

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

National Guard History

National Guard Experience

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JAMES TOWNLEY

Interviewed

by

David Arms

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YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: JAMES TOWNLEY
INTERVIEWER: David Arms
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A: This is an interview with Mr. James R. Townley for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program by David Arms. This interview is being conducted on May 11, 1976, at approximately 9:10 a.m. at the Washington Junior High School in Niles, Ohio.

Mr. Townley, could we start this interview by you giving me some background, your personal background and history? Where were you born and brought up?

T: I was born in Brownsville, Pennsylvania, on November 15, 1922. I was educated in the Brownsville City School System. I was quite active in the music field in the school system. I played in the Brownsville Senior High School Band, and participated, myself, in my own band and other bands in the area. I went to California State Teachers' College in 1940

On November 5, 1942, I enlisted in the armed services after the Japanese attacked Pearl harbor in 1941. I was called out to duty in February of 1943. In fact, it practically cleaned the college out of all male inhabitants at that time. They took a special train from the college itself. I don't know how many cars were involved but it took most of the abled-bodied men that were in the college at that time. Practically every able-bodied man that I knew enlisted on or about that time. The various programs such as Navy, Army, and Air Corps, at that time, came in and requested people to sign up. From California, I went to Camp Lee Virginia. In Camp Lee Virginia, in 1943, I was subjected to the normal tests and examinations. I excelled in the radio field. At that time, I guess, the Air Corps had first priority on new recruits, so I was sent to

Air Corps Basic Training at Miami Beach in Florida. From there I was sent to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, where I took radio operator and mechanic courses. Following the course, I was selected, because of my academic standing, to go into communication cadets. Communication Cadets Program at that time was at Yale University. The cadet program was being expanded and lengthened in time. What used to be the "ninety day wonder course" was put into Seymore Johnson, North Carolina, from Miami Beach. They took over the cadet program, which at that time was known as pretechnical training. Of course, the three month, 90 day program increased to four months. I think Colonel Wise was commanding the cadet program at Seymore Johnson, North Carolina. I went through that program there. I remember specifically his address to the cadets who completed the program. He said, "You gentlemen deserve your commission now. However, that's not the way the Air Corps feels about it. They not only increased the time here from 90 days to 120 days, but you are going to go on to an intensified technical training course at Yale University at which time many of you--though you deserve your commission right now having completed all the courses that commissioned officers who have gone before you have done--are going to have to go on and complete this requirement also."

I went to Yale University, and their course was constantly being increased. In other words, the officers at that time, who were going through a program, had no knowledge that really the war was in our favor. It was probably known to the higher headquarters and not known to the cadets in training at that time or to any of the officers within the zone of interior. Constant reduction in force strength required continued raising of the educational requirements, time requirements; therefore the washout rate was much greater. I don't know exact statistics, but I would say that the washout rate in many cadet programs was approximately 95 percent. Thus I feel in my own case it was an honor to get through. However, I felt sorry for those who did not make it. I remember families of people who thought that they were going to graduate and made plans for the trip to Yale on graduation day, and their sons did not receive the commission that they expected. This was rather a very difficult thing to face. I had one close friend whose mental attitude concerned me. This had happened to him--he had actually washed out four days before the program ended. The fear of washing out was constant.

I was commissioned to second lieutenant at the university on September 7, 1944. I could discuss many of the interests that I had at that time because I was what was known as a cadet first sergeant throughout most of my time

at Yale. I think that a cadet first sergeant had more power in the military at that time, as far as dealing over personnel, than any other position in the armed services. I won't go into that. However, it was a very enlightening experience. I think it has given me very good insight to the workings and running of organizations, because I know and have had personal experience of what a tremendous job that was required of the enlisted rank at that level.

There was a specific program offered at that time where I could go into MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] or, as their selling point, win your wings. There is always discussion and talk among new second lieutenants about the prospect of receiving flying pay, hazardous duty pay as it was known in those days, yet it was a considerable amount in comparison to the second lieutenant's salary.

I turned down the MIT assignment to enter into a classified assignment which I knew little of, other than it was known in those days as radio countermeasures. This started me out on a very classified situation which I had no knowledge of. However, it required considerable background study conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigations and the like. I was sent to radio countermeasures school in Boca Raton, Florida. At that particular time in history, it was highly classified and little was known about it. Out of over thirteen million men and women under arms, I understand that only about fifty of us were trained in that capacity at that time. That, in itself, would be something I can look back on or tell my grandchildren, that at least I was one out of thirteen million who was assigned that position.

We completed that and then I went to Eglin Field, Florida for additional training. Upon completion of radio operator training and mechanics school I taught as an instructor while waiting for an assignment to pretechnical training as a cadet. I was an instructor in radio and had a 35 word a minute code speed. With that 35 word per minute code speed, I was sent to Camp Pinedale in Fresno, California, under the Signal Corps as an officer to learn Japanese Katakana code. At that time, I engaged in developing sixteen words a minute in the Japanese code for use in the type of training that I was being schooled for.

From Camp Pinedale in Fresno, California, I went to March Field, California, where I completed an additional intensified program known as a flying ferret course which was . . . If you look up ferret in the dictionary, it has something to do with a rat or a rodent. It is used in English "to ferret out the enemy," radar

installations, and things of that nature.

From there I got my overseas assignment; I worked in the 11th Air Force along the Aluetian Islands, stationed on the Island of Shemya. At that time, preparations were being made for the invasion of Japan, prior to the dropping of the atom bomb on Hiroshima. After the dropping of the bomb and the war ended, I was on Shemya with the 104th Bomb Squadron in that particular part of the world. All activities ceased and we just waited for reassignment. I occupied my time instructing in the Willowa Technology School on blueprint reading and mechanical drawing and some other areas just to keep busy and occupied.

I went back to the states and was sent to Camp Atterbury in Indiana for reassignment or redistribution. I went into the reserve program. I might add, that the particular program that I had been in had no table of organization and equipment. I don't know if you are familiar with the OSS, but in most cases, whatever rank you went in at, that's about the rank you came out with mainly because if they had received promotion, why then this would be a matter of public record. I assume that this was the way that it was. I'm certainly sure of one thing, that probably they did get expenses and things of other nature that would probably make it worthwhile if you still maintained that rank, although I have no proof. I can't speak with authority on that subject, but that's my assumption.

I went back home from Camp Atterbury and went into the reserve program. I then got a call from the Pentagon asking if I was interested in assignment. I went to college for that particular summer . . . when the assignment came, I was completing my work at college. I went to Eglin Field, Florida, where I was engaged as a radar officer at the measurement and analysis branch of the proving ground command. I worked under Colonel Ray J. Will who was a West Point graduate and was an exceptional officer to work with. I was in charge of all the radar sites along Santa Rose Island. We engaged in many service test of new equipment within the Air Force.

After being there for almost a year, I was told I had an overseas assignment. I was sent to the Phillipines where I worked under Major General Eubank, the commanding general of the 13th Air Force. We were photographing the South Pacific, all the islands and all the coastal regions and the like, both in radar photography and in regular photography. It is something that I think will benefit mankind. I think in doing some of the work at that time . . . that particular thing was not classified, it was regular routine work of all photo reconnaissance units.

Then I received an assignment to the Far East Air Force under the command of General Douglas MacArthur. I can't speak of the type of work I did, but it was interesting. It is the type which I could receive no recognition for. It was one of those things where I was glad to do it. I was glad I had the training and expertise to perform the function for my country. I would do the same any time that I was called upon.

On my return from that particular assignment, I came back with assignment to Strategic Air Command under General Curtis Lamay. I worked with General Rosie O'Donald who commanded the 15th Air Force and also with General Travis. I was electronic warfare officer in the 9th Bombardment Wing under the 11th Air Division which General Travis commanded. He was, unfortunately, killed in an airplane accident. I was to be on that plane with him. He made a choice to go tactical air craft at the last minute and asked if I would go along with him. This was at the beginning of the Korean War. There was no additional room available on the plane, so at the last minute he said that Townley could go on the next aircraft available for an early morning takeoff. General Travis was killed that night. That was a very hard thing to take, losing a commander of General Travis' abilities; it was an unfortunate circumstance.

I spent quite a bit of time overseas. I went to Strategic Air Command. Upon my return I was officer in charge of electronic countermeasures school that trained both officers in the bomb area and also in the reconnaissance area. Officers worked for me at my school from the 5th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing which is a RB36 unit and the 9th Bomb Wing which was all B29's at Travis. I was fortunate in receiving quite a few commendations from officers among the 15th Air Force and S.A.C. for all the work that was done there at Travis Air Force Base. It was Fairfield Suisun Air Force Base before it was named after General Travis.

I would say probably my decision to leave the military was because I had, at that particular time, four children, one born in Japan. I was away from home in the Strategic Air Command so many times. I was staff officer and we worked seven days a week. I think the staff officer has more on his shoulders than the bomber crews who had some time off. They had a lot of work to do too. I think when you are on a staff in a situation like that, you have to spend whatever is required, and I don't envy anyone in a position of that type if they have other commitments like I had to the family. At this time Public Law 83 went into effect-- I can't be sure of the number--where you had to sign indefinitely that you would stay in the service. I had to choose a military career or a life with

my family. That's a reason why I decided to get out.

At Travis, then Fairfield Suisun Air Force Base, prior to the start of the Korean War, I was sent to school and graduated from the air university. An opportunity for me to get to go to a school like that with the assignment that I had was really from pulling some strings because I did wish to further my education while being a member of the military. I was fortunate to be able to complete the course at the air university.

Leaving the service, I came back to Brownsville. I completed my college training. In 1956, while working, plus going to college, my college received a call from the superintendent of the schools in Niles requesting an electronics teacher. Of course, they told the superintendent that for the starting salary they wouldn't get me. So they did offer me eight years of military credit. The interest of teaching electronics was what persuaded me to leave Pennsylvania and come to Ohio. I did come to Niles before making a decision. I spent a week here before I accepted the assignment, looking over the town, the people in it, and I could not have been more pleased with the community as I viewed it. In other words, both my wife and I analyzed the town before we made this decision. So I welcomed this opportunity to come to Niles and raise a family. That was the main reason for accepting this position, because the town could offer my children what I thought would be ideal for their educational advancement and I think it presented some fine opportunities for them.

I would not get in the reserves. I had talked with Colonel Melvin Frank who was commanding the National Guard unit on Rayen Avenue. I was teaching electronics at the high school and each year he would come to me and say, "Jim, I need a communications officer badly." And I said, "Well, Mel, I would be glad to oblige you, but I have some critical Air Force MOS's and if I sign up again, I might be recalled." I just wasn't about to take that chance. He did convince me that they cannot recall you as an individual, it has to be the whole unit as a guard unit. It was quite a few years before I took that as a fact, although I'm not doubting Mel's word. I knew he knew what he was talking about, it was just the fact that I was still a little apprehensive. You know, they have changed that now. The new law is that any officer in any unit can be called. They don't have to call the whole unit. In other words, if they need your expertise and you are in any reserve unit now, you can be called. At least this is my understanding.

I started work with the unit which was a 90 millimeter gun battalion anti-aircraft. I worked as a communications officer there. Then we went to M42's, a ground support and anti-aircraft weapon, that's the duster. Then I commanded the Warren battery, battery D in Warren. Following that, I spent five and a half years with the headquarters unit at group headquarters in Dayton, Ohio.

I don't know if this is a fact or not, but I would probably assume that I would be very close to being the most traveled National Guard officer in the state of Ohio at that time. Over five and a half years I traveled the miles to and from Dayton. I watched the construction of the various highways that were being built and I followed every route which used to take me five and a half to six hours. It kept reducing as the new highways were constructed. Really, on the seventy mile an hour limit, a very comfortable drive to Dayton was always less than five hours. That just shows you the progress that we've made here in Ohio.

During the guard time, the requirements by the various commanding generals of the National Guard must meet military standards. You know we must meet the same requirements as regular officers. I went to and graduated from artillery school at Fort Sill, Okla. That took five years with very hard work. I took a correspondence course, and two weeks of active duty training with the reserves in addition to the two weeks required by the guard units. For five years I spent over a month each year in active duty training within the armed forces of the United States Army. I then entered into the training of Command and General Staff College. I graduated in another five years from Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I think one of the best . . . it was quite an honor for me to walk across the stage at Eisenhower Auditorium and receive my certificate which has a lot of advantages if you are in the military, of course, as you know. I think it was probably one of the proudest days of my life, really, to receive that diploma at Fort Leavenworth in Kansas.

I had at that time 33 years in the service, even with the bad times, what you would call it in the reserves, the time when I was out from 1952 until I reenlisted in the National Guard. Those are still, though noncredit years, serviceable years as far as your time is concerned. I had 28 years of commissioned service. I was what we would term "roped out" at what I would consider an early age, unfortunately, because of 28 years of service, commissioned service. Of course, you know that there are no particular slots available even if I had probably made

some changes in the earlier part of my career. At that particular time, I was real satisfied with what I did and enjoyed working and was not really interested in advancing as such. I don't mean to say that I lacked initiative; it was just the fact that I enjoyed what I was doing; I was serving my country and I was not particularly concerned about going ahead. To give you an example, if I had taken the four month course which would have meant that I would have had to neglect my assignment here and ask for a month off from school, the whole thing would have changed because what took me five years to gain I could have done in that particular time on active duty. That would have changed the whole setup of my reserve status because then I would have been in a position for advancement much earlier because the requirements had to be met. Of course, those requirements having to be met slowed down your opportunities until such a time as you got caught by having 28 years and not a full opening available if you had obtained it.

A: Comparing the National Guard and the Air Force, would you say that they were one military or two different complete systems?

T: I believe always in the one military concept. I didn't see any difference in a soldier in any branch of the service. A fighting man is a fighting man, I don't care what uniform he wears. An individual is as good as his upbringing and what he believes in. I am much concerned about the public relations giving one branch of the service more publicity than the other. From the standpoint of being in the National Guard, I, upon retirement, went into the Reserve Officer's Association. To me the National Guard is the cheapest form of defense and yet one of the strongest forms of defense it could be.

Being a reserve officer, I can say that it wasn't our initial intention to have the reserve strength that we had. However, we had such a great thing after World War II in the number of reserve officers--and I am a reservist--that they had to have an organization. To me the basic concept of the state militia having fifty different commanders of fifty different units is what I believe in the most. When federalized, every guardsman is under the control of the president through the army chief of staff. We take an oath to defend the Constitution of the United States, and an oath to defend the Constitution of the state, but the Federal Constitution takes precedence.

I think the citizens are much more protected by having the National Guard, even over the reserve forces as such. As far as I'm concerned in defense, I'll take either, although I lean toward having the National Guard units as such. I am very pleased with the record of the National

Guard of air units. It is a tremendous record when you consider the flying that they have done and the minimal accidents that they have ever had; anyone in their right mind can see that this is the best and cheapest defense that we can get because those men are dedicated and they are available and they are keeping up their proficiency. We don't have to pay the full freight, the full twelve month salary for the training involved, very efficient.

A: On this basis, would you recommend a greater emphasis on the reserve forces and the downgrading of the active forces?

T: No, I wouldn't say downgrading an active force. I'm not in a position to know what active forces are needed, so I would not be able to comment on that. But I would say that they should place emphasis on these reserve forces and give them equipment. The reserve forces have always been, over the years, second rate as far as the equipment is concerned. So if they would place the emphasis on the reserve unit, they would have much better units and maybe they could actually reduce the regular forces. I'm not in the position to know; they might need all of them right now and if they do, they may need more. I don't know what the international situation is and I wouldn't care to speculate on what it is. In a program of this type, I don't think it would be appropriate.

A: From your experience and your interest in the military type thing, what do you see for the future of the reserve forces?

T: As far as the military is concerned, I definitely think from reading the information in the newspapers that we are going to have a hurdle even though many of the congress are on the side of the reserve, and many of them are reservists. But I wonder how much emphasis will be placed on this with the younger ones coming in who have had no reserve ties. I have followed some cases and read some articles that some of our junior senators and congressmen do have an active interest in keeping this country strong. And I certainly hope that they continue to do so. I think that if they are economists they can see that the reserve program will offer the best solution to their problems.

A: Do you think organizations such as the ROA, or these reserve organizations, provide a function in influencing their decision?

T: Definitely, I certainly do. In fact, one of my main reasons for being a ROA member is to help and provide

what you might call a political arm to make certain that our country is aware of the men who serve. You may say that this is selfish or think that it is selfish, but it is really not. If I thought my country could be strong without any remuneration whatsoever to me, I would rather see my country receive the recognition. But, you have to understand one thing, I don't care in what field of endeavor, I don't think there is any field where there are more sacrifices that have to be made, especially along the family lines, than in a military unit. I think that we should let people know because it is so easy to forget. That's the reason that I think the ROA is essential.

A: Is there anything that I haven't brought up that you would like to mention?

T: I don't know. I would say that I have done most of the talking here. You've asked me to give some of the background and I've left a lot of things out. I spent eight and a half years in classified assignment that I can't even talk about. I think one who deserves credit in that area is my wife. Some people can come home from their daily assignments and discuss things with them, but I couldn't. It was strictly-- What did you do in the office today? Nothing! It was that type of situation. So it created a problem. I think that I made the right decision. I still served; I was available in case of a major conflict; I was prepared to go at any time and I raised my family and still served my country.

A: Well, thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW