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Becksvoort, Julius (Juke) Oral History Interview: Parents of Baby Boomer Generation

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GR: Juke, what were you doing on December 7, 1941?

JB: We were working on the farm south of Graafschap, when we heard what was happening—it was really something. At the time we were ready to deal with it. Even before that, we could see Hitler taking over Europe. And we were really quite sure at that time being 20 years old, 21 at that time, that we were ripe for military service.

GR: You were out in the field, and you returned home that night and found out?

JB: Yeah, we heard on the radio. That December, it's the winter so we weren't working out in the field, we were probably working around the place—the barn, taking care of the cattle, and all the other things that had to be done on the farm.

GR: So did you hear the famous Roosevelt speech?

JB: Right, sure did.

GR: How did your family react when they heard that news?

JB: We knew we were really in for something, because now we were on two fronts actually. So first we had to go after the Europe side, and then the pacific theatre. So we really knew we'd be in a lot of trouble.

GR: How many siblings did you have at this time?

JB: I had four brothers and one sister.

GR: Did all of you go?

JB: I was the only one. My younger brother was in the Korean War. But my other brothers were married and had children. They were about to go, but after that and the way things
happened, they didn’t have to go. We sure knew that it was really a bad time for our country.

GR: So what are some of the most immediate things you saw happen in your life, after that date?

JD: A lot of the fellows were volunteering to go, and I thought I’d just wait out the draft. Because it seemed as though when you volunteered, they put you in whatever branch they wanted you in. So I thought I’d wait out the draft, and I was helping Dad on the farm the next spring, in ’42. I got my draft notice in February that I was 1a and again in March from the board that I was eligible to go. Then I got deferred for summer work until August. So August 11 we went to Detroit for a physical and we came back until the 25th, then left for Camp Grant in Rockford, Illinois. And from there we went to San Antonio for basic, that was in San Angelo, for two years working in the hospital and surgery and dispensary. So that wasn’t too bad a deal considering what other guys were going through.

GR: Why do you think that you had been spared going overseas so long?

JB: I was really blessed that I could stay this long here. I got to work in surgery—one of my friends was working in surgery there on the field, because we were medics for the Air corps—and they needed a helper. So I went after that job, and I got to be a surgical technician. He and I worked in surgery. Then our MOS number changed so they took a lot of the guys out of the medics for infantry. I think because I was in surgery, I wasn’t probably pulled out for infantry. Some of the guys were pulled out when the Battle of the Bulge was going on. I tell you, that was kind of a rough time for anybody to get called. I finally got orders to go over to Alaska. But in the mean time, I was there that long that
we decided to get married. And on August 11, we got married, in '44. We went back to Texas together, which was a wonderful time for 6 months. Then from August until the end of January '45, we were living in Texas together. I just thought that was so wonderful that she could go back with me. Then I got orders to report to Keams Field, Utah, and then of course to Seattle, and Alaska, then way to the end of the Aleutians, a little island named Shemya next to Attu. We had a good runway there, where they were bombing the Japanese, just the northern part of Japan. We would have had to go in from the north if it had kept on with the invasion from the south and from the north. But as things went with the atomic bomb, we leveled off.

GR: What is your opinion on that whole decision?

JB: Well, that's what my grandkids asked me, "How could we drop that bomb like that and kill all those people?" I said, "If we hadn't done it, they probably would have," because the Japanese and the Germans were working feverishly to get this bomb perfected. And they would not have hesitated to drop it. If we hadn't dropped it, and if we would have had to invade Japan, we would have lost thousands more guys. I told my grandkids, "I wouldn't be here and you probably wouldn't be here." Because that would have been a terrific thing. I think winning war is war, nobody really wins a war because everybody loses. So many fellows lost their lives; it's just such terrible thing. Fighting there on the Aleutians, the Japs had gotten off before we got there, they'd rather back up to the ocean and kill themselves than be taken captive. We still had a blackout all the time when we got there, so the Japs' planes couldn't find our island, and we had a good runway there. We lived in Quonset huts, which wasn't such a bad deal considering.

GR: What was daily life like in the middle of the ocean?
JB: Nothing but rock, there wasn’t a tree on the island. It was just all rock around the edges. Some of the guys went a little batty because you’re just sitting on a little island—it was only two by six miles, the whole island—and you had to keep doing something. In our time off, we made a little P-38 out of ammunition shells, keep yourself a little busy. We went fishing along the rocks every once in awhile for flounders, and we’d pry a little crustacean thing off the rocks and inside was a little orange piece of meat. We put that on a hook and threw it amongst the rocks. We caught a lot of flounders! (laughs) We had fun too yet, and we had nice guys in our hut. Considering what some of the other guys were going through, I thought I had it pretty good. Then after that I got transferred to Fairbanks, and I worked in the flight surgeon’s office there to replace guys that had enough points to go home. So I was in about three months after the war actually ended, because you just can’t close all those camps just like that. It takes time. Then I flew home. It took two weeks from Seaward in Alaska to Attu with a boat, and I flew back in one day. (Laughs) I was the only guy in the C-47 transport sitting in the back with the pilot and copilot in the front. Getting back from Shemya to Anchorage, I took a train to Fairbanks from Anchorage. That was quite an experience too.

GR: Did you meet your wife again back in Texas?

JB: When I came back you mean?

GR: Yeah.

JB: No, when I was discharged at Fort Sheridan, she came to Union Station in Chicago, and met me. We spent two days there. On February 7, 1946, we took the train back to Holland. It was my 26th birthday. (laughs) It was quite something to get back together again.
GR: What was it like to see your wife after, not a terribly long time, but...?

JB: It was just a year. I just kept thinking, here we were, back in Chicago, looking for a restaurant. We were walking hand in hand, and I thought: what a wonderful thing I got to be back. It was just amazing—a lot of guys didn’t make it.

GR: What did you do as a civilian, when you got back?

JB: My younger brother Nathan, and my dad, could handle the farm so I really wasn’t needed there. So I really didn’t know. After three and a half years, you’re kind of lost. To get back to civilian life again, I was just like a lost guy there, for what seemed like the first weeks. My Grandpa Slenk had been a carpenter, and I thought building maybe would go quite well after the war. So I got this job in Zeeland with some contractors that were building mostly big construction factories and stuff like that. All I had to do was lug brick and block, and mix mortar. So I thought I want to learn how to build houses. So I went to Jim Klomparens here in Holland at Five-Star on my way home one night, after I was there six months and see if he had an opening. “Yeah,” he said, “we can put you on one of the crews.” So I started with a crew here, and we started building houses, from the footings all the way through the finish. Now I was learning something.

GR: You knew how to do the masonry work.

JB: That’s right, I learned mason work too. But then we lived, she probably told you this, we lived on a little shack, for a while, at least two, two and a half years that my grandpa and grandma had—I didn’t want to take her into that but there was no place to find after the war. You couldn’t even find or buy a toaster, everything went for the war effort. And everything had to be retooled.

GR: Did you notice Holland going through that transformation too?
JB: Oh yeah, it sure did. All the factories made things for war...Western Tool and Hitch, they all made war equipment.

GR: Did you see lots of building going on for returning GIs?

JB: Yeah right. Even at that time, 28th street had very few houses on it. (laughs) It was a different time, in those days. But then I built a house on the farm for Sylvia, a story and a half. We lived there until 1991, and then we came here.

GR: Did you ever have any emotional issues with the war after you got home? The bomb being one of them, or any of the large amounts of killing that went on. Did you just let it go away?

JB: That didn’t really bother me so much, no. Because I wasn’t in the actual fighting I guess it made a lot of difference too. Sure it bothers you that so many fellows didn’t come back. From our church there were 76 fellows gone and they all came back except two of them.

GR: How was that looked upon as the years went on—the veterans that never came home? Was there any ceremony?

JB: Yeah, it really hits you. I’m getting a newsletter from 11th Airforce every few months right now, and all the names are in it of fellows that are dying now. We’re losing over a thousand guys a day now, of the veterans. It really hits you.

GR: While you were at service, was Sylvia working anywhere in Holland?

JB: Yes, she worked in the hatchery office at Drenthe, Village View, that was Harry Ter Haar’s hatchery in Drenthe. She worked there as a secretary while I was in Texas. While we were in Texas, as a PFC first I was making about 18 dollars a month. When I made corporal and got a little better pay. Then while we were living there, she went for a job at
Goodfellow Field, the neighboring field. There were two fields at San Angelo, Texas. One was a bombardier school where we were training cadets to be bombardiers with the Norton bomb sight. And at Goodfellow Field, they were training pilots. She got a secretary job in the quartermaster office there to help pay our rent. That really helped us out. That was kind of nice, we really had a wonderful time living there for awhile.

GR: Had she worked before...?

JB: After high school, she worked there at Village View Hatchery in Drenthe, and then when she got home she worked for her uncle. There are so many hatcheries in Zeeland and her uncle had one too, and she worked in the hatchery office for her uncle when I was overseas. Then after we got back, she worked there for awhile until the children were born. Then she was home for years until she worked at Holland Christian Middle School as a secretary.

GR: Did the GI bill ever attract you when you got home?

JB: Not that much. I did go to Holland High nights for awhile for carpentry training, but I never went any farther though, just for several months.

GR: Was there ever a desire to go on?

JB: Really not, I should have maybe stayed on, being a medic and working with a surgeon, I should have stayed on and been a male nurse or something. (laughs) But building was kind of interesting—building homes, finishing, building cabinets, the whole works right from scratch was...you build something and you can see it. It was really interesting, and I enjoyed it.

GR: Were you working some long hours through those years when the kids were home?
JB: Yeah, quite often Saturday mornings too. Forty-five on the average, about 45 hours a week.

GR: So not a lot, all the time.

JB: No. I helped some people build homes on the side too. My brother built a house, and I was in charge of that in 1964—mostly on the side to make a few extra dollars.

GR: Did you wish you had more time to spend with the kids, during those years when they were young?

JB: Well, sure we did spend a lot of time with the family. I guess that didn’t enter our minds that much. You know, you got to make a living for the family, you know you have to provide. We always enjoyed the family. Even when I built our home, some nights I’d work until nine o’clock or so, and some nights we’d do other things. We didn’t rush through it, we took our time to build our house—it took a year. I had a couple of fellows help me rough it in, but then I did everything by myself after that.

GR: Was it hard for you as a couple to get some time alone when here you are building a house, you’re working a lot of hours?

JB: Yeah, it was sort of, with the children small.

GR: What did you do to blow off some steam once in a while?

JB: When the family was small, we’d quite often go up north to a cottage for a week. We were blessed.

GR: Did you and Sylvia get any time alone for movies and dinner?

JB: Sure. Movies weren’t our thing, but we would do a lot of things with family. We’d get a babysitter once in awhile, but not that often. We were busy in church too, with meetings and things.
GR: Did you have a tendency to make friendships with people at work, or people that had small children also?

JB: Sure, with the cousins and relatives, and even friends. We had a lot of friends at work and from church that we’d spend a lot of time with. It was real nice.

GR: You didn’t spend a lot of time playing golf?

JB: No, I didn’t do that. We tried fishing once in a while.

GR: So really, the only hobby you had as an individual was fishing.

JB: Yeah, fishing. We’d go on little trips and stuff too; we visited different parks and other things like that with family. But no golfing, I never got interested in that.

GR: So most of your free time was spent with the kids or Sylvia?

JB: Yeah, that’s right. It sure was.

GR: How many children did you have all together?

JB: Four—the oldest one is Ben, our son; then we had three daughters after that. Two of them are nurses, and the other one does ladies hair at Upper Cut.

GR: Were they drawn into those professions because of what you and Sylvia had been doing?

JB: I don’t think so, so much. I think that they just more or less felt called to that, as a nurse two of them, and our oldest son went into the ministry, went to Calvin College and through seminary. When we were on the farm there, next to our neighbors that were older people, and Mrs. Brinks always said that my Grandma Becksoort had prayed that one of her sons would be a minister. That didn’t happen. Then she said that she prayed for one of her grandsons to be a minister. That didn’t happen either. Now when our son went, a great-grandson, she probably had her prayer was answered. (laughs) That was quite something.
GR: Did they ever talk to you about your choice of occupations in life, and why that was a good life for you, and not for them?

JB: You mean about what I did?

GR: They saw you coming and going every day, what was their outlook on being a builder?

JB: They thought that was a good work. But in those days when you have your family growing up, I guess you don’t even think about those things. You just kind of take everything for granted.

GR: Do they talk to you and Sylvia about how they were brought up at all, commenting. Good, bad?

JB: Oh yeah, sure. They really appreciate what we’ve done for them, they sure have, and they are very good to us right now, all the time too. We appreciate the kids, and they appreciate us.

GR: Do they ask you parental questions about situations that arise with teenagers?

JB: Sure they do, we discuss a lot of things together. And as a family, we go back a lot of times and talk about old times and everything.

GR: Your grandkids, are they asking the hard questions about decisions?

JB: Yeah, they ask a lot of questions, about the service, and even about life. They talk to us a lot—what we’ve done, and how things went in our day.

GR: So has your outlook on parenting changed since you raised four of your own?

JB: It sure has; it has changed a lot. Nowadays you don’t have very many families together anymore. In those days, almost all the kids had two parents. We didn’t bring the kids out to day care like they do nowadays. My wife stayed home until the kids were all of age, 1966—the last child was born in ‘57—so she was pretty well along in school. I had a lot
of surgery at that time and I was off a lot, so she had the privilege of getting into Holland Christian. But that wasn’t very much pay either, so a lot of it was volunteer. But then later on it got to be better.

GR: So there was a situation in your life where you were unable to work and Sylvia was. Was that something that you both reached as a couple?

JB: Yes, we sure have. I had back surgery in ’58, and in “66 I had a problem with the colon, but that’s when she started. It was a good time; she enjoyed the kids, she was good for all the kids. Even today, it’s “Hi, Mrs. Becksvoort.” They all know her. She enjoyed kids and was good for them. Then she retired out of that a couple years after I retired. I retired in ‘62 from Parke Davis. After I built homes for 14 years—which I enjoyed very much—but a lot of times you get rained out, in the wintertime you’re cold, and if you don’t have a roof on the house yet, you don’t have work. So I had a chance to get in at Parke Davis on carpenter maintenance. So that’s what I did then for 22 years until I retired.

GR: Did you ever take anything from your parents raising of you, and transfer it to your own kids?

JB: Sure, naturally there are things that you learn from your parents, and what we did as parents too. You remember things from years ago when we were home, and naturally it just kind of comes to do the same things with your own kids.

GR: Did your mother and father ever offer any advice on child rearing?

JB: Oh sure, they did.

GR: Did you ask, or did they...?
JB: I guess mostly by example too, by the way they lived. We’d discuss those things all right, but not a lot. It was just they way things go in life. You learn as you grow up, and that comes off on you in later life too. We were always brought up to be respectful, and to live as Christians and be active in church, and we always were and still are, but not as much when you get to be this age—I’m 81 now.

GR: Sylvia had a little bit different life growing up. Did you ever talk about that with her? And how did it affect the way you raised your own children?

JB: As you see how she grew up, and I grew up, you appreciate things more in a family life. We’ve always been blessed. She was brought up a little different perhaps, and we met, and on the first date I really thought that she was a wonderful girl, and I still think that.

GR: Now how did you two meet again?

JB: On a blind date. My cousin and I did a lot of dating and things together. He picked up his girlfriend one night, and I didn’t have a date. I said to them they might as well take me home then. “Oh no,” she says, “let’s go see if Sylvia Boerman will come along.” Well I thought to myself, “Let’s go.” I could take one night even if it would be a disaster. That first night I fell. I loved her very much all of her life. She’s been a very good wife for me.

GR: So were you both in high school when that happened?

JB: I was working on the farm, I was home with dad, and she had two more years to go in high school. I met her when I was twenty. She must have been 16. Then we saw each other off and on for a year of two, and had quite a few dates. After I left for the service things got a little more stronger. We had a lot of fun. In those days, we had a lot of things going. We had Ramona Park, and in Grand Rapids, Reeds Lake—we had a derby
racer over there. We did a lot of things. Even though the war clouds were looming, we had a lot of fun.

GR: How did a teenager, especially her, how did those potential events shape what you were thinking about doing? Were people still continuing to think like normal—they were going to get married and have wonderful lives, or did the war really kind of always rear its ugly head?

JB: It did, it reared its ugly head a lot. We gave that a lot of thought—what would happen, if there was a future for us, and things like that. We just didn’t know, we just had to trust that everything would work out well. You take all things in stride, I guess. We enjoyed dating, and we enjoyed life, and even though we knew we’d probably have to leave soon, we did a lot of things together with friends. Even with fellows, we went to Chicago, five of us guys in October of ’41, we thought we would do something yet before we got called. We just spent a nice day there, and inside of a year most of us were gone to the service.

[End of tape one, side one]

GR: After the children had left the house, what did you and Sylvia do as a couple again?

JB: It wasn’t all bad. (laughs) No, we really enjoyed it. We enjoyed bringing the kids up, but when they were out of the house, it was really nice too. We enjoyed life together. At that time we could put a little more money away for retirement. Before that with the children growing, and the Christian school, we could never lay anything away. We could then lay a bit away for retirement, and we enjoyed life, and did a lot of things together. We didn’t mind that. It was fine; you’re back again to where you were when you first got married.

GR: Did you start doing more things outside the house?
JB: Surely, yeah we did...with friends, and with traveling. We took more trips and stuff; we went back to Texas several times to see friends there that we met while we were in the service.

GR: Did you ever return to the Aleutian Islands?

JB: Never returned there. We did return to Alaska on a tour one time. And we saw the Laddfield where I was at Fairbanks.

GR: You don’t want to go back to the Rocky Islands? (laughs)

JB: There isn’t much there. (laughs) Some of the guys that we talk to at our Aleutian reunions, they’ve been back. We enjoyed the trip to Alaska, they bussed us all around there.

GR: Now recently you’ve had a reunion for the military—what was that like?

JB: Yeah, just in May. That was really nice. We had that near Sandusky, Ohio. We saw a few of the old friends, not too many of them were there. There were about 35 fellows with their wives there, some didn’t have there wives. But only a couple that I knew were there. Because you don’t get too close to all the guys in the whole field there, just to our medics and not too many of them were there. But that was really fun; we had really a nice time together. It was a good meeting for a couple days.

GR: What do veterans talk about 50+ years after the war now?

JB: We all were asked to get up to a microphone, and talk about our life, where we served, and everything. Then we all talked about what we went through, and what we did up there. There were some of these fellows had some experiences with their planes, where it was sunk. Especially up there, because one minute it can be clear, and the next minute you’re fogged in with the planes. Some of those men had real bad experiences getting
back in through the fog. And a lot of them would crash. But they talked mostly too about what they did after they were out of the service. We had a really good time together.

GR: Did they talk about patriotism in America today?

JB: Oh yeah, you bet. We’re just hoping that there is as much as what there was in those days. We sure hope there will be, because in those days everybody was so patriotic—buying bonds and doing what they could.

GR: How do you look upon that? I see an American flag in your front yard. Do you wish everyone in this development did?

JB: You bet. (laughs) We always flew the flag on the farm too. We have a lot of patriotism and respect for the flag.

GR: Juke, why do you think that everyone in town doesn’t have a flag out? What’s your thinking on that?

JB: Well, not everyone has to put a flag out. But I really want people to respect the flag when the flag goes by, and I’m glad that a lot of people are flying the flag. There’s a lot of people that don’t respect it, but I just think that’s a terrible thing, because actually that’s our symbol of our country.

GR: As retirement finally happened for you, and Sylvia retired from the school system, did you find yourselves, as a couple, wanting to spend more time in community events, or helping?

JB: Sure, more volunteer—at church and at nursing homes. We did more of that after we retired, and helping people out with carpentry. She did too with a lot of different things we could do for people. People from the church that need help, and friends. She
volunteered at the hospital, and I volunteered at school, building a lot of things and doing jobs around the school and the church for people that needed things done.

GR: Do you find your self gravitating towards veterans that are in some real need now as they get …?

JB: Yeah, you do, you sure do. We write back and forth quite a bit to different fellows—maybe a dozen or more fellows we write back and forth—we got them all over the place.

GR: Do you participate in the local veterans groups?

JB: Not much, not in these veterans organizations here. But on Memorial Day, we all go marching in the parade. And now because of my knee, I can't hardly march in the parade so now I ride in the parade. People really respect the veterans, I feel. In the parade too, when the veterans march, they show a lot of respect, clap and wave. I think that's kept up pretty well in this area. I think that's really nice, because we're all going to be forgotten pretty quick.

GR: Do you see activities like what were doing today as being valuable?

JB: Yes, you keep it for the people in the coming years. I think it's real valuable what you're doing. To get this all down, of all those years of the war. You know, it could be a lot different here if the war had gone the other way. Because even as late as I think the first part, in '41, Russia was actually thinking about going with Germany. If we would have had to fight them both, that would have been quite something. But just as soon as Hitler crossed the border into Russia, then Russia though, "This is it." So they started fighting Germany, and then they became our ally.

GR: Did you ever think that a Communist country would become an ally?
JB: I never could imagine that that would ever happen, because these communist countries, we always thought were just so far out that it would never happen. But it did.

GR: Tell me a little bit about the Cold War. Knowing what you know about that, what was your feeling about ...?

JB: I just thought it was the last straw the way Russia blocked off part of Germany and Berlin. It was really too bad that they blocked it all off, and British and Americans and Russians got different sections. And then they wouldn’t even let people come in, into Berlin. You remember those years—I don’t remember how many years that was or how long it was—that we had to fly supplies in. They called that the airlift. They were actually doing that in ‘72, because our son-in-law was in Berlin with our daughter, in the service in ’71 and ’72. We visited there, and in Berlin, we saw those planes coming in. We went right by the airport, and they came right over our head on the airlift. That was really something that should never have happened, that we had to do that.

GR: So you had a son in the military?

JB: Son-in-law. Our son was never in. At that time, most of the fellows had to serve a couple of years. Our son-in-law had graduated from college for teaching, and every school he applied at asked him if he had served his two years military training. He had to say no, but everybody almost had to go for two years at that time. They wouldn’t hire him because they’d probably lose him right away. Then he went in for two years, and when he came back out he couldn’t hardly get a teaching job, so he started working for the State Department in Traverse City.

GR: Did you have any fears that some of your children might end up in Vietnam?
JB: Not really, they weren’t really old enough. But yes, it did enter our mind that they may have to go into service, but of course there wasn’t a war after Vietnam—Ben was too young at that time—so we didn’t really have to fear that any of our children would be in any danger of wars. But yes, if something would have happened like with the Cold War, and there were a lot of things going on then too, you know. When we were building all the bomb shelters and stuff—I guess that was the sixties wasn’t it—and then you thought that war could break out, the thought did enter your mind.

GR: Did Holland have that type of mentality too?

JB: Sure, you bet. The fellows at work were building bomb shelters on the ground. It never occurred to me that we should too because if it came to that, I don’t think a bomb shelter would help that much, if it came to a nuclear war. That was really scary there for a while.

GR: So there are some bomb shelters in Holland?

JB: Yes, there are. I can name a few fellows that had them. It was kind of a scary time.

GR: So as things have come to pass—Korea and Vietnam—any outlooks as a veteran on those two wars?

JB: The Vietnam War was really too bad the way our fellows were treated. It wasn’t a war that everyone was behind, and when these men came back, they weren’t really treated I think the way they should have been, because a lot of them went through a lot of misery there. A lot of fellows were treated badly there by the Viet Kong, and it was just a war that we didn’t gain hardly anything. There was a difference, you know. In World War Two, we had to really save our freedom. But it was a good thing that we were trying to keep communism down.
GR: So you were about 30 when Korea started, I guess. Did you have a chance to talk to those returning men?

JB: Not that much, no; I didn’t really talk to any of the Korean veterans. My brother was in at the time, but he never got overseas. The year that he was in, my younger brother was in Washington State. He never got overseas during the Korean War.

GR: How did Holland treat the Korean War? Were they behind it, were they indifferent?

JB: See it wasn’t an all out war like in World War Two, so they really didn’t get the treatment and the honor that our veterans did. But on a smaller scale like that, I don’t think it’s really treated as well as it should have been either.

GR: Were people just sick of war at that point? It was five years or so after World War Two. Were they just sick of it?

JB: Yeah, so soon after World War Two, you know, and things were happening again, and people were just tired of war.

GR: So in retrospect, here we are in 2001, and like you mentioned over a thousand GIs die every day of natural and other causes. Do you think about that?

JB: Sure do. We hear a lot about that all the time. At my age, too, none of us know how many years we have left. But sure, that does enter us. And every time we get these newsletters, there are lots of names of fellows that have passed away. It does hit you, it really does. Because all of these fellows are passing away, and a lot of them think that we’re going to really be forgotten. But you’re doing things like this, and a lot of people are really keeping things on record for veterans. That’s really appreciated, it really is. We appreciate it very much, because it could soon be forgotten. It was really a serious time during World War Two.
GR: Were there ever thoughts in your mind as a young man, both in and out of the military, whether this was going to come out the way you thought it should?

JB: You mean the war, the way it came out?

GR: Right.

JB: At first we wondered how it would come out, because the Germans just took over one country after another, just like a blitzkrieg. I just think that we were blessed because... it really amazes me how our country could produce all those planes and equipment to keep the skies dark over Europe with bombing and everything and all the equipment, the tanks, everything had to be made. It's just unbelievable. I think there were nine thousand planes that came through Fairbanks Alaska, on the lend lease program to Russia. You wonder if we ever got a dime for them, which I doubt. (laughs)

GR: In saying that, I wonder how did the papers handle all of this? Were they trying to keep morale high?

JB: Oh yeah, everyday... I've seen some of the old papers. They had things about buying war bonds, and the things that were going on with the war. It was really a patriotic time; there were a lot of things like that to keep the morale of people up. I wasn't around to see many papers during the war.

GR: Do you remember any naysayers in Holland saying that the war is unnecessary, we should stay out of it?

JB: Not really, no. I think even our president at first didn't want to get involved, but after Pearl Harbor we had to get involved. And that started things off. No, there wasn't that much against the war, not that I know of. Because we knew that this man had to be stopped, because his goal I think was to take over the whole world.
GR: Did you ever think that he might just call Europe good, and leave us alone?

JB: That’s what we were hoping for, that we wouldn’t have to get involved. But with England being in so much danger of being overtaken, that really hit us quite hard. Because if they had been taken, they probably would have tried to come here too. And he would have had all of Europe, and that would have been a terrible thing.

GR: You talk about how Holland was really behind the war, of course other parts of the country were too. Did you see other cultures in the military that for the first time were kind of surprising to you? Like Hispanic or African American or Asian? Did you see any military personal like that during the service?

JB: Oh sure, I worked with a lot of colored people in the hospital—first in Texas—and I met a lot of nice fellows. We were all, I think, together, and it’s just amazing, you trusted everybody. You expected everybody to be in this thing. Even the one night when I came home on leave, I got to Fort Worth the evening before the train left for Chicago. We had the Rock Island streamliner that went from Fort Worth to Chicago in 24 hours, and if we got there that morning, we could be in Chicago the next morning. So I got there one time at night, and I went to a little hotel and asked for a room. He had one room left and I took it. Then another soldier came up to me and wanted a room, and they didn’t have any. So I said, “Come along with me.” You just trusted—we didn’t know each other. We slept all night and the next morning we both went our ways. It’s just one of those things, that you were in this thing together. You trusted everybody.

GR: You talk about working with some African American personnel at the base. Were there ever any conversations about, “Gosh, I wish we could get into this a little more heavier.” You know, the restrictions in the military were still pretty plain.
JB: They were restricted, I think in those days more than now. They had their own barracks, now they are more together, the barracks and everything. But no, we didn’t hear too much of that at that time. I think they felt that way all right, that they weren’t treated as well as the whites. Some were good workers. I made some good friends there with those people that I worked with.

GR: Coming from Holland, which you know, there wasn’t a lot of ethnic diversity in Holland even then, was that kind of an adjustment for you?

JB: Sort of. You have so many coming in, but I guess we have to accept those people too, that’s what our duty is. If you want to come here and live in our town and work, our hope is that they will appreciate it too, you know, and be good citizens, that’s what our hope is. Because a lot of these coming in are causing bad things too around town. But the majority of them are good people and appreciate the town and their work, I think.

GR: Are you happy that Holland is changing as rapidly as it is?

JB: Not really, it’s really going a little bit too wild, too fast, too much building all out—all the way between Holland and Zeeland. Riley Street now is practically solid, and all the farmland is going. It don’t make me that happy, but I guess we need growth.

GR: And you’ve stayed in Holland for some reason.

JB: Yeah, sure. We stayed around here because this was our home and area. Of course, we live five miles south of Holland, but Holland was always our place.

GR: Thank you, Juke.

JB: You’re welcome.