YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

China-Burma-India Theatre World War II Veterans Project

Experience Flying the Hump

O.H. 192

THOMAS J. BARRETT

Interviewed

by

Jeffrey Scott Suchanek

on

May 23, 1981

THOMAS J. BARRETT

Thomas J. Barrett was born on March 23, 1921, in Youngstown, Ohio, the son of John P. and Marie L. Barrett. Tom attended Rayen High School and after his subsequent graduation from that institution, he received employment with the Standard Oil Company of Ohio in 1941. Mr. Barrett served in the United States Army Air Corps during World War II and his military career took him to many exotic and distant places in the world such as the Assam Valley in India; Myitkyina, Burma; and Kunming, China. He was one of the celebrated "Hump" pilots of World War II as man and machine challanged the highest peaks in the world--the Himalaya Mountains. As such, Tom has had many experiences flying over the "Hump" and describes it as a love-hate relationship, so beautiful and yet so deadly. For his service in the Army Air Corps, Tom received the following awards: Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, and Royal Air Force Wings (for his participation in a unique experience in which American pilots were trained by members of the Royal Air Force).

Upon returning to the United States after completing the required amount of flight time, Tom returned to Youngstown and resumed his education, graduating from Youngstown University in 1949. He obtained employment again, upon returning home, with Standard Oil and worked there until 1969 when he joined Butler, Wick and Company,

a securities firm where he is currently a partner.

A member of St. Charles Church, Tom is also active in the Youngstown Rotary Club, Boys Club, and Widowed Person's Service. He is Chairman of the Boardman Township Trustees and an Officer and Director in the Boardman Civic Association. His chief interest is finance. In 1947 he married his wife, Jane, and they have five children.

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INTERVIEWEE: THOMAS J. BARRETT

INTERVIEWER: Jeffrey Scott Suchanek

SUBJECT: Personal background, Depression; Vienna Airport in early 1940's, biplanes, basic training; training with Great Britain's Royal Air Force, twin-engine and milti-engine plane training, overseas flight to India, living conditions and people in India, C-46 and C-54 airplanes, hauling cargo over the "Hump", equipment used, adverse weather conditions for flying, mechanical problems with planes

DATE: May 23, 1981

S: This is an interview with Thomas Barrett for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program's China-Burma-India Theatre World War II Veteran's Project by Jeffrey Scott Suchanek. This interview is being conducted at Mr. Barrett's residence, at 5903 Glenwood in Boardman, Ohio on this May 23, 1981 at approximately 10:30 a.m.

Okay Mr. Barrett, let's begin with some information about your background. When and where were you born? Tell me about the neighborhood you grew up in and a little bit about your educational background.

B: I was born in Youngstown on March 23, 1921. I don't remember where, St. Elizabeth Hospital, they tell me. I grew up in Youngstown in different areas. Always claimed that I was one step ahead of the sheriff because I had a father who was, I'm told, a brilliant attorney, but also had health problems. So, we had a broken home. My mother, Marie Lawlor Barrett, had to break up housekeeping, get work and bring up three kids. This made it necessary that each of us had to go to work and take care of our own requirements in terms of

education, clothing and so forth.

I finished at Rayen High School in 1938. I had to go to work. I started at Youngstown State University around 1939 and then went on and off, sometimes going to school days and sometimes nights, and sometimes full-time and sometimes part-time--interrupted by World War II. I finally finished up in 1949 with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration; majors were in marketing, advertising, and economics.

S: What can you remember about your neighborhood as you were growing up? You said you lived in various neighborhoods. Can you distinguish any differences between, maybe, ethnic groups of the different neighborhoods that you grew up in?

B: The only thing I remember that touches on that area was when I was probably nine years old. I can remember conversations at that time about some of the neighbors and their characteristics. I can remember one comment that I'm glad is probably fifty years in the past. It had to do with a woman across the street who was an Irish woman who made the greatest mistake of all: "marrying that Italian." And thank God, that has seemed to slip into the past. Aside from that, I don't remember anything in particular about ethnic references. Of course, we were aware of who was around and what they were, whether they were Jewish, Catholic, Italian, Irish or whatever. But I didn't pay too much attention to it.

S: You grew up during the Depression. What was that like? What do you remember about the Depression?

B: Well, of course, I was young during the Depression, but I can remember that also was the time when my mother had to go find a job, and she was fortunate in finding work with the Welfare Department. She was a case worker for many years and then in her later years she was a case worker supervisor. All I can remember is that jobs were very, very hard to find. Money was in short supply, although nobody ever went hungry.

I can remember going from door to door selling magazines at a nickel each. The Saturday Evening Post and Collier's were two of them. And trying to scratch together a few nickels that way. Later on I carried papers. I had a paper route most of the time through high school. Of course, after the Depression, up through 1938, things were still very, very difficult in terms of finding work.

S: Let's begin with your military career then. Did you enlist or were you drafted?

B: I enlisted. As a matter of fact, I had a sister who was fifteen months older that I, and she also went to Youngstown State University. Just as an aside, she happened to be their first homecoming queen in 1938. She got into a program of flight training, civilian pilot training, through Youngstown State University. So, what's a younger brother to do? Naturally, he has to take flying too! So, I signed up for and took the primary course in civilian pilot training out at Bernard Airport on the far eastside. This was related to school and paid for by the government.

Then later on I wanted to take the secondary course, but to take that you had to sign up in the Reserve. So, what's wrong with that? I enlisted in the Air Force Reserves. Actually, it was the Army Air Corps at the time. That enabled me to take secondary flight instruction, which was in open biplanes. By then, this was out at what is now Vienna Airport. It was then, just about open. That was the beginning, the flight training at Youngstown State University.

So, when Pearl Harbor came along, I knew that I was "already in the service," so I would be gone immediately, which turned out to be false, in retrospect. As a matter of fact, it was December of 1941 when we were attacked at Pearl Harbor and I figured I would be gone very shortly. But as time passed, and with typical government inefficiency, nothing was done and I was still sitting on my duff at home one year later in December of 1942. About six months later I was still trying to find out what I could about why I wasn't in the service yet.

Everybody at the time wanted to do whatever they could for their country. There was a lot of patriotism. They couldn't give me any information about why I wasn't in. Of course, I had the feeling people would look at me and say, "I wonder what's wrong with this guy? Is he 4F, unhealthy, or what?" I finally wrote to my congressman. He replied that no provisions had yet been made for men in my category, but if I wanted him to, he would intercede on my behalf. I said, "Yes I would." And he did. So, in I went. That was the summer of 1943.

S: What do you remember during your college training in these biplanes? Can you describe what Vienna Airport looked like? Was it much different than it is today?

B: In terms of the buildings and the physical facilities, it's quite different. I just remember the wide open spaces and, of course, the runways were in. I can remember when we would take off in these open biplanes. On occasion we'd see a herd of deer running across the runway. We'd get airborne and we'd see maybe five, six, or nine deer running across the open spaces out there. I can remember, of course, the weather; it wasn't too cold. We'd get all bundled up in these biplanes since they were open. And actually, the only thing holding you in was your belt. I can remember some stupid things I did in them, but we had a good time.

One thing, for instance, I had an old Model D Ford that I used to get out there, and the first time I did a slow roll alone, when I was upside down, something went past my face. It was the car keys which I had in my shirt pocket. Gravity took care of them. The seat belt held me in, but that didn't do the keys any good. But we had a lot of fun in them.

S: Were the runways concrete?

B: Yes, concrete runways.

S: What type of planes besides biplanes were there out there or was that all they had basically?

B: Just the usual mix of monoplanes, one-wing aircraft, and biplanes, small stuff, nothing of any consequence particularly, nothing military, just private flying stuff.

S: Was the Air Force Base out there at that time?

B: No.

S: When you enlisted, how did your family feel about your enlisting?

B: My mother had a great deal of patriotism and never had any reservation about any of us enlisting. She watched three of us go off to war one way or the other--myself, and a brother, and a sister. She never shed a tear, not until we came back; but never any reservation at all.

S: What branch of the service was your brother in?

B: My brother was handicapped with bad eyes and couldn't get in the Air Force, the Navy, or the Army. They didn't want any part of him. He finally got the Seabees to take him--construction battalion in the

Pacific. That's where he served.

S: And what did your sister do?

B: My sister was a WASP, which is a Women's Army Service Pilot. She used to fly Douglas Dauntless Divebombers and C-45 Beachcraft. In general, she operated a taxi service. It was an airborne limousine service, you might say, which would haul Air Force officers where they needed to go on business, nonflying personnel for the most part. She was a good pilot. I flew with her. She was, in fact, very cool and better than a number of the men I flew with.

S: Now at the end of your military career, what rank did you hold?

B: Same as when I graduated from flight training. I accomplished the unusual, I was still a Second Lieutenant.

S: (Laughter) Was there any particular reason for that?

B: It was my anxiety to get home and to get out of the service. I had done my thing and the war was over. I was told in India, I had all the qualifications and I had done my job. I had the needed time "in grade." I had excellent history and three decorations including the Distinguished Flying Cross. I'd even pulled extra duty. They told me that if I stayed another two weeks, the promotion was on the way for me. I said, "Thanks, no, I'll just go home." So, I came back to this country. I understood that the promotion did get there, but it doesn't "follow you," so it died there in India.

Well, in the meantime I was back in the States. The same thing later in Great Falls, Montana; if I wanted to stay in another two weeks, I was told I could get a promotion. I said, "Well, thanks, but its time for discharge." I just wasn't that impressed with getting a promotion. Later on it was even brought to our attention that anyone who was entitled to a promotion and never got one could simply write a letter to Washington, state the situation and they would get it. Again, I said, "Thanks very much," but I just never got around to it.

S: It wasn't that important to you?

B: No.

S: Upon entering the military, where were you sent for training?

B: I was sent from here to Keesler Field at Biloxi, Mississippi for basic training. I went from there to Texas Tech in Lubbock, Texas. That was for some interim college training until they moved us to the classification center at Santa Ana, California. At Santa Ana they put us through other training, processing, and testing. That's where they determined who would continue as a cadet and whether one would be a pilot, a navigator, or a bombardier.

That's where I happened to fall into a unique opportunity, which was quite different from most flight training personnel. I took advantage of it and enjoyed it tremendously. I got myself assigned to the Royal Air Force. Each month twenty Americans were selected from 10,000. Competition for these slots was very keen. I actually took my flight training with the RAF in this country. But the Royal Air Force, that's Great Britain's Royal Air Force, had four flight training schools in the United States. These schools were operated by RAF personnel. It was their curriculum, their books, and their personnel. The only American there, in terms of Army officers, was a liaison officer to handle payroll and things like that with the American cadets.

We knew that if we could get there, we would be trained with the British, finish with them, complete our flight training, and have our silver wings as any American pilot did. In addition, we'd have the RAF wings, which was most attractive. After all, the RAF was looked upon as the savior of mankind, having defended Britain against Hitler's assault. So, I did train with them for six and a half months. We also knew that we would then be reassigned to the Army Air Force. So, we'd come back with our own people. That was quite an experience.

S: Do you think that the training was any different or perhaps better since they had more experience?

B: That's a terrible thing to ask an American, but yes, I thought it was superior. The British, you have to realize, had been fighting the war before us and they had been doing some things that had to be right. In those airplanes, both the Hurricane and the Spitfire, with their Rolls Royce engines, they did a superb job in the Battle of Britain.

Their training also was a bit different. I had training with the Army Air Force in this country. One of the things the Army did was teach you to go out for several hours and just do "s" turns across the road

to learn coordination, or to fly a rectangular pattern so that you learned to coordinate your hands and feet, using the stick and the rudder in airplanes. The British took the position that, if you were flying and doing anything in the air, you could be doing something else, learning something else, and you'd be learning coordination at the same time. So, they didn't spend time in that manner.

They also didn't use any basic trainers. The Army used a primary trainer for a couple of months, then a basic, then an advanced trainer. The British moved right from the Stearman open biplanes directly into the AT-6, which was the Army's advanced trainer. In the Stearmans, which were the open biplanes used at that stage, while American cadets were doing "s" turns across the road, flying rectangles and things like that, we were doing night flying, hedge hopping, cross country, rat-racing, navigation, formation flying and you name it, all in those same open biplanes.

S: What is rat-racing?

B: Rat-racing is when you simulate chasing an enemy airplane in the sky. You're chasing one another and trying to catch up. You're trying to out-maneuver one another. And of course, you couldn't do that without learning some coordination too.

One of the most intriguing things in those biplanes was trying to land them at night at the air base, which had only one runway. So, you could only land going east or west, but with cross winds, that could be very difficult. At night, the only illumination you had was flare pots that set out alongside the runway to mark where it was. So, you had to guage your height by reference to those flare pots and you had to come in sometimes with a cross wind. With the wind coming from the side, you had a great deal of difficulty landing on that thing. As I said, that's the only runway there was! So, we'd often be slipping the airplane sideways into the wind as it was trying to blow us the other direction away from the runway. You would be slipping into it to try to maintain a constant position in line with the runway. You'd park the airplane, actually get out of it and feel the bottom part of the lower wing, which was only as high as your knee, because you felt certain that you must have scraped it, to see if you buggered it up. So, those were some rather interesting experiences at night.

S: Can you remember if there were many crack-ups?

B: Oh sure, sure there were a few. I would say that the number wasn't excessive, but we were always aware of what crack-ups there were and where they were. I remember one day when two big spires of black smoke came up from the desert, out some distance from the air base. And we knew what that meant. That meant that two airplanes had gone down there. It turned out that they were two B-24 Bombers that had had a mid-air collision and went down. That was one of the things that frightened us, because we knew that if you had a mid-air collision, chances are that you're not going to get out of it. And of course, they didn't either. There were other crack-ups around there, not too many at the air base. But when a guy does something he shouldn't do or forgets something he should do, he messes up--the airplane and himself.

S: How were you treated by the RAF personnel?

B: Great! Great! We ate with them, lived with them, and slept with them. It was their program. There were probably a hundred of them and twenty of us. We got along real well. We had a lot of fun. They were from all over the globe actually, because they included Austrailians, Canadians, Welsh, English, and others from elsewhere in the British Empire.

S: And then after training was over they went over to Europe?

B: They were reassigned. They went to do their thing and we did ours. It was because of that type of training that I was later assigned to the Ferry Command.

S: I was going to ask you about that. After having trained in single engine planes, how did you get transferred over to four engine jobs?

B: Well, we were assigned to the Ferry Command in Great Falls, Montana. From there, the idea was that we were going to be ferrying "P-shooters," which were fighter planes, up to Alaska to deliver them to the Russians. And we were to take training in all kinds so that we could fly any fighter there was. These would include the Aircobras, P-39's, all kinds of fighters, the Thunderbold, the Lightning, and everything. We were supposed to take training in all of those so that we could actually deliver them. We were to run a delivery service.

S: But they decided that before we did that we'd better take some instrument training. I don't know why,

because you don't do that much instrument flying in a fighter unless you get trapped in foul weather. But they sent us to Little Rock, Arkansas and that's where we took twin-engine training. That's where I got my multi-engine training, in instrument school. You learned to use two engines instead of one. You just needed two throttles, two this, and two everything. I got my instrument training there supposedly in preparation to go back to ferry P-shooters, but as it turned out, once you got that instrument training you were a ripe candidate for India and the Hump!

S: In other words, with the four engine plane, then you had four of everything?

B: Right, four throttles, four propeller pitch handles, four cowl gizmos to open and close the ventilators on the side of the engine and everything. Everything's four. You just grab four of them at once instead of one.

S: Can you remember the first time you flew a four engin plane? What was the feeling like? Was it any different than flying a single engine plane?

B: Sure, it's a great deal heavier. You have to realize that most of my time was spent with two engines, not four. But while I was in Great Falls, one of the things we did do was go out to Seattle and pick up a B-17 bomber, the one that was the Flying Fortress, to deliver it to Savannah, Georgia. And I found out in that airplane that they are just much heavier. They're much more sluggish. Obviously they get airborne just as easily, but they just are not as maneuverable. They react much more slowly.

S: If you would have had a choice, would you have rather stayed with the single engine planes?

B: I think actually, I'd prefer to do just what I did, multi-engine. Although it's a funny thing, at one point the recommendation was that I'd be excellent for fighter pilot, so of course, they put me in multi-engine on cargo.

S: It sounds like the Army (Laughter)

B: It sounds like the Army, right.

S: How did you get assigned to the C-B-I Theatre? Did you have a choice in that?

B; No. I really hoped to be operational someplace in the European Theatre, one reason being that I took French in high school and college and I'd hoped to be able to use a little of it. But the closest I got to that was going through Casablanca enroute to India. But no, I had no choice about it. I would not have picked India. I don't think anybody wanted to go there, because it was reputed to have the worst conditions in the world, as I'm sure you've already heard--weather-wise, very hazardous.

S: So, did you go over in 1943 or 1944?

B: I went there in September of 1944. I left Miami Beach, Florida and then came back, I think it was about May of 1945.

S: Describe your flight over there. What route did you take?

B: We went from Miami to Bermuda to the Azores to Casablanca, Tripoli, Cairo, Karachi, and then over to the other side of India. The part going across water was in a C-54, four-engine transport. And it was a long, long haul. The longest haul over water was twelve hours getting from Bermuda to the Azores.

S: From what I understand from someone else I interviewed, there's some kind of ritual that you go through when you cross the Equator over water. Do you remember that?

B: No.

S: Okay.

B: That's somebody else's story. (Laughter) Nothing happened.

S: What unit were you assigned to once you got to India?

B: The 1332nd Air Force Base Unit at Mohanbari, India, which was right over near Chabua. That was in the Upper Assam Valley. It was a base nestled pretty close to the foothills of the Himalaya Mountains. So, it was a pretty decent jumping-off point for going across those mountains.

S: Was this an all-American base?

B: Yes, it was.

S: Were there any type of fighter planes assigned there?

B: Yes there were. I didn't see that many of them and never thought of them that much, but there were P-47 Thunderbolts, and P-51 Mustangs. There weren't a great number of them there. For the most part the fighters operated out of other bases.

S: Describe the base. Can you remember what it looked like? What were the runways made out of?

B: The runways in India were made out of asphalt. A lot of the other strips might be concrete, or they might be rock, but for the most part the runways were, as I recall, asphalt. The roadways around there were also asphalt. Although one of the things you saw was Indian crews crushing rock because they used that for road base. The crushers would make a great racket. The housing was in bashas, which were made of bamboo-like material, thatch roof, or where I was quartered, tents. There would be a concrete slab and a large tent that would accomodate four men.

S: Describe the terrain around there.

B: Very flat. This was in the valley where the Brahmaputra River flowed. Generally, this valley was quite flat -- a lot of tea plantations; big, tall trees, some of them one hundred feet tall or more. That had a bearing on the flying later; that's why I mention it. The conditions were very, very primitive. We had an "eight holer" that we used for personal purposes. I can remember how great it was when we finally got some hot water in the shower. The shower was in another hut where they had a barrel mounted up high so they could get some gravity and some water flowing so that you could take a shower--always very cold. But with American ingenuity, our men had put together a means of putting a fire under the barrel and heating up the water. So, this was just like downtown--fantastic!

S: We'll get into your flying and the weather conditions as we go, but what was the climate like generally while you were there?

B: Hot, very, very humid. You have to realize I was there pretty much in the winter and spring, but even in that period of time it was hot and humid. You'd be perspiring most of the time.

S: Did you have a chance to go into any of the villages or towns?

B: Yes.

S: Describe the people, the culture. Were they friendly?

B: They were, I'd say, friendly to a minimal extent. In other words, they didn't go out of their way. They were courteous, let's say. You ran into the beggars always looking for handouts, but you'd find those more in the big cities like Karachi, where we had come through on the way there. But in the little village there, you weren't bothered too much. It was kind of a standoff. They put up with us and we put up with them. I don't think there was any great enthusiasm for our presence, but at the same time, the merchants were glad to have us there. They had Chinese restaurants in India, generally. They didn't amount to much, but the Chinese were glad to see us for our business. Aside from that you didn't have any feeling; we put up with one another, that was all.

Indians were very sad people. They were very poor. They had very little. It looked to me as if they had been substantially exploited over the years. And I know they look the same way right now, because very little has been done to upgrade the Indians. They don't get enough to eat and they're hungry. They have cattle roaming around eating what the natives might eat. The cattle are sacred, so they don't kill the cattle. It's just like a situation out of control, and it relates back to a religious hang-up that they have, as far as I could see. I think there's a lot of room for some missionaries there, because they are hungry and starving partly because of the conditions they live under. And these are related to their religious beliefs.

S: Were there signs of their religious culture? What type of temples?

B: I visited a temple. I don't remember too much about it, except that it had sort of a Mosaic tile floor and we had to take off our shoes before we went in there. But I don't recall anything. There were the Hindus and the Moslems. Some of them would worship certain gods. I remember the god or goddess that had six arms, three on each side. Maybe it was eight, I don't know, a multi-armed god. But I didn't really get that close to their religious beliefs. I did look at the temple though. I don't remember too much about it.

S: Was it a nice place to, say, sight-see? Would you like to go back just to sight-see?

B: No. It was terrible because the upper end of the Assam Valley was the end of everything as far as we were concerned. In other words, there just was nothing there worth seeing--very primitive. I mentioned flat terrain, but not too far away were jungles and jungle camps. There was always the realization of the possibility of tigers coming to visit you and things like that. These were around.

S: Oh, is that right?

B: Oh yes.

S: Were you warned about that?

B: It came out in conversations that the Americans had. But there was no question about it because I went to a hunting camp at one point for three days. It wasn't that far away, but I know while I was there I saw a tiger footprint, a fresh one, as big as my hand. And I've got a big hand. I also saw a tiger's head and skin that somebody brought in, in the back of a wagon. They had skinned the tiger and brought in the skin and head. From the tip of the tiger's nose to just the top of his head was the same as from the tip of my finger to my elbow. It was a massive head. I mean this baby was a big one! So, we were always aware of the possibility of the tigers and the snakes and things like that--cobra. It wasn't a very pleasant area.

S: Along that same line, what kind of briefing were you given before you went for your first flight over the Himalayas?

B: Sad to say, very, very little. They had a situation over there where the objective was to shoot as much cargo as they could over the Hump as fast as they could. And in many ways, they weren't that fussy about how they did it. So, for example, in most Air Force operations where you would be crewed up with others and fly with them regularly, the pattern at Mohanbari was they would have four lists. They had a list of airplanes. They had lists of pilots, of copilots, and of radio operators. The lists didn't match in numbers. So, they just pulled from the top of each of the four lists and they'd put these four together and they'd go out on a trip. So, you didn't even know one another. You might never fly with the other guy again. It didn't make for any possibility of good team work or anything like that. It was a harrowing arrangement, I thought.

As far as the actual instruction, I don't remember any. I can remember that we stopped at the briefing office and picked up maps on which we would find our courses and destinations and things like that. Then we'd meet the guy we were flying with and away we'd go. He'd tell me which handle I had to use to pull the gear up.

Every pilot over there was a copilot first. You'd be put with one of the older hands. He was the pilot and you were the copilot. That's the way you'd go. But he would tell you, so actually, there wasn't any formal training there. You'd go and have to know. You'd say to the pilot, "I suppose you want me to pull up the gear; what handle do I use?" That's how thorough it was. Pretty shaky.

S: I'm not sure I really understand. Do you mean in each different type of plane there was . . ?

B: No, we were only flying one type of airplane.

S: What was that?

B: C-46, the Curtiss Commando. That was the one we used for operations over there, but you'd be flying a different airplane every time. Each one had it's own characteristics in terms of things that tended to screw up on them, things that worked well and things that didn't, how the engines worked and all that, but they were all C-46s.

S: Throughout your career there, did you have confidence in those C-46s?

B: Yes, I did. I knew they were a very, very, tough airplane, because when the weather would really get severe, they would ground all the C-54s. The C-54s were big, four-engine transports. They were the kind of airplanes we went across the ocean in. When the weather got bad, they'd ground those. One reason was that there were stories about how the air currents, which were very, very violent over the Hump, would literally warp and twist the fuselage of the C-54. So, they couldn't take it, but ours could, fortunately, the C-46s. They were rugged as could be. They did, I found out later, have a fire hazard, but I didn't have any problems of that kind. They were a tough airplane.

S: Get into that fire hazard.

B: Well, the reason I mentioned the fire hazard is that you don't feel too badly if you know what to do in the event of an emergency. But a fire is an emergency that there's not a whole heck of a lot that you could do to really cure. The aircraft had a fire-extinguisher in each engine nacelle. So, if you got a fire in the engine, maybe some gasoline or oil caught fire, you could pull this gizmo and put--I think it was CO_2 [carbon dioxide] in there to put it out. But I do know of cases where you couldn't put it out and it didn't go out. It kept burning. When that happens, the wing falls off. When that one wing falls off, you're in an airplane which goes down. And it goes down end over end. We didn't wear our parachutes. They were in the back. Well, if you can imagine yourself in a tumbling room trying to walk back to the hallway, let's say, to pick up something--you can't do it. You're just completely out of control. So, fire was one of those things you couldn't get out of if you got into. That was one of the hazards. I mentioned that mid-air collision was the other one that you couldn't do much about.

S: Were you given any kind of briefing about what to expect if you did go down, as far as native populations go? Were you given a sidearm?

B: Yes. We had .45 automatics. And of course, in our parachute pack were certain items, including bullets. There were bullets there that were made to shoot small game, .45 caliber buck-shot cartridges. But we knew that the terrain was such that we'd have to depend on the natives to get out. If you got out at all, it would be only with the help of the natives.

The Air Force tried to curry favor with the natives by dropping them sacks of rice, sacks of salt, and things that were in short supply. The natives, depending on where you went down, could be Chinese, Burmese, or Tibetans. You didn't know. There also were, just beyond our air base on the first leg of the Hump, many tribes of headhunters. I know this to be a fact, because one of my buddies went down and he brought back pictures of them and of the fresh heads. So, this was no kidding! Because you couldn't get out, you couldn't go up and down these mountains and find your way out without their help. The boys used to say that the first thing you do is throw away your gun, as the natives would be more apt to help you if you weren't armed.

S: I understand that inside your jacket you had various languages saying that you were . . .

B: Yes. There was a map. I have one of those maps here, by the way. On that map was printed, in probably eight different languages, the fact that you were an American airman and that their help would be appreciated in getting you to the proper authorities. And you always hoped that the proper authorities to them would be the Americans and not the Japanese, because the Japanese were also in the area. And the question always came up of who was paying the most for us at the time.

S: Now, the C-46 was a two-engine plane?

B: Right.

S: Where did you fly that? What bases in China did you fly?

B: Okay, there were about eight or ten different bases in India that we used as points of departure and in China there were about eight different potential destinations. We never knew which one was going to be our destination at the time, but some of them were: Luliang, Myitkyina, Yunan Yi, Chanyi, Chungking, Kunming, and quite a number of others. You never knew till you got to the plane what you were going to haul or where you were going to take it.

S: What were some of the cargos you hauled?

B: The cargos that we hauled frequently were drums of gasoline. As a matter of fact, that was one of the potential hazards because, not only would we have barrels of gasoline aboard that represented our cargo, but also when we got to China they would drain out of our wing tanks all the excess fuel that they thought we could spare and still get back to India. So, inside the airplane we'd haul gasoline frequently, also bombs and rations and six-by-six trucks. They used to get a whole mess of coolies and a couple of fork lifts and they literally could load a ten-wheeled Army truck into that thing, intact. That was quite a job. We also hauled pipe-fittings, all kinds of things, whatever they needed.

If you got into trouble, it was always nice to have the smaller stuff, gasoline or bombs or anything like that, because if you got into trouble, you could dump it. You couldn't get rid of a six-by-six truck. A ten-wheeled Army truck you were stuck with!

S: Did you ever have to jettison some of your load that you can remember?

B: I don't recall ever dumping anything because I always hated to think of it. I knew I could do it, but I didn't like the thought of throwing something overboard that we were trying to deliver. I never had to.

S: You never flew with any type of fighter escort?

B: No.

S: Were you ever challenged at all by the Japanese fighters?

B: No.

S: Were they known to be around the area?

B: Yes, but there were a lot more Americans. On each and every one of our trips we'd go alone; one airplane and it's crew would go all alone. There were no formations, no support and nothing else.

S: Each plane would go one at a time?

B: Right. So, there were airplanes in all kinds of different positions coming and going all over that Hump. And every so often you'd see one of your fellow pilots someplace up there. You'd see those and you wouldn't see the Japs. You weren't sure where the Japs were. We were supposed to run at night, for example, without any lights. Most of the guys were of the opinion that the hazards were greater of running into one of our own airplanes than encountering a jap.

S: There were that many airplanes?

B: There were not that many, but all you had to do was contact one of them. So, we used to turn on the running lights, the red and green wing lights. We'd run with them on, in a low intensity position, feeling that if the Japs should jump us, we'd turn them off and then, hopefully, try to hide, or find a cloud, or go down low, or do something. But I was never jumped, nor do I know of anyone else that was while I was there. It did happen, but not when I was there.

S: Describe some of the Chinese airfields that you landed at. Were they of asphalt runways?

B: The Chinese runways where we landed, to the best of my knowledge, were all stone. I don't know how deep the base was, but they were about a mile long, some 5,000 feet. They were made of stone and these stones were all carried by individual Chinese in baskets, one

basket at a time to build the whole airport. The same Chinese, thousands of them, coolies, Chinese peasants, would pull huge rollers with long, long ropes to smooth those runways. And that's the way they operated, all with only manpower.

S: That must have been an impressive sight.

B: It really was. You couldn't help but be impressed with the work they put into building those things. And yet they were quite adequate. You'd hear some stones flying, but they worked all right, no problem.

S: Were you always sent back the same day or did you have to lay over sometimes?

B: There was only one time we were required to lay over. That was when the weather was so bad that we shouldn't have been out in the first place. We were really looking forward to going back to India that night, because we'd go back empty. They told us, "No, I'm sorry, you can't go back." We asked, "Why?" They said, "The weather is too bad." And we thought to ourselves, "Yes, you let us come over loaded, but you won't let us go back empty." Without a cargo, we could have flown much higher and we wouldn't have been in danger. But that was the only time we stayed overnight, otherwise it was round trip, same day.

S: What were some of the safety features that were provided for Hump pilots that maybe pilots in Europe weren't given? Were you given any oxygen?

B: Yes, and we had to have oxygen because you start getting "fogbound" like intoxication, above 10,000 feet. And at about 15,000 to 18,000 feet, you're not going to be coherent at all unless you're on oxygen. Of course, the cabins were not pressurized, so the only thing we had to keep us going was the oxygen.

S: How about the cold?

B: Very cold. I forget how many degrees below zero, but it was bitter cold. When I first got there, there was no heat in the airplanes part of the time. The heaters wouldn't work. I can remember, when I first got there, they had no flight boots my size. I was so cold I can remember beating my feet against the floor of the cabin to keep the circulation going, trying to keep them from freezing. It was very cold.

S: Was ice a problem on the planes themselves?

B: Probably the biggest problem we had.

S: Okay, let's get into some of your experiences in flying the Hump.

B: The objective was to move as much cargo as you could, obviously, from India into China, to support the Chinese troops and to support our operations over there. We saw B-29 Bombers and P-40 Fighters. These were the ones that we were supplying to keep them going because by then the Japanese had cut off every route by which supplies could be brought to these people in China, except over the Hump. So, either we took it or it didn't get there. There was a lot of pressure to move cargo in.

One of the biggest problems we had was the Himalayan Mountain Range which is well known as being the worst area in the world as far as aerial flight conditions were concerned. I'm sure nowadays it wouldn't be a problem because airplanes fly normally and routinely at 35,000 to 40,000 feet.

S: What were you flying at, at that time?

B: With a lot of effort and an empty airplane, I could get, at one time, up to 26,000 feet. But with thunderheads that went to 35,000, we could not get up above them. We had to go right through them. So, in these thunderheads and in storms, which were very, very frequent, you'd run into all kinds of buffeting and ice formation. You'd be bouyed up at maybe 1,500 feet a minute, when you have your power cut way back. You'd go down at the same rate. Fifteen thousand to 2,000 feet a minute you'd be dropping, even when you had full power on, because you'd be in a vertical air down-current. You'd be going either up or down. This is the character of the weather and wind currents inside a thunderstorm. You'd have some air currents going up at that rate and when you're sitting in them and flying in them, you go up and the same rate. And right next to those is the down side of the same current. And you'd fly right from the up to the down and it really just throws you all over hell.

And the buffeting and ice! A thunderhead, as anybody knows, is full of rain and when it gets high enough, it gets cool enough that it changes to snow. Well, it drenches the airplane with water and then that same water freezes. Then you have ice and there was no way to get rid of it. Airplanes did have deicer boots at that time on the wings. This is a boot on the leading edge of the wing, where the ice forms. They would

have alternating tubing, where one tube would open up; it would blow-up, inflate, and knock the ice off. And then it would deflate and the next one would blow-up. That's how they would get rid of the ice.

Where I was, they had none of these. I couldn't understand why. I asked the mechanics, "Why? The airplanes were built with them. Why don't we have any deicer boots?" Because this was the cause of loss of more airplanes than any other single cause. He said, "Well, they're too hard to repair and we can't get replacements." I asked, "How about on a brand new airplane?" He said, "Well, when we take them off, you can carry 300 more pounds, too." So, even on a brand new airplane, the deicer boots were taken off the wings and you flew without them.

Of course, when the ice builds up on the leading edge of the wing, it does two things. It ads to your weight; it puts your weight way above maximum and above what you can carry. At the same time, it destroys the smooth air flow over the wings from which you get your lift. So, it increases the load and it reduces the lift. It was a very bad hazard.

S: How much ice would form?

B: Ice, three or four inches thick on the leading edge and up over the top of the wing and, of course, on the fuselage. It was a little hard to measure. I'm just estimating. But I know it would be so heavy that there was no way you could climb that airplane higher. It would drag the airplane down lower. We'd know, going to China with a load, for instance, that the highest height of a mountain in that area might be let's say, 13,000 feet. We didn't know where the highest point was because we were in clouds. We can't see them. So, we were flying on instruments in clouds, loaded up with ice and not knowing where the mountain tops were.

I've been, on one occasion, 1,500 feet below the tops and unable to climb. You know, from your altimeter, your altitude. Say at 11,500 feet you're loaded with ice and you can't get up any higher and you're using all the power you can reasonably use, and you're not sure where the mountains are-- that's bad! Those were the conditions that I was mentioning that we were in when we went over there the time they wouldn't let us come back. But in a 48 hour period, they kept right on sending airplanes out. They never stopped their flights. And they lost 13 percent of everything

that went out in that 48 hour period. It was horrendous. There was no enemy activity, nothing but ice.

S: It sounds to me--and maybe you can comment on this--and maybe the pilots felt this way, that they were more concerned about the supplies than they were pilot safety.

B: Well, this is very true, but even if they were intelligently concerned about the supplies, they would have gotten more supplies over if they had not flown in conditions like that because they lost too many airplanes and pilots. You can't haul cargo with non-existent aircraft. So, we felt that it was very, very stupid and bad judgement. We were under the impression that somebody was trying to make a record for tonnage hauled that month. But it was very, very imprudent, and standard procedure over there always.

The only way they got weather reports was from some pilot out in it. There were no weather stations out there. They, hopefully, had radio contact with the pilot that was out in the worst of the weather. When conditions were bad, and they weren't so sure that they should be flying, they'd send out what they called a "weather ship." That sounds like a ship to go out and simply check out what the weather is. Actually it wasn't. It was a fully-loaded airplane going out, trying to make it, and calling them back telling them what conditions were like.

But there were times more than once when you'd be in a whole range of thunderheads. I too am impressed at lightning and thunder when you see some very vicious thunderstorms with torrential downpours. But you ought to try sitting right in them! And I've sat in them for an hour to an hour and a half, right straight through, where you're going from one to the other, and where you never come out of it, where there's a whole range of these thunderheads. You couldn't climb up and you didn't like to throw out your cargo.

As a matter of fact, that time I was telling you about when I was too low, we had a ten-wheeled truck at that time. There's no way we could throw it out. The only thing you could do is bail out. And you didn't like to do that, just abandon the airplane and the cargo because of what <u>might</u> happen. So, you'd fly blind and hope it doesn't. Obviously it didn't.

S: What were some of the most harrowing experiences that personally happened to you?

B: Well, that was one of them where the losses were very high. There was a second one where I lost both engines.

S: You lost both engines on a two-engine plane?

B: You got it. (Laughter) I knew that was a possibility. There was a hazard that day. As often happened, I was the first pilot and I had a new copilot. I asked him to watch the gauges and the indicators. The instruments will tell you that that might be developing. Carburetor ice was the problem I'm referring to. But I was watching them too because I wasn't all that sure I could rely on him.

Anyhow, we did not want to use carburetor heat. That's the heat that you use to heat the air and gasoline going into the carburetor. If we used carburetor heat, we'd lose power. And we were probably going to need all the power we could get to haul the cargo and the ice that we were going to expect later.

So, we were going up on instruments, still in the Assam Valley. That's one nice key to it. We knew that we were still over the valley. But we were in the clouds and climbing, fully loaded, with cargo. I spotted the gauges indicating that the fuel flow was declining and that meant that there was a possibility of carburetor ice developing. So, I immediately threw full heat to both engines at which time they both quit. It was very quiet.

An airplane can glide even without any power, like the Columbia, the spaceshuttle that has just flown. It doesn't matter how heavy it is, you can still glide it. The angle of glide might be considerably different.

We were gliding the airplane and trying to get the engines restarted. We were trying to figure out mentally, where we would be, approximately, so that we could call in and report our approximate location and what the problem was. We tried to calculate a heading that we could pick where we wouldn't run into airplanes following us out or coming out into that area from another base. We were probably at about 15,000 feet at the time, still going down, of course.

While that was going on--we did that figuring quicker than I can tell you about it--we has the radio operator report our position and what was happening. We reported that we were in an emergency situation. We worked on trying to get the engines started again. Well, the heat apparently was enough to melt the ice on one of them and we did get one engine going again.

We knew that we were over the valley so we weren't in proximity with the mountains. No immediate problem from that standpoint. So, we continued to go down to 10,000 feet and leveled off there operating on one engine then. But there was another nice break, because in the back were pipe fittings, sacks of pipe fittings that could have been thrown out. But we never had to do that. That airplane was able to maintain an altitude of 10,000 feet on one engine, fully loaded.

We could sit there and try to get the other one going. Well, that didn't work. So, we came back. We were still not that far from home base. So, we headed back for the home base with one engine. It's still easier to land an airplane with two because it's pulling so much on one side and dragging on the other if you only have one engine. So, we came back down to around 2,000 feet and tried again to restart the second engine, coming back to base, and no luck. Meantime, the clouds were socking in and the last thing I was really interested in was making an instrument let-down under primitive conditions with only one engine. So, I finally thought, "The heck with this." We'll put this down with one engine." And that's what we did. That was one experience, but really no problem. It all worked out just fine.

The other one that was harrowing was based on what I thought was stinking judgment all the way through. I was a copilot at that time and I was assigned to go with a pilot. The regulations at night were that, because of the darkness and other hazards that are increased at night, you were to use oxygen from the ground up. In the daytime you didn't use oxygen until you were above 10,000 feet. But we took off and this pilot, "my leader," was headed out passing through the 10,000 foot level and still didn't have oxygen on, contrary to regulations. I knew that at some point he would get less sharp mentally. I was not getting any thrill out of driving this beast anymore, but I asked him if he'd like me to handle it while he put his mask on. He said, "Well, I'll do that pretty soon." So, he went on up probably 12,000 to 13,000 and finally put his mask on.

Meantime, I had already had my first taste of his stupidity. He said to me before we left the base, "Well, boy, we'll just about get this trip in and we'll get back before the fog sets in." Well, we were going to get back to our base at 5:00 a.m. Every night the fog set in by 3:00 a.m. So, I knew that he didn't know what the weather conditions were. I did because I had volunteered to pull extra duty as an operations officer two days a week. I knew that the fog swept in so badly that you couldn't see across the runway, let alone down the length of it. This fog would drift in and out and you wouldn't know whether you were going to be able to see to land or not. So, I knew that was a mistake.

And that happened to every base in the valley almost every night at that time of year. You just could not get landed until nine o'clock in the morning. These poor devils would be hanging up there with not much gasoline and trying to keep it as slow as they could and still keep it hung up there waiting for the fog to clear.

Anyhow, we were heading for China and word came back that China was closed. Our job was to deliver cargo to China. I knew that India was probably going to sock in with fog. The radio told us that all China was closed and that there was only one airport enroute that was still open. So, China was already closed and India was probably going to close and the only other alternative was looking bad as we went over it. That was Myitkyina, Burma. I asked this pilot if he was going to go into Myitkyina and he said, "No, we might as well keep on going and get some going-home time in." Well, as far as I was concerned, that was ridiculous because if you couldn't deliver the cargo, why hang up there just to get some air time in? But we went towards China with all China still closed.

Finally they ordered us back. Now, it wasn't "pilot's choice" anymore. The radio told us that all flights were off and to come back. So, we headed back, and once again we flew over this one alternative that was open in Myitkyina, Burma. By then the clouds were socking in even worse. So, the only alternative, as far as I could see, was closing. I asked him again to see if he was going to go into Myitkyina. He said, "No, we'll get some more time. We'll go back to the valley and see if we can get in there and then we'll come back here." That left only one open airport in the whole cotton-picking valley out of twenty-two, if our home base was socked-in with fog as it usually was. So, he elected to fly back to the home base once

again. We got back to the home base and, sure enough, every airport in India within reach was closed with fog except ours. So, every airplane in the air had come into our base.

We were lucky. We came down and we had a break because we could see the runway from one end to the other. This clown, "my pilot," when he could see the runway from one end to the other, should have set that baby down the first time. But now, "my leader," had his oxygen mask on way below the needed elevation. As a matter of fact, he landed with it still on! He couldn't communicate with me nor I with him, properly.

Well, I had noticed in crack-ups there, that the airplane always had the landing gear torn out and the whole front of the airplane was shorn away, from the wing forward. There usually wasn't a piece bigger than a dinner plate anyplace. I always wondered if it was because the landing gear would trip up the thing and tip it up on it's nose and shear the nose off. So, if we ever got in trouble, I wanted to pull the landing gear up so it would slide on its belly.

Now, there I was with my leader having landed it with airplanes parked alongside the runway. And he was not on the runway! He was straddling the runway lights on the left hand side in close proximity to these parked airplanes. And still with his oxygen mask on, which he doesn't need! He reached for the throttles and I didn't know whether he was going to go around again and take another shot at it, or if he was just using power to straighten out the airplane, which was obviously screwed up on it's landing. So, I yelled at him, "Do you want me to pull the gear up?" If he was going to take off again, I didn't want to pull the wheels out from under him. But he couldn't hear me. So, there he was charging down the runway! And finally, wrestling with his oxygen mask, which should have been off by now, he said, "Oh yes, yes, get the gear up." So, we were lucky. We went back up and we came back down." This time he does get it on the ground."

Thirty minutes later we were in the mess hall about five o'clock in the morning. And we could hear other airplanes having the same problems we did, except the fog was back in. We got a break. But in the mess hall we heard a strange sound like the snapping of wood, or I didn't know what. It was related to an airplane that was droning on out there some place

in the darkness down by the runway. Then we could hear the engines of this airplane coming, coming and coming closer and closer. We couldn't see them because of the fog. It was coming towards us! Needless to say, we didn't want to be in the mess hall when it hit it, so we all ran outside. And we could hear it but not see it! Finally, when it got overhead, we could see it. Both engines were still going because there were flames coming out of the exhaust stacks, which is proper and normal. But the engines would be going, and then they'd stop, and they'd be going and then they'd stop. But something seemed to be wrong. We always wondered if he hit a tall tree or something and might have hurt himself. But that thing went to the tea plantation and cracked-up about 500 feet away with this huge orange explosion. We looked at it and said, "Boy, the same condition we just got in under."

The pilot I was flying with was the worst I ever saw. So, it kind of makes you wonder. When you have an aborted trip at night like that, you can always ask them to call you first thing in the morning for a day trip, which everybody wanted. He told me that he was going to have them call him about eight o'clock in the morning and asked if I would like to go. I said, "Oh, I'm getting kind of tired, I don't think so. I've had enough." And he's the only guy I would have asked, "Please, no," if they ever tried to team me up with him again. He was a bad one.

S: You don't remember his name at all?

B: No. They made a check pilot out of him later though. And then one night, when I was on Operations Duty, I had to decide, when he reeked of alcohol, whether I'd let him go out or ground him. It so happened that they had a beautiful night, no weather problems. I let him go out and he was all right.

S: How long would one of these trips to China and back take?

B: Anywhere from five to twelve hours depending on how far you went. The shortest trip was only about two and a half hours away, so that would ba about a five hour round trip.

That was a place we were going one night, Yunan Yi, the nearest destination. The weather was fairly decent, should be no problem. We used radio beacons at the destination airport and we'd home in on those with radio equipment. But the Japs used to have the habit

of dropping battery-operated radio transmitters into the mountains transmitting on the same frequency as ours, hoping that we'd home in on the wrong mountain. That night we did get lost. We were homming in on it and we had every reason to think things were okay. But we did get lost and we were up for five hours on that two and a half hour trip, floundering around and not knowing where the devil we were.

We also had a hydraulic problem. I had to go down into the belly of the airplane and disconnect the hydraulic system. I ran out of oxygen while down there at about 15,000 feet. I did get back up. We called in for an emergency bearing and our people gave us one. They told us that if we'd fly a heading of 120 degrees, we'd be all right. But the pilot didn't believe it. This was a good pilot. So, he was trying every frequency that he knew. Finally, he picked up one loud and clear signal and he got us to a base. Had we followed the emergency bearing that they gave us, it would have taken us right into Jap-occupied, China. I'm sure it was just the air, crazy conditions over a long, long distance.

S: Did you ever know of anybody that went down?

B: Oh yes, this friend of mine. When I was on Operations Duty, checking flights by radio, we'd know who had landed and who hadn't, who was due and overdue. This one good friend of mine, who had trained with the British the same as I did, and at the same place, came up missing. He was a very dedicated guy, and that was one of the things that concerned me. I was afraid that maybe he had gotten into trouble and refused to bail out and leave the airplane. But he turned up missing. Two days later they found the airplane wreckage, but no crew. About three days later, they found the crew. They were in or near a village over in the mountains there. Once they located my friends, they dropped walkie-talkies to them and got in touch with them. This pilot-friend of mine asked them to drop him his camera and supplies and so forth.

He's the guy we found out later had landed in headhunter country, right after a fresh headhunter war. It was no mistake because one of the first things the crew members saw was row on row of wooden pikes with fresh heads on them. Before you leave, I'll show you a picture of those because he brought pictures back. These were headhunters.

It so happened that the peace emissary of the hills was to go from tribe to tribe relaying messages, as

any diplomat would. He would have diplomatic immunity. Well, the natives in one of the headhunter tribes over there had taken issue with this emissary and killed him. So, all the other tribes ganged up on the bad tribe; they waged war; and they had killed 650 out of 1,000 in that village.

That's the village area where this friend of mine had landed. The first thing he saw was row on row of fresh heads! Not too reassuring. But they did help him out. He had to walk for twenty-one days just to get somewhere where we could pick him up. The terrain was that bad.

One problem developed during that time: the Air Force had dropped these sacks, sometimes with parachutes and sometimes free-fall,-sacks of rice and salt and things the natives wanted. One of them hit a headhunter's child and killed him while the natives were helping our boys out. That made them a little nervous that night, but they were helped out by the headhunters.

S: Did you ever have any experience with a red ball alert?

B: No. I don't even know what a red ball alert is. It sounds to me like an emergency, enemy attack or something like that.

S: Right.

B: No.

S: Were you able to get close to anyone over there? You said that often you would not fly with the same personnel ever again.

B: Yes. The normal method of operation was that you'd be assigned to your other crew members at the time of the flight. You did not know who they were or anything about them, unless just through coincidence. Well, I didn't like that. I felt that it would be well worth my while to pull extra duty, to work extra, overtime, in order to be teamed up with somebody that I could work with regularly. That's what I did.

First of all, I was a Briefing Officer, which meant I worked two extra days a week in addition to my pilot's duty in the briefing office giving out maps and telling people about routes and things like that when they'd go out. My partner was the Operations Officer. So, he and I would be put together as a team. Later on I was the Operations Officer working with another guy in briefing.

There was one guy, a fine, fine pilot that I flew with a lot, Jimmy Heyroth, from someplace in Texas. I haven't seen him since, but he was very good. And I enjoyed flying with him, because I felt that together we made a pretty darn good team. We'd known one another and our limitations and so forth. So, we worked well together. I flew with him at any time I could.

S: Tell us any experiences you might have had with the jet streams. I understand that sometimes you would arrive a little sooner than they expected.

B: First of all, I'm not sure we were that high because we couldn't normally get over around 16,000 to 18,000 feet when loaded. But if you're talking about high winds, I do know that at one time going to China, I logged and verified a wind; it happened to be a tail wind, helping us along actually, of 150 miles an hour. And it checked out. You could check it at each check point. It was 150 miles an hour. That wasn't bad, but coming back into the teeth of that 150 miles an hour, we would be flying perhaps a 170 air speed into a 150 mile an hour wind. So, we progressed over the ground at approximately 20 miles an hour.

They had drained all the excess fuel they could out of our tanks. That was not too reassuring. Coming back I know I did check it. It had dropped to 100 miles an hour. I flew the first leg of that trip and I thought, "The heck with this noise; we'll never make it over the main back of the Hump." So, I landed and I said, "I've got to have more gasoline, or I'm not going anywhere."

S: How much did you know or were you told about the conflict between Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Tse-tung? I understand that we found out later that Chiang Kai-shek was more or less hoarding a lot of the material you fellows were transporting over there to use against Mao after the war was over, and that he wasn't using this material against the Japanese at all.

B: None of that was known at the time. To the best of our knowledge, at that time, it was being used to fight the Japanese. In retrospect, you wonder about a lot of things. You wonder for instance, about how much did we accomplish when we were trying to support democracy in China through Chiang Kai-shek because ultimately, after we left, so did Chiang, and Mao took over. And so one asks, "What was all this about? What was it for?"

It strikes me about the same as a conquering country that takes over a people and their land. They take over an entire nation and later on the conquerors are absorbed through inter-marriage and so forth into the conquered country and you can't tell one from the other after a while. So, things change and things that seemed very important at the time, in retrospect, may not have mattered all that much.

But we still were most convinced that we were doing what had to be done. The Germans, Italians, and the Japanese had attacked our country. It's just like a burglar threatening your home. You don't think any thing about fighting. You're going to fight. Even if you die, you're going to fight.

S: So, there wasn't like a frustration on the part of you pilots that you couldn't see your enemy?

B: No, we felt that we were doing what had to be done. We were contributing our bit. At times we would see the enemy or we would know that he was there. For instance, flying at night over a certain base in Burma, I could see the flack coming up. It was being fired at Japanese that were then attacking our own base. So, I knew where the action was. I was just fortunate not to get that close to it.

S: Was there ever any feeling that you were really the back door of the war and because of that you were at the tail end of the cow, so to speak, as far as supplies went and new equipment?

B: As far as what equipment we were furnished with?

S: Right.

B: Yes. We knew, for instance, we got what was left in terms of the engines for our airplanes. If it was a new airplane, it had new engines. But anytime there was a rebuilt engine, we knew that what we got was one that had been worn out in a P-47 Thunderbolt Fighter. It used the same engine. So, they'd take them off the fighters when they were worn out, rebuild them, and then put them on our airplanes. We knew that we were getting the tail end of it.

But there were other things, too, that were inappropriate. One of them I mentioned before was the deicing boots that had been taken off because they couldn't repair them. And I'll tell you, I was really irritated too, to hear about the rubber workers striking

who should have been building tires, because some of the airplanes over there had tires that were not safe. I remember one of the airplanes, a P-47 Fighter, in China, had five hundred pound bombs under its wing. It had poor tires and in take-off the tire blew, and so did the bomb. That was the end of that one. So, it made us furious to think some cluck back in the States wasn't building tires because he was fighting for this or that or more wages or some damn thing. There was more than that at stake at the time.

S: How many missions did you personally fly over the Hump?

B: Ninety round trips. My objective was to get all the flying in as fast as I could, do what I had to and get done. I've always felt that way when there's dirty work ahead or something that I don't like. I'd rather get it done and be over with it. So, I was flying, it turned out, too much, a hundred hours a month of actual air time, which is very, very heavy. I was entitled to a rest leave midway, but I thought I felt all right so I postponed it. I postponed it again and again and finally flew the whole 650 hours which was required. That was ninety round trips over the Hump, not counting the aborted trips where you didn't make delivery. There were two or three of those.

S: So, the rotation basis was based on ninety flights?

B: Six hundred and fifty hours. There would be fewer flights if they were longer. It was a mix.

S: You alluded to the fact that you felt okay?

B: Yes. The reason is that I thought I was all right, but I can tell you that as time went on, obviously my skills should have increased because I had been doing it right along and I was able to handle emergencies without any problems. But my apprehension was also increasing. I was getting more anxious to get home and I was just more and more nervous about whether or not I'd make it. There was no real good reason for that. I found out when I was coming back the name of that malady, if you can call it that, is combat fatigue. I needed that rest, but I didn't recognize it. I didn't know what it was. So, I kept driving myself and that's why I did drive the whole thing, even including the two extra days a week, every week, without any breaks for a little over six months. I just wanted to get my licks in, do my duty, do my thing, and get back and get out of there.

S: Okay, one of the last questions I want to ask you is what route did you take to get home?

B: Okay, coming home it was very similar to going over. We came across North Africa. But coming back we came through Newfoundland instead of going via the southern route. I believe, as I recall, we went over via the Azores. From Newfoundland we came to New York and Newark, that area, via the northern route.

S: Do you think that the pilots that flew over the Hump were maybe the finest pilots during World War II? Obviously you're prejudiced in that respect, but from what I understand, you had more to contend with than the pilots in Europe.

B: I'd have to put it this way: First of all, I don't think you can make a valid comparison of cargo pilots versus combat pilots. I have to believe that those that lived in India and flew the Hump had to be better because if they weren't, they wouldn't make it. There was no question they had to contend with some of the worst weather and some of the worst conditions in the world. As for navigation, they did not have the equipment, and they had no navigators.

S: Was it more flying by the seat of your pants?

B: Oh, much more so. The only way we had to find an airport was a radio signal being sent out from the station there. We'd home in on that if we could, and then, make the descent to find that airport and hope to be lined up with the runway. The only way we could do that was to home in on that radio signal that was being sent out from the control tower. We'd have to fly across the runway at right angles to it. Then we'd have to use instruments many times. We'd be flying where we could not see due to clouds or fog. We'd make precision turns and fly a precision rectangle. We flew the whole rectangle in maybe five or six minutes, with precise turns, precise distances and times. Then we'd start to descend and hope to hell that that runway was lined up in front of us. When you hadn't been able to see to confirm position for six minutes of flying, at 160 miles an hour or even 140, you could go way off very fast. So, you had to be very precise.

In terms of the equipment and the methods, we didn't have anything better than that. And that was terrible. We used to do it with 300 foot ceilings. That means clouds within 300 feet of the ground. And then there were 100 foot trees. So that left 200

feet to work in and that's not enough. I used to see guys break out of the bottom of the clouds and rack the airplane up on its side and try to whip it over and snake it into position where it was lined up with the runway. This was sometimes possible and sometimes not. They'd have to be good to live. I don't think you can make a comparison between cargo pilots and bomber pilots or fighter pilots. So, hold the football game, I don't really know. Of course, the fighters didn't fight weather.

S: Okay. Anything you'd like to add?

B: I can't think of a thing, Jeff, except that I'm still impressed at your even having an interest in this sort of thing because to me it seems like ancient history. I can remember I wasn't too interested in hearing stories of the guys in World War I, who were telling about it fifty years later. And here we are doing exactly the same thing forty years later.

S: Well, nobody can tell us what it was like better than you can because you were there.

B: Not too well.

S: That's why we do it.

B: And most of the time nobody cares.

S: I wouldn't say that.

B: I thank you, Jeff.

END OF INTERVIEW