

Arba J. Brenenstuhl
Narrator

Philip Leonard
Hoosick Falls Historical Society
Interviewer

Interviewed in 1998
Louis Miller Museum
Hoosick Falls, NY ⁱ

PL: Philip Leonard

AB: Arba (Arby) Brenenstuhl

PL: Well, where do you live Arby ?

AB: North Hoosick.

PL: In North Hoosick. Could you tell us a little about what you did before you went into the service ?

AB: Oh, I did mostly carpentry work.

PL: I see. You did carpentry work. And where did you go to school ?

AB: In Hoosick Falls schools.

PL: You went to the Hoosick Falls schools.

AB: Yes sir. I started in the rural schools.

PL: I see. And then you went out to the . . . did you go to the high school here . . .

AB: Yes sir.

PL: ...the one that was on Main Street. The one where the American Legion is now. Is that the high school, or did you go up to the Walter Woods ?

AB: Up to the Walter Woods. [Walter A. Woods High School]

PL: I see. OK. So you went to school there and what happened with the service ? Did you get drafted, you enlisted, what happened ?

AB: Yes, I was drafted in July of 1942.

PL: I see. And what happened ? Where'd they send you ?

AB: Well, I went first to Camp Upton. From Camp Upton [Yaphank, Long Island, NY] I was sent to Camp Lee in Virginia, and then, let's see, I was transferred to Langley Field eventually, in Virginia, and I got into the Air Force there. I was sent from there to, well, let's see, I ended up anyway after that at Syracuse University. In the Air Force program at that time you were supposed to have two years of college education and those of us that lacked some were sent to what was called C.T.D, College Training Detachment, and I was at Syracuse University in the Summer of 1943, and then I went from there, I went to

Classification Center in Nashville, Tennessee, and I started from there. I started in pilot training and I was at Biloxi, Mississippi, but I was eliminated there and reclassified as bombardier and I went then to bomb school in Midland, Texas, and I graduated from there and then I was worked into combat training and put in a crew, and ah...

PL: Where'd you take that training, Louisiana ? Where'd they give you that training, the combat training you said you had ?

AB: Well, it was in the South, I forgot exactly....

PL: OK, so you were trained in the South , and then you got shipped overseas. Is that what happened from there ?

AB: Yeah, I shipped out of Boston. We went overseas on a boat. A lot of people didn't like that but the people who were training us said that people over there didn't care how you got there . You could swim over if you wanted to. All they wanted was replacements. So I went to England. The base was Knettishall. It was near Thetford, England, and from there I was assigned to a crew and I flew missions then over the continent. ⁱⁱ

PL: I see, and that's a B-17 that you were in? ⁱⁱⁱ

AB: B-17. Yes sir, as a bombardier.

PL: Your missions were over into France and Germany , or...

AB: Mostly Germany, yeah.

PL: Mostly in Germany. I see. And how many missions did you have over there ?

AB: 24

PL: I noticed in the things that you got, your oak leaf. What does that mean ?

AB: Well, the oak leaf cluster is a duplication of a medal that you have already received. ^{iv}

PL: I see. And what medals were they ?

AB: There was the Air Medal. ^v I got the cluster for that, and I was stopped at twenty-four missions over there because if I had twenty-fifth mission that was considered a complete tour and they couldn't send me on any more combat after that, so they stopped me at twenty-four, because they wanted crews at that time to send over to the other theater...

PL: Pacific

AB: The Pacific theater. But before I got assigned to a crew to go over there, why the war over there ended. ^{vi} So I never got to the Pacific.

PL: So that's why they stopped you at twenty-four, because they wanted to make sure they could still send you to combat.

AB: Yup.

PL: I see. So you were in England. Then the war was over in Japan, and so they sent you home, is that it ?

AB: Yes, I went back from England

PL: Yeah, and you came back to the United States and you were discharged where and, when ? Not that the where is important, but more the when. When were you discharged ?

AB: Well,

PL: During, you don't have to go [unclear]

AB: Well, I was eventually discharged in 19..., what was it, 1955.

PL: Oh, you were in the service. You stayed in after the, because you went in ...

AB: Yes, I stayed in the Reserves after the combat.

PL: Oh, when you came home you joined the Reserves and you stayed in.

AB: The reason I stayed in the Reserves was that the war in the other theater was still going on, and so I didn't want to take a discharge then because I didn't know for what they would draft me again for the other war and I'd have to start from the bottom again, so I stayed in the Reserve and kept my commission, and, well, all in all, I've got the commission right on through. I'm retired now, ah...

PL: I see.

AB: But, well, yeah. I'm out of the Reserve now but I still have the commission there. I mean it's more or less of a designation. It's just designating official now. I don't have any more obligation.

PL: Yeah, right. You're out of the Reserve, but you were... when you were flying as a bombardier, what was your rank ?

AB: First lieutenant. I worked as a first lieutenant.

PL: I see. OK. Is there anything else you can tell us about the service, as far as your missions go, anything that you'd like to say about them ? You did twenty-four missions. I mean, they were over enemy territory, all of them, and ah...

AB: Well, I had a different attitude towards the missions than a lot of people did. I didn't have sense enough to know that I could get hurt, so I just took interest in the thing, and I told a lot of people I had the best seat in the house for the biggest show in history. And I sat in the nose of a B-17. I could look down and I could recognize a lot of the things that were on the news all the time and the war that was going on on the ground and as I say, I was interested in it and I came through unscathed, and I've always enjoyed looking back on it.

PL: Well, you did twenty-four missions. I mean, you know, you were the bombardier. You were the guy that was dropping the bombs and you were the guy that they turned over to when they were over enemy territory and ready to drop.

AB: Yeah, when you got to the I.P. it was called, the Initial Point, where it turned on to the bomb run, that was a [unclear – field map ?] that the plane was, at least theoretically, in charge of the bombardier, and the bomb sight and automatically controlled the whole plane, the whole works.

PL: I see. And what raids ...name any cities you remember. Any cities that you were part of raids on.

AB: Well, the main one that I remember was Dresden.^{vii} That was supposed to be a pretty tough target. And I guess the main reason I really remember it was that we bombed

the highest from there that I ever bombed. That was 28,000 feet. We were supposed to average 25,000 but as we were approaching the target we could see what was going on ahead of us. The groups that were over the target and the way they were catching it, well, our lead commander decided to go higher and we went to 28,000 feet. And by the time they had measured us again, we were pretty well off the target, so we got very little flak on it, and ...

PL: You dropped your bombs and took off back to home.

AB:... dropped the bombs and headed back.

PL: Well great. Is there anything else you'd like to say about the war or anything before we go into what you did after the war ? Anything you'd like to say so people remember ?

AB: Well, I don't remember anything particular.

PL: Ever meet any fellas from Hoosick Falls when you were overseas ?

AB: No, I didn't meet anybody overseas. The only one from Hoosick Falls that I remember being associated with was Daniel Bush. He was from North Hoosick and that was when I was still in training at Syracuse.

PL: I see. Well that's great. We're glad what we heard about your service. Now, what did you do when came home Arby ?

AB: Well, I went back to carpentry work. I worked at that for quite awhile and then I decided I wanted something different, and I got into the lumbering business on a small scale.

PL: OK. So you did drive a school bus for awhile too, I remember.

AB: Yes, ah...

PL: OK, so that about takes it back to now. Now you're completely retired, right ?

AB: Yeah.

PL: Completely retired. Well, we thank you very much for coming over and telling us that story and thank you again. ^{viii}

NOTES

ⁱ The video lacked any introductory information. By researching the web, I was able to contact the interviewer at the Louis Miller Museum and obtain further information.
www.hoosickhistory.com

ⁱⁱ Knettishall was the home base of the 388th Bomb Group (Heavy), which had four squadrons of B-17s. The narrator, Arba J. Brenenstuhl, was in the 563rd Bomb Squadron.
See www.388thbg.org/home.htm and www.388bg.info-units 388th Bomb Group Assn.

ⁱⁱⁱ On many of his missions Mr. Brenenstuhl flew aboard the B-17G “Sack Happy”, “Miss Mac” and “Irresisible You”. <http://www.388bg.info/index.html>

^{iv} Any further awarded Air Medal came in the form of an Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster (US Army, US Army Air Force), <http://en.wv2awards.com/award/247>

^v “The Air Medal is awarded to any person who, while serving in any capacity in or with the armed forces of the United States, shall have distinguished himself by meritorious achievement while participating in aerial flight”. <http://en.wv2awards.com/award/247>

^{vi} VJ-Day, August 14, 1945

^{vii} Feb 13-15, Mar 2 and Apr 17, 1945

^{viii} Arba J. Brenenstuhl passed away July 30, 2013 in Hoosick Falls, NY
<http://www.findagrave.com> (as J.Arba Brenenstuhl)