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St. Johns High School

Home of the Redwings!

Leon Brewbaker

Interviewed by Ted Kelbel

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School Profile

Mr. Brewbaker joined the service in 1943 at the age of 17 years old and began active duty in June 1943. He did this because most of his high-school friends were joining the war and it was a "social expectation" to join the war out of high school. His older brother was already in the war and his dad had fought in WWI. He stayed in the military for one year after the war was over. He trained in the Army Air Corps as a pilot/copilot, but was too late in the war and there were already many pilots so the government reapplied him as a front turret gunner of a bomber. These were the people that would take over the plane and bombing if the pilot/copilot were taken out, so his pilot training was important. He trained in Texas, Nevada, and California for this duty. He was then sent to Panama and flew reconnaissance missions over the Pacific Ocean searching for submarines that could attack the Canal. The town near where he was stationed was an anti-American town that often threatened to attack the barracks, but never did. The base would be able to withhold any attack so they never attacked. It was too dangerous to leave the base because of this except to go to the Canal Zone by plane. In his free time he could go swimming in the ocean if he wanted. On the weekends he would fly down to the Canal Zone and some American workers would treat them to dinner and/or entertainment. Some of the entertainment was flown down from the US. Panama City was too dangerous for him to go because of anti American feelings. He had to drink water flown down from the US due to the bad water there. When he was down at the Canal Zone he would stay at the barracks that were there and it was comparable to a hotel because a serviceman did not have to pay for the bed or food.

Mr. Brewbaker thought that the Depression was a main reason that the US had the mental toughness to fight in the war. He feels that the Depression was the "Character Builder of His Generation" and it taught the people how to work hard and go the extra mile. He grew up in a poor farm family that raised food to eat. He believes that the World War II was the economic push that ended the Depression and that the New Deal did not end the Depression. The Depression was what he thinks gave the people the habit of working hard, which helped people get through the war.

Mr. Brewbaker agrees with the decision to drop the atomic bombs on Japan because it was the right thing to do at the time. The amount of American/Allied lives that would have died was an extreme number. Also, many Japanese would have died if the bomb would not have of been dropped, but it would have been more solders instead of the families that were killed.

Mr. Brewbaker would have fought in the Korean War if he had been asked to but at that time he was just out of college and starting his first job. This prompted his decision to not rejoin the service.

Mr. Brewbaker thinks that Vietnam was different than WWII because the people did not have the will to win as in WWII and did not really want to fight.

After the war Mr. Brewbaker went to college at Ferris State. Shortly after he graduated from college he started his business.

Before Mr. Brewbaker joined the service almost everyone went into the service out of school. He had friends die in the Battle of the Bulge and many other battles of the war.

In conclusion, Mr. Brewbaker is a treasure to society for his experience in the worst of all the wars, World War II. His upbringing and views toward life such as working for what you want are values that should be emulated in all aspects of present day living. I would like to thank Mr. Brewbaker for his time in teaching me as well as people that will view this web page on what beneficial values this special generation has to offer to us.