

Robert Brown Interview
Larry Brantley Thompson Collection
Conducted by James Newberry
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Full Transcript

Interviewer: All right, this is James Newberry, and I'm here with Mr. Robert, Bob Brown at his home in Marietta, Georgia. It's May 10th, 2021. Thank you for sitting down with me, Mr. Brown.

Brown: It's my pleasure.

Interviewer: Do you agree to this interview?

Brown: I do.

Interviewer: Could you tell me your full name?

Brown: It's Robert Earl Brown.

Interviewer: And what's your birthday?

Brown: 12/10/26.

Interviewer: Where were you born?

Brown: I was born in Sanford, Florida.

Interviewer: Now, I know that your father's work took you different places, so can you tell us what he did for a living?

Brown: Yes. When I was born, he was working for the railroad. I grew up in Waycross, Georgia, and that's the railroad center. That's where he worked. His father before him worked in the railroad.

Interviewer: What was your father's job, exactly?

Brown: I have no idea. I do not.

Interviewer: So, he never told you?

Brown: No, because while I was in Sanford, he left the railroad and went up to Asheville, North Carolina, to get a job as a policeman.

Interviewer: And did you go with him there?

Brown: Yeah, the whole family moved.

Interviewer: Okay.

Brown: Yeah. We moved up to Asheville, North Carolina, and my three younger brothers and sisters were all born up in Asheville, North Carolina.

Interviewer: Where did you go from Asheville?

Brown: From Asheville, we moved back to the old home place in Lakeland, Georgia. We moved in. My grandfather had a farm there, and so my mother and the six children all moved in with them. The marriage was breaking up. My father was a police officer, and I don't know if you know about Asheville, but it's sort of done in a basin and it was time during Prohibition and all the revenuers would come down from the hills in their cars, and the policemen would stop them and put them in jail. They would take whatever they had in the trunk and smash it, but unfortunately, they kept some for themselves. My mother said that my father during that time had suffered a head injury during an arrest, and he started self-medicating with that moonshine and found out he was an alcoholic. That broke up the marriage. That prompted our move back down to Georgia.

Interviewer: Did he come with the family at that point?

Brown: He came with the family, but he didn't stay long.

Interviewer: Okay.

Brown: Yeah.

Interviewer: Then, from Lakeland, or Willacoochee. I know it was the-

Brown: Willacoochee is the old home place. That's where the great-grandfathers were, but Lakeland is just that far away from it. It's right down the road.

Interviewer: And then from there to Waycross?

Brown: From there to Waycross, yes. When my mother was able to get employment, she moved to Waycross with her six children, and we were brought up in Waycross.

Interviewer: What did she do for a living?

Brown: Well, of course she was a housewife, but that was during the Depression. Franklin Roosevelt was coming up with all these make-work things. They had sewing places for women to come in and make uniforms and clothes that they would give away to people that needed it. She was a forewoman, I think they called her, for a number of, well, all the women that worked in Waycross in that project. That's what she was doing. She'd go to work and wave goodbye to us, and the six of us would wave goodbye and my older sister, Margaret, pretty well took over because we were varying ages.

Interviewer: You said six total. Can you mind naming your siblings?

Brown: Margaret, my sister, she was a teenager. My brother, Richard, he was two years younger than she. I was two years younger than Richard and Virginia, my sister that I live with now, my baby sister, I call her, she's 91. Then, my brother, George, and my brother, Don. In fact, all four of us ended up in the service.

Interviewer: Oh, wow.

Brown: Yeah. Which was the common thing in those days.

Interviewer: Right.

Brown: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, you were attending high school in Waycross?

Brown: Yes.

Interviewer: And when you were there in high school, before we transition into your service, at that time what did you excel at? What were the subjects that you especially like?

Brown: Well, I liked everything because I was a good student, but I also had to work after school, which made me a better student because I worked at a place called The Green Frog Restaurant in Waycross. That was a standard. The Green Frog Restaurant later tried to get a franchise in Florida, in Jacksonville, and found out somebody had taken the franchise, so they started a company called Red Lobster. I worked for the Darden brothers there. Because I did have to work after school, I never got to play football or baseball or any of the sports that we had, but I was one of those beta club students, the ones that the teachers liked because we did our homework.

Interviewer: Right.

Brown: Read the lessons.

Interviewer: Where did your family, your mother and siblings all live in Waycross? What type of housing?

Brown: When people ask me that now, after I graduated and went back to our reunions that we had, they would say, "Where'd you live in Waycross?" I said, "I lived everywhere," because when the landlords found out that there were six children, and then we took in two of our cousins... my aunt had a problem and so we took her children, and there were nine of us in the house. They would pretty much, after a while, ask us to please move on. We had five elementary schools in the city, and I went to all of them, because we lived in different places.

Interviewer: Okay. So, at that point, the war is going on. You're a teenager. What did you expect to do after high school?

Brown: I had the same expectation that everybody did that didn't have a parent who had a business. I mean, if the druggist had a son, his son was going to be a druggist. If a banker had a son, his son was going to be a banker. The rest of us, we just assumed that when we graduated, we'd go to work for the biggest employer, and it happened to be the ACL Railroad. I fully expected when I graduated, when I got a job that I'd go to work for the railroad.

Interviewer: What happened after your graduation?

Brown: I graduated in 1944, and the war had been going on since 1941. So, they were waiting for us when we graduated. The draft board was there, and it was you hurry up and enlist in something or you get drafted. Every male in my class went into the service from high school. I think we had 138 boys in our graduating class.

Interviewer: And you ended up in the Navy?

Brown: Yes.

Interviewer: Was that a choice, and how did that happen?

Brown: That was a choice. I liked the water, and I just felt that the Navy would be a good career for me. When I was in high school, I had a teacher that really would have liked all of us to go to college, particularly her better students, so she made us all write a report on different occupations, passed them out, and the occupation that I ended up with was electrical engineer. So, I wrote a report on electrical engineering. If anybody would ask me, "What do you plan to do when you graduate?" I'd say, "Well, I'm going to be an electrical engineer."

When I was discharged from the Navy, they explained to me that I could go to college, and what would I like to be? I said, "Well, I'd like to be an electrical engineer," having really no idea of what was entailed. They said, "Well, Georgia Tech would be a good place for you to go." So, I went to Georgia Tech. That's when I mustered out.

Interviewer: And that was after your service?

Brown: After my service.

Interviewer: Well, before we transition to Tech and your education there and then at UGA, tell me about your training in the Navy.

Brown: In the Navy, I went to bootcamp up in Maryland, Bainbridge, Maryland, and it was like being in junior college, really, except it was training as for what we would do. When I finished that, I think it was a 12-week, course, they assigned me to Quartermaster school. Quartermaster in the Navy is not like it is in the Army. Quartermaster is one on

the rigs, the helmsman. They made us take navigation courses so we could look at the sun and tell where we were and that sort of thing.

When I finished that, and I think that was also about a 12-week school, they asked us where we would like to serve, and I volunteered for submarine duty. They sent me to New London where the submarines were and took us on tours of the subs and explained to us what was involved in it. Then, they slipped a piece of paper to us saying the war is pretty well getting close to an end, so if you're going to be in the submarine duty that requires so much training, we want you to sign up to another four years. That was a contract breaker for me. I just wasn't ready to spend four more years, so I compromised and signed up to go to the patrol, PT boat school, and that's what I did. I went through that and I was on my way to Japan aboard ship when the war ended.

Interviewer: Do you remember the name of the ship?

Brown: I do not. It was a troop ship.

Interviewer: Okay. Where was PT boat school?

Brown: PT boat school was in Melville, Rhode Island.

Interviewer: Okay. You said you were en route. Did you go on? Was it rerouted?

Brown: Oh, no. No. Actually, when I graduated from that, they put us all on trains and sent us to San Francisco to be shipped out, and we would go to the South Pacific and they would send us to our assigned places. And I was en route for the PT boats, well, in the South Pacific, when the war ended. It was the time when the war had just ended. The closer we got to Japan, we could see the bodies floating in the water. A little depressing, but when I got there, they sent us down to the PT boats, and because of the limited purpose of the PT boats, when the war was over, they started looking for another place to put us. They put me on a Destroyer Tender, which is a huge ship that's staffed primarily with machinists and metal workers, so that when a Destroyer got hit with a mine or something and was still floating, we'd bring it alongside and everybody aboard ship would put it back together. Of course, we had to have the navigators and the staff. I was on the navigation staff as a Quartermaster. That was one of my assignments.

Interviewer: So, when the PT boat is making its way across the Pacific, what are you doing day-to-day?

Brown: Day-to-day, I was just on a troop ship and they were just trying to find ways to keep us busy, because it was just loaded with people. As a matter of fact, we didn't have our own bunks. When we got out of our bunks, somebody else would come and take its place. We had that many people aboard ship. There probably must have been 2,000 people aboard that ship going over. Also, bringing people back, because the people who'd been over there for years, they were bringing them home. We ended up really being the replacements.

Interviewer: How long were you there?

Brown: I was there in Japan for about a little over a year.

Interviewer: And where were you based in Japan?

Brown: I was based in a place called Sasebo, Japan. That was the lower part of Japan.

Interviewer: Is it close to Okinawa? What was the-

Brown: Well, it is close to Okinawa, because we would send people over to Okinawa to serve after the war was over.

Interviewer: I see. Okay. How did you get the news or how did you manage to come back? Tell me the process of being discharged.

Brown: Well, I was on the ship that had been there in the Pacific for years, and they were recalled home. What they did is they took all the people who'd just come aboard and assigned us to other ships. I was assigned to Destroyers. I think I served on two Destroyers, the Hanson and the Larson, and our job, we stayed in Sasebo, which was a major headquarters, and our job was to patrol the coast around Japan. That's what I did for ages, seemed like ages, until it was my turn to come home.

Interviewer: Was that the point system?

Brown: Yeah, they had a point system. I had my mother listed as a dependent, and so I got a leg up on people who didn't have any dependents, but finally, they called me one day and said, "Get packed. You're leaving tomorrow," and so I packed up my duffel bag and came on home. But I spent quite awhile in Japan. One of the frightening things about Japan is the Navy, and the Army of course, were all massing for an assault against Japan. The war wasn't over. I mean, before the war was over. We were massing for it. They estimated that we probably would lose close to five million men. While I was there in Sasebo, we would go ashore and go up in the mountains, and there were caves all over the hills in the mountains, and they had sharpened sticks up. Every man, woman and child was going to be fighting to the death when we came ashore, like they did on the islands. They wouldn't surrender.

Interviewer: Do you remember when the bombs were dropped?

Brown: I wasn't there when the atomic bomb was dropped, but I did tour Nagasaki. It was one of the most depressing sites I'd ever seen. Everything was just totally destroyed. We would go over the bridges. It's a pretty place. We'd go over the bridges and you would see silhouettes of bodies just burned into the concrete.

Interviewer: Was that just a routine sort of a trip or what was the reason for your travel there?

Brown: No. That was an opportunity. They gave us all an opportunity to climb aboard what they call traveler ships and take us to these places so that we would see the extent of what we would be facing had the war not been over. Nagasaki was one of our field trips. I just happened to be one of the people that was assigned to that trip. It was awful. It was awful.

Interviewer: You spoke about the sharpened sticks and the cave. Was that also a similar sort of a trip?

Brown: Yes. Yes, they wanted us to see... There was so much discussion at that time about whether Truman had made the right decision in dropping the bomb because it's the first time that something like that had ever happened. It was probably the greatest destruction from one bomb that we had ever heard of. I think that politically, they were trying to show us that he did a courageous thing, because otherwise, we would have lost hundreds of thousands of people coming ashore because nobody would surrender. If nobody surrenders, then the attacking force is almost doomed.

Interviewer: Right. Well, let's come to your return.

Brown: Yes.

Interviewer: At what point did you have your discharge from the Navy?

Brown: Gosh, what was that date? I've got it hanging on the wall downstairs.

Interviewer: You can do a general sort of year. If you don't recall, no worries.

Brown: I came back in 1945, late. Immediately, they were paying us... I've forgotten what they paid us. Something like \$52 a month. But I couldn't get in college then. The colleges were just overwhelmed with returning veterans, so I had put my application in at Georgia Tech, still dreaming of electrical engineering, and I couldn't get a job because people knew I was going to college. I took my \$52 and started touring Florida, going up one coast, coming back the other coast, along with a friend of mine who was in the same flight I was in. We did that for about three months, until Georgia Tech called and said, "Hey, we need you."

Interviewer: On \$52?

Brown: Oh yeah. Well, \$52 was a lot of money in those days, and we didn't worry about transportation because we hitchhiked everywhere, we went.

Interviewer: Oh, wow. You said the coast. Did you go down both the East Coast and back up the Gulf?

Brown: The reverse.

Interviewer: Okay.

Brown: We started on the Gulf Coast and we went through. The only time that we did not hitchhike is when we got down to Naples, Florida, and we had the Everglades that we were going to go through to get over to Miami. We didn't have guts enough to try to hitchhike through the Everglades. We rode the Greyhound bus, and we were just waiting. I mean, what do you do? You can't work. You know college is coming. We had to get home once a week to get our \$52. That's what they did for the veterans.

Interviewer: How long a period of time were you waiting?

Brown: Probably about four months.

Interviewer: Okay. I assume you planned to pay through the GI Bill?

Brown: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: For Tech?

Brown: Yes.

Interviewer: How did that application process work?

Brown: It was pretty simple. I think the government pretty well handled it. I went to Georgia Tech physically. First thing they did was to give us a test. They wanted to find out whether we could handle the work or not, or what kind of special courses we'd have to take to qualify for Tech. They gave us an aptitude test to see what really our qualification, what really, we should be doing. I took that test and they called me in to discuss whether or not I should be at Tech or whether I should be somewhere else. They said, "Frankly, you should not be an electrical engineer." I said, "Okay." I said, "What should I be?" They said, "Well, if you really want to go for the maximum, you should be a farmer." That was a little disappointing to me.

Interviewer: What did they mean the maximum?

Brown: I mean, the maximum qualification.

Interviewer: I see.

Brown: My greatest qualification was probably to be a farmer, because they were letting us know that we could stay at Tech, but it would be a long haul. My grades were always good. My freshman year was at Georgia Tech, and I did great grades, but my aptitude for calculus and all those advanced math courses, I was not prepared for those. I worked awfully hard just trying to keep up. When I came back for my sophomore year and I started taking the chemistry and the physics and the calculus and all that kind of stuff and realized that some people really understood all that stuff, that's when I decided I would apply for University of Georgia. So, when people ask me about my Tech career, I said I was there for one year and two weeks. I applied for University of Georgia, but they couldn't take me. So, I was in Atlanta, living in Atlanta. And so, I went down to General

Electric and they were hiring. They were building telephone master places in different cities, different areas to serve the, and they sent me over to University of Charleston. They taught me to how to weld, solder really. And they taught me the code, blue, orange, green, brown slate. And then they sent me to Charleston. And that's what I did for months, soldering connections. In those days, every phone had to have a wire. So, I went into a new building they were building, and I knew whatever they called it then. And I spent my time blue, orange, green, brown slates for three months until the University of Georgia called me.

Interviewer: So, they had just like waitlisted you, something like that, the UGA?

Brown: Yes. They said, you are accepted for this term, and it happened to be three months away. I just couldn't sit and wait, so I got a job and enjoyed Charleston, beautiful place. And then I reported for duty at University of Georgia.

Interviewer: And what was your major?

Brown: I was in the business school. Yes, I had fancied that I would like to major in finance in the banking schools. And that's what I did, went into the business school. And those were the courses that I took.

Interviewer: And did you spend three years there?

Brown: No, no, I did not. One of the things that they did allow us to do, the veterans, is they gave us tests to see what we had retained from high school and what could be used for college courses. And I was exempt from quite a bit of work, primarily the English and those courses. They just didn't, you can skip this, you can skip this and gave us credit for it. So, its kind of gave us a leg up on getting out. But after I had been at the University of Georgia for two years and had been in the service for two years, the Army came out with a program that if you had those qualifications, they would give you a direct commission in the Army. And I was taking accounting courses at the time. That was part of my business curriculum. And I thought, "You know, this would be a good time to take a break and go into the Army," which I did.

Interviewer: From UGA.

Brown: From UGA. Right. They sent me up to ... school. This time it was Army training. It was like going through officer training, except we were all officers. It was just, you're now officers, but you're going to take the training anyway. So, when we finished that, they assigned us to our permanent facilities and in the Transportation Corps, which I was in. We could have been in different things and we could have been ... One of the things that I was later on was a big truck company, hauling munitions and gasoline and that sort of thing. But I didn't get that immediately from there. What they did is they looked at my Navy career training and they said, "Well, here's something you didn't know. You didn't know that the Army had ships, but we do." And they're tug boats, seagoing tug boats, and they ran a regular route along the Pacific, I mean the Atlantic coast, running from New York or those areas down into the maybe Charleston or Jacksonville. It was a handy

way to move cargo and move people. And so, they assigned me to a ship when I graduated, so I went from being on PT boat to being on Army tug boat in the Atlantic. That was my first assignment.

Interviewer: So, may I ask what drew you back into a military branch? I won't presume, but I guess I'll just ask flatly, did you not see a lot of jobs available in civilian life from college?

Brown: Not really, but that wasn't it. I think it was an economic thing. My brother had come up, brother George had come up and also going to college and we were pretty well living on what my GI bill paid me for college, and it was distressing for us. And I thought maybe if I go into the Army, I can help brother George from there with my income, and I can always come back. And I think it was just poverty and need that made me do it.

Interviewer: How long were you in that service?

Brown: Two years.

Interviewer: Okay. And then from there, where did you go?

Brown: Well, what I did is I came back to college. I said I was in the service, because they came out with the program after about, I'd say, 12 months in the Army. What they had tried to do was to get replacements for all the senior officers. They were just ... The young people had already left, and the people who were majors and colonels and the top dogs, nobody left. They were waiting for retirement in the Army. They were trying to find a way to get rid of them. And so, they said, "Okay, anybody in the Army that would like to retire, not retire, but would like to leave, all they have to do is put a letter in." And all of a sudden, they had a mass exodus of all of us guys who had come in as second lieutenants. We were tired and went back to college. So, my initial active duty in the Army was the training and the assignment on the ship for a while. And then I came back to college and graduated, not with my class, but behind my class.

Interviewer: And I know you returned to Atlanta then, or when did you make the move to East Point?

Brown: When I graduated from college. That's when I needed to seriously find a job. But when I graduated from college, I went back into the Army for a time, for about nine months. They were looking for people on assignments, and so I went back in. And I got married, I married someone I had met in college.

Interviewer: Tell me her name.

Brown: Iris Owen was her name. She was from Macon and it was amusing how we met. We used to ... At the University of Georgia, they had a Varsity right outside the gates of the main campus. And that's where we all ate, because for a quarter, you could get a hot dog and a hamburger and a pint of milk. So, we could usually scrape up a quarter. So that was one of our places, but they wouldn't allow women to go in there and the girls would stand outside. And as we would come by, they'd say, "Here's a quarter. Would you get me something and bring it to me?" And that's how I met my wife. She flagged

me down and had me go in and buy things for her, and we did that quite regularly and started dating.

Interviewer: Why didn't they allow women in the restaurant?

Brown: I don't know. It was just one of the ways they had developed over there. The women could not come in.

Interviewer: So, she gave you a quarter, you brought some food out and y'all-

Brown: Oh, we'd sit outside. We'd go sit on the benches and on the campus and have lunch together.

Interviewer: And she was a student there as well?

Brown: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: What was she studying?

Brown: She was in the business school. She was real active in the Red and Black. I think she was the business manager for the college newspaper.

Interviewer: So, you then began looking for jobs, I assume.

Brown: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: And you found this one in, what was it? Aviation insurance?

Brown: Yes, it was hard to find a job when I graduated from college because of the war was going on, the Vietnam war. And I was in the Reserves and the Reserves were being called. So, I would go and apply for a job. And they'd say, what is your draft status? And I'd say, well, I'm in the Reserves, and they would ... There was always another reason why I didn't get the job, but I could not get a job being in the Reserves at time of war. So that's where I ended up, was in East Point. I got a job, not quite. What I did is I got a job with an insurance company, New York Life. It started a new group insurance company. I mean, [inaudible 00:34:53] never had been in that before. And I applied for that and they hired me, traveling Florida and Georgia and North Carolina. And they said, "What kind of car do you have?" And I showed them this big old Buick that I had, '39 Buick or something. And they said, "That will not do, from an image standpoint." They said, "If you will get rid of that car, we will give you enough travel allowance to buy a car." And so, I went out and bought myself a shiny new green Ford and went to work. And a friend of mine from college and from Waycross, he had graduated as an accountant and he was a CPA. And he had a client in East Point when he called me one day and said, "My client is looking for somebody with some group insurance experience and go out there and apply." So, I did, and they put me to work. They had an insurance agency, they did all kinds of stuff like automobiles and that kind of stuff, but the bread and butter for them with the group insurance, because the owner was an airline pilot. And he had

come up with a plan that he worked out through Lloyds of London, where an airline pilot could buy loss of license insurance. The biggest threat to an airline pilot was not being able to pass a physical, because if you can't pass the physical, you're unemployed. So, he got them to write that plan, a group insurance plan, subject to the airlines pay it, like they do now in group insurance, they just pay it and charge it to the employee. And he started enrolling airlines. He had six airlines enrolled and he was just overwhelmed. And I was his first employee. He put me to work and going all over the nation, going to pilot meetings, selling this loss of license insurance. But he also had a general agency where he sold automobile coverage and that stuff. So, he sent me up to Philadelphia to go to school, to learn how to do that for about two months. And then I stayed with him forever.

Interviewer: You mentioned the Vietnam war. Is this the early '60s that you're coming to East Point, or late '50s?

Brown: Let me think. The war was going on. I hope I'm not confusing my wars.

Interviewer: Not the Korean war.

Brown: No, no. The Korean War came after Vietnam. Correct?

Interviewer: Korean was '50 to '52, I believe. It came after World War II.

Brown: Okay. I graduated in '50. So, the Korean war was going on. As a matter of fact, that's true because my younger brother ended up in Korea twice.

Interviewer: So, you were coming to East Point early '50s?

Brown: Yeah, early '50s. And yes, one of my first assignments really, after in the Army, after I got out of the Army, I was in the Reserve and they assigned me to as a public information officer in the Atlanta area. And I remember all these second lieutenants every morning, getting in there and reading the Stars and Stripes to see which of their associates had been killed. That was a scary time for all of them. We had these military graduates from the academy that were serving in Atlanta. I was based at the old Sears place on ...

Interviewer: Ponce.

Brown: Yeah, Ponce de Leon. That's where it was. And it was a scary time because when the Chinese came pouring in, that's when the casualties started mounting.

Interviewer: Well, tell me about East Point in those days. Where did you live? And what was it like in comparison to now?

Brown: East Point was a garden city, beautiful place. Probably had more parks than any city. It was the seventh largest city in the state. And I remember that because when I became mayor later on, I would trumpet that about how big it was, because we mayors, when

we went to the mayors' meetings all over the country, we would sort of class ourselves by the population in the state.

Interviewer: Well, I would imagine, if you're becoming mayor, that's what, '68 that you first became mayor?

Brown: Correct.

Interviewer: That's fairly quick for someone who wasn't from there, hadn't grown up there necessarily. Were you immediately getting involved in community organizations and ...

Brown: I was, but mostly insurance. I became president of the Insurance Association in East Point and the city council in their wisdom decided that a good way to raise some money would be to text every insurance policy written in the city, which was not popular, especially with the insurance agents. And so, we rebelled against it and went to a city council meeting in force and expressed our displeasure. And they agreed with us and said, we are going to table this thing. And so, we all should congratulate each other, and we left. And as soon as we left, they took it off the table and passed it anyway. And so, as president, it was my job to find somebody to run for mayor and straighten out the city. And of course, I couldn't find anybody. And the best way to get someone to do something has put them in charge of finding somebody to do it. And so, I ran for mayor as a Republican, because I was in the Republican party, and we won.

Interviewer: So, were most folks on the city council and the mayor before you, were they Democrats?

Brown: Yes.

Interviewer: And that was still when most folks [crosstalk 00:42:13].

Brown: Everybody was a Democrat.

Interviewer: Right. Okay. So, was that your chief issue, this question of taxing these insurance policies, or did you have other visions?

Brown: Oh, no. At that time, we were kind of jumping around. But at that time in the job that I had with the insurance business, we also went into the aviation leasing business, leasing airplanes. And my job was to call all the people whose sold them airplanes, which would be airport operators. And we worked with the Fulton National Bank at the time, and all were the people who own the airplanes, their banks, coming in and offering them a lease on the airplane instead of buying it. At the time, big companies especially, did not like to show an airplane on their books because their stockholders didn't like it. They could avoid that by leasing the airplane and we would have title to it. And so, I was traveling all over the Southeast, calling on banks, and I thought it would help me an awful lot that if I had a degree in MBA, rather than coming in with no experience. And so, I started, went to Georgia state to get an MBA. And one of my courses was I had to write a thesis on the course, and they assigned me the city of East Point because I lived

in it and they wanted me to write up everything about the city of East Point. So, I had the opportunity to call and interview everybody, like you're interviewing you now, the leading businessman, officials, and all that sort of thing, and wrote a big fancy report and submitted it. And my counselor looked at it and he said, this is very good, Brown. And he wrote on it, this will not do. He said, "You pointed out every problem that East Point has, you haven't come up with one solution." He said, "Now I want you to write the solution." And so, I got involved in, in trying to come up with solutions for East Point's problems and got interested. So, when this insurance thing came up, I had a lot of issues instead of just the insurance issue. And that's what propelled me into it. The paper I had to write when I was in high school, on electrical engineering, got me in Georgia Tech, and the paper that I wrote on the City of East Point got me into being a mayor of East Point.

Interviewer: So, can you tell me a little bit about the campaign and how you ran and how you got out the vote?

Brown: I was the first person in my insurance agency that was hired to take care of all of these airline pilots being, and we hired another person, a fellow named Fletcher Thompson. Fletcher was a pilot. He had flown airplanes during the war, and he also got interested in politics. He was so interested that we got him elected to the state senate. Fletcher Thompson, because then, a state senate is a good seat, but it's not full time. So, he could continue to work in the agency with me. And that was Lester Maddox' time. When Lester Maddox started running, he decided he was going to be governor. And the Democrat Party was so concerned about his being governor, what he would do to the other races that they made everyone running for office pledge to support whoever was elected as a Democrat. And there was a fellow named Charles Weltner, who was in Congress as a Democrat. He was a man of high integrity, and he would not sign the pledge to support Lester Maddox if he were elected governor. And in fact, he was so incensed about it when they wouldn't make an exception for him, he said he was not running for reelection. And all of a sudden, the scramble was to find somebody at the last minute to run for Congress because nobody had even thought that Weltner was not going to run for reelection. And they were looking for a scapegoat, somebody who could carry the Republican flag throughout the state, or throughout the district. And there stood Fletcher Thompson. He said, "I'll do it." And he got elected to Congress as a Republican. And I was working with him.

Interviewer: So, he changed parties.

Brown: No, he never changed.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. I thought you said he was a Democrat.

Brown: No, no.

Interviewer: Okay.

Brown: He was a Republican and the Republicans were looking for a candidate to run against, and they didn't think they could win, but they were looking for somebody to run. And so, Fletcher was just new, and so he said, okay, I'll do it. Could use a name recognition. And he got elected. And my Republican, and we worked through the Republican party trying to get him elected. And we did. And so, I was a Republican. So, when I ran from there, I ran as a Republican. And the ladies in the Republican party were all fired up about the party. And so, they just took me under their wing, and I went to all these groups, and got all these people sending out mailers and everything, endorsing me. And I became the first Republican mayor that the city had ever seen.

Interviewer: Do you recall what percentage of the vote you carried?

Brown: Initially? Oh, I think I had about 60% of the vote.

Interviewer: Did it cross racial lines at the time? Do you know?

Brown: When I did my report on the city, I reported how many Blacks we had in the city and how many Whites. And the Blacks all lived over in one section on the other side of the railroad. And I doubt if I got a vote, I got one vote out at the Black area. I mean, I campaigned over there, but the black churches pretty well were the campaigners and they'd bus people to the polls. And it was a time when, if you were Black, you were going to be a Democrat.

Interviewer: Okay. So that had sort of solidified by then, and then the move of White voters towards the Republican party was ramping up.

Brown: Yes, it was. Yes, it was. And I got voted on primarily by people who just didn't give a flip about any party. I mean, parties were not strong like they are now.

Interviewer: I see. So, were these two-year terms or four-year terms?

Brown: Four-year terms.

Interviewer: Okay. So '68 to '72.

Brown: Yeah.

Interviewer: That's the single term.

Brown: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. And can we sort of talk a little bit about what your job, which I assume you continued on through your term as mayor?

Brown: Yes.

Interviewer: ... required of you, the travel, and then how that, assumed you learned to fly because of it?

Brown: Well, actually the job did continue on, but I did very little in the job at that time. I had already learned to fly, and I already had operators insured throughout the state. And I continued going to these places and nurturing the people that I had insured, but I was spending very little time at it. And we hired, excuse me, we hired somebody else to come in and run the agency. Fletcher and went to Congress. I went to the city of Marietta. And so, we brought in one of our field agents to come in and he ran the agency while we were serving.

Interviewer: I see. So, what struck me about our early conversation by phone is that you were serving as mayor up to '72, and you then still made the decision to leave East Point and go-

Brown: No, I left east point after '72.

Interviewer: Okay. So how long after?

Brown: Pretty much, I went back to work in my agency after my term was over. And probably in six months.

Interviewer: Had you decided not to run again, or did you run again?

Brown: No, I was defeated.

Interviewer: Who defeated you?

Brown: It was a fellow, named Bannister. He was one of the Councilman, strong Democrat, and I did not get reelected. I was sandbagged, really. They got a fellow named Robert Brown to run against me, former Councilman. So, the Browns were confused on the ballots.

Interviewer: Ah, and was that in the primary or was that in, how did that happen? Was Brown a Democrat?

Brown: No, he ran as a Republican.

Interviewer: Okay. And that was, I mean, literally people confused?

Brown: Yes, that's right. The two Browns. The newspaper had a lot of fun with it. Two Bob Brown's running for mayor on the same party.

Interviewer: And then did you lose to him in the primary?

Brown: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. And then he ran against Bannister?

Brown: Yeah. And that was the end of it. And I realized then that it was the Lord working. I enjoyed being mayor. It was amazing how much you can get done. As a matter of fact, while I was mayor, I went back there and got a degree, master's degree, in urban affairs because I found that I needed that to be able to talk to the people in Washington. And there was a lot to be learned about city management.

Interviewer: Was that also from Georgia State?

Brown: Yes. I got two master's degrees from Georgia State. And later on, I taught there on aviation management.

Interviewer: Do you feel that... What were you doing that led people to this sort of strong opposition to run a guy with the same name?

I mean, do you think that you advocated for policy that brought out strong opposition?

Brown: I don't think so. I think it was just that the Democrats showing their muscle. I mean, they realized that there are a lot more Democrats at East Point than there were Republicans. I had strong Republican support and lost. But looking back, I said, well, thank the Lord, otherwise I probably would have been in politics the rest of my life and really not accomplishing an awful lot.

Interviewer: So, you said within six months after, you were headed here, headed to Cobb County?

Brown: Yeah. I went back to my insurance agency and went to work full time, calling on operators. The operator at Kennesaw. I mean, I had known him for years, written his insurance. He was a personal friend. And when he died, his widow called me in and said that she couldn't run it by herself and that she was going to have to sell it. And would I consider buying it.

Interviewer: Tell me his name.

Brown: His name was Clifford Pope.

Interviewer: And his wife's name?

Brown: Betty Pope.

Interviewer: And so, he, as the FBO, for fixed base operator. What were his duties? What was his role?

Brown: He was also the city manager. I mean, the county really did not like the airport. I mean, as far as they were concerned, the airport was a nuisance because they kept getting calls from people about these airplanes making noise, flying over their place and coming in at night. And they kind of wished it would go away. And so, I had a terrible time getting them to approve my lease because I was an outsider and the airport had its own little airport organization of pilots, and they felt that one of them should be the airport

manager. So, I had a very difficult time getting it, as a matter of fact, one of my dear friends and one of my best customers was Epps Air Service over at [Peachtree-DeKalb 00:57:05] Airport. I don't know if you've heard of them or not, but they're one of the largest now, one of the largest fixed base operations in the nation. A fellow named Pat Epps was a good friend of mine. And we wrote his insurance. And that was one of the problems that I faced buying an airport operation. And my business partner in the insurance was named Carl Herring. And he was a professional insurance man. And I said, Carl, Carl said, well, let's go ahead and do it. We'll buy the airport and you run the airport and I'll run the insurance agency. And I said, yeah, that would work but we would probably lose our biggest account because we'd be in competition with him. And in his wisdom, he said, why don't you get Pat to join us in buying the airport? And that gave us the credentials and the muscle to show that we had vast experience in running an airport operation. And we finally convinced the council to award it to us. We were the three owners of... And the name we picked was Big Shanty Aviation to satisfy the local Big Shanty stuff, terrible name for an airport. But the county finally fought off the people in the airport association that did not want us to come in, and I moved to the airport and started operating.

Interviewer: So, forgive my confusion because I'm, in learning about the airport and understanding FBOs and all of this. It's been a challenge-

Brown: And you're making me recall a lot. So, it gets disjointed here.

Interviewer: It's been a good challenge, but I do want to sort of revert back to Cliff Pope, because I've heard his name a good bit. So, if you could explain to me what he owned exactly, along with his wife, then after his death, she takes it over and then, tell me that whole story.

Brown: Well, what he owned... The biggest value you have in an airport, if you're leasing it, is the lease. I mean, typically a county will have an airport, but they consider it like Cobb county did, a nuisance, pain in the neck. And so instead of having to put a staff out there to run it, they lease it out to somebody who is willing to be there and make it work. And they say, okay, you're taking the lease and we'll give you a 20-year lease. So, you can get financing on buildings, which you've got to provide a flight training, and you've got to have aircraft maintenance and they list the things that you have to do. And typically, when you fly around Georgia, we have a number of airports fly around in Georgia, you find that it's the airport mechanics that, or the airport managers, or you find somebody who does flight training, and he specializes in flight training and he does that. And then he tries to hire somebody to do these other things required. But once the airport starts being an income producer, then the counties looking at it with different eyes and say, we probably should be operating it like the city of Atlanta. I mean, why should we lease it out on the weekend, make an income producer out of it. But at the time when I came up here, what Cliff Pope had, was a house that had been moved to the airport, which was the airport office. And he had four or five hangers that he rented out to people who had airplanes, they want to pay to put them under shelter. And he had a number of tie-down places where people who didn't want to pay to have them sheltered, they just tie them out in the weather. And he had a gas facility. One of the first things that Exxon made me do when I became the lessee over out there, is they came to me and they said, we're going to make you a president of all the underground tanks. I mean, they were

looking at the future when these underground tanks were going to be a tremendous liability. So, they just passed them on to me. But I regress, the key is that the airports really didn't, I mean, the counties did not want to run the airports because they were not income producing, and they didn't want to put up with that. If somebody complains about an airplane, they'd rather have them complain to the lessee instead of complaining to the county manager.

Interviewer: So, the person who benefits most business-wise is the person leasing it.

Brown: He benefits from it if he can make a living out of it, that was always the key. My job, I had the benefit of training in management. And I would go into these places, and a mechanic, all he was concerned about is repair airplanes, and management be damned. Everything else was a nuisance. And so, the airports all over Georgia that were just substandard, and Cobb county was one of them. They operated out of that old house. If somebody wanted a sandwich tough, there's no way to get a sandwich aboard. And it was rinky-dink, and that's what it was.

Interviewer: Tell me about Cliff's death. And then what came after.

Brown: Cliff was a self-made man. He was a pilot during the war, never had a high school education. He dropped out, I think, when he was... But he was a bright guy, and he ran the airport in that facility. The county provided the toilet paper and everything they needed. And his way of making a living was selling airplanes. I mean, there was a market after the war for airplanes, and you either bought yourself a Cessna airplane, which is [high end 01:04:15], or you bought yourself one of the low ends, and he was Pipers, and he was a Piper dealer. And everything else was just to carry him on while he sold airplanes. And like so many businessmen, if somebody paid him a check for an airplane or financed it, it would be reported on his taxes. If somebody came in and paid cash for it, I don't want to include this in your report, but he put that in his recreation fund. And it was enough really to keep him and his wife happy, she worked out there with him. So, two of them ran it. He was elected president of our airport, state airport association, because I mean, he would take the job and he was kept being reelected and reelected. Since I was selling to airport operators, I was active in the airport association. And so, I could call on all these people and be one of them. But when she came to me and said, would you take over this operation? Would you buy this from me? And gave me the sad story about how her daughter was going to need the income. She wanted somebody who had a second income, not from the airport, because she had seen the ups and downs in the airport industry, where it's starvation one year and then the next year you will do well. So, she wanted somebody that no matter how the operations went, could pay the note and she wanted to finance it. And I had my insurance agency. And Pat Epps had a going business over there, thriving business. So, she elected us to take it over.

Interviewer: How did Cliff die?

Brown: Cliff had a heart condition.

Interviewer: And then she passed, she knew she was gone-

Brown: She had cancer.

Interviewer: And so, she contracted with you and that was all set to go. And her daughter would benefit. But then what happened to her daughter?

Brown: Well, after it all went through, I was running the airport and well, no, I hadn't taken over the airport yet. I had voted, but I hadn't taken it. They were still running it. Her daughter graduated from high school and she drove like her father, and he drove like a bat out of hell. He was a dare devil [inaudible 01:07:10], and she lost control and hit a telephone pole on her graduation night and died.

Interviewer: And she was their only child.

Brown: That's right.

Interviewer: And what did that mean for your agreement with Ms. Pope?

Brown: Nothing. Everything was already done, and we were already paying a note on it, and it just meant that I paid the estate. I mean, she was still alive then. I paid her until she died, and then I paid the estate. But it was sort of a tragedy.

Interviewer: What me to pause it?

Brown: Oh yeah, take a pause a minute.

Interviewer: All right. Still here with Mr. Robert Brown. So, you took over, and can you talk to me a little bit about, you mentioned what was there when you arrived, the house and the hangers, and the tie downs. At what point did you move up to Marietta, or make the decision that you were going to need to move up here? I know you mentioned-

Brown: Well, I made the decision after I started commuting from East Point every day, coming up here. I would come up during the heavy traffic and I'd go home during the heavy traffic. And my wife made that decision for me. She said, you're going to be making a living up in Kennesaw and we're living here in East Point. And that is not going to wash. So, she said, let's go find a place in Marietta. So, we piled into a car and we came up here and started looking through Marietta and looked and looked and looked. And finally, we came to this neighborhood and she said, this will do. And there was a sign on this lot for sale. A doctor had owned it and then they cut the road all the way through in the back. And he didn't like the way his lot was now. So, I bought it from him.

Interviewer: This house?

Brown: No, there was no house, just a lot. And she already had her plans on what her house was going to be. And it wasn't this house. It was the one up over next door. This house was just part of the lot that was next door. That's another story. When she got in serious physical condition, and my sister and my brother who lived on north Druid Hills in Atlanta, had to sell their house because some conglomerate had taken over the whole

area. They said, we don't know where we're going. And I said, I do. I'm going to build you a house next door because I needed them to be here. And this was the house I built.

Interviewer: I see. And so now y'all both live here?

Brown: Right.

Interviewer: So, they're at the airport. How many employees and talk to me about that.

Brown: I had three. I had a bookkeeper, elderly bookkeeper, and I had a two linemen and me. That was it, when I bought the operation. The two linemen, their job was to move the airplanes around. Somebody would call and say, Hey, we're going on a flight at 3:30. Can you have my airplane out? And so, we'd have to move all the airplanes in the hanger and bring them out and then move the airplanes back. And they handled fueling all the airplanes and everything else, really. That was the crew. And that's what was here, that old house and these three employees. And I looked at it and I said, something can be made out of this. And so, I bought it, we bought it. Later on, I bought the other two out. They were accommodating more than really being interested. And I started making changes in the airport. Pilot association just despised me because I started charging rates that were comparable to rates at other airports that hadn't been raised in 100 years and started trying to attract more people to the airport to buy fuel, and slowly but surely, it just kept growing.

Interviewer: Were you getting money from people storing their planes there?

Brown: Yes. The income that you get from an airport operation is, number one, is landlord. I mean, if you've got a, if you go out and spend...

Brown: No. I mean, if you go out and spend \$3 million for an airplane, you need to have a hangar to put it in and you have to pay for that. And then you have to have the staff to move those airplanes in and out of the hangar. The biggest, I guess, the biggest danger in airplanes is breaking them when you move them, they're on that little 3 little things, you have to hook up a big tow to it and tow them in and out. And there's so much danger of this wing hitting this wing. So, having employees that know how to do that and giving them the proper training, safety training is essential. Not only for your operation, but also your insurance company's demand it. So, that's what I started with.

Interviewer: Do you remember those two first linemen?

Brown: Do I remember them?

Interviewer: Their names?

Brown: One of them was named Mac. Let me see, Mac. I've forgotten whether it's MacPherson, but he was an old fellow. He was retired from the Army and had been working out there with Cliff, I guess for years. And the other was Smitty. His name was Smith and they alternated. I mean, he would come in and work one day and Smitty would come and

work the next one. They had one person doing all this and my secretary was Catherine Haynes, and she is not somebody I would have hired. Her public relations was terrible, just awful. But she sure did look after my money. I've had people come in at the airport and say, "I know she's got to be related to you or you wouldn't have her here", but that's what we limped along with for a number of years.

Interviewer: Did you go in every single day?

Brown: Oh yeah. I was nine to five there.

Interviewer: Okay. And when did you start adding more employees?

Brown: I started adding more employees as I needed them. I started hiring young people. I'd hired people from Kennesaw state that were looking for part-time work and loved airplanes, and I would teach them to fly if they wanted to learn to fly. I wouldn't charge them anything for the airplanes. They'd just have to pay the pilot. I didn't mention the pilots. I had a chief pilot and two pilots also, we had five airplanes. And I started expanding the flight training and I started expanding everything else. And the employees just kept coming in. One of the things that I offered my young people, I said, "If you'll go to college, I'll pay your tuition." And the lady that I replaced when Catherine left was a bright young student and I sent her through college.

Interviewer: Was that something that you had extra money for or were you able to pay that with the revenue you were bringing in?

Brown: I paid it with revenue, or I just put it in the company. I made a capital investment into the company. I mean, I had to do that in the early days. When you meet payroll, whether you have it or not, you got to make payroll and slowly but surely the income came up to the expenses. One of the things that surprised me was that the income was greater than I thought. That when I bought the operation, I based it on the income from the tax returns and the tax returns turned out to be inadequate, the incomes greater than the tax returns. So, we got a little boost there, but I was able to cut a deal with my partner in the insurance business. I said, "You run the insurance business, I'll run this. And if we need to help each other, we'll help each other." And he was happy with that and so was I.

Interviewer: How long did you stay involved with that insurance business?

Brown: Until we sold it. And that was, gosh, I'd been at the airport for maybe 15 years when we sold the insurance business.

Interviewer: Well, in terms of the development of the space itself, the buildings sort of to the south of the runway are all newer. Was any of that there during your-

Brown: No, nothing was there. There were two operators when I was there. Mine, and then there was an operation down at the far end. They called it the Red Baroness, and they had first crack at people coming in, the transients I mean. They'd have to pass them to

get down to me. So, they sold more fuel than I did. And eventually, we convinced the county that it would be smarter if we had two operators, one on each side of the field. Bill Byrne was elected chairman of the county. And he had a vision that the airport could be important to the county, could be an asset instead of a liability. And so, when he was elected, then all of a sudden, we were able to start presenting our plans and grievances to him. And we cut a deal where I would buy the operation down at the far end also, just expand my operation to include both. And he would build nice, fresh, new across the runway. And he was a builder, so he was excited about that.

Interviewer: So, you had what was Red Baroness?

Brown: Yes.

Interviewer: You took that on.

Brown: Yes. I ended up with the entire side of the airport.

Interviewer: Okay. Can you talk a little bit about the volume of traffic coming through in seventies, eighties?

Brown: It was minimal. Most of the traffic was generated by flight training. It wasn't transient people coming in because there was no reason for transients to come in because we didn't really have the facilities that would attract anybody. If you had an airplane and you were coming to the Atlanta area and you came to my airport and saw that little rinky dink house as the headquarters, and not a place to get a sandwich or anything, that next time they came, they'd come to one of the other airports in the area, like Peachtree-DeKalb airport, which was quality or the Charlie Brown airport, which was better than we were, but not as good as PDK.

Interviewer: And when did those buildings start getting an update? Did you ever see that?

Brown: Our buildings did, yes. The county made me do it. When Bill Byrnes came in and he said, "We've got to make something out of this airport." He said that we have people coming into Marietta and the first impression they get of the Marietta is the Marietta, I mean the Kennesaw airport and it's shameful. And by damn, you guys, you got to do something. And I said, "Well, Hey, you know, we're in your building here. It's not our building." And he said, "Well, you've got to build the building. You've got to build yourself a headquarters." And I said, "Okay, we can do that if you'll give us a lease that will allow us to do it and allow us to be able to finance it", because when you go to the bank and say, "I need some money for this building", they say, "Well, Hey, you're on lease property." I mean, you have to say, "Well, yeah, but I've got this many years." You've got to have enough years to pay off the loan. And so, he was receptive to that and that's when the airport started improving. We were agreeable to spending the money to improve if they would give us enough time on our lease that we could amortize it. So, that's when we started building. He extended our leases.

Interviewer: And what specific improvements did you make?

Brown: Well, one of the improvements is that we abandoned that old house and built a new facility, but we built it down at the far end because we were able to buy the other operations. There was no sense having this little house up here with the facility down, attracting all the transients. We cut new deals with all the companies, Exxon, Exxon was our dealer. And we put in new containments, we put in new tanks so that we could hold, we never had had jet fuel before. And jet fuel is where the income is. So, we cut a deal with them to put in the tanks, our tanks, but they financed them.

Interviewer: Were those underground?

Brown: Yes, still underground, but they were in containment facilities. Yes. As a matter of fact, the last ones we built were above ground. Yeah. We built a swimming pool and then put a big tank in it with the pumping facilities.

Interviewer: I see. You mentioned on the phone, the energy crisis, or perhaps you weren't speaking about that, but did that have any impact on you or your business?

Brown: The energy crisis?

Interviewer: In the seventies around fueling?

Brown: Well, yes. The problem, all of a sudden, underground pumps, underground tanks were taboo because they leaked, and we had a number of underground tanks and the feds insisted that we drill holes and put in the sensing equipment to make sure that our tanks weren't leaking and all that kind of stuff. And the expenses were pretty bad. And we realized that that's when we were going to have to come up with some money and renovate our entire system by selling some fuel to smaller airplanes that lower octane. And I had one of our customers came out in a Piper Cub. Do you know what a Piper Cub is? Just a small little airplane, one of the first. And he came, they fuel their own airplane. We had the tank out, I mean the nozzle and everything out, just like self-fueling. And when you fuel your airplane, what you do is you have a little tester and you test the tank to see how much water is in it because condensation puts water in the tanks, and then you go over and test the other one and check it. And he tested and it was clear. So, he pumped from our tank and almost didn't make it around the field. He got up and I saw him cluttering like this, and then the engine just cut off and he came in. The reason he thought his tank was clear is because he was getting all water. We had a leak in our underground tank, and it had filled up with water and it scared me to death. It did. I thought, "Oh my goodness, all we need is a that." And that's when we seriously started upgrading everything we had in fuel, but it affected everybody. Every operator had had to replace their underground tanks.

Interviewer: I see. Did you do any sort of outreach in your job as FBA? I mean, did you work education with students? Were you part of organizations, things like that?

Brown: Yes, we did. Yes, we did. We worked through the colleges with the flight training and we started giving the ground schools at Kennesaw state. Our chief pilot would go over and conduct ground schools. I started teaching at the local colleges on aviation management

for people who were thinking of careers in aviation. And we worked with Exxon to include us in their advertising. And then we were named the operator of the year twice. They did have some categories depending on the size.

Interviewer: Right.

Brown: And they helped pay for some of our training to the linemen. And they came up with special courses and grants for us to do that. And so, it was just day by day, but most of it really was word of mouth. Our facility just got better and better, and then people just kept coming.

Interviewer: How long were you there at the airport?

Brown: Oh, let's see. Well, I retired in 2000.

Interviewer: So that's '72, '73 to 2000?

Brown: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: And you mentioned that you overlapped with your successor, or at least with the current manager, the current director of the airport.

Brown: Oh yeah. With Karl.

Interviewer: Right. Karl Von Hagel. How did that transition happen?

Brown: Well, I mentioned, Bill Byrne, the one who felt that the airport was an asset instead of a liability. And he got his commissioners to agree to hire a professional manager and to support the airport. He became the greatest PR guy in the world. I mean, well, I'd invite him to the rotary club, and he'd have a program and took him up to Cartersville to speak to those folks about our airport and about their airport. I ended up buying an operation up in Cartersville also and he became the greatest spokesman for the airport and for what it could do for the county that you could have imagined. And he came here not expecting to stay.

Interviewer: From Ohio maybe?

Brown: I think he did, but I mean, he came down here and he said, "I just hope I can stay long enough to qualify for the retirement plan", because airport operators are not popular really. They don't stay long at any airport.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Brown: He is so good. And not only was he good PR with the public, but he was good working with the commission and convincing them that this was a jewel in the county.

Interviewer: Sorry to repeat simple questions but are you saying that prior to his arrival, you were kind of doing his job too?

Brown: That's right.

Interviewer: But after he came there, you remained FBO.

Brown: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: But he became a sort of-

Brown: He became the county. I was dealing with the county manager. When I needed something, I'd have to go see the county manager and convince them that it was important to do this. After that, I would go to Karl and he would go to the county manager.

Interviewer: I see.

Brown: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, when you left, do you recall how many employees there were at that time?

Brown: For us? Well, most of my employees were in the flight department. I mean, I had 15 airplanes, which we use for flight training and rental. And that fluctuated, depending on the availability of instructor pilots. We got our instructor pilots from people who are wanting to have a career in aviation. And one of the things that you have to have in order to even be considered by the airlines is to have so many hours of flight time or commercial flight time and an instructor pilot is considered to be a commercial pilot. So, they would come to me and, in effect, almost work for commission. I mean, by that so much an hour, when they flew, I paid them and we built up quite a flight school based on that with young people coming in, we let them fly our airplanes free, tell them to be on time. All they had to do was put gas in it. And we became a good training place for people to come in and the flight school flourished, it really did. I don't think it ever was, it's not something I would have bought into because it's not that productive. The expenses are too high, but I had to have it. The county required it in my lease. And eventually I leased it out. I subleased it to somebody who wanted to make a living in flight training. So, that solved my personnel problems.

Interviewer: Where you sorry to retire?

Brown: Oh, yes. I hated to because I enjoyed it so much, but heck, I was in my seventies. I'm 94 now. So, I've been retired, what, 20-something years. It's hard to believe, but the insurance company didn't want me flying anymore. And so, I said, "Listen, let's put it on the market and see if somebody will buy it." And I talked to Larry Thompson first. I thought he was going to buy it. He would have been a serious guy. He could afford it. He had that big construction business. Betty looking at me, she looked at me like, okay, I

had another income. So, I'd be a good person to sell it to. That's the way I felt about him.

Interviewer: Right.

Brown: But nobody ever thought it was worth as much as I did until Thomas Huff came along, he was one of my customers and he surprised me. He went out and got himself an SBA loan and I agreed to handle the rest of it. And the next thing I knew, he was sitting in my chair. Yeah. I just never thought he could have it. As a matter of fact, I left him a lot of money when I left. I left him a working capital of about 200, \$250,000. And he went through it that week, I think, paying off the people that he had borrowed the money from, but I didn't want to sell it to him and have to take it right back.

Interviewer: Right. Well, we have about one more minute on here, just to let you know. Can you tell me, what do you feel your legacy is?

Brown: Oh, if there's a legacy, it's that I took something that was not workable and made a business out of it. I took something that was a liability to the county and made a tremendous asset out of it because the fuel, just the fuel sales now pay them three times what I would pay in the beginning. So much a gallon, every gallon you sell, and now that we're flying, we've gotten the bigger airplanes coming in that buy fuel in quantity. Then the county is just, they look at it and they say, "Well, what an asset it is. And when we bring an airplane in here that's worth \$3 million from a tax standpoint, that's like having a small subdivision." So, from the capitalization of the equipment out there now, and the income from all the fuel sales, I would say that the county should be very, very pleased with their airport.

Interviewer: Well, thank you Mr. Robert Brown.