

Transcription: Roy Grunewald

Today is Monday, March 25, 2013. My name is James Crabtree, and this afternoon I'll be interviewing Mr. Roy Grunewald. This interview is being conducted by the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Mr. Grunewald is at the Tejeda Veterans Home in Floresville, Texas, and I'm in the General Land Office building in Austin, Texas. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us today. It's an honor for us. Sir, the first question I always like to start off with in every interview is please just tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you entered the military.

Roy Grunewald: My family lived on a farm and I just was raised there.

What town was that?

Roy Grunewald: Yancey. Y-A-N-C-E-Y.

Where is that located? I'm not familiar with Yancey.

Roy Grunewald: You know where Hondo is?

I do.

Roy Grunewald: Well, it's 15 miles south of Hondo.

Yes sir. So you were born and reared on a farm.

Roy Grunewald: Right.

Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Roy Grunewald: Yes, I had an older sister and three brothers. I was the middle child. My sister was the oldest and then the four boys.

What type of farm was it?

Roy Grunewald: Raising corn, high gear, hay. High gear and all kind of farmer stuff to feed the cattle, the horses.

When you were growing up did you plan on becoming a farmer as well?

Roy Grunewald: Well, I don't guess. I never did graduate out of high school.

When was it then that you entered the military?

Roy Grunewald: It was 1942. November of 1942.

Do you remember, were you still in high school then when Pearl Harbor was bombed? Do you remember that day?

Roy Grunewald: No, but I remember Pearl Harbor. Because I took a test in civil service in November of '41, before Pearl Harbor. I passed it and I was in civil service before I was in the military service.

Okay, yes sir. What were you doing in the civil service?

Roy Grunewald: I was studying to be a machinist. In the aircraft school on San Pedro Avenue in San Antonio. They didn't have enough room at Duncan Field at Kelly Field at first and then Duncan Field closed and then I went to Kelly Air Force Base.

Did you volunteer at some point or were you drafted into the . . .

Roy Grunewald: No. I enlisted. I volunteered.

What was it that made you decide to volunteer?

Roy Grunewald: I just thought everybody was going to come along. I was in Hondo then, they build a sub depot after I was in Kelly Field. Duncan Field and Kelly Field. And one of the ones that come out said, "If you enlist in the service you can select your base." So being in Hondo was close to home, it was about a half a dozen of us from Medina County, we enlisted.

That's a pretty good deal to get to choose your own base. That seems like a pretty rare thing. So you did that. Did they let you stay there for training or did they send you away?

Roy Grunewald: No. I took my training at Dodd Field. I believe it was part of Fort Sam Houston. In 1942.

In '42. What type of training was it?

Roy Grunewald: It was boot training, you know.

Regular basic training.

Roy Grunewald: Basic training.

How long did that last? About 12 weeks maybe? Or was it shorter?

Roy Grunewald: Yeah, something like that. I don't really remember how long, 12 weeks or something. About like everybody that took basic training, you know.

Where did you go after you finished that training?

Roy Grunewald: Well, I went back to Hondo. No, I didn't. Yeah, I went back to Hondo because that's where I was based in.

And what did you do in Hondo?

Roy Grunewald: I worked on aircraft.

Do you remember the types of aircraft they were?

Roy Grunewald: Yeah. It was trainers. T-11s.

Did you enjoy it?

Roy Grunewald: Oh yeah, best I could. You know it was a training school. Pilots and cadets.

So a lot of people moving in and out of there.

Roy Grunewald: Yes.

Did you live on base at that time or you still lived back at home?

Roy Grunewald: No, I lived on base.

On base. Yes sir. What were the other troops like in your unit?

Roy Grunewald: The other troops?

Yes sir. Like the other men in your squadron.

Roy Grunewald: Yeah, I was in the 842nd Squadron.

Do you remember any of the other airmen in your squadron or what your leadership was like?

Roy Grunewald: I was a crew chief on an airplane.

So that allowed you to fly very often as a crew chief?

Roy Grunewald: No. I've flown in helicopters, not much, just in training, when I went up there to train for mechanic. You know, working on helicopters in Fort Worth, Texas. Bell Helicopter factory.

Yes sir. Bell Helicopter is real big. So how long did you spend there at the base in Hondo?

Roy Grunewald: I guess it was almost . . . I spent my training and then I was in Hondo almost 34 years.

Thirty-four years?

Roy Grunewald: Well, I think it was . . . I got married in 1945. Then they shipped me to the Selman Field Monroe, Louisiana.

Monroe, Louisiana, okay.

Roy Grunewald: And I was preflighting the airplanes and trying to keep them up in the air until I retired February the 6th, 1946. I mean, I got out then. Then I went back to civil service.

Okay, back to Hondo then.

Roy Grunewald: Right.

So your time in the Army Air Corps you were just stateside the whole time?

Roy Grunewald: Right. I was really . . . I rode horses and my sternum jerked loose from my ribs and it never did grow back. Seemed like it didn't but when I'd lift something, you know, push out forward and it was about a dozen of us and trying to see doctors and after the exam, why they asked if anybody has anything that they couldn't see or that they couldn't determine, so I showed it to 'em. He told me to lift up on that table and it kinda of pooched out and they put on limited

service. So I was on limited service the entire time I was in military service again. They couldn't be sent overseas.

Couldn't send you overseas.

Roy Grunewald: No, about 53 of us, about the middle of my term in service. They put us all in the hospital to try to determine what to do with us. It was limited service. And after about . . . I thought it was seven months one time my wife told me, or my mother told me it was that long but I believe it was about just a few months but then they didn't do anything with us. They just put us back to work.

Did they ever figure out how to fix the problem with your sternum?

Roy Grunewald: No. It just finally . . . When I was about 40 years old, it never hardly bothered me. It just protrude out when I lifted. Just like it grew back together with the cartilage or something, the doctor said.

How did that make you feel? Were you relieved to not have to go overseas or did you feel like you were missing out?

Roy Grunewald: Well, I didn't feel like I was missing out because I don't think no . . . Maybe some of 'em like to go overseas but I didn't have no interest really in going overseas. I had three brothers over there and I had a son.

Oh, you already had a son?

Roy Grunewald: I had a son and _ Air Force Base was team chief on the Minuteman missile during Vietnam. So I knew there was a war on.

So your son was already born then when you entered the Army Air Corps?

Roy Grunewald: Oh yes. Vietnam was the last war.

Yes sir. I'm asking, he was born when you were there stationed at Hondo in the Army Air Corps?

Roy Grunewald: Yeah, I imagine so. I just can't think right now of his birthday. I had four children. A girl and three boys.

You said you had three brothers that were in the military during World War II as well, right?

Roy Grunewald: Yes.

What branch of service did they go in?

Roy Grunewald: Well, there was two of 'em in the Army and the other, my older brother and the one younger than me was in the Army. My youngest brother was in the Navy.

In the Navy.

Roy Grunewald: He enlisted.

Were you able to keep in touch with them while the war was going on? Did you get letters from them?

Roy Grunewald: No. Really not always. I know my oldest brother, when the war was over, we had to write . . . I don't know really where it was. The lawyers just told us the doctors to write to someplace why we didn't hear from him. And when they located him, said he was on a train guarding German prisoners.

Oh, he was guarding prisoners?

Roy Grunewald: Guarding prisoners. Yes.

What was Hondo like during the war? I guess with the base there and all the trainees coming in and out, it must have been a pretty active location.

Roy Grunewald: Oh yeah. I could go home I'd say every weekend or every time I was off 'cause all my brothers was gone. My mother . . . Daddy was in the hospital for a while, I think when I was young. I know when I was young but otherwise I'd go down there and help my mother because she was by herself.

Yes sir. So you were the . . . They had four boys and you were the only one that was there to assist them?

Roy Grunewald: Right.

That makes sense. When did you meet your wife? Was that during the war?

Roy Grunewald: Yes. I got married September the 12th, 1945.

'45. So right after the war was ending then.

Roy Grunewald: Yeah. It was pretty close to the end.

I ended it in I believe it was August of '45, so it sounds like maybe a month later you got married.

Roy Grunewald: Right.

And you said, sir, after the war was over, you were discharged. You still continued to work there in Hondo? On the base?

Roy Grunewald: Yes.

How were you able to do that? That seems like a pretty good setup.

Roy Grunewald: I went in the civil service. I went in November before Pearl Harbor and then I was discharged February the 6th, 1946. When I really retired was June the 30th. February the 6th, 1945, I was in Monroe, Louisiana. Selman Field.

Did you enjoy working on aircraft?

Roy Grunewald: Oh yes. It was interesting to work on 'em, everything like that. It kept you busy.

Was it something you felt you just naturally kind of had an aptitude for? Was it something you wanted to do?

Roy Grunewald: When I went into the service, why I figured the Air Force, you know, would be the best place that I would like. Which it was.

That's good. What was the typical day like for you on the base, if there was such a thing as a typical day?

Roy Grunewald: Every morning you had to preflight your airplane, you know, for the pilots to fly 'em. Then drain the sumps, you know, the gas tanks, for water. Just had to drain the sumps before they could fly. Which you just preflighted your airplane every morning before the pilots to come out because the pilot and the co-pilot, a cadet, three cadets. The navigator, bombardier, and one other one. I can't think of it right now. Pilot, the co-pilot, and three cadets on the T-11.

Did you get to know many of the crews very well?

Roy Grunewald: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I know the pilots, you know and everything, that many years that come out, but there'd be turnover of the pilots and the engineering office, and the pilots was right near our office, the engineering workers' office.

What was the hardest aspect of that job?

Roy Grunewald: Well, I guess the hardest sometime, I never hardly ever worked on engines much 'cause that was a bad job but otherwise, I don't know, it was just another day's work. It wasn't, you know, it was on this side of the war but I guess it's pretty free that I was that close to home, you know, that I got to enlist and in the Air Force too.

Yeah, that seems like a very unique thing that you were able to do that, and to be so close to home and then also when you got out, to be able to continue in that capacity in a civilian job, a civil service job.

Roy Grunewald: Yeah, I went back to Kelly Field, I think February the 6th, I mean April the 1st, 1946. I enlisted in '42, November of '42, and I got out February 6th of 1946.

Whatever became of the base or the old airfield there in Hondo?

Roy Grunewald: You know, I've thought of that. I don't remember. Being that I moved to San Antonio in 1948, I don't know really what is out there now.

Yeah, that would be interesting. I might have to try to look that up and find out. I'm sure at some point they might have . . . They stopped the military training there.

Roy Grunewald: Yeah, they probably did. I didn't know it for 31 years after I retired that Kelly Air Force Base closed.

That's right.

Roy Grunewald: But I know why they did, because they built a . . . When I went in the civil service still in Kelly Field, why they built a sub depot in Oklahoma City. And thousands of 'em come for training just to Kelly Field, you know. And then when that base was open, finished, well, they all moved back to Oklahoma City. Called 'em Okies.

Yeah, San Antonio had a whole lot of Air Force . . . And it still has a huge Air Force presence but I remember at one point they had Kelly, Brooks, Randolph and Lackland.

Roy Grunewald: And Duncan.

Oh, I didn't even know about Duncan.

Roy Grunewald: Yeah, Duncan was closed before Kelly Field did.

They definitely have done through the years, a lot of bases have closed or they call it realignment, the realignment commission.

Roy Grunewald: Oh, yes.

Shut down some of them. And now you're in Floresville. How did you come to go to Floresville?

Roy Grunewald: Well, my wife died in 1999, and I stayed at home for three and a half years by myself so finally I just got enough of it, and I went to a nursing home, Highland Nursing Center at Pecan Valley at San Antonio. And then, let's see, I came here September the 19th, 2008.

How did you like the home? Is it pretty good?

Roy Grunewald: Well, they take good care of you and everything.

That's good.

Roy Grunewald: I guess if I had any complaints a little bit and being honest, the food is a little different, you know?

Is it kind of bland?

Roy Grunewald: Right.

I've heard that. A lot of times hospital food or military food, any time they're making food for a lot of folks, it tends to become more bland.

Roy Grunewald: That's right. You have to . . . I've developed a little better taste for it, so getting along better than I did.

Yeah. You said you have four boys and a girl, four sons and a daughter?

Roy Grunewald: Yeah.

Where do they live?

Roy Grunewald: Well, my daughter, when she found out when they went to Kerrville one time to a tractor pull and ran into some kids that was, my daughter's husband now, and then she

moved from San Antonio . . . My daughter lives eight miles towards Stockdale from me, and I got a granddaughter lives seven miles towards Pleasanton from me.

So you have some family close then?

Roy Grunewald: Uh-huh.

That's great.

Roy Grunewald: My son was on a Minuteman missile, he was more crazy. He had a degree in electronics 'cause he was in the business college on electronics, so he went to Chanute Field, Illinois. That's where he went to training, and then he was on the Minuteman missile the entire time his enlistment. And then he came home, instead of getting back in electronics, why, he liked the 18-wheelers, and I guess he just . . . One time I was coming out of Junction after I was retired, got me a job at EG&G Automotive Research, safety of vehicles on the highway. And he was . . . Went and had to pick up milk, you know. And a guy here in San Antonio had seven or eight dairies but he had another dairy down to Edinburg close to Mexico, you know, and he picked up milk there, and he went 11 days without sleeping 'cause you have to pick up milk every day, and that's _ son. So I lost him about three years ago.

I'm sorry.

Roy Grunewald: He was asleep in bed.

And you have two other sons?

Roy Grunewald: Yeah, I have a son that lives close, oh, about 25-30 miles from me, and then one of 'em and his son live in my house in San Antonio, my home.

That's good, yes sir. When you got out of the service, did you keep any photographs or uniforms, that sort of thing from your time in the military?

Roy Grunewald: Yes, being that the family's kind of broken up like when my Daddy passed away when I was digging a well, my brother and me, 'cause we never hit water on that place but, what did you ask me?

I was asking, sir, if you kept anything from your time in the Army Air Corps, like uniforms or photographs.

Roy Grunewald: Yeah, I got a little photograph of me and I think they want to have one in the main office here.

That's good.

Roy Grunewald: Since a few months back, I've been president here.

Oh, you're president of the . . .

Roy Grunewald: Veterans.

Veterans, that's great.

Roy Grunewald: But it isn't much to it but you have a meeting once a month and then you can be helpful with any of 'em if they have any questions.

That's excellent. Do you feel like there's pretty good camaraderie there amongst the fellow veterans?

Roy Grunewald: Well, I don't know. You know they're from all over so you meet 'em from everywhere and different ranks.

That's true.

Roy Grunewald: I remember one morning the first time the girls giving us exercise, therapy and everything, ask every person what their rank was, and there's about 25 or better in there, when they got about five or six from the last, why they asked the guy next to me what his rank was, and he said he's a four-star general. Kind of made me sit up a little straight.

Was he joking or was he serious?

Roy Grunewald: No, it's true. His name is Warren Hardy.

Wow. That's pretty interesting.

Roy Grunewald: Oh, yeah. And there's another Lieutenant General Poe that goes to Eschenburg every two years, Eschenburg, here in Floresville that gives a talk, and flyover with airplanes and it's really nice.

That's great. I would think that it's good just to have those meetings amongst veterans, and hopefully there's some friendship and camaraderie that comes out of that regardless of rank.

Roy Grunewald: Yeah, that's right. They'll do the best they can.

Yeah, that's good. I really appreciate the staff down there because your interview is the third one I've done with the Floresville home. Last week I did a couple interviews as well. And the way we find these interviews is kind of through word of mouth. You know, folks telling other people about the interviews and what they're for, so I appreciate Ms. Corina and the other folks there in the office for setting it up.

Roy Grunewald: Oh, yeah. They do a good job.

That's great. And if you can tell all the veterans there that we're looking to interview all the veterans we can regardless of time of service, place of service, branch of service. We want to interview Texas veterans.

Roy Grunewald: Well, that's good.

Yes sir. I think I told you before we started the interview, we have documents here that go back to the 1700s. We have the land grant that David Crockett's widow received when he was killed at the Alamo, and we have the original registro that Stephen F. Austin kept of the settlers that came to Texas. So our goal is to take these interviews and add them to that so that people can study them and listen to them decades and hopefully centuries from now. And really it's all word

of mouth so if you can let any of your friends there at the home know, I'd love to interview them too.

Roy Grunewald: Okay.

Another thing we'll do, sir, and you can show this to folks when you get it, is we'll send you probably in a week or two, a really nice letter and certificate from Commissioner Patterson in a commemorative binder and along with it, we'll send you several copies of this interview on CDs, and that's something a lot of family members like. We get a lot of children and grandchildren that call and ask us for extra copies because they maybe have never heard their dad or their uncle or grandfather telling these stories before about their service. So that's a nice thing, and we're able to do that and it's all free. They can call us and ask for extra copies and we just print them up and send them to them no charge. So please let some of those other folks there in the home know.

Roy Grunewald: Okay.

Is there anything, sir, that you would want to talk about that you think I might have missed, I didn't ask about in terms of your time in the Army Air Corps?

Roy Grunewald: No, really not.

Think we covered it all?

Roy Grunewald: Yeah.

Yes sir. It sounds fascinating to have been able to spend that much time around aircraft, especially in such a busy training environment. And it definitely takes a lot of skill to know how to keep aircraft flying. If something goes wrong, it's not like in a car where you can just pull over and stop.

Roy Grunewald: That's right.

I asked you earlier one question about what was the hardest part of your job. I'm going to ask you now, what was the most enjoyable part of your job in the Army Air Corps?

Roy Grunewald: Well, there was always something to do, you know. But just the . . . You might say it was kind of clean and what you could think about everything 'cause it wasn't like in battle, you know. But I felt proud to be in the Air Force.

Sure. There had to have been a lot of satisfaction I would think in knowing that the work you were doing allowed those planes to be flown by men who were training who ultimately would go and fight and help win the war.

Roy Grunewald: That's right.

Yes sir, that's great. Did you keep in touch after the war with any of the men that you served with?

Roy Grunewald: No, it just seemed like . . . You might say you have enough here, the veterans and everything like that.

Sure, kind of go your own way after the war was over I guess.

Roy Grunewald: Yeah, it seems funny, you know. I don't know if you know the counties around here, so Medina County only enlisted about a dozen of us, why one of them was in 841st Squadron and I was in 842nd Squadron. But he was shipped overseas or a different place, but when I got discharged in I believe it's Batesville or south of Selman Field, why the second day I was there, I ran into him. So it's kind of interesting but he passed away too. I can think of him just like to hear taps sometime, you have to find out, I wonder who it is.

Okay, yeah, because they do that at the home, right?

Roy Grunewald: Right.

I guess that's gotta be tough, living there and having friends pass away and that sort of thing.

Roy Grunewald: Oh, yeah.

How is morale there in the home? I'm just curious. Are most folks happy to be there or . . . I'm sure there's some that don't want to be there?

Roy Grunewald: Yeah, well, I can say you hear something about that too, you know. Don't know it is but being that my Daddy passed away when I was young, you might say I didn't have him much after I was eight years old, I've learned to kind of try to take care of myself, you know. And you can't be mad or upset too much about anything or anybody. You gotta kind of help yourself. You gotta try to be the best, do the best you can.

Yes sir. It sounds like you have the right approach to it, sir.

Roy Grunewald: Well, I try. You know it's 34 years since I was kind of in a supervisory capacity for 27 of them, and it don't do you any good to stay mad at anybody or too upset, you're just harming yourself.

I think you're right.

Roy Grunewald: You have to kind of join things or you might say, most of us here probably this will be our last home until we meet our master you know, so we just try to make it the best we can.

That's good. I think you've got the right approach, and I think having those meetings and just being able to have some fellowship with fellow veterans I think is hopefully a good thing for folks that are there.

Roy Grunewald: Oh, yes.

I think that was kind of the whole idea behind the homes is that they would be filled with veterans so there would be something in common with each other so no matter where they were from or what their background was, everybody shared that same common bond of having served in the military, and hopefully that helps some folks to do better than they might otherwise would.

Roy Grunewald: Yeah, you meet all types, you know.

It sounds like it if you've got three- and four-star generals there . . .

Roy Grunewald: Yeah. Well, one or two of 'em was here, and then Lieutenant General Poe, why he's still, he may still be in the service, you know, three stars, you know. First came around, we got rained out about the last 30 minutes at Eschenburg Stadium, and he came by, happened to come by my table where I was sitting, so I shook hands with him and didn't know what to say hardly but I told him it was the first time I shook hands with a three-star general.

That's great.

Roy Grunewald: But then the bases had generals, you know. They built streets here in San Antonio like General McMullen and General Hudnell, and I've shaken hands with them. They come out sometimes at night in the shops, you know. And I volunteered during the Berlin Airlift.

Oh, you did?

Roy Grunewald: Yeah, just to help 'em out.

Tell me a little bit about that. Where were you when that happened? Were you in Hondo still during the airlift?

Roy Grunewald: No. I was here just in the Air Force I believe at Kelly Field.

You were at Kelly Field. Wow. So that was when . . .

Roy Grunewald: No, it wasn't. It was after the war.

Yeah but not long after.

Roy Grunewald: That's right. I volunteered to help and then it took me a good while to get back to my own shop. I was in the machine shop.

Yeah, that was a huge undertaking of all those aircraft and flying in all those supplies to Berlin from planes. I've read that it was such that almost as soon as one plane would land, there was another plane taking off, and it was just a constant procession of aircraft to supply Berlin.

Roy Grunewald: It was a lot of action.

Wow. That's quite something. I imagine then where you were had to have been a lot of maintenance work going on to keep those aircraft up and going for that.

Roy Grunewald: Oh, yeah.

Yes sir. That was a big moment that I think a lot of people have forgotten about but it was very important moment.

Roy Grunewald: I feel like all during the war, why I's lucky I didn't have to go overseas, but when you put that uniform on, why you're under somebody, don't matter what you got in the big battles or you just done this and that and the other, but you put that uniform, you're a veteran.

That's right. It's all one team, one fight.

Roy Grunewald: That's right. You hear a lot of different stories but you got to accept 'em.

That's absolutely right. And a lot of times when you're a veteran, where you went is based completely on just random circumstances.

Roy Grunewald: That's right.

You don't have a choice of saying, "Hey, I want to go here or there." You kind of go where they tell you to go.

Roy Grunewald: That's right. Uncle Sam's your boss.

That's right. Yes sir. Well, sir, I've enjoyed speaking with you today, and really appreciate you letting me interview you. Again, on behalf of Commissioner Patterson and everyone here at the General Land Office, we want to thank you for your service to our nation. And hopefully, like I said, in a couple weeks we'll be getting that big envelope to you with this interview and the certificate and letter from the Commissioner. Hopefully you can get that soon and tell other folks there at your home about these interviews too.

Roy Grunewald: What's your name again?

It's James Crabtree.

Roy Grunewald: I can remember that I believe.

Yes sir. What I'll do, sir, when I send these CDs to you in a couple weeks, I'll put my business card in there so it has my direct phone number on it, but also Corina and the other ladies in the activities office, they know how to get a hold of me too. Because I work for the Land Office up here in Austin, and the Land Office is the agency that oversees all of the veterans homes here in Texas, so they know how to track me down.

Roy Grunewald: Okay.

All right, sir, well, take care and have a good day.

Roy Grunewald: Thank you. You too. You betcha.

Bye bye.

Roy Grunewald: Bye.