

Transcription: Robert Davenport

Today is Thursday, August 25, 2011. My name is James Crabtree. This morning I'll be interviewing Mr. Robert Davenport. This interview is being conducted by telephone. I'm at the General Land Office building in Austin, Texas, and Mr. Davenport is at his residence in Laguna Park, Texas. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk with us today. It's an honor for us.

Robert Davenport: You're more than welcome.

Sir, the first question that I always like to start off with is, if you would, tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went in the military.

Robert Davenport: I was born out close to Weatherford, Texas, and moved down into Hunt County. My daddy was a farmer and I worked on farms all my life until I went into the service. Where I started at, when I was 18, I signed up for the draft in World War II. And then, I volunteered that same day for USNR.

Let me ask you sir. When you were growing up on the farm, did you have anybody in your family or anyone you knew that was in the military or who had served in the military?

Robert Davenport: No sir. We did not have that.

Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Robert Davenport: Yes. I had three brothers and two sisters. My oldest brother was in the Army. I don't know where he was at, I forgot. My brother that's younger than I am, he was in the Navy but he never did get out of the States. My younger brother, he helped Daddy on the farm.

And this was in Hunt County?

Robert Davenport: Yes sir.

Where were you on December 7th, 1941? Were you still in school or were you graduated?

Robert Davenport: I never did get out of, I just finished the 7th grade. Only 7th grade.

So were you working on the farm that day? Do you remember that day?

Robert Davenport: Yes.

How did you learn about the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the start of the war?

Robert Davenport: Well, we didn't have no radio or television, so it was just by what other people was telling us. You know, we'd been bombed and where and all. Then the draft board was set up and they notified me that I had to be up on a certain day to sign up for the draft.

How shortly after Pearl Harbor Day was it that you got your draft notice? Do you remember if it was a couple of months?

Robert Davenport: I was drafted in 1943. December 31st. I went into active service in 1943. So I was 18 on the 29th day of November.

So when Pearl Harbor was bombed, you were still about 16 years old. So you were still too young.

Robert Davenport: Uh-huh.

When you turned 18 in 1943, that's when they drafted you.

Robert Davenport: Uh-huh.

Did you think that you were going to be drafted? Did you feel like that was something that was going to happen?

Robert Davenport: I knew I would be. There was too many of us boys at home to help Dad, and I kind of wanted to go out and venture, you know.

Sure. And you said your brother had gone into the Army. Is that right?

Robert Davenport: Yes.

Did he go in before you?

Robert Davenport: No, he went after I did.

After you.

Robert Davenport: Oh yeah. I was the first one of the kids that went in the service 'cause I volunteered. But I never regretted it.

What did your parents think? Were they worried for you or were they excited?

Robert Davenport: Well, they was worried for me because of not being away from 'em and not being in connection with the public too much. But they were, if that's what I wanted, they couldn't stop it because they knew I was going to be drafted. But see I signed up without them knowing it.

Okay. And then at some point though, you told them before you left, right?

Robert Davenport: My daddy brought the papers to be drafted up to town where I was at. I told him then and he said, "Well son, I could have got you out." I said, "Daddy, I didn't want to. I want to go." He said, "If that's what you want." He says, "I'll take these papers back over to the office over across in the courthouse and give 'em back to 'em and tell 'em." And the guy's name was _ . He had handled me getting drafted and going on.

So when you got drafted . . .

Robert Davenport: No. See, I volunteered to keep from getting drafted.

I see. What was it that made you pick the Navy?

Robert Davenport: Well, I didn't want the Army because I was a little bit small. When I was that age, I only weighed about 110 pounds. And I knew I wasn't going to get in the Army that-away. So I said I'll get in the Navy and go from there.

And so you picked the Navy. Where did they send you off to first?

Robert Davenport: You mean when I got drafted?

Yes sir.

Robert Davenport: I went to San Diego to take my boot training.

Did you take a train there?

Robert Davenport: Yeah, we did. We took a whole big bunch of us. They put us on a train and shipped us right out to San Diego, California.

Was that your first train ride?

Robert Davenport: Yes it was.

What were you thinking at that time? Were you excited or a little bit nervous? Or both?

Robert Davenport: Well, I was excited. 'Course they always was kinda pickin' on me because I was small as I was. But I let 'em know right quick that little bit didn't count. The bigger they were, the harder they fell. That was my motto. They didn't bother me no more.

What are your memories of your basic training?

Robert Davenport: Basic training? First of all, you take orders, don't talk back. We went to California and then got out on the grinder and I done just as well as the rest of 'em. Then when it come to run an obstacle course, they accused me of cheatin'.

Why was that?

Robert Davenport: Because I was so swift and I'd run across them foot logs over the water and mudholes, did like a cat would. I was used to it because I was out in the country. That's the way we got across the rivers and creeks.

And they thought you were just running around the obstacles?

Robert Davenport: Uh-huh. They followed me. One lieutenant followed me and then a Boatswain's Mate. And they said, "We can't find him cheating nowhere. He went over everything." I was the last man in the 2nd platoon and I was the first man back to where we started.

That had to have made you feel good.

Robert Davenport: Yeah. They were making sure that I wasn't shortcuttin' 'em. I hadn't forgot that.

When you were there doing your training, I understand that in the Navy, two of the biggest things they teach you are how to swim and how to fight fires on board ship. Was that the same with you?

Robert Davenport: Yes. They taught us how to swim. I was a non-swimmer, but I could swim 200 yards when I got out of boot camp.

How did they teach you how to swim? That would seem kind of scary if you'd never known how.

Robert Davenport: Well, you know what? They had a big diving board. I don't know how high it was. You'd walk up there, you would. And they said, "Now, if you don't jump off, we gonna push you off." And I jumped and I think I went clear to the bottom of the pool. And I come up and they had a pole there stuck out at me and I grabbed it and they said, "Well, you are a non-swimmer. We'll start classes tomorrow." And they did and I graduated out of it before I got to come home.

How was it that you learned how to swim? Did they just teach you how to float?

Robert Davenport: Yeah, they taught me how to dog paddle and float and all this. They didn't have no specific way but they said you had to do it. The last two weeks I was in training, I was helping some more boys learn to swim their hundred yards.

I know for people that don't know how to swim, they can be really terrified of the water. You were kind of just thrown right into it, almost literally.

Robert Davenport: Oh yeah. But I never had no fear. I just always, it was a challenge to me. Everything was a challenge. It was something new that I'd never done and didn't never did care about it because I was too busy on the farm.

Did they teach you in boot camp how to fight fires as well?

Robert Davenport: No. They didn't do that.

Okay. I'd always heard or read that that was a big thing in Navy basic training was learning how to fight fires on ship.

Robert Davenport: Yeah.

So you were at boot camp. How long were you there for? Do you remember how many weeks?

Robert Davenport: About six weeks I do believe.

Six weeks. So then you graduate, do you have any idea what your specialty's going to be or where you're going to be going?

Robert Davenport: Well, no. We did not. They sent us up to Port Hueneme, Camp Mugu, I believe it was. We got connected with the Seabees. They assigned us to CASU 44. That was the ground crews that took care of the airplanes, taxi-ing 'em and gassin' 'em and all this. But the old Boatswain's Mate that was training us out there for that, we had a big ol' 40-acre field with grass a little over a knee high. And he said, "Now boys, what you learn here may save your life. It will if you do what we tell you to." That was pretty scary all right. But I says, "If that's what it

takes, I'm goin' to learn well." Man, I crawled through that grass just like an ol' snake, just slipped right on. He said, "Now you're going to be live tracers shootin' over you, so don't stick your head up." Well, some of the boys thought they was just jokin'. They got hurt and they had to be shipped home and got discharged, I guess, I don't know.

No joke.

Robert Davenport: But I went on through that. Then they told us, "Well, we going to be in charge of you from now on and we gonna supply all your, when we get overseas where we're going." And they did not tell us. They says, "We'll have everything we need." Well, we went right on in with the Marines and with the Seabees 'til we got to the airport. When we got to the airport, that was the end of our journey with the Marines.

Where was it that you went first in the Pacific?

Robert Davenport: From California to Pearl Harbor. We stayed there a couple of weeks then we boarded a transport ship and we were transported down to Tinian. We went through, I think it was, Guam, the Phillipines. Went through Horseshoe Bend and all that.

Tell us what your memories are of Tinian. When you arrived at Tinian, what did you think of it?

Robert Davenport: My opinion of what I was in?

Yes sir. Or what Tinian was like when you got there.

Robert Davenport: Well, I tell you. When we got there, I asked for something I didn't expect. But I was there and the commander told us, says, "Boys, this is it. Don't pick up nothing. It could be a booby trap." Well, there was a lot of things that I seen that I wanted but I wouldn't pick 'em up. I took orders and some of the boys got their hands partly blowed off, some wanting to pick up souvenirs. But I was one that didn't want to pick 'em up because of what they told me. I believed 'em.

You were an aerial refueler, is that right?

Robert Davenport: Yes. I was a refueler. We started out with bobtail trucks and one night we finally got caught up and we was all in the dispatch office. I was sitting in the corner asleep. And the Boatswain's Mate come in and kicked on my foot and said, "Seaman First Class Robert Davenport, get up." He says, "You volunteered for something." I told him, "I didn't volunteer for nothing." 'Cause if you volunteer to drive a truck, you pushed a wheelbarrow. So I told him I didn't volunteer for nothing. He says, "Come on, I'll show you." Well, what do you think it was? A 18-wheeler tanker. And I'd never have drove. There I was 18, just knew how to drive a car or a stick shift bobtail and he says, "Get in." Well, I started around the other side, and he says, "No, no, no, get under the steering wheel." And I got under the steering wheel. He said, "You see that little knob over there, that's the gear shift. It's got the gear shift pattern." He says, "Go through 'em." I did. He says, "Now then, go get a load of gas." I said, "Wait a minute." I said, "I gotta have a shotgun, right?" He says, "No, no." He said, "This trip is all solo for you." I says, "In other words, if I kill myself, it's all right, but don't kill nobody else?" He kinda laughed as though he had to agree but I took off and that's where I learned how to drive a 18-wheeler.

And that was on Tinian?

Robert Davenport: Yeah. Haulin' gasoline in a truck.

We know that you must have made it.

Robert Davenport: I made it and I drove a truck for 25 years picking up and delivering freight in Dallas, Texas.

So that was your first experience.

Robert Davenport: Uh-huh.

Tell us what a typical day was like, if there was a typical day at Tinian.

Robert Davenport: A typical day after we got over there was work, work, work. They'd bring in barrels of gasoline. We would stack 'em five high by hand. One night we was stackin' 'em and we got a break and went back refueling the gasoline pumps and startin' 'em up and one of 'em backfired and blowed up the compound there. Several of 'em got hurt. I knew one of 'em and he was running toward me. Well, I was blowed about 10 feet. I got up and I hacked him on the back of the neck and I told the commander, weapon carrier, to carry him to the hospital in. So he got looking for it, so I told him who took it. He says that I ought to go down there and get it. He come in and I say, "Oh-oh, I'm fixin' to get court-martialed." But I didn't. He said, "You done it for a good cause. I don't blame you." A typical day after everything got flying was go to the dump, go to the barge and back. Fuel 'em. And at night, you had to be very careful because them Japs would come out. We was out by big sugar cane patches. And they'd come out and try to get us. And did get one. One or two guys, but we never did find 'em. So it was just typical workday and when everything got quietened down, we had some relaxation time. Kinda on a regular schedule.

The fuel came in on barges?

Robert Davenport: Yeah.

And you would off-load those on to the trucks and drive them back to the airstrip?

Robert Davenport: Uh-huh.

What type of planes were you refueling?

Robert Davenport: PB twin-engine bombers.

The PBYS?

Robert Davenport: Some PBYS, uh-huh. And then we went to the B-24s. That was the typical days.

What was the hardest part about refueling the planes? I know you got to make sure you get the right amount of fuel in there and the weights and all that sort of thing.

Robert Davenport: Well, we just filled 'em 'til they come up and hit the nozzle and cut it off. And then we'd go to the next tank which was always in the wings and we filled 'em all. Another guy would come along and check the oil in 'em. It was just a daily routine like around the service station used to be.

How long would it take to fill up one of those planes?

Robert Davenport: Well, sometimes it all depends on how far they've been out and come back.

If one was completely, completely almost out of all fuel, to completely fill it up starting with nothing. How long would that take?

Robert Davenport: To fill 'em completely up from nearly empty, it would take about an hour.

That's quite a bit of time. That gives an idea of how much fuel those planes were carrying.

Robert Davenport: Oh yeah, they carried a bunch of it. And the B-24s was even, took longer 'cause they were four engines and it took us quite a bit longer. But the typical day was you start out in dry weather maybe and run a couple hundred yards and run into pouring down rain, mud and slag, and no paved roads. And then you'd run out of that, get dusty, and where's you'll get muddy. It was a difficult time.

Yeah, it sounds like a really rough climate to be in.

Robert Davenport: Oh, it was. That rain just come in strips and you'd . . . But we wrecked several of them ol' trucks, but luckily, I never did wreck one.

What did you live in? Did you live in tents or had you built some buildings?

Robert Davenport: We had tents, pup tents, two-man pup tents to start off with. And then we got graduated up to six-man tents. And then they got, brought in some bigger ones which would hold, oh, I don't know, a bunch of 'em. But it was all in tents and got no electricity 'til way late in the season. Then we got electric lights and the first hot meal. Guess what the first hot meal was?

Spam?

Robert Davenport: It was canned C-rations.

Yeah.

Robert Davenport: Dropped in a barrel of hot water, got hot, and that was a hot meal.

Heated up. How long were you eating just C-rations?

Robert Davenport: Oh, I don't know. It was long enough I didn't like 'em anymore.

But at some point then though, when things started getting a little better there, they started bringing . . .

Robert Davenport: Well, they had K-rations first, and then they went from K-rations to C-rations and then to, they set up kitchens then, and then they said, “Well, you guys go to the mess hall. You guys got mess duty.” I thought, “Good Lord of Mercy. I don’t like that.” But my time come up, I went, and I didn’t go out driving trucks, I just, our day up there as a guard and help the cooks.

At the mess hall.

Robert Davenport: At the mess hall.

How long were you on Tinian?

Robert Davenport: How long was I on Tinian? A little over a year.

About a year. During that time were you able to get mail pretty regularly?

Robert Davenport: Oh yeah. We got mail twice a week.

How long would it take for mail to get to you from back in Texas?

Robert Davenport: Too long really. I never did check it. I just always read it. I just read it and answered it and dropped it back in the mail.

I’m sure it took quite a bit of time though, maybe a couple weeks.

Robert Davenport: Oh, it took 10 to 12 days easy.

Did you get much news from the outside world? Did you have any sort of Stars and Stripes newspapers there or radio or anything?

Robert Davenport: We didn’t have, nobody had no radios over there, and so we didn’t get much news whatsoever.

So you really didn’t know what was going on outside of where you were?

Robert Davenport: No.

How about the bomber crews? The pilots and the crewmen. Did you have a chance to talk to them much about their missions and what they had seen?

Robert Davenport: Oh yeah. We had a chance. They wouldn’t tell much about it. There was one that I always talked to and he was always kiddin’ me one day I’d fly with him. And I’d tell him, I said, “No sir, no. I don’t fly, I fuel.” But one day he come in and he said, “Well, you gonna fly with me tomorrow.” He said, “You’re gonna be one of my gunners.” I says, “No.” But in 30 minutes time, I was in his squadron. They said they had to have me, and my commander, he says, “I hate to do ya that way.” But he says, “We haven’t got no other choice.” He says, “You’re the best choice ’cause you took gunner school.” That followed me all the way through.

The fact that you had been to gunner school?

Robert Davenport: Uh-huh. I told him, I told the captain of the plane, I says, the next morning, we started to board and he wanted to know what position I wanted. Did I want the tail gunner or bottom gunner. I told him it don't make any difference but he put me on top. So he, I tell him like, "I want to make a deal with you." He looked at me and he says, "Seaman First Class Robert Davenport," he says, "I can't tell ya I will until you tell me." I said, "Well, you fly this baby and get us there and back," and I said, "I'll keep the Japs off of you." He says, "Well, that's a deal." Well, two or three days went by, something like that, and we dropped bombs over Tokyo, and coming back, there's Jap Betty come out of the sun. And I was top gunner there and I said, "Boom, boom." I didn't even holler for help. I just knocked him out. So we got in and he said, "Well," he says, "I held to my end and you held to yours." He says, "We got a deal. We'll make a good team so you might get to fly with me the rest of the duration of the war." I told, "Oh no." But I was beginning to enjoy it, you know, something different.

What type of plane was it?

Robert Davenport: B-24.

B-24. Was that the first time you'd flown?

Robert Davenport: Well, yeah. Uh-huh. I never had flown but he says, "Well," he says, now and then he says, "We're well acquainted and you established yourself," he says. So we went on maybe a couple weeks or so, and I was up, here come a Jap Zero, a fighter plane, up on us. I hollered on that one 'cause I was setting down on the bottom and riding bottom gunner then. So he was coming up and I says, they says, "Well, you already got him." I says, "He oughta not stuck his head up." And I says, "I'm gonna get every one of 'em. You boys too slow." That ol' pilot, that night he says, "Well," he said, "You don't give nobody a chance." I said, "Sir," I says, "If you don't like the way I'm operating, just turn me back to my company." He looked at me and he says, surprised, and he says, "You know, you're not supposed talk to me that way," but he says, "We're pretty well in agreement on things." He says, "Don't get me wrong. I'm glad you done it." But I disobeyed orders. I thought, "Well, that would probably be the end of it." But it was. He didn't, he never did turn it in and so . . . But I returned back to my original company, CASU 44, and wasn't long 'til we was back on the way home.

How many times did you get to go fly on a mission like that?

Robert Davenport: Oh, well, I was with that squadron about six or eight weeks 'til they get replacements in from the States. And then they told me, I was beginning to like it real well but I wouldn't volunteer to keep it, you know? Because they said they would do right opposite as they did every time, so I didn't volunteer. So I come and got the chance to come home, I took it. I was getting homesick, you know? Just 18, you know, down there, never been away from home.

So you were on Tinian and you had that chance to come back?

Robert Davenport: Yes, uh-huh. I never did leave that island but just to fly. Well, now I went over to . . .

You went to Saipan at one point, right?

Robert Davenport: Saipan, which was across the bay, to a bigger island to help fuel the Enola Gay that dropped the bomb on Hiroshima.

Tell us a little bit about Saipan and how you were involved in going over there.

Robert Davenport: Well, Saipan was about three miles by five to the best of my recollection. But now the Japanese, they were smart little guys. They had a . . . We was out roaming around, four or five of us, while we was off duty, and dropped off into a hole. We decided we'd follow it wherever it went. We had flashlights. We went down 12 stories through that rock, and you know where it come out at? At the beach. They'd bring those LSTs in when the war was going on, shift all that stuff upstairs, carried up there.

All the tunnel systems.

Robert Davenport: Yeah, uh-huh, yeah. And so that was just, you know . . . Then we got barred from doing that because it's dangerous. But we just, and a lot of times for recreation when we wasn't having a plane to tow in or taxi in or fuel, well, we'd get out of there with whatever we had to entice them with and run races, just kidslike. They stopped that 'cause it was dangerous and we didn't care, we'd do it anyhow. But, you know, life there, the government would give those ladies a T-shirt and what'd ya think they'd do? They would cut holes in it where their breasts was.

On Saipan?

Robert Davenport: Yeah, yeah. They'd turn 'em around, make 'em turn 'em around and they'd cut 'em a hole again. And in the trenches, what we'd use for bathrooms for the first couple weeks or months, you just dug out and go out there and do your job, whatever one it was, that's the way they did in the prison that we have for 'em. And it was all together different.

I'll bet it was.

Robert Davenport: Yeah.

Tell us about the Enola Gay.

Robert Davenport: Well, that plane there was selected to go over and drop that bomb, and they needed more help to get it off the ground on time. So they shipped two of us over there.

From Tinian to Saipan.

Robert Davenport: Yeah, from Tinian to Saipan, uh-huh. And we helped fuel it and got it off, had it ready to go before time, and they put us up back over there and we knew where, we didn't know where it was going but we knew it was loaded heavy and had that bomb on it, but nobody knew where it was going.

Did you have a chance to see the bomb getting loaded on there?

Robert Davenport: No, no, no. We didn't, they done that with strictly guards everywhere that nobody can get close to it.

So it had already been loaded and then they brought you all out to help fuel it up.

Robert Davenport: Uh-huh, yeah.

But you had to put, I guess, more fuel than normal in?

Robert Davenport: Oh yeah. It weighed . . .

It was so heavy.

Robert Davenport: It was so heavy. But it went and got back so, but I never did see it anymore after I helped fuel it.

After you had fueled it, how long was it before it took off? Do you remember?

Robert Davenport: Nobody knew. That was a big secret too. Nobody knew when they was gonna take off. The captain of the plane, the pilot, he said he didn't know when they was going to be. They was on standby so they'd be there and ready to go when time come. Everything was on Pacific time. Nothing happened until that time come, and they took off. Well, it was two planes that took off, one right after the other one. We didn't know which was which. It was dark but both of 'em come back the next morning.

How long was it before you heard word of what they had done?

Robert Davenport: Oh, a day or two when they, maybe the best I can remember.

Could you believe it or did you think it was an exaggeration?

Robert Davenport: I thought it was an exaggeration, you know, that it done that much damage. But, man, it kinda made you feel bad that you were part of that that dropped it but, as I say, I was by myself and nobody wasn't gonna get in my way to stop me but I was determined to come back home.

Sure, it definitely helped end the war.

Robert Davenport: Yeah. So, but what you had to do, you done it and never look back. I didn't. It didn't worry me.

No, I think there would have been far more casualties had they had to do the invasion.

Robert Davenport: Oh yeah, and that's what they told us. There'd been a lot more casualties on our side.

On all sides.

Robert Davenport: Uh-huh, on both sides. This is what we had to do. And that kinda made us feel a little bit better. But it didn't take but a few days to get over it, so you look to, "Well, I'm going to get to go home earlier now." That's what we looked forward to.

Do you remember the day that you learned that the Japanese had surrendered?

Robert Davenport: No, I don't remember that day. There was so much going on and . . .

But at some point you got to go back home. Do you remember when that was?

Robert Davenport: Oh, no, not really. Days over there, you just . . .

Just kind of blend together.

Robert Davenport: Yeah. I can tell you the day I got discharged. I got discharged on 27th of April 1946. But that was when I got out. I'd already been home and spent a couple weeks and got discharged then.

Tell us what that was like, coming back home to Texas after being gone that long.

Robert Davenport: Well, you know it, and I have told many of 'em that going back home after you left home, it didn't seem like home no more. It was just a place to go back and remember and see your parents but home, it never did seem like the home that I used to have.

Why do you think that is?

Robert Davenport: Well, with me it was that I got out on my own and was making my own way, and I guess it was a sense of confidence that I accomplished what I had set out to do. So that's about all I can say about that.

When you got out, did you stay in Hunt County?

Robert Davenport: Yes, I come back to Hunt County. I married a girl down there and farmed for the first couple of years after I got out.

What did you grow on your farm?

Robert Davenport: Cotton and corn. You couldn't hardly get it gathered and so I says, "I'm gonna find something better than this." So I took government schooling to be a mechanic, automobile mechanic, and I worked at that for a while, and then I went to Dallas.

Where did you go to school for that?

Robert Davenport: Greenville, Texas, Greenville airport. There was an Army airbase out there, and we was out there. Then I got into the trucking industry, starting working on the trucks. There I got promoted into the trailer shops. They taught me how to paint, mix paint and all this. So I had, I took my training in various areas and done what they asked me to do. And so I come out and a guy says, "You got any priority work? You got any experience?" I told him what I had. He says, "Well, that's not really what I need." I said, "Well, sir," I said, "Just give me a chance to show you what I can do." I said, "If I can't handle it, I'll quit and you won't owe me nothing." Guess what he put me on to overhaul? A Pontiac straight eight. And I overhauled it, put new rings, new pistons, bored it out, ground the valves, just like a brand new engine. And we charged it up and he says, "Man, that sounds great." He said, "You got you a job." So I stayed with that, you know, a while, and he had to close the shop, he got him bad health. So I went on to Dallas and got me a job in the trucking industry, quit that, and went to driving 'em, back to driving. That ol' driving kinda gets into ya. And I stayed in the City of Dallas twenty-three and a half years with one company.

Driving?

Robert Davenport: Started out with a 20-foot trailer, wound up with a 42 on a route. Same route every day.

What would you normally carry? What type of loads?

Robert Davenport: For about 14 years, then I got off that and went to straight loads and buying shipments. But I decided I had enough of that and I surrendered into the ministry. So I took and built a church in Clifton, operated it for 25 years.

How old were you when you decided to go into the ministry?

Robert Davenport: Oh, I joined the ministry in '73. Of course I was already Sunday school teaching and deacon for several years. But one day I just surrendered into the ministry, and still am. I'm still, I'm holding down a church now for a lady that was in a wreck that was pastor of the church. My church ordained her 27 years ago.

What denomination are you?

Robert Davenport: Pentecostal.

Had you thought about becoming a minister for quite a while before you finally . . . ?

Robert Davenport: Well, yes. The Lord had to deal with me pretty strong on that. I knew that my life wouldn't be the same after that. I knew that my life would be somebody else's. A minister is on call seven days a week, 24 hours a day. Hospital call, wrecks, and what have you. But I told the Lord, I said, "Okay, I'm gonna go and it'll be no road too short or too long that I can't travel." Well, I went to South Africa, Durban, in '89. And stayed down there 31 days as a missionary helping him. So I've been kinda around, halfway around the world twice.

That's great.

Robert Davenport: And still going.

That's excellent. Have you ever had a chance to go back to Tinian or any desire to go back?

Robert Davenport: No, I have never even go back to California really.

Oh, really, okay.

Robert Davenport: No, I never did have no desire to go back to California. I just never did care about it. Too busy, too hurly burly. And I kinda like the quietness of the smaller towns. I never did get back down to the South Pacific. Never did get back over to Hawaii. So I haven't missed it. I just put them all aside and all this stuff come up.

Did you take any pictures of yourself when you were in the Navy?

Robert Davenport: Well, I took some pictures out on Tinian of what used to be the sugar cane factory, and where we bombed it and tore it all up, and how them people dress and all that. I got pictures of that. And I got pictures of aircraft with Enola Gay on it and some of the rest of 'em.

We would love, sir, to get any copies of any pictures you have, especially photos of yourself so we can add that to the file and everything, and maybe one day put it on our website. So what I'll do in about a week or so when I send you this interview on CDs, I'll put my card in there too that has my mailing address so hopefully we can get some copies of those from you. In fact, what you can do if you want, you can either send copies or if you want you can send the originals. We can scan them and then send them back to you. That way we have a scanned copy.

Robert Davenport: All right. Could I get one extra copy?

Oh, yes sir. We're going to send you a bunch of copies. Are you talking about the CD?

Robert Davenport: Uh-huh.

Yes sir, we'll probably send you at least four.

Robert Davenport: All right. My baby sister, she's wanting one, but I appreciate that.

Yes sir, absolutely. Well you know this program is just one small way of us to say thank you for your service. Commissioner Patterson is a veteran and I'm a Marine, and there's a lot of us here that are veterans. But even those that aren't are very thankful for your service to our nation. What we're doing with these interviews is we're saving them in our archives. We have documents here that go back to the Spanish land grant days that are 200-300 years old. And we have the original registro that Stephen F. Austin kept in his own hand of the settlers that came to Texas. And we have the land grant David Crockett's widow received after he was killed at the Alamo. So our hope is that we add all these interviews to that so maybe a couple hundred years from now, people can listen to these interviews and learn a little something about those that have served.

Robert Davenport: All right. You know, I will always be honored. I had never thought about giving an interview like this but when Jason Barlow, is that it? The trooper's name?

I didn't know what his last name was. I know his first name was Jason and he called.

Robert Davenport: B-A-L-L-E-W is what it looked like to me.

Yeah, I don't know his last name.

Robert Davenport: Well, he asked me about it and I said to set here a minute, and he said, "Well, I'll write the guy up." He says, "You think it might be a sham." I says, "No, coming from you I don't."

Yeah, that's great.

Robert Davenport: But he says, "Well, I didn't wanna call you and talk to you about it." He says, "Because I'm afraid that's what you'd do and just put it aside." I probably would have.

I appreciate him calling me that day, and I told him, I said, "Sir, I'd be honored to interview him." So he told me he was going to go out and see you.

Robert Davenport: Yeah, he did. And he told me he'd go . . . I'd like to give him one.

Oh, absolutely. And we can make more copies too. It's all free. We're also going to, along with those CDs, we're going to send you a nice commemorative binder that has a letter and a certificate in it signed by Commissioner Patterson. So they're pretty nice. You can frame them or keep them in the binder.

Robert Davenport: I appreciate that. James, it's been good talking to you and giving you the interview.

Yes sir. I really appreciate it and, again, thank you for your service to our nation. It's just a small way we can say thanks.

Robert Davenport: Good day.

All right, sir, take care.

Robert Davenport: Bye bye.