

Eric Walz History 300 Collection

Allen Brinkerhoff

By Allen Brinkerhoff

February 14, 2004

Box 4 Folder 5

Oral Interview conducted by Robyn Knight

Transcript copied by Luke Kirkham February 2005

Brigham Young University - Idaho

An interview with Allen Brinkerhoff in Lovelock, Nevada on the 14th of February 2004.

RK: February 14th 2004. Where were you born?

AB: I was born in Fillmore, Utah.

RK: What year?

AB: 1929.

RK: How old were you on December 7th, 1941?

AB: 13 I believe. I was in the 7th grade.

RK: What do you remember about that day?

AB: The look on my Dad's face and my Mother and the concern that they had for family members who were going to be involved, they were scared.

RK: Do you remember them talking about it or them saying anything?

AB: There was a lot of conversation about it but I didn't really pay attention to it.

RK: How did you feel?

AB: Spooky and exciting, I suppose. It was something that was brought home real quick to us all.

RK: Do you remember them talking to you in school about it?

AB: I don't remember a lot about it. We talked about it a great deal as kids, you know being in the seventh grade it was something we seen and heard. We heard a lot about it in newsreels. Now you want to remember in that time in the world television wasn't around so we listened to the radio and when we go to a movie they always had what they call the move tone news and we would see little bits and blurbs about some of the things that happened then. But we didn't see the actual footage of war like we do today on television. It was mostly radio.

RK: What was your image of Hitler, Mussolini, and Hiro Hito during the war?

AB: It wasn't good. The Japs were Japs, slant – eyed so and so's. The Germans they were just Germans and Hitler was the only thing we knew and he was a deferrer. And we kind of made fun of that but we didn't have a lot of knowledge of him other than that.

RK: What is your opinion of Japanese and Germans now?

AB: I think the war has gone by I don't think we need to worry about it. As far as they're concerned, it took awhile especially the Japanese and some of the things that I heard about them. We were alarmed with the attack on Pearl Harbor and some of the atrocities we heard about. But it is the past; let me put it that way. The war is in the past and I think like most of the Americans in the United States will forget and forgive, if you will.

RK: When did you first hear about the German concentration camps?

AB: It was after the war. I don't remember the exact day, but it came out when the war pretty much ended. The troops got in there and started reporting on it. And until then nobody knew about those concentration camps that I am aware of.

RK: What was your reaction toward that?

AB: My reaction at that time was we left too many damn Germans alive.

RK: Did your life change as a result of World War II? Were things different?

AB: Well I don't know how it would have changed. I wasn't affected as far as the fighting or anything that way. So I don't suppose it changed it a lot.

RK: Did you or your family contribute to the war in anyway?

AB: Well being in the seventh grade I didn't contribute a lot, except a pain to the teachers. But Dad was a trapper and considered a necessary for things he was doing. He caught a lot of furs and they went into the government into the aircraft industry for pilot comfort and flight suits and one thing or another for the first three years of the war. He caught a lot of them.

RK: Do you remember any community efforts that helped with the war that went on?

AB: That was one of the amazing things of the Second World War. When the Second World War started we all went to war. In the Korean War, that was just a war sitting over in some foreign country and Vietnam was just another war that we were involved with, but in the Second World War we all went to war. The women went to work in the factories, airplane factories and building ships. We got all the scrap iron in Humbolt County or the county where I lived and huge piles of scrap iron were placed along the railroad. And they were picked up and hauled off to the factories, but it was just generally an effort of everybody. Everybody was involved. More so than...I don't know how to explain it except that. Everybody was involved. We bought war bonds. We went out and gathered all the scrap and hauled it in and I personally hauled quite a little bit of scrap iron and put it in the pile. And as far as I know no one was ever paid for it. It was just an effort to support the war that was going on. And that was the way it was.

RK: During the war, was there always talk about what was going on or were there ever times when things were quiet?

AB: It was always there. It was always there. We listened to the news to find out what was going on, the battles being fought. For a long time, after we got into the war, we kind of got chased around quite a bit. There was bombing. One time England was being bombed and the merchant marines were getting their ships sunk right and left and the Japanese had some battles there. It was a daily, lets find out what's going on and everybody did.

RK: Was there ever a worry that we were going to loose the war?

AB: We wouldn't have allowed it. No, there wasn't any worry of that that I know of, but then again at my age I was sure we were just going to take care of everything.

RK: What do you remember about rationing?

AB: Well several things, to start with we were only allowed so many shoes. They rationed the shoes we could buy. They rationed meat. They rationed sugar. Oh, we hated that because we couldn't get all the ice cream we wanted. Donuts were blah. And gasoline, we were allowed three gallons a week for a car. And you couldn't buy tires. If you wore out a tire you were in tough shape. You might find a used one some place, but that was all you could get. With gasoline being rationed they set speed limits at thirty-five miles an hour. That was the speed limit on the roads. It was for safety reasons. Some kind of clothes were hard to come by.

RK: What kind of clothes?

AB: Well, specifically ladies' silk material. You couldn't buy, women couldn't buy any hose for instance. At that time they didn't have nylons they were using silk. And flour was rationed. And I remember sugar was rationed pretty closely. It never seemed to bother us we always had plenty to eat. That wasn't the problem. I remember them shipping the stuff out to all the service men. And were feeding most of the world at that time with whatever they could get because they had so much disruption. Just that kind of stuff we didn't have.

RK: How did you make up for the things that you lost?

AB: Change your pattern. Really rationing was in a way a method of slowing people down and making them realize what was going on. I don't know that anyone was ever hungry in the worst sense of the word. There was plenty of bread and so you switched from roast beef to chicken that you could raise around some places. It was a matter of, instead of eating this, eat this because it was going out to the service men and the troops in foreign nations and this we could get here so we just switched back and forth between the things we could get here and we made it work.

RK: Did anyone resent having rations that you knew of?

AB: I don't know anybody that ever did. In my experience, like I said when this country went to war everyone went to war to support that war effort. We had to give up this we gave it up. We couldn't buy a car. You couldn't buy a car at that time. They just absolutely froze anything like an automobile. You couldn't buy any kind of an automobile or motorcycle or anything that way. It was used; they were all used for the war effort.

RK: What did you do to entertain yourselves?

AB: Well I was 13 years old. I was riding a bicycle. I was going to the movies. That wasn't any problem for me. I don't know what my parents did really. We were in a small community and town we were really worried about blackouts or anything. We got by.

RK: How did the war affect the community?

AB: Well so many of the men were gone and the women were doing so many of the jobs that the men were doing before. Up until that time the women worked in the home. They didn't have jobs like they do today. They didn't have a job in the office or anything that was done by men. As soon as that started the women were mobilized like the men. They didn't go to war as far as getting shot at, but they went to war as far as building what those men were using. We seen a lot of that in the community where there were jobs that they could handle strength wise and everything they just did it.

RK: Did you know of any young men who served in the war and didn't come home?

AB: Yep. I can only think of one right know, but he was a young man, a member of the church. Morby. His name was Morby and his dad worked on the railroad. And I remember when he went into the service they put a little silver star in the window. That was the common practice when you had someone in the service you put a star in the window. And they put the star in the window and about three months later they changed it to a gold star. He got killed in action. He was a little older than I was, but he was killed in action, the first action that he got in. It was very tragic, such a useless thing but that was the way it went. Some of them went in and didn't see any action and went through it fine. I don't remember all of them, but there was a list of them all the time on who was killed. But he's the only one that I can remember at that time. I knew several men later that were in the service that had served and that had served well and they were heroes at one time or another in the army and the air force.

RK: How did their families cope with losing their sons?

AB: Like all the rest of the families, it was a very traumatic thing. And as far as I know it didn't change much. His dad still worked for the railroad. It wasn't easy, but it did happened and they did what they had to do to get by.

RK: So where there a lot of young men who didn't come back?

AB: Like I said I don't remember a lot of them. They were a little older than I was and I wasn't really familiar with them. So I don't know but there were a lot of men who didn't come back. But my recollection is we lost 600,000 men in the war and that was just a minor part of the population that served in the service. We had nine million men in the service. We lost that many and when you take the total number of men that were killed in the Second World War it was probably 30 million. I mean a whole bunch of people, Russians, English. But that was the only one that I remember, that I was familiar with.

RK: When the war broke and you finally realized it was over what were the reactions of the people around you and your reaction?

AB: Oh, we celebrated. At that time I was probably a junior in High School, Senior. I remember some of the service men that came home that had been in the service for several years, three or four years and they had come out of the service and come home and went back to high school. And they out classed us so much in maturity and wanting to get stuff done that it made it hard for us guys in school. We couldn't keep up with them. They came home and wanted to go to college and wanted to get an education. It was quite a thing to have them come home. The older ones who had already been out of High School, a lot of them come home and I knew them. You remember Brother Albiston. He was a waste gunner in a B-24. At the beginning of the war, 25 missions over Germany was the maximum and they lost, I don't know like, 70% of those men that went over there they lost. And he came home. He made it out. He made 25 missions and he came home and was an instructor. It's funny when you talk about guys who come home. I knew him for years and years. I knew his family and I knew he was in the air force and in battle. And I talked to him many, many times and he never mentioned it, never said anything about it except that he was in an airplane. And that was the way it was with so many men in the war that come home. I can think of several men that you couldn't get anything out of them. They wouldn't talk to you. They would tell you some funny things you know, things that were kind of entertaining on war. But they wouldn't talk about their war experiences themselves. Mainly I guess because they didn't figure we would understand and because maybe it was just too difficult for them to express themselves on it until forty years went by. It was almost forty years that I knew brother Albiston and one day he would talk and he would tell me what went on in that war. And I knew two or three other fellows that were the same. It took forty years for them to open up. Especially when they got together and they started to talk and it reminded me so much of Moses' forty years in the desert. I think it took forty years for those people to forget that they were slaves and to function on their own. And I think that it was probably the one thing that I learned. It was a terrible experience for them. Brother Albiston had a silver star, which is heroic. You don't get them unless you do a lot of things. He never mentioned it. I didn't know until he died, some of the things that happened.

RK: So did you know members and nonmembers in the war? Did it seem like the members of the church were able to deal with it a little bit better than the nonmembers or were they about the same.

AB: I doubt if it is much different. You have to remember when that war was going on in the forties there was only a hundred people in this end of the state that were LDS. There wasn't very many of us. It took a while to get built up. I don't know how to tell you if one of them handled it better or not. There were some of them that didn't handle it very well at all. Their experiences were very hard on them. One of our members here in the ward talked about his experience, a couple of them, one of them was a member and one of them wasn't. Both of them had experiences in the Baton Death March. I don't know if you are aware of what that is or not, but that was when the Japanese captured the islands and they captured 23,000 men at that time, I think that was the figure that I heard. And I think that it was just 3,000 of them that ever came back. The Japanese were viscous with their prisoners of war. They just didn't believe people should surrender. So they worked them as slaves until they killed them or killed them outright. It was pretty mean. I had or went to a reunion up in Wendover where the pilots trained to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. I knew both pilots and their experience. I had a book. I had Mom look for it, but she couldn't find it. I had dinner with them and they were quite intelligent people, I mean very descent. They have no or they said it had to be done and they did it. They had no, it didn't bother them as far as mentally or anything. Some of those men that were on that mission that are living in Wendover ended up marrying some LDS girls out of Salt Lake. So they were LDS men, not all of them but one or two. And that was quite an experience talking to old Tivets. He didn't like the Japanese, but when I think about it the war ends. We as the American people have a tendency to okay it's done, it's over, let's forget it. We had to go about it to get it done. I think the United States did some marvelous things to help Germany recover and Japan. We could have been viscous and I'm sure that there were some bad things on both sides, but war's hell no matter what. But we helped them recover and that's the best thing that ever happened in this world that we helped them recover.

RK: Do you remember anything about the Japanese camps that we had here in the states?

AB: No, but I knew some people who were part of them afterwards that had been placed in those camps, and I remember the attitudes of those. They were Japs; well there was a German over here. They could think of me as a German with the Brinkerhoff name even though I'm Dutch and your dad, but we were white and we didn't stand out like that. The Japanese did and actually in some respects, even though it was a cruel thing to do, it actually saved even some of their lives because we did that. But it was a mistake as it turned out that we would do that. It was talked about and they went to camp. It was a terrible thing.

RK: So did the country keep it pretty quiet during the war about the camps or did people know about it?

AB: There wasn't many here. There was one around Bishop in California and in Utah, there were several in there. The people weren't prisoners. They were not worked, was my understanding. I think they tried to treat them half way descent but they were still regarded as an enemy alien so to speak. Some of them had been in this country for three

generations. It wasn't just a Japanese citizen they did that to. They did that to Japanese because they looked Japanese.

RK: Did you know anybody who was in the camps?

AB: Uh Huh. There is couple of families here in town that were in camps and when they got out they came here and started farming. Most of them are getting old and some of them have already died. But it was surprising what a little bit of ill feeling they seemed to show having that happen to them. When they had very good reason to feel that way because so many of them lost their homes and their businesses and everything else. They just were gone.

RK: Where there any hostile feelings toward them after the war?

AB: I don't think so. And I don't remember any. Like I said the war was over go home, forget it. That's kind of the way it was and it was sure nice to have the families come back that we hadn't had for four years.

RK: What was that like?

AB: Well being able to buy a new car, going to the service station and fill the tank with gasoline, buying a new tire for the car and not having some one threatening to bomb you, it was kind of nice. Go to the store and buy a piece of meat when it was available, it was a great relief when the war was over. I was working at a service station at the end of the war and during the latter part of the war I worked in a service station where I had to ration. And they said no more stamps so we could fill everybody's car. It was a good feeling and then we got guys coming home from the service. My dad had a young lady working for him and she's still here in town and her husband came home right after the war and it was quite a reunion and things like that. When school mates had come home and come back to school and lost his leg, you think about the kids who got killed that's one thing, but we seen a lot of people come home who weren't all there, with injuries and things like that. And probably one of the greatest things that happen because of that war was the G.I. Bill. Ever heard of that. That's were the guys who got out of the service could go to school and get paid a little bit to go to school. It improved the educational standards in the United States. They wanted to go to school and they wanted to build houses. They wanted a good life and that's what they did.

RK: I never thought about that before. Is there any stories that you remember that you want to share with me?

AB: No, I don't know about any stories, there were so many things that happened. But I think the thing that impressed me and that I remember more than anything was when that war started everybody went to war. If you were a little girl you went to war. If I was a little boy I went to war. Everybody knew there was a war and we all went to do it. It was an attitude. We're not being picked on because we have to do this, we gotta just do it. I really have always been impressed with the attitude of the people when this happened.

Now we're in a little town, not near the coast, but Uncle Rial, you remember Uncle Rial; he went to the coast to become a ship builder. He worked as a welder on the shipyard. People lived in some terrible conditions sometimes to do that. I had one friend that worked over at the Hawthorne ammunition depot. And he said he'd go to work in the morning and he'd get done working after ten or twelve hours and he'd go home and kick the guy out of his bed so he could go to work and he'd sleep in the same bed because they double shift in that bed.

RK: How long did they do that?

AB: I don't know how long. He ended up in the service, but that was after that. I imagine they had bunks or barracks built after that so I'm sure that didn't last forever. You have to remember that this country built all the stuff that we had; we built in three and a half years. Thousands of ships were built and sent across the water. Think of the airplanes they built the tanks, the trucks, and the food we raised to put in them and sent them over there. Well instead of building Ford cars they built airplanes in three and a half years.

RK: Nobody ever worried about making money?

AB: There were limits on what they would pay you. You were paid this much and that was the way it was. It was a tremendous effort on part of the United States. You take Germany for instance; they never did utilize their women. They never did utilize the force they had in their women to build things. They tried to use slave labor from Russia and other places. It was different in the United States; here we all went to work. You heard the song Rosie the Riveter? Well, she was working on the airplanes. It was a big thing for the gals to weld and to rivet and to cut sheet metal and to build airplanes. They did everything and they didn't quit. The opportunity started then and it still goes. That's why this country is so great, because they did those kind of things.

RK: Alright I think we're done. Thank you for talking to me.

AB: I wowed you with all the wild stories in the world. No I wasn't right in the war, but I remembered that was one thing that always impressed me. That everybody went to war, everybody. And it hasn't been that way sense.

RK: Do you think if there was another world war that the country would be as supportive as they would back then?

AB: Oh, I think they'd be supportive. I don't know what would happen on something's, but I think that you, that how this works is this way...If I get you and pick on you a little bit and pinch you and pinch you, pull your hair a little bit and I can do that forever and you'll just sit there and take it, don't do that, and you might get a little up set, but if I hauled off and really slugged you and hurt you what would you do?

RK: Fight back.

AB: Okay. This is what happened in the Second World War. We had been picked on a little bit by Germany and a little bit by Japan and we'd done a little bit of that too. And we were a nation of pacifists who really didn't want to be involved in someone else's problems until Japan bombed us. It was like Japan slugging you. Now we were able to fight back. We weren't going to put up with that.

RK: Were there any regrets about not getting into the war before Pearl Harbor?

AB: No. There were so people that go into the war and the President, President Roosevelt was actually giving England some help even at his own risk. So those things...As far as regrets, I think that there were some things done that were probably wrong but nevertheless, hindsight is very good. I could have been a Saturday night quarterback pretty good. In some ways it brought the country out of the Great Depression.

RK: Did the people like Roosevelt or were they upset with him?

AB: Roosevelt has fought a hard battle all his life, but he was elected four times president. Now what does that tell you?

RK: They liked him.

AB: Okay, there was a whole bunch of people in the Great Depression and when the war started we were still in the Great Depression and it help lift the burden of the Depression. We all went to work and it never came back like it was before. But they liked him and I liked him. And I heard a lot of people say he was the worst president we ever had. Let me tell you what, I don't think this country would be what it is today if it wasn't for Roosevelt. I think Roosevelt kept us from going communist, socialist, or something I don't know. This country would be something terrible. But that is a difference of opinion between me and maybe your dad about that. History has proven he's a great person. Did you know that he was a crippled?

RK: Yeah I knew that.

AB: Any other questions?

RK: No I think we are done. Thank you.

AB: Your are quite welcome.