

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War 1939-1945

Personal Experience

O.H 1434

BLAIR WOODSIDE

Interviewed

by

Dave Glunt

on

November 21, 1991

Blair C Woodside

"Very fortunate in every respect" is how Blair Woodside, born the son of Blair C Woodside Sr. and Hattie Belle Nordick on 6 October 1920, characterizes his life. Born in Canton, Ohio, where he currently resides, Mr Woodside has had an eventful and colorful life. Maturing in the Canton area, Mr Woodside attended Canton area schools and graduated from Canton Township High School. Following graduation he entered into employment with the Hoover Company, which he remained with until his retirement in 1985. With the entrance of the United States into war, however, his employment with Hoover was interrupted.

Mr Woodside entered the U.S Army Air Corps on January 26, 1943. After attending West Texas State Teacher's College as part of his training, Mr Woodside gained his wings and was stationed in the CBI (China-Burma-India) Theater, where he was engaged in the piloting of C-46 Aircraft. Remaining in the theater until after the end of the war, Mr Woodside earned both the Air Medal and the Distinguished Flying Cross before being discharged from the military 26 January 1946.

Upon returning home, Mr Woodside returned to his employment at Hoover and continued as Vice-President of Personnel. Currently residing in North Canton with his wife of forty-eight years, Marjorie, Mr. Woodside remains active as a Mason, a member of the Oakwood Country Club, the Hump Pilots Association, and the Retires Executive and Professional Men's Club. In addition to enjoying golf and photography, Mr Woodside is kept busy with following the whereabouts of his clan of four children and several grandchildren.

G This is an interview with Blair C Woodside for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program by Dave Glunt, on November 21, 1991, at 2365 Sheffield St N W , North Canton, Ohio, at 1:00pm

Could you tell me a little about your childhood and your youth?

W I was born on October 6, 1920 My father was a barber, and my mother was a house wife She had been employed I guess, to various capacities She had minor industrial organizations for which she worked, Gibb's Toy Factory in the city of Canton, and she also worked in a place called the Buttonless Tire, she was a seamstress But primarily she was a house wife I started school prior to my sixth birthday, and ended school in two weeks when my parents moved. I transferred to Henry S Martin School in Canton My first teacher was Miss Meade I completed the first grade there, and for second grade I attended Hartford School For the third grade I went back to Henry S. Martin, and I continued there through the seventh grade

This would take us up to 1931 At that time we were in the depths of the Depression The stock market crash was in October of 1929, I was nine years old It did not really hit my family until about 1930 At that time, it was a disaster My father lost his barber shop, and he had a lot of customers that continued to come to him, and he had a lot of customers that continued to cut their hair, even though they could not pay, and he would record each hair cut for 35 cents in the man's name But he was unable to ever collect on any of those things, and eventually he simply went broke He did not go bankrupt, he went broke. He lost his barber shop and lost the equipment and we moved out into the country I had been a city boy up until that time So, my eighth grade then, was at Waco School, in Waco, Ohio It was a rural school, a consolidated school. This was quite a change, because the country kids were different than city kids considerably One of the courses that I had to take was agriculture I can recall that I missed algebra. In the city schools, algebra was taught in the eighth grade, and at Waco, it was taught in the seventh grade So I missed the math that I should have had, the algebra I finished eighth grade there

During the Depression, my father built a home He literally built it himself with his own hands. He cashed in a small insurance policy that he had, and he bought two lots in the country, on Trump Road I remember they dug the basement by hand, they used my grandfather's Model T truck, with a hand scoop, dug the basement, and they bought tile. I think they paid a half a penny a piece for them at the clay mines over in East Canton. He constructed a two bedroom, bath, living room, dining room, and kitchen It was a very small bungalow, and we lived in that In fact, they just sold that about five years ago Those were hard times. I was very comfortable as a child, because I could not tell how poor we were I had very loving parents, and a younger brother, who is four years younger than I am

Then I went to Canton Township Schools It is called Canton South now but,

then it was called Canton Township. I like to work with my hands, I like woodwork, and I had helped my dad a great deal. I had been artistic then. When I was 12 years old I was carrying one hundred pound sacks and I only weighed eighty-five pounds. But I learned to paint, I could cut a sash as neatly at the age of fourteen as most painters can. I learned to finish cement. I did some electrical wiring, some plumbing. We built our well. We put in a garden, and the first year we reaped one hundred bushels of potatoes on a back half acre of ground. We had a strawberry patch, and tomato plants. We could have fed the neighborhood on everything we raised that first year. We made apple butter outside in a big cooper kettle, made thirty gallons of apple butter for the winter. Really, I had a very happy childhood. As I said, I did not know we were poor.

I graduated from high school in a commercial course, and that was purely accidental. I knew I wanted to take shop, Manual Arts. I could have taken that in a college entry course, there were only three courses: commercial, general, or college entrance. Really, I should have taken college entrance, but I did not realize it. I was in a big long line to sign up for courses and I heard a young man in front of me say, "I want a commercial course and industrial arts." That is for me, and so, that is where I was. We had a principal by the name of L. T. Drennon, he had come from Massillon, Ohio, he was a little director. He was despised and he only lasted one year. Well, I did very well in the manual training class, in fact I was so adapted to drafting, the teacher had me put in all drafting assignments on the board. I found that I could only take manual arts for one year, and you could only take mechanical drawing one year in this particular course. So, I went to the principal and asked to switch my course and he said absolutely not. "You signed up for this course, you are going to take it." Even the industrial arts teacher asked if I could be changed. I finished in the commercial course taking shorthand, bookkeeping, and typing. I liked bookkeeping, I hated typing, and I absolutely despised shorthand, but I graduated on the honor roll.

I came out of school in 1938, May 27, 1938, I graduated. We were in what was known as the recession. We had pulled out of the Depression a little bit, and then back down it goes. There were no jobs available. Men were on WPA (Works Progress Administration), they were a national youth administration for young high school graduates, and for young people. Then there was the three C's, (Civilian Conservation Corps). For two years I did just what I could do. Sometimes I would help my grandfather at the service station. A friend of mine had a truck, so I drove truck a little bit. I would be lucky if I could make a couple dollars a week. Of course, a couple dollars a week went a lot further back then than it does today. Finally, in the fall of 1939, I got a job with the National Youth Administration. This was a government project, and I got a job working in the parks. I worked seven days out of the month and I got \$18.40 for seven days work. I was raking leaves and cleaning brick. The park systems at that time were building shelters, and there were old brick cabins on the East end of Canton, and they donated these brick cabins to the park project. So, we cleaned brick with a piece of steel, we would knock the cement off of it. We got the brick good and clean and that is one that they could use. We did that and raked the leaves, and various other things. That went on for about two months in the dead of winter.

I remember one day that I worked it was fourteen degrees below zero I was completely miserable. I had so many clothes on I could hardly move. After about two months, they discovered that I could type, some how or another, this came out They transferred me to an office job working in the WPA office where I alphabetized files every day. Just literally thousands of files formed by six pieces of paper for WPA records I was very conscientious. When I finished alphabetizing the files you could find what you were looking for My superiors were amazed because they had other people doing this work, it took me much longer, but when I was finished they could find things When the others finished they could not. So, I must have found a very adequate job. One month of that job, that would be seven days, I realized that I was going nowhere, I had to do something a little more to my liking, and personal development, and I seriously considered going into the military

I was going to enlist in the Army, Air Force Now this was March of 1940, and I was nineteen years old I had to paint my papers, I was going to go to Rantulfield, Illinois, I think Anyhow, I was referred by the Ohio State of Service to the Hoover Company, and they had a job in the personnel department. A young man who had been there for years was leaving for a job in Washington DC, and they had just three days to replace him, he turned in a two week notice but they had not found a suitable candidate They interviewed me and hired me the next day, so I began to work for the Hoover Company That was on March 4, 1940, as a typist clerk in the personnel department From that point on, Hoover Company was my career

I enlisted in the Army Air Force in June of 1942, following Pearl Harbor, which was December 7, 1941 And I was going to enlist in the Marine Corps The head of security at the Hoover Company had been a Marine and he talked to me constantly, just Marine, Marine, Maine He had me so enthusiastic that I was ready to go to the Marines, although my mother objected to the Marines I had met a girl that I had married, and she also objected to the Marines

G. Why was that?

W They were afraid I would get killed Of course, I could have gotten killed in the Army, or Navy, or Air Force So they agreed to my decision to go into the Army Air Force, and I enlisted in June. I failed the eye test the first time I went up, and they gave me a second chance I had three raw carrots a day for two weeks, drank a quart of milk every day The pharmacist told me that if I took 25,000 units of Vitamin A a day, that is as much of a Vitamin A as you will get in a bushel of carrots. So, he gave me a supply of 30 days of these things, and I took them for two weeks I got so my eyeballs turned orange, they really did The whites turned orange, I could see as well at night as most people can see in the day time I would go to the theater after it was all over, back in those days you went to the theater alone, the pictures were on the screen, and the theater was dark and no one could see, but I could So, I passed just like that.

I was called in January of 1943, it was six months before they called me to active

duty after enlistment. Then from there I went down to Columbus, Ohio, boarded a train and ended up in Wichita Falls, Texas. I took my basic training, six weeks of the most god-awful experiences I do not even want to describe. My father-in-law had been in World War I, and he told me what to expect. I thought, Well, what does this old fogey know about this modern Army? After all, that was almost forty years ago. It was exactly as he described it. I completed my six weeks of training and became ill there, homesick really. I did not realize that homesickness was a real sickness. It is not that you just miss home, you get real sick. They hospitalized me. The other people that I was with at the time moved out, and there I was, in the hospital. So, while I was in the hospital, I finally got to call home, and talked to my mother and my girlfriend, we were engaged to get married. And with those two conversations, I immediately recovered, just like that.

I was transferred, then, to another group. These were nothing but aviation cadets, they were moving on through basic training then on to whatever destination. I got attached to a group of Texans and they were a wild bunch, they were really wild. I never met anybody like that, but great guys. Some of the funny things they did were just fantastic. We got confined because somebody in the outfit got the measles, and we were stuck in the barracks for a week while we had to go through these measles inspections every morning. They would pull up your shirt and look at your stomach, and if they saw red spots, then you had the measles. I went through one time, I remember, and pulled up my shirt and they grabbed me and jerked me out of the line, and I had forgotten to pull up my undershorts. I did not have the measles, it is just the way they treat you. There was another scare while I was there. They had a rheumatic fever. There were several people that got rheumatic fever, but fortunately, I escaped that.

They shipped me out with a group of Texans and some boys from Wisconsin, mostly Texans though. They shipped me down to a place called Canyon, Texas, a small town just seventeen miles south of Amarillo, Texas, to a school there called West Texas State Teachers' College, which I attended for six months. We were all high school graduates. A lot of the fellows had two years of college, but they really threw the book at us as far as mathematics was concerned. I missed algebra, so I did not have any higher mathematics at all. In a six week period of time, I took algebra, plane geometry, solid geometry, trigonometry, calculus, and believe me, I worked my butt off. The other guys would go to bed at night, and I would go to bed because I had to. But I went to bed at night, and pulled a blanket up over me, and I had a flashlight and studied to all hours. But I came through alright. I did everything they everybody else did, and I got good grades.

From there we went to Santa Anna, California, where we went through classification to determine whether we were going to be washed out or permitted to continue on learning to fly. I had ten hours of flight training at Canyon, Texas. I passed all the tests and was classified for pilot training. I had a little psychological problem there. They had you interviewed by psychologists. I did not know what the purpose of it was, but you had to take off your shoes and sit there in your stocking feet. I think it was to make you as uncomfortable as could be. You were in fatigues and you looked terrible. These psychologists said, "What does your father do, Mr Woodside?" I said, "He is a

barber " He said, "I thought so " I thought, Boy this guy is sharp, he knew my father was a barber And he said, "Where does your father have his farm?" I said, "My father does not have a farm, he is a barber." "Oh, a barber," he said Well, that was the end of the questions, and he wrote down three figures, passed it along and said that it was okay, we were excused, and I left I found out that I had washed out, washed into the cadets So, I sat there for a long time, and then I saw a Captain, who was head of this unit He said, "What happened to you, Mr. Woodside?" I said, "What do you mean by that?" He said, "Were you nervous?" I said, "Yes, I am nervous " He said, "Why?" I said, "Well, I spent six months preparing for this, I have accomplished everything that I have to do, and now I find out that because my father is a barber instead of a farmer, I am washed out of the unit " He said, "Well I think I understand," and wrote three new numbers down, and I became a pilot

I went to Das Palas, California where I took primary training through the PT-19, and was transferred to Rossette, California. My wife joined me, by the way. We were married while I was at the West Texas State Teachers' College Then I went up to Marset, California, where I went to what they call the basic trainers, which is bigger, heavier aircraft I finished that successfully. That was my first experience of night flying Then I went to Arizona, right on the Mexican border, Douglas, Arizona and got my wings I was trained in a twin engine 18-9, which was a very hot little aircraft It had originally been a fighter plane, but it was converted into a trainer I was supposed to be a fighter pilot, because of my size, I was small and light, and that is what I wanted I wanted B-38's I graduated in May of 1944 in class 44E, in Douglas, Arizona I was a Second Lieutenant

From there I went to Louisville, Kentucky. I simply reported into Louisville, and then I was given a two week leave to go home. Then Syracuse, New York where I learned to fly a C-47. I learned there that I was not going to be a fighter pilot. I was a cargo pilot I had 100 hours in C-47's, and then they transferred us up to the big C-46, which was a monster at the time. It was so big that when I got into it for the first time, I realized that the whole fuselage of a C-47 could fit inside of a C-46 You sit in the cockpit and you are 21 feet off the ground practically before you start the engines I had my training in the C-46 in Syracuse, then they moved us back to Louisville, Kentucky We flew our own airplanes and every thing down, and finished our training at Louisville Following that, we said good-bye to our wives, and they went home, and we went top Fort Wayne, Indiana where we were prepared for wherever they were going to ship us We had no idea where we were going or what we were going to be doing, but we got our aircraft there We were assigned a brand new airplane, and we were issued our clothing, summer gear, and winter gear. We did not know whether we were going to the arctic or whether we were going to the orient, or where we were going We got our orders and we went to Morrison Field, down at West Palm Beach, Florida

From there, we hopped off and flew south to Puerto Rico, and down to South America. We took off from a town in Brazil across the Atlantic, and ended up at the Ascension Island. Then on the East coast of Africa, and then to Belgian Congo, up to Haydn on the Red Sea, and across to an island in the Indian Ocean, on up to Karatchie,

India. Went from Karatchie to Niagara, where the Taj Mahal is located, and from there to Souette, in Agretilla. There we set up our first station, and I did my first over-seas flying then while we were in Souette, Agretilla. We were only there for a short time, until they moved us down to Chitigong, which is now part of Bangladish .

We flew into over the Chin Hills, that was our primary assignment, that is why we were formed. We did not know that at the time. We flew objectively to supply the British in their push South to try to get the Japanese out of Burma. By the time we got there, the Japanese had pretty well been pushed out of Burma, a few Japanese fighters left, but not many. On the ground, there were a lot of Japanese soldiers. They did considerable damage to the C-46. Once in a while, when we were flying over, we would see a huge burn spot on the ground where a patriot had hit a plane and it simply exploded right there, because we flew at tree top level. We would take off and get over the Chin Hills. My memory, of course it has been almost fifty years now, but it seems to me that the highest peaks in the Chin Hills are about 14,000 feet. So, the C-46 had a good load to get up and over them pretty quickly. Then as soon as you were on the other side, you dropped right back down to tree top level to locate the air landing strips, and pulled up and landed. Some of the strips we landed at were H form. You would land on one side and go back and cross it, unload, and take off on the other strip. Sometimes the Japanese would hold this piece of land in between the two landing strips.

G Were they that far apart?

W Oh, yes, I would say they were probably the width of two football fields apart. They would have snipers in the trees that would shoot at us. They tried to hit the airplanes if they possibly could, to save that airplane, of course. Also, we learned not to wear any insignia because they tried to all look alike as much as possible, officers and enlisted men. And we were pretty good friends anyway, the officers and the enlisted men, so, until we were in combat, we decided on the separation. The officers live separate from the enlisted, but you live your lives together.

I talked to my radio operator about ten or eleven years ago, it was my first CBI reunion. I called him, he was a heck of a nice kid, he was an artist, he painted the pictures on the side of the airplanes, every airplane ended up with a picture on it. Ours was called, "Monsoon Maize". I remember the other pilot and I were arguing about what we were going to paint on the outside of the airplane, he wanted his wife's name on it. We decided that maybe we could take the two names and come up with a name to put on the airplane. We had a girl painted on the outside of the airplane and "Monsoon Maize" resulted. The radio operator liked it. I talked to him, I suppose it was about eleven years ago, but he is totally prone and disabled to retire. And my crew chief, one of the finest men I have ever known, his name was Gibb Verne, he was from Amarillo, Texas, and he has been dead over a year. The other fellow I was with, he was a first pilot, I was his co-pilot, then we later split and I became a first pilot over-seas. He died in 1948, so my entire crew is gone now. And the radio operator, by this time he will be gone too.

So, we finished our job in Burma, I guess it was probably about May of 1945, and

then they transferred us up to Mitchinaw, which is North of where we were, and this was in Burma then I do not know if you have read anything about the Battle of Mitchinaw, the Merles Marauders

G. The spelling had confused me for quite some time

W Yes, it confused me too when I first saw it, but we learned to pronounce those words over there Then we flew out of Mitchinaw, and we flew the hump, for the balance of our time over seas. By this time our airplanes were getting a lot of hours on them. They were wearing out really I lost my best friend in March of 1945, Lenny Logan We met in Syracuse, New York, our wives got very well acquainted, we rented apartments together, and we ran around together When I first started to fly over-seas for some reason or other, I got more time in than anybody else in the outfit, I flew more hours. I was flying one hundred twenty-five to one hundred forty hours a month, and eighty hours is about what you were supposed to fly a month In March they grounded me for a couple of weeks to let some of the other fellows catch up, and Lenny had been ill He was a good pilot, a real good pilot, but he flew by the seat of his pants He was a wild man really. He would have made a great fighter pilot. He and I flew together a few times, but I was grounded for about two weeks, and he would just fly his pants off. They flew him everyday. I believe it was March 21, the first day of spring, he had flown three missions that day, that is over and back It would be a total of six really Three loads over to Burma. I guess he was exhausted at the end of the day, so they called for another pilot to take his plane, it was called the "Jungle Bung", and I happened to be the pilot they called

I did not get a chance to talk to Lenny that day, but as I was going out to the flight line, he was coming in. In trucks back and forth And when he saw that I was going to have to fly his mission he just was hilarious, laughing. Woodside had to fly again after being grounded for two weeks They assigned a co-pilot to me that was probably the worst possible excuse for a pilot, I will not mention his name, but he was just a poor excuse for a pilot He never qualified as a pilot, he was always a co-pilot, and you could not count on him for anything He would not get up in the morning and when he did, he would run around in his underwear with a pair of these sheepskin boots that were designed for arctic wear. He drank beer for breakfast, one beer for breakfast. He would get mail from home and he would just lay it on the top of his bunk. He would not open it and then maybe once a month he would reach in and pull out a letter He was just a poor excuse

So, they assigned him to me as my co-pilot. I taxied the airplane out and I learned that the right engine on the plane had over five hundred hours of flying time on it Well, an engine was supposed to be pulled at five hundred hours, and get reconditioned It popped and banged, and it popped and banged as we taxied out, but it checked out I tried everything I could to not let that engine check out so I could red line it and not fly it I was not happy about flying with this co-pilot anyhow, and I was not too familiar with

the airplane. Anyhow, I got off the ground and into the air and I learned that I was the only pilot that got off that night, they had closed the field immediately because of the weather conditions.

By this time it was night, it was black, and I flew over the Chin Hills into Burma. I forgot just what my destination was, I think it was Maewaw, and when I got over the Chin Hills and located Maewaw, I asked for the field lights. They would not turn the field lights on for me. There was supposed to be Japanese bandits in the air, bandits was the word for two Japanese fighters. They were looking for whoever was there, and I was the only guy there. Nobody else was flying that night. So, they blinked the lights on and off, they would not turn them on because they were afraid the bandits would bomb the field. Here I am trying, to get in with a load of gasoline. I had twenty-seven drums of one hundred octane fuel on board. All it would take would be one bullet and I would have been history. I had to fly what is known as a right hand pattern; usually you fly a left hand pattern so the pilot can look out the window and see the strip and judge how far away he is supposed to be before he makes his cross wing. I had to fly in and to depend on my co-pilot, so I knew when I had to make the turn. In the meantime, they would blink the lights on and then blink them off, like that. You just had to judge everything from that one blink you got.

So, he had me turn too soon, I was way high, but I dropped it like a bomb and I got pretty descent landing out of it, I landed long. We got on the ground and could not get anybody to unload the gasoline off of the airplane. We finally managed to get them to bring some people out, and we just literally rolled the drums of gasoline off, threw them. If they broke one, they broke one.

G Why would they not come out?

W I do not know. In India, you have loaders and you have unloaders, you have sweepers. The caste system says that they can only do what they are supposed to do. If they are a loader, they will not unload an airplane. If they are an unloader, they will not load it. If they are supposed to be a sweeper, that is all they are aloud to do is sweep. They sweep, they take little brooms and they sweep everything, but that is all they do is sweep. So, I do not know if they did not have enough unloaders or what, but we finally got the airplane unloaded and took off again. They turned the lights on enough that I could get off the ground. We flew back over the Chin Hills and the field was closed. It was socked in. I thought, What in heaven's name are we going to do, and all of the sudden over the field, there was an opening, a hole, and I spiraled down into the hole onto the ground. I was the only one to get off, the only one who flew the mission, got back, and got on the ground. I rejoiced at that; I think the good Lord was looking after me.

The next day Lenny flew the plane in the morning, flew one mission, came back and loaded again, and took off a second. And that right engine caught fire. Another friend of mine, a fellow by the name of Bill King, was flying and he yelled over the radio for Lenny to bail. He had pulled the extinguisher and the fire had gone out, but it caught

again. They told him, Lenny the wing is going to fall off. As I say, Lenny was kind of a hot dog, and he thought he could bring the plane back, and he was down four hundred feet when he gave the order for his crew to bail. His radio operator and crew chief bailed out, and the crew told me that his parachute opened just as his feet touched the ground. It opened just in time, he made it, he did not break his legs. Lenny was flying with a fighter pilot. The man had been on his way home and they pulled him off and assigned him to us for a couple of weeks for flying. He had already completed his missions, he was on his way home, and he was flying as co-pilot. Nothing but co-pilot, all he did was pick up the gear. But Lenny and the co-pilot went down with the plane. They did not find either one of them. They went up and we feel that Lenny probably, at the last minute, bailed out the door right behind the pilot's seat which would take him right into the propeller. They found the segment of a left arm and a patch of yellow hair from the back of his head, and that is all that was left. That was a very, very, sad moment, and how close I came to it. I had flown it the night before.

We flew the flights out of Mitchinaw to Chung Ming and in August of 1945, when they dropped the bomb, which ended the war, I had seven hundred and ninety hours of combat time, and I believe four hundred and fifty combat missions. They grounded me, seven hundred and fifty was supposed to be the top number of hours you were allowed to have. They grounded me, they said that some of the crew members were complaining about me, I was getting pretty short and hard to get along with. I do not know whether that is true or not, it could be. But I never regarded myself as that kind of person. Then I was grounded for a little while and, since the war was over, they sent me home.

We got down to Calcutta, and a fellow by the name of George Williamson and I, George was in the same outfit as I, by the way, he was from Pittsburgh. We got down to Calcutta, and they discovered that there were two trucks that were the property of this fighter outfit that had been left up in the Chin Hills someplace and they had to be destroyed. We were not allowed to leave them there for the Indians to use. So, they sent two men back up to find the trucks and blow them up. We waited a month in Calcutta for them to blow up the trucks and get back with us. By this time, a whole group of guys from my outfit were on their way home, and they caught up with us in Calcutta. We managed to all get together and fly a plane over to Karachi where we docked a ship and came home. I came home aboard the General Richardson. I remember there were a lot of nurses on board. It was quite a trip, I will tell you. A bunch of love starved GI's in their mid-twenties, and all these nurses. Some were attractive and some were not attractive, but it did not make a whole lot of difference whether they were attractive or not. They were females.

A lot of enlisted men aboard the ship. Black soldiers, and of course, in those days the blacks and whites were separated. The blacks were not permitted to do things that they were very capable of doing. They were maintenance workers. They operated the kitchen, and they did not clean up, and all the crappy jobs that the white men did not do, did not want to do. They would do them if they were ordered to do them.

We landed in New York. I will never forget my first sight, it was the Statue of Liberty, as we pulled into the New York Harbor. From there on in, it was separation. We

were in Kilmer, New Jersey for a very short time. I made it home for Christmas, it was 1945. I stayed in the Reserve, they had nothing here in this area to do. I had a couple of hours in an elite trainer up at the Navy Base. Someplace around here, I do not even remember where it was. I went back to the Hoover Company where I became an assistant personnel manager. In 1953 during the Korean Crisis, they gave me a choice of either resigning my commission or going back into active duty. By this time we had four sons. I resigned my commission, which ended my military career.

The rest of my time I spent with the Hoover Company. I retired in March of 1985. I was personnel manager, I worked in the personnel department for six years and became manager of the personnel department. I moved from there to assistant to the president of the company and went through a reorganization of the company and the president left. He was Herbert W. Hoover, Jr., grandson of the company. He was then the man I was supposed to be working for. I was reassigned and became manager of real estate for a year and then moved back into a phase of personnel work, pensions, and employee benefits. I managed that for a couple of years, my last three years I was functional manager and responsible for pensions and employee benefits, payrolls, budgeting, salary budgeting, and that is when I retired at the age of 64.

It has been a pleasant six years of retirement. I am active, I am secretary of the Retired Executive and Professional Men's Club. I am treasurer of St. Luke Lutheran Home for the Aged, that is a volunteer position. I am on the Board of Trustees, I have been a trustee at my church, served on call committee. Past president of Stark County Personnel Association, which is known as Stark County Resources Association. They do not have personnel anymore. They forgot how to spell personnel with two N's and one L. Passed president of the Kent State University Chaplaincy, I think they call it Kent State University Ministry Association, or something like that. That was when Reader Vil was president and there was a big blow out at Kent, the National Guard fired on the students.

G How did your organization react to that?

W It is pretty hard to say. The Chaplain and most of the participants in the chaplaincy sided very heavily with the students. Of course everybody was very upset at the deaths and the fact that the National Guard fired. But I can see both sides. Personally, I could because you have to remember that those National Guardsmen were about the same age as the students protesting, and they felt in danger. They were being pelted with rocks and bats, bottles, and that sort of thing. They reacted. I have a feeling that many of those wish that they could do that incident over again, do it differently. The people here were very upset about it. They were generally in favor of the students. Of course, everyone was very upset about the reaction of the National Guard, it was a terrible thing.

My oldest son is a graduate of Kent State University, he is an attorney in Washington DC. He enlisted in the Signal Corps during the Vietnam War, and was sent to Germany, and hated it so bad in Germany that he volunteered for service in Vietnam. My second son is a graduate of Grove City College in Pennsylvania. He is a movie

director in Hollywood, he is an animator and a writer of music. He is a self taught artist. This new movie that Disney has just come out with, Beauty and the Beast, he did the story work on it, he has with Disney, so he will have screen credits from that He is working on a movie with Ralph Botchier. I am not sure if you are familiar with Botchier, he did one of the first adult cartoons called Fritz the Cat

G I remember the movie

W Bruce, he was one of the ten key animators on Lord of the Rings Did you see Lord of the Rings?

G Not the cartoon

W You did not see it? It was not what they expected it to be He was one of the key animators My number three son is a set decorator In Hollywood My number four son graduated from Kent with a degree in Sociology He is now a tech writer They are all on their own Three of them are married I have eight grandchildren, four granddaughters, and four grandsons That is the story of my life.

G When you were in Burma, and then later In Mischinaw, what were your bosses like?

W In Chitigong, we lived in what they call bashas, which were bamboo buildings I forgot how many men were in one, let me see, about twelve men in a basha They had bamboo walls, and grass roofs There were snakes and there were scorpions We were there during monsoon season. Rain like you never saw, and when it rained, it rained You just could not get out of it. It would rain for about four hours, and then it would stop, and then it would sun, and then the steam would rise up off the ground They had what we called wog ponds, which were depressions that were dug down into the ground probably seventy-five square feet They would fill up with water, all the run off, and they had these bamboo walks to step on for when it rises.

G Is that what they were designed for?

W Yes, to catch water. The Indians would bathe in there. They would get in there and wash themselves Physically, the Indian people clean themselves a lot Under the circumstances, they were as clean as they could possibly be They were nice people Of course, we could not communicate very well because, naturally, we could not speak their language, and we were not going to learn it In the short period of time we were there Many of them could speak a smattering of English We had bears that worked for us, young boys that were probably ten to twelve

years old. It was hard telling how old they were because their growth is so stunted, they are small people except for the Seagues, who are very big people. These young men that worked for us, they did everything. They made our beds, they would take the beds apart in the morning, and take them out during the sunny period so they could dry out, at night they just absorbed so much moisture. You would take your shoes off and set them next to your bed and when you go to put them on the next morning, they would be covered with green mold. You wanted to make sure that you checked the content of your shoe before you put your foot in it, because there might be a scorpion in it. A scorpion sits with its tail sticking up and they hiss like a snake.

These people worked very hard for us, they did our laundry, they shined our shoes, they cleaned up around the place, they swept, if they were sweepers. We paid them sixty-eight cents a week, and that would be two rubies, eight annas. The British hated us because we were ruining the economy. It was my understanding that at that time the average annual earnings for a farmer was fifteen rubies a year. That is not much. A ruby is worth thirty cents in America. Unbelievable! We would go into the town and buy something, I bought my dad one of these pipes, hookeye, I think it was called. It has a hose on it, and then a stem with a clay thing on top. You put your tobacco in the clay thing, then you put some charcoal in there and light it, and then you put water in it, a water pipe. Then you suck on this end of the hose and the smoke goes down through the water and it cools the smoke, so when you inhale you have the cool smoke. I forgot what I paid for it. No more than a couple of rubies, if it was that much. When I told my bearer what I paid for it, he laughed, it was hilarious. He could have bought it for like two pennies or three pennies.

I remember I went into a tailor shop there and these guys were all sitting around smoking on this one pipe, they would pass it around. When they smoked it, they were not very sanitary. The stem coming out of the pipe, they put their hand around it like that, so then they would put the thing in their mouth. I know it smelled funny, so I said, "What are you smoking? What is that tobacco that you are smoking?" He said, "Half and half," and he pulled out a can of tobacco. Did you ever hear of half and half tobacco?

G No, I have not.

W MJ Reynolds tobacco company, made in this country. They called it half and half because the can was a little flat can, about that high and no wider than your hand, but it slid together as you used the tobacco. You could push the can down so it became a half of a can, half and half. That is what they were smoking. "Half and half," he said. I thought it was some exotic Indian tobacco or something. They did have a cigarette that they smoked over there, it was just a roll of some tobacco, but it was very orange, and it had a sickening smell to it. They would roll it and tie it with a little string, and everybody smoked it. And they said they chewed beetle nut. I do not know if you have ever heard of that. But their teeth were always red and they spit this red tobacco juice constantly. Our toilets were a pit with a concrete slab, and a rectangle cut out of it.

When you used the toilet you had a certain spot where you placed your feet and then you squatted down in the toilet. The Americans used one hundred octane gasoline to disinfect those toilets. One time we had a GI that used the toilet and forgot that it was one hundred octane gasoline and he lit a cigarette and dropped the match in. They sent him home. You never smoked when you went to the bathroom. Happily, I did not smoke then, anyhow. Our rations, we had lots of rations. We got a case of beer, a fifth or whiskey, a fifth of gin, two cartons of cigarettes.

G Do you remember what kind?

W Cigarettes?

G Yes. Or the beer also.

W The beer was a west coast beer. It was not a particularly good beer, but we drank it naturally. We drank the whiskey. I did not drink the gin though, I never drank gin. I could not stomach it. I later learned to drink gin, but I always gave my gin to my radio operator. He drank it, he drank everything. We got two cans of totty, and usually a box of candy like a Baby Ruth, or Clark Bars, or something like that. I loved the totty, but I loved my beer too. I usually traded my totty to nonbeer drinkers. I would give them two cans of totty and get their case of beer. We drank our beer warm because we did not have any facilities for making ice. Later, we built an ice machine. We did learn that if we took our beer in a laundry bag when we were flying, we would tie it on the end of a rope and hold it out the window of the airplane. It was twenty degrees below zero out there and we would chill it pretty good. Except that it would bang against the side of the airplane. I have a picture of my crew chief pointing out to me that the beer bottles on the outside of my airplane were popping, so we had to quit chilling the beer outside the airplane.

We did that for a couple of weeks. We hauled a lot of, well we hauled everything, gasoline, barrels of tar, even sides of beef. There were certain Indian troops that would eat beef, but there were others that did not. It is the Hindu that would not kill a cow. The Muslims would eat beef, and there were Muslim troops over there. We would haul these sides of beef over to them. I had a great big switchblade knife that I carried because they told us to buy a switchblade knife before you went over seas, in case you ever had to bail out and got hung up in a tree. That switchblade knife might save your life because you have to open it with one hand and get the blade to cut yourself out of the parachute. So, I always carried that switchblade knife with me, and my radio operator, well, he would slice off about an inch of those steaks. We carried gasoline stoves in our airplanes and he would fry those steaks for us. That was the only meat that we had when we were over there. We did have water buffalo, but that was like chewing leather. You would chew it and chew it, then finally spit it out because you could not swallow it. There was no way that you could get your teeth through it. We would fly sixteen hours a day, come in and

maybe would have K rations or something like that over a day

I went from one hundred and fifty pounds down to one hundred and twenty-seven pounds when I was over there. We lived on coffee, really. We drank coffee like it was going out of style. Like I said, I dropped down to about one hundred and twenty-seven pounds. The food was poor, a lot of powdered eggs, powdered mashed potatoes, which was like water. They would make hot cakes, they would probably make them at midnight, and we would get up about two or three o'clock in the morning and get ready to fly, and go to eat breakfast. These hotcakes would be piled in a big tub, well, they were not particularly good hotcakes to begin with. When hotcakes sit for several hours, they all glue together. You try to pick one up. Then we had a butter that was really a wax, like a wax. It would get rancid, and they would try to get a few of those hotcakes which were really cool by this time and then spread the butter on it. Well, the butter was like a wax on there, and you would go to put syrup on it and the syrup would just run off because you were eating a wax pancake. So, very few of us ate breakfast. We would drink coffee. They would make coffee in a big tub and I think they kept pouring water into it and more coffee, and boiling it until the ground got up to the top of the kettle. Then they would start over again. You here jokes about spam, but we would have given anything for spam. We did steal a whole plane load of grape jelly from the British once. I mean, we had a lot of grape jelly for awhile. On my way home when I was in Calcutta, I ate like a horse because they had good food down there. Four o'clock in the afternoon they would open up and serve hamburgers with beer. We would usually eat six hamburgers a piece and then drink six bottles of Miller High Life, they had that in Calcutta, which was a very, very good beer.

In Burma, when we were in Mitchinaw we lived in tents. Two men to a tent. We had furniture, I do not know where we got it, but we had a book case, and a big table in the center of our tent. We each had our own cot with mattresses that we had bought from the Indians. They were simply a mat, not that thick. Then, of course, the mosquito nets. Frequently we would see snakes. I came out of the mess hall one night and almost stepped on a coral snake that was stretched across the sidewalk. The sidewalk was bamboo, or tar paper. Some of them were tar paper. We had that heavy tar paper down and then put steel matting over top of it. Pop Reynolds, the older man in the outfit, he was 26 years old, he went to put his jacket on one time, and for some reason he snapped it, there was a little crate snake that was in there. If he had not done that, he would have been dead. They claim that the bite of the crate snake is the most poisonous there is, that it kills very, very shortly. So, we all got in the habit of shaking our jackets before we put them on after that moment.

We lost quite a few men over seas. A lot of them at the end, the very end, because of the condition of the aircraft. The aircraft was in bad shape. We had a commanding officer who was trying to make a name for himself. He had been a civilian pilot and would go back to the airplanes. He was trying to set the record, or at least we were told that, for the amount of tonnage flown over the hump. They were pushing the airplanes, they were pushing the pilots, and flying the hump was a dangerous cross. There are mountains there that a C-46 with a load on it just would not hold. You could not hold

your altitude. When you were on instruments, you had to have that altitude to make sure you cleared those mountains, that is all there was to it. They pushed the aircraft and they pushed the pilots, and I remember a fellow named Joe Smith, that was one of the most handsome young men that I have ever seen. He took off in the airplane, and he lost power after the take off, and he crashed. His face went right into the windshield, and just smashed it. He was killed immediately, but he was just such a handsome young man. And such a nice guy. We lost a few, but not as many as some of the other outfits. The 13th squadron, they even lost an airplane on the way over. They had a lot of bad luck. After the war, I had a bad period, about 1953. I went through a very serious depression for awhile. I came out of it without any counseling or any help, but I always figured it was a delayed reaction to some of the trauma. It was not that we were in, as far as the enemy was concerned, it was not a problem because by the time we got over there, they were being pulled back. The number of hours that we flew, we flew too many hours, we flew missions when we were absolutely exhausted, we were flying missions in Burma. Night missions after having flown all day long, I could not stay awake. Have you ever driven a car when you had trouble staying awake? So, you can imagine what it is like in an airplane, and you have a crew there. I remember sitting there slapping my face, doing all kinds of things to stay awake. I was just absolutely exhausted.

Those were the kinds of things. Weather, very, very bad weather. I remember Mitchinaw had three landing strips, in a triangle, and I had come back from Cung Ming. Joe Dehecous was my co-pilot, he was over in Pittsburgh, and there is another man you could talk to if you would like to, because he stayed in the military, and I think he came out a Colonel. Heck of a nice guy, a lot of fun. He came over as my co-pilot, and he was flying co-pilot for me this time. We came back from Cung Ming and came in at eighteen thousand feet. There were mountains that were about seventeen thousand feet, so we had to use the instrument let down. Keep in mind, there are three landing strips down here, and three airplanes going into all of them. They let you down five hundred feet at a time, so that means at every five hundred feet, there is an airplane flying. You just are praying that they all have the same altitude set. You fly out so many minutes and then you make a forty-five degree turn, and you fly so many seconds. You do a one hundred eighty degree turn and fly back, and then you fly back on the beam until you cross over the silence. You fly so many minutes and then you do the same thing. Then they call you on the radio and they tell you to drop down to such an altitude, eighteen thousand, to seventeen thousand, five hundred. You want to catch that, you do not want to drop down to seventeen four, because the guy at seventeen thousand feet maybe a little higher.

Well, you do this and it probably takes about five minutes to do each one of these changes, I do not know, I am just guessing at the five minutes. But you are flying the airplane, you are not on auto-pilot. You have this route that is like driving a truck, because that is what it is like, truck drivers. By the time you get down to five hundred feet off the ground, you are almost at tree-top level. And you still cannot see the ground because of the weather. Finally, you break out and you see a landing strip ahead of you, and nobody is going to get you to back up again, you are going to get that airplane on the ground if you possibly can. Well, I spotted the landing strip, Joe called the tower, and we

got landing instructions I landed and there was a C-47 taking off right in front of us I almost landed right on top of him I was on the ground and I asked for taxi instructions They did not see me Well, I was talking to one strip and landed on another one Needless to say, I did not take the airplane back up and fly it I parked it there, we got a jeep and went back up to our outfit Somebody else got it when the weather cleared up and flew it back. When it got on the ground, it was fifteen minutes before I could get up out of the cockpit Maybe that is an exaggeration, maybe it was five, but it seemed like fifteen minutes As I remember it, it was fifteen minutes.

Before you could really let go of the control column and unclench your hands and move, you realize you did it wrong Those things begin to tell on you after awhile You fly over to Cung Ming, you get low on gasoline, and your stacked up at eighteen thousand feet, and you know you can only get so much flying time in the airplane, what are you going to do? You wait for someone to say, "Okay, we are heading north, we will bail out over whatever the base is " That is what they tell you When you are out of gas, you have no choice, it is just taking chances and bail out of the airplane. I was very fortunate I had seven hundred and ninety hours of flying time or better and I never had a serious accident I never lost an engine I remember one time I was flying with David Long, he was my squadron commander, much younger man than me I came in and I landed that airplane fifty feet in the air I just landed like I was on the ground, and here I was stalling out fifty feet in the air and that airplane drops Whoosh! And when it landed it bounced right back up in the air You could look out the window and you were right level with the control tower Davey never said a word We taxied in and checked our landing gear I do not know if we sheared off the wings, but it was a good airplane It held up.

Another time I went into Cung Ming with a fellow by the name of Mack Williams He was a pilot that I flew over seas with Mack was a heck of a nice guy His co-pilot was a man by the name of Don Smith Mack and I had never flown together. I deadheaded on his plane, and brought it into Cung Ming. He was flying right seat, he was flying first pilot I landed that airplane so gently that you could not have known that we were on the ground The landing gear just touched, it did not squeak, bounce, nothing You could have balanced eggs on it Mack, he was amazed He said, "Good gosh, Blair, if I would have known that you could fly an airplane like this, that time we were flying over, I had no idea while you were deadheading " But George Rooney up here In Akron, who was a Major, wanted flying time, so he bumped me off of my airplane They made me deadhead over. One time you would graze it in, and the next time you would just bounce the hell out of it I was glad when it was over

I mentioned that we lived in tents in Mitchinaw We bathed In the water from the Burma Putra River They pumped it up into a big tank and hopefully it would warm up during the day so that you could take a warm shower, but they were always cold The water was not particularly clean, but you felt cleaner than you did before Believe me Our laundry was done by the Indians They would take them down to the Burma Putra River and beat it on the rocks. I did have one pair of Gavrachines that had to be cleaned every now and again, and they would always come back smelling like one hundred

octane gasoline So, I guess the Indians somehow were copping a little bit of our gasoline to do our clothes in

We had a lot of good times We had built up a relationship There were six of us that still get together every year at this pilots association We are all now in our seventies Joe, my co-pilot, I guess is in his late sixties. Buck Rooney, and Dutch Wagner, Simpson, we are all about the same age When we get together, it is like we are nineteen again. Years will not mend, the same old stories, same funny jokes. We would laugh like crazy All our wives know each other too, that is nice I have had a good life, and I have been very fortunate in every respect, my career, my military career They offered me my Captaincy if I would have stayed in one more year at the end of World War II I almost did it, but I had a son born while I was in India, he was born in February of 1944 No, I went over In November of 1944 and he was born In January of 1945, I was over seas I do not know, I might have had a completely different career if I would have stayed In the military A lot of my friends went back in during the Korean Crisis, and then made a career of it If I had not had four sons, I probably would have too, but with a family of four, I decided I was better off as a civilian I had a good life with the Hoover Company It was good to me and I performed well there

G Can you personalize your aircraft in any way other than nose arc?

W Other than the what?

G Other than the nose arc Did you personalize your aircraft in any way?

W No

G The interior?

W No But I felt a very strong attachment to that airplane, 6809386 In fact, I still have the key to the door. That airplane ended up on a hillside in China, after the war. My former co-pilot, Joe DePachous, told me He named the fellow that was flying it and they ran out of gas and bailed out It is laying over in China somewhere It was a very good airplane, primarily because of my crew chief, Gil Maylan. He was an excellent crew chief, a little older than the rest of us, he was about twenty-nine or thirty. We picked him up. We actually had another crew chief that was assigned to us and we were upset, when I say we, I mean my first pilot Bud Sooter The man was not a good crew chief and we were afraid that we would get stuck with him over seas. The son of a gun, just before we shipped out discovered that he has syphilis, and they of course gave him some penicillin since there is no cure for syphilis, but he had some special kind of treatment, and we lost him.

I remember one time I took off from a very dusty field in Burma, and of course it was very dusty there We had dust screens that you would put in, and you would pull a

lever in the airplane and put the dust screens in front of the carburetor to keep the dust from getting in the gasoline mixture. I was flying with Bud Sooter, who had been my first pilot, I was his co-pilot on the way over. Then we got there and I checked out and we split. He was flying right seat, we unloaded and had an empty airplane, which that would be very light, it just went up fast. We got up off the ground with full power and could not get above the tree line. We were just brushing the tops of the trees. We could not figure out what was wrong with that airplane, why it would not fly at full power. Gib Burrow walked up and looked down, and here we forgot to take off the dust screens, he reached down, and kicked off the dust screens, and the airplane went, "Whoosh!" All he said was, "Jesus Christ." He turned around and walked back. So, he saved our necks, just like that.

G. Did he often fly with you?

W. Oh, yes. Every time we flew we had our radio operator and crew chief with us. Yeah, we flew Chinese soldiers from Chung Ming back to Burma, and Gib Burrow stood between the cockpit and the passenger compartment of the airplane with a submachine gun in his hand. You could not trust the Chinese. Oh, they were awful. We would take their guns away from them and put them in the belly of the airplane. They would like shoot up the plane while we were flying. They would wrestle in the back of the airplane with the back door open. This never happened while I was flying, but I heard from another pilot that once in awhile, they would throw one of their comrades out the door. Listen to him scream. They would throw him out without a parachute, and they would laugh, they thought that was funny. In China, now I do not know this to be a fact, but I was told that in China, if you killed another person, you might get a week or two in jail. But if you stole a loaf of bread, that was firing squad. Now, whether there is a truth in that or not, I do not know, but life was very cheap there.

I flew with a California policeman by the name of Chuck. He was really broken up. Now he was a big husky man, and he and I used to ride what they called a confidence ride, when they felt that Chuck was losing his confidence, or I was losing my confidence, they would put us together and we would fly together. Everything would work out alright, and they said we regained our confidence. A Chinese ran through the underneath of the airplane and did not see the propeller spinning, he had already cut the engine, but the propeller used to spin until it winds down. It hit the man in the head and practically decapitated him. Well, the Chinese did not think anything of it. I mean, they just drug him aside and went on with what they were doing, but Chuck was just broken up over it. Just terrible.

Another time an Indian was working on the airplane, and these big doors on the side of the airplane lifted up and something happened to it and it came down. It hit the man and broke his neck. They just took him over and laid him in the shade of the tail of the airplane, and the man laid there and died. They did not think anything of it, just another dead Indian, that is all. Of course, people die on the streets over there all the

time. When we were in Calcutta, you would see people laying in the gutters along side of the street. They lived in the street. We talk about street people in this country, we do not know what street people are. Mothers with little children, skinny, dirty, begging. Oh, death is so common that they go through the streets with wagons picking up the dead. Then you go down to the burning gas where they are burning the dead bodies. Then towers of silence, where they let the dead bodies hang and let the vultures pick them clean. They would pick a body clean in less than twenty-four hours. I have no desire to visit India ever again, I never want to go back to the orient. The CBI takes trips over to China and India, they do not go into Burma, but I have no desire to do it.

I did visit the Taj Mahal on three different occasions, and that was one of the most beautiful experiences of my life. Unbelievable, it is almost like a religious experience to see that. The first time I saw it was in the moon light as we flew into Agra. We flew over it, and circled it. It was like a jewel. Full moon and all that. We landed and somehow or another they developed a little engine trouble. We had to spend the night. So, we went and visited Taj Mahal. Then I was on a week of detached duty where I had to fly out back, and I had a chance to really spend some time there, take photographs of it. So, I had some really interesting experiences in my life.

The first night over there I did not sleep at all, my bunk was right under a window and I could hear all these animal sounds outside. There was an eighteen foot python lying on the runway when I tried to land, and we had to wait for them to get the python out of the way. I was assigned Toledo. Bud Sooter and I were transferred up there for a week on detached duty, and we had huge ramps on our airplanes and we could not fly with those, so we had to store them some place. Bud said, "Well, you go with those ramps so we know where they are, so when we leave we can take them back with us." So, what did I do? I got on the truck and drove three miles to some place around there, and when they got there, I had no way to get back. I thought they would bring me back. No sir, they were done for the day. It was three miles. I forgot how I even got there. But while I was up there, they shot a tiger, a five hundred pound tiger. It had ran through a tent and grabbed an Indian and killed him.

G: This happened a lot?

W: I understand that where we were, it did not happen a lot, but at this particular station, yes, a lot of that sort of thing goes around. Yes, tigers killed a lot of people, Indians, not the Americans, the natives. I got a picture of that big brute. They had him draped across the jeep. That is where I was, that tiger could have got me. Believe me, I was a novice then, that was my first time over seas. It took me a while before I could fall asleep at night, even though I was dead tired. I would have been happy to have slept in the airplane.

G: What was that like internally?

- W: What?
- G: The basha. If I were to have walked in, what would I have seen?
- W: A mat floor, a bamboo mat floor. Windows that had bamboo on them a lot like this.
- G: Like a square?
- W: Yes. No glass. It was all open so insects and everything could come in. There was furniture there. I suppose it was a remnant of the British furniture that had been there. We had a desk. Our clothes were hung on a bamboo rod, and we had cots, Army cots that had bamboo sticks on each corner, and they were wrapped and tied to each corner and these thin mattresses with the GI sheets and blankets. That was about it. I remember one end of our basha had a big round table because the guys used it to sit there and play poker, and they were poker players. We had a footlocker that we kept our personal belongings in and those things that we locked after we left.
- G: What kinds of things?
- W: Oh, personal things. Your socks and your underwear. Pictures of your wife and your kids. Your diary if you were keeping one, writing paper, some of us had cameras, that sort of thing. We always kept those locked because the Indians would steal. They would steal. I remember at Chitigong, there was a young Indian there who spoke excellent English. He was kind of a head babul, and all of the sudden he disappeared. I understand that the British had shot him, that he was spying for the Japanese. Of course, the Indians hated the British, they hated the British. I think they would have been happy to see the Japanese come in, at least those that were real rebels. I had a little prayer book that my pastor had given me, and that disappeared, and I have a feeling that that young man stole it. That he thought it was some kind of a code book, he did not realize that it was a prayer book. I missed it, I liked it, and I wanted to keep it, but I never saw it again, it disappeared with my belongings. It was not something that I had secured, so it was probably available, and he thought it was a code book. He was very personable and very competent in the work that he did. He disappeared quick. They caught him, tried him, and shot him all in the same day. They did not waste any time. Quiet.
- G: What about recreation?
- W: We went to the movies on the bank of the Burma Putra River. I remember they put a screen down by the bank, and we would sit on the side of the bank. We had movies. We did very little for recreation, we did not play games, no baseball, no

football, or anything like that. No basketball. A lot of card playing in the evening. The guys would sit up and play poker. I was not a poker player.

My friend and I, Buck Rooney, were into photography. He had enlisted the day after Pearl Harbor, and was a photographer out in Colorado. He went to school out there and became a military photographer. Then he entered cadets, so he left the photography behind, but he always enjoyed it. He was an artist, he was a very good artist. In fact, he has taught art. He lives in Fort Worth, Texas. He and I built a dark room, and did our own developing. We bought cameras in Chitigong, and I had remembered enough of the formulas because I had dabbled a lot in photography before I went in the military. We built a dark room and developed our own film and did our own printing. He built a print box, we did not have an enlarger. A lot of the guys had their own films over there. I mean, their own cameras, and they had no way to get anything developed.

That was our principle hobby and, of course, we wrote home a lot. I received letters from my wife, and I wrote her almost everyday. I tried to get a letter off as much as possible, but I did not get one off everyday, I am sure of it. I still have her letters and poems, the letters that I sent to her. I am going to burn them one of these days. I kind of thought sometime that I could put a little history together, put them in an archive. It would have been nice to do that. That is really what the CBI is trying to do. Put together a summary of each other and activities. We get a letter from them about three times a year and there has been a lot of stories, and it brings a lot of those memories back. It is hard to remember, it really is. You forget a lot. There is a lot that I cannot remember. I remember some of these incidents, especially the dramatic ones about landing the airplane fifty feet in the air. I remember the very particularly smooth landing in Cung Ming. I remember that instrument let down where I landed at the wrong strip.

I remember one time, Joe and I were coming back from Burma, this is when he first came over there and he was assigned as my co-pilot. We were flying another friend's airplane, a fellow by the name of Don Fredrick. We took off and the right landing gear would not retract. He left and tried to help them stay down. We shook the airplane, we did everything we could to try to jar that gear loose. We were flying about seventeen thousand feet when we got on instruments. We were in clouds and all of the sudden it became extremely violent. The crew chief was standing behind me. It was not Kip Burrows, it was the crew chief for this particular airplane. He tapped me on the shoulder and pointed to the outside temperature gage, and it was twenty degrees below zero. We were only at seventeen thousand feet.

All of the sudden I looked out at the wings of the airplane, and ice was forming on the wings, and it was St Elmos Fire. Have you ever seen St Elmos Fire? Do you have any idea what it is? It is an electrical disturbance, and it is like blue flames. Around the propeller tips there was a big circle of this St Elmos Fire dancing along the wings. The astrodome where the navigator is supposed to stand, that was covered with this St Elmos Fire. Scary, scary thing to look at. It cannot harm you, but it is very frightening, especially the ice on the wings. Here what I am in is a thunder head. Actually a small hurricane. We were rocketing two thousand feet a minute. I threw on full power and we dropped. All of the sudden we were going up two thousand feet a minute, and I pulled

off all the power and we still kept just going up We were just going up and down. I hit the panic button, it was something I should not have done, but I gave the crew orders to bail out Thank God none of them heard me It would have been the worst possible thing I could do I thought we would have hit a mountain

All of the sudden, I am in the center of this thing, the eye It is just as calm and eerie as can be It is green and you can see the clouds swirling green You can smell ozone It was the weirdest thing And then I was out of the eye and back into this violence Then all of the sudden it stopped In the mean time, that landing gear retracted It shook the airplane so hard that whatever was wrong with it, it shook it From that point on, we flew on with our mission What an experience! Quite, oh yes Once is enough Joe remembers that one too.

Another friend of mine, he is a retired engineer from Ford Motor Company, was down in Florida He was in a similar incidence, and the airplane turned upside down, a C-46 When he went by, they popped a lot of rivets off the airplane He was flying co-pilot and the man flying pilot was a Captain and he had a lot of hours in He lost his nerve and they grounded him for awhile and they gave him a ground job and then sent him home He never flew, at least combat, after that Victor, who was a highly nervous individual, he was really the one who pulled the airplane out. He saved our lives Although he was an extremely excitable, nervous person, he pulled through it and finished his career duty He was very fortunate to escape dying in that airplane By the way, there are only two of those airplanes left In the United States One of them is owned by the Confederate Air Force I had the chance to visit it out in El Toro Marine Base in San Diego They had the plane there and for two dollars you got to go in and see it My wife, it was the first time she had ever been in a C-46 We put her in the cockpit and showed her the controls She was very thrilled

G What did you think of the C-46 as an aircraft?

W I liked the aircraft I liked it. Everybody says what a great airplane the C-47 was, and it certainly was, but I was not involved with the C-47, I did not particularly care for it I really fell in love with the C-46 I thought it was a very good airplane I was comfortable in it I loved it, I really did. It was not the fighter plane that I wanted to fly, I wanted to fly a P-38 It was not an easy airplane to fly, it took a lot of strength It had hydraulic controls on it, and without those hydraulic controls, a man of my size could not have flown it. It had trim tabs on it. I flew a lot with trim tabs on it, a great big wheel that would control the upper valve movement of the airplane. When I took the airplane on, that was the way that I took it on When I wanted to land, I used that a lot. The controls were hard to move We had some guys in the outfit that had arms on them like that, and they could move that control column But I could not, it took everything I had. The airplane was very stable, at least the one that I flew, the one I flew the most, my 6809.

The Jungle Bung, the one that crashed, that the wing burned off, it was a nice

airplane to fly too. It was a good airplane and if they had not of pushed that engine, my friend would be alive today. They were trying to see how many hours they could get on that engine, and they found out. They did an experiment in war with that. It was a good airplane, although there are a lot of people that were scared to death of it. Before we went over there, they had a lot of trouble with the airplane, they were blowing up. You see, it has a big belly compartment. Are you familiar with the airplane, have you seen it?

G Yes

W It has a big belly compartment, and they had two gasoline heaters in the belly compartment, and here what was happening was, gasoline fumes were escaping and filling that belly compartment. When the pilot would get up in the air, he would get cold and kick on that gasoline heater and blow it up. They discovered that was what was causing it to blow up, and people lost their fear of the airplane. Until they learned that, a few pilots lost their lives, a few crews lost their lives. Foolish kind of thing. The airplane lost hydraulic fluid a great deal. It leaked like crazy. If you were smart, you always carried extra hydraulic fluid, because your landing gear went down with hydraulic fluid, your controls were all hydraulic. One time In Louisville, Kentucky, we had to make one landing with the hydraulics off. You had to know what to do in case you lost your hydraulic power, and how to handle that airplane. What you really did was you had to look at these trim tabs.

My friend Buck Rooney was flying with a fellow by the name of Jim Malone, he was an instructor, he was flying right seat. I was sitting in the jump seat, which would have been the radio operator's seat. Buck Brought the plane in and started his landing approach, and he was coming short and he needed a little bit more power. He reached over to the controls and went to put more power on, and there were friction locks on the controls, and they were loose. When he went to give it a little more power, he gave it full power, and that airplane, it had the control panel, it rolled on for a landing. Now, that airplane just stood on its tail. He pushed forward on the sticks and the throttles slipped right off again, lost all the power. He hit the throttles again, and back up again. By this time, I had reached up and put my hand on the throttle quadrant, and held the controls, one of them. He kicked the hydraulics back in again, Jim hit the hydraulics back again, and we went around. The fire trucks and the ambulances came out, the people in the control tower ran out of the control tower, this was In Louisville, Kentucky. They thought we were going to hit the control tower. I forgot what Jim said to them in the control tower, it was funny. I know that much, Roger tower, did we give you a scare? Buck did not pass that particular problem on that particular day. We made a regular landing with the hydraulic controls. That was as close as we came to a crack up in our training.

They had some other incidents too. I remember a hot shot pilot took some nurses up to show them what a smooth landing he could make, and he forgot to put his landing gear down. The props hit the runway, and it ground an inch of the end of each prop, as soon as the props touched he realized what it was, and gave it some more throttle, and took off. Happily, he got it back up In the air again, came back around again, and got his

gear down this time, and made the proper landing. They had to discard those props on the airplane; they also discarded the pilot. The next day he shipped out to another outfit someplace. I cannot think of anything else, except the incidents over there.

We, as you say for entertainment, we did what we liked to do. Some guys would build model airplanes. I remember this one fellow that he carved airplanes out of blocks of wood. Different people had different hobbies. I made a lot of things out of pieces of tin from beer cans, picture frames, just all kinds of little things. We did as much traveling as we could. When we got the opportunity, we went to a rest camp up in Shalong. A beautiful place. It was built by the British. Good food up there. The Major in charge of our maintenance opened a little recreation place for us in a place called Achiab. The border of India and Burma, down on the sea shore. Here is where we were at Chitigong, and he opened this up down here, right on the Indian Ocean. I remember going down there. We got to bathe in the ocean, and get a lot of sun. In fact, a friend of mine and I got about half in a bag, and went hunting for tigers. We had our 45's, fortunately we did not find any. We did find evidence of elephants there. We found elephant foot prints, and various deposits that were made there. Then they discovered that this was illegal, the Major did this on his own, and was not permitted to do that, so they shut that down.

We had pretty good food down there. We lived in tents right on the beach. Jellyfish came in and stung a lot of the guys, they had never seen a jellyfish before, and they would be out in the water, and that thing would hit you and whew, it would paralyze you. Nauseated for about two days, really upset. Where ever it would sting, or where it hit you, turned all red, itchy, and you would vomit, nausea. So, we stayed out of the water. That was my first experience with jellyfish. That is it.

G Well, thank you for your time.

W You are welcome.

End of Interview