

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU Veterans Project

China-Burma-India Theatre

O. H. 148

ROBERT E. FROOM

Interviewed

by

Jeffrey Scott Suchanek

on

May 8, 1981

ROBERT E. FROM

Robert E. Froom was born in Youngstown, Ohio in 1921. The son of the man who invented America's first pinball machine, Robert has lived parts of his life in Toronto, Canada, Grove City, Pennsylvania, and Columbus, Ohio. While attending Ohio State University, he joined E Troop of the 107th Cavalry Unit of the Ohio National Guard. Mr. Froom then enlisted in the Army in 1940 during the institution of the draft, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and he transferred to the Air Corps where he was trained as a pilot. After completing his cadet training and earning his Wings, Bob was assigned to the Ferrying Command which was assigned the responsibility of transporting new aircraft to different parts of the world for the war effort. Due to the scarcity of pilots, he was eventually assigned to the China-Burma-India Theatre where he participated in "Flying the Hump" or Himalayas as the Allies attempted to support China's war effort against the Japanese during World War II. Robert experienced the many hazards of "Flying the Hump" and as a result won many decorations for his service. He is honorably retired as a Lt. Colonel from the Air Force.

Robert and his wife, Ruth, are the parents of three married daughters, Heidi, Bonnie and Holly. Bob is President of an Employee Benefit Plans Consulting firm - Robert E. Froom and Associates, Inc., and is a member of New England Life's Million Dollar Round Table.

Jeffrey Scott Suchanek

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INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT E. FROMM
INTERVIEWER: Jeffrey Scott Suchanek
SUBJECT: China-Burma-India Theatre
DATE: May 8, 1981

S: This is an interview with Robert E. Fromm for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on China-Burma-India Theatre, World War II Veterans Project by Jeffrey Scott Suchanek. This interview is being conducted at Mr. Fromm's place of business at 5700 Market Street in Youngstown, Ohio on May 8, 1981 at approximately 4:00 p.m.

Okay Mr. Fromm, let's begin with a little bit about your background, when and where you were born. Tell us something about your family as you were growing up, what your father did.

F: Well, I was very proud of my parentage and my family background. My father invented the first pinball machine that was ever made right here in Youngstown, Ohio, made quite a name for himself and made and lost a lot of money in the early 1930's when the Depression days were on. When people were hard up for money, hard up for food and he seemed to hit it pretty well at those times.

As I say, I was born in Youngstown and primarily raised here, but I did live in Toronto, Canada. I have moved to Grove City, Pennsylvania and Pittsburgh, back to Youngstown and finally wound up, in 1936, living in Columbus, Ohio. And, in Columbus, Ohio, I went to finish up my high school training at Columbus East. I graduated from Columbus East and then I matriculated into Ohio State University. I started off to be a civil engineer. That's what I had in mind. I thought maybe

I would build bridges and dams and roads and tall buildings and that sort of thing. It just didn't work out that way.

When I was eighteen years of age I joined a horse cavalry outfit. I guess that's a start in my military career. I also was in the Cadet Corps at Ohio State University when I was there. But I joined the 107th Horse Cavalry outfit in Columbus, Ohio in January of 1939.

S: What were your reasons for joining?

F: Fairly social I would say. They paid us a dollar for each training session as a buck private. And that helped in those days. A dollar was a lot of money, but we would meet on Sunday mornings and have about an hour, an hour and a half drill period. And then the social part came because, after going through the National Guard military training for an hour or an hour and a half on Sundays, we could have our friends come in and we'd saddle up our horses and we'd go for some real nice rides maybe the rest of Sunday, Sunday afternoon, that sort of thing. We didn't have to pay for the horses. We all had our own horse and that was a social thing. It was quite an honor to be a member of what they called the Governor's Troop. That was E Troop of the 107th Cavalry of Columbus, Ohio.

S: Now, you grew up during the Depression. What can you remember? What stands out in your mind about the Depression?

F: Well, I think the biggest thing that stood out was my father's going from a job where he owed money, a job of about \$125 a month, leaving that job for a crazy idea that he invented. And within a year's time, at least on the books, they tell me, he was worth over a million dollars because it was like striking oil. He invented the pinball machine. He did not operate them. He only operated the first ten and then they sold those, but they built them. And within a year's time he had a factory here in the United States that turned out over 27,000 games the first year.

S: Wow!

F: And then they had a factory up in Toronto, Canada which turned out a large number and wound up with offices in London, England and Paris, France and offices in the

United States here in Chicago and the West Coast, St. Louis. So, it was a time and a memory that was great and something that, just by chance, I happen to be the son of the man that invented the pinball machine.

In fact, Howard Aley, in his book that he wrote for the Bicentennial, he gives my father credit for that. My father did fight patent cases for seven years in courts, and finally in the Federal Courts in Chicago all 22 of his patents were thrown out and they were called mechanical improvements. By that time Dad had spent his money trying to protect the patents that he had. . . So, that was pretty much my background. It was sort of a feast to a famine to a feast to a famine type of life.

S: How did your dad react to having all the money and then having to fight these court battles and then losing it?

F: He was extremely discouraged, and disappointed and disillusioned, I would say, as many people are today with our court system. Because as you probably know, you cannot force your way into the Supreme Court. They won over a thousand local cases in all the States of the Union and worked their way up, never lost a single case until they came to the Appeals Court, Federal Appeals Court in Chicago with two federal judges sitting on the bench. And of course, my father always said they were only in court ten minutes when these judges reversed the decisions of all the lower courts. And at that time there was about \$40,000,000 worth of games built. That was in 1937. And \$40,000,000 worth of games manufactured, they were looking for 5% royalties, which would have given them about two million dollars a year of income, but within ten minutes time you go from everything to nothing. It's very discouraging.

S: You mentioned that you were in a horse cavalry troop. Was that sort of the forerunner of maybe the ROTC program?

F: No, it had nothing to do with the ROTC. As a matter of fact, it was part of the Ohio National Guard. And the 107th Horse Cavalry and, I forget the number of the cavalry in the State of Kentucky, made up the 54th Cavalry Brigade. It had quite a long history. The cavalry has been around a long time. And this was the dying age of the horse cavalry and I happened to have the fun and experience of spending almost three years with the cavalry. I joined them on January 9, 1939. We were able to go to summer camp at Fort Knox in 1939 and in 1940 we went to the summer camp for three weeks up in

Wisconsin. And I was in one of the last of the large brigade parades. There were somewhere around 1100 head of horses that passed in review before Governor Bricker, who was Governor of the State of Ohio at that time and the Governor, whoever he was, from the State of Kentucky. They watched their two state National Guards pass in review up in Wisconsin.

And I had the privilege of riding a horse in the machine gun platoon of the horse cavalry and drag a pack animal carrying a machine gun pack on its back past review.

S: How did you get into the regular Army then?

F: I was a student at Ohio State University in 1941 and I had the chance to go into the service for one year. We had the option. As a student at Ohio State I could either go with the cavalry outfit that I was already with or I had the option of staying in civil engineering at Ohio State University. And at that time, I was also in the Cadet Program, the Officer's Training Corps at Ohio State University. I was in both groups and I had the choice of either going with the Horse Cavalry, which were all my friends and I knew all the officers and all of my buddies, or I could have stayed home and finished up my work at Ohio State, which of course, never came about. The Japanese changed our whole idea on December 7, 1941 at Pearl Harbor.

During 1941 we went down to Tullahoma, Tennessee. We were on maneuvers there with our horses. Then we moved on into the Louisiana maneuvers and then back into Tennessee and then down into the Carolina maneuvers. And between, March of 1941 and December of 1941 we spent a good part of the time with the sky as our roof over our head, sleeping with our horses and under the stars at night. And it was a great experience.

But, in all the maneuvers we got beat at every turn. Patton's Armies chased us out of the woods of Carolina's and the Air Force, such as it was, dropped sacks of flour on us in the Louisiana maneuvers and we couldn't keep up with the infantry, which was something new. The infantry were mobilized by then and were 30, 40, 50 miles ahead of the cavalry. In the old days, the cavalry was always out ahead of the infantry. So, somebody decided they were going to mechanize the cavalry and they got us big semi-vans, horse trailers, put eight horses and a squad of men in it, but when we strung out on the highway during maneuvers, why, we were miles and

miles long and there was no way to hide us. So the Air Force would bomb us with sacks of flour. And the people that were supposed to be the judges of these maneuvers, the Blues against the Reds. We never won one. We kept losing all of our maneuvers.

So, I decided I better get out of that and get into something else. And I had a chance to get into Aviation Cadets so, I opted for that and passed my exams and everything and went.

S: Do you think that these maneuvers probably contributed the hierarchy in the Army to see that the place for the cavalry was just about finished?

F: I don't quite understand your question. There was no place for horses from this point on. What they did, they started to make horse mechanized. Our outfit became the 107th Horse Mechanized because they were hauling us around in trucks. They took the horses from a couple of our squadrons and gave them motorcycles and halftracks. And the concept was that the new cavalry would be completely armored, be tanks and that sort of thing. And I couldn't visualize myself winding up in a tank. That was probably the worst place in my mind, to be. They were pretty hot in those days. They didn't have air conditioning and all that sort of thing. And I did see one drop through a bridge down in Louisiana and it was upside-down in a stream when we forded the stream on horseback and the men were still trapped inside and they had all died. I didn't see that kind of a life for me. And I had no intention of staying an additional year.

But when the opportunity came through to go to Aviation Cadets, the idea of flying airplanes intrigued me and I did pass everything, I was ready to go, but they did not call me. I was lacing up my boots one Sunday morning when the word came through that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor and, of course the "year" idea was up. Everybody was going to stay and that's what happened.

So, we immediately moved all of our troops, all of our cavalry outfit by train. We split our regiment in two and immediately on December 19, 1941, we made our way to the West Coast. So we had our horses and everything on trains and I arrived at Fort Ord, California, on the morning of December 26, 1941, and when they backed our train into the station there they had picked two Japanese sailors out of the bay, out in Monterey Bay the night before. They believe they came off of a

submarine and they don't know what happened to it. Maybe the submarine could have been attacked because they were trying to shoot at something that bombed, shelled the oil refineries down at Santa Barbara two days before. And they think maybe these Japanese came off a submarine. But at least they were laying on the dock when they backed the train in.

I was sitting next to the window and I looked out and my greetings at Fort Ord, California, were apparently two bodies under a canvas on the deck that they were looking at trying to figure out where they came from, what they are. But we were told they were Japanese sailors that had drowned.

On New Year's Eve 1941, I liked to froze to death behind a .30 caliber machine gun up on the banks of Fort Ord, looking out over the bay of Monterey protecting the American coast from what they thought would be an attack by the Japanese.

S: How did you get, then, into the Air Corps?

F: As I told you, I had been approved, I had taken my physical exam, I was awaiting orders and the orders did not come. And one night in February, early February 1942, I'm sorry to say it, but I was sitting in a bar called the El Nito Bar in Monterey, California having a drink--let's call it a beer, I don't remember--when an Air Force officer walked in and he sat down beside me. He was a pilot and I said to him, "Boy, you guys are really lucky. You've got your Wings." And I said, "I'm approved for the Air Force, but I haven't got my orders and here I am in the Horse Cavalry and we'll be shipped out of here and probably headed down across the South Pacific and I'll never get in the Cadets." He said, "You mean to tell me you've been approved?" And I said, "I sure have." He said, "You got a few dollars on you?" And I said, "Sure. Why?" He said, "That's my job, to find out people who have been approved. They get first priority." He said, "Come with me," and I did. We went up to Western Union and he wrote a wire to a Lieutenant Burke Jr., Office of the Chief of the Air Corps, Washington 25 D.C. I'll never forget his name because I paid for the telegram.

I found out later, because I wrote him and thanked him later as a result of my appointment. But I found out later that it was just a matter of processing. There was a stack of these and he did find mine and he processed it, because the very next evening after this happened,

I am standing at Retreat with my cavalry outfit and the orderly came by and he said, "Bob, the skipper wants to see you in the office after Retreat." And of course, at that time I was an enlisted man and I thought, "Oh boy, I've done something wrong again." But when I went into the office the captain and the officers all congratulated me and they said post orders had come through that day at Fort Ord, California that I was to go back to Montgomery, Alabama to Aviation Cadets and start my cadet training. So it just took that long for somebody to get my name and get the post orders written. And that's exactly what I did. The next day I cleared the post and the following night I pulled out by train and headed across the southern part of the United States and went to Montgomery, Alabama and started my cadet training.

S: What type of training did you get? What type of planes were you trained in?

F: Well, at basic training we had no airplanes at all. The first month I was at Gunter Air Force Base outside of Montgomery and then they transferred me to Maxwell Air Force Base where I had two months of pre-flight training, a very, tough, tough indoctrination. You had the underclass, upperclass type of approach and as I say, I went in in February of 1942 and I graduated with my Wings and became an officer in the United States Army Air Corps, at that time. There was no Air Force as you probably are well aware.

But I went through Aviation Cadets and the first two months was just schoolwork and they really pumped it to us. Then we transferred from Maxwell Field where we were in basic, then we went to primary. And the primary school that I was sent to was the Greenville Aviation School at Ocala, Florida down where Silver Springs is. And that's where I started my training to be a pilot.

We had PT-17s, which is a Steerman type airplane, open cockpit, where the instructor would sit in the back of the student in the front. And the first day we were there they had us line up and they said, "Would you all eyes right, eyes left." They said, "You see the man on the right, you see the man on the left. They're not going to make it. Only one out of three of you will be pilots."

S: Did you find that to be true?

F: Yes, I think the statistics was just about one out of

three of your starting class and some of them became navigators, some became bombardiers, but about one out of three finally wound up as a pilot. The washout rate in primary school was pretty hard and we lost, of course, most of us, I think, got through.

S: Okay, in advanced school what did you fly?

F: Well, let's take you to basic school at Shaw Field at Sumpter, South Carolina, we flew in what we called the Vultee Vibrator, that was a BT-13. In basic you had the right to opt for whether you wanted to go to Single Engine Pursuit, which was our advanced school or whether you wanted to go to twin or four engine, whether you wanted to fly multi-engine. And I opted to personally win World War II. I thought I would put a white scarf around my neck and go over and knock all the Germans out of the sky and I wanted to be a pursuit pilot. So, I opted for single engine pursuit flying and went through Spence Field at Milledgeville, Georgia, graduated in the class of 43-A in January of 1943.

S: How did you wind up in the China-Burma-India Theatre?

F: By just a fluke, a real fluke because I think it might be interesting in your discussion here to know a little bit about how most people wound up over there. As I told you, I had personal designs on winning World War II. And I think I never saw such a disappointed group of guys who graduated from flying school as the class that I was in at Spence Field because we were all hyped up, ready to go. We thought we were good. We had done a good job of aerial gunnery and everything that we were asked to do. And when the orders came through after graduation and the orders did not come through for two or three, I think, a couple weeks after we graduated. But they sent the entire class to the Ferrying Command. It was for the delivery of airplanes all over the world.

And I couldn't have been more disappointed, because I just couldn't see myself flying straight and level in the Ferrying Command, but that's where we were shipped. My first order went to Memphis, Tennessee, and the first order I got was to, up to Middletown, Ohio and pick an Aronca, L-3-C, which had a 65 horsepower engine, and I never had flown anything that small because I started out in a 220 horsepower engine with the Steerman, graduated to the 450 horsepower engine in the BT-13 and a 650 Pratt & Whitney in an AT-6, which the Navy called the SNJ. But a beautiful single engine airplane in advanced. But, here I am now a graduate, ready to win

World War II and they sent me to deliver, ferry a little L-3-C like an outboard motor on a kite. And I did deliver that to Homestead Air Base down in Florida, my first delivery.

But from there I found that we had one of the best situations that we could ever hope for in the war because I was very fortunate. I got to fly every kind of an airplane that the United States Air Corps had at that time. And I wound up getting what they call a 5P rating. Five stood for four engine airline. . . I had the highest instrument rating you could get. I was qualified to fly VIP, very important people on the oceans to transport anybody anywhere in the world.

And I wound up going through my airline pilot training down in Homestead, Florida. But this all took place during the period of time that I was in the Ferrying Command. I flew airplanes of every kind of a description right out of the factory, and that's why I say we were somewhat of a test pilot because many of these planes came right off the production line and we'd get in them and deliver them to some base where they were going to be flown in training.

S: Did you find that there were a lot of defects with these planes that came off the line?

F: Well, a lot of the planes, yes, had defects, but more important than that, you have to understand how things like B-24's were built during World War II. We would, for instance, fly down to Birmingham, Alabama and pick up a B-24 airplane. We might fly that B-24 right out of the factory brand new for what they called modification. You would fly it, possibly, up to St. Paul, Minnesota and at St. Paul they would add something to that plane. Then some other pilot might pick it up and fly it down to Tulsa, Oklahoma and they might add something else to it.

S: What would they add?

F: Oh, they could add maybe radio equipment or they could add guns.

S: So it was like, one huge assembly plant then, all over the country?

F: Yes. Now I have flown a number of old A-31s and A-35 dive bombers out of the Nashville plant, where they came

out of there and there wasn't any radio equipment in them. And we would fly them without any radio or any communications contact all the way to the West Coast or down in California and we would deliver them there and then they'd tear them apart because none of us in the American Air Corps would use them, but they gave on reverse-lend lease to the British and they would ship them by boat to Australia and down into the Pacific. But many of those old planes, they'd tear the wheels, tear the wings, whatever they had to do to ship them they would do.

Now, when we got to Downey, California we'd go down to say Long Beach and pick up something like a P-51, which were real nice airplanes. And we would fly those clear back across the United States to Newark, New Jersey, where they would put them on the boats, ship a whole bunch of them over to the European Campaign or the North African Campaign.

S: Did you find a lot of difference between the different types of planes? For example the P-51 as compared to the P-47 Thunderbolt?

F: Oh yes. Every plane has its own characteristic. And most men who were pilots like the plane best that they did the longest tour of duty in because that plane brought them through the worst and so they usually said that was the best airplane. And I've heard a lot of pilots argue that the B-17 was the greatest bomber. But talk to somebody that flew a B-24 and they'll tell you that that was the greatest bomber. But I, personally, loved the P-51. It was a fine hot pursuit airplane. The fastest I ever flew one personally was in a P-51. I got it up to red line at 420 miles an hour and it scared the living daylights out of me. So, some of these modern day pilots that go through the sound barrier, I know what they're going through.

The highest I've ever been was in a B-24 and I got above 30,000 feet. I think it was somewhere around 34,000 feet, but it was probably higher than it should be because I don't know why the turbos stayed together. They should have blown apart, I suppose, for what I was trying to do, but I was lucky.

S: How much of a transition was it going from a single engine pursuit plane to a four engine bomber or cargo plane?

F: Well, most of us who were in the Ferrying Command, we did have the ability to jump out of a B-25 on one trip, and

in fact, we would do this. We might deliver a B-25 from the East Coast to Fairfax Air Base outside of Kansas City, get out of that and maybe get on an airliner and go somewhere else and pick up a single engine airplane, get out of that and go somewhere else and pick up a B-24. We really never knew what we were going to fly until we got to the point of delivery of the last airplane. In most cases they would send us back to our home base and we'd deadhead back on an airline, even on the foreign deliveries that we made.

And I did make a number of foreign deliveries. I've flown both oceans as a ferry pilot. My first airplane that I delivered was a B-25 Billy Mitchell H, which had a French 75 Cannon sticking right out through the nose of it. And I delivered that to a place called Sousse, right south of Tunis on the Tunisian Coast. Sousse is a little airbase, which was south of the old Kesselring Pass, which made such a name for itself. And I flew down over the Kesselring Pass and delivered this airplane, this B-25 Billy Mitchell. And our orders said, deliver the airplane, get home the best way you can. And we thumbed rides all the way back to the United States.

And that whole trip started out when we picked up the plane in Savannah, Georgia, flew all the way down through South America, across the South Atlantic, up through Africa. The route is pretty commonly known by most fellows, men that were in the Ferrying Command.

S: How long would a trip like that take?

F: Usually after what we called a foreign delivery, that was outside of the continental limits of the United States, the crews would get a two day leave of absence. I was stationed at Nashville, Tennessee at the time when I got my first foreign delivery and I went as a copilot on a trip, as I just mentioned, B-25 trip, my pilot was an old Pan American Air Ferry Pilot, and he was a civilian who had a flight officer's rating now and worked for the Ferrying Command. We flew down to, as I mentioned, Savannah, Georgia, and picked that airplane up and that's where it started. But to tell you how long it would take, I must point out that the day I got my orders at Nashville to go on this trip I was so delighted because this was my first foreign delivery.

I had seen these men in the Ferrying Command coming back from all parts of the world. They were coming back from India, they were coming back from the Middle East. They

were coming back from Africa, They were coming back from England. And now I had my chance. But the navigator that they picked was not happy. He just reported in and was entitled to two days leave because he had just delivered an A-26 to Abadan in Iran, and he fully intended to fly to New York to see his wife and family because his wife was pregnant and was due to go in the hospital at any time for the delivery of their next child, and of course, he was very anxious to get home. He had called her on the phone and found everything was all right. But now he gets orders to turn right around and go back and he's very unhappy with this. And he complained all the way, "This is terrible. I just got back from Abadan, now I'm going again."

We never knew where we were going. We picked up the plane in Savannah. We flew to West Palm Beach. We were briefed out of West Palm Beach to Borincan Field in Puerto Rico. The orders were given to our captain, I was copilot, and a Second Lieutenant. Our orders were given to our captain. He opened them one hour on course toward Puerto Rico. The orders said, for us to proceed beyond Puerto Rico to Natal, Brazil. Well, so we flew from there down to Trinidad, from Trinidad to Belem, a town on the Amazon.

And one little thing, which was customary, which you may want to know, in the Navy they have quite a ceremony when you cross the Equator. You probably heard of it, old Neptune or something. I don't know what their ceremony is, but they dunk the sailors that have never crossed the Equator before. It's quite a historic thing.

S: I didn't know that.

F: Well, the Ferrying Command had an interesting little idea that they put together along that line. I was nodding, sleeping, sitting there just going along for the ride pretty much. We were down over Brazil. We were about ready to go over the Equator, but I never realized we were that close to the Equator. The navigator had this thing pretty well figured out. The captain was flying the airplane, either the captain or "George". We called the automatic pilot "George". And I suspect it was on automatic pilot and I was just dozing as we would do when we weren't at the controls specifically.

And all of a sudden I got hit in the face with a bucket of water. They brought me out of a deep sleep, and in addition to that, everybody's screaming and the plane is headed straight down and the pilot is jerking this thing

all over the sky and they're all screaming, "Bail out! Get out! Do whatever you can do to get out!" And I came out of a deep sleep with water. I couldn't see. I didn't know what happened. I'm scared. I said, "Well, what happened, what happened?" I didn't know what happened. And he says, "You don't know what happened?" And he said, "We just crossed the Equator." (Laughter) So, I had the privilege of doing that to fellow pilots at a later time when I knew it was their first experience to cross the Equator.

Okay, we flew on down to Natal, Brazil. We were briefed out of Natal at night. We used to fly east at night. We had two B-26 bombers follow us because they had no navigators. They were a crew taking B-26s to the English, going up to England and they had no navigators, so they were briefed to follow us during the night because we had a navigator. Our crew on those flights consisted of a pilot, a copilot, a navigator, which were all officers; and two enlisted men, a radio operator and an engineer; five of us. We flew from Natal, Brazil that night to a little base called Ascension Island, which is a cable base out in the South Atlantic.

And that in itself is quite a historic thing. You might want to write a story about the engineers that built a runway during World War II. They dug a slot right down through this lava rock. And it was quite an engineering feat in those days. But that's where we used to stop to refuel.

And then from there we went on up to Robert's Field in Liberia. From Robert's Field in Liberia we went to Dakar, French West Africa. And then from Dakar we stopped at a place called Marrakech in French Morocco, which now is just Morocco. It was divided between Spanish and French Morocco at the time. One of the things that happened at Dakar was that they installed sand filters on our carburetors because up to about 8,000 feet when you're crossing the Sahara, there's constant sand blowing, and it's important that you don't clog up the carburetor. So, we flew above the 8,000 foot level, but as you look down, it always looked like there was a mist down there, but that was sand.

At Marrakech, see, we did not know where we were going with that airplane. Our orders out of Natal, Brazil, was to deliver the airplane to Marrakech for further orders. We did not know whether we were going on into England or whether we would be delivering the plane to the North African Campaign, which had just wound up.

At Marrakech, the further orders were to deliver to the African Campaign, which is what we did.

Now, after delivery we got back the best way we could. So, how did we get back? Our navigator, now, who was so anxious to get back, he said, "Let's go back the quickest way possible. I just came through Cairo, Egypt, through central Africa, over to Natal, Brazil, and back up the Eastern Coast and that was pretty fast. If we go that way I think we can get down through. . ." So, we started thumbing a ride on any plane available. We thumbed a ride into Tripoli, Tripolitine where we met some of our own guys from back in Nashville and they were thumbing rides the other way. And they said, "Don't go that way because they'll just turn you around at Natal and send you back over. They need pilots."

So, we decided not to get hung up back down in South America again, so we turned around and thumbed our way all the way across North Africa to Casablanca. At Casablanca there aren't any planes going out to the Azores, but a friend of mine came through in a C-54 and he said, "I'm not going west, but I'm going to Scotland. Do you want to ride with us?" And we said, "Sure." So, we got on and rode up to Preswick, Scotland, flew out to the thirteenth parallel so that the Nazi's wouldn't knock us out of the air and flew out around Spain, Portugal, on up to Scotland, landed there in the middle of the night.

The word was that the best way we could get home was by ship. Well, the navigator didn't want to take that time. You have to run the North Atlantic and that was bad news. So, we decided to see if we couldn't get something flying across the north. A couple hours after sitting there in the airport at Preswick, Scotland, we were able to bum a ride, but they only had room for three of us. So, we told our enlisted men to catch a boat, which they did. And the three of us got on a bucket seat of a C-54 and we bummed a ride as far as Iceland, Reykjavik.

In Iceland we didn't know whether we'd get a ride anyway, but during the night--and incidentally, we landed in Iceland about midnight and there was a full sun out, 'Land of the Midnight Sun'-- about 2:00 in the morning they woke us and they said, "Are you the guys that want to go to the States?" And we said, "Yes." And they said, "If you hurry and get a cup of coffee, there's a plane coming through, but the skipper wants to leave in a hurry. He's got room for you. Come on." So, we did

and we got on that and bummed a ride down to Bangor, Maine, stopping at Goose Bay, Labrador, on the way.

At Bangor, Maine, that's all the further he was going. So, we bummed another ride down to New York City, landed at LaGuardia. When we got at LaGuardia, my navigator called home and his wife had just been taken to the hospital. (Laughter) So, he spent a couple days, he chiseled a couple days--let's put it that way--in New York before we even reported in. And I had a little fun in New York before I flew back to Nashville and reported in and then I got my two days leave. But nobody knew where we were in the world. Does that give you an idea?

S: Yes. So how long did that round trip all around the world take you?

F: I'd say seven or eight days.

Now, what I'm showing you here is a historic thing. Someday I'd like to give this to the Smithsonian Institute. What you're seeing is a short snorter. A short snorter is what? Well, you're looking at bills of different countries of the world that I've been in. Every one of these are a different country at a different time, and it's 35 or 40 feet long. And the first one at the very end has on the United States dollar, where my captain and my navigator signed me up as a short snorter. And it was just a gimmick, which you would sign people up on the first time they crossed an ocean. So, anybody that was a short snorter would ask you for a dollar for them, plus one more dollar and they would sign you in as a short snorter. And then, from that day on, every country you went into, why, it was customary to paste on a country and then have people sign it who might be there. And you're looking at a short snorter from countries from all over the world.

S: How many are here?

F: I don't know. But you're looking at an awful lot of money but it really is of little or no value to anybody today other than from the historic standpoint. I have some very famous names on here. I have names like Gary Cooper, I have names like Rochester, who used to be with Jack Benney. I have many famous names from generals and people that I'm very proud of. And there's some real history in these bills. I'm just unrolling one here where these are some Japanese invasion money from down in the South Pacific. I got this on a B-24 delivery to Australia

on August 27, 1944. Those were my crew members, So, this in itself has a lot of history in it and could make, and has made an interesting story for a lot of people. Unless you unwind it and people hold it up and get to see, but it just goes on and on and on.

Okay, now, how did I get to be in India flying the Hump?

S: Right.

F: In 1944, after having graduated from Airline Pilot School, which was run by eighteen airlines at that time, at Homestead Air Force Base in Florida; and we used C-54s, which were four engine Douglas aircraft, After having graduated from that and getting my top pilot rating, getting my, what I called a green instrument card, which allowed me to fly any kind of weather anywhere in the world, then four airplanes were outfitted special, in the fuselage they mounted extra gasoline tanks and they assigned three crews to each C-54. And they dispatched all four of these planes, with their crews, to India. They were really to be sent down to Ceylon, that's the island south of India, off the Indian Ocean, because the mission of these airplanes were going to be rather unique. At that time, all of the logistical supply of the war, clear through to China, was done by going all the way around the world to the east. The supplies to the Pacific Theatre of war was done out of the West Coast to the west. But there was approximately eighteen or twenty degrees of the world that took. . .the Indies here, (pointing to map) Borneo and Java and all of that and the East Indies, the Japanese had control of all that in there. And this is a very long over-water run from Ceylon clear across all these islands in this area that the Japanese held. And there was no way you could get these long transports through with either material or personnel. With these long distance flying, four engine airplanes, they were trying to get both important equipment and personnel to be able to make it from Darwin, Australia up to Ceylon.

I was with the second airplane that went. We got into Calcutta, India. The first airplane had gotten there, had gone to Ceylon and had tried to make it across to Darwin, Australia. The Japanese discovered them. The fighters in the air, from whatever source, learned, on the first pass that they were trying to bring American transports across there.

And of course, we were so far out we had no protection, no kind of protection. So, the first C-54 and their

crews turned back and they just couldn't make it. But, as we say, the secret was up. So, it was useless, at that time, until the Navy and other people got into that area and cleared them out and got us some protection down there, to even try it again across there.

So, when I arrived in Calcutta, India, the whole program was scrapped and they took all four airplanes and the twelve crews and they said, "Well, we need the equipment and we need the crews to fly the Himalayas into China, so, we're going to assign you to fly the Hump." I did not go over there with the idea of flying the Hump. I went over there with the idea of flying that long 2,800 or 3,000 miles over the water, over the islands area from Ceylon to Australia and make that run back and forth.

S: Were you briefed at all before flying the Hump the first time exactly what to expect?

F: Sure, I was briefed. And this is something that a lot of people did not realize then or some of them do not now. We heard of the B-29s later in the war, but the B-29s was the first thing I was briefed about. My first trip across the Hump was in a B-24 type airplane of which I had a lot of time. I had, at that time, approximately 450 hours. I had delivered a B-24 to Italy, I had delivered a B-24 to Australia.

And it might be of interest to you to know that the fellow who checked me out in a B-24 back here in the States wound up as President Eisenhower's personal pilot and Air Force Aide to the President, William Draper.

S: Is that right?

F: Yes. But anyway, I had had about 450 hours of flying, pretty much all over the world in a B-24 when I arrived in India. The C-109 was nothing more than a consolidated B-24, but they called it a C-109 because in the four bomb bays in the belly of the ship they put gasoline tanks. And up in the nose, where the bombardier normally sat, they put a gasoline tank. And over the half deck in the back, where the radio equipment usually was, they put a gasoline tank.

S: You sound like you were a flying bomb.

F: Moreso coming back empty than going over. With all the gasoline we were always aware of the possibility of fire,

but with empty tanks, coming back, you had more of a possibility of explosion. And there was always a better chance of getting out of a plane on fire, in my judgement, than there was getting out of one that just blew up.

S: Why would you say. . . the fumes?

F: Because the tanks, being empty, the fumes, the air and everything, yes. You don't get explosion on full tanks, you get them with fumes.

So, my first trip over I was briefed by a first pilot on a B-29 bomber. Now, at that time, the B-29s were very secret. The public did not even know they were in operation. They were called the XX Bomber Command. The XX Bomber Command had secret bases in India. They would fly across into their forward bases in China, refuel, go on out on their bombing raids; and their first bombing raids were over Manchuria and over Japan. The Japanese did not know where these airplanes were coming from. The first that the American public realized there were B-29s bombing Japan was after the major operation out of India was all over. In fact, the XX Bomber Command that had been making many runs into Japan, upper Northeastern part of China and bombing the Japanese facilities up there, the XX Bomber Command was the 20th Bomber Command, as I recall the numbers. You might want to check those, but I think it was the 20th Bomber Command that wound up out in the Pacific. But they couldn't move and work out of the Pacific until such time as the Navy and those people were able to build airfields out there to support them and take them and that sort of thing. But that came after the India-China deal.

Our mission was to gas them up, to top them off for their bombing runs. And then, when they came back from their bombing runs, they would refuel, sneak back across the Himalays into India, back to their major base, do their maintenance and whatever they had to do. And that was their mission.

It took four of our runs, incidentally, to get them on one run, that's what they told us. We talk now about the high cost of gasoline, but I saw a GI up in China one day washing his flight jacket out in a bucket of gasoline. And he told me that they were told that it was costing \$88 a gallon, at that time, to lay gasoline down in China. And our planes would use 400 gallons an hour in takeoff and climb.

S: Describe the trip over the Himalayas for us. What was it like flying the Hump?

F: For the most part, it was one of the most thrilling experiences that any man could ever have in life. I would tell you this because I really believe it. I grew up in a fairly religious family, but I thought very little about God and that type of thing during my early years, but I can tell you this, that I got my religion flying the Hump. I thoroughly believe that there is a Super Being that I have every right to thank my lucky stars for everyday. I think most men who did fly the Hump will tell you that they had basically the same experience. But there is an almighty God up there that looks after you.

I happen to have been raised in a Christian home, but he did not reveal himself as a Christian or a Jew or a Mohammedan, or a Buddhist. He revealed himself to me, as an almighty one powerful God over everything. I don't know whether that explains my reaction to the Hump, but I can tell you this: that I have been in thunderheads when, thirty tons of aircraft, I've had all the power off and we're still going up at sixty miles an hour; 5,000 or 6,000 feet a minute, going up in thunderheads. We've rolled out on top with everything going down. I've had full power trying to hold my altitude because of the mountains around, couldn't hold it with full power. We've been in icing conditions, it's hard to explain. The men who flew the Himalayas discovered what today is common knowledge, it's called jet streams.

After every trip you used to have to be debriefed. You'd go into the weather office and you'd report and tell the weather, but I arrived one night in Chengtu, China and reported my trip in three hours and a half and the officer said, "It's impossible to make it in three hours and a half." And I said, "Well, here I am. You are Chengtu, China? Yes, well, across here in three hours and a half." And he said, "If you did that you had to have about 150 miles an hour tail wind." And I said, "That's exactly what I was reporting."

With my airplane indicating 150, at the altitude that we flew we had a true air speed of around 220, but with a tail wind of 150, that meant that we were doing 370 ground speed, going over. And going back you'd sit there wondering if you were ever going to make it back. Some nights we would have to put in, in places like Kunming, China or Myitkyina in Burma to refuel to get back into India. But it took us, normally, eleven hours or thereabouts

for a round trip, three and a half or four hours going over and the balance coming back.

And you're talking now, to a man who put about 750 hours flying the Himalayas, which, in terms of a 24 hour day, if you were to go up in an airplane and stay up for 30 days and never come down, that's the amount of time that I have flying the Hump and I'm very proud of that.

S: How many missions does that come out to?

F: I made 68 round trip missions, which some of them were longer, some of them, of course, were shorter depending where the cargo was delivered. But most of my trips were delivered into the Chengtu area. We had seven air bases up there, and the Chengtu area was in the Northwest Central part of China. And we were told it was the old summer palace or area where Genghis Kahn and Kublai Kahn used to spend their summer months. And they also tell us that Marco Polo made his way up there and that's where he brought back some of the artware and things on his visit. On some of the Chinese motif that you might buy today that is attributed to things that Marco Polo brought back, they usually indicate that it came out of Chengtu, China.

We did deliver into places like Chungking, Kunming, Yunari, and that sort of thing.

S: What bases were you flying out of?

F: I first started out at a base called Kirmatola which was next to Dacca in the Bengal area. Kirmatola and Tesgon were two air bases. Actually, you could taxi between the two, but they were two actual different air bases. I started right out hauling gasoline on the Hump and I stayed hauling gasoline until I left in 1945.

S: That's all you flew?

F: I only flew gasoline on the Hump. I made a few trips like with C-47s into Burma, delivered an engine or two. I made some trips on a C-54 because I was checked out and I took some pilots up to an air base, took a B-25 Billy Mitchell over to Agra, India one night. And used to fly out on some rescue missions on a little L-5, single engine.

S: Rescue missions?

F: Yes, they were rescue missions. It wasn't part of my

duties, just that I would go along for a ride once in a while where they would drop supplies down on the Naga Hills. The Nagas had head hunters in them and the British used to drop salt down to them and gifts and things like that. But many of our guys that went out had to bail out or crash on the Hump. Some of them walked out and they had some horrible experiences.

S: Anybody you knew?

F: Oh, I had a lot of friends that went down on the Hump. One night in February of 1945 we had eighteen planes go down. And all that night on the Hump we were trying to get fixes on people that were bailing out and going out all over the place because we were in terrible thunderstorms.

I think maybe the Chinese had one of the best alerting systems I'd ever known. They had a one and two and three ball alert. One ball meant that Japanese were known to have taken to the air. Two ball alerts meant that they were within of five minutes or thereabouts of arriving on the scene. If you were on an air base and there was a two ball alert well, you knew it wasn't going to be long before the Japanese would be over and a three ball alert meant they're there.

I had sat in the air over the overcast up in areas in Chengtu, which the overcast might be up to 19,000, 20,000 feet and I'd be on top, clear night, clear day and you'd know there was a bombing raid going because they'd turn off all your radio on you. So, you had no way of knowing where you were. So, we'd go into a box flying procedure tempting to fly legs of the box knowing what our winds aloft were and it was an approximation because we had no radio contact. They'd shut it off.

S: You had no radio fix then?

F: No radio fix. And we were flying all with ADF at the time. We had no radar and the old Loran was no good in the mountains. It was all right on oceans where it was flat, but not in the mountains. So, I've flown many a night while the Japanese were on their bombing raids. We sat up there in the air with them. They didn't attack us, we didn't attack them.

S: Did you see them?

F: Oh sure, sure.

S: Did they see you?

F: Oh sure, but they were from so far off, their mission was to make their bombing run and go home. And my mission was to deliver gasoline. So, I'd wait till they make their bombing run and then they'd turn on electronics again and then we'd make our instrument approaches and come on in and land.

I've been in bombing raids on the ground in some fairly good weather and we would pull some tricks on them. I suppose they pulled tricks on us similar, but on the ground, when they would be bombing us, they would normally turn off the ADF radio stations on the ground that we would normally use and we would turn on a similar one up in the mountains so the Japanese would home in on those and drop their bombs up in the mountains. And we could see flashes way up, miles away.

S: Then it worked?

F: It worked to a degree, sure.

Now, one bombing raid that I will never forget was Christmas Eve, 1944. I had just landed my plane. I was on a return trip from Chengtu, China, and had to refuel at Kunming because I had dropped so much gas off in Chengtu I didn't have enough gas to get back into India. So, I stopped at Kunming to pick up some gas to get back into India. And I had no sooner got on the ground, we parked, I had opened up the cockpit windows, my copilot was filling out the log and writing up any of the mechanical problems of the plane and I looked out and I saw Chinese and Americans going in every direction, Jeeps all over the field. One fellow from one side wants to go to one place and the guy on this side wants to go to the other. I said, "What in the world is going on." We'd turned off our radios and everything. I said, "Turn back our radio. Put it back on. Let's see what's going on." So, he turned on the tower and the tower said, "This is a three ball alert. We're under attack. The Japanese are bombing the field. Take cover."

So, we grabbed our 45s. That's the only protection we had. We had no gunners or anything like that. And incidentally, our crews on the Hump did not have a navigator. The pilots did all the navigating, either the pilot or the copilot,

S: Dead reckoning.

F: No, with radio operating, ADF, and the old AN Beams, which weren't too accurate. Most of it was ADF.

But anyway, we got out of the plane and headed out and some people showed us where the nearest rice paddy was and we stayed there all night while the Japanese worked us over pretty good and that was my introduction to a pretty good Christmas Eve, 1944.

In answer to your question, the Hump, it was a great experience, absolutely a marvelous experience. I can honestly tell you this, after two or three or four trips on the Hump, as I mentioned, I got my religion. I think it came out of absolute fear. When I sat there realizing with my oxygen mask frozen to my face, 35 or 40 degrees below zero in the cabin, no heat, sitting there in big fur boots, heavy fur jackets and so on, ice forming on the wings, the radio crackling and carrying on, in thunderheads, lightening busting around you, rain, snow, sleet, whatever; going up sixty miles and you're coming down sixty miles an hour, riding a rough bronco; all of a sudden you begin to realize there's an awful lot of little gears and wheels and things twisting around in four engines out there. You're loaded down with gasoline. So many things are working for you.

There's a guy that used to be a tower control man, a sergeant ^{at} Kunming, he talked like an auctioneer. And he should have a DFC. He's a hero in my mind because when they would back up traffic over Kunming, when you'd come over Kunming in an instrumentation situation where there's planes all over the place and he'd say, "You're number 22 to land," and you didn't see anybody else around. He brought you down at five hundred foot intervals and he talked you down to the ground. And without a guy like that you never would have made it. But you had to be on the ball and you had to understand. "Okay 429 you're at 22,000. Give me a call at 21,500. Give me a call 792. You're at 14,500. I got you 792. Come in. Okay 312, down to 2,000 feet." They would call him out. They'd get him out of bed when they'd get backed up because he could handle the traffic, yet I doubt if he ever got any recognition. Great, great people.

We had guys that absolutely lost their cool. We had guys that kept their cool that you'd think they shouldn't have. The first hundred hours that I put in on the Hump I had a very fine copilot and he flew the last trip he flew with pneumonia and he made it over to China and we got him back and we got him into bed and shipped him down to Calcutta and I've heard from him since. But

that washed him up as far as the war was concerned. Finally, he got so physically bad they shipped him back to the States.

We had a lot of buddies bail out. I had one friend that took 52 days to walk out of the jungles. I had one real bad experience one night. I was on my way from Yunani up to Ipin, which is a place on the way to Chengtu. I was flying at 19,000 feet with a full load of gas and all of a sudden I looked up and my number two engine oil gauge pressure was fluctuating. I called my engineer up and I said, "We got a problem in number two. Take a look." He threw a flashlight out on it. He came back and he said, "We're leaking oil real bad." I hit the feathering button, got the radio operator on, called him, told him we had an emergency, we were going on to three engines. I had enough pressure left in number two engine to get my prop feathered. I got her feathered, but when you do that the plane yaws on you terribly because you've got two engines pulling on one side and one on the other. We're at 19,000, starting to lose our altitude. I can't hold because of the weight with three engines and I'm pulling about everything I can, like 48 inches of manifold pressure with my props spinning as high as they can.

I called my crew up and I said to my copilot and I said to my radio operator, my engineer, I said, "Look guys, you're over Noshu country. This is a place where we've been briefed that no white man had ever come out of alive." In fact, very few Chinese have ever come out of it alive. There's cults of people living here that, for centuries, that has been their area, don't come in. I said, "That's where we are. We're over Noshu Land. If you bail out here the chances of ever getting out are slim." I said, "I know where I am because I've been doing the navigating on this thing." I made a 180 degree turn and we started back for Yunani on three engines, but we dropped to about 15,000 foot, which was below the peaks.

S: What were the peaks?

F: 16 or 17 thousand at that point. And we flew for an hour and 43 minutes on instruments and if I'd have been a little bit off course I wouldn't be here. And of course, they were waiting for us in an emergency landing at Yunani and about 20 or 30 minutes out they called me and they said they've had a smash up on the field at Yunani. "There's no way you can land here. You either

come over the field and bail out or you have the option to put it into an old AVG [American Volunteer Group-Flying Tigers] fighter field," east of there. I said, "Well, what kind of lights or facilities have they got over there?" He said, "None. We'll have them light smudge pots." I said, "Well light them up. I'm going over. If I can see it. . ." because there were no facilities to make an instrument approach. I said, "If I can see it we'll land there. If I can't see it we'll come back to Yunani. I'll fly till my gasoline just about gives out then you tell me what course to set the automatic pilot on. I'll send the airplane in that direction and we'll all bail out over Yunani," because they had hospital facilities and that sort of thing.

But I was very fortunate, when I flew over this old AVG fighter field that General Chenault used to operate with his P-40s and his Flying Tigers, I could see them lighting the pots down there between the cloud cover. I made a spiral approach on three engines and we landed that plane on this AVG Fighter Field and nobody ever flew that plane out. Nobody had the courage, I don't think, to fly it out of there. They tore it apart for parts. But we landed there very safely, we stayed there overnight and we had breakfast in the morning. Then they took us by a carry-all to Yunani, a couple, two, three hour ride on the back country roads. We got a C-46 and flew the Hump back to India, deadhead, passengers and we started all over again.

But the first thing I had to do after I got in my plane, what I called straightened out, was able to maintain my altitude and got my props feathered and all, I dropped 1,200 gallons of gasoline on the Chinese that night. I opened the bomb bay doors and let three 400 gallon tanks drop. I had to get rid of the weight to keep my altitude.

Well, I asked the crew, I said, "You have the privilege to bail out anytime you want because here's the situation." But they all opted to stay with me. And when you can get on the ground, I'll tell you, you thank the good Lord again. That's some of the emotional experience I suppose.

For the most part I'd love to fly it again. There's things over there that are unbelievable. There are monasteries on the top of 17,000 foot peaks, there are pagodas that the gold roof up in the Chengtu area on a good sunny day will sparkle your eye out. There is architecture like you never saw in your life, there's poverty like you never saw, but there's more happiness than I've ever seen.

S: How about the people, your relationship with the natives?

F: They called us Migwayfigii, which meant American flyer. That's about as much Chinese as I know. We used to say, "Dinghau." We used to say, "Buhau." I have seen 100,000 people in the Chengtu air fields in China, building the air fields 10,000 feet long; men, women and children like ants taking little rocks up out of the rivers with buckets hanging off of sticks across their back. And by handing one piece of a rock to the other, by taking little buckets of mud and patting the mud and the rocks together to help build the air field that took the B-29 bombers.

And the Chinese people, in all their misery always said, "Dinghau," to you. We used to say, don't educate them and make them unhappy. But the poor, poor people that we saw, you just can't believe the misery that they really were in in comparison to what we know.

S: What was the translation for Dinghau?

F: Good, very good. Buhau is very bad.

I carry to this day, I've carried for many, many years, since 1944, that coin. The coin means nothing now. It has been so badly banged up by other coins in my pocket. It's strictly a conversation piece. That coin is a Chinese trade dollar minted over a hundred years ago by the British, the Dutch minted them, Spanish, Portugese, Italians, Norwegians, Swedes. They all minted their own coins for trading along the China coast and they called them trade dollars because the Chinese skippers and captains and people that would come out and do the trading, the old clipper ships and stuff before the turn of the century, they used to measure the amount of silver by weighing on a balancing scale with the American cartwheel the dollar. So, these got the name trade dollars. And I was able to give a Chinese boy out of the revetment a bar of soap for that and I didn't know what I had. But I always used it and used it as a conversation piece.

After the war I gave it to a friend of mine who was a professor at the university up there when it was Youngstown College and he told me what it was. He researched it and told me what the English stood for. And at that time, it was a beautiful relief, Chinese all on one side and English on this side plus the Chinese dragon.

Of course, the Chinese dragon is a motif of the Chinese for centuries, part of their religion. What are they

like? One of the first times I rode in a Jeep from a revetment into the operations house, with an American jeep driver, and we're going pretty fast. Those guys didn't waste any time. They'd put those Jeeps up to 50 or 60 miles an hour just because they were cowboys I guess. But many a time I've seen a Chinese crouching at the side of the road and just about the time you'd get there they would dart in front of the Jeep and cross the road. They had lots of time to cross ahead of this and they had plenty of time to cross after it, but they'd make an effort to get across in front of that Jeep. And I said, "What are you doing? You about hit the guy." And he said, "No, I did him a favor." "You did him a favor?" "Yes," he said, "It's my understanding that the man thinks he has sinned and that the dragon is chasing him and I just killed his dragon. He is free of sin."

One time taking off, I couldn't believe it, I thought I'd killed a fellow but I didn't. But I was taking off in Chengtu, China coming back to India. The tower had given me clearance to take off. I poured the coal to all four engines. We started down the runway, there were thousands of people working on the runways all the time, big rollers and things that they pulled; maybe a thousand people pulling a heavy roller. And here comes a supervisor, I guess, on a bicycle. He pulled right out in front of me after I'd had my speed up and was just about ready to get airborne. I had the nose wheel just coming off and this guy decides to come right out in front of me. And I felt sure I was going to chop him up with number three or four engine. And boy, I started pulling back and she started to fly, but by then he's on his bicycle going behind me and I said to my copilot, "Oh, I think I killed a guy." I just can't believe what happened to him. So, my copilot called the tower and he said, "I think we killed a guy. A guy riding a bicycle." He said, "I saw it. He's all right. He's still riding." I said, "He's what?" He said, "He's still riding." The only thing we could figure is there's about that much space between each prop, between number three and four propeller and I think he went between those props knowing what he was doing. I think the dragon was chasing him. So, maybe I got myself a good dragon that day, but I didn't get a Chinaman.

I got a telegram when I was in India that my dad had died just before the war was over.

They dropped the big bomb.

Two nights that were important to me over the Hump that you might want to know about: I was over the Hump on my way to China the night that they opened the Burma Road. And down below me for as long and as far as you could see were lights on trucks winding their way through the jungles coming and they were making their way down to Myitkyina in Burma; ground troops. They had finally gotten the Burma Road open and then were now being able to go over with their trucks and their jeeps. And I was over and that was quite a sight to see, for, oh, I don't know how many miles because they had been waiting an awful long time to start the first convoy over.

They built a pipeline across the Himalayas into Kunming. The Chinese used to bore holes in it and steal the gas out of it as fast as you could pump it through and they had a terrible time patrolling it just to keep. . . because gasoline was an interesting item. It created a lot of good things for people to burn and to use for lamps and whatever. So, there were bandits all along the way, which that's a long way and it's rugged country and they had to patrol it.

We used to listen to Tokyo Rose on the Hump. She was part of our entertainment and we looked forward to listening to her when we would ride.

One of the things at night we would do, we would fly over at one altitude and come back on another. Usually there's supposed to be 1,000 feet between each other. However, we were always flying using barometric pressure readings on our altimeters, and they weren't always as accurate as maybe they could have been. But we'd be flying the Hump at night with our running lights on. That's the wing tip lights and the tail tip lights. And every once in awhile you would see a light coming toward you and you'd think he would be at your same altitude and you'd think, "That guy, what's he doing? He's coming right at me. I'm going to hit him." So, one of the things we pilots used to do would be reach down and push the two switches to operate the landing lights, which would come out of the wings and sweep the ground and then point forward. And when you would do that, the most interesting thing would happen. There would be hundreds of people up there with you flying and they would be sweeping the sky. And all of a sudden that one person you saw coming at you becomes very insignificant. You couldn't believe the number of airplanes coming and going.

And of course, I was in a C-109, which had blowers, that is they had turbo blowers, spun at a very high speed and

so we were flying on top. Down below us we had two-stage blower C-54s operating, and C-46s and then below them were some C-47s. The Hump, of course, was high north, way north. The Hump would go up to 23 or 24,000 feet. But as you came down south the Hump, would peel off and you could actually, on a good day, get across the Hump at eleven or twelve thousand feet at the southern area. But we would go across, many times, on the southern route and come back on the northern route. We would usually go over at around 19,000 feet and we'd come back usually at 22 or 23,000 feet or on top.

S: Did you have confidence in your aircraft?

F: Great confidence in our aircraft, you bet you we did. I felt the C-109, the B-24 type airplane was one of the greatest airplanes ever built. You bet I had confidence in it.

S: The C.B.I. Theatre was sort of the backwater theatre of the whole war. Did you ever get the feeling that you, indeed, were the tail end on the cow as far as supplies went?

F: I never had that feeling. I always felt we were doing a job and we were doing a very important job, I can say this, I was very proud to be an American flyer at the time and I felt that we commanded a tremendous amount of respect. I think it was all summed up in words by Pat O'Brien, the movie star who came over there and flew the Hump with the USO at one time; went over and came back and, of course, he told about his trip to the American people during the war. And my father wrote and told me that he'd heard Pat O'Brien, either on the radio or something, and Pat made the statement that there was only one thing greater than flying the Hump, and that was the people doing it. So, I was very proud of what I was doing. No, I felt it was a very important part of the war effort and we certainly contributed an awful lot to it. And you have to keep in mind that the Canadians were over there with their troops and their things.

I was flying wet cargo, but many people, like my friend John Leeson, was flying dry cargo, which meant he had drums of gasoline and oil and ammunition and food supplies and that sort of thing.

S: Do you think the Aluminum Trail is part of your legacy?

F: No question about it. We made history over there. We made history in many ways. We learned that we could

supply China in very trying circumstances, because you must remember that the entire Nationalist Chinese Government was supplied by air for so long.

I have a print here that might be of some interest to you by General William Turner, who was Commanding Officer over there. And he said, "The most convincing proof of what could be done was shown in one day, the First of August, 1945, when 5,327 tons of cargo were carried across the Hump in 1,100 trips averaging a two-way distance of 1,500 miles." And I'll never forget, the Burma Road, the best they ever did was six net tons of cargo in one month and we took over 5,327 tons of cargo in one 24 hour period.

So, it was out of that that the Berlin airlift was a possibility. The logistical work thing had been worked out.

S: What was the Aluminum Trail? Was that something that was talked about by the pilots?

F: I never heard of it before till today, till you mentioned the Aluminum Trail. A lot of people have a lot of titles for a lot of things, which I am not aware of. And I'm sure some of the things that I mentioned probably have not been heard by others.

S: Right.

F: But, we used to refer to flying the Himalayas as the Hump, the Rock Pile, flying the Rock Pile.

S: Is there anything else you can think of you'd like to add, something I haven't asked?

F: I think I volunteered the fact that I, personally, won World War II. Now, if anybody else makes any claims of doing it, you might query them, they've probably been misinformed.

S: (Laughter) Thank you very much.

F: Okay, thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW