Well, about 4 of us went in, at the time.

HA: All went to Shepard Field?

WB: Right. You realize that when we went in, the war was about over. They had the Battle of the Bulge, that was over with, and Patton was racing across Europe. Everybody knew it was going to be over in a few weeks, so we didn't have any sort of royal send off or nobody paid any particular attention to us anyway.

HA: Ending the program that way?

WB: Yeah, it's a good way to conclude the program [Laughing].

HA: So here you are in Shepard Texas. Did they give you any specialized training there?

WB: Well, I was in the Cadets at the time, and while I was at Shepard's Field, Germany surrendered... and it was just a matter of time before the Japanese followed, right? The Airforce took it upon themselves to disband the Cadet Core at that time, and so.... many of us were reassigned to overseas duty. Well, anticipating the fact that it wouldn't be long before Japan surrendered, so therefore when they disbanded the Cadet Core some of us were shipped to...well I was shipped to Lowery Field, Colorado. That's where a lot of the B-29's were stationed. The same kind of plane that dropped the Atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki...

HA: I think Stanley Tucker was there, possibly pretty much the same time. He was in a few weeks ago talking to us.

WB: Ok, and I guess we just stayed there learning a little bit about the B-29 until the time when we were shipped overseas.

HA: Did you get any flying time? You got flying time in the B-29's?

WB: No. We never even got off the ground in the B-29 because about that time Japan surrendered. And so, everything was on the ground from there on out as far as we were concerned. We hadn't been in the cadet core long enough to really earn our "wings", put it that way. So any of the moving around we did was by train or by ship. So from Lowery Field we went to San Francisco Port for deportation, and we were loaded on 2 ships there and our first destination was Manilla in the Philippines.

HA: Tony [Raiello] was there and he talked with us earlier, spent some time...

WB: Well we still had the Black Out on because, well, that wasn't too many days after the Japanese surrendered, and we knew..., at least we were told..., that many times there was Japanese on the islands in the Pacific and all, and they didn't get the message. So they would still be shooting bullets. But we found in our situation that we were one of the first ones to get over in the Philippines after the Japanese surrendered and there were still a lot of snipers around. Japanese snipers. So we were on guard pretty much while we were there and what I remember mostly about Manilla, well, you know it's one of the most beautiful cities in the far East, they called it the "Pearl of the Orient". At that time, it had that nickname. Dewey Boulevard is a great big..., looks like the throughway is now and at that time it was quite a boulevard. Nice palm trees in the middle of it and all that sort of thing. It wound its way along the side of Manilla Bay and what I remember about that, is the beautiful big white buildings that lined that. The walls were just over 45-degree angle from the ground, you know, and the only thing that made them stay that way was the concrete reinfor..., the steel reinforcements within the concrete and the Phillipino's themselves wouldn't touch them. The only way they were made safe were by our own Army Engineers at the time, and the harbor itself was so full with sunken ships that the masts were sticking up. They were sticking up and you could just walk on them it seemed. There were so many of them sunken there, and of course a lot of Manilla was destroyed, bombed, ... the streets were muddied, they used to be beautifully paved streets. They were all mud and we just traveled around in jeeps and things like that, but we stuck pretty much close to our own base.

HA: What was that Clarke Field? I remember that was one that was...,

WB: (*Interrupting*) Well, we were stationed in Manilla. I think the place was called Fort McHenry. We were actually part of an Engineer Battalion and stationed there, separate from Fort Clark Field, although we were still in the Airforce. After we survived a few of the wet seasons, we were actually living in tents, built up on platforms and when it rained, there was like a Monsoon season. I remember wading knee deep in mud to get your Christmas Dinner, and many times we'd be lying down on our backs in our cots, and tents weren't the newest materials so it'd leak like a sieve, (*chuckling*) and we were drawing channels along with our fingers on the roof of the tents, so it would keep the water from dripping all over our heads and that sort of thing. And of course, malaria was around at that time, and we were very careful with our mosquito bars.

HA: Now they had little white pills. They weren't little, they had big white pills, if I remember. I remember figuring this out one time and it took me awhile because I was a little slower then, probably more now I guess, but if you took the pill it would NOT keep you from getting Malaria, but it would suppress the symptoms so you could stay in the Army, so you wouldn't get to go home. But then when you got home and stopped taking the pills, then you'd have symptoms. So they would give them to you in the "chew line" every Sunday, and I would open my mouth and fire them right on by, like ziiiiipp, and most people got rid of them because they tasted bad but they were coated.

WB: They used to give that to us on the ship on our way over [10 sec. break in audio] on the ship and we'd feel a big thump, uh oh, must've been a mine or something, must have been a whale because we..., nothing happened right, so we had to keep our lights on every night. [Laughing].

HA: What about the civilian population? Did you see many....

WB: Philippines?

HA: Yeah.

WB: Yeah. They were quite friendly. Of course Americans were there saviors.

HA: Right. They suffered pretty much I guess during the war.

WB: Yeah they did. The Japanese on the outlying sections of the Philippines, they were still there, while we were there. We were watching the Japanese troops going on the trains and coming out of the hills.

HA: Did you get to see any of the scenes of really “hot” action there? Corregidor, Buotan Peninsula and places like that?

WB: We visited those places there..., that was really quite a shock to most of us. The guides that were in Corregidor at the time told us that if we had seen this before the war... Corregidor we're talking right?

HA: Uh huh...

WB: That you wouldn't recognize it because of the whole topology of the landscape was completely changed by the end of the war because of such excessive bombing. It completely changed the whole contour of the land. They said you wouldn't recognize it if you had seen it before the war started.

HA: I've seen some pictures of it, of course I never been there myself.

WB: Saturation bombings, that's it [Interrupting].

HA: And incessant artillery too, from the mainland. Which was only a couple of 2-3 miles away.

WB: They allowed us into that tunnel were General Wainwright had his headquarters, not all the way in because a lot of it had crumbled. But we saw parts of it were they had a hospital set-up.

HA: So how long were you in the Philippines?

WB: Maybe about 6 months. Something like that. 6 or 7 months. Then they shipped our outfit to Tokyo

HA: You visited Japan. “Ah-So”.

WB: “Ah-So”. We were part of, at that time what's called the Civic Air Command Headquarters. Our headquarters building was located down just a few buildings right across from the Imperial Palace grounds. Just a few buildings down from where General McArthur's headquarters were. [Smiling]

HA: Did you ever get to see the “Great Man” himself?

WB: Oh yes..., yes. Quite a few times. As a matter of fact, the building was next to a British Headquarters building, and the British of course were famous for having those Gurkha troops.

HA: Right... The Indian troops.

WB: Well, they're the ones that stood guard in front of the British building, right. Well one time a few of us were walking along the street and we saw that he was carrying a Japanese, in front of that building and they were standing around, shouting and yelling something. You couldn't understand what they said. But when we got closer, we found a couple of those Gurkha's had their machete's, or whatever they're called that they wear, half drawn out of there scabbards, and

it is tradition for the Gurkha that if they ever draw them out they're supposed to draw blood. Right, well they had the Japanese scared stiff. They were standing around them, apparently something irritated them, something the Japanese, maybe a couple of passerby's said to them, or whatever, and we were all waiting rather excitedly for just what was going to happen. Until some British Officers came out of the building and kind of subdued those Gurkha's enough so that they put them back in.

HA: Well that's interesting. I had the impression that the Japanese, right after the war, just like a switch was turned off, they went from tigers and they were, you know, refusing to surrender right to lambs. They became very peaceful under the occupation and there was very little trouble with them.

WB: You know, we used to ride their trains on occasion, all electric of course, and they had no problem with Americans, and I credit all that to General McArthur himself. You spoke whether I saw him or not. Often times right at 5 o'clock, being punctual like he always was, he'd come out of his building and there'd be huge crowds of Japanese gathered around there to shout his name, just as if he was their hero... and he was their conqueror. As he came out of his building he got into his car and left. He would wave to them and they just didn't seem to have any hatred toward the man at all, they idolized him. Whether it's because he convinced our government to keep the Emperor as their ruler. They probably respected him for that. He also had employed on his staff at his building, many Japanese themselves. I think that's one of the smartest moves this country ever made, was the fact that they let him stay there in that country after the war. And I guess for one, in better words to say, he kind of pacified the people to the point where we, they never became our enemies again, right up to this day.

HA: Yeah, they went from being a very aggressive and very hostile population, right down to zero, just like that.

WB: And here they suffered one of the most disastrous bombings of any human race in history.

HA: Tokyo must have looked pretty bad. The fire bombings of Tokyo killed more people than the A-Bomb at Hiroshima actually.

WB: I never actually saw where the Atom Bomb was dropped. They have a monument there of course now, but I never saw it. They say it's quite a shock to people who first see that.

HA: I was in Japan near there, but I never got over there.

HA: Then you were in Japan for how long?

WB: Until I was..., or we were discharged. I would say we were discharged in around December of '46. Came home on a ship [Inaudible].

HA: The Airforce today flies their people home. It's much easier...

WB: I know but there was so many of us, they thought probably it'd take too many planes. [Interjecting-Laughing]

HA: ...back to Frisco, take the train. It takes about 5 days, 6 days on a train, the old clackity, clackity, clack stuff, and of course the war had been well over by the time you got back. There were no receptions. [Continuation of prior statement]

WB: No, no, there was no welcoming party, nothing like that.

HA: Then of course there was the G.I. Bill.

WB: That's right. I took advantage of that and went to college.

HA: Out in Buffalo?

WB: Well, I started out in Sampson College. Which was an old naval base. You know that place, on Lake Geneva, I went a couple years there and transferred.

HA: Do you ever keep contact with any of the people you were in the service with?

WB: No. I haven't met any of them, as a matter of fact, since I was discharged.

HA: And you probably never talk much about it?

WB: Nope. Not really. I was..., it's an odd thing to say but looking back on it now, and at the time I was in service, I kind of regretted the fact that I didn't see any action. Although, people consider that being lucky too.

HA: Yeah..., that's right.

WB: But I can't really say that I don't feel, speaking of being a Veteran and all this sort of thing, if you don't actually get into the thick of things, you know in other words, you feel like there's something missing. That's my feeling. I appreciate the part that I had in it. Playing in it and this sort of thing, but that kind of a war was I labeled the last war that had any romantic kind of a feeling toward. In other words, it was something that people treated others as heroes, that was the last one.

HA: We talked with Ed, just before you, and we talked about the patriotic impulses during that war.

WB: Right. Now after the wars..., after that people never got the same feeling about them.

HA: No..., because I don't think we felt threatened usually by the circumstances. That could be part of it.

HA: So you were discharged and home and that was it. You never went in the reserves or anything like that?

WB: No. I was thinking about it one time, but it never really materialized.

HA: It would have been nice. They got a little pension in there now.

WB: Ohhhh, yes. [Both laughing].

HA: But of course that's water over the dam.

WB: Yup! I can't go back now and retrace steps.

HA: No we can't. But I guess that's the way it is.

WB: Time catches up to us after awhile

HA: Yeah, I've noticed that myself [Chuckling].

HA: Well, Dr. Bradt, thank you very much for sharing your thoughts and doing this with us.

WB: It's a pleasure.

HA: That was very good.

WB: It was a pleasure.

-----**END OF INTERVIEW**-----

After Interview Summary

At this point, Hector Allen concludes the interview with Dr. William Bradt and returns to the interview room with several colleagues to reflect on the success of the program. Also discussed is the potential of doing more interviews in the future while exploring the possibility of creating similar programs for veterans of both the Korean and Vietnam Wars. These interviews provide not only a wonderful cross-section of the veteran experience to the public, but a therapeutic approach for many veterans to discuss their own personal experiences. Many of these veterans spoke of things that they have never spoke of before either privately or publicly. As time moves forward, the hope that these interviews and transcriptions increase in historical value will be reflected in large part not only by all of those that made these interviews possible, including those that served, but also by the public who take the time to listen.