

VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

John (Jack) Richardson

Conducted by Deborah Barrett

June 2, 2005

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in partnership with the Library of Congress

(Note: Corrections made to original transcript by interviewee are noted in parentheses.)

Part 1: Introduction:

This interview is being conducted on June 2, 2005, at the Indian Prairie Public Library in Darien, IL. My name is Deb Barrett. I am speaking with Jack Richardson. Mr. Richardson was born on September 17, 1925, in Salem, Massachusetts, and now lives in Willowbrook, IL. He is a retired sales developer for the Bernardi Brothers subsidiary of Lionel Corporation. He learned of the Veterans History Project through a retired library staff member, Joann Klene. Mr. Richardson has kindly consented to be interviewed for this project. Here is his story:

Part 2: Entering the Military:

Jack, you had mentioned to me you were a civilian when Pearl Harbor was bombed and you remember it very clearly. Why don't you tell us where you were and what you were doing at the time.

Yes. I was in my senior year of high school. I turned 16 after I started my senior year, so I was very young to be a senior. I was the youngest member of my class. The afternoon of December 7, 1941, I was in the Ware Theater, matinee, Sunday afternoon. We came out and got the word. There was a crowd on the street, I remember that. I wouldn't use the word chaos, but crowded and of the awareness that we had been attacked. And I remember one of my classmates who was there, a fellow named David Werme. David said, "I'm going to enlist in the Marine Corp." And, by golly, he did. He was one of the older members of the class. And I was the youngest. David did, and he was gone in a hurry. I didn't see him for a long time. And he was off with the Marines, on flying status with them as I understand. I didn't learn much about that. But the older people in my class – and I had an older brother, five years older than I – who went in immediately. And he stayed in for thirty years.

There were a lot of people volunteering for the service at that time.

Yes. And, of course, the draft picked up a lot, and others volunteered. Some were already in Reserve groups. But things changed in a hurry. With so many gone, I remember that my senior year in high school, I was driving my brother's car. He left a 1937 convertible, V8 Ford, and said, "You take good care of it." And I think he'd have stopped the war and come home and walloped me a good one if he'd seen me driving that car around (laughs). Fortunately I didn't crack it up.

So you said your brother was five years older than you?

Five years older.

And what branch did he enlist in?

He enlisted in the Air Corps, as I did. His eyesight was such – and I can't explain this one, you have to be able to see to be in the field artillery, too – and that's where he ended up. And officer's candidate school. He went overseas with the 66th Black Panther Division. And they went over on New Year's or Christmas Eve. He didn't get over until that time. He was in England and the Battle of the Bulge – that's where they were headed. He reported that they lost their infantry in the channel. They lost that boat, and they were assigned to another part of the war effort over there at the time.

Now when he went overseas, you were still here. Let's go back to that afternoon. When you came out, there was a crowd gathered, and you knew something had happened.

Yes.

Was the crowd quiet, was it noisy?

No noisy.

Very noisy.

Yeah. It was anger.

A lot of anger.

A lot of anger that we had been attacked. And then, "We need to do something about this" attitude.

So it was a lot of anger, and "let's go take care of this now."

Yes.

Okay. Now, you said you were sixteen, you were a senior in high school. This was December, this was just before Christmas.

Yes.

So you still had school to go to. Did you go back to high school?

Yes, I was in high school. I was and I wasn't. I really wasn't there.

What do you mean?

I was going, well, when you know everything. (laughs)

When you're sixteen, and you know everything? (laughs)

And you know everything. I never carried a book out of school. And that was my major accomplishment.

Well, what was the mood like in the school? I mean, I would imagine that some of the older boys in your class, as you said, were ready to go and enlist, and some did.

They did.

What was the mood in the school when you went back to school after this happened?

Golly. I don't know how to characterize it. It's been so long. When we were attending to our – I paid attention to social things in school. And we went about our business. And all of us, all the males, knowing we were going to be involved, it was a matter of when. But in the meantime we graduated in June of '42, and we'd celebrate accordingly. There were changes. The mood in school. The changes in the community with so many going and gone. Stewart Corning and I were the senior people in the Scout troop – Troop 2 in Beverly. At 16 we were running the troop, because there were no senior officers. That summer we went to Scout camp in New Hampshire with Doug Raymond. Doug was a star athlete from Beverly, and he later became coach at Boston University. And he had the first young man to jump seven feet on his track team at Boston U – a man named Thomas. But Doug ran the camp – we had to have an adult there. – we were running the troop. Mr. Cantly registered the troops, but he didn't know much about Scouting and had no background in it. Stewart and I ran the troop at 16.

Because most of the men who would have been doing that were off.

And gone. Things you did, you did differently. I had my brother's automobile, but I had to paint out the lights. There were brown-outs on the coast. And you painted out the top half of the headlights.

And that was because ...

All through the war, because of the submarines off the coast. And the older men were patrolling the coast.

In boats?

On foot.

On foot?

On foot. On the beach. No, not on boats. That would have been a Coast Guard operation. We had a Coast Guard station.

So the older men were patrolling it as part of an organized effort, or just a community effort, or ...?

An organized effort, up and down the coast.

How were they organized – who organized them?

I don't know much about that, just that they were out there. And I can remember driving by in an area. People don't walk the beach in November-December, unless they're patrolling – it's cold out there in the North Atlantic. And seeing them out there. How they communicated, I don't know. They didn't have the little cell phones that we have today. That was going on. And most everyone did something. We did least of all, those of us that were still in school. But my mother went to work for the first time in her life. Remember we were coming out of the Depression. Things were difficult. Most families, where one person was working, hopefully, and when war started, there were things to do. Mother, my recollection is, was working out of a factory – a storefront operation. They were assembling radio components or tubes. Probably through Hygrade, which later became Sylvania – Hygrade Sylvania – probably through that local company. Actually, she didn't know much about radio tubes. They had techies to do that. But she could handle the young teenage girls that were assembling ...

Small fingers.

Yes. That was her role. Dad was in the leather business. He was the sales department of a depression company – United Finish Company. He had come out of the laboratory of a tannery and finishing company – A. C. Lawrence; a bigger company. And finishing hides was part science, part art. And Dad had that, and that made him valuable as a sales customer service representative. That's what he did. He had an "A" sticker. Everything was rationed. He had an "A" sticker for gasoline, I remember.

What was an "A" sticker?

That meant he got more gasoline – he had more stamps in his book. Everyone got a little bit, but there are A's, B's and C's. I don't remember the distinction between the B and the C. I just remember that Dad got more stamps.

And why was that?

Because of the war work he was doing. The jackets we wore flying was one example. On high altitude we had a fleece lined – these are shearling type jacket – they were heavy, cumbersome things. I never tried to get in a small turret with one on at my size; the old belly turret.

You're very tall. (laughs)

Yeah. That wouldn't work at all. And they were kind of cold. But Dad worked on the formula. Lacquer was emulsified. The purpose being to make them flash retardant. The lacquer normally put on leather goods. Wow. When those things get going, those things put on decorations. For example, they were in the Coconut Grove fire in Boston a little while after that. They lost more than 100 people, I don't remember the number off hand. But just everybody in there. That was flashover on things that had been painted with lacquer and not properly treated. So, he worked in developing that...

Boots.

And there were contracts there, yes. So I would occasionally try to swindle a stamp or two of Dad's. Gasoline, I remember, when I got home on leave, after I got in the service. I remember the number 17¢ a gallon with stamps -- 25¢ around the corner – ask no questions. (laughs)

Black market gasoline?

Yes, black market in gasoline. But there was very little of that. Black marketing was frowned upon. Or fudging on those things. People at home took seriously the importance of conserving. They saved lard, bacon fat -- everything -- was gathered.

And what was that used for? What was it gathered for?

It was reused.

You mean for cooking?

No, not for cooking. I think it had something to do with preparation of ammunition.

Oh. Okay, they turned it in.

Yeah. They turned it in. These were used – had been used in cooking at one time or another, and they saved all that, and it was collected. But people were serious about doing it and doing their part. We had relatives – my grandmother was born in England. And it was a County, I don't recall the name of it right now. It was northeast of London. She lived with us. Which was common during the depression years. And after my grandfather died, she was with us. She had cousins there who were school teachers. And she and Mother, I can remember them preparing boxes.

To send?

To go. And on a regular basis, to send things. To send soap, just bare essential type things. And I guess every once in a while I'd stick some candy in there. But care packages. And that was...

To the relatives?

Pretty much a weekly event. Yes. To those people over there who were in desperate straights. Yes.

Did you have a victory garden?

Yes. Everyone planted something. It was small. Even if it was just a few tomatoes, depending on the size of your lot. In those days our lots were small. But I think while I was gone Mother may have participated – they had victory gardens you could use, lots that said “these can be used for victory gardens.” And you could plant it yourself. That would be a hard thing to do today. Picture that. And those things were done, and you'd come back, and you'd find the things you planted would be there for you when you got there. I imagine there were some exceptions – someone would swipe a tomato or what have you. But I think that was the exception.

So this is what your life was like while you were finishing up high school after Pearl Harbor? When you graduated high school, did you go into the service right then, or did you do some work, or something else in the meantime?

No, I was still 16 when I graduated from high school.

So you were still too young.

So I took a job spraying leather.

For your Dad?

Dad? No. Dad got the job for me. He knew all the job shops around. And he got the jobs for me. And that was good, because spraying was paying \$1 an hour.

That was good money!

That was a lot of money. Men were raising families in those years on \$40 a week.

So how long were you in that job?

On that summer I wasn't in it. It was after summer, I remember, because that summer I went to camp in August.

Scouting?

Yes. In New Hampshire. And Doug Raymond, as I told you, that ran it for us. And then we worked with Doug in Pembroke on the Cape. They had a community thing for underprivileged children. And that was a switch from supervising Boy Scouts. These were tough youngsters. (laughs) That was an education.

I bet. So you did the camp and then ...

Then I worked, as I recall, at the leather factory spraying until I went into the service. At 17 I enlisted in the Air Corps.

Okay. And why did you choose the Air Corps?

I'd rather fly than walk, I felt. Had I had any idea of what the guys were going to go through in combat over Germany, I might have said, well, "I think I'll walk – a little mud won't hurt." I don't know.

So why did you decide to enlist? Was it just because this is what was expected, or were you anticipated being drafted?

I enlisted rather than being drafted so I would have that choice. And I thought that Air Corps would be the place to go. I took the exam for Aviation Cadet. And I remember there were about 35 of us, and 2 of us passed it. And that was the beginning of something for me. Remember I told you that I was a pain in high school, to be sure, to the teachers. Being as young as I was – I was big, but young – the teachers were trying to help me, and I just wasn't ready. But that was a spark when I passed that exam. Because there were fellows there from the Cambridge area with their tweed jackets on that didn't pass it.

(laughs) There's different types of knowledge. Different types of intelligence.

Maybe there's something I can do here. And that was the beginning. And when I was 18, they took us in, and we were sworn in.

Where was this that you were inducted?

In Boston. I was sworn in there. The officer who swore us in explained to us that we were the cream of the nation's youth. By the time we got to Biloxi, Mississippi, we discovered that the Sergeant down there – he didn't know that! (laughs) We were in tent city down there doing as he told us to do.

So you stayed in tents in Biloxi?

We stayed in tents.

What was the name of the camp where you were?

In Biloxi? Hm. There's only one there – Air Force Base.

Kiesler is the name of the base. Kiesler?

Kiesler Field. Yeah.

I know – I was born there!

Oh! Oh great.

So you were inducted in Boston. How did you get down to Biloxi?

Train. Open windows.

A troop train, or just a passenger train that was being used?

Troop train. We were dirty when we got there.

I believe it!

That's my recollection – troop train. I don't remember ever traveling on a passenger train as a group – it was always troop.

What time of year was it?

The fall of the year. It was cold sleeping in tents. Outdoor everything. The business of getting a shower, the business of staying warm. We got newspapers, and we

packed those, and we'd put on all the clothes that we'd been issued – as many as we could get on – to go to bed at night, it was so cold.

So there were not enough barracks? Or it was standard to stay in tents? How did you end up in tents? Was it just the number of people, or was it just the way they did it?

They didn't have the barracks space, I'm sure. That's a fair guess. They didn't put us in tents just to have us in tents. That's what they had.

How many men in a tent?

It was a pretty big tent. It was a pretty good sized tent. Eight would be a small number. I don't really remember. They were good sized tents. And you'd roll (the sides up) during the day. You had things out, and the sun would be on them to get warm in there during the day.

And at night it got cold?

So you got the extremes. Yes.

Part 3: Training:

So tell me what life was like for you in Biloxi? What did you do? What was your training like? Besides the Sergeant not thinking you were the cream of the crop? (laughs)

I remember they asked for strong swimmers. And I volunteered. I remember the corporal, then, I think it was, qualified us. He said, "Now, what I want, I want to be sure for this assignment that you are a strong swimmer." Well, I grew up close to the coast, and I considered myself to be a strong swimmer. So I hung in there, and we got our detail and found out that we were on latrine duty.

Strong swimmers, huh? (laughs)

You learned not to volunteer! That was my first lesson down there – keep quiet: keep your eyes open and your mouth closed!

So what else did you do while you were down there? What was your training like – what did they have you doing?

Well, we were out on the range. I think we may have fired guns. I know – I think it was there we took our armament training and qualified marksman with pistols – 45's

– so we had a little gun training. Yes, we did. We were out on the range and firing. It was just basic Army type thing and conditioning.

Physical conditioning?

Yes. It was advertised as a 28 day conditioning period. It took three months, I think, before they shipped us out of there.

So, were you in contact with your family at this time?

Oh yeah.

What did you tell them about camp? I mean, how did you feel, and what did you tell them?

I told them everything was fine. How were things at home? (laughs)

How did you feel being away? Was this the first time that you were really away from home?

Yes. It was difficult. It was difficult. It was a taste of reality. Being there and not knowing where we go from here. It was an adjustment.

Probably made you grow up fast.

Got old in a hurry. I went from there, and I don't think we had a stop, but our next stop was a move up to aviation students, North Carolina State College – in a six month program. And I caught fire there.

You caught fire there?

Yes. I started to listen to teachers and instructors. And I found out there were a lot of smart ones. Smarter than I was. (laughs)

It was a revelation, huh? (laughs)

Yes. Yes. And I was sick there. I got pneumonia. I was in the hospital. When I came out, they had pushed me ahead a month from 45C – I was in 45C – they said you're now in 45B. So I missed a month of training, plus the two weeks I was in the hospital. I hadn't paid any attention in math classes in high school. I didn't get a decent grade in freshman algebra – they were just talking about X's and Y's. I said if you can't speak English, why bother. Just a stupid attitude in high school. So I had all that to learn. And fortunately, the daughter – I can't remember the name – of a professor there; and there were very few women on campus – it was an engineering

school then. I think it's co-ed now, and there are a lot of gals there in many programs – a very different profile of the school. But it was mostly men. And this was a delightful young woman who was our math teacher. And she took two of us who were pushed ahead like that and got us from algebra to be ready for spherical trig in a few short weeks. We'd go, (both) of us, in the evening, to her home on campus and have supper with the professor and his daughter. And she'd tutor us after we had our supper over there. And I ate it up. So I was at the top of my class coming out of there, and I stayed there through the cadet program.

And how long was that program?

I was in for the remainder of the war – the better part of two years – I was in the aviation cadet program. There were times where we were put on casual status. “We're going to park you over here.” And be at Maxwell Field or Valdosta, Georgia, or what have you – until there's room in the next step. Some of the things that went on – I think the most important thing I've said about college training – that I woke up. That was the most important thing that happened there. And now I'm in a New York outfit instead of a Massachusetts one. Way different accent. (laughs) Different group of guys. I made some good pals there. Can we use names?

Sure.

Rushton Skakel was a pal of mine there. Rushton Skakel was Ethel Skakel Kennedy's older brother. And he kept a picture of a 14 year old girl, Ethel, sitting a horse. His dad's company was unusual at the time – Great Lakes Carbon Holding Company – 26 companies were the base of it. I got fairly close with Rushton. He was a good egg. And, of course, went with him all through bombardier school. It's interesting, because, by the time I got to bombardier school, I'm looking at Rush sitting over here, and here's Ethel and her picture sitting on his foot locker. And the fellow next to him is from West Virginia, and he smokes a stem pipe and sits on his foot locker. And he's just as bright as anybody... He'd been a First Sergeant in a line outfit and qualified for cadets and was with us. And we were mix from all walks in that one squadron. And you better, at North Carolina State, walk as one. The town there turned out for us on Saturday morning when we had our inspection – that would be after PT.

Physical Training?

Physical training. Then, after physical training, we were (running) up to six miles in formation. And while we were doing that, they were inspecting our barracks. Spit-shined shoes – the coin better bounce on your bed. We got back to our barracks long enough to put our white gloves on, get the sabers out for those who were student officers, and put the cap on and out on the parade grounds. And the town would turn out for us. And Raleigh, North Carolina, just adopted us. And we responded. If

someone was downtown out of order wearing that patch, 59th CTD, and he's walking the street weaving, the next thing you'd know there'd be somebody on either side of him. "It's time for you to go back." "Well, I'm not going back, I'm having a good time." "Well, you've already had a good time. And you are going back."

Was that somebody from the school or from the civilians or what?

No.

One of you guys.

We would take him back.

Somebody from the squadron.

Sure. We wouldn't put up with foolishness like that. I guess – not that we were opposed to having a good time ... (laughs)

You just kind of watched it. (laughs)

We had a good thing going there. People were wonderful to us. We had cars lined up. In our squad room on Thanksgiving – "Does everybody have a place to go for Thanksgiving dinner? If not, come with us." That's the way it was.

So the town really adopted you?

Yes. They did.

How did that make you feel?

Good. Good. We responded. We responded. We wanted to show that we appreciated that.

So how long were you at NC State, then?

Actually, I was there five months – I got four and a half months of training on a six month program. Remember, I was two weeks in the hospital, and they pushed me ahead a class. And then we moved out. From there the next big thing was Tindell Field, Florida. And I don't remember all the in-between's. Because we'd be parked at a base here and there from time to time en route to the next step. And that was aerial gunnery. We flew in B17's and B24's.

And you were a gunner?

You have to be if you're going to be a bombardier. You have to fire every gun on the ship. I very suddenly became big. I didn't like that ball turret at all. It was tight for me. I just stuck my elbows out and said, "I'm sorry, Sarge, I'm not going to fit in this." I was absolutely uncomfortable in that. We had one in the air in a B17. If you remember the movie, Memphis Belle, where they had someone stuck in that ball turret. That happened to us at high altitude. And it was a lesson we hadn't planned on. When the ball went down, it cut the lines, the feed lines, to the turret – you've got oxygen, hydraulics and what have you – and I'm on the waist gun on one side talking to the Sergeant up there, who's in charge. I'm talking to him. There are P63 airplanes running around with us and making runs on us. We had cameras on our guns, not ammunition. So when they came, you're supposed to be getting a good picture. He went under, (whish) and I got as close to him as I can and started yelling, "He's going under. Watch him, he's coming up the other side. Sergeant," I looked at him, "Sergeant," I started making hand signals at him, and then I started to figure out what was going on. And discovered – because we were up at 20,000 feet, maybe 22 – they were all out of oxygen. I was the only one that had oxygen. I called the pilot. He said, "We're getting out of here. Hang on. Make sure everybody's buttoned." And he dropped a wing and down we went. Well, on the way down, we're looking the crank this thing, and the gear ratio on that thing was awful. Boy, you find out who your friends are there if you have an emergency, with that thing. And that was a lesson to us about that ball turret. You get down in there, and without the hydraulics and you are stuck in there, pal. Because that ball rotates, and it's only in one position that you can open the door. And if it's in any other position, even slightly...

Somebody has to...

You can't open it. That hydraulic is everything. So, we were getting some lessons. We had some air incidents in training. Bombardier school had a pilot freeze on us one night.

Freeze as in, like attacked you...

He choked. He was a new pilot. I don't know how he got on our plane, but he was alone, and this was a solo for him. He's taking a group up by himself for the first time, and he's fresh out of pilot school. So I said, "Look, I really need the practice. Would you let me set up the auto pilot, because I'm first one on the bomb site." We've got ten bombs on the plane. And, no, he's going to do it. I thought, "Oh, great." By the time I got up there, it was fouled up. I found out on the first target we ran on, it would drop wing low, and it was trouble. So, to make a long story short, we got instruction from the base to salvo the load. So, without a working bomb site, I had to get that load inside the fence, so to speak. Not kill any cattle down there in Texas – we were in Childress, Texas, at the time. Flying out of Childress. Salvo'd that load, which is an armed dropped, and they'd all explode. But there wasn't much

in there. Just 2 lbs. of black powder, and the rest was sand. That's so you could score the hits. When I dumped the load, we got (back to base). We made three passes at that field before he could put the thing down. And at one point I asked, "Can I help you up here?" "No, no" he's insisting.

And this is still from NC State?

He finally got it on the ground.

And this is still when you were flying out of NC State?

No, we were flying out of Childress, Texas, then.

So how did you get from NC State. I mean you were in Florida, you were telling us – Tindell Field?

Tindell Field. Then you've got to go to pre-flight.

That was pre-flight?

Pre-flight you go to Maxwell, which was headquarters eastern flying training command. Montgomery, Alabama.

So, let me see. You went from Biloxi, to Tindell Field, Florida. From there to Alabama?

Yes. There may be some switches in there. Not exact. But that's the progression of the training. I was at Montgomery twice. Once just before we went to bombardier school, and once for pre-flight. So, we landed down there, a bunch of hot-shots. Lieutenant, we called him "Rock," not directly – "Sir" – "Rock" Shea, at North Carolina State. He ran a tight ship, and we thought we were a bunch of hot-shots. And we hit the platform down there in Montgomery, Alabama, 256 cadets – wham-bam, with our white glove on, ready to go, and the student officers that came out to pick us up wondered, "What have we got here?" We were gung-ho.

(End Side A)

We turned the tape over, and we've been talking for a few minutes off-line about the progression that Jack made from NC State to Tindell Field for aerial gunnery, then to Alabama for pre-flight. Then from there you went to ...

Valdosta, Georgia. They were parking us there – they were flying B25's out of there for pilot training. And we had the luxury of the cadet mess, which was manned by German prisoners of war. They were great. I couldn't believe it the first day I

walked in. At that point I was a squadron commander. I didn't have a lot of responsibility because my squadron was permanent detail – they were assigned around the post on jobs. I'd go down and take the flag down – I had to open post every night. And that mess hall was something. I can remember a fellow asked the first time I went in, "How would you like to have your eggs done?" I thought, is he putting me on? (laughs) We had pretty good cadet messes here and there, but this – the officers referred to their mess at Valdosta as the "trough." The cadets are going to dinner, let's go to the "trough." That was the officers' club. (laughs) That was a nice stopover before we went back to Maxwell.

How long were you in Valdosta?

Not more than a month to six weeks.

Nice little break.

Nice little break. We moved in trains. One of the things – I can't give it to you chronologically because it was on one of these gaps when we were on casual status – I went up the coast and was coming back with one of my pals. We had been at Valdosta, we had to leave there. So I went home to Massachusetts, and coming back we were seated. Now these are old railroad cars, straw type seat things, old things, windows open, no air-conditioning. And we'd have a mess car in the middle of it there somewhere – go through, tin cup kind of thing. But this was a civilian train, and those cars were just as bad. And we were sitting with two (black) cadets from Selma. On the way back, and when we hit the Mason-Dixon line, the train stopped, and they had to get up and go to another car.

When you got to the south?

Yeah. When we crossed the line. That hit you right in the pit of your stomach.

I can imagine.

These guys were good, by the way. These were cadets like we were, and we had an awful lot in common, and they were a couple of sharp young guys.

So it was like you were equal until you got to the Mason-Dixon line and they had to move to the back.

They had to move. That was a reality. I should not have been shocked, because back in high school, and I'm running you back and forth...I was great at proms... I went to all the proms. So I went to 1943 prom – I was still at home – and Gloria Gerten was in that class, and she was one of the best looking girls in the class. And she didn't have an escort, so she asked her dance instructor, George Mitchell. There were two

black families in the city of Beverly.(MA) There was the Stowe family and the Mitchell family. Olive Mitchell, I think, was in my class – and her brother was four years ahead of us. And he was Gloria’s dancing teacher. And I guess because, guessing, everybody was thinking Gloria must have a date, but no one asked her. So she came with her dance instructor.

What was the reaction?

It was a hullabaloo. I remember the faculty members got together, and there was a big pow-wow, and George and Gloria walked out. So I shouldn’t have been too surprised. So it wasn’t just in the south, and the Mason-Dixon line.

But that abrupt stop must really have brought it home to you.

Oh yes. Yes, it did.

You can ride here until now, and then you have to move. And this was a civilian train you said?

Yes.

And how did people react – first of all, how did people react to you on the train, and how did they react when these two had to move back? Did anybody...

I don’t recall their reaction, I just recall my own.

Because it was so strained...

It’s one of those things that at that time you just had to accept because that’s the way it was.

But it didn’t sit well with you.

No. No. To sit there and watch these guys who were doing everything we were doing and then to be treated that way – that you can’t sit there and have to go and sit somewhere else.

I can see that left a lasting impression.

Yes. It did. Yes it did. It’s changed a lot.

Now, you took the train home to Massachusetts. So you got to go home on leave? And visit your family?

Yes.

What did they think when you came ... well, what did you do when you came home on leave? Did you help your Dad with his business? Did you just relax? (laughs)

When I'm home, you know that I just might have a date. (laughs) Mother was there to spoil you. She saved all her ration stamps. I'd tell her, "Mom, don't save butter for me." She was so pleased that she had all these things set aside to make, and I'd get that every day in the mess hall. We had a cadet mess that was separate. We got a dollar a day allowance for food. And it was more than enough, well managed, with good food. We ate well. Not at Biloxi, Mississippi! (laughs) That was another experience.

When you got home on leave, how did people react when you got home? Did people stop by to come visit you, or ...

All the cousins would show up.

So it was a special occasion.

Oh yes. Yes. We'd get together. We'd been used to getting together with cousins often as a youngster. More often than not we'd be at the Doust family, my first cousins, in South Salem. We'd be over there for holidays. Thanksgiving. Bring a little of this and a little of that; do this and that. My mother and my Aunt Angie would fight over which family recipe for the dressing was the best. And we'd scatter when that started! (laughs) Go out and get all into the sailboat. We'd go out in the sailboat, depending on the tide. Maybe go fishing, depending on how we felt. That was a Sunday get-together.

So you were talking about sailboats, and earlier you were talking about people patrolling the shore. So, were people more comfortable going out at that point? Or did you just get used to it.

You were just in the harbor. You were right in the harbor there. This was a cove. We didn't go very far.

So, you took the troop trains back and forth. You went home on leave. We talked about being in Georgia for the pilot training. Where did you go after that?

I was not there for pilot training. They were training pilots there. I was there casual.

Okay. Where did you go after Valdosta?

Bombardier school. No, I went back to Maxwell. Went back to Maxwell and was on lifeguard duty.

Okay. And how long was that, that you were there?

Golly. A couple of months.

Okay. Not a real long time.

Not a long time. I did lifeguard duty there. And I was taking my water safety instruction. I left there – they shipped out to Childress before I got my WSI.

Childress where?

Texas. It was bombardier school. There were bombardiers in Childress. There were other places, but there was three of them from my group that went down from Maxwell. Now we're going into central command. Montgomery, Alabama was headquarters for eastern flying training command. We're now in central command in Childress, Texas. And I believe San Antonio was the headquarters of central command. Childress, Midland and Big Springs. And we were with the Childress group. The reason I mention the others, that we had some problems there. I mentioned the one we had flying with the fellow we had who froze on us. We had a mid-air collision in Big Springs. And there were six casualties. Art Jackson, who was a flight lieutenant at Maxwell Field with us, ...was killed. George Stoolman – those are the two names I remember -- lived. And I remember George because he was a passive, easygoing guy who would get up and give somebody his seat, kind of guy. You don't think of others being aggressive, but the report we got back was that George was thrown out of the airplane and went back in and got the pilot out of there – the pilot was unconscious. And George did that with his legs mangled. And crawled in and pulled the pilot out of the airplane. So, in preparing ourselves for combat, we had some incidents that tested, and tested George. But the war was all over for him with those mangled legs – that was the end of it for him. Of course, the folks back home had to hear about the other fella. We had veterans who had flown Ploesti (Romania) raids that trained us. And we were at a point while we were in bombardier school that we understood that this was pretty serious business. There was some fun and games things in the cadet corps. And I got a lot out of it – being in the cadet corps. But those fellows who trained us let us know just how nasty it was. And how happy they were to be home. We were preparing ourselves to go to Japan. We knew nothing about the atomic bomb. There were a lot of things we knew nothing about. We thrived on rumors, we moved on orders. And our rumors were great about all sorts of things that were going to happen. But we waited for orders, and that was what was actually going to happen. And coming out of bombardier school in the early fall when we were scheduled to come out, we expected that most

of us would be going to Japan. In the process, some of these cadets, and then the ASTP guys that were in college...

What is the ASTP?

Army Specialized Training. 130 and over IQ's, ASTP. These are bright boys. They were washed out wholesale and put into outfits where needed; many of them wound up in infantry outfits carrying a rifle. We had guys – if you had a 111 serial number, you were safe. We had guys who washed out who were good students, fellows who were trained pilots when they came in, washed out because they were drafted. They had a 3 in the front of their number, Army serial number.

The 3 indicated that you were drafted?

You were drafted. But they had a contract with us of enlisted. And with the 1 we stayed in on the basis of that one number. That was how that was divided. Now, a lot of those guys were just pushed into outfits where bodies were needed. We had so many guys, so many veterans, coming back from Germany. Some of these were high point guys themselves and had spent a lot of time over there. They weren't planning to go to Japan if they could help it. We were expecting a horror of a combat situation there. And as it turned out, when those bombs were dropped, that did it, and that stopped it.

And where were you when the bomb was dropped?

In Childress, Texas.

You were in Childress. How long had you been there when that happened?

Oh, I had only two more bombing missions. I had my uniforms ordered. I was getting ready to graduate. Six months, I think.

How was the news received on the base there?

You have never seen a party like that. (laughs)

Tell me what it was like.

Well, they closed the base, and they opened the PX, and there was a lot of beer drinking, a lot of celebrating. Our barracks was next to the WAACS barracks, and they put us there because they figured that's a safe place to put the cadets, because they're not going to start any trouble. (laughing) But it didn't work out that way that night. It was a rainy, rainy night. And the trenches down there were full of water. And guys were swimming in it in full uniform and walking around with a girl on their

shoulders. And the girl that was in charge of the WAACS barracks was having a nightmare because the gals were going to have a good time, too. And it was just a big party. And the CO – there were two officers on the post that had mustaches; one was the commanding officer who was a good guy; the other was in charge of the mess hall. And they both had mustaches. And one of the cadets – it wasn't necessarily a cadet, I hope (laughs) – went up and slapped this fellow on the back and told him what a good job he was doing with the mess hall. And in the process he knocked him down and into a puddle of beer. That was the CO. That was not the captain. And to add insult to injury, I was told on good authority, some girls got on the base who were interested in a party – let's just leave it there. And they got to the officers club before the base was locked down. And they were there at the officers club party, and one of them nailed him – he got into another uniform – he got nailed with a bottle over the head later in the evening, which is unfortunate.

So, you're ready to graduate. You just find out you're not going overseas, and you were discharged after that?

They said you had an option. Do you want to be in the post-war Air Corps? What do you mean post-war – that was one question I had. The other one is, can I take pilot school. I knew that I had been designated as a second lieutenant, and I was of two candidates for class bombardier. "Can you tell me I'll go to pilot school and I'll sign right now." "No, we can't tell you that." We didn't know; we had no way to know. But I had been touched at North Carolina State when I started to achieve and do things right and listen and pay attention. And I said, I want to get a college education. I don't think that would have happened to me under normal circumstances. My brother was putting himself through college.

He was out of the service at this point?

(Yes)... (laughs) When I was in high school, remember he was five years ahead of me, and he was at Northeastern, nights, working for a Dr. Vandergren in a laboratory at Lever Brothers. That's where he picked up his (language skills). He was fluent in German, and he went on and his career was something. He was in intelligence. I found out after it was declassified – what he was involved in. But only then. That's why he was in it – he would never tell the left hand what the right was doing anyway. But he stayed in for thirty. He was at Vietnam, he was in Korea.

So he was a career military man.

Yep.

But you weren't.

Not me. No. But I'd have hung on there, become a pilot, I figured would have been the equivalent – I'd have been all set. There's no future for bombardiers. You had to do that. And I wasn't going to do it on the "if, maybe" routine. Because I knew I could go home and go to school.

So you decided just to take the discharge.

Yes. And I came out of the cadet corps a better man than when I went in. And better off. And I was one of the ones who did. Some of us did. So many didn't. Some didn't come home – Art Jackson didn't come home, two boys from my grade school class, Charles Cutler and Garrett Lynch didn't come home. And that's just one room in a grade school, and they were with us, and they never came back. And some came back depressed, and for good reason. And I gained from my experience there. And fortunately came back in my right mind and motivated.

So you were discharged from Texas.

Yes.

And you came home. Did they know you were coming home?

Oh yes.

Did they meet you – you took the train back?

Yes.

And what happened when you got home – who met you, what did you do? You partied, I'm sure! (laughs)

Mother and Dad. They were happy to see me. There's one incident that I'd like to tell. When the war ended, before I finally came home, before I was discharged – I was about to get discharged. But it happened at that time. My grandmother died. I talked to the chaplain, and he arranged for me to get emergency papers and for the quarters or whatever it took to get me started. I picked up a ride in General Bliss' plane. The General was not there. That was a Lockheed Hudson, which was a twin engine bomber, a number of which we made for the Brits and sent over there. There was a captain flying the plane. He picked me up at Washington National, and there were two "paddle feet" there. A "paddle foot" is one who does not fly – we had names for each other. (laughs) These boys had what appeared to me to be wounds, and had late in the war, and they had problems. I think it might have happened on post, perhaps not – I have no idea. But they were hurting. And we stopped over to the Naval station. He said we have two nurses to pick up. They were prisoners of the Japanese for four years, and they are on their first leave home. Do not discuss it with

them, under any circumstance. Okay. So, by the time we got to Pottstown, I was flying co-pilot for him because it was a nasty day, and he put me in the co-pilot's seat, and I had plenty to do – I know what to do to help him. And the two “paddle feet” got sick, and guess who looking after them – those two girls. And they were in their 20's, and they looked closer to 50.

After what they'd been through.

Yes. And we didn't discuss it with them. They were so glad when we landed at LaGuardia.

Where did you pick them up from?

The Naval Air Station across from Washington National, right in Washington D.C. We just hopped up and down, picked them up and headed for – I think it was Pottstown – that's where we dropped his crew member. Then from there on he put me in the co-pilot seat, and we flew on instruments coming in from there. He had me flying the airplane out over Long Island Sound up there, where they had us stacked. I can remember we were flying north-south (all turns to the west). I think we were (every) 60 seconds at a given altitude and down again – one of us on the liaison, the other one on command...we were pretty close to the ground when we broke out of it. (laughs) So you could clearly see the runway. We were all glad to be on the ground. He was a good pilot.

That was for your grandmother's funeral.

I didn't get home in time. I tried. But I was there for my mother, the time when she lost her mom, so. But I had missed the funeral, and we did everything I could to get there.

So that was an emergency leave home.

Yes.

And was that toward the end of your time?

Yes. And I went back was working personnel services – that was my assignment on the post. I was sitting in line – you sit in line. Don't volunteer – remember I told you don't volunteer? (laughs) So Richardson and Roy. We traveled together, were in formations together. Our names were called in mail call together, Richardson and Roy. And, he said, “Hey, look, they're getting people over at personnel services.” He said, “I can play the piano. I'm going to tell them I'm a musician.” I said, “I can do posters. I'll tell them I'm an artist.” (laughs) Most of the guys were put on “MP duty,” out in the hot sun. And I got on personnel services. I don't know – do you

remember Damien O’Flynn? Do you remember the show, Gunsmoke? He was the judge. Damien O’Flynn was in there. He was the only other person in the barracks that they put us in. The other guys are doing MP duty out in the sun. And we have to carry the girls’ costumes for them for the USO shows, and stuff like that. (laughs) If you listen long enough and pay attention, you learn and learn. It took a while, but we kind of got the hang of things.

When you were there and you did have some entertainment or down time, what did you do? Did you have USO shows on the base?

What did we do for entertainment? We had dances. I remember we’d get busloads of girls to dances at Childress. And I remember we got a new cadet club when I was there, and the bus arrived, and here come the gals – and they’re well chaperoned when they come – and here they come. And the Alpha one is in the lead. And she’s looking for the signs for the ladies’ room – they had been on a bus ride, I’ve forgotten where they came from. And so she took off for it. And some clown in this new club had switched the signs on the men’s and ladies’ room on the poor kids. And that started a hullabaloo, too. But the girls were well chaperoned, except for someone having a brain cramp like that and doing a dumb thing, they were nicely treated.

You mentioned carrying the costumes for dancers for the USO shows. Who did you see in the USO shows?

Oh, we didn’t get the stars. They were young troops. Gosh, Bob Hope – he hit the front lines.

He was busy in Europe and the South Pacific ...

He was over there, yeah. These were local troops.

Local acts?

Yes, that came in. “A banana peel sergeant” more or less supervised our activity. She was a young woman. She had me sized up to be a dancer with her. She was a dancer. I said I don’t want to dance, I act. She thought, I’ll show you how. I’ll have to pick her up and toss her around, and she had that all figured out. I hadn’t planned on that when I volunteered.

You didn’t know you’d be carrying her, too!

It never came to that – never came to that. We were discharged, and I got out from under that one.

When you were discharged and got home, what was life like when you just got back home? What did you do? How did people respond?

Well, we had a 52-20 club, which I didn't join.

What was 52-20?

\$20 a week for 52 weeks. For veterans who needed it. And I imagine there were some veterans who did. They'd been tramping around in Europe, in the jungle or what have you, and they needed that.

And what was that ...

Government, federal ...

Assistance?

Federal program. Yes, absolutely. Just \$20, no questions asked.

Just to help pay for expenses ...

To get readjusted. And I took a job again. I think the first one I took was at Hygrade-Sylvania, slugging hampers for the girls that were assembling things there. And then I found a good one in Finishing Leather where I could make more money. And I took that. I wanted to put some money away to go to school. I had an objective other than just to sit on the beach when I got home.

You wanted to get an education.

Yes, ma'am. And I was very grateful to have that GI Bill that made the difference in me being able to go. And I went to Boston University.

What did you study?

I was in the first class of general studies there – general college. It was great. It was great. I know we took the grad-record exam before the end of our sophomore year, and we had ten points above the median for liberal arts seniors.

How old were you compared to the other students?

I felt sorry for the high school kids coming in, because they were straight out of high school. They were where I was – know nothing.

When you went to the Air Corps.

Yes, before I went into the Air Corps. Perhaps a little better directed. But I can remember going down – I train-hopped Beverly to Boston, back and forth. I drove down at night, and I'd stop in once in a while, say on Friday night, have a beer in North station. I'm looking at the book *History of Western Civilization*. Up there behind the bar, it's one of my classmates, he's working, he's got a wife, no fooling around. We were there to get grades. I had an opportunity there – I was asked if I wanted to take the exam for Med School. And I met a young lady. We were married 54 years. I lost her this past October. She was going to what was then a girls' school, in Beverly, Endicott Junior. It's now four years, and they have a grad program, and it's co-ed. But we were introduced by her roommate and a pal of mine that I was train-hopping with. He said she was a nice tall girl, and I think you'd enjoy each other, and she was getting the same urging. And it worked. She was a theater major. She went to New York to crack Broadway and wound up at an ad agency as an expediter for bread and butter. We were married there. I was with the Petroleum Institute, entry level. I was transferred to Minneapolis and a promotion. But while we were there, we had a good time. We did all the free things – my office was in Rockefeller Center. I'd walk out on my lunch hour and get tickets to the Milton Berle show. Freebies. And we knew where all the freebies were.

So how did you end up in Willowbrook, Illinois?

We were in Cincinnati, Ohio, where we wound up. And we were in a condo down there. And I was desperately ill. I had had brain surgery – hematomas removed. Cause, for sure, not certain. Then my second aortic valve replacement, plus a pacemaker, plus losing part of one lung and pneumonia, congestive heart failure. And to get my second heart valve. I was down to 153 pounds, and we have two daughters here in Western Springs. And my wife wanted to be near them so she could get help taking care of me. And it turned. After we got up here, I got better, and she died of breast cancer. It was a rare form – fast traveling – came in under the radar. It was a shock. Good memories, though.

So you have two daughters in this area?

In this area.

Any other kids, or is it just the two daughters?

I have a son in New Jersey. He and his wife and his daughter are there. And the two girls here are married and both living in Western Springs. Five grandchildren all together. And I spend a lot of time with them. I'll be having dinner tonight with my oldest daughter and her family.

Have you kept in touch with any of your buddies from the service?

I saw Rushton Skakel in New York City on one occasion. I was still with the Petroleum Institute, so it was back in the '50s. And I think I was in Minnesota, no I was in Cincinnati at the time, so it was after '55 – it was between '55 and '58, in there – and I saw Rush. And I met him at the New York Athletic Club – Rush – and he was just off the squash court. And he had his entourage of people around him. And we were working stiffs in the middle of a lunch break.

(Side B Ends)

At the end of the tape you were telling me about running into Rushton Skakel.

Rushton Skakel. Rush was a good athlete. His arms came down to his knees! (laughs) At least it seemed that way to me, because I thought I was a pretty good swimmer. I got in the pool swimming against him and found out... now, I'd not learned some things swimming in Idlewood Lake and down at the beach in Beverly Cove (MA). But he'd been trained in the pool, and he was good! (laughs)

So, when you ran into him in New York you said?

I ran into him in New York, and he had his entourage with him, and he was just off the squash court, and we visited briefly for a little bit. It was just a nice visit to say hi and how are you. He was a good egg. I had to laugh. When I was in the hospital with pneumonia, the nurse and I got kind of, well, acquainted. She said, "We could go out." ... "We'd have to be in civies. ...because there were officers, ...and we couldn't be seen together." And she asked me if I knew anyone athletic. And I said, sure. And I had Rush in mind. And so she said, "Okay. I'll get another gal. I know the gal to get, and the two of us, and we can go up to the pond, and we'd be in civies and swim, and we'd have a good time." Well, I got word back that that girl wasn't going to go out with this guy because he wasn't a commissioned officer. And I thought later, honey, you missed the boat! (laughs)

Any of your buddies you stayed in touch with afterwards, like on a regular basis? Did you all just go back to your lives?

Kind of went back to our lives. Back into the community. Yeah.

Have you gotten involved in any veterans' organizations?

For a brief time I belonged to the Legion in Milford, Ohio. My son was playing junior legion ball, (laughs) and it seemed like the thing to do.

But you didn't keep it up.

No, I didn't keep it up.

We're just about ready to wrap up. So is there anything else that you remember, that you want to share?

I think I probably...I'll remember it when I get home.

One of the things you mentioned was that your time in the military really affected your outlook, your drive. You said it affected your desire for an education, which you really didn't have much before. Is there any other way that it affected you?

That was the most important thing. I gained an element of self respect because I realized that I could achieve things. I think it may have come another way. But it came in a hurry when I got in the cadet corps. And it all started with the desire to fly rather than walk. And I ate it up – the cadet corps; I liked it. I was good on the (Norden) bomb sight. I had no trouble with the math and the things I had to work on. I suddenly found instructors who were smart. (laughs) I was paying attention. I was motivated. So I came home better for having been there. Much better off.

It turned out to be really an important thing in your life for a number of reasons.

Absolutely.

Okay. Is there anything else that you would like to share with us before we go off record?

I've had some wonderful years. I had a great marriage. It started out like a lot of other marriages – young folks, and we had issues. But we wound up starting every day with a hug and ending it the same way, and my memories are good ones. My memories of my service are good ones, fortunately. So many fellows just don't want to talk about it – the things they had to go through. And the reality today. We had hoped that war time problems had been solved.

The war to end all wars, huh, and the war after that.

Absolutely. And I guess it worked out that way. I just hope and pray that we can keep a free society for our children to grow in. There are so many things to learn, so many things to do – more important than shooting each other. That they'll have the opportunity to do those things.

Okay. Well, thank you for taking the time to do this and for sharing your memories. And we'll go off record.