

ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

PHIL GEORGE

An interview conducted on

February 4, 2020

Interviewer: Laurie Dickmeyer & Matthew Gritter

Angelo State University

West Texas Collection

“George Ricks Memorial WWII Oral History Archive”

LEGAL STATUS: The oral memoirs of Phil George are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on February 4, 2020.

Interviewer: Laurie Dickmeyer & Matthew Gritter

Transcriber: Lydia Dillen, Darby Cheek, Autumn Cleveland & Joshua Buske

Editor: Laurie Dickmeyer

The electronic file and complete transcript of this interview were processed in the Department of History at Angelo State University and are available at the Dr. Ralph R. Chase West Texas Collection, Angelo State University, San Angelo, Texas.

GRITTER: So much

DICKMEYER: Yeah, okay. So, again this is...

GRITTER: Matthew Gritter

DICKMEYER: ...and Laurie Dickmeyer. We're in San Angelo, Texas, on February 4, 2020. We are here with...

GEORGE: You're interviewing Philip George, normally known as Phil, Phil George.

DICKMEYER: Great, thank you.

GEORGE: Mhmm.

GRITTER: All right, so when and where were you born?

GEORGE: I was born in Austin, Texas, on June the 3rd, 1924.

GRITTER: And where did you grow up?

GEORGE: I grew up in Austin the first eighteen years of my life.

GRITTER: Mhmm, and then um, when and where did you enter in the Armed Forces?

GEORGE: Well, it, uh, happened in a very unusual way. A friend of mine actually came by and talked me into it because what had happened, in those days where you had a draft board and the real name for them is Selective Service ...

GRITTER: Yup!

GEORGE: ...Commission. And when you turned 18, and you were a male and uh, I don't know the top ceiling but I think it was like 32 or something like that

GRITTER: Okay.

GEORGE: ...and the bottom was 18 and they could draft you and then sign you to whatever they had needs for.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And so, all of us knew that we would have a draft number at 18, ...

GRITTER: Yeah.

GEORGE: ...and it could be subject to the draft. And so, we uh, I can remember the day after Pearl Harbor when I was walking home from high school, I had to come through town and there were a big line of men in line around the federal building.

GRITTER: Oh yeah.

DICKMEYER: Oh.

GEORGE: And I didn't know exactly what they were doing and I asked one of them and they said, "We're volunteering for the military."

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And that's what I think that that's a graphic example of an indication of the high morale that saturated the American public...

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: ...throughout World War II.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: But anyway, then when I turned uh, 18 on June the 3rd, 1942, then I knew I'd be subject to the draft.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And I had received an athletic scholarship to the University of Texas, so I was kinda torn 'bout what I was gonna do. I wanted to go to college 'cause...

GRITTER: Yeah.

GEORGE: ...that was a big gift to me to get to go.

GRITTER: Mhmm, definitely.

GEORGE: But, uh, it was kind of an unknown quantity what you was going to get. I mean, answer whether you were going to get to go or go to the military. So, the end of July, a good friend of mine named Wally Sussdorf came by the house and...

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: ...he said, "Phil let's go join the Army Air Corps." And I said, "Well, why are we going to join the Army Air Corps? What are we going to do?"

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And he said "Lets join the Pilot Training Program."

GRITTER: Mmm.

GEORGE: And I said, "Wally, I don't think they'd let me in, all I've got is a high school education."

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: I said, "I'm eighteen years old." He said "No" and I'm paraphrasing, I don't know if he exactly said or if it basically this, "No, they've lowered their standards."

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: [laughter]

GEORGE: So - so, anyway. It was that they were looking for people. So, uh... broad base that they had lowered it down to eighteen.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And so, I told my parents, and my oldest brother was already in the army.

GRITTER: Okay

GEORGE: And then, my brother just older than me, he, he was going to the university.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And uh, so they were not involved in this decision at all. But anyway, uh, Wally and I get out on the San Anton' highway in the south part of Austin and thumb a ride to San Antonio.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: Because the uh, testing center and the center for joining Aviation Cadet Program was in San Antonio.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And, luckily a man in a truck picked us up and took us all the way to San Antonio. And he knew San Antonio, and he let us off at a bus stop and told us which bus to take. And...

GRITTER: Okay.

GEORGE: ...I'm not sure, but I know the bus ticket was not more than ten cents.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GRITTER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: But uh, we went down to the center of town where the office was. And we're going and report to 'em and they say, "Okay, here's what we're have to do.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: "Tomorrow morning we've got a group of them, that we're testing."

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And said, "We'll put you all in that testing group, and we're gonna have a mental test - written test first."

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And said uh, "We'll put you up in a - Air Officers in the first floor of an old motel – hotel - downtown." And so, we spent the night with 'em. Next morning go down and...

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: ...they get us in the ballroom where they've set up tables and all so that they can take tests. And uh, they made the introduction and handout the tests.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: Tell us that uh, we've got X number time to do it, and I can't remember what it was, but it was either two and a half hours or less. But I'm guessing it's closer to two and a half hours...

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: ...'cause it was quite an extensive test. And it was primarily about math, and physics, and government, and citizenship and uh, just a few things about government, not too many.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: But uh, anyway. We - we took it with the masses of the others and I don't remember how many...

GRITTER: [chuckle]

GEORGE: ...but it was quite a few in there.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

GEORGE: And then they said, "We'll grade in the afternoon, and y'all come back in the morning..."

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: "...and we'll give you a psycho-motor test." And I had no idea what that was. But, what it was, it was th - to test your reaction to different stimuli...

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: "...and fo - for looking for balance and blinking and jerking from noises and sounds or..."

GRITTER: Oh, yeah.

GEORGE: "...pain or poking you or stomping or whatever it was, I can't remember. It was - it was a whole litany of things and I remember one of 'em was a ring with a - a double-jointed rod, and you had to hold it fully extended, and not touch the sides of that ring. 'Cause if you did it, sparks would go off..."

GRITTER: Oh, yeah.

DICKMEYER: Right.

GEORGE: "...and they'd mark it somewhere they were trying to see how steady you'd be.

GRITTER: [laughter]

DICKMEYER: Yeah, yeah.

GEORGE: I guess. But anyway. So, then they said, uh, "We'll accumulate the results of this and..."

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: "...you come in the morning, and if you passed it, then we're gonna give you a physical."

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: So, Wally and I fortunately did. And next morning we go and they take us out to Fort Sam Houston, which was an old, old army base there in San Antonio.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And they take us over in the medical, uh, hospital area and get us in the locker room and tell us to take off all of our clothes, get in line, and they were gonna check us.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And that was a new experience for me.

GRITTER: [Chuckle]

GEORGE: But it was handled to where it was, it had nothing to do with naughtiness or anything like that. It was, they were gonna really check you out, and they really did.

GRITTER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: But uh, fortunately we both got through that and uh, and uh, last station, they give you your clothes back.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And then you'd wait in line and go one at a time in an office where there were four officers.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And they - they give the 'ol psychological thing, they were on a riser and you're down on a chair.

DICKMEYER: Oh, I see.

GRITTER: Yeah.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER [laughter]

GEORGE: And I just kinda thought that whatever they were wanting to do, it didn't make it - but anyway. And so, they gave you a bunch of questions and they're looking at your paperwork and everything.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And they - their purpose was to classify us. You were either gonna be a bombardier, navigator, or a pilot.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: So, you didn't get a choice, you might have gotten a preference, but you didn't get a choice because they were gonna put you where they wan - wanted and felt you could...

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: ...get through the training program, I guess, being the way to say it. Well fortunately Wally and I both were, uh, put in the pilot training program.

GRITTER: Okay.

GEORGE: Okay, then they take us all in a big auditorium out at Fort Sam, and they said, "Okay, we're swearing all of you in." This was on August the 2nd, 1942.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE~~George~~: And so, at the end of the swearing in we belonged to the United States Army Air Corps.

DICKMEYER~~Dickmeyer~~: Mhmm.

GRITTER: That's great.

GEORGE~~George~~: But then they said, "We've gotta have a slot open in the schools you're going to before we call you." And said, "We'll call you in advance of that because we got to send you through basic training in the Army."

GRITTER/DICKMEYER~~Gritter/Dickmeyer~~: Yeah.

GEORGE~~George~~: And so, we asked, we were allowed to ask questions, and they said uh, since it was August and school started the first week in September those days. They said, "If you're still at home in September, just go ahead and enroll in school."

GRITTER~~Gritter~~: Mmmm.

GEORGE~~George~~: "And uh, we'll call you whenever your name comes up." There were no exemptions.

Gritter: Mhmm.

GEORGE~~George~~: So, that's how we got in the Pilot Training Program.

GRITTER~~Gritter~~: Okay.

GEORGEGeorge: And so, the next question is, 'What branch you served in?', so you served in the Army?

GEORGE: Yeah in the United States Army Air Corps.

GRITTER: Okay.

GEORGE: They sometimes called us U.S. Army Air Forces, yeah.

GRITTER: Mhmm. And what were your years of service?

GEORGE: Pardon me?

GRITTER: What were your years of service? Like what years did you serve in the military?

GEORGE: Oh, I served from 1942 to 1946.

GRITTER: Okay. So, were you in the enlisted ranks, a non-commissioned officer, an officer, a warrant officer?

GEORGE: Well, what happened is uh, they called a bunch of us and I was in school at university. And in those days our athletic programs were really good but we didn't have the number of men that are in all those things, and UT Austin then probably had a grand total of 8,000 students, probably.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: It wasn't real big like they are now.

GRITTER: Yeah.

GEORGE: But it was the biggest one in Texas. And so, I'm sitting in a class, ...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...and all of us guys in the different sports were like a family.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And they had a freshman day and the freshmen couldn't play varsity athletics in those days.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: But the freshmen could be hazed.

GRITTER: [Laughs]

GEORGE: And the upperclassmen, you know, would do things to us...

GRITTER: Yeah.

GEORGE: ...but there was freshman day once each semester where we could get it back.

GRITTER: Oh. [laughter]

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And so, we did our best to catch up with.

GRITTER: Yeah. [laughter]

GEORGE: Anyway. And there was about a week after freshman day and I'm sitting in class and a guy named Stan Mauldin, he was an All-American football player, and, incidentally, Stan had an unusual thing happen to him. He died at the half of an NFL game in the locker room from a heart attack.

GRITTER: Oh, wow.

DICKMEYER: Wow.

GEORGE: But he was a great guy.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And he walks in the class and I look up and I wonder, "What's he doing here?" And the teacher says, "Young man, you're disturbing the class." And he said, "This won't take but a moment."

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And I thought, "Uh-oh." And he comes back there and he said, "Freshman, get up!"

GRITTER: Oh.

GEORGE: I said, "Stan, I didn't do it this time, I don't know what it was..."

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: "...but I'm innocent this time."

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: He turned to the teacher and said, "He won't be back."

GRITTER: Oh wow.

GEORGE: And I thought, "He's 'gon kill me!" [laughter]

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: [laughter]

GEORGE: So, we go out in the hall...

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: ...and he looks at, holds up the paper and said, "Look, freshman, we been called up."

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Wow.

GEORGE: And he was in the Aviation Cadet Program too. And a bunch of athletes were all - like one of them's a guy y'all might've heard of called Tom Landry.

GRITTER: Oh yeah. [laughter]

GEORGE: And we were all freshmen, not Stan, Stan was an upperclassman, ...

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...but a whole bunch of us. So, they called us up and we reported to Fort Sam.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And they put us on a troop train, and took us to Wichita Falls, Texas.

GRITTER: Oh yeah.

GEORGE: And they had a base there called Sheppard Army Air Field.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: Didn't have any airplanes on it, it was just basic training.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And it was a six weeks course, I believe.

GRITTER: Okay.

GEORGE: Yeah, six weeks. And it was really good for all of us because most of us had come out of the depression and we weren't big, America was pretty slim in those days.

GRITTER: Yeah.

GEORGE: And uh, they taught us discipline and they built up our bodies and they fed us good and they taught us about - a little about military expectations and what have you.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And then they called us - we were privates at that time.

GRITTER: Okay

GEORGE: And we're getting \$21 a month.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: There was room and board, uniform...

GRITTER: Yeah.

GEORGE: ...but, uh, \$21. And they said, "Okay we're gonna send you to CTD." And, of course, none of us knew what CTD was. It stands for College Training Detachment. And a bunch of the universities in the country had agreed with the military powers to crash course young men who had limited education to give them as much advanced math and physics and stuff like that...

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: ...as they could in a short period of time. And so, the group that I was with, we went to Texas Tech.

GRITTER: Okay.

DICKMEYER: Hmm.

GEORGE: And uh, we were there about six weeks.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And, uh, wasn't that late in the day they told us, "You got your supper. Pack up all your - pack up all your gear and be ready to load up at 11:00."

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And we went down and got on a train and headed to Santa Ana, California.

DICKMEYER: Hm.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And, uh, Santa Ana was uh, the aviation cadet programs in those days were in three geographical regions. There was an East Coast flying training command and a Gulf Coast flying training command and a West Coast. And they - doesn't make any difference where you grew up - it's where the slots were available and they needed you. And so, all of us from Texas in that group - and a lot of them in Texas stayed in the Gulf Coast but we went to the West Coast to Santa Ana.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And that was the first time we were called aviation cadets.

GRITTER: Okay.

GEORGE: And aviation cadets, we got a big raise. We got \$75 a month.

GRITTER: Oh wow.

GEORGE: Yeah, we hit the jackpot.

GRITTER: Yeah. [laughter]

GEORGE: Okay, pre-flight was 3 months and it had nothing to do with flying, it had to do with military discipline, and all about military courtesy, and about protocol...

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: ...about leadership, about how to be an officer, about - it had a lot of ground schooling in it too, that had to do with military aviation and all. And it was a very concentrated course. And...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...the, the thing that we all bought into, whether we liked it or not, they couldn't allow us off the base hardly ever...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...because they needed to keep crashing the course for us and get us up to snuff or whatever you ought ta call it.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: So. I think we got off uh, two nights in the six-weeks there.

GRITTER: Oh wow.

DICKMEYER: Mmm.

GEORGE: And, one - one of the nights was really interesting, uh, we had a guy that come out of the movies named George Neise. And uh, he was in our aviation cadet group.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And he had buddies and all, and so they got the - the uh, not the Polynesian... wha - what's the name of that big uh, dance thing in Los Angeles? Uh, Biltmore or whatever it is.

GRITTER: Oh, the Biltmore Hotel?

GEORGE: Yeah. And uh, he got a bunch of his buddies from Hollywood to bring a bunch of those starlets, or girls, whatever they were...

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: ...over. So, we had a big dance and dinner, and I still got a big picture of that thing.

DICKMEYER: [Laughter]

GRITTER: Oh, that's great.

GEORGE: And we - we looked so prim and proper.

DICKMEYER/GRITTER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: I mean we like - we knew what we were doing.

DICKMEYER: Ah.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: Well, and uh, so we - in Santa Ana when you finish uh, ground school, they would send you to primary flight school. Okay? Except - but the group I was with went to Tucson, Arizona.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And there was a little field on - about ten miles east of uh, Tucson that had been a civilian field, lot of civilian fields were used to train the military people in those days.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And uh, we went to primary there.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And we flew a little uh, low wing plane called a Ryan PT-22, PT stands for primary trainer.

GRITTER: Okay.

GEORGE: And it was a real basic airplane, it didn't have any electronics. It was uh, just to teach you the eye-hand coordination, how to take off and land, and do acrobatics, just whatever take short field, a bunch of flying techniques.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And the first ride was what they called an orientation ride, and it's with your instructor. And I fell in love with it on the first ride.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: Now these are open cockpits, so you're sitting out in the open with just a seat-belt on, we didn't have...

GRITTER: [Laughter]

DICKMEYER: Oh [chuckles]

GEORGE: ...shoulder things then.

GRITTER: Wow.

GEORGE: And I thought it was like a circus ride. You know?

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And uh, the guy that was my instructor was a civilian, Mr. Fisher, and he was really good, and uh, he had uh, six students. And so, he had to process six of us through, and we only flew uh, seventy hours in primary.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And when we graduated from there, after completing our flying requirements and test-rides and everything...

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: ...and uh, they would move you to basic training. Basic would be just gonna get a little bit bigger airplane.

GRITTER: Uh-huh.

GEORGE: And they moved our group to Bakersfield, California...

GRITTER: Okay.

GEORGE: ...in a place called Minter Field, and uh, we flew a thing called a BT-13, there's one sitting on the base out here at Goodfellow now, ...

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: ...and it was built by Vultee Aviation. We called it the "Vultee Vibrator."

GRITTER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: 'Cause you'd get to going fast and it would vibrate so.

GRITTER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: But it had uh radios in it, and it had a canopy, and had lights, and had uh a bit more instrument panel...

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: ...and bigger engine, and it had more horse-power, and you could do more in it. And uh, it had a fixed gear though, meaning that you couldn't...

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: ...pull the gear up, it stayed fixed all the time.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And it was a very noisy airplane.

DICKMEYER: Hmm.

GEORGE: But uh, so, you fly seventy hours there.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And if you complete it, and course, unfortunately somewhere in the whole process now, either in pre-flight or primary or in basic, guys are washing out, or we had a few crazies, we lost a few, but most everybody was still doing pretty good. So, you got your choice, if you - by how you finished in the class. And I wanted to fly P-38's, which was a fighter plane that had a great reputation for high speed and had a high kill-rate, particularly in the uh, the uh Pacific war.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: They had some in uh, Europe but they had most of 'em in Pacific side. Well there was one base that uh, Douglass Army Air Field, in Arizona...

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: ...that had a plane called a AT-9, looked like a big tadpole.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And they also had AT-17's that uh cadets commonly referred to as "Bamboo-Bomber" 'cause it was basically a very uh light built plane, it was not a real...

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: ...and the uh AT-9 was a all metal airplane. And when we graduated from there, not a single guy got P-38's. Now it's not the Air Force, I mean Army Air Corps', fault.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: We thought it might be, but we're kids, we don't know the difference.

GRITTER: Yeah [chuckle]

GEORGE: And uh, what it was, they had a lot of heavy losses in bombers in Europe and needed to train bomb crews. So, almost everybody got assigned to bomb crews, but my assignment was to stay there as an instructor.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: Now, I'm nineteen years old and uh, I'm thinking, "No way I'm doin' it."

GRITTER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: I wanna go see the world or what have you.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GRITTER: Yeah.

GEORGE: So, I asked permission to talk to the uh group commander who was a colonel.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And he gave me permission, and he listened to my story. And I told him I needed to have a assignment that would get me into some of the action, hopefully, and I wanted in the fighters and all. And he said, "Well I don't know what I can do for you." But said, "You sit in the auditorium and wait till I call you."

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: That was the longest wait I'd ever had.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: I'm guessing it was four to five hours in actual time. And he called me and he said, "Okay, I got you into a air evacuation squadron in Louisville, Kentucky."

DICKMEYER/GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: That's - I didn't know what air evac was, I assumed it was to go in and get the injured out and take 'em to hospitals.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And so, I - we traveled not by troops, now we're traveling by individuals. And uh, let's see if I remember correctly, they gave us five cents a mile.

GRITTER: [Chuckle]

GEORGE: And that wasn't too bad in those days.

GRITTER: Yeah.

GEORGE: You know?

GRITTER: [Chuckle]

GEORGE: And I mean we weren't griping, that's a good deal.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And so, I had about a week to get to Louisville. And I went by home and visited with my parents and my girlfriend. And everybody had gone to high school and she was still in high school. Then I went to Louisville and this is where everything started changing.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: And I was a second lieutenant. Uh, part of the class was commissioned officers as second lieutenants and part of the class was uh, warrant officers called flight officers.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And how they determined who did what I have no idea.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: I don't know if they just threw darts at names or what.

GRITTER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: But I was fortunate because mine was a commissioned officer and the warrant officers had to go up to the second lieutenant ranks so they had one more grade they had to be promoted to before they could. And I'd give it to luck, not skill or having all of my teeth or anything like that but.

GRITTER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: And so, I go in and report to the duty officer and hand him my orders.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And he said, "Well, welcome aboard. Here. Here's your new orders." He had new orders transferring me. I wasn't there 30 minutes.

DICKMEYER: Oh.

GRITTER: Oh wow.

GEORGE: Yeah. Well what had happened, the Troop Carrier Command, which is now the Air Tactical Command, ...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...had come up with an idea of, uh, combat cargo squadrons.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And technically the theory was that these squadrons would be trained in short field landings and takeoffs and terrain flying and how to get in and about of hot spots and take men and equipment and stuff. And so, they were starting this and I was in the first combat cargo squadron in Syracuse, New York.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And uh, we were flying an old airplane called a Gooney Bird, a C-47. It had been an airliner for the American Airlines since about 1934.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: Matter of fact, some of them are still flying.

GRITTER: Oh really?

GEORGE: There's one of them parked out there in front of the headquarters building at, uh, Goodfellow right now.

GRITTER: Oh yeah, mhmm.

DICKMEYER: Huh.

GEORGE: And uh, but anyway, it was a field at Syracuse they'd cut out of a pine forest so it was what they called camouflage. Now the purpose of the camouflage was not concerned about the enemy in Syracuse, it was to train guys how to sneak up on the ground terrain and recognize air strips, get in and get out real fast.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: Well they trained us there and then they called me in one day and said, "We need you to go to Fort Benning, Georgia and be on a task team down there of training eighty-second and hundred-and-first airborne paratroopers." I knew nothing about, uh, paratroopers or- didn't know who the eighty-second or hundred-and-first was. And Fort Benning was the jump school for the - at that time. And it was a good experience because the - we only had 9 pilots and we had like uh, 14 airplanes. So, we could fly a whole lot every day. And three of the guys had already flown a tour in the Lucian Islands, which is up off Alaska...

GRITTER: Yeah.

DICKMEYER: Right.

GEORGE: ...where the weather's so bad.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And one of them took me under his wing to teach me how to fly instruments. And I'm thankful to him to this day...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...because he really helped me. And - but we were on a - what they do in the military, they have what they call war games.

GRITTER: Yeah.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: War games is where they try to simulate war action while they're training the troops but it's in friendly territory. It's not, it's not in a combat zone. And uh, we were doing a drop and the drop we were gonna do this day was called a - we're dropping eighty-second airborne guys. They already have their wings and they're already trained in infantry and all, now they're getting their units together and getting ready to go overseas.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And we were gonna sneak up one the drop zone and then jump - pop up and drop them out real quick and then dive back down.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And it uh, was pretty warm that day and we're in trail formation and the plane I'm flying hits a downdraft and we fly through the top of a bunch of trees.

GRITTER: Oh wow.

GEORGE: And that - we were able to fly on through them but we lost an engine and had parts of trees stuck in the plane and what have you.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And I got it back to the field okay but, of course, that's a flying safety hazard and even though nobody was hurt, the plane was damaged, so I had to meet a board. And on the board - and they were right - I mean I couldn't help it, what happened because when I got the downdraft I gave it all the power but it wasn't enough to keep it from flying into trees. So, they said, "Well you're pretty tall," and I said, "Yes, sir."

GRITTER: [Chuckle]

GEORGE: So, they said, "We need to check how you sit in that airplane." And that was a real gift to me because the yoke - the yoke is what is mounted to the flying controls and all - and the yoke came up there and then went across at about a 45-degree angle.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And I had to sit sideways to get my knee under the yoke to fly.

GRITTER: Oh wow.

GEORGE: And they said, "You're too big for this. We're sending you to a bigger airplane." So, they sent me to a overseas training unit for C-46s. And that was a bigger airplane and the yoke was between our legs.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And I was there I think six weeks. And they made me an aircraft commander and gave me a crew. Real interested now, I'm 20 years old.

GRITTER: Yeah. [chuckles]

GEORGE: My co-pilot's a flight officer, he's 20 years old.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: My radio operator is 18 and the engineer is 26.

GRITTER: Wow.

GEORGE: And we called him dad.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: He was so old.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: And so, they said, "Okay, we're flying y'all over to Savannah, Georgia..."

GRITTER/DICKMEYER;Mhmm

GEORGE: "...to pick up a new airplane." Okay. So, they had a field at Savannah Army Air Field called uh, oh what was - Hunter Field.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Hunter Field. And it was on the military base at Savannah. They had a bunch of ground troops there too. And the way they worked it in WWII the aircraft factories would build all these different airplanes, and when they'd come off the line the factory test pilots, which were civilians, flew 'em and put 'em to the flight test. Then they had military pilots stationed there and

they would test 'em and then they would sign off for the military to accept the airplane. And that's the way they kept quality control up.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: It's a pretty - pretty interesting way to do it. Well then uh about '43, I could be wrong with the date, they established a group in Sweetwater, Texas called the Women's Air Service Pilots, WASP.

GRITTER: Okay, okay.

GEORGE: Okay they - these were gals that could - most of them knew how to fly before but a few of them didn't. And they taught them how to fly and the majority of their assignments were ferry pilots. And it was great.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: I mean those gals could fly everything as good as a man. And so, they would pick the plane up after the check pilot, the military ch- and take it to the unit that's gonna be flying it.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: Okay. I didn't know any of this because the plane was sitting on the ramp out there when my crew arrived at Hunter Field. And when I went into the command post and reported in, they gave me all the paperwork and the manuals and everything for it and he took me out showed me where it was and all and said, uh, "Usually have to fly it about 3 or 4 days to make sure that you sign it off for the squadron you're going to."

DICKMEYER: Yeah.

GEORGE: And this was common, not something they were doing special for me, this was normal. And what the crews called it, they called it "swinging the compass." And the old military planes had a magnetic compass that sat up here above the windscreen and it floated and you had to line up it and check it with your automatic direction finder and see if it was graduated right, or whatever it is, with the North Pole and all that kind of stuff.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And so, we flew it for about 4 days and the maintenance officer would meet me every time I'd land and say, "What discrepancies?" And um, discrepancies are things that need to be fixed on the airplane. Now, don't misinterpret this, brand new airplanes have quite a number of discrepancies. They're mostly minor like radios, or leakage, or hydraulic fuel, or maybe the aerodynamics, the trim is not set up right or - I mean it's not real big things.

GRITTER: Yeah.

GEORGE: Now if it's big things they're gonna put the airplane down and replace it or fix it or, you know. So finally, it got to where the maintenance officer said, "Well it's ready to go. You ready to sign it off?" And I said, "Yeah." So poor little old second lieutenant 20 years old, I'm signing off a brand-new airplane.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: Okay so I go in the command post and he says, "Okay you're joining a squadron of a troop carrier squadron in Dinjan, Assam." And I said, "Dinjan, Assam?" I said, "Where's Assam?" Do y'all know where Assam is?

DICKMEYER: Mm-mm.

GEORGE: I didn't either.

GRITTER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: He says, "Come into the chart room and I'll show you." The Assam was a small nation that sat in a valley on the Western slopes of the Himalaya Mountains between China and India.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And we had uh, 3 different bases in that valley.

GRITTER: Okay.

GEORGE: And the one that I was assigned to was Dinjan, D-I-N-J-A-N. And it was a - well, Air Transport Command was like - later became the Military Airlift Command - but Air Transport Command was like military airlines.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: Okay these were, a lot of these were military pilots been trained in the military, but also, a lot of them were airline pilots or long-hour flying civilian pilots that were awarded wings with an 'S' on it called service pilot.

GRITTER: Oh okay.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And uh, so, they were flying what we called "the hump."

GRITTER: [Chuckles]

DICKMEYER: Right.

GEORGE: And the Himalaya Mountains are the highest mountain range in the world. And it's - that's where Mount Everest is, in the Himalayas.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And I believe Mount Everest is what, 28 thousand some-odd feet. Something like that.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And it was - our planes couldn't fly that high.

GRITTER: Yeah.

GEORGE: So, we had to fly a southern route called Able Route and just called them Able, Baker, Charlie, and Delta and Easy. They had, I think, five routes and some airplanes could fly two of 'em, but some of us could only fly one of 'em.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And so, what you'd do, you'd load up in, uh, Dinjan, whatever the cargo was, it might be men, it might be gasoline...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...it might be, uh, artillery pieces, it might be bombs, whatever. I mean, you just took whatever they did - gave you. And, of course, you always check the manifest and everything because airplanes have a center of gravity that is extremely important for the flight characteristics to be good. And so, you have to make sure it's loaded right and tied down right and all, and that it's weighed right.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And the weight sometimes is what bothered the crews. And where you could tell the difference was sometimes your take-off roll would be pretty long. That meant they were pretty heavy back there. But anyway, so the normal protocol, you would take off from Dinjan which I don't remember the elevation but it was probably I'm guessing 300 feet elevation; I never have looked it up. We had charts then, but I don't have 'em anymore.

GRITTER: [Laughs]

GEORGE: And you'd circle until you could get enough altitude to start goin' over the Himalayas. That was just common sense. That was safety. I mean you can't fly below the mountains, I mean you can, but you're not going to live very long.

GRITTER: Yeah.

GEORGE: And so, you had to fly certain routes that had already been predesignated and most all of this is what we call by pilotage. Pilotage is where you fly time distance headings, in other words, you would pick up a heading and you compute the wind drift and you mark a known fix and you go by time and airspeed.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And you should be close to the other one. And we did have some, um, uh, couple of homing beacons...

GRITTER: Mhmm.

DICKMEYER: Oh wow!

GEORGE: ...that you could pick up a radio signal on, but they were not directional beacons. They were just a noise beacon.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

DICKMEYER: Oh.

GEORGE: And if you're lucky enough to fly right over it you could get a silence. So, you don't.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: But you, you knew if you turned a little and kept goin' and it got louder you were getting a little closer, within variables.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And so, you'd use pilotage to make your trip over. It's about a four and a half, five-hour trip depending on the wind. And uh, most of our landings at that time in China were at Kunming, which was a very large city in the western edge of China.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And uh, Chungking which was up north of uh - And occasionally we'd go into one down in the south-west China called Luilang.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And uh, but Kunming was the big one. Now, Kunming had what called a radio directional approach.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Um, show you how archaic it sounds from what they do today with GPS's and all this stuff. Every instrument landin' has a instrument landing plate that you carry in your possession that you study and use while you're shooting the instrument landing. And you're under control of approach control and ground control, but you're under approach control until you get on the ground. And uh, they didn't have radar at Kunming at that time. So, you were flying what's called radio beams. Okay, if you can visualize a vertical radio transmitting tower.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Okay, one quarter, one part of the beam is, uh, putting out the Morse code "A-N." The one next to it a quarter of that beam is "N-A." And then "A-N" and then "N-A".

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Okay, when you fly to where the "A-N" and the "N-A" join, it's a steady sound. Now that sounds pretty archaic, but - but that's what you try to do.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And you try to stay on this steady thing and do your let down.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And the direction for those things are, uh, mathematically figured according to the where you're coming into the airfield and what the approach runways are and what have you.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And Kunming just had one big, long runway. But they had, this is still current in the aviation, I'm sure of it, what you call pilot NOTAM's, in other words that stands for pilot notices, that other pilots have given this notice of that. Well what it was, there were, uh, magnetic things in the mountains of the Himalayas that would take those things and turn 'em.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And as a result, a lot of guys would be flying 'em perfect and crash right into the mountains.

GRITTER: Oh wow

GEORGE: And so, one quadrant of it, nobody ever flew that one. That was one that went back towards the west. We just wouldn't fly it.

GRITTER: Wow.

GEORGE: But uh, you try to get into Kunming and then - you love Kunming for one reason, they had fresh eggs...

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: ...instead of powdered eggs.

GRITTER: Yeah.

GEORGE: It's amazing to me, I'm still amazed at how the military feeds you in the field.

GRITTER: Yeah, definitely.

GEORGE: And they, they do a heck of a job, I mean a lot of us processed food in [burp] excuse me, doesn't taste good but they keep you alive.

GRITTER: Mhmm

DICKMEYER: Right.

GEORGE: And in time of hostilities you're not thinking much about that anyway.

GRITTER: Yeah [chuckle]

GEORGE: But anyway. And you would uh, normally offload as quick as you could. Now you heard me say gasoline. A whole lots of our trips were hauling 55-gallon drums of gasoline.

GRITTER: Oh wow.

GEORGE: Now they're very volatile.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Okay? The military, and they still have it that way, there's no smoking in an airplane on the ground or on takeoff or on landing. If the altitude - if there's no fumes available they'll let you smoke. Okay?

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: In WWII a lot of guys smoked. Matter of fact, in our K-rations, that was our rations for food, they'd have a little pack of four cigarettes...

GRITTER: Oh wow.

GEORGE: ...in there.

GRITTER: [Chuckle]

GEORGE: Now people say that they know they were harming us. No, they didn't know that. They didn't know about all this lung stuff and.

GRITTER: It's true.

GEORGE: So anyway, uh, those - those things were very volatile so you - you preferred not to have a load of them. You preferred something that wasn't that, but you took whatever you had and went with it. And some of the guys, the biggest problem you had in the Himalayas was weather.

GRITTER: Oh, that bad?

GEORGE: The Japanese were very remotely in there, basically in the southern part going over where they'd come flying out of Burma.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And uh, the uh, they flying fighters and fighters can get up pretty high and the weather goes up pretty high too.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And the weather was what knocked down so many hump planes. They called it uh, tongue-in-cheek, "The Aluminium Highway"...

GRITTER: [Laughter]

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...because so many planes have crashed. Well, if you - on the transports you got a loading door back there that you can open in flight. But then you stop and think, you got one uh, we didn't fly with radio-operators, we flew with engineers and a guy that was like a load master. And he would often take two of 'em to go back to roll them big things to try to throw them out if you lost an engine to lighten the load so you can go and uh, stay airborne and unfortunately some of them didn't make it.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: So, it was, pretty mind-racking at times.

GRITTER: Yeah.

GEORGE: But uh, it was basically the weather, not the Japanese.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Well we've been at uh, Dinjan I guess probably two months, and the commander called all the air crews together and said uh, "We're moving to China. We're going to a place called Chikyang." Okay. None of those things meant anything to us.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: But Chikyang was a dirt landing strip built in a little valley. It was in the western part of China. It was uh, East-Southeast of Kunming, and it was - the Japanese built it, it was a rock runway, and uh, very remote.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: There wasn't any physical structures there at all. And so, our army had kicked them out of there so they said, "You guys go in there and operate out of it." So, the reason I - back up - the reason we're carrying gasoline there wasn't any road to take gasoline into China.

GRITTER: Oh yeah.

GEORGE: So, the air way was the way. They finally built the uh, what's the name of that road that goes up? But it was horrible to try to - water let it out, it'd be bombed by Japanese. Anyway.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: So all the aviation fuel and the ground equipment, avia - uh fuel, basically had to go over by airplane.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And so, they started converting B-24's to a plane they called "One-O-Nine"...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...and they'd put uh, auxiliary tanks in the bomb bays and fill 'em with fuel.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And they'd fly 'em over and they could get higher than we could. They were four-engine, we were two-engine. And the crews totally hated them, 'cause the B-24 kinda vibrates and they called them "One-Oh-Boom's", said before you could say "nine" they blow up.

GRITTER: [Chuckle]

GEORGE: They had, they lost a bunch of those and. But anyway, there was, it was a complicated thing but it was needful.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Well at Chikyang we would uh support the army in Burma, and in different parts of China.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GRITTER: Yeah.

GEORGE: And uh, I'd been in Chikyang about uh, three, three or four months.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And my commanding officer called me in and said uh, "We're sending you and uh you're co-pilot to temporary duty with OSS."

GRITTER: Oh.

GEORGE: OSS is Office of Strategic Services, ...

GRITTER: Yeah

GEORGE: ...forerunner of the CIA.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And I said, "Well, what would I be doing?" He said, "You'll be their mission pilot."

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: "You'll do whatever they tell you to do."

GRITTER: [Chuckle]

GEORGE: Well that was an exciting thing for me; I just heard of them, I didn't know any of 'em or anything. And so, I go over and meet the colonel and he was on the base there in Chikyang and he was a big strapping guy that was all of 28 years old.

GRITTER: [Chuckle]

GEORGE: And he had um, he was a hero, I wasn't a hero, he was a hero. He had a lot of bad encounters with the enemy.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And actually uh, he and nine other OSS guys bailed out and I wasn't the one that took 'em on this mission, I had nothing to do with this, took 'em and they bailed out where General Wainwright was in the Japanese prison.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmmm

GEORGE: And if y'all remember, I think the uh, and I'll stand to correct it if my mental memory's not good, the first atomic bomb was dropped on uh, August 6th.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: The second one on August the 9th I think.

GRITTER: Yeah, I think so, yeah.

GEORGE: And the Japanese surrendered on uh, I think August 11th, but it was a verbal surrender.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And they didn't sign the uh official document on the *Missouri* until September the 2nd. Well, what we'd been doing in the OSS, we'd been operating in northern China, and in Manchuria, ...

GRITTER: Yeah

GEORGE: ...and in Burma, and crazily, in Formosa.

GRITTER: Oh wow.

GEORGE/GRITTER: [Laugh]

GEORGE: And so, he would tell me, he said uh, "Here's what you're to do, you're to take this team," and he just give me a number for the team and their teams number "and you'll take 'em and you'll get 'em into this place."

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: "And you'll, based on where it is, whether you wait for them or you fly out and come back and then we'll radio and you'll go back in and get 'em. And you'll never ask them what they're doing."

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Now that was smart, because I was not trained OSS, I'm just a pilot.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And I didn't have a need to know what they were gonna do, all I needed to know was where they wanted to go and when they want to get there...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...and where to come pick up, and so, that was perfect for me. So, I never asked 'em. But uh, sometimes when we come out of Manchuria we'd have to go to a place we called "The safe house."

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And it'd be a remote place where in some part of China where we could get in and they'd go in and they'd have a, a small OSS group in there and they'd have a little facility that probably nobody knew about...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...and they'd decompress and they would debrief 'em there. And uh, that was really interesting.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Now...

GRITTER: Wow.

GEORGE: ...I didn't get to sit in on any of the debriefings 'cause I was still was not privileged to know.

GRITTER: Yeah.

GEORGE: So, I had to be in some other part of the place.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: But that was fine. Well one of the ironies of the thing is that uh, I don't know which way you - Understand, I'm not a hero, I'm just a guy that loved flying and they let me do it...

GRITTER: [Laugh]

GEORGE: ...and I got to see a lot of exotic things, but.

GRITTER: Uh huh.

GEORGE: So, the command post calls me down to Chikyang right after - we didn't know what to - we didn't have iPhones or any of that.

GRITTER: Yeah.

GEORGE: So, it was probably - and I'm guessing, my memory's - probably two and half or three days after Hiroshima that we heard that some exceptional big bomb had gone off and killed a lot of people.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And, uh, we didn't know what it meant at that time. And then when the second one went off, at Nagasaki, I guess it was a day later, and they called me to command post and said, "You need to go to Chungking and pick up the Nationalist government." Now, if you'll check your history, ...

GRITTER: Wow.

GEORGE: ...the Japanese overran Eastern China in 1937.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: They came in through Manchuria and all down the Eastern side and Nanking, which is over on the Eastern side, was the capital of China. And so, they killed many, many thousands of Chinese and they assaulted and raped a lot of women and it was horrible.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: That was in 1937. So, the Chinese civilian people that had been in the government that had escaped had been evacuated to Chungking, which is over in Western China. Said, "You need to go over and pick 'em up and take 'em to Nanking so that they could be in place to take over the government." And hopefully get a bunch of the Japanese files and stuff before they destroy them, hopefully.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: Heck yeah, I'll go do that.

GRITTER: Yeah.

GEORGE: Well that's going pretty much all the way across East of China. So, I've got these, uh, I think there were 42 of them, Chinese civilians in the back and I've got a copilot and I've got my engineer and myself and we're headed to Nanking. We have no charts or anything we had an old

surface map that showed rivers and terrain heights and stuff like that and we did it by pilotage that picked up headings and then we'd try to figure drift because we could see it wasn't weather...

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: ...and we'd see and. Anyway, we'd been flying about uh, I'd say four and a half, uh, forty-five minutes and my copilot said, "Phil, look out here on the right wing." I looked out there and there was a Japanese Zero sitting out there.

GRITTER: Oh wow.

DICKMEYER: Oh, my goodness.

GEORGE: The first thought I - first thought I had, honestly - I hope he knows about Nagasaki and...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...Hiroshima. Okay there's international hand signals you use when you see each other in the cockpit. And he was wagging his wings and I was wagging mine. He's sitting in a canopy and you can see his head up and we're in a closed canopy but he - we got windows you can see. And he's pointing down and, okay. So, we're going down in formation and I'm not gonna do anything to give him a false impression, I'm gonna go slow and easy and maintain the heading until he gives me some indication to change.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And probably we were like that for 20 to 25 minutes and he took us into Nanking. And when we landed, 'course they weren't expecting us, so masses of Japanese surrounded the plane. And I thought, "Oh boy." And I'm just 20 years old so what do I know about anything?

GRITTER: [Chuckles]

GEORGE: So, I say, "Okay it's my responsibility I've got to do something, I don't know what but I've got to."

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: [laughter]

GEORGE: So, I told 'em, the guys on the crew, "Y'all stay on the plane." Then I told the leader of the Chinese, "Y'all stay on the plane."

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And I went back and got off the plane.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And I have no idea what the rank of the Japanese guy was but I'm sure he was a colonel or something because he spoke with authority. And I'm looking and here's these hundreds of Japanese, all armed to the teeth, and I - all I've got on is a side-arm.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: I'm not about to turn her in or anything. But anyway. They had briefed us months before that if you encounter Japanese for either - in any way, in other words if they're captives or if you're captives or whatever about one in four can speak English. So, I had remembered that and I said "Do any of y'all speak English?"

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And about three or four of them said "Yes, we do." And so I apologized for not speaking Japanese and said, "Tell me what it is y'all want me to do."

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Okay, the guy wanted to know what we were doing there. And I figured don't, don't try to fool these people just be honest, tell them the truth. And I said, "I have on board 42 Chinese civilians that were in the municipal government in Chungking that I was ordered to bring here to try to help in the transition for the peace and all."

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And then the guy says, "The peace hasn't been signed." I thought what in the world have I...

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: ...done now? I mean.

GRITTER: Wow.

GEORGE: So, he says, "You're on Japanese territory." He could have told me I was a rocket ship and I'd have to believe it 'case he's got me outnumbered and everything.

GRITTER: Yeah. [Chuckle]

GEORGE: But anyway. So, I said to him, "What do you want me to do?" He said, "I want you to get back in that airplane and go back to your base." I said, "I'm sorry, I can't do that." He said, "Are you refusing to do it?" And I said, "Yes and no." or words to that affect.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: He said, "I'm ordering you." And I said, "You'll have to do something else. I'm not gonna fly this plane out of here."

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Okay let me tell you why I wouldn't. We didn't have enough fuel to go back and it was getting dark and Chikyang doesn't have one light-bulb.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: So, I would have crashed somewhere - lack of fuel.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And so, I started to explain that to him and I see him turning and speaking Japanese to some of them.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And their conversation maybe lasted uh, three minutes, four minutes. They were really jabbering. He said, "Okay, we're gonna take your crew and we're gonna incarcerate y'all. The Chinese have to stay on the plane and we're gonna put guards on - can't get off of it. They got to stay on board the plane." They said, "In the morning we'll give you some gas and you get your butt out of here." Excuse me, "get - get out of here."

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: So, I thought, that's a lot better than getting shot so.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: I wasn't crazy about getting shot - little bit crazy

GRITTER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: And now this wasn't any bravery on my part 'cause I didn't think I had another option; if I got in there and tried to go we would've all died and I wasn't gonna do that. So, I'd rather take my chances.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And so, they separated the three of us, the co-pilot, and the engineer, and I, and I didn't know where they were and they didn't know where I was.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And they take us in the town and they put me in a old hotel that had been built in about the 1920s or something.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And they put a Japanese guard in the room with me.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Now that was very uncomfortable to me...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...because neither of us could communicate with each other.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And he had seen so many of his countrymen die and I'm on the side that's gonna be the victory.

GRITTER: Mmm

GEORGE: So, I was saying the odds are not in my favor.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: But that was just an illusion of mine I guess. I never went to sleep. Never took my clothes off.

GRITTER: [Chuckle]

GRITTER: I did lay on the bed but I just laid there and watched that guy.

GRITTER: Yup.

GEORGE: That light – that night lasted about eight and a half years.

GRITTER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: So, in the morning some other Japanese came and opened the door and said something to him and he said - signaled - that we went down and that's the first time I saw the other guys. And they gave us something to eat and I had no idea what it was. And then when they walked us out of the hotel there was a mob of Chinese out there; they've seen the airplane and had heard about it and they came and they wanted to see.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And here I am, six-four and a half by - bout this time...

GRITTER: Oh yeah.

GEORGE: ...weighed about 225.

GRITTER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: And on our backs we had these flags with Chinese writing, you know, that if we're shot down we're allies of the Chinese nation...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...that'd get us back to friendly lines and all that.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And they're reading all that stuff and squeaking in Chinese and...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...the Japanese guards are uneasy and I don't - I don't know what to do you know. So, they take and rush me into an old, looked like a 1934 Ford.

GRITTER: Oh [Chuckle]

GEORGE: I don't know if it was. And uh, took me back out to the airfield.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Okay, I had no idea - I mean we got to do the pre-flight and I knew we had fuel but I had no idea what grade of fuel they put in there. Now no jets were flying at this time.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: They were experimenting with the P-80 back in the states...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ..and the Germans had one in Germany, ...

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...but in the Pacific there was nothing. So, I knew it was aviation fuel but uh aviation fuel is measured by the different engines that are in it. They put different fuel for different

engines. And so, I had no knowledge but I don't have a choice. That if it's really bad it would give an indication on the pre-flight takeoff by backfiring or smoking or something. So, I said "We'll do a really thorough pre-flight takeoff."

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: I mean before takeoff, check in - so we did. And there was no indication and we took off and flew back to Chikyang.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Now you can imagine the condition of that airplane, those people had been in there all night. It was horrible.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: I thought they'd have to condemn that airplane.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And so, we get back to Chikyang and they see these Chinamen out there, and I had called. We had a thing that was built on poles, I don't know if they were bamboo or they might have - I don't know.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: But they had poles that went about twenty feet...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...and they'd built a little tower there. And we could get in radio range we'd call 'em and I told 'em I had those Chinese on board, gonna need somebody to meet me on landing. And I didn't - that's basically most of the information I gave. So, when I landed and cut the engines we didn't have uh - we had real short taxiways like uh - say that this pencil is the runway.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Now this is all rock and just one of - one of these runways, this was about uh five thousand feet long.

GRITTER; Mhmm

GEORGE: And every time you took off or landed they had Chinese coolies, primarily women,
...

DICKMEYER/GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...with baskets of rocks and they'd run out behind you and put rocks in the holes. That's how crude it was.

GRITTER: Wow.

DICKMEYER: Interesting.

GEORGE: And so, we parked all of our airplanes on each side of the runway...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...because they didn't have terrain we could drive on it - fly - taxi on. And so, we, instead we had about uh sixteen maybe, fifteen airplanes.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And uh, there was um, a P-51 fighter squadron of Chinese on the Chikyang too.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And they were the scariest bunch of guys, they crashed all the time.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: We got to where we didn't - our commander says, "We don't want any cover from y'all. We'll just take our chances." We were afraid they was gonna run into us.

GRITTER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: They were that terrible.

GRITTER: Yeah.

GEORGE: But anyway. So, they came out and the Chinese got off and the guy from the command post says "Why'd you bring them back?" And I says, "Pretty interesting story I need to..."

GRITTER: Yeah

DICKMEYER: Mmmm

GEORGE: "...I need to tell you all or you can put it in writing." And so, we went in and they debriefed all three of us...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...and got each of our stories. And then the colonel called me in and he said, "We almost made a mistake, didn't we?" And I said, "Sir, I think you can eliminate 'almost'."

GRITTER/DICKMEYER; [Laughter]

GRITTER: That's great.

GEORGE: [Laughter] Yeah, and he said, "Well it worked out okay, you got back." and I said, "Yes sir." I said, "It wasn't by my brilliance, it was by pure luck."

GRITTER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: I said, "That was a little unnerving."

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: I said, "When I took off I was a brunette, now I'm a blonde."

GRITTER/DICKMEYER/GEORGE: [Laughter]

GEORGE: But anyway.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Uh, that was kinda the - the highlight of my encounter with the Chinese - I mean, the Japanese until they signed the peace.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And uh, then we got real active in OSS.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Now it's gonna surprise you because by observation, not by actual observation, and then I'd listen to them talk in the back end sometimes when I'd get out of the cockpit and go. Part of our OSS was to observe and spy on the Russians.

DICKMEYER: Mmm

GRITTER: Oh.

GEORGE: Okay.

GRITTER: [Chuckle]

GEORGE: Now let's put it in a historical reference. The Russians came on board as an ally...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...in a quasi-matter, primarily when Hitler had, had started his eastern attack.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Thought he could wipe Russia out...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...and Russia needed help and Americans did a lot of lend-lease stuff with Russia.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And uh, matter of fact, uh, we served for a while on a uh strip up in uh North-West China...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...that uh, had some Russian planes on it.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And they were real different than we were. We'd take 'em on our planes and show 'em...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...and they'd never let us on theirs.

DICMEYER: Mmm

GRITTER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: Very distant or...

GRITTER: Yeah.

GEORGE: ...cold and - and I'm not sure now that I think about it, they might have been scared of their own leaders as much as they were scared...

GRITTER: [Chuckle]

GEORGE: ...of us seeing anything.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Might thought their leaders would think they were traitors or something. I don't know.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: But anyway. So, the Russians, if I remember correctly, came in to the uh Japanese-Allied war about two, two and a half months before it ended. And they came down through the southeast part of Russia down past Vladivostok which is in the southeast corner and came down through Manchuria to Mukden. Mukden was a big uh, uh, manufacturing industrial city.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: On the - In Manchuria.

GRITTER: Mhmm

DICKMEYER: Right

GEORGE: And what they were doing was stripping it.

GRITTER: Oh

GEORGE: And I didn't know this 'till I heard them talking about it.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: So, the - We'd find a field that we thought, not an airfield, we just found a grass field or...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...farm field or roadway or something we thought we could put an airplane down...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...and let the team off, or we'd drop 'em. But if we dropped em, we'd have to have a point by latitude and longitude where we knew there was a place we could get a plane in to get 'em out.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And if they needed to be picked up earlier than we was supposed to go back...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...they needed to get on the phone, get on the radio and - not the phone - get on the radio and hope they could get contact.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: So, it was kind of interestin' to a guy like me. And uh, those guys, they would be so happy.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And, I didn't know until later that the Russians knew that some of those guys were in there. They were shootin' at 'em.

GRITTER: Oh wow

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Yeah. And so was like, it was escape and evasion and things that those guys were doing. And, so anyway, then when they signed the peace, then the political machinery started trying to take over that.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And uh, we tried to go to centers of high Japanese concentration to get as much of their intel as we could.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And that fascinated me.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: So, we went a lot of exotic places.

GRITTER: Oh yeah

GEORGE: Did things

GRITTER: [Laughs]

GEORGE: But, anyway, I was one of the reinforcing guys. I got to...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...do something I like to do and...

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...just a kid.

GRITTER: Yeah

GEORGE: They gave me a lot of confidence.

GRITTER: Mhmm, that's great.

GEORGE: And I thought, it's kind of an interesting story, how I got from Savannah Georgia to uh Dinjan Assam.

GRITTER: Mhmm it is.

GEORGE: Oh, excuse me.

DICKMEYER: No problem. [Chuckle]

GEORGE: Uh, when they told me that I said, "I guess there's some way you would prefer that I go."

GRITTER: [Chuckle]

GEORGE: He said, "Yes." it come in the chart room, that's where they have charts of all the world, ...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...aviation charts and stuff, and he said, uh, "Your plane can't fly across the Atlantic, you don't have enough range."

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: "So you're gonna have to hop." And says, "You can't go the southern route, you don't have enough to get to the Azores..."

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: "...from La Paz or any place in Brazil or - and so, uh, you're gonna have to go the northern route."

GRITTER; So, through Iceland?

GEORGE: Okay. So, the northern route we went from uh, Savannah Georgia to uh, Bangor Maine.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Okay, it was a brand-new airplane that they had changed props on.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: We'd been flying a airplane engine with a Curtiss Electric props, which were three-bladed prop and they had electrical governors on 'em.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And we kept having trouble with the run governors on 'em malfunctioning, the prop was run away. Runaway prop doesn't mean it's flying off the engine, it means it's going at the highest RPM in the world, you can't control it because the governor was not regulating the angle of attack.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: So, what you'd have to do is you'd have to shut it down because it's gonna impair the flight and it could eventually damage the airplane.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Could vary vibration on some of 'em.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Buy anyway. So, they switched to Hamilton standard props which was a big three-blade prop which was a hydraulic prop and it was much better.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GRITTER: But the engines were uh, what they called a R-2800s and they were 36 cylinders uh, radial engine. Works like an automobile engine, this one fires, and then this one, and drive a drive shaft. And uh, they put uh, two plugs in every cylinder so it had 36 spark plugs. Okay, think about regulating the fire in a 36 of those things so that they alternate the way they order to try. And so, the engines would give, they would build up with carbon, we call - carbon is a byproduct of gasoline.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And so, when you taxied a long way at low power setting, carbon would build up on the heads of the pistons.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And then when you'd run the pre-takeoff checklist the torque would not register enough and they would backfire and miss and everything. So, you'd have to burn 'em out by leaning the fuel and then burning that stuff off while you're on the ground.

DICKMEYER: [Chuckle]

GEORGE: So, it was a mess.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Well, the, the guy that was my engineer was a guy named Jake Distal, he'd grown up on a farm, ...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...and I believe he could fix anything.

GRITTER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: He was a real gift to our crew. And so, we had loaded up at uh, 'fore taking off at uh Savannah and we loaded up again at Bangor. Sometimes you can't control that because it's a long taxi or you're waiting for takeoff.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: So, when we got to Goose Bay, Labrador, now the bad thing about an engineer if the plane needs working on, the air-plan means nothing to them, they've got to work till they get it back in commission.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And I, I hated that cause we're gonna go to bed and he's gonna be out there working...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...but he could sleep en route if he wanted to, but that's not the same as sleeping in a bed.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And so, we taxied out at Goose Bay and he says uh, "Lieutenant," he said, "try to load it up." And I said, "Did you say 'Try to load it up?'" and he said, "Yeah." I said, "Okay Jake, what happened?"

GRITTER: [Chuckle]

GEORGE: "Did you meet a girl here last night?"

GRITTER: [Laughs]

GEORGE: "What's the deal?" He said, "No, I tried something with a spark plug but I'm not gonna tell you unless it works."

GRITTER: [Laughs]

GEORGE: And I said, "Okay."

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: [Chuckle]

GEORGE: I mean I trusted him.

GRITTER: [Chuckle]

GEORGE: And it didn't load up and so he said, "Just try it again." at Goose Bay lab - I mean at uh Bluie West, which was called Bluie West One, which was a little single strip in Greenland.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And we had a military base there, real small, and it was just a refueling base y'know? and it was about a hundred miles up a fjord.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And at the end of the runway was this three-hundred-mile glacier. [Laughter]

GRITTER: Oh wow.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: And it, of course it was about fifty of sixty feet high and you always landed into the glacier...

GRITTER: [Chuckle]

GEORGE: ...and you took off away from it out toward the fjord.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Course you had to fly out between the mountains. Anyway. It's really interesting that almost like...

GRITTER: Yeah

GEORGE: ...a travel log.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And so, there wasn't much taxi and there wasn't much traffic 'cause real remote base. And so, I asked him, I said uh, "Okay, no games no more, what'd you do?" He said, "Well, I put a hot plug - hot plug and a cold plug in each cylinder." Spark plugs are hot or cold.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And he said, "I though one would compensate the other ones, the other ones compensate it back. See?" And it worked. And I said, "Okay, now when we get to Scotland" we were going from uh, I mean uh Iceland,

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: uh, "When we land in Iceland, you gotta tell the American maintenance guy there what you did..."

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: "...because we're - can't be messing with the..."

GRITTER: [Chuckle]

GEORGE: protocols." So, he said, "Yeah." And they came out and talked about it and all, and then the guy, the maintenance guy, came and asked me about all the readings, when I checked props and when I checked, uh, we had manual uh fuel controls on 'em...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...stuff and I said, "It worked great" and he said, "Okay, but we're putting it in the flight log there." We had a flight log we carried and we kept everything that we did.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And that's typical airplane stuff. And so, we went from uh Greenland to Scotland, and then Scotland to England, and England to southern France, Marseille. And uh, when we uh,

got to Bangor, Maine, the command post said "Well, we're gonna assign a air transport command navigator..."

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: "...to get you across the northern Route." And I said, "Okay." I mean that's fine.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And uh, so this guy comes and he's a young guy, a lieutenant, ...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...and we hit it off good. And so, when we get to England to report in, I thought he was to get off, he came back out and he said, "They want me to go be on the far-east deal" which is Calcutta "and you're going to Calcutta..."

GRITTER: Oh wow.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: "...eventually so I'm gonna ride with you to Calcutta."

GRITTER: [Chuckle]

GEORGE: I said, "Okay." So, we're leaving England and we're headed out over the Atlantic, and we're gonna go around to go to Mariselle because the war's over, the Americans have already taken Paris but they're in the eastern side of France and all.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: So, I tell him, I said, "Bring the chart for France up, I want to, I'm gonna deviate 'cause I'm a single plane." So, nobody....

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...I don't know who my boss is or anything.

GRITTE/DICKMEYER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: So I'm gonna go over and look at Paris.

GRITTER: Oh yeah. [Chuckle]

GEORGE: And he said, "No, you don't want to see 'em."

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And I said, "Yep." The fighting makes me mad and I say, "Bring the dadgum charts up."

GRITTER: Mmm

GEORGE: He brings them up and drops two packages in my lap. He had bought something in England and wrapped them in the charts.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GRITTER: Oh wow.

GEORGE: I said, "Goodnight! That's crazy, you know we need those things."

GRITTER: [Chuckle]

GEORGE: And he said, "I lived in Paris two years before the war."

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: He spoke French and Spanish and English and Italian.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And he said, "I can show you the Arch of the Triumph and the Eiffel Tower and so we went over..."

DICKMEYER: [Chuckle]

GRITTER: Oh that's great.

GEORGE: ...and buzzed everything, looked around and then went to Marseille.

GRITTER: Uh huh

GEORGE: Well, I won't tell you how many times we broke down in different places...

GRITTER: [Chuckle]

GEORGE: ...and had to spend one or two or three days while they worked on something. But Marseille was one of those place that had happened.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And it was not equipped to handle transient crews.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: So, it was a little uncomfortable, but uh we finally got it out of there. But then we went to uh Tripoli in uh Libya down in North Africa.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GRITTER: Yup

GEORGE: And uh, from there we went to Cairo, Egypt.

GRITTER: Mmm

GEORGE: And uh, the North Africa campaign was over at this time, ...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...but you could still see uh destroyed military hardware and trucks and jeeps and tanks and stuff.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And we flew over an airstrip that had about uh, eight, maybe nine or ten, German airplanes on it.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Just parked there. So, I circled and looked at those things, they looked like they were in pretty good shape, ...

GRITTER: [Chuckle]

GEORGE: ...but I had to go on to Cairo.

DICKMEYER: Mmm

GEORGE: So, when I get to Cairo and we're gonna R-O-N, that means remain overnight, ...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...and we remained overnight and the next morning when I went to the command post I told the duty officer, I said, "I'm gonna fly back out to that German airfield, see if I can start one of those planes, ...

GRITTER: [Chuckle]

GEORGE: "...see what it's like to fly one." He said, "No you're not." I said, "Yeah, I'd like to..."

GRITTER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: "...takeoff." "No you don't."

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: [Laughter]

GEORGE: "You're not going."

GRITTER: [Chuckle]

GEORGE: And I said, "Is there a big problem?" He says, "You bet there is." He said, "Everything out there is mined."

GRITTER: Oh wow.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Said, "You'd lose this airplane, but you've got it on the ground."

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: I said, "I'm not going back out there."

GRITTER: [Chuckle]

GEORGE: So, we went from there to uh Abadan, Iran.

GRITTER: K.

GEORGE: And uh Iran - uh Abadan is in the south-west corner of Iran.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: It's a big oil center.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And uh, the temperature was so hot that uh, they restricted takeoffs just at night and before nine in the morning. And it had to be two hours after dark for it to cool down enough because the airplanes would tear up the runway.

DICKMEYER: Oh

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And the ground crews could not work out in the open on the planes 'cause the metal would be too hot.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And it was so hot that you would sweat but you would never see it, it'd evaporate.

DICKMEYER: Wow.

GRITTER: Oh wow.

GEORGE: I mean it's a real dry heat.

GRITTER: Yeah.

DICKMEYER: Huh.

GEORGE: So anyway, it wasn't a place you'd want to spend much time in.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: So, we spent overnight and we took off for uh Karachi India, now it's Karachi Pakistan, ...

GRITTER: Yeah.

GEORGE: ...but it was India then.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And so, we're going down the Arabian sea and all and we're about uh, hour-forty, hour-fifty, maybe two hours out, and my copilot says, "Look out here on the right wing." And the right wing was just wet with fluid.

GRITTER: Oh wow.

GEORGE: And so, Jake came up and looked out there and he said, "I don't think it's gasoline." if it'd been gasoline we'd've blown up.

GRITTER: Yeah.

DICKMEYER: Right.

GEORGE: He said, "It's hydraulic fluid." And I said, "Okay. I'm gon - I'm gonna turn it." Then I realize we had hydraulic boosts on all the flight controls, meaning that you had to have hydraulic fluid too.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Because otherwise they'd be so hard to do it, it'd be manual labor, it be.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: But it was all we could do to turn that thing.

GRITTER: Oh wow.

GEORGE: Okay. We're called back to Abadan, which was closest, ...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...until it was declared emergency and we're gonna bring it back in.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: They said, "You're not cleared to land." And I said, "We've declared emergency." They said, "We don't care, you can't land." And I said, "I don't have any options."

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: [Chuckle]

GEORGE: And they of course, the American voice is on there but it's Iranian territory.

GRITTER: Yeah.

GEORGE: And, so anyway, I told 'em I'd try to land this soft as I could.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And that I didn't have any brakes 'cause their all hydraulic out, and so we tried to land as slow and as short as we could...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...and get the tail - there's a tail wheel airplane....

GRITTER:Mhmm

GEORGE: ...and uh, get it down to get more drag and we chopped power back as - we left them running because in case it deviated that's the only way we're gonna guide it not by brakes.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And it rolled pretty straight and it stopped and we shut it down. Well a maintenance officer there was on American attachment there comes out and he's a - I'm a Second lieutenant he's a First lieutenant –

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...and he's reading the riot act to me.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: [Chuckle]

GEORGE: He's embarrassing me, I mean, you know he's - I did something crazy according to them.

GRITTER: [Laugh]

GEORGE: And I said, "Well It's my understanding when the plane's on the ground it belongs to maintenance. It's yours."

GRITTER: [Laugh]

GEORGE: I said, "It's got no breaks."

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And he said, "You left it on the active." And I said, "Well they're screaming about me landing on it anyway."

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: But he says, "We've got to get it off there in case of an emergency." And I said, "Well, that's what it was."

GRITTER AND DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: So, so he gets in there and starts it up and turns on this taxi-way and then it dawns on him, he doesn't have any brakes.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And so, he chops the power and the plane's rolling on the ramp and with no power and all three gear down, it probably rolled...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...35-40 yards and stopped and didn't hit anything, thank goodness. And I'm grinning.

GRITTER: Mhmm [Laughs]

GEORGE: He said, "You told me it didn't have any breaks." And I said, "Yeah!"

GRITTER AND DICKMEYER: [Laugh]

GEORGE: But anyway, so we had to stay there a few nights while they fixed that.

GRITTER: Mhmm

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And then we, got it fixed, and we took off and went to Karachi

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And uh, nothing happened at Karachi and after Karachi we went to Agra, India. That's home of the Taj Mahal.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GRITTER: Oh okay.

GEORGE: And uh, we took time to cruise and we went out to the Taj Mahal.

GRITTER: Yeah [Chuckles]

GEORGE: And a real odd thing happened. There was a - we called them uh, mattress covers. They were canvas sacks that fit all they way over the body.

GRITTER: Oh, uh huh.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: You know, like a long gown and there was this real black guy standing with this thing on, big grin on his face.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And he came up to us, and he was speaking Oxford English.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GRITTER: Yeah

GEORGE: They wanted to guide us. Now you remember India was an English possession.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And he fascinated me.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: I mean I'm looking at him and I'm thinking "How'd that guy...?" So, he's showing us around Taj Mahal. So, I ask him where he learned to speak like that, I mean, he spoke it beautifully.

GRITTER AND DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: He said, "My father worked for the English plantation over there," they have a lot of tea [hiccup] tea plantations.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And they knew [hiccup] and he'd been with this plantation owner for two decades or so and said he took a liking to him. And so, he said, "When I was fourteen, he made arrangements with my family and sent me back to England."

GRITTER AND DICKMEYER: Oh Wow

GEORGE: "I went to school in England."

GRITTER: Wow

GEORGE: Yeah.

GRITTER: Amazing

GEORGE: And I thought that's pretty neat isn't it.

GRITTER: Yeah

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And, but anyway I, that was just a sideline but then we went to uh, Calcutta, and there was a base there named, of all things, Dum Dum.

GRITTER AND DICKMEYER: [Laughs]

GEORGE: D – U – M D - U - M, Dum Dum. And another one there was Barrackpore.

GRITTER: [Laughs]

GEORGE: But we went into Dum Dum and uh, a guy from the squadron up at uh, Dinjan. I had, first time I had met him, and he said "I'll fly with you and show you how to get to Dinjan."

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And so, we spent two days, I think, in Calcutta and then went up to Dinjan. I joined the squadron.

GRITTER: Okay

GEORGE: So, it was kinda an interesting sideline.

GRITTER: Yeah, definitely

DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Yeah. And.- but uh, the guys in World War II, with exceptions that I never saw but I'm sure there might have been some, ...

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...were extremely highly motivated.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: I never saw an air crew fuss about a mission or try to get off a mission.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Uh, I seen guys try to help each other to the nth degree.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: I've seen uh, commanders heartbroken over people who weren't gonna make it home.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And uh, it uh, it's just a different world.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: Uh, hindsight I'm glad I witnessed a lot of it, but I realize that in my heart of heart I was one of the lucky ones. I got to come home.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GRITTER: Definitely

GEORGE: And I didn't come home with any post-traumatic stress, ...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...or any hangups, or bitterness. or...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And for that I'm extremely thankful.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And they brought us into a - we got on our troop ship. It was a Liberty ship. Are you familiar with the term 'Liberty ship'? It was built by a guy named Kaiser and they were small transports.

GRITTER: Uh-huh.

GEORGE: They were used to transport troops in close for an invasion or stuff. But they, when the war ended they had so many of us overseas. I don't know how many million but I'm sure it was in the millions.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And they had a system - you got points for so many, uh, missions and you have so much time overseas and there was some other things too and when you got a certain number of points you were higher in the rotation and then when they got ships available they'd put 'em on there by points and all.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And so, it took a while for our squadron because our commander - we didn't have any captains in the squadron because they'd either rotated or died. We were all lieutenants or the major who ran the squadron.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: That's pretty sad, too. But - and I was a first lieutenant at that time. But anyway, we loaded up at Shanghai and got on board the... *HMS Bachelor* I think was the name of it. It had been used by the British but it was American Navy.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And it... This sounds like sour grapes but... but it's only sour grapes for the person who's picking the grapes. It wasn't sour grapes to the Navy. And it wasn't sour grapes when we finally ended 'cause we were back home.

GRITTER: Yeah.

GEORGE: But it was a nightmare. They um, they had six bunks. I mean they had bunks six high.

GRITTER: Oh wow.

GEORGE: And they were made with, uh, metal pipe with canvas between 'em. And they were only about that far apart where you could just slide in 'em. Well I'm two...

DICKMEYER: So that's about a foot and a half maybe, right?

GEORGE: Yeah.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Yeah. [laughter]

GEORGE: And I'm... it might've been two feet.

DICKMEYER: Two feet? Yeah.

GEORGE: Yeah. And I'm... I'm real tall and they were made, like, for six-foot guys.

DICKMEYER: Yeah

GRITTER: Oh wow.

GEORGE: Yeah. So, I couldn't lay out because the guy in the bunk at my feet - they were just stacked in there like shelves. You know?

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And couldn't lay on my side 'cause that metal thing would irritate my knee.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And I'm thinking, "How am I gonna handle this?"

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: So, they would have what they call lights out.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And the purpose of that had nothing to do with enemies. It had to do with just being on board ship and to get us all down to where the Navy could do their job and do what cleanup they had to do or whatever.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And so, they had to do a bed check and... I mean you understood all that and... So I, second night after the bed check, I got up and I went out and I went up on the deck.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: Now the Navy uses United States Marines for guards...

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: ...on Navy ships. And so, they had guards up there.

GRITTER: Oh.

GEORGE: And he said, "Sir, what is it you're doing up here?" And I said, "I've, I gotta have some fresh air."

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And so, we talked and I went over and sat on the cargo hole. Cargo hole is a big hole in the deck where they cover it with a cap on it but the cap is made out of wood covered with canvas.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And I - at least on this ship it was - and it sits about as high as that couch. So, I'm sitting there next to this marine talking and all and I'm telling him about down there and he says, "That's not good, sir." And I said, "Well I think I'll try to sleep up here on this hatch..."

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: ...where the air's fresh and all." And he said, "That'd be fine, sir."

GRITTER: Mhmm

DICKMEYER: Aw.

GEORGE: And, you know, it was hard, it wasn't comfortable but it was better.

GRITTER: Yeah.

DICKMEYER: Right.

GEORGE: I slept some and all and then when they changed the guard he'd hand me off and...

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: [laughter]

GEORGE: ...then he'd make sure that I was gone before daylight. They were good to me. I mean everybody was happy we were going home.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: They, uh, they could only feed us twice a day. Now that had to do with their capabilities.

DICKMEYER: Right

GRITTER: Yeah.

GEORGE: So, they built these high tables on the deck and you had to stand up and eat.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: You didn't care - 'cause you were going home.

GRITTER: Yeah.

DICKMEYER: Right?

GEORGE: And the food was adequate. It wasn't what you'd really like but it was sustaining and all.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And one of the pilots in my squadron committed suicide on board.

GRITTER: Oh wow.

GEORGE: He hung himself and we had a burial at sea.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And another guy died of an abscess tooth.

GRITTER: Oh wow.

GEORGE: We didn't - a small boat didn't have any doctors or have a medical corps

GRITTER: Yeah.

GEORGE: And so, they deviated - Pacific is a great big ocean, big, big, ocean. And they told us over the P.A. system that they were deviating going to Midway because they had a hospital in Midway and one of the returnees was having trouble...

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...it settled in his lung, the abscess did.

GRITTER: Ooh.

GEORGE: And he didn't make it. And that was the one we had at sea. The pilot that hung himself, they stopped and had a pilot boat come out in China and take him back.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And it really bothered me, he was the guy I went overseas with.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: He was one of the replacement crews... he took another plane somewhere. I never did see him 'til we got over there. Anyway, then they let us off at uh, Camp Stone in the San Francisco Bay area.

GRITTER: Oh, nice.

GEORGE: And I can remember it so clear. When I stepped off on American soil I said, "Thank God the world will never be in something like this again."

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: But it's never changed. And what they did uh, - you can imagine how difficult logistics are...

GRITTER: Oh yeah.

GEORGE: ...with trying to get back to civilian life from military and demobilize and get the guys back into the civilian world and still there was shortage of fuel and stuff so they put us on a troop train...

GRITTER: Oh okay.

GEORGE: ...and sent us to uh Fort Bliss in El Paso.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And uh, took three days from San Francisco.

GRITTER: Oh wow.

GEORGE: Yep. And we ate at a boxcar. They had, like, they had fast food. They'd have sandwiches or something, you know. That's okay. I mean you're getting to go home. So, they - I was demobilized at Fort Bliss. And they uh, gave me my separation things.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And I stayed in the Army Air Corps Reserves 'cause I wanted to continue to fly airplanes.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And I got on a bus and rode back to Austin.

GRITTER: Mhmm. That's great.

GEORGE: That ended my WWII time.

GRITTER: Alright.

GEORGE: But it was... quite an experience.

GRITTER: Definitely.

DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: I don't know if that's what you wanted to hear.

GRITTER: Oh no it was great.

DICKMEYER: Well pretty much I would say.

GRITTER: Yeah, definitely. I think it was great, is there anything else you'd like to share with us about it?

GEORGE: Well I think that America's, by far, the most charitable, benevolent, caring country in the world.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And we can't take our freedom too lightly.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: And the main reason we have freedom is through military strength.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: And the men and women that are doing this job need to be appreciated, need to be thanked, need to be supported.

GRITTER: Definitely.

DICKMEYER: Right.

GEORGE: And we need to tell them. And uh, it's not a pleasant job. And if you watch TV a lot of our men and women are coming home with legs and arms... and emotional problems and legs gone and arms gone and...

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: ...and that's the rest of their lives. But the military is a positive thing, it was great for me and I've - I'm not sure everybody has the same experience, but it was good for discipline, it was good for growing up.

GRITTER: Mhmm

GEORGE: It was getting to learn about leadership, it was getting to learn about men, ...

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm

GEORGE: ...it was getting to learn about the feeling of accomplishing expectations. It's getting to feel proud of something when you feel like it's been successful. And it's getting to feel that you played a small part that maybe helped somewhere in the big picture.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: So, it was a great experience for me.

GRITTER: Great.

DICKMEYER: Cool.

GRITTER: Thank you.

GEORGE: I can show you a pic - this isn't about me it's about my brother. My brother, older than me, was my lower class-man going through pilot training.

GRITTER: Okay.

DICKMEYER: Oh yeah.

GEORGE: And that bothered him...

GRITTER: Yeah.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: [laughter]

GEORGE: ...'cause I'd haze him a lot.

DICKMEYER: I'm sure.

GEORGE: Yeah I remember one time I was having him stand at attention and he said, "I'm 'gon kill you."

GRITTER: [Laughs]

GEORGE: I said, "That's gonna cost you twenty more, mister, get on the ground."

GRITTER: [Laughter] Oh, that's great.

GEORGE: But anyway, he was a bomber pilot in England and flying B-17s and one of the missions they got the side of the plane blown out and he brought it back. I wanna show you that picture.

DICKMEYER: Oh yeah, that'd be great.

GEORGE: Yeah.

GRITTER: Oh, that's amazing.

GEORGE: That's the plane and this is him, the crew beside the plane when they got back.

GRITTER: Oh, that's great.

DICKMEYER: Wow, they really are all young guys.

GRITTER: They really are, yeah.

GEORGE: Isn't that something?

GRITTER: It is.

DICKMEYER: That is. That's fantastic.

GEORGE: Yeah, he's gone. He was a great guy. But those bomber guys had a tough deal.

GRITTER: Oh yeah.

GEORGE: Yeah. Ours was not tough in the light of what they had. Our tough was we had to fly in so much weather, that's where we lost a lot of guys.

GRITTER: Mhmm.

GEORGE: But that's part of it.

GRITTER: Yeah.

GEORGE: Yeah. What do you think?

GRITTER: Great.

DICKMEYER: Yeah, I think that's great.

GEORGE: Yeah, it was wonderful. Thank you so much.

DICKMEYER: Yeah thank you.

GEORGE: Well, it may not be the truth.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: [Laughter]

DICKMEYER: I hope it is. [Laughs] Oh, man. Okay so I guess we're probably good.

GEORGE: You got any more questions?

DICKMEYER: Uh, well, I think what ended up happening is you worked through a lot of the questions...

GRITTER: You did, yeah.

DICKMEYER: ...we were gonna ask you as you were talking. Uh, so, that was... that was great.

GEORGE: Yeah.

DICKMEYER: Yeah, um, I would like to go back and make sure we get the names of your friends that you mentioned. So, you mentioned Wally?

GEORGE: Yeah, Wally Sussdorf.

DICKMEYER: How do...

GEORGE: Wally S-U-S-S-D-O-R-F.

DICKMEYER: S-U-S-S-D-U-R-F...

GEORGE: -D-O-R-F I think.

DICKMEYER: -D-O-R-F.

GEORGE: Yes.

DICKMEYER: Sussdorf, then. Okay and... let's see, who else? There was George Neise, you said?

GEORGE: Yeah George Neise was a supporting actor in movies.

GRITTER: Yeah, his name's familiar, yeah.

DICKMEYER: Oh, he was? How do you spell his last name? I'm sure I can look it up too, but...

GEORGE: Well poor George didn't make it. He washed out in primary.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: Oh.

DICKMEYER: Do you remember how to spell his last name at all or...

GEORGE: I think it's N-E-A-S-E or something like that.

DICKMEYER: N-E... wait, wait. N-E-A-S-E.

GEORGE: I think. I'm not good on spelling but I think...

DICKMEYER: That's okay, we'll double check, too.

GRITTER: We'll find it.

DICKMEYER: Yeah and, um, you said your flight instructor was named Mr. Fisher. Is that just F-I-S-H...

GEORGE: F-I-S-H-E-R. Fisher.

DICKMEYER: Yeah, great. And...

GEORGE: I've got a picture, somewhere. Let's see if I can remember where those things are.

GRITTER/DICKMEYER: [Laughter]