

**Corp. Leburn Hoyt "L.H." Burnett
Born 13 March 1919 in Pelham, TN
World War II Veteran**

**Served in USA At various airbases as mechanic in maintenance of air craft
Served 1 June 1943 – Feb 1946 in the Air Transport Command**

**Interviewed 20 May 2003 by Tom Zerfoss
at L.H.'s kitchen table in Pelham, TN**

I was born in an old home about ¼ mile away. The home had a dog trot. I was born and raised on the farm there. I left here in 1937 & worked in Detroit in the factories there and came back here in '39. My daddy died in Sept. 1939. I believe I was called back to work in 1940. I worked in Detroit until the war, left there 1st of May 1943 & entered the Army 1st of June 1943, served 2 years 7 months & 14 days in the Army Airforce. I took my basic training in Miami Beach & stayed in a nice hotel. Basic training was on a golf course. I remember one instance I kinda got a little ___ with a sargent in the hotel, and he told me - he said if you don't rush, I'll make you GI this lobby with a tooth brush. I struck me that that might be a pretty good job, but anyway I got along pretty good. I was married and had a kid when I went in. I was used to going where I wanted to and doing what I wanted to when I wanted to. Kinda cramped my style when they stopped all that, but I finally got used to it. I remember another instance. We patrolled the beaches down there. At that time they was thinking maybe there was submarines off of the coast there. We had a dirigible patrolling that. One day I saw them dropping ash cans, I believe they called the bombs. When it hit, in a few minutes, it big boiled up. In my judgment they hit the submarine. I never did know for sure whether they hit that submarine.

One instance there, kinda funny, I was out there one night patrolling. We had to stay so many hours then be relieved. It was night. A lot of people still from the down there went out on the beaches. That night we had to keep everybody off these beaches, and this bunch of young girls came out. I got sight of them and hollered, "Halt". They started screaming and running, but anyway they finally got them off the beach. Instances like that are something to remember.

Mr. Zerfoss: Where did you go into the Army?

Mr. Burnett: I went into the Army in Ft. McPherson, GA. They shipped me from there to Miami Beach, and I stayed there, I believe, 6 weeks for basic. Then they brought me back to Gulfport, MS, and I went to airplane school. It was pretty thorough. They taught everything about airplane engines. In airplane general, I know, to graduate, we had to wire up a microplane, electrical. That was my hardest test. I sweated that out. I had so

many minutes to do it, and I was having trouble. I couldn't get the cabin lights to come on, and the last, I'd say in the last minute, I happened to hit the right wires together and they came on, and that was close, but I went on to graduate. I went through everything else, but that give me more trouble than anything. We started the engines, the props, the hydraulic system, and all of that. Come out of there and they sent me to Detroit to Woolron Airplane Plant Engine. We stayed there, I believe, 5 weeks. I say we, there there was some from bigger places that went. I was the only one that went from Gulfport. They sent me back to Nashville. I stayed there a while and went to. We were Preflight to planes. They had planes in Nashville that was preflight. They was scheduled to go overseas. We worked there on B-26 & B-225's mostly. We had to preflight them every day, just like they were getting ready to take off. I reckon to keep them in shape & know everything was alright. Anyway we done that. I stayed there for a while. I remember one instance there it wasn't too funny in a way. They backed those planes right next to 41 and there was a house that had a fence between 41 and the airfield and I perflighted this B-26 there one night, and the lady had her washing hung on the line behind the plane. Of course I didn't know it & didn't know nothing about it. Anyway, next morning there was a big oil drum there and we were told that nobody would be preflighting those planes next to the fence. Pull them out and turn them around. Anyway that must have destroyed a lot, you know, I don't know.

Mr. Zerfoss: Was that at Sewart or was that at ...?

Mr. Burnett: Municipal Airport I stayed there a while then they sent me to Curtis Wright Factory in Buffalo, NY. I stayed there and worked on those B-46's, I believe is what they were manufacturing there then. Then I went through several weeks there. Then I went from there to, I believe it was, Wilmington, Delaware, Newcastle Army Airbase. There I spent the rest of my time in the Army. They wanted me to go to Boeing in California and give me a choice to go or not to go. I didn't go because my wife and little boy had moved there and was living in a government housing project. I was living off the post. I turned that down, and then they wanted to send me to helicopter school in Illinois and give me a chance. I didn't take that. Anyway, I spent my time there and I was.. They started a school there and we was going to get our A & E license and I went to it. I lacked a month or so and my discharge come up. I never did get my A & E license, and also just before we was discharged ... we was getting ready to leave... we was in ...they sent us to report back there, but before I left Wilmington, there were Chinese nationals, and they offered me \$800 a month to go over there and work on those planes in China, and I had my wife and kids and I turned it down. They come in there recruiting people. I worked there. We changed the engines and done airplane general work and hydraulics and all such as that. We worked on the C-47, C-46's, 7 C-54's. Anyway on the last they was bringing those hospital planes out coming from France, where the boys were on stretchers, in the last

part of the war. Anyway, I stayed there and was sent to Ft. McPherson, GA, for discharge. I remember this was something. Maybe, I don't know if you are interested in knowing about this, but we were coming back, and they give our papers to the sergeant. There were about 15 or 20 or more sent to Ft. McPherson to be discharged. The sarge got so drunk on the train and got to fooling with some women, anyway, the MP had arrested him, and he had all of our papers. The people there were going to take him off, and we knew if he got off with our papers, we wouldn't get discharged and we just bluffed the MP from taking him off that train. He went back and found, I forgot, a full colonel or something on the train, and he come up there. Boys, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Anyway we got away with it. It would have been a court martial if they had wanted to push it. But there wasn't anybody who was going to let him get off that train with our papers. Of course, that was bad in a way, but it happened.

Mr. Zerfoss: How did they decide who should be airplane mechanics?

Mr. Burnett: I'll tell you, I had training in Detroit. I was a union steward at the ___Plant. The union got a school started sometime before, I don't know how long it had been going on, but because I was steward I got a chance to go to that school on Sundays, and I went to that school for several weeks on Sunday and got training on airplane mechanics. That's how I got in the Air Force. My brother was up there working at the paint plant. I got him in that same school, and he went in the Navy Air Force. He wound up over in New Guinea, based there at the field. That's how I got in the Air Force, I feel like because I took that training.

Mr. Zerfoss: Have you used that training since you got out?

Mr. Burnett: No, I started teaching veterans the year I got out. I taught veterans until the post office come open here in Pelham, and I took the examination and I made the highest grade on it and also I was elected president of the young Democrats and we had a convention in Chattanooga and had a congressman there. I was pulling for the congressman at that time, and I got enough political influence to be appointed rural carrier. I served 30 years, 31 years in there, and I got 2 years of service so I had 33 years in other words counting that toward retirement. I retired out of the post office.

Since that time, since I was retired in '80, I organized a national coalition of coalmining states in 1982. They had a national association conservation district convention in Nashville. I had it announced they had different meeting rooms. In a couple of meeting rooms I had it announced that any of the coalmining states interested in getting their coal mines reclaimed to meet in my room that night at a certain time. We had 5 or 6 that got in there that got in there in '82 and we started from there and the next year we had a meeting in Washington, DC and organized got more states involved. We wound up with 20 states. Then I organized our state of Tennessee. That's where I have been today to the

Tennessee Association to the TN Association of Abandoned Mines Reclamation. I organized that, worked on that, testified in Congress about 4 times, I testified before Jim Sasser's committee in the Senate one time for the corporation for the reclamation of those mines. They got a 35 cent ton strip mine total and 15 cents tax on coal for deep mines. Anyhow, it brings in millions of dollars. And that's .. they told us today that there's over a billion of dollars accumulating in that fund, and they don't appropriate the money. I was sent there by an organization, I was chairman of the national organization for 4 years, and I was chairman of this one for 2 years. Anyway that testifying was for the subcommittee on appropriations. They are trying to get them to put money in the abandoned mine fund. The intention of that fund public law 9587 was to reclaim abandoned mines mined after 1977. After that the law made the people doing the mining reclaim it. This has been in effect 25 years and in the U.S. we have 1 million acres of abandoned mines and in Grundy County we have 3000 acres and now they claim we got about half and it's been in effect 26 years, this year. Anyway, the last, this is 5 years they've not appropriated any money for it. The money's still being collected but anyway that's what we are fighting for the conservation part of it. And that's what I've ___ since I got out of my post office job.

Mr. Zerfoss: So your war experiences were essentially career –

No, these was a 25 hour, 50 hour and 100 hour inspection. That's the inspection we pulled. In other words, we just kept those planes running. We changed those engines out every - seems like every 300 hours - I forgot, but ever so many hours the engine pull those engines out and rework them.

Mr. Zerfoss: Were these planes that had been over in Europe somewhere?

Mr. Burnett: Yes, they flew all over. They would take troops or whatever. I know the boy I used to work with. He flew over, he was a crew chief. Somehow I can't forget he was on a crew of a B-26, and the B-26 wasn't supposed to fly according to all aerodynamics, but it -. He said that there were 3 of them lined up __; two ahead of him. The two ahead of him crashed and him and his bunch got off. I don't know if they was overweight or what he said . I think it was a short runway. Anyway, that's what we done. I remember we got a bunch of planes in. The Army, I don't know what you'd say, confiscated or took some planes from the airlines and brought them in there and actually some of the parts of the engines was wired up with bailing wire. I'm not lying on that and we had to rework all of those planes to _____.

Mr. Zerfoss: Did they do these maintenance checks in France or Germany?

Mr. Burnett: As far as I know...now they..those combat planes, fighters and bombers, I'd say they had to do them over there, they stayed over there so long. They had to do them.

And they had to so some transports. Mostly we went through those that were working out.

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