

**Solomon Brauner  
Veteran**

**Michael Russert  
Interviewer**

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Division of Military and Naval Affairs Headquarters  
Latham New York**

**Q:** Could you tell me your name, place, and date of birth, please?

**SB:** Solomon Brawner, Brooklyn, New York, May 12, 1918.

**Q:** What was your pre-war education?

**SB:** Very varied. I had attended several different colleges, nighttime only because I was working. I never received a degree though, had I taken certain courses toward a degree which I hadn't done. I had enough time to have earned a degree.

**Q:** So, what were your occupations prior to the war?

**SB:** I was an apprentice blacksmith at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. I spent two years at that apprenticeship, which was from the same civil service list. I was offered a job paying twice as much money with the Census Bureau in Washington D.C. and took that. I had previously taken the exam for New York City Police patrolman and I made that. They appointed me when I was about a year down in Washington D.C. and that was an improvement in work. It was a 20 year retirement with merit promotions, it was desirable and I took it.

**Q:** Could you tell us when you heard about Pearl Harbor and what your reaction was to it?

**SB:** Yes, I was a member of a beach club, the JP Day Club in Manhattan Beach, Brooklyn. It was on a Sunday. We were dancing and there was an announcement. I think it was December 7th, was it?

**Q:** Yes, sir.

**SB:** And all of a sudden there was a hush. You know, it was a noisy place. There were about 200 people dancing and then the hush, you couldn't hear anything for about 30 seconds maybe. Then all of a sudden there was a rush for telephones, they were lining up at the coin telephones.

**Q:** What was your reaction to this when you heard about it?

**SB:** Astounded, a little bit surprised, I didn't know what to think. I just thought like everybody else, that it was coming. To some people it was actually shocking. I didn't feel shocked, but I felt astounded by the news.

**Q:** When did you enter military service?

**SB:** Oh, 42.

**Q:** Okay.

**SB:** I feel November 42 is the way. I didn't enter the service. I enlisted.

**Q:** You enlisted?

**SB:** This was into the cadet program, pilot training, and I was called up in January 43. That was my actual entrance.

**Q:** Okay, could you tell us about your pilot training and where you went?

**SB:** It seems that they were having large washout rates in the pilot training program, and some of this was the learning. They decided to have college training detachments called CTD's. So I was inducted through that, at that time it was the Army Air Corps and I went to Atlantic City, which was my first base, that was basic training, regular army basic training. We weren't brought in as cadets, we were brought in army basic training, and from there we went to the counter training with hashes. My particular group went to Syracuse University, we were there for, I don't know, four, five or six weeks on the college courses. Now the training, the pilot training, was a condensed book, it would take four years, 36 months. Each year was condensed into nine weeks, and so this college training detachment was a sort of preparation for the very intensive training that there was. Thereafter I went to San Antonio, Texas, where I was inducted as a cadet, and that was pre-flight school.

From pre-flight school we went to primary school, but I washed out there because every time I got a new plane, different plane, or a new maneuver to learn, I had thrown up. I had soloed and I was doing quite well and I was very much surprised when they had me up before a board of four of the instructors and they were washing me out. The flight surgeon was there too, they wondered if they could send me on to navigation to become a navigator, and the flight surgeon nixed it.

**Q:** What kind of planes did you train on?

**SB:** PT18s in primary school. First Cessnas, I forget the number, and there were some Piper Cubs, but I was never in the Piper Cub. I was in a Cessna. They were very much alike, super little planes, like a Ford. Then PT18s, I think it was a Fairchild PT. I think PT stood for primary trainer.

**Q:** Okay, what happened after you washed out of flight school?

**SB:** I was sent to Amarillo, Texas, which was a replacement depot. There was some testing and I was there, I don't know, about three weeks or so. From there they sent me to Buckley Field, Colorado as an armorer, and someone explained to me that they based this on my background, having two years apprenticeship as a blacksmith. From armament school, I was sent to Kingman, Arizona for gunnery training and finished there. They sent everybody in all different directions, and I wound up in Taunton, Massachusetts before taking a boat. I don't remember whether it was Boston or New York we left out of, I was there for about five days and then boarded a ship. It was a ship that was converted into a troop ship. It was one of the newest, I think it was called the America before. The military gave it a different name though, about six days to get to Liverpool.

**Q:** What year was it when you arrived over there?

**SB:** I think it was early 44. BMI was in a replacement depot, and at that time Patton was crossing France. He was moving fast and they needed gasoline. So they had gasoline coming in by plane and rail, and etc. From the replacement depot they took, I don't know, 200 or 400 men, it was a big number of men. They sent us to various towns where there were jerry cans, the five gallon gas cans, and we would unload either a railroad car or a plane and then load it onto another plane which was headed for France. We called it 'Petrol for Patton'. We went around doing that and that lasted about three weeks or a month.

Then naturally we all got back to the replacement depot and along came a captain from the 6th Cavalry and he picked up four men. I was one of them to join the 6th Cavalry, and it was a 6th Cavalry Squadron, Mechanized. I joined them just before the Rhine Crossing, about ten miles before. The first town sign I remember seeing was Andernach, that was before crossing, I think where we crossed was on a pontoon bridge. The town on this side of the Rhine was Thakur, I think something like that. My first troop, there were five troops in each squadron, 6th Cavalry Squadron had five troops. A, B, C, E, and F. A, B, and C were frontline troops. E and F were just behind them in half tracks and armored tanks, few light tanks, and a lot of Jeeps. In the cavalry, they called them bantams, I don't know why. There was no glass, it was an orange shield with a slit

to work through. That's when we crossed, and an interesting thing, when we got to the other side of the Rhine, the A, B, C troops and the E, F troops got through, cleaned up when it hit. And all of a sudden we heard that the group headquarters was being attacked and we turned around to rescue group headquarters and we continued on. We liberated a number of camps.

**Q:** Were you assigned to Patton's 3rd Army?

**SB:** Patton's 3rd Army until almost near the end of the war, then we were transferred to Virgil Patch's 1st Army. Then we continued on, we were about fifteen miles short of Berlin. We would have been in Berlin, but we were stuck. The explanation I got was that we stopped because they wanted to let the Russians get into Berlin first. Just about four or five days before the end of the war Roosevelt died. We were in the Sudetenland, it was a city or town called Rossbach, I don't know if it was in Czechoslovakia or in Germany. But we're all called out one day to be told that Roosevelt died, and there was almost a tear in everybody's eye. It was a blow, we felt stunned by that. Shortly after that, the war ended and we were sent, the 6th Cavalry, to a province called Thuringia. We were just an occupying force. Hildburghausen is where we were. We were there for a while and then in three weeks or so we were sent to Berlin. We were the second outfit to enter Berlin, I think the 2nd Paratroopers were the first into Berlin. While in Berlin I became a mail clerk and I stayed there. I liked living in Berlin. We were conquering heroes, you know, things were going our way and I liked it. I turned down two rotations, meaning a chance to go back home. Then they shipped a group of us out of Berlin, and I was put in there. Wound up in Camp Philip Morris in Le Havre, waiting for the boat. Came back on the USS Champlain, it was an aircraft carrier, and the captain kept talking to us on the loudspeaker about trying to avoid a storm. Evidently we didn't, and the most unusual thing that I ever saw in my life was when we got off the boat. We knew we were in a storm, we were being pounded around and the after deck, its flat extends beyond the hull, and we looked at that, and I don't know how thick that deck was, but it was like a skeeball alley. There must have been high waves lifting the boat and bent that deck. It was one of those things where it's nice to get back home. I was at Fort Dix, New Jersey, in March, that was the Discharge Depot, and they discovered I had amoebic dysentery. So I was on an infectious disease ward for three weeks or so, which delayed my discharge. That was it.

**Q:** Okay. I wanted to go back and ask a couple questions. What were your feelings about Patton himself?

**SB:** Don't know, never saw him. What I got, he was a rough and tumble guy. Good general, that's all. Stern, maybe not often fair, but he was stern.

I might cite a couple of interesting anecdotes, in one of the towns in Germany that we had liberated. I forget the name of it, but it had a few factories, and in those factories were a number of French soldiers. They were still in their blue uniforms, most of them, and they were captured in North Africa. I was corresponding with a girl in Paris. I had become pretty conversant in French, and I mentioned it to one of these Frenchmen. He says, "Jesus, my family doesn't know if I'm living or dead, they haven't heard from me. Could you write to them?" I said, "Oh, sure." All of a sudden, there's a mob around me. Everyone wants me to write. So I told them very simply, you gather the names together and put them in a list, all those who were in Paris, all those in Lyon, Bordeaux, wherever. I'll write to the top name and I'll give them the list of the other people and ask them to do the same. I wrote about 20 letters like that. I told them, "I have today met your husband, or your son, he's in good health and you will soon see him." Very nice. "Please advise these other people." And, you know, I got letters and a few of them had what they call mouquets, that's a pressed flower in a letter. One letter was really funny, she thanked me for everything, she liked the sentiment, the idea of what I had done. But her husband was there before the letter.

Another interesting anecdote, in Berlin I was pulling guard on a bank, just posted outside the bank. People were walking by and a little old guy, about 70ish, short, portly, came up to me. He spoke a fair English, a little broken. He told me he's a retired university professor, and asked me where I was from, so I told him New York. He apologized to me for the devastation that they had wreaked on New York. I said, "No, nothing happened in New York." He says, "That's the American propaganda you got." A number of peculiar incidents there.

Another thing about Berlin, the Russian soldiers hadn't been paid for three or four years, they just hadn't been paid. The Americans made a mistake, we gave the printing plates of the money, it was called Allied money, Aliettaskelt, to the Russian soldiers. They printed it up to three to four years' salary, so everyone was wearing a shoulder bag full of money. They had watches going up their arms, from buying watches from the GIs. For the first two days they came, they put the watch to their ear and if they couldn't hear it, it was no good. Like a 17 year old, give them a Mickey Mouse watch if that's what they wanted, and they paid \$200 for it, but on the third day they wised up to it.

**Q:** You said that you liberated some concentration camps.

**SB:** Yes.

**Q:** Could you?

**SB:** Werdau, and Zwickau, they're two close little cities, there were three or four camps. We went in different directions, different groups were liberated and we brought them back to a little plateau where we were just outside the town. There must have been about a total of 400. There were Englishmen, Americans, Poles, there weren't really any Frenchmen. We gave them food, I don't know where they brought up all the food for them, but they did, they got food and they ate.

**Q:** And were these POWs?

**SB:** Yeah, these were POWs.

**Q:** How did they react?

**SB:** They looked like civilians, none of them were soldiers. These were civilians, men and women, but they were in the camps. I mentioned Ohrdruf before. My particular unit did not want to be the first to go into Ohrdruf. There was someone aside from us who got the order first. The Germans must have left there about two hours before, because there was a mound that must have been fifty feet wide and four feet high. Bodies, men and women, and they all looked emaciated and they all had a bullet hole in their head. Somebody, a general maybe, decided to have all the American units that were close enough to go through there. We did before any of those bodies were removed, and saw that big bunch. Then I went roaming around the camp and I saw a man sitting in what looked like a bathhouse locker, a large bathhouse locker. If he weighed 60 pounds, he weighed a lot with skin and bones. He looked at me and I looked at him. I wanted to talk, I wanted to say something to him, but I couldn't, nothing could come out. He kind of recognized it, looked at me, but had to turn away. I want to ask him, "How come you're not out there with the others? How do you get away?" There were about six who did, evidently they hid, they saw what was going on and they hid. That was Ohrdruf.

**Q:** Where were you when you heard about VE Day?

**SB:** Oh, boy, Rosbach is when they told us about Roosevelt. It was about four days later so I think we were still in Rosbach.

**Q:** What was the general reaction of your unit and yourself about VE Day?

**SB:** Elation, we were very happy. I felt that I would be going home soon.

**Q:** When you were in Berlin, what were the relations between the soldiers and the people that were living there?

**SB:** Very friendly, funny thing about them, they're all complaining about the Russians. Every woman you met would tell you the Russians raped the women, but not me. Everyone would tell you that's what they did. Only one woman told me, she lived in an apartment, she had a little daughter and in the next apartment there was a woman whose husband was an officer in the German army. Evidently this one Russian who came into her apartment, looked at her and said, "You're bad, are there any clothes?" He looked into the ice box or whatever and he saw very little food. When he went into the other apartment, he saw a lot of food and a lot of clothes and dresses. So he took about half the dresses out of that woman's apartment, brought it into this one, took about half the food out and brought it into her. That's the only nice thing anyone ever told me about the Russians, but I met a lot of Russians.

**Q:** That was the next question.

**SB:** There were some pretty wise guy Russians too. I was looking for a Contax camera. I wanted to buy a Contax camera. I was speaking to a German, and then he called over a Russian soldier and he told him that I was looking for a Contax camera. He said, "Yeah, get it from me." He took me to an apartment in an apartment house and there were about four Russians in uniform. They didn't have a camera. All they wanted was to make an arrangement with me, they wanted to buy American soldier uniforms. I learned later that there were some of these groups of Russians that used American uniforms to board trains and they held up trains. I told them, "Oh, I'm interested in buying a Contax camera. I'm not selling anything, I'm looking to buy a Contax camera." That was then, I left them.

**Q:** How do you think the war and your military service changed your life?

**SB:** Well, I had a feeling that when I got back, I didn't want to be a cop anymore, but I had 90 days in which to either go back or find something. Now, I knew I didn't have a resume to get a good job so I figured maybe I should try to get into a business. But everywhere I went, to try to establish a source of supply we got down to the side. We wanted to buy, that was the situation, a lot of shortages. I did return to the police job and I got married. It was in March '46 that I was discharged, and Thanksgiving Eve '46 that I got married. You know, it's tough on a wife and family for a cop. The various hours we would work, the danger of the

job, some of the pressure from her family. Her father was in the furniture business, and he made me an offer I couldn't refuse so I left the police job.

**Q:** Did you ever make use of the GI Bill or anything like that?

**SB:** Yes, I went two nights a week to CCNY and I got some kind of subsidy. I'd get \$40, \$50 a month. I got something like the GI bill, but that was the only thing.

**Q:** Do you belong to any veterans organizations?

**SB:** Yes, Jewish war veterans. That's the only one.

**Q:** Have you ever been in contact with any of the men that served with you in your unit or have you gone to any reunions?

**SB:** I haven't gone to any reunions because I never heard of any. Yes, I was in contact with a few of the guys, but not from 6th Cavalry. The 6th Cavalry was peculiar for me, there were a lot of peculiar guys. I was like a super professor there. These guys were headquartered in the states in Chattanooga, Tennessee and were from Georgia and Tennessee. 'Crackers' in that vocabulary, about twenty words and every second word was a profanity, but they were good soldiers. They had been hunters before the war, so they were really good soldiers.

**Q:** How did you get along with them being in New York City?

**SB:** They tried, also I was Jewish, and there were just some dumb guys. We're sitting around on the ground and we're cleaning rifles and we have gasoline in our helmets. One of the guys said that his daddy had a general store and he would never serve a Jew or a nigger any time at all. I'm sitting there, I think he knew I was Jewish, but it didn't bother me because he just spouted it, he doesn't even know what he's talking about.

There was one place where there was a young kid, Sammy, and I noticed the kid staring at me. This is in the barracks, I'm sitting in my bunk. He was at the end of the barracks, my bunk almost sort of at the front of the barracks. I notice him and look up at him, then he walks over to me. He says to me, "Are you a Jew?" I said, "Yeah." He says to me, "You don't believe in Jesus Christ?" I said, "No, I believe somebody lived like that. He was a Rabbi, but I don't believe in him in Christianity." So he says, "Well, maybe you don't believe it, but really that's it. If you believe in God, that's what you believe." So the experience was very interesting. Actually my recollections are more of the humor, this is what I remember mostly. I used to kid around saying that if and when I ever write my

book about military experience, it would make, *See Here, Private Hargrove* look like Greek tragedy.

**Q:** Could you tell some of the humorous stories that you have anecdotes.

**SB:** I was at the replacement depot in England, Stoke on Trent. When they decided to call everybody out to get people that they were sending to this labor thing, the 'Petrol for Patton'. I had bought a bike and I was on my bike going out the gate when they made this call and the MPs at the gate got worried, you know, nobody goes out. They even went into town to round everybody up. In the evening there was a slight drizzle and there was a chaplain who came out. They informed us and they were calling out names. There were the rumors, "Why is this going on? You heard that there must have been, or that there was a German parachute jump nearby and some kind of attack. All kinds of stories. I looked around and I was smiling because of the rain. You couldn't tell whether these guys were crying or not, because their cheeks were wet. They're calling out names and as they call out your name, you go here. There were things about the way the army did things that were very inconsiderate. So instead of telling you, go into your barracks and pack, instead, stand there until they call off 200 or 400 names, whatever. Then they gave you five minutes to pack and you're shipping out of here. No worries, no nothing about where we're going. And I was lucky. I paid £8 for my bike and I would have had to abandon it but my bunk mate, he gave me £4 for it.

**Q:** Okay. Well, thank you very much for your interview. It was very fascinating.