

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War 1939-1945

Personal Experience

O.H. 1432

EDWARD STILES

Interviewed

by

David Glunt

on

November 12, 1991

EDWARD STILES

Born October 22, 1919 in McCaysville, Georgia, Mr. Edward Stiles has since lived a life of adventure. Three years after his birth in Georgia, Mr. Stiles' parents, Jake and Augusta Rogers Stiles, moved the family to 390 Wilson Street, Struthers, Ohio. With his father employed at Youngstown Sheet & Tube, Mr. Stiles grew up in the world of company stores and running amuck in the streets. Following his graduation from Struthers High School in 1937 and a year of working with his future father-in-law, Paul Ellis, Edward enlisted in the U.S. Army.

After a short period in the service as both a soldier in a machine-gun heavy weapons company and as a mechanic, Edward signed a contract with Camco Corporation and was sent to Burma as a mechanic with the American Volunteer Group in 1941. Following his stint with the Flying Tigers, Mr. Stiles returned home and underwent training as a pilot, checking out in a variety of aircraft. Fortunately for him, but unfortunately for his aspirations, the war ended before Mr. Stiles could be deployed.

Though Mr. Stiles was discharged from active duty in October of 1945, he continued on in the Air Force Reserve until 1970. Concurrent with his service was his employment with Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company, from which he retired, and Weirton Steel Company. He currently resides with his wife of forty-nine years, Edith, in the former home of his parents in Struthers, where he still enjoys reading about the CBI, flying, and woodworking.

G: This is an interview with Edward Stiles for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the World War II China, Burma, India Theater, by S. David Glunt, on November 12, 1991 at 390 Wilson Street, Struthers, Ohio at 1:25 p.m.

What do you remember of your childhood? What was your family like?

S: My childhood? Well, I grew up in this house here. The first [thing] I can remember was when I was four years old. My mom and dad had come up here, back in 1922, I believe it was. He had come up here from the south, North Carolina, Tennessee. He got a job at Youngstown Sheet & Tube. He worked there as a narrow-gauge engineer, later on, as a stationary engineer, until the time he retired.

As far as this area, this plat was known as Highview Plat. Really, it was nicknamed Dogtown. There were only two blocks in the area, which was Wilson Street and Creed Street. The rest of the area around was open field, with the Youngstown Country Club at the end of the street. That was the lay of the land. I began school in a one-room school building over at Lyonplatte School. They had one room, wooden, with a potbellied stove. I started first grade there. Along in 1926 or 1927, they built Fifth Street public school, which is still there. They are going to expand there with the passing of the levy. I began there in grade three. I went there until junior high. From there, I went into high school.

I graduated from Struthers High in 1937. This, of course, as you might possibly realize, was an area where workers came in and we grew up under the courage, I guess you might say, of the Youngstown Sheet & Tube, being the steel company. And at that time, we had company stores and we dealt from coupon books. Usually at the end of the month, they had most of the pay allotted in coupon books. So, I remember many times I went to the store dragging the wagon with my mom and pulling the groceries back.

I can go into many areas as far as growing up and teenage [years]. We always had a strong rivalry with, what they called down there, Buckeye Plat, down next to the Campbell Plant. Then, they had the Brownlee Woods area, which was another area. We as boys grew up into that group-type area, competing with one another. This was in the 1920's and 1930's. We more or less traveled and competed as groups, or if you want to call them gangs, they were at that time. I guess it was just a normal environment. [We were] Boys growing up. My mom and dad, they were not too strict with me. I was more or less left to roam and seek my own ways. Of course, they controlled my goings and comings, just like any other family. Many of the boys that I grew up with are all departed. In fact, I do not know of any still living in this area that were alive at

that time. They have all departed, either passed away or moved away. That was more or less the type of environment I grew up in.

Of course, the streets were not paved. We used to play tin can hockey with the sticks we got from trees and pass our leisure time away. That was one method we used. I got to grow. Of course, that was a time that I remember most. It was Lindberg flying the ocean for the first time, solo. Of course, that was in 1927. That always stayed with me. I never will forget that. Then, many times, at the age of ten or eleven, I guess, I became very good friends with my wife's brother, who is the same age as I am. Our desire was always to fly. We wanted to fly. We acquired bicycles, various types over the years, starting out with one you could make. It just had wheels, no tires, handlebars, frame and stick through the sprocket hole. We used to run and jump on it. Those were the times, during the Depression that we grew up.

G: What were the company stores like? Do you remember?

S: Oh, yes. They were similar to the grocery stores on the corner, not anywhere near the supermarket. They were company stores. They were continually busy because all the families were dependent upon them. In fact, this house used to belong to the Buckeye Land Company until the government got in and made the corporations get rid of all their holdings. They made it illegal for the corporation to own real estate. Then, they were sold to individuals. Then, that is when my dad was able to acquire this home. My mom and dad lived here until after the war. Then, they sold this place to my wife and I. They moved out to Palmyra Road out in Canfield. My mother died at a young age of fifty-two of sugar diabetes. My dad married again and lived over in the Brownlee Woods area and later, in Akron. He married a lady over there. He lived until he was eighty-three, then passed away in 1978, I believe it was.

G: What did you do after you got out of school?

S: That is very interesting. I graduated from Struthers High School in 1937 with my good friend Blake Ellis, which was my wife's brother. As I mentioned, we always wanted to fly one way or the other. He went into the grocery clerk business and selling autos. I could not get a job for about a year, I guess. At that time, we depended on soft coal for heat. The trucks of the Sampson Coal Company and others around the area hauled coal. I was acquainted with one of the truck drivers. This was, I guess, in September of 1938. He promised me if I worked with him a week or so as a helper that he would get me on as a truck driver. I was not satisfied with that. So, I started looking around. It crossed my mind that I would probably be better off if I joined the service and got away from the area. But during that year, from 1937 to 1938, I went to work with my father-in-law. Of course he was not my father-in-law then, but later became my father-in-law. He

and I used to paint houses and wall paper. Of course, he worked at the Youngstown Sheet & Tube. He was one of my idols, Paul Ellis. That is the way I spent that year between 1937 and 1938, before I joined the service.

The way I joined the service was I inquired with two or three other friends of mine. We decided to all go down to Fort Hayes for an interview and processing. The latter part of October we went down there. Somehow in the processing line we got separated. I got ahead of the other two in the processing line and long about 3:30 in the afternoon, the sergeant came along and he said, "Hold everything! We are not taking any more." I had already been sworn in. I said, "What about me and the rest of us here that have been sworn in?" He said, "Boy, you are in! The rest of you guys go home." So, the other two fellows that went with me, they went back home. Then again, within two weeks they were back down there.

They put me on the bus the next day. I rode it all day Saturday, all day Sunday. Sunday evening, I arrived in Plattsburgh Barracks up in New York State, at Plattsburgh, New York, the 26th Infantry. I was assigned to that regiment at that time. That was in November of 1938. So, I started out in the Infantry. The big red one division. The first division. My heart was not in it, but I was assigned to D Company, which was a machine gun company. They had three rifle companies and one machine gun company. I was assigned to the machine gun company. After some training, I was able to acquire the expert badge with a machine gun, shooting across Lake Champlain at that time.

G: What were you using, 30 or 50 caliber?

S: This was a 30 caliber, water-cooled World War I machine gun. We wore the britches and the leggings, the wrap-around leggings. Really, it was left-over World War I. It was what we had at the time. That is what the Army consisted of. Of course shortly after that, it all changed. I do remember that particular time because we were not too far from Lake Placid, New York. We would go for hikes. In the wintertime. In the winter of 1938 or 1939, we used to get in formation and march through town in all our winter underwear; our heavy coats, bundled up like Eskimos. It used to amaze us to see the local womenfolk, especially the young folks out on the street playing in skirts and ankle socks, with bare legs. Here we were, freezing in all our gear. So, that was quite a time.

G: What did your training consist of?

S: The training was infantry training. They had this 50 caliber mounted in the back end of a one and a half ton truck there. We, as far as the 30 caliber water cool machine gun, we used to have to take it apart and put it back together blindfolded. Then, we would practice shooting out over the lake on targets. Up one, traverse two, down one--that sort of thing. There was a set course that we

used to fire and get all the short bursts. Shoot five rounds, get all the short bursts and put those in that little square to make expert. Then we would hike for days on end, it seemed like. We used to stand reveille in our overcoats. Believe it or not, we used to stand at reveille. The old bugle would go off and we would finally open our eyes. There were all kinds of tricks pulled at that time. The sergeant, depending on how strict he was, we would line up out there when they would call role call. You could see down around the parade ground all the troops and these permanent brick buildings. They would be out there calling the role and someone would yell. Of course, it was early in the morning, many times, you could not hardly see! The guys would stand there at the last minute, throw on their overcoats and shoes, and stand at reveille, and come back in and go to bed. Those were the sort of things we did!

At that time, I was more or less indoctrinated to the bowling alleys and amateur boxing and whatever went along with Army camp and environment at that time. Believe it or not, we were paid twenty-one dollars a month. Yes, we were.

I stayed there. I was always hoping. I recall that periods of time, 1938, 1939, 1940. I remember the 1939 World's Fair, New York City. Along in the summertime in 1939, we were reading the newspapers and magazines, "War Going On in Europe." Our military was questioning whether or not we were actually going to get into war.

So they were starting to build up the Air Corps at that time. They came out with a notice one day and put it on the bulletin board and we read it. As a member of the military, if we were interested, we could transfer to the Air Corps. Well, I did not have to read that twice. I was in the first sergeant's office and signed up along with four or five other fellows. Within a week, one of the other fellows had a car. Their homes were in New York City. We were in that car heading to Langley Field, Virginia. We stayed overnight, maybe two or three days, if I recall correctly. We stayed in New York City at this fellows' home. We took in the 1939 World's Fair. Then the next day we took off in his old car. I do not even recall what kind of a car it was. But, it had four wheels on it and a steering wheel and running boards. When we got down into Washington, D.C., we got two flat tires right in front of the capital. But, we finally made it to Langley Field, Virginia.

We were assigned to what they called the Eighth Pursuit Group, which was the only fighter group on the whole east coast at that time. They did have a bomb group there, which later got into the news when President Roosevelt made a couple visits there and they flew to S.A. WE got to see him along with the new bombers that were coming out. Some of the earlier bombers, the B-19, 17's, that is where they had the B-15's. At that time, the Eightieth Pursuit Group was equipped with the P-36 Radial Engine Fighter's single seat. You also had some two-seat consolidated airplanes--PV2Y's, I think they were called. I managed to get a ride in one of those at night. I cannot ever remember an experience like

we had that night, flying in the back seat of that consolidated plane out of Norfolk, Virginia.

We were assigned there. All the barracks at that time were permanent barracks. The war had not really had too much of an effect on it. But, they were planning to send us to mechanics' school. The only thing [was] they did not have too many Army mechanic schools at that time. The best ones were civilian. So, I got in the 2nd Army Class from Langley Field, Virginia that went to Newark, New Jersey. I went through Casey Jones School of Aeronautics, which was a civilian, well-known, well-reputed mechanic school. After spending two years there, you came out with a master mechanics course in aviation. Of course, they reduced all that to a year, teaching and training, into six months for us. So, we spent six months. We were graduated as mechanics in the Army Air Corps. We were then transported back to Langley Field, Virginia. They moved the whole group shortly after that in the spring of 1941 to Mitchell Field, Long Island. During that period of time, we acquired the P-40's and by virtue of going to school and [having] experience on the air planes, I attained a rank of staff sergeant in the 8th Pursuit Group, the 36th Pursuit Squadron. Later in World War II, I was sent to Solomons in that area as the Flying Fiend Squad. That was sort of a guerrilla-type face with mouth open and helmet and goggles on. That was the P-40.

When we were sent on maneuvers, the early part of 1941, at Groton, Connecticut, where they make the submarines, they had the big submarine base. Of course, they just had a little dirt field there at that time, which is probably a municipal airport now. We got rumors that there was some civilians looking for volunteers to go overseas, and of course, we did not know what it consisted of or any part about it until early May of 1941.

A fellow by the name of Skip Adair came around and it was all an undercover thing. Whether enough of it got around by rumor or amongst the people that were interested to come down and get the particulars and sign up for the overseas duty. Of course, I was interested, being a fellow of about twenty-years old then, and looking better than twenty-one dollars a month, at a little bit more since I was staff sergeant at that time. I was very interested! Then, like many young fellows, I did not know or could not even find out, the full particulars until we arrived in Burma, then China.

We were given a short discharge, convenience of the government by virtue of President Roosevelt's acquiescence with Chang Ki Cheek and Clarence Channault. Others in the government to sign a trainer factory of some sort in Loi Wing, China, on the China-Burma border, they were building trainers for the Chinese Air Force. Of course, William Paully was strictly a business man. All of these funds made available were all in the lend lease plan. As a result, I became one of the ground personnel that was the first group over in Toungoo Burma to get the airplanes and maintain them. After they were assembled in Rangoon and flew up to Toungoo, which was about one hundred seventy-five

miles north of Rangoon in the middle of Burma called Keydaw. It was a British Air Dome called Keydaw. We lived in a thatched building under tropical conditions. I arrived there on May 27, 1941. Of course, I am omitting experiences going over there, because that is a long story in itself.

We traveled by train across the states, after I came home and said goodbye to my family, which was June 6, 1941. I still did not know all the particulars of what was going to happen. I signed this contract. They were going to pay me \$350 a month for my services over there.

G: Quite an improvement?

S: Yes, it was a pretty good increase in pay. There was a number of other ground personnel from the 33rd Squadron and the 35th Squadron. There were two of us from the 36th Squadron. There was another fellow by the name of Carl Schure. We were not all mechanics. There were some armored men and some communications men. But most of us in that group, that thirty-member personnel, we traveled by train across the states and arrived at the Jonathan Club in L.A., which was a club like we had never seen. It was one of those plush, elderly, well-healed mens clubs. It was one of those clubs. We thought it belonged to the British at first. But, you can imagine a group of young personnel assigned to that place. Of course, we only stayed there about two or three days before we were on a train to San Francisco.

We went to San Francisco where we boarded the USS President Pierce, a combination freighter and passenger President liner. Just a day before, the Army commandeered the ship and turned it into a troop ship. So, we were the only real civilians aboard. Although each and ever one of us was former military personnel, we were the only technical civilians on board. The troop commander of the ship, believe me, had his hands full. But, as I recall, the whole trip, we went by way of Honolulu, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Singapore, and then up to river to Rangoon. Then, we traveled by train in Burma from Rangoon to Toungoo. We arrived there on June 27, 1941. They had about five airplanes there at that time, five P-40's, camouflaged still with British markings on them. It was all lend-lease equipment. It was diverted to our use. So, we were familiar with a P-40. In fact, as I recall, we were the only ground crew personnel. I later found out, that was familiar with a P-40 type aircraft.

The next few weeks followed and the main group came in sometime in July, and others stretched clear into November with various boatloads of pilots and ground crew arrived in Toungoo and Rangoon. Chennault came in with his staff from China and the British. We checked the airplanes out as they came in. They were assembled at docks in Rangoon and they had a couple of Curtis Wright representatives there supervising the assembly because they all came over in boats and diverted from the British in various places, assembled in Rangoon and flew to Toungoo. We never did get one hundred airplanes, which

were supposedly allotted to us because, when they were unloaded, they dropped one into the bay. It was covered with salt water. Later on, they did assemble it and fly it because they had no other place to go for parts. Chennault and all got acquainted with one another and had various experiences. Our leisure time was limited. We had too much to do. Actually, it was spent sightseeing, hunting.

We found these Buddhist Monks that were treated like gods or something or other. Of course, we had heard all kinds of stories about them. We did not like them. They always seemed to come up with rubies and cat's eyes and jewelry. They were smart enough to know that Americans were interested in that. Some of the fellows picked up some fairly good jewelry, relatively cheap. I was not one to do that. A lot of fellows got cat's eyes and sent them home.

Then, some of the other fellows got acquainted with some of the British nobility and the missionaries and the Indian nobility that lived in the area plantations, and went on tiger hunts in the jungle. So, our favorite part was to ride our bicycles, which was the mode of transportation around there, other than your feet, to get into town. Actually, it was a train depot. This was the congregating point, or the main part of business in town and they had these little cafes. We were warned and cautioned not to drink the water, otherwise we might get dysentery. We did manage to get by. They had canned soup, Campbell's canned soup. It was shipped over there at that time. We got acquainted with one of the missionaries in the area and made a couple of trips to the plantations around there. Bangle tigers and elephants, we would hunt if we were invited. [That was] the British type of overseas living, which was typical in Burma at that time. Many times it happened where we saw the Burmese women and men come around with the cobras in the wicker baskets and put on shows. We tried to get a few pictures of that and some of us did.

It was no strange undertaking to go out in the outhouses, which were a little way from where we slept and find cobras in the outhouses. We had to be careful. We always carried our pistols. Everybody had a sidearm of some type. Some of them even brought some rifles. The big thing was ammunition. You could not get any ammunition. So, we always carried our sidearms with us to the outhouse. A couple times we got there and there was a big cobra sitting up there waving his head at you. We had to get rid of him. I never will forget the one time a guy was in there, he saw this snake, he came funning out with his pants hanging down to his knees. We all came running out. We made a sieve of that outhouse before we got the snake, and the snake ran off into the jungle. That was an example of some of the side occurrences we had. We used to have to sleep at night with nettings over us.

The airplanes kept coming in; the pilots kept coming in. We soon found out that most of the pilots never even seen a P-40. There were a lot of Navy pilots from carriers that never saw a P-40 before. The Army pilots had. There was about five or six from our group that came later on another ship. There was

none that came with our group, though. One note that I remember: going over on the President Pierce, there was at least thirty or thirty-two Army nurses that we took pictures of on the boat that I still have to this day. Everyone of them was captured and held as prisoners on the island of baton in the Philippine occupation. Of course, they were all cited for their bravery and experience later on, but it took quite awhile after the war before they were recognized. I think they were brought to the White House and recognized. I do not believe any of them were killed, but I am sure they certainly had many experiences to tell. After all, it has been fifty years, you know. Much of that has been told and is already history.

I guess it was July, August, the fellows were getting acquainted with airplanes and the mechanics. The Armory personnel [were] getting acquainted with the guns. Chennault had his hands full selecting squadron commanders and flight leaders, trying to whip the guys into shape and make some kind of fighting organization. At that time, rumors began to filter through about really what kind of an organization we were and what we were expected to do. Because up to that point, we had only known that we were over there to protect, really, this aircraft factory or any kind of American interest in that area of combat from sporadic raids from the Japanese.

One day in September, I guess it was, the first sergeant put up a notice on the bulletin board. The First American Volunteer group. We wondered what was going on there. Then, it all started to filter out. Actually, we were considered to be the first American volunteer group of possibly three that would be organized. The other two to be organized later and sent over. After this came up and we went in to see the first sergeant, there was a number of fellows who were very dissatisfied to find out that we would be considered as part of the Chinese Air Force, and that we were actually a full-scale combative organization in the Chinese Air Force. Of course, there were all kinds of rumors, readings in the papers, news filtered out about what was going on overseas. The Japanese and what they were thinking and doing. They supposedly knew all about us and had all sorts of spies, that type of thing going on.

As a result, as the fellows got the full implication of what we were expected to do over there, many of them decided they did not want to be a part of it. So, I think--I am just guessing now in percentages, this has all been documented in other books--as a result of this, finding out the true facts, many of the fellows, and I assume it to be at about 1/3 of the personnel decided that that was not what they signed up for. So, they were going back home, which they did. One of them was one of my buddies that I went over with by the name of Carl Schure. I do not know how far back he got to the states before Pearl Harbor, but he was on his way. It was shortly after that, within, I guess maybe a week, a week and a half at the most that the fellows were allowed to leave and were given transportation one way or the other, back to the states. So, what it amounted to was the fellows were getting the true picture of what they were

expected to do, more or less developing the attitude that they were going to be a fighting force there.

Of course, we had very little to do with the British Air Corps or the troops because there was not too many of them around there to begin with. In Rangoon, the fellows that stayed in Rangoon, there were some of them that spent some time in Rangoon. Later on in the year, after the war broke out, we were more acquainted with the British. As a fighting force, we did not see where the British amounted to too much there in Burma. As far as the Burmese, they had nothing. Of course, Burma was protected by the British at that time. The British had Gurkha Guards there. The only British personnel was officer personnel or a few enlisted personnel that took care of the supply and the fuel depots. As far as British Troops, there was not any other than the Gurkha's.

G: What were they like?

S: The Gurkhas were short, well-disciplined good fighting personnel that made their marks actually from the country of Nepal. The British used them as fighting units. In fact, they are still in existence today, I believe. They were all throughout Burma.

G: How reliable were the Gurkhas?

S: They were very reliable, fighting personnel. All I ever saw them do, was stand guard duty. They did that relatively good.

G: How did they meet you?

S: Oh, we did not converse with them. They did not understand us. Very few of them did. They treated us as Americans. If you have ever been overseas, you can pick out an American one hundred yards away, just by the way they walk and act. So, that was not very difficult. They treated us with respect, as all the Burmese did, and the British and all the rest. The British did not like our ways or "our guts" if you want to put it that way. They had to accept us for what we were. It was a little bit of home to get acquainted with the missionaries there. We enjoyed some good times visiting with them, talking with them.

I stayed in Toungoo, Burma. I was assigned to the Third squadron. There were three squadrons. It was made up of first, second and third, or what they called the first was the Adam and Eve Squadron, the second was called the Panda Bears, and the third was called the Hell's Angels. I was assigned to, as most of the Army personnel were, Hell's Angels, the Third Squadron. Our squadron commander was a fellow by the name of Arvid Olson. He was an Army pilot as I recall. He treated the fellows very well. But, as it turned out, he never was the aggressive squadron commander that developed in the first and

second squadrons, which were made up of Navy pilots. We had a few Marine pilots in our third squadron. So, the third squadron mostly consisted of Army personnel and a few Marines, maybe one or two Navy.

I would say about half of the whole unit was Navy. Navy did not know anything about a peephole, but they soon learned. They sure did. Some of our topnotch Army pilots that were well thought of by other pilots such as Neil Martin, who was killed early in the fighting. So, it did not always work out the best pilots were the best fighters when it came to combat. Be that as it may, that is the way it was. As far as size, you could not tell by size either. Some of our shortest fellows were the most aggressive. Those that were not as aggressive were larger in frame and stature. Nevertheless, we had some accidents there. There were three or four of the fellows that were killed. Usually it was a result of over exceeding the limits of the airplanes or taking chances.

G: What did they do?

S: They would dogfight. I remember standing out in a field one time when they were dogfighting over the field with one another. I could not believe what I saw. I saw one of these P-40's pull up and go end over end, nose over tail. I heard that engine rev up and then pull back and then rev up. That happened to be a fellow by the name of Eric Schilling. I never even thought an airplane would be able to do that, but it did. He was lucky to throttle the engine when the nose was down and pull out of it. Otherwise he never would have pulled out of it. That was an experience.

As far as Pete Atkinson, he went up to try up this airplane with a new prop on the engine. The next thing we knew, we heard a scream like a banshee. It was unbelievable. That airplane came straight down and buried itself into the ground. There was about a ten-foot deep hole where the engine went in and it must have been about thirty feet in diameter when that airplane hit. He had been somehow thrown clear with the seat, out of the airplane, and that is how Pete Atkinson died.

G: When you said that it had a new prop in the engine, did you mean a new model?

S: No. It was a change. What he did, he exceeded the limits of the airplane and the propeller and he lost control of it. That was typical of some of the accidents. After all, they were all younger fellows in their twenties. They were flying the aircraft to their limits and then themselves to the limits. They had those accidents. Armstrong, he was the first one killed, then Pete Atkinson, and there were a couple of others.

But Chennault finally got them together, got them organized, and put us into the three squadrons. Then, he started moving supplies around, anticipating and planning for the attacks that he knew would come. In about the middle of

September, it was on the first convoy, I went from Toungoo up the Burma Road to Kun Ming, China. I was split from my third squadron. I was assigned to this convoy. All the trucks, one and one half ton international trucks were loaded with ammunition for guns. I was in the first convoy and it went to Kun Ming. It took us about the better part of a week to get from Toungoo to Kun Ming. We had to carry our own canned food because we could not eat anything along the way. We were just playing with dysentery that put you out of commission. They had beautiful vegetables, which we were told not to eat. We took our own food.

G: Commercial food?

S: Canned food. It was unbelievable, that Burma Road. Of course, the Chinese Collies were still working on them, trying to straighten out anything. They would just plow over the terrain. Some of the pictures were unbelievable. Crossing the Sal Ween river, going down some of them turns down the hill at a forty-five degree angle, you would point the nose down and then you would have to back up and make another turn and go around. Anyway, after about a week, we got to Kun Ming, China. This, of course, was the first part of November. The training continued there in Toungoo. There were no airplanes in Kun Ming at that time. I became acquainted with a German refugee, a man by the name of Gearheart Newman. He was a Jewish refugee from Germany who later became famous along with our group, and later became vice president of the engine division of General Electric Corporation. You may have heard of it. He is listed as one of our employees, personnel mechanic. He has a story that is special that he could tell.

We were put up--I think it was the best building in Kun Ming. It used to be a university there. We had very nice accommodations. We were given rooms. They had a bar, a mess hall, dining area. We were attended to by Chinese houseboys. We would go everyday out to the Kun Ming Airport, and they were trying to lengthen the runway with stones. They set up a motor pool. We were constantly harassed during that period of time, until the first combat over in Kun Ming, which happened around the 20th of December, after Pearl Harbor, of course. They had a warning net there that we did not quite understand. It took all our communication personnel. They had radios planted in the hills. They had spies in inner China, wherever there was a Japanese airfield. These people, observers, every time a group flight would take off and head in a certain direction, they would get the news to the first radio station and the radio station would send it into Kun Ming. It was a net that the Chinese with Chennault's supervision set up for a warning net. So, we pretty well knew where they were coming from, how many planes were coming, and approximately at what altitude and what direction they were flying, if they were heading for Kun Ming or some other place. This was going on during that time.

Of course, every time they had an air raid, they had this red ball system.

The first ball, they ran up on a flag pole, like a big flag pole, the airfield or also the place where we stayed at, Hostile #1, the university building. One red ball would indicate that airplanes had taken off and were heading, but they did not know what direction. Two balls would mean they were heading in your direction and to anticipate them at anytime. Three balls [meant] that they were in the vicinity and would be bombing. We called that Jing Bow. In fact, there is a book written about that called Jing Bow. The fellows in communication, they all went to the hill and we never hardly saw them unless they had a break or were relieved and came back to head quarters there in Kun Ming.

Chennault had his headquarters at Kun Ming and Chung King, which was about two hundred miles further northwest up the Burma Road to Chun King from Kun Ming. The roads were not too good. They were worse than coming to Kun Ming. I never did get to Chun King. Some of the fellows did. One day, it must have been the latter part of November, the first part of December, they moved the first and second squadrons to Kun Ming and sent the third squadron to Rangoon from Toungoo. That took care of all our P-40's. The British always had a few of these twin engine Blenheim bombers they used for transport. I never did see any of the Buffalo Brewsters that they later stationed in Rangoon. They had a number of those. So, I was working with the first and second squadrons at Kun Ming when they came in. That was quite an event to see these P-40's circle and come in and land at the base there at Kun Ming. Of course, the whole idea was getting ready for the next bombing raid. That is what they were doing.

Sure enough, on about the twentieth of December in that area, here comes about twenty-six or thirty Japanese Sally Bombers. They called them from Indo-China. Previously, they had bombed us, but we had not had the P-40's there. We used to have to get on our transportation. We had our little four-door Studebakers that did not have anything to lose. You could not leave one of these sitting on the street. They would strip them. You would find the parts in the black market in the street the next day. So, we used these old Studebakers for transportation. The Chinese used to jam the outlying roads on these air raids. These bombers would come over, I would say, anywhere from eight thousand to ten thousand feet, and they would use Kun Ming as a bombing target. The civilians and the town. They did not seem to hit the city or the air field. They ignored the airfield completely. Some of the places we would see they would drop the bomb indiscriminately. There was really no reason for it, other than target range or practice bombing whatever they hoped to accomplish. There was nothing there. So, I guess we had about eight or ten air raids during that period of time that the bombers came over until, like I said, December 20th, after Pearl Harbor. Our knowledge of Pearl Harbor was one Sunday morning. They got in on the radio that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. We started looking at one another. "Boy, we are in bad shape here." So, because we knew that Pearl Harbor meant war.

Things started filtering in. We knew that we were in for it then. Whether we liked it or not, we were part of the armed forces. Of course, we were hoping that this would give us a little bit more importance because we had no way of getting supplies, other than Burma Road. The tonnage across the Burma Road was nothing to speak of. It had to all come to Rangoon and up across India. That was months at a time. They had no road of any kind, until later on, they built the Ledo road.

I have heard various dates. I did not keep a diary. But it was in the area of the twentieth or the twenty-first, in that area. These bombers came over and we were ready for them. We had more airplanes in the air, more P-40's in the air at that time, than at any time that I recall in the later months. They did have trouble because there was some misunderstanding in how many waves there were and at what altitude they were coming in. Finally, some other airplanes picked them up. They just decimated the bomber formation. They did not have any fighters with them. They were not expecting any opposition. The story we got is that they stretched that whole group of bombers from Kun Ming clear down back to the end of the China border. I heard they got about everyone except one. There were accounts that they did not. So I do not know the true picture on that. They got most of them. That is when you heard about the Flying Tigers, the American volunteer group. Now, later on, the name was attached--and that is a story within itself--the Flying Tigers. The sharks mouth was painted on the front of the airplanes. You would read about all sorts of stories. But, my experience--I was there on the field at the time. The airplanes came back there. Of course, the fellows were all excited. [It was] their first experience in combat. We did not lose any. We had some damage to the airplanes, but we did not lose any. The fellows knew that it was more than a game at that time. They were playing for real. So, Chennault had briefings after that. The fellows settled down. They saw where their weak points were and they were working on them. The third squadron went on down to Rangoon. That is a complete story. In fact, I am still finding out. I am reading this book that was published here, by Daniel Ford. I am still learning things that I did not know happened then because I was not at Rangoon at the time, even though I was part of the third squadron. So the Japanese quit bombing Kun Ming. They did not bomb Kun Ming after that. They did not come back.

G: What effect did that have on the personnel and the people?

S: Oh, it was tremendous. We were acclaimed as heroes and something special. The name Chennault, all sorts of rumors were going on. Even what you called the Shanghai Soldiers, there were different kinds of them, some of them were outfitted fairly well and had a personal guard, others were just coolies, where they had their toes sticking out and fabric wrapped around their feet. We would not really call them soldiers in any sense of the word, but that is what they were.

The people, they would see us. They would treat us like we were gods. Americans, they had special names for us. We were special people, as far as that was concerned.

But, what I remember about Kun Ming is it was just unbelievable, because leprosy was quite prevalent throughout the area. You would see young boys down in town laying on the streets, compound fractures, the bones sticking out, old women that could not walk. They had small hospitals there, but I do not know what good they were doing as far as the people that lived there. It was just a matter of time that they were gone. Any day of the week you would go downtown and that was what you would see. They were begging all the time. You got to where you became impervious to it. So, it was a combination. Young folks and some people had things, but most of them did not have anything. There were rumors at that time that there were communists. But, if you knew about Chiang Kai Shek, dogs were anti-communist. We heard stories of how he was able to maintain power by controlling the overlords of China. Each one had their own army. They tried to get the armies to work together as a unit. That was more or less an uphill battle, or almost impossible. He was the best there was. So, that was our first encounter in combat. That continued. The next thing we heard about was Rangoon. That is where one of the big fights took place. That happened around Christmas time, the 23rd, the 25th, until the end of the year. The third squadron really racked up a score there.

Do not forget the British. They had their Buffalo Brewsters, but they were not too effective. The Japanese concentrated their offenses there. So, they took a number of us to Kun Ming. Now, the British had another field there along the Irrawaddy River at a place called Magwee, right on the Irrawaddy River. They had two airfields there. One was a fighter field and the other was a bomber field. The bomber had Blenheim Bombers. They must have had about ten or twelve. They had about, I estimated, sixty to seventy Hurricane fighters. We heard there was a Japanese aircraft carrier coming into Rangoon after the Japanese had run our third squadron out. They were relieved in Rangoon by the first and second squadron. They fought until everybody dispersed. The aircraft carrier was supposed to come in and Chennault tried to send these Blenheim bombers because he was working with the British. We did not work too good with them. Their tactics and their way of operations were completely different from ours. Anyhow, we were always in the minority. We seemed to have the most effect.

I moved from Kun Ming at that time. I guess it was in the latter part of January or February or March. Myself and number of us moved from Kun Ming down the Magwee. The Army started getting into the act because they were thinking of supplying us. They brought a C-47 in there, flown by Army pilots from the states. They loaded maybe eight or ten of us with our tools, and some relief pilots from the other squadrons and we were to meet the ones from Rangoon. At Magwee we left Rangoon and everybody dispersed. The next meeting place was there in Magwee. The Japanese had come in across the

mountains and we knew it was just a matter of time before they took Rangoon. So, we made a stand there at Magwee. I guess we were there for about a week or a week and a half. It surely could not have been more than two weeks. We thought we were fairly secure when we saw all these British airplanes there.

Until one day the British had assembled and they made a raid. Like I told you, they were hoping to hit an aircraft carrier at Rangoon. They went down there and started up a hornets nest. They came back and landed. Bombers were sitting all around the field that I was out where the P-40's were. We had about ten or twelve P-40's sitting around the dispersal area. We were maintaining them. Across this satellite field there, they had these hurricane fighters. The Blenheim bombers had been down early in the morning and had bombed Rangoon and came back and landed. Long about twelve or one o'clock, I heard a noise like I had not heard in, I do not know when, like a bunch of bumble bees. They kept getting louder and louder and louder. I saw a few hurricanes take off from the field over there. The next thing I know, all our pilots had manned the P-40's, came out, and took off. There could not have been more than ten or twelve. We still had a couple P-40's sitting there. In fact, one of the mechanics, was running the airplane. He did not know anything was going on. This developed into a mass of airplanes, fighters and bombers coming in from every direction with different altitudes. The next thing you know, we heard the sound of a descending airplane, and boom, the field went up in smoke. We all hit the ditches.

I got this guy who did not know what was going on, running an airplane. His name was Leo Schramm, from Pennsylvania. He said, "You saved my life." I said, "Oh, come on now." He said, "I had no idea that those airplanes were up there." I do not think they got that airplane to begin with. So, I do not think he would have been hurt, but anyhow, we lost some of our own ground personnel. The only ground personnel that was killed was a fellow by the name of Charlie Fauth in that air raid. I do not know. He got up and ran for some reason. I understand that he had seen a whirlybird [hurricane] pilot land there and could not get out of the airplane. He made a dash to help him. He was hit by shrapnel. I did not see that. That was the story. The doctor worked on him until ten o'clock that night. He passed away about one o'clock that night. So, that was the only ground crew that we had that was killed in our group. We lost another pilot that was injured.

I was thinking of those pilots. I said, "Boy, if it is anything like this in the air like it is on the ground, I feel sorry for those fellows up there. We could hear the P-40's fighting because the guns were different. We knew they were still up there. Our boys gave a good account of themselves then. Anyway, they tore us up. The next day, we were wondering what was going to happen. We got word late that next day that we were leaving the place. They came back the next day and they just tore up everything around. Those fighters were, after the bombing -- they came down between the bombing. Fighters would come down and just

circle the field at their leisure and look for targets. We got one like that. We shot one down over in the river. We were in the hole and we had these Bren guns. He got a little bit too cocky. We got him. He went over in the riverbank and went in there. Like I say, those two days with those air raids we were back on our trucks heading back up the Burma Road.

G: Before we get too far off of the subject, I was wondering if I can ask you a few things to clarify a few remarks that you made earlier?

S: Sure.

G: How did Chennault go about picking a squadron leader?

S: I was not privy to that info, because I was a mechanic out in the field all the time. I never hung around headquarters. Of course, rumors get around. We had clerks and we had the pilots themselves. We would get fairly well-acquainted with the pilots, most of them, especially those in our squadron. Chennault would pick them according to ability, experience, aggressiveness--just size them up. Keep in mind that the bonus for every airplane they shot down, they got five hundred dollars. I often wondered also about other ones, why they even came over there. We had some that did not want to fly combat. We even had a big boat flying pilot. In fact, I understand that he washed out four airplanes before Chennault told him to. You get a different perspective. Pilots when trying to land and he would level off thirty feet in the air and drop it in and wash out the landing gear.

To answer your question in a definitive way, that was Chennault himself, along with others as he picked as leaders. How you would do in a group and the aggressiveness and ability. Later, the squadron commanders were good leaders. They say, you can pick out one in a group that becomes a leader when it comes to a situation like that. To my knowledge, that is how he did it. After all, he is an old military man and he knew what he was doing. Some of them were disappointments and others were much better than he figured. They were given the right of squadron commanders or flight leads or wing men.

G: We were discussing your activities right after Pearl Harbor occurred.

S: I believe I was relating a period in the Spring of 1942. We had this fire fight over Kun Ming and, of course, we ran them off and got most of them, nine of the ten, I guess it was. To refresh my memory, I think there were more than that, but I never saw them. There were stories that went around. We were not bothered anymore with the Japanese bombing Kun Ming. We had false air raids, but we never did see any airplanes, and they did not bomb Kun Ming after that. The battle ranged from Rangoon up to Magwee. The Japanese threw everything

they had against the British and our two squadrons. Chennault relieved the third squadron in Rangoon with the first and second squadrons. They got into the battle. From the news we heard that they were hopelessly outnumbered, most of the time. The British managed to shoot down a few here and there, but I do not know how much help they got by way of supplies from India. It could not have been too much.

Over that period of time in January and February, the Japanese were making, outside of the air raids, attacks on the ground. They were planning a campaign to take over Burma. This they proceeded to do, and we were chased out of Rangoon and up the Burma road to Magwee, which I told you was a little airfield along the Irrawaddy River. After I was there, whenever they started bombing Rangoon, after moving in we had, I believe, one squadron. It was the third squadron. We moved down from Kun Ming to Magwee. The British had some air raids on Rangoon without too much effects. With the Blenheim bombers and the hurricane fighters, our boys did not want to fly with the British because their methods of communication was completely foreign to our boys. They all wanted to do their own thing, which they did.

Until--I forget the exact date, but It was sometime in March--the Japanese came to Magwee and bombed us for two or three days unmercifully. They damaged us so bad that we got orders to pull out. We packed our equipment and headed up the road by truck. The Japanese had taken over Rangoon and were coming up the Burma Road. We were just a day ahead of them. Some of the British attached to our ground force, had gas trucks, and w traveled up into China that way; and we passed through Lashio into Pao Shan. Pao Shan is about 200 miles north of the border in the mountains, a Chinese village. They had previously bombed that place.

We were just outside there this one day, and Chennault had a few planes stationed as a refueling base there at Pao Shan. They encountered quite a few Japanese fighters over in there. The bombers just bombed the place unmercifully. We had three or four fellows that were shot up pretty bad and caught by surprise. You have to keep in mind that our air raid warnings that we had been completely annihilated and the British had moved out what was available there and moved their warning nets out. Ours was only around Kun Ming. So any other place, we were more or less on our own. But, the Japanese troops that came up the road, like I said, we were about a day ahead of them. The Burma Road was completely filled with refugees going north and Chinese Army troops coming south. They got as far south as the Salween River. They had some big operations going on. They came over and they had already taken Toungoo. They were moving pretty fast up the Burma Road and also across the mountains. We were able to hold them at the Salween River gorge. Of course, Chennault and the fellows were using the P-40's and bombers. They did not have too much opposition in the air. It was on the ground. The ground fire was very good for the Japanese. We lost a couple of fighters there.

G: How did you continue maintenance during this?

S: It was all hit and miss. As far as the airplanes were concerned, we had a few personnel here and there, and they were on the move all the time. We moved to Paochan [China] and then we went to a little dirt field called Mongshee. We stayed there a day. They had the gasoline stored at certain small fields around. Mongshee was one of them. We would go in there and the planes would come in. We would gas them up and rearm them and do whatever maintenance could be done. A lot of times, a lot of maintenance, as far as the radios and whatever else, was just patchwork. Just so the airplanes were flyable. The big thing was that they had enough gasoline and ammunition to operate after they got in the air. So, it was very much a hit and miss operation, because there never was more than ten or twelve airplanes, P-40's, involved at one time, that I can remember.

So, we left Mongshee and kept going on up the road until we arrived at Kun Ming. We more or less assembled ourselves together there at Kun Ming. It was a day by day operation from Kun Ming, hoping that the Chinese troops would be able to hold the Japanese back. At that time, that was as far as they got. It was the Salween River Gorge.

Of course, when we got back to Kun Ming, the rumors were that we were going to be taken over by the Army. The feeling was, "what are you guys going to do? Are you going to go home?" We did have the option of going home or staying, simply because we were civilians. Technically, we were civilians. The Army really had no jurisdiction over us until we went back to the United States. They could not draft us while we were out of the country. We had to go back in the country, in the United States, before we could get drafted. So, the official disbandment day was July 4th. We went through May and June with sporadic raids here and there. That, I believe, was when Stillwell and Merrill's Marauders were operating along there, trying to stop the Japanese.

G: Where were you launching these raids from?

S: Kun Ming. We were using these forward bases where we had a few men to arm and refuel the planes. Mostly they were from Kun Ming when they got as far north as the Salween River. Back to Paochan, of course, they had bombed the field pretty badly. But, it was still usable. Paochan was the closest to Mongshee. Otherwise, it was Kun Ming.

Our airplanes were getting fairly meager, of course, it was all during these months that we did receive some reinforcements. There again, we often wondered where in the world was our Army, our Air Corps that was supposed to relieve us. Remember all they time, this was after Pearl Harbor. We were a forward base looking for supplies which did not come. Very little.

G: With that, whenever you were cannibalizing aircraft, did you do a great deal of that on your retreat?

S: No, not a great deal. There were some that made forced landings in the hills around there in the mountains. We went out and tried to salvage anything we could. We salvaged planes in the mountains. We took trucks and removed all the guns and anything that was removable or serviceable. We would salvage it and load it in the truck and take it back to Kun Ming.

G: What kind of things tended to be salvaged?

S: Flight surfaces, even engines. Propellers, of course, were all bent up. Wheels, tires, anything, instruments. Anything that we could remove from the aircraft, you know, that we needed especially. [Things] that were in short supply. Then, we would just discard the rest of it to the Chinese, which would come in and tear it all apart and take it away. During those months, let's see, April, May and June, we did have some supplies that reached the Gold Coast, believe it or not, in Africa. General Arlond and Marshall and the brass at that time, they were not in accord with helping Chennault. They did supply, we got some P-40 War Hawks, they called them, which had Merlin Engines in them and had six, fifty-caliber machine guns. The only trouble with that was that the Army Air Corps would not even furnish the pilots to fly them into China. So, Chennault had to use his combat pilots (and it took about five months) during this period to get them into the Gold Coast and fly these airplanes back to Kun Ming.

G: How did you get them there?

S: Flew them. They flew by commercial aviation, CNAC. Keep in mind, Chinese National Airways Corporation were flying the hump. They got to the Gold Coast any way they could. We had a number of the pilots who picked up the airplanes and flew them clear from the Gold Coast across Africa, across India, and into China. I think we got maybe about fifteen P-40 War Hawks at that time. Those were the only supplies, really--new airplanes--that we received from our own government as far as the AVG was concerned. Of course, the Tenth Air Force was in India. The Army operated on their own. There was just a big snafu in the brass, the higher brass. It all started with Marshall, Arnold, and Bereton. They put him in charge of the tenth Air Force. Then another guy, Chennault's nemesis, a fellow by the name of Gen Bissel, who was really an undergraduate in flying school with Chennault. He and Chennault were completely at odds.

G: Were you aware of what was occurring?

S: Not really. Not the full story. We were smart enough to put two and two together

and the rumors had come down, and the dissatisfaction that Chennault was able to get around, of course, disseminated through pilots, down through the ground crew. We were able to get a feeling of what was going on. At first, we were told that we were going to be automatically incorporated into the Army. We said, "Oh, wait a minute. You cannot do that." They could not; they did not, even though they threatened to.

So, as of the Fourth of July, 1942, we were scheduled for disbandment. As I told you, come my turn, I left Kun Ming, the 27th of January, 1942. It was one year to the date that I arrived there. We were flown out by C-47 Army Air Corps to Karachi, India. That is as far as they would take us. We were aware of, we did not know who, but definitely, the Army was not going to help us get back to the States. Whether Chennault had anything to do with it, I do not know. But the feeling was he did not. He said good-bye to us and wished us the best. So, I was one of the first to arrive and one of the first to leave over there. They agreed, if we would stay, they would give us one rank higher than what we left the service as, which was no inducement whatsoever to us. Some of the fellows that stayed were given commissions on the spot. Others were given one grade higher. But, there was less than one third, a rough estimate, of the gang that agreed to stay. The rest of them elected to go home.

G: When you were in Karachi, how long were you there?

S: I think about two or three days.

G: Did you get the opportunity to look around the city?

S: We were at the airport. No, we did not see the city. We went out on the rickshaws. We did that near New Deli. New Deli was a little bit further from Karachi. We were dumped off the airplane in Karachi. Some of the fellows, though, accidentally meeting up with some of the Air corps personnel, were able to arrange flights back to the States. We found out later. But, it was all on their own. There was no group policy or anything. So, we were left to get back to the States by ourselves. We banded together in groups of five or six or whatever. I was with a group of five or six. I cannot even remember their names now. We took a train. We could not get a boat from Karachi. They said that was impossible.

This was at the time when the British and the Americans were trying to stop Romell in North Africa. They give us the reason, "All aircraft are being diverted to carrying troops and supplies to the front in North Africa to stop Romell." Which they did. We were on our way home then and we took a train from Karachi after being there two or three days and went from Karachi down to Bombay. It was a local Indian railway train where anybody could ride. They were hanging out the windows and the doors. We were lucky enough to get a

seat, you know. We would stop, and we could see the buzzards circling around the train as we moved. That was one bird that had a field day in that country, the buzzards, the vultures.

G: Do you remember what kind of train it was?

S: It was a narrow gage, Indian type train at that time, 1942. It was not any train that would compare to our type that we have standard gage by any means. It was a train that moved from Bombay to Karachi. So, we arrived in Bombay. We were able to find a hotel. We hung around there for about two weeks before we were able to book passage on another combination freighter and passenger line, which happened to be the President SS Buchanan. We booked passage there. I forget the exact date that we left, but it was in the latter part of July of 1942.

We went by way of Bombay to Ceylon. We were scheduled to pick up a load of rubber at Ceylon, which is now Sri Lanka. We spent about a week there. We visited in town and picked up elephants, you know, different weight door stops. They were very reasonable. We picked up mementos and visited in town. We enjoyed ourselves as tourists there. When we left Ceylon and went out, we were scheduled to stop at Capetown, South Africa. We had trouble with our rudder. We lost the control mechanism on the rudder. We floundered around off the coast for maybe a whole afternoon before we were able to get into Capetown. We stayed overnight in Capetown. We got the rudder fixed, took on a few supplies, fresh water and so on. Then we headed out over the ocean toward Trinidad. We zig-zagged all over the ocean. [It was just] Ourselves, no convoy. We had to stand watch for submarines, submarine patrol.

G: Did everyone on the ship take part in this?

S: Yes. Everyone on the ship. [They each took] A period of four hours around the clock that we would stand guard. They had one five-inch gun mounted on the deck of the ship.

G: Did you have any special gear for this?

S: No. It was just observation. They told us what we could expect to see. We were not given any special training. We just went out there. Any foreign objects we would look for. Fortunately, we did not see any. We were on that ship for three weeks before we finally came into the port of Trinidad. The first thing that met our sights was ships--cargo ships there with huge holes blown in the sides of the ships. We did not know why they did not send. Maybe they got them unloaded, you know. We understood that a submarine had come up in the harbor and just shot everything it could see. It blew holes in these cargo ships. Then, they submerged and left again. From what I understand, they never did

get the sub. Not there, anyhow. We stayed there, it must have been a week to get in convoy. We finally got in a convoy of about thirty ships. We left Trinidad and headed out into the Atlantic, up the coast to New York City. We still had to stand guard. It was very slow. The convoy would make about five or eight knots at the most.

G: How many ships?

S: I would estimate around twenty-five or thirty. Of course, we had escorts. Very little, but some escorts. [The] Navy off to the side. Planes would fly over every now and then. We made it up the coast. I arrived in New York City on September 13, 1942. We were checked through customs and we booked passage on a train coming to wherever we were going. Of course, I was coming here to Youngstown, Struthers. I had the good fortune of riding in a pullman car with Gene Sarason, the golfer. He had just returned from New Zealand.

G: Where was he going?

S: He was traveling from New York going to Chicago, I think. We listened to his tales and we told him some of our tales. It took about two days.

G: What did you talk about?

S: Mostly the war? [Laughter] That was the big topic of conversation. Naturally, [we talked about] our homes and families and golf.

G: What was he in Australia for?

S: Golf tournament. So, I finally arrived back home. I met my family. I was unmarried at the time. My fiancé was waiting for me. I got reacquainted with the family. I sort of just settled down. Of course, I had correspondence waiting for me at the time, telling me to appear down at Fort Hayes, Columbus for an interview. If you did not within a certain period of time, you were going to be drafted. So, I took the trip to Columbus and drove down there. I was reenlisted in the service, in the Army Air Corps, as a master sergeant and assigned to Richmond Army Air Base with a couple weeks leave before I was to report. I was due in at the end of September. So, I packed my gear after being home a few weeks and went to Richmond Army Air Base where I was made line chief of the 323rd Fighter Training Group.

G: What exactly did your job consist of?

S: My job at that time was line chief of a squadron in the 323rd group, and we had

the job of taking care of approximately twenty-five P-40's. It was really a training group for the troops moving over to North Africa. At that time, I was married November 3, 1942. I had married Edith Ellis, my childhood sweetheart. We lived there in Richmond for about a little over a year, the end of 1942, the beginning of 1943. Our job there was to service the airplanes. I met two or three other fellows that were in a group in China with me that I had become acquainted with. One fellow by the name of Charles Leahty and others, Bill Towery and James Cross, a communications man, food service and a parachute rigger. One of them, the food service man, Bill Towery, he was a first lieutenant. So he had stayed over there and he had got his commission in food service and later on, he came home. He was assigned there as food service officer in the group. Our group commander was a fellow by the name of Quesada, who later became head of the 8th Air Force. Colonel Quesada.

G: What was he like?

S: I did not know him too well. They came down to one of our squadron to fly one of our P-40's and he had problems starting it up. He flooded it, and I had to jump up on the wing and show him how to start the thing. He had a reputation of being a nice fellow, one that you could work with, a stern disciplinarian. He took a group and went over to England. Which, keep in mind, from 1943 to 1944, the Richmond Air Base was used as a training base for all Air Corps going overseas, pilots and ground crew.

G: How long were you at Richmond?

S: I was at Richmond until I got tired and wanted to get into flying. So, I went down and signed up for the cadets. I passed the test and was accepted as an aviation student because I was a master sergeant to begin with. They only paid aviation cadets seventy-five dollars a month. I was making almost two hundred dollars a month. I went through aviation cadet training as a master sergeant. Of course, rank did not mean anything, only on payday. I went to the head of the line and got my pay.

G: That is what is important.

S: That is what is important. During that period of time, we received P-47's. They were changing the P-40's and bringing in P-47's. They sent me to school in Dearborn, Michigan to learn all about the R-2800 engine made by Ford in Detroit. So, I spent a month up there at the Rotunda in temporary barracks. We went all through the factory and studied the engine, saw how it was made and how it was tested--all the in's and out's about it. Then, we went back to Richmond and we got a flock of P-47's in. We started doing the same thing with

P-47's in. We started doing the same thing with P-47's. Well, it was more or less, you might say, a factory-type operation. So much training and pilots and ground crew, and out they went. Another group came in. So, we were approximately three times over strength all the time. One would finish and another would come, one training. Everybody was living in temporary barracks.

Right there I met my previous mentor from Langley Field. He was a Tech Sergeant by the name of Siphon. He was still a Tech Sergeant. He did not remember me. But I remembered him. I Said, "What are you doing here?" He said, "It looks like I'm on my way to North Africa." So anyway, I left Richmond and went to Greensboro, North Carolina and went through boot camp again. Then, they were just biding time to fit us into the training program. We went through distribution center in Nashville, Tennessee. From there, we went back to, I believe, Raleigh, North Carolina. They had a program where they sent us at least through three months of college training. They called it CTD--College Training Detachment. From the distribution center, I was catalogued as a pilot trainee going through on aviation status--just like an aviation cadet. So, they gave us three months college training in Raleigh, North Carolina, and oriented us on light planes.

G: Was it affiliated with the university?

S: Yes, that is what it was. The military going through the university on a military program.

G: What university?

S: University of North Carolina at Raleigh. Of course, we had military training and we were treated like cadets. We had upperclassmen, just like what an aviation cadet would go through. We spent, I guess it was three months, and then that finished up in 1943. We went down to Montgomery, Alabama and we were given a month's greater cadet military training there and uniforms. Then, we moved to CTD at the airport in one of the small type trainers. We never soloed, but we oriented. Most of us enjoyed it quite well. Then, we went to Montgomery, Alabama for one month military training as cadets. Then, we were sent out to the various flight schools. I was sent to Camden, South Carolina, to civilian training flight school. We spent primary training there flying PT-17's. That was quite enjoyable. Then, we moved to Shaw Field, which was at Sumter, South Carolina or near Florence.

At that time, they were starting--keep in mind this was probably the summer of 1944--starting to experiment with the training program. We were scheduled for single-engine basic training at Shaw, where they had PT-13's. But, they took our class, which was called 44J. That was the time we were to graduate, and they took our class and made twin engine pilots out of us. They

said, "We will take your class and see how you do in twin engine." We were indoctrinated in the U.C. 78 or the plywood bomber they called it, made by Cessna. It was sliding canopy, side by side, single tail, twin engine radios, which was quite nice to fly. We were given basic training in twin engines. After a couple months there doing daylight and nighttime flying, instrument flying, we moved on to Turner Field in Albany, Georgia, where they had the B-25's. They were taking pilots from basic and moving them into advanced. We went into what they called a TB-25 airplane. We were given about sixty hours of B-25 training at Albany and, of course, at Raleigh, my wife had to come home. She was pregnant with our oldest child. She was born, a little red-headed girl. When we went to Albany, she was just beginning to walk. So, that was our war-time service.

During that time, our biggest problem was trying to find a place to stay because many of the people, even though they had rooms to rent, they did not want people with children. So, my wife had to depend upon the goodwill of the ladies who worked for the USO to get a place. We were able to find a half-way nice place in most of the places we stayed, which included Camden, Sumter and Albany.

We graduated in Christmas time from B-25's in 1944 as second lieutenants flying B-25's. Now, they took --it was not the whole class. I think it was twelve or fifteen at the most that stayed in twin engine flying. The rest of the fellows, they put in for four-engine training and sent them to Seebring and Fort Myers Florida, flying B-24's and B-17's. They were to get checked out in those airplanes and then they would move out overseas, wherever they were needed. I was in B-25 group. We stayed there at Turner and they took all of the pilots who were the instructors in our class and told them, "Any of you fellows who have not been overseas are going overseas." Now, this was the early part of 1945. We were at the height of the war. That is what they did. Then, they took about twelve or fifteen of us and made us instructor pilots with a new class coming in, 45A, and we became instructor pilots in the B-25's.

G: Since you had been a mechanic and now you are a pilot, what is appreciation of the B-25? What did you think of it?

S: It was a good airplane. I fell in love with it. I loved the B-25. Of course, there has always been controversy with the original, with what they call the B-26, the Martin Marauder, which they said was a hard airplane to fly, and people that could fly them really swore by them. But, I know when we were at Raleigh, I saw one come in there and he overshot the runway and crashed. So, they evidently were a little difficult to fly because all you had was your brakes. If you came in too hot, you were going to run off the end of the runway. But, I understood they were difficult--I would not call them unstable because in the 8th Air Force, the fellows that flew them and got acquainted with them loved them.

G: Did you see a lot of accidents in training?

S: Oh, yes. You mean in a B-25?

G: Yes.

S: No, not as far as our group was concerned. The B-25 was a real stable airplane. Easy to fly. I liked it. Of course, that was demonstrated by crews that flew it off of the aircraft carrier, Hornet with Dolittles' Raiders. So, it was a good airplane. Of course, it was not as fast as a B-26. But, there are pros and cons like that in any kind of machine. At first, they developed ways of trying to overcome the flaws or deficiencies that fellows cracked them up. There were all kinds of pilots, too, you know. Some were good, some were hot. Others, they should not have been there in the first place. So, there are pros and cons on that.

Yes, I like the B-25. The only thing we had wrong in our training is that we could only get 92-octane gasoline. All the 100-octane gasoline was going overseas, all we had was 92-octane for us in the training program. We could not use full power on take-off. So we had to be careful.

G: Did you find that there was a supply problem in training? Was there a shortage of spare parts because they were being shipped out?

S: Yes, to certain extent. There are always delays. No one ever had everything that they needed. No. But at that time, there was no critical spares that I know of that kept us from flying. But, there were shortages in certain instances, yes. I just mentioned that on account of the gasoline, because it was very important. You could not use full power on the take-off. You had to be careful. Of course, the B-25's were not loaded with any kind of armor or anything like that, but you still had to be careful. You could not use more than forty-eight inches of mercury for take off. Ordinarily, when you push the throttle forward, you get fifty-two, which is quite a difference when you needed it.

G: When training was beginning, how was it conducted? Was there an instructor assigned to groups of pilots?

S: Oh, yes.

G: Whenever you went up, did the instructor take up those who were in his group?

S: Oh, yes. Each instructor was allocated maybe about four students. He stayed with the four students all through the training period. He flew with them all through the training period. That is the man I was telling you about. They spent all their previous time in the service training pilots. If they had not been

overseas, they were automatically put on the list and shipped overseas. There were a few that were returning, but nowhere near what was being sent out. So, that is why they had a shortage of instructors and they had just made us fellows that just graduated from flight school instructors.

G: How exactly were they conducted? Prior to your solo flights, did the entire class go up with the instructor and another student flying?

S: No. You had a program where one instructor would take two fellows with him. We would go up for maybe anywhere from two and a half to four hour flying times, depending on daylight or night or when it was shooting landings or navigational work or cross country, or that sort of thing. The instructor always flew in the right seat. The student would fly in the left seat. They would go up for four hours and he would move in the back and the other one would get in the left seat. Then, you went through a phase of daylight flying where you would get familiar with the airplanes. After you got familiar with the airplanes, you would start on you instrument work and night flying. If you got fairly proficient in instrument work, then you would start night flying, night takeoff's and landings. Then, [you would do] night cross countries. That sort of thing. Later on, it was one on one. The instructor kept a running process sheet on every student. There were interruptions. Fellows would get sick and whatever. Maybe [they had] family problems, or whatever. They were delayed in their training and they would try to catch up. You stayed right with the program. You completed the course in the allotted time. So, we enjoyed every minute of it.

I stayed at Albany Field there and went through the next class. The middle of March, at that time, they were talking about this program and that they since initiated in hurricane following, flying into a hurricane. There was a hurricane watch out in Florida. Of course, there in Georgia, we were practically in Florida. We got a little bit of that, but not much. The next thing I knew, they shipped our GRP to Lincoln, Nebraska. They were cutting back on flying time. The wars were beginning to build up where we were going all right in Europe and making headway in the Pacific. So, our group was sent to a distribution center in Lincoln, Nebraska. That was a case where we had a lot of pilots and a few airplanes that we just tried to maintain our flying proficiency a month. We were lucky if we got four hours a month to maintain our flying proficiency in various types of aircraft until they assembled us into crews. A distribution center--that is what it was exactly set up for, to put the crews together and send them to one month transitional training and then assign them to a combat outfit overseas.

Well, this went on. We were just putting in our time there in Lincoln, Nebraska, more or less waiting for orders. Then they finally put us all together and made crews out of us. I had a co-pilot. I was the only one who was experienced in the airplane, a B-25. I guess my virtue of an instructor, or whatever. They gave me a little red-headed fellow that flew P-40's in flight

school. He had never seen a B-25. He was my co-pilot. We had a crew of about seven. That went throughout the summer of 1945. Of course, D-Day in Europe was building up to VJ, when they dropped the atomic bomb in August. We were just buying our time. Come September, the first part of September, I guess it was, we finally got orders. A number of us would ship out to Greenville, South Carolina for B-25, one month transitional training. Then, they would ship us overseas. We got on board the train that one morning, told our wives good-bye, they took off going to Greenville and we sat there in our train and finally pulled out of the yard, then stopped and backed into the yard. They called the whole thing off. That is how indecisive they were. They called the whole thing off. Within a week or two, we were given our discharge.

G: Were you relieved at your discharge?

S: I wanted to complete that transitional training. I was looking forward to that. I got beat out of that. Anyway, we were all happy. The war was over, naturally, and we were anxious to get home. We were given our final orders and we were allowed to go home. So, I came back here to Struthers.

G: How did you come back?

S: The wife and I had a 1941 Oldsmobile that we were driving around. It served us pretty well. We had our oldest daughter with us. We drove from Lincoln, Nebraska back here to Struthers. We moved in with my mom and dad here, and this is where we have been ever since. This was in the latter part of September of 1945. I guess they had given us October 25, 1945, the discharge date. I was very much interested in flying all the time, so I signed up for the Air Corps reserves, which they were called at that time. We did not have any reserve program like they have now. That did not come into being organized until 1952. I came back here and lived with my mom and dad. I got a job down here at the Youngstown Sheet & Tube.

G: What were you doing?

S: I started out as a millwright in the tube mill where they made Buttwell pipe. Then, they had a shortage of electricians. I did not want to be a millwright. I wanted to be an electrician. So, I switched over to electrical work and I was an electrician in the tube mill. I started work down there November 5th, I guess it was. I worked in the tube mill down there as an electrician. Keep in mind, I belonged to the Air Force Reserve. At that time they had a nucleus of the reserve--we still had our commissions in the reserve, and they had half a squadron of AT-6's at Youngstown Airport which were flying. We flew those until 1948. Then, they moved those AT-6's down to Pittsburgh. The new airport was

opening up down there. We went down there and flew AT-6's whenever we could get down there as part of the program. Then, they brought in a couple of C-46's. We were supposed to check out on those. They never did have enough airplanes to do the job and we only met when we could get down there or one training weekend each month. We called it UTA. I never did get checked out in a C-46.

So consequently, in 1950, when the Korean War was very much in evidence and they were calling fellows back from World War II into the Korean War, they were calling this outfit that I belonged to at Pittsburgh. But, they transferred me from what they call the "active" to what they call the "inactive" status. Simply because I did not have enough flying time in the C-46. I understand that even though they called up the unit from Pittsburgh, they did not get any further than Greenville, South Carolina. They never did go overseas. So, I was transferred to the inactive status at that time in February, I guess it was of 1950. Keep in mind I was working in the Youngstown Sheet & Tube all the time, in the maintenance department as an electrician. This went on, the Korean War. They came out in 1952. We were supposed to earn points by taking correspondence courses. They would give you the first fifteen points, and here you were supposed to earn thirty-five points to make a total of fifty to make a satisfactory year. It finally worked out. We would meet in various places, like up here on South Avenue or La Clede Avenue, the Navy place, or we would meet in church as you know.

There came the 95 33rd Air Corps Squadron, Air Force. Remember keeping in mind that the Air Force Reserves. [I was] still a second lieutenant, not much hope of advancements. Things were on hold there until they came out with a reserve program and found out what they were going to do. Anyway, I stayed with the program working in the mill all the time. I finally got promoted to first lieutenant and within a couple years, to captain. Meanwhile, they had come along and opened the squadron status at Youngstown Airport in the Reserve. First F86's and then, I think, it was C-87's.

G: Did you get the opportunity to fly anything?

S: I could not because there were too many other fellows and they immediately filled up. Pilots were a dime a dozen then. Everybody was a pilot. Everybody wanted to fly. There were not enough jobs to go around. So, I did not get assigned up there until the unit, the 757 Youngstown Air Base, went from squadron status to group status. Then immediately, I went up and applied for duty. I transferred from what they called a training outfit, the 95 33rd, into the 757th troop carrier squadron, which, like I say, has become the nine-tenth troop carrier group. I started flying the C-119's.

I stayed with that program until they went from C-119 to what they called these T-37's, these small jets. We were hoping to get the 130's like they got

now, but that was ten years in the future. We were all becoming older, and I was getting over age and grey. Meanwhile I had been promoted to major. I stayed there. When they got the T-37's, they would not let us check out because they planned on discharging us--all those that were in that age bracket. So, I retired at the grade of major from the 757 troop carrier squadron in 1970. That has been my military career. Since then, we have had three other children, two girls and one boy. We have been living here ever since. I am now at the age of 72 and I am enjoying my Air Force retirement with my LTV retirement and social security.

G: That is the way to be.

S: We have been very fortunate, Edith and I. All my kids are school teachers. The boy's wife is also a school teacher. We got a family of school teachers. That is it.

G: Do you mind answering a few questions?

S: No.

G: Some of them will go back to the beginning of your narrative. Whenever you were in China, did you very often construct dummy aircraft at your air fields?

S: The Chinese constructed the aircraft. We just placed them around and tried to make them look real.

G: How did they go about constructing them?

S: Out of wood and white cloth. Then they would paint them and camouflage them to try to made them look like the real thing.

G: How long did one last?

S: I do not think they fooled too many. They lasted all right through Kun Ming because we were not bombed there at Kun Ming. Later on where the 14th Air Force is now, they did the same thing. The 14th Air Force, you are talking about 10,000 or 12,000 personnel. They were much larger and had many more airplanes.

I just told you about the AVG. The AVG was disbanded on the 4th of July, 1942. There was a transition period there where the Army moved in and Chennault tried to incorporate fellows from the AVG that stayed there along with personnel from the Army. I guess that was a real ball game. It was called the Chinese Air Task Force at that time for about six months. Then they were called

the 14th Air Force. Chennault was given first brigadier general then, a major general. Then, all of that stuff going on with Bissel and Bereton and Marshall and whatever. Then, that 14th Air Force, that is another story. I do not want to get into that. I was not there. Certain fellows in our group that stayed, they are the ones that would be able to tell their experiences. A lot of them have.

G: Whenever you were leaving airfields in your retreat, what methods did you use, if you used any methods to destroy your airfields?

S: That was not our job. That was the ground troops' [job]. We just packed up and left.

G: What sort of vehicles did you have to carry your equipment in?

S: We had ton and a half trucks. A few beat up old Studebakers for transportation. A few jeeps.

G: What was your daily routine when you were with the AVG?

S: Daily routine was out on the field on the flight line. Each one of us were given three or four airplanes to take care of. Actually, we did not have enough mechanics for one per airplane, so we serviced the airplanes. We would get up in the morning and bring them in from the dispersal places. In the evening at nighttime, we would disperse them out in the far sections of the field and then, in the morning at daylight, we would bring them down to the headquarter's shack and put them up along the line and they were ready to go. The guns were loaded, the armory, the fuel and everything. They were ready to go. We would check them out, run them up, check out the engine and everything. We made sure. So when the pilots got the word, they would come out. We would help them with their parachutes. Their parachutes were in the airplane. We would get them started and off they would go. When they came back, we would check for damage, listen to the pilots' complaints, we would fix up whatever had to be, refuel and get ready to go for the second flight. That was mainly my job. Outside of that, there were times when we had to work on them. We would move them from the field into a clump of trees and we would make make-shift scaffolding.

G: You did not have a hanger or anything?

S: No. It was just out in the open in the trees, wherever place we could find. Now, a lot of them, we would bring in some of them from the hills where they would remove the wings and put the fuselage on the back end of the truck. You would put the wings alongside and bring it in. See, we would rebuild it in the

boondocks. Kun Ming was 6,000 feet altitude and fairly nice weather year-round. It was a good climate. Of course, we operated in the tropical climates down in China and Burma.

G: Whenever you were coming back home and you came into New York Harbor, can you describe it?

S: It was certainly a welcomed sight to see and we came right along side the lady in the harbor there. We docked up at one of the warfs. I do not remember any special occurrence. We were not given what you would call a fireboat demonstration where boats would spray water up in the air. We did not have any of that. We were just another ship coming in. I remember at that time, 1942, things were going on that were more important than just a ship docking. [Laughter] That happened every hour on the hour or whatever. I was more or less disappointed with New York harbor. I had different views of the lady in the harbor holding a torch. We came up on it, this was, of course, before they renovated it and really fixed it up. It was all grey and murky. We used to count the condoms floating by down along the ship in the harbor. There were plenty of them.

G: Recreation.

S: Yes. Actually, it was a little disappointing outside of being home after a year's time. But, it was certainly a good feeling being home back in the old States.

G: Were there many ships in the harbor?

S: Oh, yes. We did not see any military aircraft carriers or anything like that there. They were just commercial boats. That was about it. We were more or less thinking about what customs were going to do with some of this junk that we got. Of course, they had already confiscated all our film or anything that might pertain to war information.

G: Did you ever receive it back?

S: Yes. We got some of it back. They censored every one of our letters. I can still show you letters that have been censored. Basically, we did not give them any information that they really had to censor. Some of it was places and dates and things of that nature. It was really a nice trip home from New York. We went from Platsburg in 1939 through there and stayed overnight a day and a half at my best friend's home there in New York City. His mother lived there. We saw how they hung out their laundry. They had a rope across to the next building. They would hang their laundry out there and pull it back in. I have got a few

pictures of that.

I was what you would call a flight line crew chief. The P-40's had to be serviced, as far as keeping the engines running properly, the propellers performing, the oxygen tanks replenished, communications and gunners. The armorment men were responsible for keeping the guns operating properly and the armorment being supplied. They claim that--in fact, the armorment men will swear by this and so do the pilots--a good part of the success is due to the armors bore sighting the guns. Our first models were the B models that had 2-50 calibers in the front of the cockpit, looking out from the cockpit and 4-30's in the wing. On our later models, what they call the war hawks, they did away with the 2-50's up in the nose as far as the propeller, and they put 3-50's on each side of the wings, total of six, so it consisted of 6 50 caliber machine guns that were able to fire 525 rounds a minute. That was a terrific fire power!

In order to be able to hit anything with those--we had no electronic gun sights. We had strictly a mechanical gun sight with cross hairs that the pilot used as an aiming device. They tried to rig up something electronically, but it did not work. The pilot concentrated his flying to five hundred yards, anywhere from one hundred to five hundred yards in front of the airplane. If he could get a target withing that range, he had it. The bore sight of the guns could cross at least, I think it was, one hundred and fifty to two hundred yards in front of the airplane. So, with the rounds criss-crossing at that range, they had them. The armors tried to maintain that. They developed that type of aiming. So strictly flying the aircraft as the gun platform and the pilot maneuvering that target within that range and hitting. As far as the mechanics are concerned, we were responsible for the brakes, the wheels, the tires, the struts, and everything that goes along with the airplane. Of course, a P-40 is nothing as complicated as what we have in today's fighters, but it still had to be operating properly.

We had one occurrence where one of the pilots in a type called a CW-21, this was a radio type engine, I am not sure whether it was made by Curtis or made by Seversky. It was called a CW-21 whereas they were flown, three of them, from Rangoon up to Kun Ming. They landed at Lashio. The flight leader was Eric Shilling, and he was having trouble with his engine. It was not running properly. He ran into one of the mechanics there and he told him [Eric Shilling] that he was probably using the wrong type of gasoline. But anyway, that evidently was not the trouble because he took off from Lashio and he had two men with him that did not have any maps or did not know the way to Kun Ming. So, Shilling had trouble with his engine, and he had to crash land. He crash landed and was not hurt, but the other two wandered around and did not know where to go, so they crash landed. I think the other two were killed. So the engine was a vital part.

You could not get any place over those mountains in that altitude without a good engine. The P-40 was a liquid cooled, very reliable engine. Earlier models had Allison's. The War Hawks had Merlin engines. So our job was to

keep them running properly, spark plugs, whatever, propellers. We had a lot of problems with propellers where the 2-50 calibers, the synchronization mechanism would become worn. Especially in the dive, the propellers would pick up speed and the synchronization would not be exact, and the slug would go into the propeller. That is one reason why they did away with those 2-50's in the nose by the propeller.

We used to disperse the airplanes around the field at night in the revetments, and then bring them all together in the morning and get them ready for instant take-offs. We would fuel them, check them out, the guns ready to go, the communications, oxygen, everything.

There is another thing that they found out early in the war. Langley Field had these high pressure oxygen tanks, you know. They were 1800 pounds. They were no good, because if one bullet hit that tank, it blew up, and the airplane was lost. So they developed a low-pressure, self-sealing oxygen tank, which was a life-saver for the bigger models. So, that is what your mechanic did. I got more taxi time on those things than a lot of guys. [Laughter]

G: Did you taxi them out?

S: Oh, yes.

G: Before sunrise?

S: Right. At the crack of dawn, we were out there early. I spent most of my time out on the field.

G: Were you assigned to one aircraft?

S: No. They had it on the board, but we never went by it. If you were the mechanic and it had to be serviced, you serviced it. But my numbers were the Third Squadron went from anywhere between 70 and 100. So you could usually tell by the squadron of the airplane by the number on the airplane. I worked on number 72, 77, and 97. Those are the ones that I serviced mostly. We had maybe eight to ten mechanics out there at one time. That is where we spent most of our time.

G: What problems usually arose?

S: Propeller governors, slugs in the propellers, spark plugs, cooling problems, oil coolers. They had two big oil coolers under the column area that cooled the oil. Leaks, patching bullet holes, and sometimes flight surfaces, control surfaces [had problems]. We had a complaint one time where a couple of the rudders almost came off. We took all of the rudders off, checked the engines and pins.

There were things of that nature. It was a completely metal covered airplane, except for maybe the trim tabs. Those were fabric covered.

G: Whenever you received the planes when you first arrived in a country, you said you had to put them together. How did they arrive, in what major pieces?

S: Well, fusel lodges, wings off, flight surfaces off, wheels off, landing gear off.

G: So it was almost like putting a model kit together.

S: Exactly, yes. Then you had to rig the airplane, make sure it was rigged properly. [You put] Tension on the cables. There were cable controls, you know. That is another thing we checked. We would lift up the back end, snap the cables and made sure they were at the proper tension, because they went around pulleys, fiber pulleys. That was very important.

G: You said that a few times you ran into Colonel Chennault. What was he like, personally?

S: I can tell you what I saw of him, and what others said about him. As far as me talking to him personally, he never did that. I did not say, "How are you, Colonel?" He was always a man of business, and he was always in the headquarters. When he was out in the field, he was with some dignitary, or whether they were discussing tactics or whatever. He did play a lot of softball with the fellows. I have seen pictures of him playing softball, doing a little recreation. Mostly, I saw him at banquets and group meetings. He did not fly. He never flew any of the P-40's that I know of. He was supposed to have a 75 Hawk, but I never seen him fly. He did fly, he used a beach craft, a front twin engine beach craft, for transportation. I flew in that one time with one of the pilots. But, he was not on board. He was, "What you see is what you get." I learned more about him when I came back than I knew about him over there. Of course, he has got quite a background, there is no question about it. You ought to research it. He was able to judge the men. We listened to him if he had something to say. As far as I knew, he treated everybody fairly. He never played one man against another. He treated them all fairly. I never had or heard any criticism about him. We all thought the world of him. He was a good leader.

G: And Boyington?

S: Boyington was a troublemaker. He was born a troublemaker. He was a troublemaker from A to Z. He was always in a fight. He was a womanizer. He was always looking for a fight, and many times he got it. [Laughter] He was a loner as far as working with people. I brought it to the attention of some of the

fellows when we were in a group meeting being interviewed for the Stars and Stripes we were for one group in Germany, I know this to be a fact. At Loiie Wing, China, they had a big fight at night. Olga, Greenlaw's wife, was the woman in the picture. Everybody wanted to go to bed with her. Boyington, I guess, was quite attractive, but he was always drunk. He got into an escapade one evening at Loiie Wing. Someone said, "Here comes the Japs." He ran out the back door and rolled down a hill. [Laughter] And he was supposed to fly the next day.

He came out and flew my airplane. He did not want to fly that day. He took off. He just got off the end of the runway and started the wheels up, and he said the engine quit. That engine did not quit. He pulled the throttle back. He set it right down into a rice patty. We went out there that afternoon, picked the airplane up, cranked the gear down, drove it back in the field, changed the propeller, and we had it ready for duty. There was nothing wrong with the engine. He did not want to fly. Nobody wanted to fly with him, because he wanted to be the leader. He was made at Chennault because he did not make him a squadron commander. So, nobody wanted to fly with him.

He was a good pilot. He had the natural ability, and he proved that later in the Marines. He got the Congressional Medal of Honor. The group he was with was a bunch of misfits, you know, just like himself. I met him many times. In fact, he came to our first reunion back in 1952, at the Ambassador Hotel. None of the guys wanted to have anything to do with him. He was not welcomed by too many. But he wrote his book and made a name for himself. The last that I saw of him, he was selling books. I think he finally passed away of cancer. He was in the black sheep squadron in the Marines. That is what I know of Greg Boyington. [Laughter] If you wanted to operate with a fellow like that, more power to you.

G: No thanks. You said that there were quite a number of supply problems and you had to go through cannibalizing.

S: We had no supplies. We were very fortunate to have ammunition. We were not getting any more. Like I said, our supplies came up by ship to Rangoon, by truck up the Burma Road, and to Kun Ming. When they cut off the Burma Road, the only place they came over the hump by air. They tried that, but they could not get us enough supplies. The Fourteenth Air Force never had enough supplies. We were only allotted initial allotments. So our supplies were cannibalized from other airplanes.

G: What about food and things of that nature? Did they come through the commercial interest?

S: The food was more or less Chinese food from the cities, the government,

Changki Shek. Chinese food was pretty good. In fact, we had a thirteen-course meal one time that lasted all afternoon. It was put on by Madame Chang. She called us her boys, you know. She was a special person. She had a theater party in downtown Kun Ming when I first saw her. General Changki Shek was with her. She was really a special lady. She is 90 now, you know, and living in Long Island. She left her home in Taipei. She has got more relatives now in the United States than she does over there.

G: What exactly is she like?

S: A very beautiful woman, very pleasant, intelligent, knowledgeable. She was educated in this country. She did all of general Lissimo's public relations. I saw him two or three times, but I never saw him speak English. I saw him speak Chinese, but I did not know what it was. This theater party that we had, that they had in our honor in Kun Ming after some of our victories.

Of course, I could tell you my feelings and experiences with Jimmy Doolittle's Raiders. They came over there, Spring, 1942. Of course, we had no idea. We never dreamed that our high brass was feuding like they were. You do not want to think about things like that. The Army Brass did not care for us. We were a bunch of renegades, misfits, whatever. Even though they knew every one of us had been educated in the military. They did not have control of us, that was the thing. To have Brass like that not have control of you, they did not like that.

Anyway, they did not trust Chennault. They never told Chennault about that raid. If they would have told Chennault about that raid, he could have saved every one of those airplanes, every one of those B-25's. We had that warning net, and we could have picked them up and brought them in. We picked them up and did not know who they were. They wandered around and crash landed along the coast. Some of the survivors, including Doolittle, was maybe, I would estimate, thirty personnel. They appeared there on a field and we wondered who they were, a bunch of refugees. Where did they come from?

G: Did they land their bombers there?

S: No. They crash landed, every one of them. They ran out of gas. The only one that landed in good condition was the one that went to Russia. There were 16 B-25 bombers. They were practically in Kun Ming for maybe one day, and the Army flew them out again. They flew them back to the States, including Doolittle. But, we did not know who they were at the time. Then we heard rumors, "That was Doolittle." and we started hearing about the raid. See, we saw the men before we started hearing about the raid. What I am saying is, if they would have let Chennault in on the raid, the P-40's could have escorted those B-25's. It makes you wonder, does it not?

G: Politics.

S: That is all it was. This was March or April of 1942.

G: What did you think of the P-40 as an aircraft? Was it easy to maintain?

S: It was, yes. It was very easy to maintain. It was not complicated. It performed and did what it was supposed to do. The only thing is that it was never fast enough. There were too many airplanes of that category that could out maneuver it, except for the dive. The P-40's were always bale to dive. Zero's would tear their wings off diving.

G: So, we have you on the record stating that there were definitely Zero's in the area?

S: Now wait a minute. [Laughter] I did not know what a Zero was at that time. I can see what this fellow Ford is talking about, because there was another airplane that looked like the Zero. It was called a Haboshi, or something like that. We did not know it existed. To my knowledge, none of our group ever got together and talked to these Japanese. Although there was a time in 1985, I think. We were invited over there by some of the pilots that flew against us. In fact, there was two of them that Charlie Basiden became real good friends with. He went over there for a couple of months. He had been living with them. And we were invited over there and spent three days. They had a big banquet for us. Two nights, especially, the Japanese came over and they spoke at our reunion. We went back over there, and they gave us gifts and special treatment, all on their own money. It did not cost us anything, the banquet. We had to pay our hotel, transportation and all of that. But at the banquet, they gave us gifts. Every one of us was given a gift. We had numbers, you know, and the number corresponded with the gift. Edith got a kimono as her gift.

This group that he is talking about in that book, I could not be an authority on that Zero. I wondered about that myself. It is probably true. I would not argue that. But this other airplane does look like a Zero. If you saw the two of them, they are quite similar. So we may have been fooled on that. It was not a Zero. After all, the Zero was a Navy airplane.

G: How exactly were the relations between you and the other pilots?

S: Very cordial. In fact, there was no military, non-fraternization like the military between an officer and the ground personnel. We were all buddies. I know of no dissatisfaction or animosity whatsoever between the ground crew and the pilots or even the staff personnel. Other than those little quarrels like I told you with Boyington.

G: He deserved it.

S: Well, everybody has his own cup of tea, you know. We thought the world of Chennault. He was a great leader. But there was much more going on. I was not privy to everything that happened in headquarters and with the staff, you know, being out on the field. I never did go into headquarters. What I heard was fed to me by someone else. A fellow by the name of Bill Donovan, a Navy pilot, just before he was killed, to pass the time away, we would be on alert. He was one of the pilots. We would sit in the back of a one and a half ton international truck. We had a little card table, and we would sit and play Acy-Deucy. That was our favorite game. He would sit there and tell us--I do not know if he had a premonition or not--he said, "I do not think I will ever get back to the States." It was shortly after that he was shot down over Chiangmai, Thailand.

We lost a number of pilots like that to grounds strafing. That was always dangerous. They would rather have combat in the air. They have a chance up there, but the strafers got a lot of planes on the ground. We always hit them by surprise, early in the morning, late at night. Toward the end of the war they tried the same tactics on us. It did not work too well. They caught us one morning at Loi Wing, though. We were still in bed. And we saw fighters and we thought they were Zero's. There were some of their best pilots, and they caught us with our airplanes lined up along the runway, and they just shot us all up. We ran out of the barracks with our pajamas on and everything. Their pilots just took their time, circled around, and looked at us, you know. They came back the same afternoon and we were ready for them. We got seven of them.

G: In a situation like that, what did you do? As a crew chief, did you more or less have to strip those aircraft which were unserviceable?

S: Oh, yes. We had to patch them up. We had a line of P-40's down there and one C-47 sitting on the end of the runway. They came over there, strafed those airplanes. One of them dropped a 500 pound bomb about twenty feet from the C-47. It did not even touch it. I think out of those ten airplanes, we put seven of them back into flying shortly after that. We were waiting for them to come back in the afternoon. They thought they had us dead to right at Loi Wing. They had already taken Burma. That was the next place, Loi Wing. They came up through the valley. They had us dead to right. [Laughter] I never felt so helpless in my whole life. You would see that little Japanese pilot out there circling around and looking at us. We were sitting down there with our pants down. It was something.

G: This may seem like a strange question. What did you think of the AT-6? I did not have nay problem with it. It had a wide enough landing gear. The AT-6 was a nice trainer to have, but it was a taildragger. It was a good training airplane. I

liked to fly it. Most pilots will tell you that it was underpowered, but that is true of just about any airplane. They like an airplane that is easy to fly and maneuverable with lots of horsepower. I enjoyed the AT-6. I do not know what to compare it with. I never flew a P-51. It is on the same order, but they have the long nose. They have to swing the tail back and forth, otherwise you will run into something. I guess I got about, maybe one hundred and fifty hours in the AT-6. I liked the B-25 very much.

S: Did other pilots that you were acquainted with like it also?

S: Oh, yes. There were no complaints about the B-25. It was a good, stable airplane, good platform. I just feel so frustrated, you know, hearing about these things. I am glad today that the services have overcome, to a great extent, this feeling that they have to compete with the other services instead of working with them as a whole. You know, we now have facilities wherever you go as long as it is a military base, it does not make any difference if it is the Navy, Air Force, Army, or whatever, you are welcome there. During our service in World War II, it was not like that. The Army had their own; the Air Corps had their own. Well, the Army and the Air Corps were supposed to be the same thing, but they had differences, you know. Then, the Navy was a separate branch. They were all competing for the old congressional dollar. It was not a good situation, but that has been overcome to a great extent now. We do not have that, as demonstrated by the Gulf War and the present regulations. We can go overnight at any Army or Navy base, down the right path, you know. The facilities are open to all personnel, not any one branch. So, that has definitely been a good step forward.

G: Thank you.

End of Interview.