

**Armond "Art" Brown  
Narrator**

**Part Two of Interview**

**Michael Russert  
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Interviewers**

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Armond Brown	<b>AB</b>
Michael Russert	<b>MR</b>
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**MR:** Today is the tenth of July 2010. We're at the home of Armond Brown, and this is part two of the interview we're doing with Armond. When we left off the last time, you spoke about some of your experiences during World War II, and there was some information you had left out that you decided you wanted to add to the interview.

**AB:** I don't have my notes with me, so what I think I'll do is answer any questions that you ask me, and I'll have to go back and look at the tape a second time with my daughter. And then we will continue and I'll have the notes.

**MR:** All right. Let's start with your overseas tour. Now, when and where did you leave to go overseas?

**AB:** We thought we were going over to Germany because we left from New Jersey. We shipped out of New Jersey, and the next thing I knew – I'd been through Panama twice, and I could see Panama coming up – and I said..... Charlie Weir is one of them, and the other one would be – I can't think of his name – an insurance man from Glens Falls – Sullivan! His father had a truck that moved furniture, and Sullivan was a really big guy. So I told them "We're not going to Germany with those blue-eyed blonds, we're going to Japan, and it's not over yet."

**MR:** When was that, approximately? Was this in 1944 or 1945?

**AB:** I would say that was 1944 definitely.

**MR:** Now you mentioned you had gone through the Panama Canal before –

**AB:** I was in the Merchant Marines then. I was what they'd call a "snipe." I worked below the waterline, and anybody that worked below the waterline.... I started as a fireman, a water tender, and only two of us wound up being junior engineers, and that would be Richard White and Armond Brown. They moved us topside when we were going over in the Pacific.

**MR:** When did you go into the Merchant Marines?

**AB:** I went into the Merchant Marines in 1943, I guess, and I left... I was making Army tanks, and they said that I could not go, and I think I told you on the tape before, that I went to draft board 364 over in Trenton, and I told the girl definitely that I wanted to go in the service. I did not want to stay here. I had two older brothers already in, and it was getting close to when my younger brothers were going to be eligible, and I said I was not going to let that happen. That's when she told me to write her name, which I did, and she gave me a blank paper with her name at the bottom. And when I got down there, I wrote her name. But I kept that, so that I would remember how to write her name. There were 7 or 8 of us that went

down: Len Green, Armond Brown, Earl Cooney, one of the – from Thompson, New York, I can't think of his name. Anyhow there were 7 of us that went down, and I was the only one left.

**MR:** You went down to New York City?

**AB:** Yeah. I wound up on the ship the next morning.

**MR:** Do you recall the name of the ship?

**AB:** Yeah, there were two of them. USMSTS American Navigator and I can't think of the other one's name; they were sister ships. They were breaking us in to be Merchant Marines. And I had enough credit from taking the test, that they made me a white cap. All the ones... we trained them. I hadn't been in before, but I had a pretty good background living on the Hudson River and being on a lot of boats.

**MR:** What did that mean, that you were a white cap?

**AB:** A white cap, that you were a teacher, and the regular – I'd say dirty gray-- we were teaching them.

**MR:** What were you teaching?

**AB:** My specialty was engine room, so I was teaching them fireman, water tender and oiler. And I wasn't a junior engineer yet, but when we went the third trip through Panama, Whitey and I were the only two. We slept topside. We used to sleep down water level, and when we went to work we were always below the water.

**MR:** Now how was that ship powered? Was it powered by diesel?

**AB:** No, it was powered by... We had Scotch boilers, so yeah, it would have to be diesel. Fire cones. There were four of them in the engine room. It took up both sides in the engine room. There'd be at least three on duty at once, and sometimes four.

**MR:** Now were you, being down inside that engine room, exposed to asbestos or —

**AB:** Oh yeah. We changed all of the packing [unclear] and the reciprocating pumps and both above and below was asbestos packing, in the pumps especially.

**MR:** Has that asbestos affected your health at all?

**AB:** Oh yeah. I have asbestos lung, and the Service, the DEA already knows that. I got one check from Lexington, Switzer [??] and somebody else out of New York City, a check for \$500, and I think they got a check for the same.

**MR:** If you don't mind my asking, did you apply for any disability through the Veterans Administration because of that?

**AB:** They told me... I was in five different hospitals. First on board that ship that I told you I was sick for a week down in sickbay. It wasn't from riding on the water, but I had caught an awful cold and I don't know where I got it, and it lasted well over a week. The first food that I ate that tasted good — and it was one of the cooks that brought it to me — he brought me a pear, and I tell you, that made my day. I hadn't eaten for two or three days, maybe even more.

But then I was also... When we came in, below Chesapeake Bay there's a hospital. One of our boilers blew up, and one of our officers was looking down through the grates, and a 3/8 steam line had broken, and it took the flesh right off his leg. He was a lieutenant. Herbie Bartels was the chief, and I picked up the phone and grabbed it to call Herbie. But meanwhile, I went up the stack and there was another pipe that you could talk through... I don't know how we did it, but I said, Herbert, I'm blind. When I opened the stack, all the carbon flew in both eyes." And I said, "Your officer's down, he's trying to get up; he's crawling." He says, "I'm on my way, Brownie." So he comes down. I couldn't see what happened after I got the

carbon. So the next thing I know I'm on the captain's launch and Herbert and one of the SPs took me to Aberdeen, I think it is, it's a Marine hospital. So Herbert says to me, "Brownie, we're going to be here all day. I'm not going to stay. There's a line of guys here." Well, the ship had already radioed the hospital, and they brought me to the front of the line, and I was being operated on in less than an hour. This eye (points to left eye) I had to wear a patch for about a month or two. My right eye I could see out of. But they took all the carbon out, however they did it. But I was out of the operating room.

That was in the Merchant Marines. So I was down in sickbay. That's the only two times I remember that I was in the Merchant Marines that I can remember right now.

**MR:** How much time did you spend in the Merchant Marine?

**AB:** I spent two years.

**MR:** Did you work both sides of the continent? Did you go to the Pacific and Atlantic?

**AB:** Yes, I went to the Atlantic and Pacific. One time when we were... I don't know what was going on, but I think it was some kind of invasion. And we got a hot bearing, and we were almost to Bermuda, and we went limping back home, so I was lucky there.

**MR:** What were you carrying aboard ship most of the time? Was it cargo?

**AB:** We had a machine shop where we could help repair. We had — God only knows what they had in there. I wasn't a part of that because I was down in the engine room. I don't know what they carried in the different compartments.

**MR:** How big was the crew on the ship?

**AB:** Oh gosh, that's a good question. Pretty big. You had cooks, you had... I don't know what they called them, they catered to the officers, you had guys that could work in the machine shop. In fact I worked in the machine shop; I made a mariner's [unclear] and put my picture on it and sent it to my girlfriend. And I sent another thing to one of the girls that I worked with, I forget what that was. It's a long time ago. I could go get that, though, because she called me one time and said, "If you ever want that, come and get it."

**MR:** Did you carry any kind of armament on board?

**AB:** Oh yeah. We had a 3 inch gun on the front. If you want to cut that [stop the tape], I'll go get a shell and show it to you.

**MR:** Yeah ok. (Stops tape)

**MR:** (Tape resumes) What is that?

**AB:** (Holds up a large shell case, more than two feet long) This was on the bow of the ship, on the main deck, just ahead of where we had the galley. Right up over that was the captain's bridge. I got a drawing of that ship, I started to carve the ship up. I even had the guns that were on the stacks, but the kids played with it. But I've got the ship in the cellar, I could get that...

**MR:** No, that's all right. That's a pretty good size shell.

**AB:** Yeah, it depends what they were using. If they were using what was in the nosepiece, it all depends on what they had.

**MR:** Were you ever under attack?

**AB:** Not that I remember. Always a sub was following us, but that's the crew, and when you're working in the engine room. The closest thing.... one of our own ships in Chesapeake Bay, a Navy ship challenged our ship, so it must have been a bunch of young guys.

**MR:** You can set that down if you'd like.

**AB:** Yeah, I brought quite a few of them home. We spent them, but we practiced. I was no part of that because all of my business was in the engine room, and based on—they thought that I was pretty good, evidently, because I didn't spend any time training. I spent time training other people because I knew so much about engines and stuff from being on the Hudson River.

**MR:** Now why did you end up leaving the Merchant Marine?

**AB:** Our ship went to drydock, and Whitey stayed right at my house for about a month. That's the guy I told you about, Richard White from Boston. He buddied around with my brother. I had a girlfriend, and I buddied around with my girlfriend. One day he said, "Brownie, I'm out of here." But I think he went back to New York and got on another ship. He never called me. I would like to, somehow, meet him or write to him, but we're old now, and I'm lucky if he's alive. But he was a big boy. My father got him aside and said, "Armond is a small guy, would you watch over him?" And he said, "Mr. Brown, you don't know your son. He don't need nobody watching over him." It made me feel good; my kid brother told me, because he heard the conversation. It made me feel good, but I never mentioned it to him.

**MR:** So you ended up leaving the Merchant Marine, and then you went into the Army?

**AB:** Well, I wasn't even home and they called my mother. See, they found out that I could shoot good because Tijuana and Ensenada, while I was in the Merchant Marines, we had some guys over the side painting the ship, keeping it in shape. We were anchored offshore, and I could hear them down in the armor room, and I thought, What the hell are they doing? So I went topside to see, and sure enough, they were going to shoot—or maybe they did—but they said, "can you get them, Brownie?" And I said, "You want to believe it," and I did. I shot at one shark and there were twice as many there, and the

guys that were painting wouldn't go over the side, not until we moved the hell out of there, and we did. But that's up to them, not me. That's not my bag of tea, mine was in the engine room. I had a lot of fun experiences.

**MR:** When did you go into the Army?

**AB:** As soon as I got home, my mother said to me, "I don't think you're going to have any time; they want you to report immediately to Camp Dix." I said, "Immediately?" But I took a week at home and then went right down.

**MR:** And they took you right into the Army?

**AB:** Oh I was gone, I was in Fort McClellan the next morning, Alabama.

**MR:** Did you have to go through basic training?

**AB:** Oh yeah. Oh did we go through basic training. Yeah. It was tough. Maybe I did tell the story to you already about the guys jumping on each other's feet? They'd tell you to jump on each other's feet; you were in pits, and you counted off, and the odd numbers would get with the even numbers and you'd face each other. Well, I'd gone home with Shelnut, and I wasn't about to jump on his feet, he was a little short guy. So the guy up in the cadre stopped the music and said, "Brownie, I said jump on his feet!" But anyhow.... the music started up again and he stopped it and said, "If you don't jump on his feet, I'm coming down there." And I said, "Mouth, come on down, I'll jump on your feet." He wasn't down there two seconds and he was on his back. I hammered him. And the next time we were down in the pits, all the guys, different ones from different pits, "Hey, go jump on Brownie's feet!" So the next thing I know, up comes a guy, he drove over himself—I didn't even know he was in Fort McClellan, he was a truck driver. (Trying to remember the name) He had three brothers, one of them I think was a minister.... Anyhow he lives right by the monument. There's one house, then

the second house down, it's a Polish name, it's not Lewandowski. I drew a tavern for Lewandowski when I came home. His wife lived in the old Villa bank and barber shop. Pletchko! Pletchko's Barber Shop. They had two sons in the Second World War, I think they were in the Air Corps. They may not have come home.

**MR:** So you were down at Fort McClellan, you finished basic, and where did you go from there?

**AB:** I want to get back to what this guy did that I hammered. He went down, and that truck driver from Scoville [?] he come up and said, "Brownie, are you out of your mind?" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "You put a note down on the name..." We had A, B, and C Company. A Company I was in, mostly guys my size, not big guys. [In B the guys were] a little bigger, and C Company was all big guys. So this guy that I creamed went down there and put up a sign [at C Company] saying "I can lick anybody" and signed my name. So along comes this truck driver from Scoville and says, "Brownie, this guy's a big guy – he's going to kill you!" I said, "What?" He says, "You got your name on the bulletin board that you can lick any guy in our company," and I see the light right away. I said, "Well, I know where that come from." He said, "Well, you're not coming down on Saturday to fight, are you?" I said, "You bet your life I am." He said, "Brownie, he's going to kill you, he's twice your size." I said, "I don't think so. Tell you what, you tell them just what you told me, and you bet all the money you can on me, and if I lose, I'll pay you."

So I went down, and the first round I took it easy, I felt him out and I boxed. There's a lot to boxing that people don't realize. When you're hitting a punching bag, hit with you're your elbow, this fist, that fist, your elbow, back the other way. If you get in the ring and you're fast, you do the same thing to the other guy's chin, and sometimes with the back of the hand, that's illegal. So I got in the ring with him and I felt him out and I draw him up and make believe I'm going to hit him in the head and then I bring my hand down and give him a kidney punch. Then I do it the other way with this hand (gestures

other hand) down. So I got so I was tattooing him pretty good, and I was knocking the wind out of him. I could tell – the guy's eyes will get glassy, that's one thing. Then I tie him up in the first round, and I said to him "I just took it easy on you. In the next round, I'm going to hurt you." And I tried to hurt him, don't think I didn't. So the round's almost over, and I tied him up, and I said, "Now I'm going to surprise you, and--" he wasn't fat--"I'm going to knock your fat ass out in front of all your buddies." And I pushed him away at the end of the round. He wouldn't answer the bell; he wouldn't come out for the third round. Out comes – I can't think of his name – and he used a four letter word, "Where the f--- did you learn to fight like that?" I said, "My father, my uncle, and – I can't think of his name either, it sounds like Billings but it isn't Billings – he was an Italian guy who taught all the guys in high school. I fought all the way through high school, and never lost, nor did any of my brothers. Because we had an uncle who was a professional fighter, we had my father, who was a wrestler, we had Leo Brown, who was a cousin, you know – that's what we did when we were kids, other than peddle newspapers and magazines and work in peoples' gardens. And I worked with my grandfather, especially; that's why that trophy was left to me. So I had one hell of a ride in life: Christ don't want me, and the devil's scared of me – I'll live forever.

**MR:** Where did you go after Fort McClellan?

**AB:** Right to New Jersey to get on a ship. That night, we slept – I don't know where, it was on the shoreline. Guys went out and got drunk but I didn't, I went to bed. One of the guys went out and some guy creamed him. I got up and I stopped the fight. He was gonna get pounded; he'd been drinking and the other guy was soused. I stopped a lot of fights in the service, a lot of fights, and I fought all the way over on the ship. I'd been over before, I'd passed the 180th meridian line, and I didn't have to take that like the rest of them did, King Neptune's Court, I had to give it. Do you want to know some of the things they did? They'd take a mop and spin the mop and put it over his head, and the guy would be sitting there with a washtub full of garbage, and they'd make him get on his knees, and they'd tell

him "When the King's says dip, you gotta stick your ass....." And I got some pictures of that, it's too good to believe. I sat on the mast taking pictures, because I'd been over the 180<sup>th</sup>, the Equator, you name it.

**MR:** Where was the ship headed for?

**AB:** If they hadn't dropped the atomic bomb, we were the ones that were going to go in, because my outfit was all expert shots, every one of them, 12 of them. And I was.... The thing that got me, is I was supposed to get my sergeant's stripes – that would be in the Pentagon, or I'm going to try to get to Kyoto University to study the [zabacho? ] system, and that's gotta be in West Point, because all of them except one was West Point teachers. And the other one taught me the zabacho system, which was the same as General Motors and people like that, the five wealthy landowners, that's what the zabacho system was... I forget the names now.

When I got back, I taught 4.2 mortar, I was the head of the theater, I gave a talk on the theater to the guys. We went looking for, when I was in the Army, we went looking for airplanes that might have been shot down by Mount Fuji. And there was a guy by the name of – these are different names than I gave you the last time – Smurr and Bresley from Indiana, and Armond Brown, we were all corporals, and we were up for getting technical sergeant. We found an airplane, we found one that was torn all the hell apart –

**MR:** Was it an American plane?

**AB:** Oh yeah. So I'm looking around and I said to Smurr and Bresley, "Let's go up on the hill, there's a farmhouse up there." So we got talking to a guy that knew a little bit of English, not a lot but a little bit, and I got the feeling that they took prisoners. I said "What happened to those guys in the airplane? GIs? Pilot? Fly?" (gesturing) And he pointed to a tree. "How many?" He told me but I couldn't understand that much Japanese then. (He says a few basic words in Japanese) Well, you learn it from being around the guys that come

back home and tell you about their girlfriends' stories. Well, I never – I don't know if I should put this on the tape – I never had sex in Japan. 1946, Christmas Eve, I brought all my men, my squad, because I knew they'd been out before, but I had the 519 MPs test every one of those girls except Myoko. The girl began to sing to me, "You virgin boy." She had all the guys singing to me – and I was, but I didn't want that known! I was embarrassed to tears. So one of the guys – I may have told you on the other tape – from Corinth, New York... She offered to pay me 50 yen, and this kid from Corinth said "I'll take that offer." She's the only one they didn't inspect, and he got the clap. So it paid me never... I used to kick them out of the [unclear] station in Kamata? They used to come in and pick up the guys and take them. Or even better than that, there was an old building that was shelled out, they used to take them down in there. I knew that, but I wasn't about... Cornucopia, they used to dance with them and then go, that Cornucopia was something. I used to go there and kick them out, my squad. I was squad leader – I made my men do the dirty work. If there was anything that was going to be dangerous... they knew me, they knew me like the back of their hand.

I'm laying in the sack one night, and we're in the old bicycle factory that Doolittle saved just for the 82<sup>nd</sup>. He saved buildings hither and yon, 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry, they had a building. He leveled the place from Tokyo to Yokohama..... I was going to tell you something about the buildings..... It was an old bicycle factory that Doolittle left up, and we trained in it every day. And I had Japanese challenge me. I got stabs in this wrist in the motor pool. They fired the guy, but Danny was a little guy that worked for me only. He used to get my clothes washed, and I'd pay him to do it, and I'd give him stuff when my mother sent me a package. He told me, when they brought him out, after he stabbed me – I hammered him, I did, and I hammered him good, enough so they carried him to the front guard, the main guard, and Danny walked with him and he said "I'll get even with those guys," and we got poisoned. And I'll bet two-to-one he was in back of it. I drove people all the day long to the 42<sup>nd</sup> Annex Hospital – I may have put that on the tape before, but if not it should have been

on there – and when I come home, the last one, it was raining, I'd say it was around 6:30, 7:00 I'm guessing, out comes the lieutenant, the doctor, and says, "Brownie, you gotta take me." Do you remember me saying this before?

**MR:** I think so.

**AB:** Then there's no sense in repeating it. Because when he went to get in the back of that ambulance, I said "You get in the front," because I knew that by the time I got to the hospital he was going to be like the rest, and I was right. But the only think that surprised me was I wake up 7 to 8 days later and a nurse was sitting there and said, "You've gotta give me your mother's address, you won't give it to me. I know you've got a brother and sister" and she named them. Then I passed out again, and I looked over, and if that was the doctor he had died because they had the sheet over his head. But I want to find out how many of them died that I knew.

**MR:** Did you ever find out what kind of poison?

**AB:** No. The Red Cross nurse didn't tell me. One of the other nurses – they used to call her Birdlegs – she was a beautiful girl, but she had legs like a broomstick, you know, and it made me mad when they called her that because she was very good. I asked her "What the hell happened?" Our outfit, they said we had – you get it mostly from in a farm, where the cows' urine gets into your water well, diphtheria? Something like that. And then they said we had spinal meningitis. And then this nurse said, "You had none of that. You were poisoned." And I lived.

I can remember one night when a guy says, "Get Brownie, get Brownie!" And I was like – all there was was a sheet of tempered wood, probably plywood, and I could remember him saying "Get Brownie." So they come and get me and say, "Brownie, he's having a heart attack. He's going to die." So I went over and said "Get up, it's not time to go to bed." "I want you to write a letter to my mother." I said, "Get your ass up and right it yourself." That's the way I did

business. I said to a couple of guys, put him on the cot, go get the ambulance and take him right to 42nd Annex Hospital in Yokohama. Next thing I know he called me and wanted me to go visit him. And they sent him home. I had a couple of guys sent home, I can't tell you about why.

So, it's time to close the tape now, for today, and I'll look for notes. And you make me a copy of that and I'll play that. I don't want to keep repeating myself. But I will tell you the story... But not on that.

**MR:** Ok, I'll turn it off. So we're done for today?

**AB:** Yeah.