YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU CBI Project

China-Burma-India Theater

O.H. 1431

SANFORD SLIFKIN

Interviewed

by

David Glunt

on

November 5, 1991

SANFORD O. SLIFKIN

Born on July 29, 1918, in Alliance, Ohio, Sanford Slifkin has spent a large portion of his life in his native Alliance. Following his graduation from Alliance High School, Mr. Slifkin went to Indiana Tech. However, plagued by a lack of funds, Mr. Slifkin was forced to return home in 1937. Undeterred, Sanford joined Taylor Craft of Alliance with his return. It is C.G. Taylor whom Mr. Slifkin credits with his chance to gain a pilots license. C.G. Taylor's gift of an aircraft to his employees for learning purposes allowed Sanford the opportunity to gain much stick time and feed his desire to fly.

With the entrance of the United States into war, Mr. Slifkin felt the need to enlist. However, owing to a number of factors, he was turned down by the military. Taking advantage of the situation, he joined the Wartime Training Services and eventually became an instructor for the military. Following a short period of time instructing, Mr. Slifkin moved to Ferry Command and eventually found his way to the CBI Theater where he was to remain until the end of the war.

With his return home Mr. Slifkin returned to Taylor Craft and planned on returning to college. However, with the failure of Taylor Craft in 1946, Mr. Slifkin joined a long time friend and started S&S Products. Originally a seat cover business, S&S has expanded into upholstery and other home services. Now the sole owner following his partner's retirement, Mr. Slifkin resides with his wife of 42 years in Alliance. Though no longer able to play due to health concerns, Mr. Slifkin is an avid pianist and continues to hold a Musician's Union Card.

--David Glunt

O.H. 1431

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU CBI Project

INTERVIEWEE: SANFORD SLIFKIN

INTERVIEWER: David Glunt

SUBJECT: Veterans of China-Burma-India Theater

DATE: November 5, 1991

G: This is an interview with Mr. Sanford Slifkin for the Youngstown State University, Veterans of the CBI project, by David Glunt at Mr. Slifkin's place of business, S&S Products on 927 S. Arch Street, Alliance, Ohio, on November 5, 1991, at 7:10 p.m.

Mr. Slifkin what exactly was your family like? What do you remember of your childhood?

S: My childhood?

G: Yes.

S: How far back?

G: As far back as you can remember.

S: Well, I remember that I was born and raised on W. Oxford Street in Alliance. We

used to have a lot of fun playing basketball and all kinds of the athletic sports, football, softball, what have you, swimming, fishing, all the childhood endeavors that most children go through. My mother got me started playing piano at about four or five years of age and for most of my life as a matter of fact, I've been a pianist, [I have] played in combos, had my own band for many years and I still have a gold card with the Musicians Union. Recently, about four years ago I had bypass surgery, and I lost interest in playing around at that time. As a hobby, as a second endeavor, a vocation I guess, I've been a musician playing piano and the organ. That took up most of my childhood. I always wanted to be a pilot. Always, that's the thing like most young children, who have something they want to do, and I wanted to be a pilot.

G: When did you start wanting to become a pilot?

S: Well, when I came back from Indiana Tech in 1937, broke, and I couldn't complete the school there. I had started the school and I was broke and I needed a job, and the lady who lived in the apartment where I lived with my parents had a husband who was the personnel director at Taylor Crafts. It just had moved to Alliance. She said she could get me a job through her husband and I started working at Taylor Craft. At Taylor Craft they had a man who owned it, C.G. Taylor, the "Father of Light Aviation", as they called him. He gave the first Taylor Craft to the employees so that they could learn how to fly, with, naturally, more enthusiasm, better techniques and what not. So, I learned to fly there, and stayed at Taylor Craft for about eight years, and got my private license. [I] did some flying for them ferrying some airplanes. As a matter of fact, it was the first military observation plane that I got to deliver to Wright Field. [I] delivered one to Washington D.C., and we had a mass flight of nine Taylor Crafts in 1939 into Los Angeles International Airport. I've thought of that many times. Can you imagine taking nine Taylor Crafts and landing them right in the middle of Los Angeles International Airport today? It would be ridiculous. But in those days, they only had low frequency radios, and only the airlines had them. Light airplanes didn't have any radios. So, we used the lights. The control tower would use lights to let the pilots know whether it was okay. [There was] the green light to land, or red to stop, or red to circle, or whatever. But we landed nine airplanes right in the middle of Los Angeles International Airport.

Anyhow, the war broke out and I didn't have to go to war because I had a deferment, naturally, working in an aircraft factory. But, I had to go. My friends were leaving. I knew one fellow that left and he went into battle in Britain as a pilot. Another fellow went into the Canadian Air Force, and he flew with them. So, I tried all the services, believe it or not. I tried the Air Corps, they turned me down, and the Army Air Corps. Then I went to the Navy and the Navy passed me and then flunked me and said I didn't have enough college credits. Then I went to the Canadian Air Force, and on the day I entered--I was filling out the papers--they stopped taking Americans. So, I came back home devastated.

[I] couldn't figure out what to do, and then they started a training program in the colleges called WTTS, War Time Training Service. That was the old CPT program that they started, that Roosevelt started to train pilots through the colleges. I got into Kent State through that program. It took me a year. It took most of us a year. We went through a commercial, a cross country, an instrument, and courses. [I] finally ended up at the University of Minnesota where I got my instructors rating. We had a lot of fun, I could talk for hours about those years. Anyhow, when I graduated there at the University of Minnesota, you had a choice of either going into Civilian Pilot Instruction, because there was a lot of Civilian Pilot Instructors flying for private schools training military pilots and European pilots, or I could go to Randolph Field and go through a Central Instructors School. Of course, I wanted to do that, I went to Randolph Field still as an enlisted reserve. [I] ended up in Wickenburg, Arizona, where I taught students out there in primary.

G: What year was this?

S: Well, I'm going to guess. It's in the very early part of the war, 1941-1942, something like that, 1942 probably. Those programs folded and then we had a choice. We could either go back to civilian life as instructors, or we could take a written test and get into the Air-transport Command, or the Ferry Command as they called it. So, most of us, [meaning the] instructors, took the test, and we passed and then they sent us. Our group went to Nashville, Tennessee, for about 30 days to become officers. From there we spread out all over the country into various Ferry groups. There was one in Detroit, one in Los Angeles, and there was one in Wilmington, Delaware. They were in every place all over the country. From these spots you ferried airplanes from factories over seas, modification centers. They went every place. We ferried with the WASP. Incidently, that's when the Women Auxiliary Service Pilots (WASP's) were out there, too. I went to Los Angeles, Long Beach, California, and finally ended up at Detroit which made me happy because Detroit was closer to my home here. I hadn't been home in about a year and a half or two years. I can't remember now. I ended up at Detroit, and we ferried planes all over the place. Eventually, we ended up in Reno, Nevada. We knew that we were all going to go to the CBI because we were service pilots. We were not military pilots. We had an "S" on our wings and we were proud of that. That meant that we didn't go through any training like the cadets did. Most of us taught cadets. Many of the people that we taught became our co-pilot. So, most of us ended up at Reno, Nevada, and I went through what they called C-46 school, that's the Curtis Commando. [I] went through a school there, I don't remember how long, for maybe 60 days. We knew we were going to end up over seas, probably in China, Burma, and India.

G: How did you come to that conclusion?

S: Because it had filtered back to us. My instructor at Reno was an old CBI pilot. He

came back. You had to get in 100 round trips over there before they sent you home. So, we knew eventually that's where we were going to end up. When we graduated we got to come home for a week, and then our orders said go to Fort Wayne, Indiana, which was a modification center, and pick up a C-46. So, I go there and was assigned a crew. [I] had a co-pilot who had just received his commission. He out ranked me. Most of us were out ranked. Most of us were flight officers in those days. It was a temporary rank they gave us because there was so many of them, so many pilots. I had a co-pilot that out ranked me, and I had a navigator who out ranked me. He was from Akron, and I had a crew chief who liked to drink. He was drunk most of the time. He was a nice guy.

Well anyhow, we were on secret orders. Nobody knows where we were going, including us. All we knew, [was that] we were going to go to New Jersey, and pick up our cargo and go someplace. So, it took us about a week to get out of there, the weather was very bad. We finally got out of there and got to New Jersey, got our cargo, and they said you're heading for Miami, Florida. So, we're on our way to Miami, Florida, and we got down around Raleigh, North Carolina I think it was. That's the capital anyhow. I call this guy up and tell him one of my engines is cutting out, I think I'll have to come in there and get some maintenance. He starts reading me a Federal brief that no military airplanes are permitted to land in Raleigh. This tickled me, I'm supposed to hold this thing up with my hand. He said, "I suggest you go on to Fayettville". I remember this very well. He starts arguing with us and I just laughed at him. I mean, I'm not supposed to land there. Anyhow, we made it into Fayettville. The reason I'm telling you this, you'll understand in a second.

We landed there, opened the cargo door and this guy, some Captain was running in and looks, he said, "Hey, I see you're going to England," and I said, "Huh?" I got secret orders in my pocket that we're not allowed to open. If I open them I get shot, and he's telling me I'm going to England. I said, "How do you know we're going to England?" He says, "Well, it's stapled right on the side of your cargo." I said, "Your kidding me," and I jump up and go back to look, and there it was, New Kirk, England, right there. I got secret orders in my pocket, no body knew where we were going. I didn't have the slightest idea where I was going. That was funny but typical of the government. Secret orders and they put it right on the box. Well anyhow, we had a lot of fun.

We went from there down to South America, down to Belem, Brazil. We had a lot of fun going down there, a lot of crazy things happening, over through the Ascension Islands, over to Africa, and up the coast to Morocco, and up the coast of Spain, France, and into England. I don't remember how long it took us anymore. It was a lot of fun and that crazy girl over there in Germany, what did they use to call her, Axis Sally, or something. I don't know if you would remember that. She use to call all the aviators, and somehow she knew our numbers and who we were, and where we were going. She talked to us as we were flying along the coast and says, "Go back, go back, you'll never make it." We just laughed.

We ended up in England. These 27 airplanes, there was a flight of 27, and they were all going to be in the invasion incidently, they were jump planes to be used in the invasion. So, we stayed around in England, and there a few weeks until they figured out what to do with us and they finally dead handed us to cross France, ended up in Naples, Italy. That was all shot to the devil. Then, over to Cairo, that's the end of the world, there's nothing but sand. Finally, we ended up in Karachi, India. From Karachi we were assigned then to our base, I happened to get to a little base, one of the smallest bases on the CBI, which was Mohanbari, upper Assam Valley, which is now part of Pakistan. That was called the upper Assam Valley then. The big base in India was called Chabua. We weren't far from Chabua, and the big base in China was called Kunming. Down in Burma it was called Myitkyina, those were the three big ones. You may have heard of them.

G: I heard of Myitkyina quite a bit.

S: Yes, Kunming was a common name, but Chabua was sort of a military base. Those were the three big bases. Most of the stuff filtered into there. So I flew out of Mohanbari into Myitkyina quite often, into Kunming. I flew for 87 round trips. That's how many trips I got in. You flew about four or five trips as a co-pilot, we had to ride with and instructor pilot. Even though I had a lot of first pilot time in that airplane, flying the hump is a different ball game all together. You were flying in severe weather. Weather and maintenance was our problem. I never saw the enemy. The enemy was smart, he stayed away from there. The weather was bad, the maintenance was bad. I don't mean the maintenance that was on it, things would just break down, severe strain. So, the things that we concerned us was weather and maintenance, really nothing else.

It was good you were young because you could take the stress and the strife. Not that those of us that came back were any better, the good Lord sent us back, that's all I could tell you. One day somebody came around to see me, and they said, they made a statement like this. "Would you stay to the end of the war, or do you want to go home before the end of the war?" Can you imagine anyone asking you that question? I said, "Are you kidding me?" "No." I said, "Hey, I'm ready to go home any time." Those of us that were crazy enough to make that statement, of course the war was over by the time we left. As a matter of fact, they flew the hump at least 30 to 60 days after the war was over. I don't know whether you know this or not, but it takes time to shut it down, to get things moving. They can't just stop.

The war was over and we were still flying the hump. I was one of the lucky ones from our base. I got to go home sooner because I made that crazy statement. If somebody's going to ask me a crazy statement, I'm going to answer them crazy. Somebody says, "Do you want to go home as soon as you can?" "Yes." Who wouldn't? I was there about a year, [I flew] 87 round trips. I came home on a boat, it took us 22 days to come home on a boat. That was a lot of fun.

I could tell you many stories about India, but I'd rather forget about them. I lived--this is interesting--I lived with the medics. When I got there, there were no beds available. We lived in grass huts called bashes. When I got there, the only bed that was available for a pilot was with the medics, the doctors. So, I moved in with the doctors. Of course I was a novelty to them, of course they worked on pilots all the time. The first thing they said was, "Where are you from," I said, "Alliance, Ohio," and you can believed this or not, but the one doctor said, "I graduated from Mount Union College." I couldn't believe it, not only that but he said his wife was a doctor and she graduated from Mount Union College. Now wasn't that fantastic? I think it is.

G: Yes, quite.

S: They lived in California some place. Two other things happened to me there that I thought was great. One night I became air-dome officer. Everybody had to be air-dome officer. That means you go up into the tower, there is no lights, and you sit there. I don't know what for, but you sit there. So I go up and I sit down, its dark, I saw a couple of guys talking. Somebody said, "Are you from Ohio?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Are you from Alliance, Ohio?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Did you ever have a dance band?" I said, "Yes." He said, "My name is Messenheimer, and I danced to your band." So I said, "Hey, that's great." I mean what would the chances of that be?

The other thing that happened to me that I thought was startling, was one time over the hump, I had a force landing in a place called Paoshan, China, out in the middle of no place. One of the engines cut out and they had to work on it. The next day I said to the man in charge, they had some sergeant running this little field, I don't know what it was, relief station. I said, "How far is it into that town that I flew over." He said, "About ten miles," but he said, "I'll get you a mule cart and take you guys in." So two or three of us jumped on this mule cart. We go into town and they said as soon as you get in there, he said be sure and check in with the MP's because they don't want any American soldiers running around, it was all Chinese. So, I got into town and I asked an MP where his headquarters were and he told me. I go into this building and there was this guy with his feet on his desk reading a newspaper. He drops his newspaper and he says, "Hi Slifkin, how are you doing?" It was a fellow I knew from home, this is in the middle of China. I couldn't have found this fellow if you would have told me how to get there. It was a fellow that I used to work with out at Taylor Craft when I was a kid. Of course, I was a kid then. So I thought that was strange.

Then there was a fellow in Konming who now owns a grocery store down here on West Main Street. We used to run into him all the time. Of course, I knew he was there. It is amazing when you are 17,000 miles from home, and how many people were there in the service? Six million or ten million, or something? You run into somebody like that, it's startling, I think. I don't know maybe it isn't, but I think it is. I've had a lot of experiences. What else can I tell you?

G: What planes were you flying?

S: Well, I only flew the C-46. When you were checked out, that's usually what you stayed in. Let me tell you one other thing, that brings another thing to mind. When I first got there, there was a little rivalry, a friendly rivalry between service pilots and military pilots, for the obvious reasons. A service pilot didn't go through the military indoctrination like the cadets did. You know, they had to go through a lot of strife and struggle. So, when they saw an "S", they felt that they were a little better, and the service pilot thought that he was a little better, and it was all friendly. There was nothing bad about it. They got a new commander on our base, and he was a West Point graduate, and boy he was spick and span. Everything had to be just right for him. It was strictly military. Over there you couldn't tell the officers from the enlisted men. We were there to do a job, and everybody was doing a job. No body wore insignias, and very few of them did. Most of us ran around in coveralls. Anyhow, this fellow saw all these service pilot wings running around, and he didn't like it. So a directive came out that all service pilots will change there wings. Well, how do you change your wings? Well, you had to take a flight test and prove that you were good enough to be a military pilot. Well, this didn't go down too good. Why?

Well first of all, most of the service pilots trained the military pilots. So, we had to prove it. So anyhow, they sent me to some base, Sookerating it was, down in southern India. I got on the base, and the fellow says, "What do you want?" I said, "I'm here to take a flight test." He said, "What have you been flying?" I said, "We're flying C-46's," and he said, "Well, we don't have a C-46 on the base, but I'll tell you, if you check me out on a C-47, I'm sure you've flown one of those," I said, "Yes, I've flown them." He said, "You check me out, and I'll sign you off that you passed your flight test." So, I checked him out, made sure he could fly it and he signed my flight test that I passed my flight test. I don't think I ever did wear my military wings, it was just some crazy thing this commanding officer had to have his way. I don't know why.

G: Typical, in the military.

S: I mean it was ridiculous! There was a war going on and he was worried about what kind of wings your wearing. I mean who could care? Most of us didn't wear a pair of wings anyhow. You couldn't hardly tell who was who. I was out at the airplane one day, checking it, getting ready for flight, and a fellow came out and was talking to me for a while and left. I said to the sergeant, "Who was that?" He said, "That was the commanding officer." I didn't even know it. I didn't even know who he was. Most of the fellows on a small base like that, they get together, they drink beer, and once in a while you go to the officers club, have a drink or something, or play cards. The doctors played cards all the time. They'd play bridge day and night, and day and night. I got to be a pretty good bridge player because one of the doctors was a

professional bridge player. He used to play with this guy, what was his name, Colberson or whatever his name was. He was great. So, I became a pretty good bridge player. That's all we did when we weren't flying, just play bridge. Bridge, bridge, bridge. For a while, even when I came home, I used to play bridge, just for something to do. What else would you like to know?

G: Now you said you were flying C-46's, what did you think of them?

S: [It was] a good airplane.

G: In comparison to the C-47?

S: Well, the C-47, of course, was a DC-3, and it's a good airplane, but it couldn't fly as high, or carry the load. The C-46 was a good airplane for the job.

G: Handling?

S: They also used the B-24, that was converted. That was a bomber but they converted it to a tanker. They flew higher than we did. The C-54 also, they started flying that for cargo, too. Those could fly higher and faster. But the work horse was the C-46.

G: What did you usually carry whenever you flew a load?

S: Everything: gasoline, furniture, office furniture, clothing, some bombs, a few bombs. You name it. We used to carry peanuts, and then we'd go into the Chinese, into their headquarters there, or whatever they called that and they'd try to sell those back to us. Bags were one ruby, which was 30 cents in those days. We used to laugh at them. After we broke our fanny going across the hump with all these peanuts, and then they'd try to sell them back to us.

G: Did you have to do any airdrops? Parachute drops?

S: We didn't do any of that at all. We hauled a few soldiers, but not many. Our group didn't. It was strictly cargo.

G: Can you remember any brand names of items that you might have carried?

S: There was nothing in brands. It was all in boxes, and they had military numbers and everything of that nature. No, I don't recall anything of any names. Coming back, once in a while we'd bring Tungsten, which they used for light bulbs, but other than that, we usually came back empty. I don't recall. Very few trips when we'd come back with anything.

G: How was the maintenance? You said things were breaking.

S: Well, maintenance was good. I would say maintenance was good. I was lucky. A few force landings, but that was because of engine problems, nothing dangerous. I don't think I was ever in any risk. The only time I can remember and that was a faulty gage. I thought I was running out of gas or had a gas leak, and that was one time I landed at Myitkyina. So, when I got down we got up on the wing and checked it. It was just the gage. We thought we were running out of gas, or had a gas leak but we didn't. I had a couple single engine's, made some landings. I was pretty lucky.

G: What did your bases look like, the general layout?

S: Of the bases?

G: Yes.

S: Well, in China of course, you always had at least 5,000 foot runways, and those are always crushed stones. You used to see, what you see in the movies where there are 5,000 Chinese pulling one of those big rollers. That's the way it used to be. They didn't have any tractors like we had. You had about, it looked like 5,000, we called them "Coolies", but they were Chinese out there beating on the rocks and pulling these big rollers. In India, many of our bases, not all of them, but many of them were paved, and they're long. They were real long because we were carrying a lot of weight and we needed a lot of runway for takeoff. Usually they were single runways, and about 5,000 feet long. One of the things that used to get us, of course, life in China and India is very cheap. There were so many people. Not to us, we weren't brought up that way. Life to us is a very wonderful thing. But to those people, there is so many of them.

We used to land sometimes and you'd see a body lying by the side of the runway, and you'd call the tower and tell them, and they would say, "Roger, take the first turn to the right". They were so used to bodies laying all around, they just didn't bother. It didn't bother them. It did us. The Brahmaputra River, which is I think either the longest or the widest river (I don't know, I looked it up one time), the Brahmaputra River in India... Is it the Mississippi is the longest? The Brahmaputra River, if you look it up is something. It's the longest, or the shortest, or the biggest. We used to go swimming in that once in a while, and we used to see bodies floating. It used to make you sick. Like I said, to those people, there's so many of them, there's millions and millions. The filth and the stench, and the disease was horrible.

G: Your bashes, how were they set up, and how did they look?

S: Just a grass hut with one door. They were big enough. The one I stayed in, I lived

with two dentists, one from St. Louis. I can still remember his name was Tom Davis, and he used to read. I would wake up at night and hear him crying. He would read his wife's letters over and over. He hadn't been home in two years. I felt sorry for the guy. He was really mentally cracking up. Another fellow, his assistant, was a young fellow. I can't remember his name. Well, there was room for three beds, and we always had mosquito netting over it, we always sprayed it before we went to sleep. There was a table in the center and I think there was two or three lockers. That might give you some idea. It was, for three people, it was alright. I mean what would you want? He mentally was starting to get to him. He'd work on me and a few friends. He'd clean my teeth all the time, he'd fill my teeth all the time. People would come to me and say, "Hey, Sandy, how about asking Tom, I got a bad tooth here." I'd go talk to Tom and say, "Hey, this guy here has got to have his tooth filled." Finally, he would work on it, but he didn't want to work on anybody's teeth. I can understand that.

After a while you just go nuts. Then he started drinking beer. He wasn't a drunkard. Mentally, he was ready to go home. They should have sent him home. You know, I think I left before he did. He was there when I got there, and if I remember, I think I left before he did. He's the guy they should have sent home. Nice fellow. He was from St. Louis.

G: Maybe they didn't ask him. They probably didn't ask him.

S: I don't know whatever happened to him. I don't know what happened to any of these guys. I never met up with any of them.

G: What was one of your typical days like? Getting up? Taking off?

S: You mean to fly?

G: Yes.

S: Well, when you flew, you didn't know when... You see it was 24 hours. For a while they would shut the hump down. If the weather was bad, they would shut it down. But when General Turner, I believe it was, became Chief of the Hump, in that division. He said, the hump would never shut down. So, even in the bad weather, bingo, away we went. So, you were liable to get a call anytime, two o'clock in the morning, one o'clock in the afternoon. They usually called you up about any hour ahead of time so you could go take a shower and shave. Go down to the operations and check your cargo. You didn't fly with the same crew, you were always flying with somebody different. Go down and check your cargo, go check the airplane, and get ready to go.

G: Did you supervise the loading of your own cargo?

S: No, they did that, but it was up to you to check it and make sure it was secure because if the weather was going to be bad, you didn't want that thing bouncing around. I remember one time we were playing cards one night, and the medics got a call. There was a crash down at the end of the runway. So, we kept playing cards, and those guys ran out into the jeep, run down there and came back. They said, "You won't believe what happened." We said, "What happened?" They said, "Well, this fellow started to take off and he went on instrument immediately," which means you're looking strictly at the panel, and the next thing they knew there was tree at the end of this runway, and it was sitting right in the middle of the fuselage, and they were stopped. It was bad loading of the airplane. They took off, but they settled right back down, and when he did, this tree went right through the middle of his fuselage. Nobody got killed. A few glass plopping all over the place, and fortunately no fire. They just got out and walked. The tower didn't even know it. They got out, walked back to the runway and the tower then spotted them, and they went roaring up there. It was just a bad load. They got off the ground, of course, being on instruments, they immediately went on instruments and they just settled right back down and it went right through this tree. That's remarkable, I think. They got cut up, but they were okay. I remember that very well. Generally, they were loaded well. We didn't have any problems. It was either mechanical or severe weather.

G: How did your flights usually go? How long did they take?

S: About three and a half, three and three quarter hour flights. Both ways, that was one way, and then back the other way.

G: Did you do anything strange or out of the ordinary to pass the time?

S: You mean on the ground, or in the air?

G: In the air?

S: Well, on a nice night or a nice day, it was beautiful. You could talk, shoot the breeze, because you had a radio operator with you. There was always a pilot, a co-pilot, and a radio operator. The radio operator was always doing the talking because he was on a low frequency range. We didn't have the great navigational facilities that we have today. We were all flying low frequency, or what we call non-directional beacons, NDB's, which is tough flying. It was tough flying. It was tough letting down into the valleys with this type of a frequency. They're not what we call precision. You had to be a half-good pilot to go down through these mountains with this darn needle. The needle would start swirling like this, 360 degree's sometimes when you were letting down. We used to call that bird-dogging, when its just the inefficiency of the radios, or perhaps the signals.

I can remember a few times, and it happened to everybody else. When that happens, you have to get the devil out of there, full power. Pull your gear up and get out of there. Either go back and try it again, or ask for another field, which we frequently did. It could have been some disturbances from these mountains, it's hard to say, or weather disturbances. Its hard to say. I remember one night, we were flying along. Every base had an altitude, ours was 16,500 over and about 22 coming back. Low altitudes compared to what they fly today. We were all on oxygen, we didn't have the pressurized airplanes. We were just sitting there shooting the breeze, and all of a sudden somebody says, "Miami tower this is 'blah blah blah', down wind for something." Just like the guy was sitting right next to us and he's, of course, 17,000 miles away. What it was, was a signal that bounced across the world so to speak, and then you could hear the tower come back and tell them you're clear to land. The guy said, "Okay," and I thought, "I'll be damned, you're sitting somewhere over the Himalayas, and you hear somebody." In those days, today it would be no problem, but it bounced off the ionosphere and down on the ground. Today it would be no problem. I remember that. I thought that was a remarkable thing that happened.

G: Did it stir any emotions or anything because of that?

S: Well, it gave you a funny feeling. I'd say at 16 or 17,000 feet over the Himalaya mountains, and there's a guy over Miami, Florida, talking to the tower. It gave you a funny feeling. I think the worst feeling was to look at the thunderstorm that you are going through at 16,500 feet, and you're all strapped in, and those were wild. You would drop your gear, drop your flaps, throttle back and go up. In those days I don't remember what the rate of climbs used to say, maybe 5,000 feet a minute. Then you'd hit the top and all of a sudden down you'd start coming. So then, the gear comes up, the flap comes up, and full power, and there's nothing you could do. All you tried to do was keep it level, that's all. You can't do anything. Those were the nights that were rough, maybe for a couple of hours. You feel like somebody beat you to death, and then you finally get to Kunming and you sit down and think, man, that was rough. Then you hoped you didn't have to go back through it again.

G: On the crushed stone air fields, was there any difference when ever you landed? How well were they packed down?

S: No, there was no problem. No problem in that respect.

G: Did you come into any contact with Chinese pilots, or anything?

S: No, but I'll tell you, I didn't live in China, but I had friends who lived there. We became friends through the year, and I remember some of the boys I went through training with were living in China and we'd see each other. They used to tell me

stories that I wasn't aware of. I thought all of China was our allies, that's not true. There were factions that were allies, and factions that weren't. There were so many segments of Chinese, part of them were fighting us and part of them were fighting with us. Two or three of them told me they would be out sunning themselves on a cot, maybe, and somebody would start shooting at them. They learned to carry a 45mm, or have one near, then they would jump up and start going after them. They were warned, they told me this before, "Don't wound a Chinaman, kill him." Why? Because they would go to our American representative and accuse us of being abusive. They said, "Hey, if you're going to shoot at them, kill them, because we don't want anybody to talk." I thought that's a heck of a thing. I didn't realize that. I thought that they were our allies. Part of them were, and part of them weren't. They didn't know, how would anybody know?

G: What about British pilots?

S: I ran into a few of those. I landed at the field... I'm trying to think of the field where that group when they first started, what was the name of the group that before we got into the war, they were there?

G: The volunteer group?

S: Yes.

G: The Flying Tigers?

S: Yes, the Flying Tigers. I can't think of that field, but I landed in there a few times. Of course, the Flying Tigers were gone by the time that we got there, naturally they were way gone. But I ran into a few British pilots there. Once in a while they would come into our base in Mohanbari. Mohanbari actually was on a tea plantation, believe it or not. And the fellow who owned that plantation, we went over to visit him a couple of times, he invited us in. He was a British man. I don't remember what he used to drink, tea and something, I don't know what it was. He was a very congenial man, elderly gentleman. He used to get me on the way they used to make tea. They had a big brass kettle, probably twice as big as these two desks, and they'd throw the tea leaves in there, and then they'd get in there with their dirty feet and squash them. I thought, "Oh my God, I'll never drink another cup of tea." For a long time after that I couldn't drink tea, I'd see that dirty filth on their feet going down into those leaves, and that's the way they would crush these leaves. I couldn't believe that. It was a big tea plantation where the base was. I don't know, it was a lot of things. For instance, when I first got there, they cut bamboos for my bed, and I had to pay 30 rupies for each bamboo to hold my mosquito netting up. I said, "You have to be kidding." He said, "No. British insist that if you cut down one of the bamboo trees, you have to pay for it." So we had to pay for it. We also, which I didn't know

this, every landing that an American airplane made on that base, and all bases, they had to pay for it. We were there for the British, weren't we? As well as ourselves? I thought we were, but maybe I'm wrong. That didn't go down to well.

G: Did it come right out of your hands?

S: Well, I don't know how they paid it. They probably kept track of it, who knows? I couldn't believe that. We were paying for our airplanes for a war effort. Does that make sense? I don't think it does.

G: No.

S: How and what method I don't know. Then after so long, we got to go to a week thing, they called Jungle Camp. It was up in the mountains someplace. I couldn't even tell you where. It was a nice hotel where we went for a week, and the food was pretty good. They had these Indian workers, and the guy who made the bed couldn't make the fire in the fireplace. We asked him and he said, "No, me make bed." Their cast system. The thing that got me one day, was we walked out of the hotel and there is an English lady, and she was just bawling the devil out of some little Indian waif. She was calling him every name, and she could speak their language. I finally said to somebody, "What's that all about?" He said, "That English lady was bawling him out." I said, "Well, she was abusive, as far as I'm concerned." He said, "Yes, that's the way the British treat these people." I thought, "Boy, I don't buy that for a minute." The British were that way I know, reading history, from everything that I've read about it, that they were very abusive. This woman I thought was a nice woman, but very abusive to this young Indian for some ridiculous reason. That didn't get down to good with me either. I thought they could have been a little more civil in their manner of treating, after all the British didn't own India, or did they? Maybe they did, I don't know.

G: When the war was over, what occurred within your base?

S: What happened in what?

G: When you received notice that the war was over, were there any special activities or things on your base?

S: Well, no. We were relieved. I don't remember. The Japanese didn't surrender until later, didn't they? The Japanese surrendered last, didn't they? Hitler, he surrendered and then the Japanese surrendered. Not particularly, we were all happy about it. But we were still flying. The war was over and we were happy because we were going to go home. There was a couple of tragic things that happened. One group left by plane, and they crashed, and they all got killed. We really felt bad about that. Here they had spent a year, two years over there, and they get on a stinking airplane to go

home, and they get killed. That was sad. We talked about what we were going to do after the war, nobody knew. At this point, your mind is too mottled. Nobody knows after you go through all that duress for a year. A lot of crazy things happened. We used to carry side arms. I quit carrying a side arm. Some of my friends got drunk and they started shooting each other. A couple innocent people got killed. They finally made us quit carrying side arms. There was no reason for us to carry a side arm, except for when we were flying. If you went down in the jungle, it was a good thing to have. It was just like here. Who's going to shoot at you? Nobody will shoot at you.

I remember one night, I was getting ready to go to China and somebody said, "Hey, do you want this machine gun?" I said, "No, what for? What am I going to shoot?" They said, "The Chinese are trying to take over Kunming." It was one of those nights with the crazy factions. I said, "I have a 45mm, I don't want a machine gun." I couldn't shoot a machine gun anyhow. Guns never interested me, I'm just not one of those guys. A lot of people love guns, they like to hunt. I don't like to hunt. I'm not against it, I just don't like guns. I almost got killed by a gun once when I was a kid. I guess that did it. My hobbies have always been flying and music. Those are the things that interest me. I realize that you have to have a gun to protect yourself. I think that if you ever went down that you would need it. You have all kinds of people down in that jungle. We flew over jungles, mountains, deserts, rivers, you know. You go through every type of a climate change. So, its hard to say.

G: Were you carrying anything different after the war was over than what you were carrying during the war, in your flights? Your cargo?

S: No, same thing. It's like anything. It's impossible to stop it all at once, they just kept going until they finally got it stopped. They probably stopped the guys in the infantry. We weren't doing anything, we were just carrying cargo. Maybe they needed the cargo. As a matter of fact, I think they were still, I may be wrong, but I think I'm right. I think they were still flying after I left for awhile.

G: Where did your cargo come from? How did it arrive at the base?

S: I'm not sure about that, but I think some of it came on trucks. They would come in on transports, all methods. They probably came in by boat to down at the tip of China. Not China, India, Bombay, one of those big ports. Then they were probably trucked in, or flown up from there. I don't know, but I imagine it was trucked into there.

G: You were a service pilot, how was your chain of command?

S: What do you mean by that?

G: Your exact unit.

S: This was a troop carrier command over there. It isn't like you think of the military over here. It was just a bunch of pilots. If you would of said, "Who was your commanding officer?" I would have to go down to headquarters and ask who is my commanding officer. You associated with your own people, you go down to headquarters, they had your name, they gave you your orders, they put you on a truck, you go out to the airplane. Its just like going to work every day.

G: You worked there.

S: Yes. I knew the medic's work because I lived with them. I knew the officers club, I'd go over there every once in a while. Usually we'd fly, we'd play cards, we'd eat, that's it. There was nothing military. The only time I can remember, maybe six to eight months after I was there, they had a parade, so to speak honoring the men who went down over our base. I tell you, it made you cry. There must have been, they read for at least an hour, names of people who got killed. Some of them I knew, many of them I never even heard of. They just kept reading names, and names, and names. Sort of a military type thing. Other than that, there was an operations officer, and there was a chief pilot. But you never talked to them unless you got in some kind of trouble.

One time I got in trouble. We're in a real crazy bridge game one night, it was about two o'clock in the morning. The phone rings and I'm supposed to go to operations. Now, when you're not on flying status, they call in and call you DNIF, that's what they say. Duties not involving flying. So, we're playing and one of the doctors picks up the phone and said, "Slifkin is not flying tonight, he's sick. Put him on DNIF." "Okay guys," I didn't care. That happened a couple of times. One time I had a force landing in China, and they call me about two o'clock in the morning. I go down to operations, and they said, "Slifkin, you are going to dead head over to China and bring back that airplane you left over there." I said, "Oh Jesus, I feel lousy," And I did, I had a cold, and I thought, I don't want to do that. This guy, some Captain, I don't know who he was. He said, "Are you telling me you refuse to fly?" You never refuse to fly in war time. That's treason, never. I said, "Oh no, I'm not refusing to fly, never." I said, "I'm going off of flying status," which you were permitted to do that.

So, anyhow, a few days later, the chief of the medics, I lived with them, we were all buddies, we all played cards. He said, "Now Sandy, don't get excited, but they're going to call you down to operations. They are going to chew on you a little bit." He said, "Nothing is going to happen." So, they call me, and I go down. And there is this guy, I never saw the guy before He's from headquarters. He said, "I'm looking at your file here, and I see that you went off flying status quite a few times." Well it was, and these medics wouldn't let me go. They wanted me to play bridge with them. They didn't care. I didn't really care either. They want me to play bridge.

He said, "What's the problem?" I said, "I've got sinus trouble," and I wasn't lying, "I've had it all my life, I still have it." I said, "This climate is not good for sinuses." I said, "You can look at my record there and see that I've got sinus trouble." I said, "The doctors treat me for it." He said, "If I would have known that, I would have sent you up to the mountains." There is a place up there where they send you if you have sinuses. It's like going to Arizona. Over there they send you up into the mountains. I would have loved that, because I wouldn't have had to fly the hump. He said, "You almost have all of your time in now. There's no sense in doing that." I said, "No, no, no, I want to finish my time." Well, he said, "I don't want to see any more of this kind of stuff." That was the end of that. What he did was he called the chief medic in, and they had a talk, I don't know what all this DNIF was. He had to get me out of it. He put me in there. Other than that there wasn't anything serious. That's about the only time I ever really got into any trouble. It wasn't of my making.

G: What did you do when you came home?

S: Well, when I came back to Wilmington, Delaware, I was still in the service and I was in military air transport. I was flying up to Boston and back. There was a fellow from Pittsburgh there that I became friendly with. He said to me one day, "We're waiting to be discharged." You had a choice, they wanted to send us to Memphis, Tennessee, and give us a raise in rank, sign up for another three years. I wasn't interested in that. Forget it, I wanted to go home. I'm not a military man. This fellow said, "How about going to New York with me, I'm getting an interview to go on the Columbia Airlines?" I said, "Columbia? You mean the country of Columbia?" He said, "Yes. I said, "Okay," so we jumped, I don't know what ever they had electric street cars or what ever they have, but anyhow, we went up to New York. They interviewed him, and they interviewed me. They said, "Are you interested?" I said, "I don't want to go to Columbia." The reason they wanted hump pilots is because the weather and the terrain is the same, and because they were going to use C-46's down there. I guess they were buying them from the service, I don't know, and they were going to start an airline. So, I got discharged and came home.

I got a call from him one day, and he says, "Hey did those Columbia people call you?" I said, "No, why would they want to call me?" He said, "They are going to offer you a job, and I want it." I said, "You want it?" He said, "Yes, I want to go to Columbia, that's a great opportunity for me." I said, "You can have it." I said, "I'll tell you what, I'll go if they give me a $1000.00 a month, which was big money in those days." He said, "well, if you don't take it, I get it." So, they called me, and they said, "Are you interested?" I said, "How much money are you going to pay me a month," and they said, "$750.00." I said, "How about a $1000.00," he said, "$750.00," so I said, "I'm sorry." That was the end of that, and I never heard from the kid from Pittsburgh. I assume he went, I don't know what ever happened to him.

I went back to Taylor Craft, and I became a test pilot because I had all this

time, and they needed a test pilot. So, for about six or eight months they were going great, and I was enjoying myself, and I was really getting ready to go to Ohio State. I had the money saved, a GI deal that I could finish up my school. That's where I really wanted to go. I wanted to become an Aeronautical Engineer. So, I went down there, I signed up, they signed me up for, I had an instructor rating. I could fly at the airport, and make some extra money. I was all ready to go. I had a job, I had a room with some lady down there. Rooms were tough to get. I was getting ready to start in the fall term, I don't remember when this was, probably June or July, in the middle of the summer. In the meantime, I had come back, my buddy, who didn't go in the war, but he and I grew up together and played in a band together, his name was Shank, wanted to go into business. I wasn't really interested in going into business. I wasn't going into business, I was going to be a pilot, and I wanted to still monkey around with music.

Through the personnel director out at Taylor Craft, he got us started into a seat cover business which I didn't know one end of a seat cover from the other. Taylor Craft folded, and we started making seat covers. I never went to school. The name of the company was the S&S Products Company. That was in November of 1946. Here it is, November of 1991, 46 years later, and I'm still here. What happened to my buddy? Well, Shank is retired. He comes here in the summer time for four months. He just left last month. He lives in Florida, and I'm still here. Why am I here? Because I don't want to retire, and every body thinks because you own a business you're rich. No, I earned a living, raised five kids, my wife and I. And I still like it. I make a living just like you do, and every body else. That's all, it's a living. With all the same headaches that everybody else has got. You try to make the payrolls, and pay the taxes, and keep the health going, and pay your bills. I enjoy it. I don't want to retire. I have no desire to retire. As long as I have my health, I want to continue.

In the meantime, I've been instructing ever since I've acquired about 25,000 hours I suppose. I belong to an instructors association and the one I'm chairman of E.C.O.P.A., Flight Instructors of East and Central Ohio. In 1962 we started the East Central Ohio Pilots Association, which is one of the biggest active groups, in this whole area. Taylor Craft flying club is still going, I'm the president of that, and we have 70 members and three airplanes. I'm also a trustee for the Akron-Canton Air show which we have about every year now. So, I'm well entrenched in aviation. I like aviation, and have been with it all my life. It's great. I advise a lot of other young people, men or women, to get involved. I like it, and still like it. I advise you to get involved.

G: I've always wanted to.

S: Well, we were lucky. We flew for a dollar an hour, and paid the instructor what ever you could afford to pay him. My instructor, I took him to work, so it didn't cost me anything. He was the son of a preacher. I wouldn't have believed he was a preacher's

son because he cussed like the son of a gun all the time. What a nice guy though. He passed away a few years ago. Today it's a little bit different. It costs you money to fly a plane. If you get into an organization like the one that we've got, its not bad. A matter of fact, we've acquired a lot of people because a club is the cheapest way to fly today. You can't go to a base operator and expect to fly, you can't afford it. The average guy can't. So, you try to get yourself hooked up with a club like ours. There's a lot of them around. There's good instructors, and you learn to fly that way. Either for pleasure or as a step up to whatever you want to do, become a corporate pilot or an airline pilot. It's a lot of fun. It's a hobby, expensive, but what hobby isn't expensive.

G: True.

S: So, that's the story of my life.

G: Anything else that pops into mind?

S: I can't think of anything.

G: I can stop it if you like.

S: Is there anything else you want to know.

G: I can't think of any questions that pop into mind. Well, thank you for your time.

S: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW