

Newell Brown Turner Jr.

Interviewed by Judy Hansen
April 2015

My name is Newell B Turner Jr and I was born in Salt Lake City July 30, 1922 to Newell B Turner Sr. and Mareda Poulson. I moved to Lehi in 1928 and went to school until the 11th grade. I quit school and joined the Civilian Conservation Corps then I finished High School the following year. I then went to work for the Lang company in Salt Lake City as a sheet metal worker helper.

The war came along and I was the first volunteer from Lehi. I tried to get into the Navy, but they wouldn't take me because I was partial red/green color blind. They wouldn't take me in the Marines, because I was deaf in one ear. Then they lowered the standards, from peace time to war time standard, so if you were warm (alive) you could get into

any of the military. I joined the Army. I went to Fort Douglas. There were about 110 draftees and volunteers that went through that day, and every one of them wanted to go into the Air Force. They asked me what I wanted and I said the Calvary. They said, "We don't have the Calvary anymore." My dad was in the Calvary and I had thought that would be good but they said the Calvary was the tanks now. I told them that the Army was good enough for me. Then they found that I had been working in sheet metal up at the Lang Company and that was a critical military occupational specialty (MOS), so out of the 110 people that tried to get into the Air Force they only took three of us. I only had a high school education and some of them had two and three years of college. They put them in the Army and I went to the Air Force. It was the best move I ever made in my life because I'm sure some others didn't make it all the way through the war.

I was 19 years old and I had to have my parents sign for me because I wasn't old enough to sign for myself. I was sworn in December 12th, 1941. When they swore me in, the Captain told me to raise my right hand, and just then a Sergeant came running in with a piece of paper. The Captain read the paper and it said from now on instead of being enlisted for three years, which was the Army regular enlistment, you were enlisted for the duration of the war plus six months. So he said, "Soldier, you are the first one in the State of Utah to be sworn in for the duration of the war plus six months." Everyone ahead of us had to sign up for three years. We laughed at



them when we got back to the barracks, “Hee-Hee you guys are going to be in for three years, and we’ll be out in a year because the war will be over” (he laughs).

They sent me to Sheppard field, Texas for basic training and that is the only place you can stand in mud to your knees and have sand blowing in your eyes. Then I went to Mobile, Alabama and from there I went to Columbus, Ohio to the Ohio Institute of Aeronautics at 340 East Broad Street. We stayed at the KofC¹ Hall. I went to school for sixteen weeks and then I went back to Brookley Field in Mobile, Alabama. While in Mobile, I went to a café for lunch. The girl took our order and we waited and waited but no meal. I got the manager and asked him why the delay. The waitress told him, “I’m not serving no DAMNYANKEES”. That is the first time that I knew DAMNYANKEES was one word.

Basic training was a pain in the butt. Being in the Air Force we got the basic, but it wasn’t like the infantry where they got all the rifle training. We didn’t have rifles to train with, so they trained us with boards cut to look like rifles. When they finally got some rifles, we went out and shot five rounds into the ocean and that was our training with the rifle. They didn’t have ammunition and they didn’t have rifles.

While in Mobile, some of the guys were on leave. The Germans were sinking ships just outside the harbor. One day a submarine was spotted just off the coast. They tried to get a plane in the air to scare them and make them dive. They had to send him up without any ammunition or bombs, because the soldier that had the keys to the bombs and ammo was in town on leave. The Army wouldn’t admit it because they didn’t want the people to panic, but we would go down to the beach and there would be all kinds of oil and debris on the beaches. The German were actually sinking ships just outside Mobile with their submarines.

I left New York on a hunk of rust called the *USS Uruguay*. We were assigned our sleeping schedule. I was assigned to sleep from 8 in the morning to 4 in the afternoon. The bunks hung from chains on the walls; four bunks high. Some of the soldiers got sea sick and heaved over the side of their bunks onto the three bunks below them. I went down to sleep on the first day and it stunk so bad that I never went back. I slept on the stairs or in the hallways or anyplace I could lie down. We were 16 days like this. No fresh water to bath in or shave. Almost every soldier went the 16 days without shaving or bathing. Imagine how we smelled when we finally disembarked. Have you ever tried bathing or shaving in salt water? They had a marine on each water fountain to see that you didn’t take more than a canteen of water at a time.

I was in the 8th Air Force. I went overseas and we landed in Swansea, South Wales. I was stationed all over England. They sent us to Langford Lodge up near Belfast, North Ireland to a place call Loch Neagh; which is the largest inland body of water in the British Isles. We didn’t have an airfield and we didn’t have any airplanes, so we had to build an airfield. We were Air Force but they put us on construction building the airfield. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) they claimed didn’t start up until after the war but they were actually active then. We had a lot of Irish helping to build the runways but they would sabotage the equipment. They would put sand in the tanks and they would mix cement without enough cement in it so the cement would crumble. The IRA was pro-German.

¹ Knights of Columbus Hall

I was on guard duty rather than construction. It was a better job. We would work four days and then have three days off. We would go to Belfast on our days off. They had a lot of trouble with the IRA in Belfast too. We were in a pub one time, when a fight started between the Americans and the Irish. Somebody shouted, "Here come the bobbies," you know, their police, and they were all over six feet. They had on tall hats that made them look about eight feet tall. They had horse-shoes on their heels and hob nails in their soles. You could hear them a mile away as they come clomping down those cobblestone streets. Me and this guy named Fox, I don't remember his first name - took off down the street and hid in a doorway. The bobby came after us and went right on by. Fox jumped out and hollered, "Hey, here we are!" (He laughs) You could actually see the sparks from that guys shoes and his horseshoe heels as he slid on the cobblestone street. He came running back to get us. I said, "You crazy little son of a gun" and he took off one way and I went another. I don't think the bobby was that interested in catching us anyway.

I had lots of experiences - some good and some bad. I've seen many people crash in airplanes and get killed. In Ireland, American civilians were assembling YP-38's². They had our pilots take them up and unwind them to see if they would stay together. We had Sergeant Pilots then, that is something else some claim we never had. We did have Sergeant Pilots, but they eventually made them all officers. One evening two pilots took off side-by-side in two new YP-38's. They went up and were going to turn over to fly away. The one turned over to fly away but the other tried to finish a loop right from the ground. I was watching with a pair of binoculars. He tried to pull it out and you could see that it was mushin'. He came down and smashed right into the runway. Just before he hit, he put both hands in front of his face. The plane just disintegrated. Of course when it crashed everyone came running. I was only about 100 yards away and was the first one on the scene. They brought four medics out and each took a corner of a blanket. They went along the runway picking up pieces of flesh, bone, and whatever they could find throwing it into the blanket. They only found maybe eight or ten pounds. I looked over and there was something on fire. I thought it was part of the engine. I went over and saw it was what was left of the pilot with his leather flight jacket on. He had his Sergeant stripes and his Officer bars pinned on the top of his shoulder. The top of his head and his hands were worn right off. He was on fire so they brought a fire extinguisher over and put him out.

I was stationed all around England and Ireland for a couple years and then we went to France. The British had a saying that the Americans were, "Over-paid, over-sexed, and over here!" They weren't too happy about this because the Americans were going with their girls. Some of them got married and some were over there long enough to have families and even bought houses in England.

I was transferred into the 9th Air Force when it first became active. We were the first Air Force Troops to land in France. We were what they called a MR&R, mobile repair and reclamation outfit. On the way over, there was ship in front of the ship that was ahead of our ship, and when they saw they were going to collide they told them to reverse the engines. So they were backing up, but when the lookout on our ship with the telephone told our people to reverse their engines, the telephone didn't work, and we plowed into the other ship - full steam. It knocked one of

² Later the YP-38's were just called P-38's. *The P-38 had distinctive twin booms and a single, central nacelle containing the cockpit and armament (Wikipedia)*

their screws³ off. We were on what was called a LST, landing ship tank. It damaged our doors and knocked our anchor off. We were in danger of sinking because of the high waves and we might take on water. I didn't care if the ship sank, but I was worried that the salt water would ruin a new pair of binoculars that I had just bought. I was teaching aircraft identification and I was always trying to identify anything in the air. We had to go back to England and they welded a patch over the hole where the anchor got knocked off. Then they fixed the door and we went back and landed at Étretat, France.

The first night we were there, we had our shelter halves. Each man had a shelter half and you would hook them together to have a tent that two could sleep in. That morning we had a big air raid and when we got up some of the tents had shrapnel holes in them. The next night we had fox holes dug and we were down in there with planks, armored plates, and everything else over the top of us because everything that went up had to come back down. We had air raids almost every night. At night (we were right close to the ocean of course), the Germans would come and drop magnetic mines in among the ships. They would explode if they got around a magnetic field. A Ju 88⁴ came over and our guns must have hit one of the mines he had in his airplane because you had never seen such an explosion in your life when that thing went off. There is nothing more beautiful than an air-raid if you're far enough away from it, but when it is right over-head it is not a lot of fun.

Like I said, I was in a mobile-reclamation and repair outfit so we were always the ones closest to the front lines - or the airfield closest to the front lines. When our planes ran into trouble and couldn't make it back to their base, they would land at our field. When we first got over there, they were flying from England and would land on our field to refuel and get ammunition. Then at night they would fly back to England. The infantry finally captured enough land that they brought a bunch of planes and landed them in France so they didn't have to fly back to England at night. They weren't too happy about that, because we had primitive conditions and they had nice quarters in England.

We were all bottled up and when they broke through at Saint-Lô, I was up on a hill and watched the 8th Air-Force destroy the town. I went through France, Belgium, Holland, Luxemburg, and Germany. We just kept moving to a different base, whichever was the closest to the front where the emergency planes would come in. We saw all kinds shot up, land with no wheels down, maybe one wheel, or damaged really badly. We saw a lot of crashes.

I was supposed to be a sheet metal man but I took the assignment of being a truck driver. When we were on forward bases we would take two 10-wheel trucks pulling two trailers, a Jeep, two tents, sixteen men, and a cook. We were self-contained, by ourselves with never any Officers. We would go set up in a field someplace and work on these airplanes where they came down. If the airplane was repairable we would repair it, but if it wasn't repairable, we would take it apart and send it back to Paris on a low-boy⁵. We would put the airplane fuselage in the center of the low-boy with the engine still on it and a wing on each side. Some of those places we were at were 20 degrees below zero and we were out there working on those airplanes in the storms.

³ Propeller

⁴ *The Junkers Ju 88 was a German World War II Luftwaffe twin-engined multirole combat aircraft (Wikipedia)*

⁵ A low-boy is a trailer that is built closer to the ground than a regular trailer.

One airplane we fixed so it could fly back to the base for major repairs. They brought in a bulldozer and a road patrol. They took out whole rows of fruit trees and a house, bulldozed them right down, so they could fly that airplane out. We'd take all the armor plates, and guns and strip everything out to make it as light as possible. Then we put in just enough gasoline so it could take off as quick as it could and fly back to Paris. That's what we would do out in the field. Sometimes we would have airplanes come down behind Germany lines, but we were advancing so quickly we knew we would have it back in a few days. If we were lucky and got there before the British, we would have a pretty good airplane, but if the British got there before us they'd strip all the Plexiglas and the eight day clocks. They would take this Plexiglas and make all kinds of jewelry out of it. They were really clever. They would make hearts with flowers inside and everything. They would steal the eight day clocks too. Most of our fighter planes were too shot up and damaged to be able to repair and fly them out, so we almost always had to salvage them.

Like I said, I assigned myself a truck driving job. When we would go out into the field we always needed parts and mail. I would go back to Paris and pick up the parts and the mail and take it out and give it to the guys. Sometimes it would take me a day or two and you could



Me and Robert (Robear) – my French interpreter

always stop at any Army Base or British Base to pick up gasoline and get something to eat. We hated to eat at the British bases because they would have fish for breakfast on Fridays and things like that. It was terrible. They would complain about our rich American food but whenever they got a chance to come to our base they always came over to eat rather than have their own rations because we had a lot better food than they did. I had a little French kid that I took with me all the time because he spoke five languages. Over there you would change countries like you would change counties here. You would go to a different country and there were no signs to tell you where you were at. We didn't have GPS or anything. The only way you could find out where you were was to talk to the civilians. I had this French kid dressed in a GI uniform and he would talk to the people. Almost everyone over there is bi-lingual. If he couldn't talk to them in English, French, or German he would find some other language he could communicate with them in. He was just a life-saver for me.

I was in Belgium the day the Battle of the Bulge started. I had a load of broken down generators that I was taking to a place to have them repaired. They were generators that we used on our mobile trucks to make electricity to run our equipment. They were poorly made at best. We had machine shops on trucks that we used to repair planes in the field. When I got up to where I was supposed to go in Belgium, the soldiers were all excited and I asked what the deal was. They said the Germans had broken through and we've have to get out of there fast; the Germans are coming right over the hill. I asked them to help me unload the generators. We threw them off the truck. I said we would let the Germans fix them. On the way back, I started picking up GI's that had lost their outfits. I picked up about thirty and took them back to Paris.

Whenever you would stop at a crossroad, the Americans had a check point. They had what we called a quad-50 on a half-track⁶. They had one guard on the north/south road and one guard on the east/west road so nobody could drive through. You had to stop or they would shoot you. We stopped at one and they had a barbed-wire enclosure about 30 or 40 feet in diameter. It had about seven or eight soldiers inside. I asked who they were and was told they were American speaking German spies. They had dropped with parachutes behind American lines to interrupt and slow the Americans down. To interrogate the soldiers, they would ask us to say a whole bunch of words that had w's and v's in them because Germans have trouble pronouncing their w's and v's. They would say, "Who is little orphan Annie?" "What was little orphan Annie's dog's name?" "Who is Joe Palooka?" and ask a bunch of questions like that. Then they asked me, "Who is the 16th President of the United States?" I said, "Hell, I don't know" and they said, "OK, go ahead." I said, "Wait a minute, I don't know who the 16th President of the United States is." Then he said, "If you were German you would know." Because I didn't know who the 16th President of the United States was they knew I was American (he laughs). Anyway, I got through all right but they told me I better keep going because if it gets any worse they would give me a rifle and shovel and tell me to dig a fox hole and stay right there until I was relieved. Well, we did get back to Paris ok, but I thought it was the funniest thing that happened to me during the war, not knowing who the 16th President of the United States was.

I was at one place where the British had four search lights, one on each corner of a large field. They also had what they called a predictor, which was the precursor to the radar. It was primitive but it worked. This British Sergeant and I used to like to play cribbage together. We were in his tent playing cribbage and a British Soldier came running in and said there was a formation of Germany planes coming over, of



Me with my British Sergeant friend

⁶ A half-track is an American armored vehicle used by the United States, the British Empire, and the other Allies during World War II (Wikipedia)

course they were bombing every night anyway. So the Sergeant said, "We're just about done, wait until they get a little closer." So he waited until they came a little closer and he came running back in and the Sergeant said, "Wait a minute, we only got one more hand." Finally the guy said the JU 88's were only so far away. We went running out and the Sergeant yelled, "Lights!" There were large generators that powered these huge searchlights. They were tracking all the time with this predictor and when they turned the searchlights on, there the Germany planes were right smack dap in middle of their center beams. Of course all the artillery opens up on them. This Sergeant that I played cards with got credit for shooting down a German 88. It came down real low and he had either a bren gun or a sten gun but he started shooting at it because he could see the exhaust. He said, "I just started shooting between the exhausts." He started the plane on fire and as it went out over the harbor, the ships opened up on it and shot it down. They gave him credit for shooting it down because he started it on fire and lit it up. One of the British Generals came and gave him a medal. My British friend was a real nice guy.

Another thing that happened was real funny (he laughs). When we were in Belgium, the Germans were sending buzz bombs⁷ directly over us all day and all night. They were shooting at Liège, Belgium and London. Anyway, we had seen dozens of those buzz bombs come over. We got to where we wouldn't even watch them because they were so common. Well, a guy from Idaho came running in yelling, "The Wars Over, The Wars Over!" "Whad-da-ya mean the wars over?" He said they just dropped an adam, A-D-A-M, bomb on Hiroshima and it has the equivalent of 50,000 tons of T-N-T. He said it was so big the sound will be heard clear around the whole world. Just then we heard a great big BOOM. He said "there it is now." Of course we didn't know anything about Atomic bombs because it was super-secret. Well, they had been taking ammunition out into the North Sea on barges and blowing them up. This had been going on for quite a while. But the timing could not have been more perfect. Of course we didn't know what the Atomic bomb was but he called it an ADAM bomb. They kept that top secret. They didn't want anyone to know anything about Atomic bombs.

At the end of the war, my First Sergeant came and said to me, "Pack up your gear, you're gonna go home." I said, "What do ya mean I'm gonna go home? I can't go home tonight, I got a date." He said, "Well you're going home anyway. You either leave now or you're gonna miss your chance." I got thinking, "Well, if I leave now I'll be home in time for the deer hunt." That's the thing I missed the most. He said, "You got to leave right now." So I went back and got everything packed up and got on a G.I. truck. They took me down to the train station and put me on a German passenger car that had been strafed and bombed about a dozen times. It had holes all through it and the windows were knocked out. It took me four or five days to get out from where I was in Germany because they would shuffle us off to the side track to let the Army trains through that were more important. This darn thing had flat wheels and it would go bump-bump-bump every time they went around. I finally made it to Paris. When I got there, there were about a dozen of our guys there. I had more points than anybody in the outfit; I had been

⁷ A V-1 flying bomb. The 'V' came from the German word *Vergeltungswaffen*, meaning weapons of reprisal. The V-1 was developed by German scientists. . . They were nicknamed "buzz bombs" by the British due to the distinct buzzing sound made by the pulse-jet engines powering the bombs, which overall resembled a small aircraft. Other British nicknames included "doodlebugs" and "flying bombs."
(<http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/timeline/v1.htm>)

overseas longer and got all these points. When they first figured the points out, I was the only one qualified that had enough, but then they reevaluated and these other guys were eligible to be sent home too. They put them on an airplane and sent them to Paris and they had been there three or four days before I even got there, and I had left before they did (he laughs).

I wanted to be in Paris when the war officially ended. I thought, "Boy, they are gonna have a party and a half." I waited and waited and waited until I finally thought it ain't gonna happen so I'd go across the English Channel to London. I was sure they would have a big celebration there and I had never seen London with the lights on. I was sure they would turn the lights on. I got right smack dap in the middle of the English Channel and it come over the radio that the war was over and the whole world was celebrating. There I was on a boat in the middle of the English Channel with a bunch of G.I.'s (he laughs). No party for me!

I came home on the *USS General A. E. Anderson*. I think it was a liberty ship. The seas were so rough that even some of the sailors got sea sick. I stood on the deck looking over the side and when the front of the ship came up out of the water, I noticed a great big bulb on the bottom. I didn't know ships were built like that. I thought they were pointed all the way to the bottom. When the front end would dive under water, both screws on the back would come out of the water and turn in thin air. It would make the whole ship shudder. We started developing cracks in the hull and the sailors got pretty excited. The ship had broken the anti-magnetic belt and they thought we might hit a magnetic mine.

We landed in New York and saw the Statue of Liberty: that was quite a sight. After we got off of the boat and onto the soil of the good old U.S. of A., they took us to the mess hall and you could have all the steak you wanted to eat. That was what everybody wanted was to have potatoes, gravy, and a big steak. You could have all the steak you wanted to eat but you found out you couldn't eat that much anyway. We all floundered on our steak.

In those days the only transportation was on trains, so the trains took us everywhere. The trains brought us home. We got on a train to come home and I knew I was going to go through Lehi so I gave the conductor a note to drop off at what they called the dog house. They used to have a station right there by the old Lehi Hotel on Main Street that controlled the traffic on the railroad and there was always somebody in there. I wrote this note to be dropped off there and I stood on the other side of the train 'cause I knew it went right by my house at 444 W Main Street. My dad was standing out in the yard watching the trains go by. I hollered at him and he recognized me. He called my mother up in Sandy and by the time I got up to Fort Douglas and unloaded, I had my family waiting for me there.

When I got out of the Army they asked me if I wanted any clothes. I had a barracks bag packed full of clothing. I said I didn't want anything to do with the Army and that I would go downtown and buy new ones. Then I went downtown and found out I couldn't buy ANYTHING! You couldn't buy a pair of shoes, you couldn't buy a pair of socks, you couldn't buy nothing so I had to wear my uniform for several days or more until I could finally get to enough places where I could round up some civilian clothes.

My mother put on a big feed for me. She had all these ration coupons. I had been over in England where they got one egg a month or one orange a month. That was their ration. She ordered steak and all this other food. I couldn't believe it. I said, "Boy, you don't need all this stuff." I had never seen ration coupons other than the ones the British had but she was using them to buy all this stuff. It blew my mind that they could have all that food here in the United States. I couldn't believe it. It was so different than what was over there.

I served for three years, nine months, and seventeen days; overseas, three years and one month. Now they go overseas for six months and when they come home they tie ribbons on all the trees and have parades and everything. They have cameras at the airport and big huge signs everywhere. When we came home, we came home and that was it. There were no parades - no nothing - nobody could have cared less. Now I wear that hat over there (he points to a hat) that says WWII on it and I get on a bus and some of those boy scouts that have been taught if you see a veteran to salute them, will salute you because you have a WWII veterans hat on.