

Charles W. Williams
Narrator

Philip Leonard
Interviewer

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Louis Miller Museum
Hoosick Falls, New York

IV: We are at the Louis Miller Museum interviewing Veterans. Would you please state your name?

CW: I'm Charles. W Williams from Hoosick, New York.

IV: Okay, Charles what did you do before you went to the service?

CW: Well, I worked for Hanes Brothers.

IV: Where did you go to school?

CW: Hoosick, Hoosick District School.

IV: I see, and then, you went to work for Hanes Brothers in [unclear] ?

CW: Right.

IV: Alright and that was from...?

CW: 1937 to 1941.

IV: Alright, so, what happened in 1941?

CW: Well, I was inducted in the service.

IV: You got drafted, you were number ninety-five, and then got drafted into the service.

CW: Yes.

IV: And you went to the service-

CW: Camp Upton. The 21st of January 1941 and went to [pauses] yes, Camp Upton and stayed there to learn maneuvers and then I went up to Fort Ontario, I don't know why but that's where I got discharged from. On the first time I was in service.

IV: So you were there until November of the forty-one?

CW: Yes.

IV: You were in the service and you were in the coast artillery?

CW: Yes.

IV: How come they let you out of the service?

CW: [Smiles] Got too old for 'im, I guess.

IV: How old is old?

CW: I don't know, I was born 1912 and this is what forty-one? Oh, that ain't right,

IV: Yes eleven, that would probably be around thirty years old.

CW: Yeah, that's the reason.

IV: I see, so they told you to go home.

CW: Go home.

IV: The war hadn't started yet.

CW: That's right.

IV: Okay then, the war broke out-.

CW: No, then I got went back to Hanes's.

IV: To work.

CW: The 11th to the 12th of forty-one. Then I got recalled to go to fort Dix on 1/20/42

IV: In forty-two yes, my question is, were you drafted or was it you were in a reserve?

CW: Reserve.

IV: I see and they called you up from the reserve?

CW: That's why I didn't have to wait anytime.

IV: So they called you up to the reserve and what happened then in forty-two?

CW: I went to fort Dix and was [unclear] New Hampshire, [pauses] what was the name of that? 197th [unclear]. And then we went from there to San Francisco and we stayed for about five or six days then we went to Sydney, Australia.

IV: Alright, so...

CW: We stayed there and then they decided they didn't need us there so they sent us around to Free Mantle Australia which is down and around on the other side. We stayed there for about four months. And then-.

IV: What was your job in the service?

CW: Automotive mechanic.

IV: Oh, I see.

CW: When we went to Darwin, they set up all our guns and search lights and we would, well, we acted as supply we took our trucks and took all our supplies from the dock to different areas.

IV: Were you there when they bombed Darwin?

CW: Oh yeah.

IV: Yeah? What about that?

CW: They knocked hell outta us one time but the next time we got our big guns out and, well as I showed you there we shot down, Christmas morning, two zeros. We had trouble with them at night. They'd come in you know, we had out search lights on and they'd follow the search lights down they get [unclear] to the ground, they knew we weren't established in that area so they'd go either right or left of the search light, So we got wise to them. We set up a demi search light out about a mile away from our staging area was we turned that light on and there was nobody there. Well, they'd come down that light. We had gun positions and just blew them right out of the air. Then they kept coming back at

night. We used to call them “Big Check Charlies' coming turn your lights out.” So they got shot down, well, four of five times, so they stopped it.

IV: So the Japanese bombed Darwin quite a bit?

CW: Oh yeah. Then they had a bunch of ships coming in. And they went up in to a cove and, well [unclear] and these scouts that we had came and told us where they were.

IV: They were Natives. They were natives from Australia.

CW: No, they were in New Guinea. Well, you saw the pictures.

IV: Yes, I saw the pictures. Yes.

CW: They decided then that they would bomb at night, not wait until they got ready to come out in the morning. So, they sent B-24s, 17s, and some straight bombers. They sunk about five ships. Of course when they did that they couldn't get out. So when it came daylight they went back and finished the job.

IV: I see so Americans sunk all those Japanese and caught them in the cove because they...and you were in Darwin when all this happened?

CW: Yes, and they decided then that they would come down 'round the old Stanley range and get us. So, we're like over the mountains somewhere. So, our scout radar picked them up so they sent the Air Force out after them. They had just sent this task force into us. We had the airfield ready for some of them. And that night they came and got four of us and well, they called us replacement gunners. So we went up, went over there, and well they dropped, what, forty pound bombs on them. And of course big things, when they go off you know, they just blow holes in everything. So...we got rid of that bunch.

IV: I see and now you became a gunner, you were in the pool but you became a gunner for a B-24.

CW: But I was on detached service for my outfit, five of us, to the Air Force.

IV: I see...

CW: And one time we were on detached service to the Navy. When the swordfish went up north we were supposed to go with them but they found out they needed us somewhere else. So I didn't get a chance to go. I got on a submarine.

IV: I see, but you were a gunner on the B-24.

CW: On the bottom. Belly gunner.

IV: The belly gunner.

CW: Lotta fun.

IV: Yeah I bet it was! It's hard to get in there. A real tight area.

CW: But we had one of the [unclear], which was hydraulically operated. You didn't have to crank it around. You pushed a button and you were here. You wanted to go back there you pushed the button. The observer was watching all the time. If a plane was coming we knew where he was. Weather he's coming in on our starboard or whether side he was coming. If they tried to come behind us we'd turn right around face back. Then they had gunners in the doorways of these big planes. Fifty caliber machine guns. They'd come close to them. You know hell could get them with a 50 caliber where they expected to hit us. Ya know? Before they hit us they'd shoot them down! We got five in one cluster. They were coming in. Everybody hit a different ship. They all went down. We don't know what happened to them. We had another bomber that we captured there and took them as prisoners and 'course they used the-we had Australians with us too ya know and they captured them guys they really

mistreated them. They'd punch their eyes out, cut their ears off, cut their tongue out. They were brutal. We had no sympathy for them. So they had them taken back to prisoner camp they went over the ol' salmon range. Somehow the bay door got open and they all went out.

IV: So, alright how many missions did you make on that B-24. You were flying out of the Darwin area.
CW: Yes.

IV: So how many missions over New Guinea?

CW: I made four or five. Five I think I made. Rich stayed there, the guy that was with me. He stayed with them. And I went back to our outfit because we were moving up. We went from Darwin to the Formosa Islands, up above New Guinea. And that's where we got all set up there and well, we had a few interruptions with planes trying to come in. Not many because...right after that they kind of squelched them. I got hurt over there and they sent me back down to...

IV: How did you get hurt?

CW: Well, we were in a truck and they, we don't know what happened. It was a mine or what it was and I got my back hurt and...

IV: The truck get blown up by the...?

CW: Well, it didn't blow it all up but blew...couldn't use it. Blew the front all off of it. But we got out of there all right and of course we didn't have any hospitals or anything there. No doctors. So they flew us down to Fitch Haven. And then we went by boat from there down to Australia. And I was in an army hospital and there was a bunch of up there that were a lot worse than I was so when that ship was going to come back, 'The Matsonian', we went over on "The Matsonian" and come back on the sister ship so they sent us all back to Frisco and I came back, went to the hospital and then after I got out of there I went to Aberdeen, Maryland proving ground. Of course that was another joke. I mean they wanted us to do camp duty you know, and everything else there. We had about forty of us there. And they said 'oh yeah we want to get discharged'. So they had a little, it wasn't quite a riot, but you know they wouldn't work or anything so their commander come down, he was going to put us all in jail or in stockade and all this stuff and he said "Well that's a good deal. We're better off there or were we are." He was some big commander. He said "These men are entitled to get discharged. That's what they were sent here for." So they started discharging us.

IV: I see, and you got out in forty-five.

CW: Forty-five and they gave us our rations and travel pay, money I had accumulated in the bank [Charles could not recall or name where his money was kept.] We had no use for money. We played cards and loose it!

IV: So then you got discharged.

CW: Right.

IV: It was on 8/22/45 you told me.

CW: Right.

IV: Alright now, Let's go back and think this whole thing. I want to sum up what you did. They sent you to Australia.

CW: Right.

IV: They set up the coast guard artillery for when the planes come over you tried to get them down.

Shoot them down with your anti-aircraft guns. Then you were sent to be a gunner. So you made five missions as a gunner, as a belly gunner.

CW: B-24.

IV: Then you came back and then you went out with the artillery to start setting up banks. You went through New Guinea, and then up to Formosa. That summed up your service, right? Okay. Is there anything else about the service that you remember?

CW: Well, I lost a lot of good friends I know that.

IV: Yes, now you showed me pictures of scouts, in other words these were New Guinea natives.

CW: Yes, Some of them you couldn't trust. They worked with the Japanese tonight, tomorrow they'd be out for our place. So we had to kind of weed them out. The ones I had were real good. We took care of them. We fed them. We gave them clothes and everything else.

IV: And this was in New Guinea. And they would let you know where all the enemy's were—that was their purpose, they would go up the trees and look.

CW: We were all trenched in this big area where they were going to move out. Kept moving the troops in and they come back and tell you "Oh there's another ship unloading today." They're all going up and forgot the name of the place, well the next day they go up and bomb them.

IV: And that's what happened with that cove. They told you there was a lot of ships in there.

CW: They tried to come in on barges, I got a couple of pictures there. The doors on the barges [Makes hand motions as if the barges' gates were coming down] Well they just shot them or else captured them. A lot of them surrendered. When they found out so many were getting killed they just surrendered, you know? They had their flags, they had nothing on 'em, no guns or nothing. So they'd take them to the staging area for a few days then they'd take them down to camp.

IV: Well good, Alright, I've got a pretty good idea of your service down. You did a good service.[Friendly chuckle]

CW: It was an awfully rainy time though. The big planes flew from East to West and the fire planes North to South. You'd go to one airport, dry as it is here. Go to the next one: Rain, Rain, Rain! I mean rain! Walk in mud up over your shoes. Two days. Just like it hadn't rained. The ground was so hard.

IV: The sun would bake it out.

CW: It was more or less runoff and some of the streams we'd have people on one side of the stream. They couldn't get across for a couple of days because there was no bridges and it was too high for their trucks to go through.

IV: I see, this is New Guinea?

CW: It was a muddy pool. But I'm surprised. We must have gotten into something there because everyone has died in the last ten years all died of cancer.

IV: Everyone...

CW: My friend in Springfield last year died. He was at my house. Picture health. We went out to eat and he went home and we had another engagement to go up to new Hampshire to visit some of our friends. We went up there and found out the two of them had died between the time we had talked with them that we were coming. We didn't know about it of course, you know.

IV: And these were all buddies that were in New Guinea with you?

CW: Same ones with us.

IV: Yeah that's a coincidence or something.

CW: But we used to have a reunion every summer, July, August, everybody, even the officers[unclear] would come. Like common people ya know. But we had a bunch of officers, we had a few, you know you always get a few.

IV: Okay, so now you're out of the service and you come back to Hoosick falls.

CW: Yes, I go back to Hanes Brothers in September and I worked there until I had to go to the VA Hospital. Well, they sent me to Cambridge hospital first for my back. I went to Stacy, remember Stacy used to be here? [Smiles and waves dismissively.] He was a butcher.

IV: He went back to the service.

CW: It was a good place for him. To bad he's since died but...well anyway we went to Cambridge. I got out of there. Then they sent me down to Kingsbridge Road Veterans hospital in New York. Well, they fiddled around with me, stretched me out, gave me a brace to wear sent me home and finally I got a call for examination to come to VA in Albany well I [unclear] disability seventy percent.

IV: And that was the back you got hurt in that truck accident.

CW: Yes, And there's a doctor from Troy, Doctor Lanzillo, I'll never forget him, an Italian doctor and course when I went back for this examination all these doctors said "Oh there's nothing wrong with you, you're just faking it". Boy he got-he was there like a lawyer, on my part. He knew about it, but boy, he really got mad. Of course you know they got into a real ruckus, they threw him out of the trial. So they decided they'd knock off twenty percent, still give me thirty percent. So well what can I do. So that's the way it ended up. But he was a mad doctor. I miss him.

IV: So when did you get married, Charlie?

CW: I got married in...I've been married for fifty-five years.

IV: Oh fifty-five years, you got married in forty-five.

CW: Forty-five.

IV: How many children did you have?

CW: Two.

IV: Two children.

CW: Two boys, you know Bob.