

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

World War II - CBI Project

O.H. #1426

JOSEPH M. CELIN

Interviewed

by

David Glunt

on

November 19, 1991

JOSEPH M. CELIN

Born April 18, 1923 in Lowber, Pennsylvania, Joseph Celin is a first generation American born to Slovenian immigrants. Following a brief period of five years in Pennsylvania, Mr. Celin's family moved to Salem, Ohio, where his father was employed as a coal miner for Pascola Coal Company of Salem, as well as a laborer for Mullin's Manufacturing. Following Joe's graduation from Salem High School, Joe entered Lincoln Electric Company of Cleveland to learn the welding trade. However, with the United States' entrance into war in 1941, Joe felt the need to volunteer for the military.

Enlisting December 3, 1942, Mr. Celin passed through a variety of military bases and learned a variety of skills. Eventually completing training in Morse code as radio operator, Mr. Celin was stationed in various states. During his service, he received a number of decorations including two Distinguished Flying Crosses, four Air Medals, and two Battle Stars. Remaining in India until after the cessation of hostilities, Mr. Celin returned home and was discharged October 4, 1945.

Since his return to the United States, Mr. Celin has been very successful in the attainment of goals. He majored in Business Administration at Youngstown College, from 1946 to 1948, and completed the course work of the American College of Chartered Life Underwriter. Educated in business, he has been employed by the CIGNA Financial Services Company as a financial planner since 1959.

In addition to being a philatelist, Mr. Celin is a Master Mason, a 32nd degree Mason, a Shriner, and a member of the Salem

Chamber of Commerce. He was the President of the Board of the First Christian Church in Salem, and he was also active in the church's choir and in other committees. He currently resides near Damascus with his wife, Mary.

-David Glunt

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INTERVIEWEE: JOSEPH M. CELIN

INTERVIEWER: David Glunt

SUBJECT: Veterans of the China-Burma-India Theater
of War

DATE: November 19, 1991

G: This is an interview with Joe M. Celin, for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Veteran's of the China-Burma-India project, by David Glunt, on November 19, 1991, at Mr. Celin's business address, 2388 Southeast Boulevard, Salem, Ohio, at 9:00 a.m.

Mr. Celin, could you tell me a little bit about your family life, your early childhood?

C: Of course, I was born in Pennsylvania, south of Pittsburgh [in the] small town of Lowber. Both parents were foreign-born and came from Slovenia. At the age of five, we moved to Ohio. Strange as it may seem, I did live about a quarter of a mile from my present office space. [I] went to grade school at McKinley School and the old high school on North Lincoln here in Salem. I graduated from Salem High in 1941, moved in the Damascus area in 1951, and [I] have lived there since. Both of our daughters graduated from West Branch.

G: What were your parents engaged in?

C: My father came to this country in 1910. My mother came over in 1921. She was a homemaker. Father worked in

the coal mines in Southwest Pennsylvania. Then, [he came] to Ohio and worked at Mullins Manufacturing in Salem. He worked for about six months, got tired of it, found that there were coal mines in the area, and left Mullins Manufacturing to return to the mines.

G: Do you remember what coal mine?

C: Yes. At that time, it was known as Pascola Coal; and then, it became the Salem Coal Company, located just east of Salem, approximately a mile or so. Father worked until 1943, and then, returned during the war years to Mullins Manufacturing, working approximately sixteen years. [He] retired in 1958 and passed away in 1964. My mother passed away about twelve years ago. We lived on a farm east of Salem; and [we] raised our own chickens, beef, and pork and had our own large garden. I always remember Bill Cosby talking about his shoes going flap-flap during hard times. It's kind of interesting. It brought back memories, because my shoes had that same flap-flap sensation, but we never went hungry. We never lacked during the Depression era.

Of course, I went to the service, then, in 1942. I went to the military approximately a year after Pearl Harbor.

G: What did you do between the time that you finished school and entered the service?

C: I graduated in 1941. We had some family friends that resided in Cleveland. I couldn't find a job here in Salem, so I asked this family friend for a job. He said, "We can always use welders, but," he added, "what you should do is go to school." I asked, "Where?" He proceeded to say, "Lincoln Electric Company in Cleveland." They had a welding school, which I attended for six weeks and learned the welding trade. He promptly gave me a job. I was an assistant welder for approximately eight months; and then, I became a welder just on small items and gradually worked on diesel locomotives at Athens Car & Manufacturing, Ivanoe Road, Cleveland.

About that time, I felt the Army draft was about to reach me. I kept thinking, "Would I be better off if I volunteered? At least I could select the service I chose to serve in." Since I had some truck driving experience, I thought perhaps, it might be fun getting into the Armor Division--obviously driving tanks. "No, I don't think I'd like that," and because my early childhood experiences with the "wireless"--we fooled around, sending messages in Morse code--I thought that might be kind of an interesting field to volunteer. I

began inquiring about radio operating and all that at the recruiting office in Youngstown. The recruiter said, "Maybe you should join the Air Corps." Obviously, I joined the Air Corps. My parents had to sign that it was okay for me to join since I was eighteen at the time.

While in basic training, my mother sent me a card to report to the draft board. I replied, "I'm not going to worry about it. I'm already in the service." So, I told Mother to go to the draft board and tell them that I already enlisted and the date of my enlistment.

G: The military was not notified that you had already enlisted?

C: No. Apparently, they never notified the draft board. The draft board had no knowledge that I was gone, and I didn't think about notifying them either.

G: Isn't bureaucracy great!

C: It can be a pain in the neck. At the time of the draft notice, I was stationed in Miami Beach, Florida, for basic training. What a nice time to go in December. I joined the third of December, 1942. My itinerary began in Salem to Akron to the former Mayflower Hotel for physical exams, etc. Then, [I went] to Fort Hayes in Columbus, Ohio. From Fort Hayes, [I] went to Miami Beach. When we came there, my thoughts were, "What a nice place. This is really living." We stayed at a hotel, which was recruited for Air Corps Service. Obviously, I enjoyed both amenities, the "beach" and the hotel.

G: So, it wasn't an actual military post?

C: No. It wasn't. I do remember meeting a couple of movie stars of that era, Preston Foster and Bruce Cabot. They were recruited into the Air Corps. They were also there for basic training; and from there, where they headed was unknown. I was there about four weeks; and then, moved out from the ridiculous to the sublime. We were shipped to Madison, Wisconsin. This happened to be January 3, 1943. When we arrived, it was 30 degrees below zero! What a contrast! I arrived to train as a radio operator at Traux Field, Madison, Wisconsin. I spent about fifteen weeks in radio operations, radio mechanics, hand and light signals, and Morse Code. I got to a proficiency of thirty words a minute, which was fairly fast to receive code.

From Madison, Wisconsin, I moved all over the western part of the United States. I first went to Salt Lake City, Utah, a replacement depot. I wasn't there more

than about a week, and they moved us to Topeka, Kansas Air Base. I was stationed there for about three months; and then, the decision was to ship about twenty of us to another base in Clovis, New Mexico--a brand new base. As a matter of fact, it was so new that the roads were muddy and [it] had no grass planted, etc. I was there about three weeks. Then, [we were sent] to Hastings, Nebraska. I did spend quite a while in Hastings. I was there through the summer of 1943. I then, moved to Spokane, Washington, Geiger Field.

I ended up out of the Air Corps into the Aviation Engineers--what a contrast again. The officer in charge asked, "What do you do?" I told him, "I'm a radio operator and radio mechanic." "We don't have any need for a radio operator." I asked, "Well, what can I do?" He said, "We need men in the administration office of the Aviation Engineers." He asked if I could type. I said, "I don't know anything about typing. I never took it." He said, "What we can do is send you to a typing school in Spokane." The ironic part of it was that the school was like a trades class. It was an old school building, if I recall correctly. We were on the third floor, taking typing lessons for at least six weeks. While there, I smelled welding smoke. I thought, "Apparently, they are teaching electric welding." I asked the teacher during a break and she said, "Yes. They have a welding school down in the basement." [I thought], "Perhaps during a lunch break, I'll go down and take a look." Here's the contrast. The GI's are taking typing lessons, and the girls were learning how to weld. It was ironic in that I did welding before my service tenure.

I was at Spokane for six months working in the administration office, typing up purchase orders, etc. From Spokane, I received a furlough to Salem, Ohio, right after New Years, the third or fourth of January, 1944. I had a very pleasant experience by train. I had ten or twelve days to get home and back. I went up through Yellowstone Park, Montana; and in all the northern states, we ran into snow. The train had two steam engines in the front and one pushing. The one in the front was equipped with the snow plow, plowing the snow down the track. [It was] quite an experience. We went through Minneapolis, came down to Chicago; and then, I caught the Pennsylvania railroad down to Salem. It was a beautiful trip. When I got back to Geiger Field, orders were waiting for me to get back into the Air Corps. [I] was transferred to Bowman Field, Louisville, Kentucky, and became a part of the Troop Carrier Group. Basically, the troop carrier group was a training period of radio operation and voice transmission which trained me for my overseas stint.

From Louisville, the Air Drome Squadron went to Fort Wayne, Indiana. We were there about two months. While in Fort Wayne, I got to know a couple pilots from the Cleveland/Akron area getting flight time, so they could get their flight pay in. What these fellows would do is fly to the nearest airport of their hometown. I naturally bummed a ride for a three day pass to Akron. We got in Akron an hour later. I had the whole weekend to myself and thumbed a ride from Akron airport to Salem, the former derrigible hanger in Akron. A farmer and his wife picked me up. They resided in Deerfield and asked where I was going. I said, "I live in Salem. Just drop me off in Deerfield, and I'll find a ride home." I've never forgotten that incident. I now wish I had remembered their names. They took me all the way to Salem. With gas rationing at the time, it was a beautiful thought and were very kind.

From Fort Wayne, we were transferred to Camp Anza, California, near San Bernadino, which was the port of embarkation. Within six weeks, we were on board a U.S. Navy transport bound for India via Melbourne Australia--the ship's name was the General Butner--then, to Bombay, India, where we docked. That was the beginning of my sojourn to the China-Burma-India Theater of War.

G: Did you know where you were going?

C: No. We had no idea. We got to Bombay, which was the western side of India, traveled across India by train, taking seven days to reach Calcutta, India. From Calcutta, we took a riverboat, which took us up the Bramaputra River taking about three days. We finally disembarked and got on a narrow-gauge train that the American G.I.'s built and ran. We arrived in the early part of 1944. I believe it was April. [We] transported by truck into the Assam Province, the Moran Air Base. I became a radio mechanic, because they had no need for radio operators in the 332nd Air Drome Squadron. We were the maintenance people for the 12th Combat Cargo Squadron consisting of C-47 Cargo Aircraft. One of our men was placed in the base radio station at base operations as chief radio operator.

About three months later, he mentioned to me a fellow pilot who was chief of flight operations at the time, who was from Ohio. When you're half way around the world, Ohio is next door, right? I said, "Great, I'll stop up and introduce myself," which I did later. It happened to be a pilot by the name of C. Bruce Riley [Charles]. He lived north of Damascus on Route 165 about eight miles west of Salem. It was like a next door neighbor. He asked if I had ever flown. As a radio operator, I said, "No, not really." But while in

Pueblo, Colorado we flew short missions to check out radio equipment. He asked, "Would you like to fly someday?" "Of course. I would like that." After crews flew a thousand combat hours, they were rotated back to the United States for thirty days rest period. Anything to get back home. About a month later, I got orders to be transferred out of the 332nd Air Drome Squadron and into the 12th Combat Cargo Squadron of the 3rd Group. I began flying with Bruce Riley, or cordially known as C.B. We had some great times together. He taught me to fly actual "sticktime," probably accumulating eighty plus hours in a C-47. C.B. would fly from the left side, and taught me all the basics. After all of the basics, the crew chief and I would fly as pilot and co-pilot (outside of the combat zone). C.B. Riley and his co-pilot would use the navigation table playing Gin Rummy. When flying into a combat area, it was their responsibility. That's how I got the eighty hours of stick time.

I continued to fly with C.B. Riley for about 350 combat hours, when he was rotated to the U.S.A. I picked up another crew. The pilot was from New Jersey, by the name of Fred Gillen; and the other pilot was from Hutchinson, Kansas by the name of Roy Garrison. They were a nice crew to be with. I was fortunate in that respect. Fred Gillen stayed in the Air Force after the war and began flying jets. He was stationed at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and [he] crashed a jet and died in 1950. We also flew off and on with other crews. Actually, what we were doing was dropping and landing supplies for the British 14th Division. We also dropped supplies on special missions to Merrills Marauders, the MARS task forces, plus other penetration forces. We had an idea where we were going, but used radio fixation and coordinates; but, you had to be within a ten mile coordinate, because the radio did not go beyond that limit. When we made contact, they laid out white sheets on the ground to give us direction usually an "X" with an arrow. We free dropped mule feed and other perishable items of food with parachutes.

G: Without a parachute?

C: Without a parachute. Correct. It was seven sacks within a sack of feed.

G: Would it be set above the trees?

C: No, it was in a clearing. They would always find a clearing for us, establish a pattern, drop the supplies; and then, come back out, and around for another drop. As I said earlier, it was Merrills Marauders and the MARS Task Force. As a matter of fact, I met an

individual at the Salem Golf Club several years ago. He was from Canfield. He was in the Mars Task Force as an artillery officer. It was ironic. We were dropping supplies this one time, and as we were making the turn, you could see way off in the distance 105 millimeter howitzers belching fire and smoke. I said to Bruce Riley, "I hope to high heaven that those shells are going either over top of us or under us; because when I look down at the cannon's mouth, I see belching fire." Anyhow, they were firing over top of us, and [I] could hear those shells whizzing past like a whooooooooosh sound. That was quite an experience. Actually, what they were doing while we were dropping supplies, they were shelling the Japanese, so that they wouldn't come in and steal supplies. Frankly that's basically what the Japanese would do. It was a harrowing experience.

Another incident in supplying the British going across the Irrawaddy River--it was a shallow river at that point. We were dropping supplies on the other side to the river for the British; however, the Japanese were on the other side as well. The British were crossing the river, and we were low enough to see the troop movement. We never thought anything about it. It was a very active drive to move the Japanese out. We had planes coming in and going out at all times dropping supplies. We got back to the base to pick up additional supplies when I mentioned to Bruce Riley that I saw a lot of small-arms fire. Who knows in what direction. We scanned our plane and sure enough, we had about seven bullet holes. One was only about eighteen inches behind Riley's pilot seat, obviously, which scared the "fire" out of him. When I say small-arms, it was .25 caliber rifles. With a thin shell of a plane, small arms fire penetrated clear through the roof.

G: How high were you flying on these drop zones?

C: I would guess anywhere from four to five hundred feet off the ground. We actually could see human beings. Going into any area, we never flew over five or six thousand feet. We kept a low profile for fear of the Jap "Zeros," fighter planes. We had a couple instances where Jap "Zeros" were in the area, but we had never seen one. We had VHF radio set and used channel three, which was called the Red Alert Channel. You punched the red alert button, and three or four P-47's or P-51's or P-38's were right there scouting around. We had reports that they did shoot down a few Jap "zeros."

We had some harrowing experiences over there. They weren't funny at the time. But, when I look back at them, I think some of the experiences were kind of stupid. For example, I remember an incident with another pilot. We had hauled some heavy machinery to a

place called Mekteila. The pilot said, "I can't see the air strip for the monsoon rain." I said, "Let me see if I can get someone on the radio." I called the tower. The tower said, "You are right over us." We looked out the window and he said, "I still don't see them." Finally, we lowered our altitude a bit and saw the tower. He said to the tower, "We're coming in." The tower operator replied, "You can't come in. The field is closed." The pilot retorted, "We have to come in, we're running out of gas." The pilot turned off the radio transmission and said to me, "We're going in." We came in, bounced all over the place, hit a couple of big pot holes, but landed without incidence. However, the commanding officer came out and really chewed out the major. "You can't leave the field," he said. There were four other aircraft from the 12th Combat Cargo there. They inquired what we were going to do. My pilot replied, "I'm leaving."

Now, this happened to be my first experience where I flew as a co-pilot. I was the "co-pilot" and radio operator combined. We got in the plane, and the pilot instructed me to listen carefully. "I'll warm up the plane right where it sits. Then after the warm up, put your foot on the brakes and pull the stick clear back to your stomach. I'll "rev" it up to about 3,000 RPM's, and when I tell you to let go of the brakes, let of of the brakes!" I said, "I'm ready." We didn't go more than 400 feet, and we were up off the runway. We circled the field, and of course, the tower is giving us all kinds of holy heck. The pilot just slid his window shut, and we left. He gave the tower operator the "fickle finger of fate." The pilot commented, "There was no way we were going to stay in that mud hole. I know their tents are probably soaking wet, terrible, and everything else. I'm just not interested in staying. Id rather go back to my own air base." That was quite an experience, and I'll never forget it. I haven't been fortunate enough to meet this pilot in civilian life. Maybe one of these days we may meet if he hasn't passed away.

G: What equipment were you carrying?

C: We were carrying spare parts for road grader equipment and bulldozer parts. Let me start out by telling you about this MARS Task Force incident. We were hauling eggs. We had four foot square woven baskets made by native Indians. They packed them in straw, then added eggs and more straw and so forth. We usually had three or of our parachutes tied to each basket so the eggs would come down very easy. It so happened that someone only put two parachutes on these baskets. They came down, and who knows if they were scrambled eggs. Anyhow, I was telling this fellow from Canfield. . . .

His name was Pete Hyatt. We met at the Salem Gold Club. I was out playing golf with him. The conversation led to being in the service in World War II. He said he was in the service and that he was stationed in Burma with the MARS Task Force. I said, "Yes, I remember one time we dropped some supplies like eggs." Of course, this is not for publication. But, he said, "Ah hah! You were the SOB's that dropped the eggs and scrambled them before we even had a chance to get to them." He's never forgotten me for that. He suggested I was a lousy fly boy and, "We never did trust you fly boys."

Anyhow, we hauled supplies. We hauled equipment, clothing, mortar shells, guns, ammo, artillery shells for 75 millimeter or 105 millimeter Howitzers. We hauled jeeps a few times. That would be land base landing for mobile equipment. Many times, we would return with mostly British wounded. We would return "used" rifles and submachine guns to a replacement depot.

The only weapon that we carried was a .45 Caliber side arm. That's it. So, we would scavenger those Thompson Submachine guns, and we'd look at the rifling to see if it was fit to fire. They were in pretty good shape. We would requisition a couple of them. We'd pick up some ammo, which fired a .45 caliber slug. We would store them in the C-47 and always had a big box of .45 caliber ammo. As a matter of fact, I look back now and say to myself, "If we ever crash landed, how would we ever carry that box of ammo and those Thompson Subs, plus all the food we needed to escape?" You couldn't do it. But, of course, we never had the opportunity to savor a "crash." A couple times, we came close; but we never crash landed.

We also hauled mule feed. We would either land it where perhaps they took over an airstrip from the Japs; and other than that, most of it was by parachute drop. We always had a couple of British G.I.'s with us. They would push the drop loads out. It was quite an experience. I received three Distinguished Flying Crosses and four Air Medals, because of the combat areas we had participated in. Other than that, it was a harrowing experience to say the least. The campaign in Burma was winding down. In fact, we flew as far down to Mandalay and Rangoon. Then, the Burma Operation ceased because they had pushed the Japanese out of Burma. Then, our 12th Combat Cargo Squadron acquired a different aircraft, the C-46. They were a large cigar-shaped aircraft. We began hauling 100 octane gas over the southern hump route.

My last trip, I almost got my everlasting. They were

small drums containing 100 Octane, perhaps 35 gallon containers. We had them latched down by rods and threaded nuts. We were up about 26,000 feet and once in awhile, you would hear a pop. Where the screw outlet was--a leak would occur on one or two drums. We would very carefully slide those barrels with a rag underneath, because a little spark could set them on fire. We always had open doors to let out fumes at 26,000 feet. We always carried portable oxygen masks with a little bottle strapped to you. We would tie ourselves to the inside of the plane and push out the leaking barrels. When they hit the ground, it was just like a bomb exploding. We were always out over uncharted areas in the Himalayas, hopefully, not one was living down there. You had to get rid of those leaking barrels, because they would spell doom! Then, we'd get a lot of rags and clean it up.

On my last trip, we got over into China and all of a sudden, the plane began losing altitude slowly. I pointed this out to the two pilots who were snoozing because my seating position was right behind the pilots. I saw the altimeter slowly moving downward. The pilot remarked, "I don't know what's the matter." He grabbed a hold of the wheel and got control of the plane, but we found that one of the hydraulic lines broke. We had no idea where. We always carried about 15 to 20 gallons of hydraulic fluid with us, just in case something like that would ever occur. So, we were refilling the reservoir. We began pumping the emergency landing gear, the flaps, the brakes, etc. We hit this runway in Kunming, China. The length of this runway was 10,000 feet. We landed at an air speed of 130 MPH. Normally, the landing speed is approximately 90 to 100 mph. We were pumping for everything we were worth. We came to the end of the strip and hit the left tip of the wing, came into the turn, and missed hitting a big bunker that was at the end of the runway. We were there for three days while mechanics were looking for the leak. They finally found the leak in the tail wheel assembly, and we got back to Myitkina, Burma. I went straight to the flight surgeon, and I said, "Major, if there is any way I can quit flying, I'd love to do that. I have about 850 Combat hours." He said, "We'll see what we can do." Anyhow, I did finish flying for good. The day I got my orders to go back to the USA, I was on the temporary switchboard duty at the time. We were working three hours a day.

G: Where were you working at?

C: Operating a telephone switchboard in headquarters in Myitkina, Burma. I happened to be on the switchboard in the morning. The fellow from group headquarters called and said, "Who's on the phone?" I told him. He

said, "We have your orders out to head back to the USA." I said, "Wait a minute. Are you kidding me?" I said, "I just heard on the radio that they dropped the bomb on Japan, and we'll probably have to stay here and haul the troops back." He said, "No, you got your orders." We, the four of us, got our orders; and two days later, we were on our way to Calcutta to board a ship, a Navy transport. I came over on board ship and also left for home on a ship. It took about thirty days. We sailed around Ceylon, now Sri Lanka and on up through the Red Sea and Suez Canal across the Mediterranean and through Gibraltar.

I went clear around the world. Thanks to Uncle Sam, I said around the world and lost a day in my life because of crossing the international date line in the Pacific. Remembering we were there on Friday and the next day across the date line was Sunday. Anyhow, I've never regained that day. We came back to New York City, had all the fanfare--bands playing, cheering for one of few and early troop ships that were coming back. A relative later sent me a picture cut out from Pittsburgh Post Gazette, stating that the CBI Veterans returned from India and the Far East.

G: Do you recall the name of the ship?

C: I believe it was the General Butner. It was a Navy troop ship named for famous generals. I was very fortunate coming back on a modern troop ship with 12 feet 5 inch guns fore and aft. We also went over on a Navy ship. For the record, they had target practice on our way over to India with their five inch guns. That's a real experience. When you hear one of those things fire. . . . no question about it now. You need hearing aids forty-five years later. They always asked for volunteers to help the Navy personnel. On the way over to India, I worked in the bake shop. We'd get up at 4:00 a.m. and we'd slice bread for four to five hours. I never saw so much bread in my life that we sliced just for breakfast. It was a great payoff though. The chief petty officer would always go to the officer's mess where they either had steak or shrimp; always the good things, where the rest of us ate left-overs. The CPO always brought the goodies into the bake shop; and with a crew of eight or ten, we ate like kings all the way over to India.

It was the same volunteering coming back. I got on as a plumber's helper. All I did was carry the sailor's tools. But, I was allowed anywhere on the ship. Clear to the topside, and the upper decks, plus down below. It was also a great experience. It kept me busy. When we went through the Suez canal a particular day, we were topside. I could see the whole landscape. Of

course, there wasn't anything to see, really; but it was nice to be free. I only saw desert and sand. Actually, it is a part of that Desert Storm War . . . for the ship. We got back to New York Port, and we got on a train to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. From there, we went to Camp Atterbury, Indiana near Indianapolis and got discharged. That was the end of my stint overseas.

G: Atterbury. I've been there.

C: You've been there? Is that right? I believe it was located near Indianapolis, Indiana.

G: Eaton. Between Eaton and Indianapolis.

C: Oh, is that right? Okay. I'm really not that familiar except that I got to Camp Atterbury. The recruiter said, "You have enough points to be discharged honorably. It was a point system devised by the government. At the time, over ninety points qualified for an honorable discharge. I had ninety-seven. Those points were based on how long you were in the service, how many months you were overseas, and if you were awarded a medal.

For example, the Distinguished Flying Cross, I had been awarded three of them. Then, the Air Medal, I was awarded four Air Medals. By the time I added up the points, I had ninety-seven. The recruiter said, "We'll discharge you unless you want to reenlist." I said, "You can't be serious." I'm not reenlisting--not after all this experience. He said, "Okay." That was the end of that. I came back to civilian life within a matter of ten days. I said to myself, "The first thing I'm going to do is take six or eight weeks off. I'm not doing anything, but reorienting myself and seeing what is going on in this world outside of the service.

Some of the crazy things I recollect that we did with this Bruce Riley were stunts that were, I believe, next to incredible. We had a lot of fun while we were doing the work that, obviously, we had to do--like anybody else in the war. You had to laugh about it. As I say, we almost crash landed a couple times, but the engines refired and safety arrived to our base. We did have one minor accident, but it wasn't really bad. It just banged up my left knee cap a bit. All of the sudden, the brakes gave out, and we ran into a bunker, which was at the end of a runway. That was the only incident that I ever had that was of any consequence or any concern. Other than that, a lot of scary stuff, just like anybody else would tell you, but we had a good time in spite of adversity.

Other than that, that's about it for my CBI

stints--except for the fact I was stationed in Myitkina, Burma [for] I believe a total of ten months; and I think, I was there about eight months in Moran and Ledo, Imphal, India. We always flew out of India into Burma. Then, finally, while we were in Moran, Assam province, we then moved to Imphal, India. We were there for a little while; then, we moved into Myitkina, Burma, about north central Burma. They had a fuel pipeline there, plus they hauled supplies in. We would just fly the supplies out of there into South Burma. They actually had a gas pipeline from the port in Calcutta, India into Myitkina Burma. The natives would load up 35 gallon drums. We'd haul gas into China near the end of the war, but that was about it. I wouldn't give you a million dollars for all the experience, but I wouldn't take a million dollars either to go back to do it again. No way!

G: I was just wondering. You said some of your pilots were snoozing and you had the plane on autopilot.

C: Yes.

G: Did that occur a lot?

C: No, not really. The flight over the hump, which was the lower part of the Himalayas, we would fly an average of 26,000 feet. When the weather was clear. . . . It was like a five to six hour flight. The pilots would take a little snooze. When they did, the flight engineer and radio operator would always keep alert to what was going on, because the hump over the Himalayas probably had more weather changes than anywhere else in the world. It was sunshining; then the next thing, it was raining. The next, it was snowing. Then, [there was] sleet with icing on the wings. Then, [there were] large clouds that you'd go through. The weather was so changeable. Within that six hour period, you went through all these weather changes as well as down drafts and updrafts.

G: What was the basic crew on one of these flights?

C: It was a pilot, co-pilot, and radio operator. That's it. Once in a great while, the flight engineer would go along, but not very often. Actually, in C-47's when flying in Burma, it was always the three of us. The pilot asked me, "Can you fly?" I said, "Yes, Sure. I think I can." He said, "Okay, you can be the radio operator and co-pilot today." Well, we got halfway down into Burma, and the weather was horrible with thick, black clouds that probably went for a couple hundred miles across. You had to fly underneath it. He said, "You go ahead and fly," and he gave me the directions. So, I was flying, and he was kind of

snoozing. But, every once in awhile, he'd kind of look out and see what I was doing. I was sitting there sweating. Sweat was pouring off my face. I mean you were fighting these updrafts and downdrafts. He finally said, "I'll take over." He figured that he rested long enough, and he saw me suffering. He figured he'd better take over before something happened.

G: Did the crew ever personalize the inside of an aircraft? Putting little things of home. . . ?

C: Oh, yes. Sure. We always had pictures of the family. Outside the plane, we always had "nose" art. The plane I flew on with Bruce Riley was called the "Jester." We had painted an old King's jester. As a matter of fact, there is a six volume video out, that someone put together on the CBI theater of operation. The introduction to each video illustrates the nose art of the plane. I flew in the "Jester." I sent in a picture of it, and it is on the video.

The fellow from New Jersey, we called it the "Jersey Bounce," name of a popular song, which was a hit tune back then.

G: Was there a lot of nose art on C-46's and C-47's?

C: Oh, yes. Each plane had something or someone painted on the nose. You weren't allowed to have a camera to take snaps of nose art. So, a lot of that nose art was lost, unless it was an official photographer of the Air Corp or an official photographer of the squadron. Historically, that would have been very interesting, but a lot of it has been preserved. For example, the book that I presented to the Salem Library. There is a lot of nose art in that. A lot of it is on B-24's and B-17's, plus C-47's and C-46's.

G: Your base where you were stationed, what was the general layout? What was it like?

C: I can recall living in a four man tent. It was a perimedal tent about 12 foot square. We always had a native boy who came and cleaned the premises. Other than that, the regular base operation was strictly made out of bamboo and grass roof thatching.

G: If I were to walk into your living quarters, what would I see?

C: You'd see our bunks. They were native rope beds. You had foot lockers, probably pictures hanging and things of that sort.

G: What kind of pictures?

C: Girlfriends, relatives from home, mother, father, etc.; including some sexy pictures like Betty Grable perhaps. Nothing risqué. We always had rations once per month. You would get four cartons of cigarettes and get a ration of beer a month--twenty-four bottles. They would also have a chocolate drink that you could purchase similar to Ovalteen.

G: Who produced it? Do you remember?

C: No. Don't remember. Those of us who didn't drink, we would trade our beer off for Ovalteen. The ground crews would say, "Ahhh, if I only had a cold beer!" We suggested, "We'll tell you what we'll do. We'll take your case up during a flight. . . ." Of course, that meant when you got to 10,000 feet or better, it would get down to about 20 degrees for a period of time and would get cooled down. For "pay," we would say, "Now, to get you a case of cold beer, it's going to cost you six cans of beer." That's how we traded off. Everybody was negotiating for something.

As another aside, we were landing supplies at a place in Burma called Mogok. That's where the finest rubies in the world come from. Matter of fact, National Geographic had an article on it within this past year. I found the article rather interesting, because I was there. We always carried cartons of cigarettes with us. We traded American cigarettes for rubies. I brought back a couple rubies. I had them for about a year or so. Then one day, I took my suit to the dry cleaners and had them in my pocket. They probably fell out, and I lost them. I also had a piece of jade that I brought back from China, which I did salvage. I also had a couple rubies and a star sapphire that I brought from India, and I lost those as well. One of them was close to half a karat. I don't have any idea of the worth. Burma was very, very famous for rubies, star sapphires, and tiger eyes. The tiger eyes stones were about a 1/2 inch wide by 3/4 inch long. They looked just like the eye of a tiger.

G: Did many of you take these things home?

C: Oh, yes. As I said, I lost them taking them to the dry cleaners. I brought back a flying jacket, which I still have. That's about it. I brought back a Japanese rifle, but someone stole it in transition to home. I had it in pieces and never did bring it back. My flying jacket that I brought back has quite a history behind it. I came back in October 1945.

But first, as an aside, I have relatives living in Slovenia, Yugoslavia, an uncle and six first cousins.

My mother went to visit them in 1950 or 1951. We married in 1948; and [I] thought I had the jacket, but [I] couldn't find it for the longest time. As time past, I forgot about it, thinking I hung it somewhere in a restaurant and that someone took it. Eight years ago, we went to Slovenia, Yugoslavia to visit some relatives. My uncle, who is the only survivor from my mother's side, took me to his workshop. He turned on this little light bulb, which was very dim by the way, looked up in the corner, and said, "Does that look familiar to you?" I looked at the article and said, "Yes. It looks like a leather flying jacket." It was my flying jacket! My mother had taken the jacket and never told me about the incident. Even to her dying day, she never said a word. She took it when we went over in 1950 in a loaded steamer trunk and left by ship. She also had loaded with clothes, this leather jacket, and a sewing machine. Of course, Yugoslavs were devastated by the Germans during World War II.

So seven years ago, I saw my jacket. My uncle had been wearing it all this time. About four years ago in September we went back for another visit. By this time, my uncle had acquired Alzheimer's disease and did not wear [the jacket] any longer. My cousin said, "Would you like to have the jacket? Father hasn't worn it in a couple years." Of course, I said, "I'd love to have it." Would you believe, I got my flying A-2 jacket back after almost forty years. Just had it repaired recently and have it in tip-top shape. Believe it or not, I can still get in it, a little snug perhaps. I have it strategically placed with my memorabilia in my den, along with some other items that I requisitioned while in the service including a survival kit.

G: What was in your survival kits?

C: First, it was in a parachute pack, with a square, plastic box containing two silk maps of Burma, a book on how to survive in the jungle, a little compass, [which is the] size of a nickel, which I have sitting here in my office. That was the survival kit included within that parachute.

G: My, that is small--a compass about an inch or less.

C: Yes. We always carried a G.I. issue knife with us and, of course, your 45 caliber side arm. That was about it. It was a very compact survival kit. Of course, we also had some K-rations on board the plane.

G: In addition to K-rations, what did you eat while you were over there?

C: We had powdered eggs. For posterity, I should tell you this story. Everyone could tell how long you were overseas by the way he ate his powdered eggs in the morning. A fellow who was there under six months would always look at the powdered eggs, just shove them away, and say, "I'm not eating them. They look awful." Then, the G.I. who was there for twelve months would look at it, eat a part of it, and shove it away. The next fellow who was there for eighteen months would look at it and say, "Hummm, it has some mealy bugs in it, but I don't really care. This probably has some 'meat' to it. I'll just eat the whole thing." The G.I. who had been there twenty-four months or longer was out looking for mealy bugs to put in his oatmeal, so he could get rotated back to the United States. Everyone knew that, if you were there twenty-four months, you were almost off your "rocker." Other than that, the food wasn't that bad. You ate a lot of K-rations and C-rations while you were in flight. When you came back to the base, they always had some fairly decent meals--not the best in the world; but when you're hungry, you'll eat anything. I've always said, "I'm a survivor, simply because of my experience in the India, Burma, China Service."

G: What was your daily routine?

C: [You'd] get up about three-thirty in the morning, get yourself put together, report to operations about four-thirty; and you'd be off and flying by six in the morning. You wouldn't get back until probably 7:00 p.m., sometimes as late as 8:00. Then, you'd be back up and going again at three-thirty. That went on two and three weeks without stopping. Now, I can see why a lot of men cracked up. You came to the point of total exhaustion.

A couple times, we had a three-day weekends. They flew us to Calcutta when they went after airplane engines on an administration flight. We'd bum a ride, stay in Calcutta three days, and come back. As a matter of fact, I was on a rest leave once for ten days, in Shillong, India. I played my first game of golf there; believe it or not. It was a British rest camp, which had been there for seventy-five "PHIS" years. It was a beautiful place, absolutely gorgeous. We rented a golf ball for ten dollars, or thirty rupees. If you lost it, you lost your ten dollars. We hired a bunch of natives, about six of them; and we'd pay a them half dollar to go out there and watch for the golf ball coming towards them. They even went into a swamp to look for it a couple times. Then, when you were through, you received your thirty rupees if you produced the golf ball.

G: Is that what you did for recreation?

C: Yes. You played golf, [did] a little bit of shopping, and just rested for the balance of the time. The location of the camp was up in the mountains, approximately 6,000 feet up--a beautiful place.

G: After you came home, what did you do?

C: Well, I went back to work as an electric welder at Mullins Manufacturing Corporation; and [I] also said, "That's not a career for me." I started Youngstown College under the G.I. Bill of Rights at the time. I took Business Administration and went to night school. I believe it was Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturday mornings. I took Business Law, Economics, and English. Anyhow, I did attend for approximately two years, but never received a degree.

As a result of education, I decided I didn't want to spend my life in a factory. I saw an advertisement for an insurance agent, answered it, and went to work as a debit agent collecting premiums door to door, which later I hated the work. I left the debit route and affiliated with Nationwide Insurance, thinking that selling automobile insurance and fire and life insurance people would flock to your door. Well, people don't do that. You still have to go out and sell insurance. I spent seven years with Nationwide. Then, I came in with Connecticut General Life into Estate Planning. That has now become CIGNA Financial Services, involving taxes, investment, fringe benefit planning, business continuity and estate planning.

I have been involved in that work for the past thirty-four years. I found my niche. I found what I wanted to do, and I'm very happy with what I'm doing. I love it. At this point, I'm not planning to retire. The work is too important to me and my clients not to do so. The companies allow me to work, and that's fine. It's been a wonderful career, very rewarding, in meeting people in all walks of life, business, professional, and executives. I love the motivation, and I am a highly motivated person anyhow--and a very high energy person, as well.

My wife and I have been very fortunate. We've taken a lot of excursions to a number of seminars since we've been with CIGNA Financial Services Company. We've been to Palm Springs, California, Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, Colorado. We've been to Miami, Florida, a couple of times, just about all over the United States, including Mexico City. It's been a rewarding experience. Internationally and nationally, we've met speakers that have attended these meetings as guests. It's

given both of us a very broad spectrum on life. I see many individuals who are narrow-minded because they don't bother expanding their lives and minds. We have been blessed by the fact that we've had the opportunities, and seized those opportunities as well, to expand our lives and expand our thinking. Expanding our universe would be more appropriate.

That, I believe, is what you're here on earth for. You're here to do the very best you possibly can. That has always been my philosophy. Do all you can while you can, because as long as you keep busy doing a lot of things, you get a lot of rewards. Both in satisfaction and secondly monetarily. Satisfaction, in particular, . . . For example, I've got a widow right now. Her husband passed away about fourteen years ago. We've actually made her wealthy. She has all the income that she needs, and she is supporting three grandchildren in school. You look back and say, "Perhaps I had some influence in that situation." So, those are the real rewards, helping others. That's a Christian principle. I have followed very closely.

My wife and I have been very active in our church here in Salem, which is the First Christian Church. We believe there are certain Christian principles you should live by. We don't go out and make ourselves obnoxious about religion with people. We believe, if you live your life as an example, the rest will kind of take care of itself, basically.

G: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

C: No. That's about it. I think you know me pretty well by now. Other than that, I appreciate the opportunity to be able to give you a little bit of my personal historical background; my stint in the United States Air Corps Service in the China-Burma-India Theater of War, my personal philosophy of life, and where I am today in my beliefs and standards.

G: Thank you very much.

C: You are quite welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW