

**John Baker**  
**World War II Veterans History Project**  
**Interviewed: September 8, 2009**  
**By: Jean Reynolds**  
**Transcript by Mike Colgero**

Jean Reynolds: Tell me your parents name and where they were from.

John Baker: My dad's name was Fred W. Baker and he was born in Alabama. My mother's name was Anna Oswald. Oswald was her maiden name and she was born in South Dakota.

JR: How was it that your parents met each other?

JB: My dad worked in the oil fields in Oklahoma and he was a Roustabout. My mother worked in the boarding house. Cooking, I guess, for all these oil field workers. That's how Dad met my mother. Dad was ten years older than my mother when they got married and they had nine children.

JR: So they met in Oklahoma then?

JB: They met and married in Oklahoma and dad worked in Oklahoma until 1933. When he got to the age of forty-five, they laid him off. He lost his job. So there he was, at that point in time with eight children. He had no income. He went down to Texas, Texas City. No, it was New London, Texas and he got a job and came back home and he got to thinking about it. He didn't think he was qualified to hold that job down so he wouldn't take it. It was a good thing because just after that, that school in New London ignited, blew up and if we would have moved down there, we all would have been in that school.

So anyway, in 1935 he loaded up his family and headed for Arizona and wound up in Mesa. He went from job to job trying to make a living for his kids. My two oldest sisters were working in homes. Housekeeping is what they doing. They were just young girls, 15 or 16 years old and we went to school as best we could. I went as far as I could go, but had to stay home and help make a living for the kids. I got as much education as I could and I started nights, but I didn't finish nights. I quit and stayed home on the farm to help make a living.

When I got to 18, I went to the West coast and I went to work for North American Aircraft. I worked for North American Aircraft for about six or eight months. It was difficult to get to work from where I lived so I got to looking around. I went to work for Douglas Aircraft and I could walk to work. So I quit North American and I went to work for Douglas Aircraft.

*[section deleted]*

I got tired so I went home and this was in the first part of November and on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November I joined up for the Air Force.

JR: Ok, let's back track a little bit. When were you born?

JB: I was born February 25, 1923.

JR: 1923 and where?

JB: Oklahoma. Coweta, Oklahoma, just south of Tulsa. Coweta, that's an Indian name.

JR: Now can you name off all your brothers and sisters in birth order?

JB: Oh yeah. My oldest sister's name is Irene and my sister under her was Margie. Margaret was her given name. Then, I come next and then I have a sister just under me named Mary. She had spinal meningitis when she was two and lost her hearing and vocal chords, so she was a deaf mute. And then after her come my brother, Fred and then after her, was my sister Ruthie. After her was my sister, Georgie and then Peggy and last was my brother Donald.

JR: Lots of sisters.

JB: Six of them. Six girls and each one had three brothers apiece.

JR: Yep, that's right. So it looks like you came to Arizona when you were about 12 years old?

JB: 12 years old. Yes ma'am.

JR: First of all, going back you were talking about your dad during the Depression. How did the Great Depression affect your family?

JB: In what way you mean?

JR: Well, you know just kind of financially or socially?

JB: When my dad worked in the oil fields, he had a good job. He was a chief mechanic at a gasoline refinery. And this gasoline refinery they took wet gas, what they called wet natural gas and they compressed it. And then condensed it and made gasoline out of it. And that's where he worked and kept these big engines running. And then during the Depression, of course, things went to heck and there wasn't no demand. There wasn't no

need for gasoline and that's when he lost his job. Up until then, he had a good job and got good pay for it. But after that, it was pretty rough until we got on our feet you know.

JR: So were the older kids kind of helping out at that time after he lost his job?

JB: I think my two older sisters got out on their own. I was the oldest boy so it was up to me to help support the family. When we came back from the service, I went back to farming with my dad. My brother said, "That's not for me." So he left. He took off. I stayed with him for two years farming with my dad when I quit. That's when I took a job with International.

JR: Ok, alright. Now you said your family came to Arizona in 1935?

JB: Yes ma'am. My youngest sister was born October 10<sup>th</sup>. Just after she was born, that's when we came to Arizona, 1935.

JR: Now do you know what it was that drew your family to Arizona specifically?

JB: Some place to make a living. Fact is, he knew some people. He knew a family that lived in Queen Creek. He set his sights for Queen Creek. He worked for the (FBI?) for a little bit but that was it. Kinda struck out on our own.

JR: Do you remember how your family came to Arizona? Did you go by train or car?

JB: Oh no, we drove out, he drove out.

JR: So you had nine kids, almost? You had eight children in the car?

JB: We had eight children in the car. We had a big "Hubmobile, Hubmobile Eight". It was a great big car. Good thing it was!

JR: So you brought all your belongings with you and everything?

JB: Oh yeah. Of course so much of that stuff we had to leave back home anyway, but we made it.

JR: Yeah. Do you remember what you thought when you came to the Valley? Do you remember what you thought? You were 12 when you came into the Valley, into the Mesa area, do you remember what you thought about it?

- JB: No, citrus trees. That's about it. Different climate, different country. Saguaro cactus. We never seen a Saguaro cactus before. Of course, in those days, a lot of people hadn't. But, it was different.
- JR: Now, so you started in Mesa. Then did you guys move somewhere after that?
- JB: Moved to Chandler and we ended up out to Chandler Heights. That's where dad got a farm in Chandler Heights. That's where he retired. When he quit farming, he lived in Chandler Heights.
- JR: Do you around what the location was, where the farm was in Chandler Heights?
- JB: Well, he had different plots all over Chandler Heights.
- JR: Ok. Where was the house at?
- JB: Over on the East side. I don't remember the name of the street. It's been a long time ago. Fact is, I'm getting a little ahead of myself but when my wife and I got married, we moved just south of where my dad lived. I bought 10 acres from him and I built our first house and it's still standing there.
- JR: Ok. Do you know where that's at?
- JB: It's on the same street and I don't know the name of the street.
- JR: Ok. Well if you remember, let me know because it would be kinda neat to see where that is. Ok, so let's see, you went to school until about the ninth grade?
- JB: Yep.
- JR: And were you going to school at?
- JB: Chandler?
- JR: Chandler? OK, so you started Chandler High then? You started your first year at Chandler High?
- JB: I graduated out of grammar school in Chandler. Then, I started in ninth but I never did finish the ninth even.
- JR: Ok, what were you doing after you finished school? What were you doing after that?

JB: I went to work at a dairy. And I worked in a dairy until I was 18 years old.

JR: Do you remember the name of the dairy?

JB: No. It was just a family. It didn't have a name and they're all gone now.  
[Gephart Dairy]

JR: Was it in Chandler or somewhere else?

JB: Outside of Chandler.

JR: So when you turned 18 you decided to go to California? What made you decide to do that?

JB: To better myself. And I did. I went out there and got a good job.

JR: Did you decide that you wanted to go to California to be an aircraft mechanic or how did you move into that line of work?

JB: I went to California to get into aircraft because at that point in time, my sister just older than me was married to a guy that went out there and worked for Douglas Aircraft. I thought if he could do it, I could do it. That's why I went out there. Fact is I lived with them when I went out there.

JR: Alright, ok so you were out there and you were living with your sister and you were worked for North American Aircraft?

JB: Yes ma'am.

JR: And what kind of work were you doing there?

JB: I was a riveter. Then when I quit North American and went to work for Douglas. I was still a riveter.

JR: Can you describe what that's like, doing that work?

JB: Just putting superstructures together in a jig and then building them together. When I worked at North American, I was working on the fuselage in the cockpit area. When I worked at Douglas, I was working on wings. I was assembling, putting wings together.

JR: Now you were saying that at the time you were working in the aircraft plant, the war had already started.

- JB: Well the war started when I was working at North American. But then after that I quit them and went to work at Douglas and after that I quit Douglas and went into the service.
- JR: Ok. How did the war affect the plant where you were working at? You know as far as like an impact on the work force or?
- JB: Oh well, we worked around the clock, seven days a week. We got so far behind that the women couldn't work overtime. So they could work 8-hour shifts but then they went home. See I worked a second shift all the time. When they went home at midnight, the boys that were left, there was only about a half a dozen of us worked until four o'clock in the morning trying to catch up. Every night, we worked seven days a week.
- JR: That's a lot of work.
- JB: And we worked from 4 o'clock in the evening until 4 o'clock in the morning.
- JR: So you had a 12-hour shift?
- JB: Well, eight hours and then four hours overtime.
- JR: Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor was attacked?
- JB: Yeah, I was working at North American.
- JR: Do you remember that particular day?
- JB: No, not in particular. I just know that everything was in turmoil. Fact is a lot of people didn't know where Pearl Harbor was. But we just knew that the Japanese had hit us. But I had already made arrangements to come home on a holiday, but then when Pearl Harbor was hit all passes were cancelled. We didn't get to go anywhere.
- JR: So production was increased at that time. So tell me about why it was that you came back to Chandler? Why did you come back to Chandler when you say you quit from Douglas?
- JB: Well, my folks lived in Chandler Heights. No. I beg your pardon, they lived just east of Gilbert and that's when I went in the service. After I went in the service, that's when they moved to Chandler Heights. He got his farm out there.
- JR: Ok. So what was it that made you leave California and come back to Arizona?

JB: To go in the service.

JR: Ok so that why. You decided to enlist in the service as opposed to working at the aircraft plant?

JB: Yes ma'am.

JR: You talked about you got frustrated.

JB: I got frustrated working with those girls and old women. They were 25 years old and I was only 19. No, you couldn't make them work and they only worked a certain speed. You had work to do and you couldn't get it out and I just got tired of it. So I told the boss and he said he'd get me deferments. But I told him, "No I want to go in the service." So I came home and went into the service.

JR: Now what branch of service did you enlist in?

JB: US Army Air Corp. At that time it was the US Army Air Corp.

JR: What made you choose that particular branch?

JB: I didn't want in the infantry. So I chose Air Force. I liked aircraft anyway, so that was my choice.

JR: When did you enter service?

JB: November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1942.

JR: And where did you enter service at?

JB: Phoenix. I went from Phoenix to Fort MacArthur, California. That was my induction center. I stayed about three or four days. That's when we got our uniforms, got a physical and whatnot. We shipped out and I went to Wichita Falls, TX. Sheppard Field. I went to Sheppard Field when we got there, we went to basic center, you know, basic training center. I was there about three days taking aptitude tests, to find out the best thing that you were qualified to do. And, we were fully expecting to go to basic training any day when we were all through with our training. So the third day, we had fall out after lunch and this little PFC said the following named men step forward for shipping. I was the third man called and we shipped out. I didn't have any basic training. I shipped from the south end of the field to the north end of the field. The north end of the field was the schools. I went to aircraft mechanics school right there.

I never had any basic training. We walked that two miles. It was two miles from the basic center to the where the school was. I say we couldn't march because we didn't know how to march, so we just walked out there.

JR: How did you feel about that?

JB: Well, we got out of basic training and we were glad of that. But when we started the school, of course, we had to march to school from the barracks to the school. It was heck trying to march when you didn't know how to march. Hut 2 and all that bunch a stuff you know? Right, left, but we learned. We learned the hard way. By doing it and seeing other people, we learned it. We picked our own leaders for the squad and picked a right leader and left leader and front. We just learned. That's how we learned to march.

JR: Can you describe the aircraft mechanics school, what that was like?

JB: The first day, we had a woman instructor. There were about 25 of us in the class. The first day we had seats; we sat down at a desk. So we all sat down and she came in the room. She said, "Gentlemen, this is what they call a screwdriver." I could have hit her, you know? She had a little screwdriver about that long. Well, I guess she thought we didn't know what a screwdriver was. But that was our first day in school.

After that, we didn't have any more seats. You couldn't sit down. Every class you stood up. We went so many days on a day shift and so many days on a night shift and so many days on a graveyard shift. And then you rotated see.

JR: So you were just doing hands-on training?

JB: Hands on. Everything was hands on. And you didn't repair anything, you just removed and replaced. Like a starter or a generator or a carburetor. You didn't overhaul them you just took the old one off and put the new one on.

JR: What did you like best about the training that you had? What did you like best about your time at the aircraft mechanic school?

JB: That's what I wanted.

JR: What part of it did you like best?

JB: All of it. Because we knew that at the end of it, when we finished the school, we'd graduate as aero-engineers. That's what we were striving

for. We wanted to fly, so that's what we got. When we graduated, we became flyers. It was what they called aero-engineers.

JR: Was there anything in the mechanics school that you found was difficult or challenging?

JB: No. Not really.

JR: So you had a knack for mechanics.

JB: Always. I've always been mechanically inclined. It was pretty easy for me, really. For instance, you go into the engine room and it had the engine mounted and it was run-able. This instructor would go in there and he would jimmy it so it wouldn't start. So you had to go in there and find out why that thing wouldn't start. But I didn't have too much trouble. He had the switch in the ignition system or he had a valve in the fuel system shut off or whatever. You could find them, if you were inclined to know that. It wasn't too much trouble.

But the biggest thing you had was where they put you in an aircraft and somebody had torn out all the cables. Then you had to re-cable that thing, like the control cables. It was difficult trying to find out where they went and how they went. That was the biggest challenge.

JR: How long were you in the mechanics school?

JB: I can't remember whether it was seven weeks or nine weeks. It's in my paper work. But I don't remember exactly. It seems like it was nine weeks.

JR: So when you finished up you graduated and you were an aero-engineer, right?

JB: Yes.

JR: Ok and what happened after that?

JB: When I graduated Sheppard Field for advanced training, I went from Sheppard Field to Baltimore, Maryland to Glenn L. Martin. I went to school on B-26's, bombers, medium bombers and the B-25, which is the North American B-25. It's a Mitchell. When I graduated, they sent me to Glenn L. Martin up in Maryland. That was a B-26 factory and I was up there for thirty days. We followed the plane from the minute it was started until it was finished. That was just for the advanced training.

Then when I left there, I went to Omaha, Nebraska to another advanced training for Glenn L. Martin. There I picked up my plane. When I picked up my plane, I was ready for flight then. So I went from there to Shelfrige Field, Michigan. Three of us. Three planes and the crew. Three-man crews were all we had: pilot, co-pilot and the aero-engineer. When we got to Shelfrige Field, they didn't want us. It was three planes and they didn't want us because we didn't have advanced training. We weren't ready for combat. So they shipped us down. I was there for about a week or ten days maybe. But the town, little old town of Mount Clements was off limits, you couldn't go to town. But it was during, right at that time it was Memorial Day. We marched in town. They let us go into town to march the parade, but they wouldn't let us go into town with a pass. It was off limits. But after that they shipped us out and we went down to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina to an advanced base down there, there were groups getting ready to go overseas. We tried to get with them, but they didn't want us because none of us guys had any gunnery. So we couldn't join them. From there they shipped us down to McDill Field, Florida to the 21<sup>st</sup> Bomber group and that's where I was assigned to the 398. That's where I stayed as long as I was flying as an engineer.

JR: OK, so you were with the 398?

JB: 398 Squadron.

JR: Squadron, OK.

JB: 21<sup>st</sup> Bomb group.

JR: Now just for the purpose of someone who maybe isn't familiar with what was happening in WWII. As far as the way the planes would be set up with the different men that would be involved with the plane. You talk about there was a pilot and a co-pilot and an aero-engineer. Can you tell me what each of those persons was responsible for in the plane?

JB: Well, the pilot was the pilot. The co-pilot, he was supposed to take care of the landing gear and the flaps and check all the gauges make sure the gauges were reading right and take over in case something happened to the pilot. The pilot had a heart attack or got hit or whatever, then the co-pilot could fly the plane. Well, we're getting a little ahead of time here, but when I was in Florida, Lieutenant Gleese was my pilot. Lieutenant Gleese said that he wanted all men in his crew to know how to fly that aircraft. Because any man could fly that plane home, if need be. But if just he or the co-pilot was the only two men aboard that plane that could fly that plane, if they both got hit and it was highly possibly, then you were doomed. There would be nobody else to fly that plane. But then the pilot had his responsibilities, the co-pilot had his and he still had his. He had to

perform daily pre-flight for that plane. Every morning, he would pre-flight that aircraft whether he flew it or not. You had to pre-flight that aircraft. If everything was perfect, you never carried your log on your initial. If you checked everything out and everything checked out perfect you signed your initial down here, meaning that you verified that everything was perfect. Well, you were responsible for that aircraft. So he always carried it on a red diagonal. A red diagonal at the bottom you would put down what that red diagonal meant like as if you had a scuffed right tire or if you had some little something that was insignificant. But you wouldn't sign your name. You would just put that little red diagonal so if the plane was ready to fly, it could be flown. But in order for the pilot to fly that plane, he had to sign that diagonal off see. So he signed that off. He was responsible. Now if you pre-flighted that aircraft and there was something wrong, you put a red "X" in the square. So nobody could sign that plane off. Even the pilot couldn't sign his name. That plane was not flyable until that was repaired.

JR: Now could you tell me what is entailed with the pre-flight?

JB: Yes, the pre-flight meant that you had to start the engine. You check your pressures, your oil pressure and your fuel pressure. You run up your engine and you check to make sure your prop was working properly. And you make sure that you had two mags on it. Each cylinder had two spark plugs and one mag took care of one row of spark plugs and the other mag took care of the other row of spark plugs. So when you revved your engine up and you shut off one mag, if that engine lost 200 RPM you had to change spark plugs. But if it didn't loss 200 RPM then you went to the other mag see, and checked it. You couldn't lose over 200 RPM's or you couldn't take that plane off the ground.

And we would do our best. We would sit there and burn those things out. Rev it up and run things for a long time to burn those things for a long time to burn those spark plugs to get the carbon off of them and to make sure that they didn't short out to give you your 200 RPM drop. If you get to where it wouldn't drop 200 RPM you could take it to the air.

JR: Now what kind of planes were you mostly working on or with?

JB: In Florida, it was the B-26. It was what they called the Martin Marauder and we had a name for it: the Widow Maker and the Flying Cigar. We had a motto there in Tampa Bay and we had a motto there in McDill Field, "One a Day in Tampa Bay." And we just about lost one a day in Tampa Bay through pilot error. The military stopped the B-26 program when I was down there. That's when they shipped all of us out. But Jimmy Dolittle said there's nothing wrong with that aircraft. He said, "Let me fly it." So he came down there and flew it. Not at our base, but at one base.

He flew the B-26. He said, "This is a good ship." He said, "This is pilot error is what's doing it." And he was right. It was a good ship. But I lost my ship. It wasn't through pilot error though; it was through hydraulic failure. We lost our ship.

JR: Can you describe that?

JB: We landed and come to stop. The brake system worked off the hydraulic system. Most aircraft in those days, your brakes worked a separate system hydraulically. But his B-26 worked off of your main hydraulic system. It was reduced down. Your pressure was reduced down from 1000 PSI down to I think 300 – 350 and that was your brake pressure. But when we landed, we had hydraulic pressure. But when we went to stop, we lost everything and we couldn't stop. So we hit an aircraft. We hit another plane. We hit a truck and we hit the hanger and it wiped us out.

JR: Was anybody injured?

JB: Nope, all three of us got out without. I got a scratch on my finger but that was it. When the pilot said, "No brakes," the co-pilot grabbed for the emergency brake. Between the pilot and the co-pilot was two emergencies: one was the bomb bay to drop the bombs, to salvo the bombs, and one was your brake control, the air brakes. Well, the co-pilot grabbed the first thing he found and he salvo'd the bomb bays. It didn't do any good, but by the time I got a hold of that brake, the airbrake, we'd hit. And I didn't know I had pulled it, I got a hold of it but I didn't know I'd pulled it.

So during the inquest, this Colonel got up and said, "What I want to know is who pulled the air-brake?" Well, at that time the pilot come to me and said, "Did you pull it?" I said, "I don't know," but when he asked that question, the pilot looked at me and winked. He knew damn well, I had pulled it accidentally. Just the momentum of stopping, I pulled that thing. But that was the only thing that saved us and by that plane.

JR: That was in Florida?

JB: That was in Florida.

JR: So you were in Florida with the 398 Squadron. What happened after you were stationed there in Florida?

JB: Ok, when the 21<sup>st</sup> Bomb group broke up, they shipped us all out. A bunch of us were shipped to Louisiana. I can't remember the name of the base, but it was a pilot training base. Pilot training to fly a P-47 aircraft, fighter aircraft. So I got there and they gave me a plane to crew and some guys to

help me. We crewed that plane and we taught those guys to fly those P-47's. And I did that until I got a chance to go overseas and I took it.

JR: Tell me about how you got that chance to go overseas.

JB: We just got word that they was looking for guys to go over as volunteers. We thought that was our chance to get back into a Bomber group, our only chance to get back. Get out of the fighter group because we were trained for bombers. We were crewing fighter aircraft and we thought it was out of place. So we thought, "Well let's get overseas and we'll get back into a real bomber group." Well, we signed up and went overseas.

I left there and went to Dyersburg, Tennessee. That was our processing point. That was where they processed all our clothes and made sure our clothes were all in good shape and everything. They gave us our gun. That's where they gave us our rifle. And then I left Dyersburg and I went to New Jersey, Camp Kilmer. That was my debarkation center.

JR: Now what year was that? Do you remember when that was?

JB: February 1943.

JR: OK. And so you're in New Jersey and you're getting ready to deploy and head out to Europe, right? That's where they were sending you? How did you feel about that?

JB: I was ready to go. Well, if I hadn't have been, I never would have signed up to go. I could have stayed there in Louisiana.

JR: So you're in the European Front and your port of debarkation was in New Jersey, right?

JB: Right, we left Camp Kilmer and got on the Queen Elizabeth. 17,000 of us.

JR: Do you remember what it was like on the boat?

JB: Hectic. You couldn't reach out nowhere without touching a human being. There were 27 of us in a little old stateroom and one toilet for 27 of us. It was a bit crowded. It was a British ship. And, of course, it was all crewed by British. We had 2 meals a day. Of course, they couldn't feed over 2 meals a day because there was so many of us. I think they were lucky to feed that many people twice a day. We thought we were starving to death. Mostly we ate oatmeal for breakfast and mutton in the evening. When you got out of the chow line in the morning and ate, you got back in the chow line for the evening because it took you that long to eat. So we thought we were about starved to death. We were scouting around the ship one

evening and we found where they were soaking some prunes behind a chain link fence. We waited until things got kind of quiet and you didn't see over 15 to 20 people at one time. We broke into that chain link fence and we got a canteen cup full of prunes. Each one of us. We ate those damn prunes. And can you imagine one toilet, the next day? But we didn't starve to death, we finally (made?). It was only 6 days going over.

JR: Six days. Where did you land at?

JB: Scotland. We landed in Scotland. We landed in Scotland and then we boarded a train and went to England. We got down to a relocation center down there. We thought, "Well now here's where we're going to get back into the bomber group." But that's when they shipped us out to Fort SAD. Fort SAD was building up. When we got there they gave us a Quonset hut to live in. The place where we were repairing aircraft was a bombed out RAF hanger that the Germans had bombed them out. They cleaned them up and there was no top or nothing. We were repairing aircraft there just on the cement floor. And we didn't know it at the time but they were building our part of the base which was prefabbed over the south end of the field, which was our three big hangers. The supply hanger and all the supply buildings and all our barracks were all prefabbed. Our barracks were all plywood. There were 17 men to the barracks. They moved us over there about 6 weeks after we got there. And that's where we stayed.

JR: So you moved out of the Quonset hut into the barracks.

JB: Yeah.

JR: Tell me a little bit about the 4th SAD. Tell me again what SAD stands for.

JB: Force (?) Air Depot.

JR: And where was that located?

JB: Four SAD's. The first SAD was at Burtonwood, England but I don't know where the other two were located. But the first was Burtonwood and we were the fourth one.

JR: Ok and where was that located?

JB: Just out of Ipswich about 12 to 14 miles. That was over on the East side of England. It wasn't too far from the coast.

JR: Ok. So tell me what you were doing there at the 4<sup>th</sup> SAD. What was your duty?

JB: Well, we were supposed to have so many days to get a damaged aircraft back in the air. We had P-47's and P-51's, not at that point in time. We had P-47's and P-38's and a few P-51's, but not very many, the older ones. We repaired those aircraft and got them back in the air. And when the later model P-51's came out, they added the sixth gun, the other two outside guns on. When the pilot would get into a tight turn, he'd buckle that wing and we had to replace those wings. The wing is actually half of the aircraft. When you lift the fuselage off the wing, you have half your plane gone. But anyway, me and my crew and about a dozen or so other crews were given a hanger and that's all we did. Assemble aircraft wings, P-51 wings. We did that until the war's end. We got to being pretty good at it.

JR: How many were in your crew?

JB: Four men.

JR: So in that photograph that you showed me, that's the four men that were in your crew?

JB: Five men, yes. But one man didn't stay very long. If he wouldn't work on my crew, I wouldn't keep him. They give me one guy and he was an orderly in the Officer's quarters. The Line Chief brought him to me and said, "John, you think you make a mechanic out of him?" And I said, "If he wants to learn, I'm willing to try him out." And he made a good mechanic. He said, "I'll do anything in the world rather than go back into that Officer's quarters." And he would. He would do anything I would tell him to do. He was a good mechanic. He didn't want to be an orderly.

JR: Do you remember any of the men that you worked with?

JB: Oh yeah, I spoke to Lonnie Morris. We corresponded. He's gone now, but he had a stroke 10 – 15 years ago, but I still corresponded. I did with his wife for a long time after until he expired. But I lost contact with her, so I don't know what's happened. But he's the only one I corresponded with out of the crew.

JR: You stayed at 4<sup>th</sup> SAD until the war ended?

JB: I stayed 20 months there. Then when the war ended, they shipped us home by the point system. I had 51 points and they were all service points. You had so many points for how long you had been in and how long you had been overseas. I only had 51 points and that was a long way from coming home. So they took me and the other guys and we

disassembled that base. We got rid of it. When we were finished tearing that base down, they shipped me to France.

JR: Do you remember when you went to France?

JB: I come home in February and I was in France for four months, so four months prior to that is when I went to France. About September or October?

JR: Of 1945?

JB: Of 1945. And that's when I went from the 8<sup>th</sup> Air force to the 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force. In the states here, I was in the 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force. Then I when I went overseas, they put in the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force. Then when I went over to France, they put me back in the 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force.

JR: Now going back to your time at Fourth SAD. Tell me a little bit about the kind of damage you would see on the planes.

JB: Well you would see mostly bullet holes. Some metal torn off. But if a plane was damaged too bad, he never got home. He never got home. But most of the stuff we had was mostly bullet damage that you could repair pretty quick. But if, like those wings being buckled, that wasn't due to artillery fire or ack-ack fire that was during combat, during maneuvers. If a plane was hit very hard, he never got back home because if shrapnel hit, like a P-51, if shrapnel hit like a coolant line, that plane wouldn't fly very long. He'd be forced down. The engine would burn up. And the old P-47, I've seen some of those come back with a cylinder gone off of it and it was still flying.

JR: Now the planes that came in for your men to repair, where were they coming from? What battles were they involved in or where were they involved?

JB: Usually all over Europe there: France, Belgium, Germany or Holland or where ever it might be. But 4<sup>th</sup> SAD was here and this Operations was over here. This Operations had 100 planes. They had to get 100 planes in the air every time they went up. They got 100 planes in the air and out of the 100 planes, they might lose 10 or 15 that one day. Maybe out of the 10 or 15, maybe only two would get back. The rest of them wouldn't come home. Out of the two that would come back, maybe we would get them and fix. Maybe they wouldn't have a scratch.

JR: So they would be flying the damaged planes back?

JB: Oh yeah. If they could fly them back, they would fly them back. But a lot of times, they would land them in a British field or some other place away from their home base. Then that's where we would have to go over and patch them up to get them home. We would go over to a British base and patch up a plane and get it back. At least get it back to our place to where we could fix it.

JR: Do you have any specific memories from being there of something that was difficult or very memorable for you at that time?

JB: We had one B-24 that crashed right there in the supply barracks. I don't remember how many people were in supply, but it was quite a few. We had an air raid alert and these bombers were coming home. They claimed that some German plane had slipped in with our bombers and shot down this B-24. When our bombers were coming back, they were just over the treetops, coming home down on street level, almost to get back home.

They hit this B-24 and all the guys had bailed out. They thought that it was clear of us, but the B-24 went over in circles and came back by itself. Then crashed into the barracks and burned up a bunch of barracks. But everybody was out because we was out on the air raid alert. We were all in foxholes. And that's why nobody was killed because everybody was out. If we hadn't have had that air raid there, would have been a bunch of guys in bed when that plane would have hit.

JR: Did you have a lot of air raids?

JB: Three or four is all. The Germans hit us three or four times, strafing at night. They come in.

JR: Can you describe what that was like?

JB: They would hit you and were gone before you knew it almost. The most troublesome we had was the V-1 bomb. They sent them over every three hours. I'd say maybe eight or ten of them and we were right in the path. They would ship them from Belgium to London and they would send those things off. They would come over us, maybe five or six at a time, at intervals about 20 minutes apart. Just enough to keep you awake all night. You had to get out. You couldn't stay in your barracks. You had to get out in your foxhole. That would keep you awake all night. That was your main thing. Those V-1 bombs, they never fell on us. They would either knock them down before us or after us or they wouldn't knock them down at all. They would hit London. But the V-2's now, you wouldn't hear them coming. They didn't hit us anyway, they would hit London. You wouldn't hear them coming until they had already hit. They would hear the "shriek" after they had already hit.

JR: Another question that we ask is, and I ask everybody this question because they had been in various places at various times in different parts in the Pacific or the European fronts. But the question is, how did you feel about basically the people that the US was fighting? For example, the Germans at that point right, how did you feel about the Germans at that time?

JB: Well, I had no hatred for the German people. I hated the big wigs more or else. A German soldier was just doing what he was told to do, just like I was. I had no love for him, but I didn't hate him. You shoot a man because he's going to shoot you first if you don't. But I didn't have deep hatred for them. I didn't love them, but there was a war to fight and you had to win the war at whatever the cost may be. You can't hesitate to shoot somebody.

JR: Being the aero-engineer, once you got into England, were you ever up in the air with a pilot and the co-pilot? That kind of set up? Or were you always on the ground fixing planes? Did you ever get up in a plane and fly?

JB: Oh yeah, I flew all the time in Florida. We flew about every third day. They had four-hour flights, but it was every third day. It was more or else pilot training. And you were training, too, because you had bombing runs to make. You had to practice bombing runs, but we only had the three-man crew. We didn't have the whole bomb load personnel because there was no reason to have them. You didn't have a tail gunner or waist gunners or radio operators because you didn't need them. You only needed the three men. You had to have the bombardier. Four men, but other than that, you didn't have to have anybody else.

JR: Now what about in England? Did you ever go up in a plane in England?

JB: Yeah. This was after the war now. We went to France to get champagne for the officers. We had a little aircraft that the pilot would take us over to get the champagne for the officers. But when I got to France, I finally got back on flying status. We flew mail from Villiacoubleich to Germany, Weisbotten. We flew from Villiacoubleich to Weisbotten. We did mail hops. We carried mail over and we carried mail back.

JR: And the war had ended by that time.

JB: That was after the war.

JB: In France, we had a bunch of German prisoners that helped us down on the front line that helped us keep the place clean. If you tried to give them

a gun, they would run backwards. They were nice guys. They were blond haired, nice looking guys.

JR: So in France you were stationed where in France?

JB: Villiacoubleich. Just outside of Paris, about eight miles, I think it was.

JR: I think you wrote down something so that I could figure out the spelling is of that, because that's French.

JB: Villiacoubleich. See when I first got there, we went into a Chateau. That's big, like a hotel. Then they finally got a place up on a field for us. It was a Quonset hut. They got Quonset Huts ready for us. That's where we had our books. We had a little old coke stove about that big. It wouldn't heat nothing, so we'd pipe 150 octane gas into it until they caught us.

JR: Well, that was during the winter.

JB: Darn right, it was cold!

JR: When you went into France, and this was after the war had ended, do you remember what it looked like? What the landscape look like, what did the town look like?

JB: Well it looked alright to me.

JR; It hadn't been affected by the war?

JB: No. The fact is England looked worse than France ever did. England was bombed out. But, France didn't.

We used to go to Reims, France to get that champagne. The place was pretty well bombed out. But that was after the war.

JR: Now where were you on VE day?

JB: Victory in Europe? I was at Fort SAD.

JR: Do you remember that? Do you remember hearing the news?

JB: Yeah they wouldn't let us go to town. We had to stay on base.

JR: How did you feel about?

JB: Well you couldn't celebrate. The only celebrating you did was go down to the pub and have a beer. That's all you did. They didn't want any GI's to go to town because they were afraid they would tear up the town. I don't know why they thought that, but I guess they thought it, so you had to stay home.

JR: How did you feel about hearing that the war was ending?

JB: Well I was kind of glad of it. I know Dad spoke to me one time and asked, "When are you going to come home?" I didn't have anything to say about it. I have there for the duration plus, so I had to wait.

JR: Now a couple of months later we had VJ day. Victory in Japan. Do you remember hearing about that?

JB: We were sweating that out because we thought we might have to go to Japan. After that bomb, we thought we're not going to have to go now. Other than that we were glad the war was over.

JR: When did you leave the service?

JB: I left on March 7, 1946. We left Villiacoubleich and I went to Antwerp, Belgium. I stayed up there for about a week or ten days. I was waiting for a ship to come home. We finally boarded the Wilson Victory. We had rations on board for 1200 men. There were only 600 of us that boarded that ship. We had all that food and only 600 people to eat it. And we couldn't possibly eat it, so we had to throw it out. We had to throw it overboard. It took us 14 days to come home on the Wilson. We landed at Camp Kilmer and we flew to Fort Bliss, El Paso. I was there for about two or three days. We were discharged and a fellow drove us home in his car. He drove us back to Chandler. That was the end of my military career.

JR: What do you remember about coming into the US, coming into Camp Kilmer? You're leaving Europe and you're coming back to your country. How did you feel about that?

JB: Well, there wasn't anybody there to greet us. There wasn't a soul there. I take it back. The Salvation Army was there on the dock. The Red Cross was there too, but the Salvation Army gave us a pocketbook and donuts and free coffee. But there weren't any horns blowing.

By that time it was old hat because everybody had come home. I came home on points only. A lot of guys came home that got points for battles, wounds. But in my case and a lot of guys' cases, we just came home on service points.

- JR: Because you were in a support positions. So it was a little different than being in battle.
- JB: Us boys at Fort SAD didn't pull any triggers. We didn't fight any battles, but we put a lot of planes back in the air that had been knocked out. So we figured we did our part.
- JR: How do you feel about what your role was?
- JB: I'm proud of my service time. I'm proud that I could serve my country. The military didn't have too much of an effect on me. You did what you were supposed to do and that was it. But I will say this much. I think that all boys that reach the age of 18 should spend two years in the military in the branch of his choice. He ought to serve his country for two years. And the military never hurt anybody. If he was ruined when he came out, he wasn't any good when he went in. And that's all I have to say.
- JR: What metals or citations did you receive?
- JB: I got the Good Conduct metal.
- JR: Ok. Good.
- JB: And that's about it. We didn't win any battles. We didn't fight any battles, so we didn't have any ribbons. I've got five or six ribbons, but I don't remember what they are.
- JR: Yes, I think they're listed on your discharge papers. So you served overseas for about 20 months?
- JB: I was overseas for exactly 2 years. I left in February and I came back in February.
- JR: What did you do when you returned back to Arizona?
- JB: I went to work with my dad for two years.
- JR: In Queen Creek?
- JB: Chandler Heights. And then after two years I said, "This is not for me." So I took a job out at International Proving Grounds.
- JR: Where was that?
- JB: At West Chandler. I stayed out there for 32 years.

- JR: At the International Proving Grounds? Do you know the cross roads of that? What the general area is?
- JB: It was right across the hill from Central Avenue in Phoenix. It was on the other side of South Mountain on Pecos Road.
- JR: What did you do you there?
- JB: I was in test development. In other words, I was a glorified mechanic.
- JR: You were working on farm equipment?
- JB: Heavy equipment, earth moving equipment.
- JR: So were you testing the new models that were coming out?
- JB: We test production models and test models and we even tested competitors' tractors. We compared them with ours.
- JR: Where were you living at?
- JB: When I started, I lived in Chandler Heights [on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street North] and then I moved to Mesa. I left Mesa and had a home built in Chandler out on Elliott and Dobson. We had a home built out there and I lived there until I retired in 1980.
- JR: Where on Elliott and Dobson?
- JB: Right there on West Comstock. There is 80 acres right there in the county. And I lived in that subdivision.
- JR: I live right near there. I live at Warner and Dobson.
- JB: Warner and Dobson ok. I lived on Elliott and Dobson.
- JR: That's kind of funny. So tell me about how you met Emma. And your stories better mesh with each other.
- JB: I came home from work one night and Dad said, "You ought to take a look at that little girl up there at Russ's store." And I said, "Why?" He said, "They just moved in up there and her dad's running that store now. He owns that store." I said, "I don't know if I'm interested." He said, "A little bitty thing. You ought to go up and take a look at that." Just like a piece of merchandise. I sat around there and he said, "I still think you ought to go up and take a look at it." So I said, "Ok." So I went up there

and took a look at it. And that's how we met. Our first date was on the Fourth of July and we got married on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August.

JR: Wow, the same year?

JB: We've been married 61 years.

JR: Where did you get married at?

JB: Quartzite, Arizona.

JR: Were you eloping? How did you go to Quartzite?

JB: It was the first place we could find that had a Justice of the Peace. Everything wasn't closed up. We went all the way out to Quartzite.

JR: So what year did you get married?

JB: 1948. August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1948.

JR: So you had children?

JB: One. My wife had a child by a previous marriage.

JR: And what's your son's name?

JB: Pat and I adopted him when he was seven.

JR: Pat Baker.

JB: He changed his name.

JR: These are just some last questions that we like to ask. Do you feel that your service in World War II affected the rest of your life?

JB: I don't think so. It might have bettered me. I think the military was good for me. I was always too serious-minded. I don't think the military changed me in that aspect. The thing about it is when the Second World War broke out, so many people were raised and died in one area. When the war broke out, so many of us uprooted. Like myself. I saw a lot of the country. I saw a lot of the world. My wife was born and raised in East Texas and she had never been out of there before the war. It changed people, I think for the better really.

JR: What lessons did you learn from this time in your life? If you were going to pass something on to your son or if you had grandchildren about this time, what would you tell them?

JB: I don't know what I would. I don't know. Somebody asks me a question I'll answer it as best I could, but I'm not too fond of giving advice.

JR: What do you think kids today should know about WWII, about that time period?

JB: I think they should be taught something about it. I don't think they should ignore it. Your school systems today ignore all of your wars and I think that's wrong. Your kids grow up today and they don't know too much about the world. Some of them don't know where New York City is. They don't know where Paris, France is. They should be taught instead of just going in one door and out the other. At least teach them about the war and the trials and tribulations that we went through. A lot of men lost their lives fighting that war. I do think the Second World War veterans came home and built a good nation. We didn't sit around crying about it. We came home and went to work.

JR: Do you have any other thoughts that you would like to share before we end?

JB: I think I probably talked too much already.

JR: I think you did a good job. Ok I think that's it. I sure appreciate your time and we appreciate your service to the country and being part of WWII and being in the Army.

JB: Well I wouldn't take a million dollars for my experience but I'm glad I went. I'm glad I could serve.

*Notable Quotes:*

“During the Depression, things went to heck you know and there wasn't any demand, there wasn't any need for gasoline I guess and that's when (my dad) lost his job. Up until then he had a good job and got good pay for it. But after that it was pretty rough until we got on our feet.”

“We had eight children in the car when we came out to Arizona from Texas. We had a big ‘Hupmobile Eight.’ It was a great big car. Good thing it was!”

“When I graduated Sheppard Field for advanced training I went from TX to Baltimore MD to Glenn L. Martin. I went to school on B-26 bombers... That was a B-26 factory... We followed the plane from the minute it was started until it was finished.”

“We had a motto there in McDill Field, One a Day in Tampa Bay. And we just about lost one (B-26) a day in Tampa Bay, through pilot error you know.”

“We left Camp Kilmer and got on the Queen Elizabeth, (there were) 17,000 of us. It was hectic. You couldn't reach out...without touching a human being.”

“Well you would see mostly bullet holes, some metal torn off or whatever but if a plane was damaged too bad he never got home, you know, he never got home.”

“I had no hatred for the German people. I hated the big wigs... A German soldier was just doing what he was told to do, just like I was.”

“Us boys at Fort SAD didn't pull any triggers, we didn't fight any battles but we put a lot of planes back in the air that had been knocked out. So we figured we did our part.”

“A lot of men lost their lives fighting that war. I do think the Second World War veterans came home and built a good nation. We didn't sit around crying about it. We came home and went to work.”

