

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH EDGAR WOLF, JR.

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

MOUNT LAUREL, NEW JERSEY

FEBRUARY 4, 2008

TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Edgar Wolf, Jr., on February 4, 2008, in Mount Laurel, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth. Mr. Wolf, thank you very much for having me here today.

Edgar Wolf, Jr.: It's really a pleasure. I was sort of looking forward to this.

SI: Wonderful, and thank you, also, for all the materials that you've collected and given me to take back to Rutgers.

EW: Hopefully, what I gave you today will enhance what you already have.

SI: Oh, it certainly will. On the record, I'd like to note that you were interviewed for NJN's documentary coverage that supplemented Ken Burns' *The War* documentary series and, also, by the National Museum of the Pacific War, their Center for Pacific War Studies' Oral History Program.

EW: That's correct. Also, although it wasn't a separate interview, I filled out all the documents that went to the Library of Congress.

SI: Okay, the Veterans History Project.

EW: I do have an identification number--I don't know it offhand--that they assigned me there.

SI: If anybody's listening to this and you don't find something you need about Mr. Wolf, you can look in these other sources. To begin, could you tell me where and when you were born?

EW: Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, May 12, 1920, at Mount Sinai Hospital.

SI: What were your parents' names?

EW: Pauline Brinkmann Wolf and Edgar Wolf. Actually, he was Senior, but he never assumed a senior; it was just plain Edgar Wolf. Only after I was born was there a junior added. It just so happened that we lived in Center City, 18th and the Parkway, right now where the Four Seasons Hotel is located.

The situation after I was born, we lived with my grandparents at 130 North 18th Street, again where the hotel is now. My Grandfather Brinkmann was a prominent Philadelphia surgeon. His offices were on the street level and the grandparents lived on the second floor front. The parlor and leisurely part of the household was in the second floor rear.

We had the third floor front and the third floor rear was servants' quarters. This was a seventeen-room brownstone in Philadelphia, a big house. Actually, we lived in that residence until my grandparents died when I was about, I guess, nineteen years old.

I went to grammar school at Thaddeus Stevens School of Practice, which was at 13th and Spring Garden Streets, and it was attached to the Philadelphia Normal School. The student teachers came over to Thaddeus Stevens to practice their teaching. It was really a quality school.

From there, I went to a grammar school. It was at 15th and Race Streets. Offhand, I can't remember the name of it, but I was there from sixth through eighth grade, strictly grammar school. From there, I evidently was good enough that I got into Central High School in Philadelphia, which is one of the two predominant schools at that time.

Central High School was for boys, Girls' High School was for girls. Today, they both remain quality schools in education, although Central now is combined with the boys and girls, and still remains the number one school, along with Girls' High, in Philadelphia.

SI: Can we go back? I wanted to ask a little bit about your parents' backgrounds. Your father, what was his profession?

EW: My father was in theatrics. Actually, if you can appreciate Radio City Music Hall and the presentations there, he did the same thing in Philadelphia at the Stanley Theatre, which then would be the equivalent of Radio City Music Hall in its day. Then, further in his association with the Stanley Company of America, he was instrumental in developing the Mastbaum Theatre, which became a showplace just like Radio City Music Hall.

Of course, it doesn't exist today, because it was just too much for Philadelphia, and it was torn down. Of course, eventually, in retirement days, he went to work as a theater manager for different theaters in the City of Philadelphia and, also, Atlantic City.

My mother went to a Quaker school, the Friends School in Center City, Philadelphia. From there (or along with it), she went to a music school on North Broad Street in Philadelphia, where her--I don't think it was a major, it was just her training--was in piano. She played beautiful piano.

She got involved during her lifetime with a sorority who was of talented people in Philadelphia. That was sort of like her objective. During life, she remained close with that in different activities.

My grandparents, as I say, both died within about six weeks of each other. He died in his office. He had a--I can't remember exactly what it was, but where you have a rupture of a blood vessel.

SI: Embolism?

EW: Sort of that, and my grandmother outlasted him by about six weeks, but she had been sick for years with cancer. I didn't know my grandparents on my father's side too well. My grandfather had died long before I was born.

His business took him into Camden, New Jersey, where he was a liquor merchant, wholesale distributor of distilled something; I forgot how they described it. Only recently did I find out where he was located. I went down to the Camden County Historical Society.

My grandmother, I did remember. She lived on Snyder Avenue in Philadelphia and associated with her was my uncle, my father's brother. He lived not too far distant, also in South Philadelphia. That family, interesting enough, it was two different--how can I describe this? I am of such broad backgrounds religiously.

My grandmother on my mother's side was Scots Irish Episcopalian. Dr. Brinkmann was Jewish. My mother went to Quaker school. My father was Jewish. His brother was Catholic. That whole family had been raised Catholic. So, I'm a man of all religions and understanding of all and appreciate them all, although I practice Judaism. What else can I tell you along that vein?

SI: Your mother and father brought you up in the Jewish faith.

EW: I had the choice. Mother never pursued anything. The only way, I guess, I selected it was because I used to go to synagogue regularly with my father, went to Congregation Rodeph Shalom in Philadelphia. It is one of the oldest Reformed congregations.

I followed through with that over the years. Both wives, my first wife, Ruth Brandes, followed the Jewish faith and my current wife, Nancy, likewise is from a Jewish background. In that field, I've been very active over the years. Actually, at the time--well, I'll lead up to a certain time. I'll go backwards.

After I graduated high school, even before, I was working as an errand boy in a [family]-owned business called Westcott & Thomson. Westcott & Thomson, Thomson was the family background of my grandmother.

Going back even further, I am directly related to Charles Thomson, Secretary of the Continental Congress. So, my historical background goes that far. I have all sorts of documentation about that, although I can't say that he was my great, great granduncle or what it was, but there is that direct connection.

Getting back to where I lost trend after I made that statement--oh, Westcott & Thomson, Charles Thomson (at this level) was my grandmother's brother. They had established Westcott & Thomson. At the time it was liquidated, it was the oldest company of its type, having set type for various public publishers, home and Bibles, Lippincott, who published medical books, W. B. Saunders, a broad manufacturer of medical-related texts.

Actually, after errand boy, I got into being an apprentice there. At the time, it was prewar and I got active in Rodeph Shalom, in the junior congregation there. Somewhere along the way, I got to be president of the junior congregation. I happened to be conducting a meeting the day that the United States was attacked by Japan.

[Editor's Note: Japanese forces attacked the American naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941, thrusting the United States into the Second World War.]

I was chairman of the meeting that day. Somehow or other, somebody got the word to me that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. I had previously been registered for the draft with one of the higher designations. I forget how it went then.

Ensuing, I said to my junior congregation at that time, I said, "It's apparent that I may not be with you in the future, so, I just want to tell you the sad news is that the United States has been attacked by Japan. I don't know what's going to be the future, but you are warned that we are in this situation now." Of course, that was December.

Somehow or other, I decided that I knew I was going to be drafted. My interest had been in aircraft, and so, I volunteered. I enlisted in the United States Army Air Corps, as it was called then, and [was] immediately accepted. From there, there was just such a rush of enlistees that they put me on hold for about two or three weeks, until they could process all the people who had volunteered.

They called me, I think it was around the 29th of January in '42, to go to a station up in Mechanicsville (I think it was Mechanicsville), Pennsylvania, where they issued your uniforms and gave you your initial shots. Then, they put us on a train and we went to Kessler Field, down in Mississippi. It was a train ride down there, very uncomfortable, but not as uncomfortable as future train rides would be.

We got down there and Kessler Field was a brand-new field that some politician had inveigled the military to buy his property. So, they were developing Kessler Field on this property. Well, all I can describe it is that it was not initial training as one would expect.

Because the field was so new that, when we got there, the first responsibility we had was to clean out the barracks, the newly constructed barracks, which the contractors had left. It was finished, but there was no clean-up afterwards. There was sawdust and lumber all over.

So, we had to clean that up first, which would be our assigned barracks. Then, I forget where we slept that night, if we'd slept anywhere, but, the next day, they hauled us down into Biloxi, to the port. We unloaded ships of cots. In other words, the cots had been delivered by ship--I don't know why, anyway--but, then, we unloaded the ship. We brought the cots back and set up our quarters.

The weather down there at that time of year was very, very rainy. We spent many hours--I can't tell you how many days--we'd get up in the morning, we'd go out and we'd shovel sand back in where it had been washed out around the concrete work. That's how new the base was, because they didn't have enough sand that you could practice drill.

So, anyway, we finally developed that into where, the few days we were there, that was something that we could maneuver. I think we did get some basic training. We also got our

interviews, based on the records we had submitted when we signed up, to decide where we would be trained.

Of course, I had volunteered. Again, I wanted to be an aircraft mechanic. I had forgotten (had never presented it, even to this day) that Central High School was qualified by the State of Pennsylvania to issue degrees. I had gotten a degree in mechanical arts from Central High School. It may have gone a long way from an educational standpoint, but, evidently, I didn't need it, because I tested well.

They decided that I would go to a specific school for aircraft maintenance. It was operated by J. Paul Getty. Now, if you know J. Paul Getty, he was a millionaire and developer. In recent years, we went to his museum, somewhere, well-known. Only about two years ago, when I looked at my, I guess you call it a diploma, is a hand-signed signature of his, which is a historical and valuable document.

Anyway, I evidently went [far] in the testing. I did get sent to this school because of its quality education. It was well-known because it had been established to afford primary training for flight pilots. Also, they manufactured, and I think there's some of them still in existence, one of the first trailers, home trailers, which was made of aluminum and very unique, almost like a bullet in its shape.

SI: The streamline ones?

WD: Yes, and that was one of their main businesses. So, anyway, it was interesting there. The people in Tulsa, which was where they're located, were magnificent. Here we are, a military outfit under strictly civilian control, except for [the] commander of the detachment, the training detachment, and the people were wonderful.

We would get off on a weekend and there would be cars--this is all during gas rationing--there would be cars sitting there with keys in them that we could use and return as we needed and as cars became available. We got treated royally down there.

In the meantime, I was pretty much involved. I'd left home with the idea that, when the occasion would arise, I would marry the gal of my dreams, but there was a gal down there who was kind of in competition. I think my fiancée was worried, but it never went beyond that. We got transferred out before it got too serious.

We graduated. How well you did there determined the next step in your military life, and I had done very well there.

SI: Was it a high-pressure school? Did people wash out a lot?

EW: No, no, because they were selected to be sent there. I can't remember if anybody washed out, as a matter of fact, now that you mention that. Again, how you did there determined where you would go next. Here, again, there were a group of us, split in half. I got the higher quality [assignment], as I realized.

I got sent to Lockheed Aircraft Corporation on the West Coast, where they manufactured P-38 aircraft. They had a school there in conjunction with that to train you as P-38 specialists--Burbank, California, it was. There, the half went on P-38s. The other half went on an aircraft which was called Lockheed Vega, and it was in two versions. One was a small, twin-engine transport. The other was a twin-engine passenger plane.

So, we had the P-38s. As I say, I did very well there and finished that course with an excellent report. I got assigned to a P-38 fighter squadron, which was based at the San Diego Naval Air Station, because we were on a pier in San Diego, as far as the base part was concerned, but adjacent was an airport.

We flew what they called--let me see what they called those flights?--we did observation flights down over Baja, Mexico. This was to determine if the--it wasn't radar stations, but it was homing stations--were operating properly and that the enemy hadn't come ashore and vandalized them, and so forth, put them out of operation, because they directed aircraft up and down the West Coast. It was called the Fourth Air Defense Wing that they operated under. We maintained those by air.

At that particular time, the squadron was alerted for overseas duty assignment. I got transferred to March Field in California as I got assigned to one of the base squadrons there. Because of being a mechanic, I did get assigned to an aircraft, an old Martin B-10, as a crew member. This was a predecessor of the B-17, at that time, the current bombers.

It was an experience, because the sides of it were like roofing--it rattled when you're in the air. You would wonder whether it would hold together, but there was no problem about that, just the way it was constructed. We did those observation flights, again, down over Baja, Mexico.

Of course, because of being on the crew there, I was called a flight engineer. You were responsible for whatever controls a mechanic would be onboard plane. At that point, then--maybe I got it in the wrong order--I was assigned from San Diego to March Field, and then, to an aircraft that did the observation flights. I was a little out of order there.

Anyway, I did not know it--well, I did know it when I got transferred up to March--that I had been recommended for Officer Candidate School. So, the reason they sent me to March Field was, they had to wait until the next class opened up at Miami Beach. That's where they sent the Air Corps' officer candidates.

SI: Before we get into OCS, can I ask a couple of questions about the period?

EW: Sure, sure.

SI: First, going back to when you entered the Army Air Corps, what had interested you in aircraft? Why were you so interested?

EW: Well, it goes back to the days, believe it or not, at Thaddeus Stevens School of Practice. This school faced south and it had floor-to-ceiling windows. It was the early days; if you talk about, let's say, 1928, aircraft were a rare thing. The aircraft, for some reason, there used to be often a flight of aircraft over there. I was always looking out the window at the aircraft.

As a matter of fact, that teacher sent a note home to me that, "I was a good student, but I spent too much time watching the aircraft." So, I think that's how I got some interest in it. Other than seeing them in the air, I don't think it was anything particularly. On the other hand, mechanically, my grandfather was a terrific gentleman. Besides being a prime surgeon, he did things that were unique. He got involved in radio.

He built one of the earliest radios in Philadelphia that I knew of and he taught me more about that, how to read schematics. He would take me down to the store where he bought his supplies, a place called 437 Market Street in Philadelphia. The owner used to set me up on the counter. Of course, my grandfather and he would be looking over schematics.

He would ask me, "Well, what's this?" and I would be able to identify whether it was a resistor, whatever it was. I can remember a story--I don't remember the situation, but I remember a story--that my grandfather told, that I was sitting up on the counter and a customer came in. He saw me up there and he came over just to see what I was doing there.

The owner of the store said, "I bet he can tell you all about the parts in there." I don't think there was any money waged, but he bet the man that, if the man pointed out something, I could identify it. The man pointed out and I named everything that was on there.

I got an interest in that, not necessarily building radios, but just the fact that he was that qualified. As a mechanic, I follow so much in my hobby, do-it-yourself-er, that I learned from him. I don't think I have any--yes, I do have some of his tools. I still have some of his tools.

Anyway, next--where was I headed, how I got involved in it? Yes, well, of course, the mechanical arts course at Central High School was remarkable, because, in your training, there was hardly an aspect of work that you didn't get some training in--plumbing, electrical, tinsmith, carpentry, cabinetmaking, all those fields. I just loved them all and I did well in them all, better than I did in my normal courses, but I did graduate well from Central.

SI: You mentioned you got the mechanical arts degree. Was that in addition to a diploma?

EW: That was your diploma. Yes, I never got a straight diploma. I've still got it mounted up on the wall upstairs. That was in lieu of a diploma. It was, of course, a higher award. The yearbook and other documents I have from Central, which I maintain, sort of follow up on the degree.

Also, there was a gentleman by the name of James Barnwell who endowed Central High School with untold dollars. Each semester as you progressed, you got a Barnwell Award, which was a pin acknowledging that you qualified for--I don't know what you would call it--but it's an annual award, if you met certain goals. It started out with bronze and bronze with a wreath, and then,

went up the medals each year until, if you succeeded after eight semesters, you got a platinum one.

In that field, the best I got was a bronze award, because, as I mentioned, I had gotten this job with Westcott & Thomson. In the early days, I would go after school and run errands for them before getting an apprenticeship. An apprenticeship, you had to be full-time. After I graduated high school, then, I went there full-time. Let's see, what's next?

SI: Did your parents encourage you to follow the mechanical arts degree?

EW: Unfortunately, there was never anything about further education. All I ever heard of was my apprenticeship with Westcott & Thomson. I was going into a family business (it led me to believe) with untold potential. Of course, it wasn't to be.

I can't remember at what point, and I'm sure it was after I came back from service; otherwise, I forget what year. I was a fourth-year apprentice when I went into service. They kept your apprenticeship open until you returned, and then, you would pick up. I think they intended to give you a year's credit for service in the apprenticeship.

So, anyway, I came back and I started back to work. Somewhere along the way, I had an opportunity.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

EW: Let's see, where were we?

SI: We were just talking about your education and how your parents were encouraging you to go into the family business as opposed to further education.

EW: Okay. Actually, [they] had never talked about any advanced education. It was always Westcott & Thomson, so that I never had in the back of my mind to go on to college, and so forth. So, it ended up that, again, when I came back from service and I went back to finish the apprenticeship, I thought, "Well, let me see where I stand with the company."

My Uncle, Charles Thomson, had assumed just a visitation association with the business. He was up in years and he would stop in just to see what was going on. There was a gentleman there that was, I guess, acting general manager of the corporation.

So, I decided, one day--oh, what had happened, at that particular time when I came back, it was the first strike of the typographical union. Being an apprentice, you had to go on the picket line, and so forth. This is when I determined, "I want to find out where I stand with the corporation as far as my future."

I got permission from the steward of the union to go back into the building and talk to management. Meanwhile, I was on the picket line. While I was on the picket line, you would

get a small allowance, a strike benefit, if you picketed. So, he told me, he said, "Well, if you picket," oh, let me give it to you [this way]. I went into management and talked to them.

I said, "I understand, somewhere along the way, that, as a family member, when I finished my apprenticeship and was qualified, I'd become more than just an employee of the company." This gentleman says, "Well, I never had that conversation with your uncle, so, I don't know anything about it." Just arbitrarily, I determined, if that was how far it had advanced, I was finished.

So, I told him right on the site that I would not return--by the way, I'm married, and so forth--that I would not return after the strike was over, because what I had done during the [strike], I used to picket during my lunch hour, grab a sandwich and walk up and down and eat my sandwich and picket. I had talked to my wife about this.

Meantime, an uncle of hers was working for a wholesale distributor. This was at 11th and Arch Street and the company that he was working for was 810 Arch Street. This was a wholesale distributor of what was then known as small appliances and electric clocks and Oneida Silver, stainless steel silver. So, he said to me, "Hey, Ed, why don't you come down? They need somebody to fill in down there." It was summer vacation [fill-in work], different jobs in the warehouse, and so forth.

So, I went back to the steward and told him that I had this opportunity to work nearby. He said, "Then, follow through. If you will picket during the lunch hour, I will see that you get your benefits." Well, this was, again, the beginning of summer and I went down there. What happened, as soon as I start in there, each week, some other department guy would go on vacation and I would fill in that department.

I worked as a warehouseman, pulling orders, I worked out in the counter, and I didn't know anything about the business. I worked down on the counter, taking care of customers who came in to pick up orders. They were authorized repair service for two small appliance lines. I worked back in the shops, repairing appliances that were brought in.

Then, the guy that took care of calling the transportation companies and writing out the manifests for shipments that were going out, I got that for a week. Well, anyway, I got into all the departments during that summer vacation.

At one time, the General Manager said to me, "We've been watching you and we just fired a salesman. Would you be interested in taking an outside territory?" I said, "Well, let me tell you this--how do you work?" He explained it was on commission, and so forth.

I said, "Well, I would have to have some money to be [covered]," because you operated your own car there. It wasn't a company car. Everything, you were on your own as far as being out there and you got commission. So, he said, "Well, okay, we can arrange for that."

So, I forget what I said--I'm being bold--I said, "Well, I think I'll need at least 125 dollars a week to operate, for gasoline, and so forth." "No, that's no problem. We would give you an advance against commission." So, lo and behold, I go out. I take this responsibility and I start traveling.

I had part of South Jersey, and then, I had what they called the Delmarva Peninsula. I traveled that territory. I forget, within less than six months, he says, "You're far exceeding your commission. You're a new guy out there." "I'm getting my young customers;" well, I did have the customers that he developed, but they weren't too great. So, anyway, I began making my draw-plus each month.

So, I stayed with them for a number of years until that location [closed], which is right behind Strawbridge and Clothier's in Philadelphia--or was Strawbridge and Clothier's; now, it's an empty building. They were located there. Then, at one time, the city took over the property to redevelop it for an additional warehouse for Strawbridge and Clothier and they sold the business.

While it's still operating, I was then sales promotion manager for it. I'd been promoted to sales promotion manager. I got some calls at home which were very suspicious. They said, "Well, what's your boss doing? He's not paying his bills," and I found out that the Redevelopment Authority already had a contract on the property. He knew, as of a certain date, he'd be out.

Meantime, he sold the property, or he sold the business, to some manufacturer's representative who had been selling [to] him. They bought it on--I can't remember the term. Anyway, they really, [as] I described it, hocked the inventory for money. So, they had no money to buy it, but they used the money for the inventory. When the inventory went down, they had no money to pay back the bill or expenses. So, they were put out of business.

Fortunately, I had found out about that and I was so suspicious. Meantime, a direct competitor, a company by the name of--this was called Everybody's Supply Company--a competitor of theirs who was primarily [in] jewelry, wholesale jewelry, Aisenstein & Gordon, called me and talked to me. Meantime, as I say, I had resigned from--where was I at this stage?

Anyway, I would be available. I know what it was--Aisenstein & Gordon called me sometime around November and [asked], "Would I be available? Would I be interested?" What had happened, a younger member of the firm who was their sales manager had died. They asked me, "Would I be interested in joining them?"

What I had done, in that November, I had accepted a job with a jeweler in Philadelphia to go in and manage their--they had a gift department in this jewelry store. I had accepted a job to go with them. Then, Aisenstein & Gordon called me and said, "Would I be interested?" I said, "Well, unfortunately, I've already accepted another job and I must follow through with that responsibility."

So, I went to work for them in probably late October, November. They were leading up, of course, that would be the busiest time of the year in the gift-giving field. So, I went to work for them. I no sooner got to work for them, and it was called the Jack Kilmer Company, and Jack Kilmer called me in one day.

He said, "We bought a property over in Cherry Hill, used to be an old Lit Brothers shoe store. We need somebody with mechanical experience, and I know what yours is, and, also, sales

experience. We need a resident engineer in there while they're converting it over from a shoe store to a fine-quality jewelry store. We want you to be there daily to watch over the operation."

Well, I accepted that and, meantime, the conversion went through. They opened for business, like, the last week of November. It was a case of, in that business, you worked seven days a week, almost twenty-four hours a day. So, I went to work for them and they opened the store.

It was a real problem. You're working long hours, you're on the floor selling, taking care of inventory, but what I didn't know--I only lived about five minutes from where the store was at Ellisburg Circle, in that part of Cherry Hill. Frequently, we had a call during the night from the police, "Your alarm is going off."

I was the only one that had an access key to the code, to the company that protected it, to their [system]. "So, you'd better come on down. Let's find out. I can't go in your store without you being there." So, I went down and we could never find out why the alarm went off, only at nighttime when it was set. So, I'll tell you, it was tough. I was losing sleep, and so forth.

I forget what [the occasion was]; I was sitting down one day when the store was closed. It may have been Thanksgiving Day; it may have been. The alarm went off, the police called. In the midst of family dinner, I got called down there. I said, at this point, "I can't take this anymore."

So, what they finally found out, there had been no coordination between the contractor and the heating/air-conditioning people. What they found out was that one of the pieces of equipment [that] would send a signal off to the alarm was right in the direction of a blower. When the heat went on and off, the blower went on, it set the action alarm. This is what was setting it off.

So, I said, "This is ridiculous." Anyway, they got it corrected, but, anyway, we went through the Christmas season. We went back into normal hours. What they did, what the management did, they decided to have a special dinner for all those people who were with them during the tough period of the sales. The only thing was, they forgot to give me an invitation.

I said, at this point, "I can't take this anymore." So, this was over a weekend. I decided--I wrote a letter, I went into their Philadelphia office, I slid a resignation under the door--that I was leaving Kilmer Jewelers.

Meantime, I called back Aisenstein & Gordon. I said, "If that job is still open, I'm interested." He said, "Well, funny, we had made no decision. We had interviewed some people, [but] we made no decision. However, Mr. Jacoby," who is the owner/operator of Aisenstein & Gordon, "goes on vacation to Florida and no decisions can be made until he comes back."

I said, "Well, when is that?" He said, "Oh, he's due back..." gave me a date and I figure, "Okay." So, meantime, I had a very good friend of mine who was a manufacturer's representative who sold Everybody's Supply Company and who also sold Aisenstein & Gordon. I was talking to him one day and he said to me, "Congratulations."

I said, "I don't know what you're talking about." He said, "What do you mean you don't know what I'm talking about? You're going to work for Aisenstein & Gordon." I said, "I don't know anything about it." Meantime, they had decided upon it by talking by telephone between this one gentleman who was running the business, who was also a partner, and Mr. Jacoby.

So, anyway, I called Buddy and I said, "Hey, I understand that Mr. Jacoby says he would like me to join your concern." "Oh, I just didn't get a chance to call you and tell you, but we want you to start..." and he gave me a date. That's the way I got connected with that.

Well, that was one of the best things that ever happened to me in my life, because I went in there and they had, I forget, like, three or four different profit-sharing [options], partner and bonuses. It was a wonderful experience. I stayed with them until I was approaching sixty-five years.

I wrote Buddy--Mr. Jacoby died and he then became the whole company--I wrote a letter, said, "I just want to tell you that, on May 12, '85, I will reach sixty-five years of age, at which time I desire to retire fully." He said, "Oh, that's fine, okay, thanks for letting us know."

So, meantime, this is October of the prior year. Buddy said to me, he said, "Actually, you've trained your replacement very well and we would like to come to some agreement and settlement with you [so] that you can stop working right now."

So, I said, "Oh, I have no objection to that. The only thing I want--here's what I need--I need my hospitalization covered until May 12, 1985, when I can pick up some additional coverage. I would like to be paid--you'll be saving some money, you won't be paying me fully until I'm sixty-five--I would like to be paid until December 31st this year." He said, "How would you like it?" I said, "I would like it in cash," and so, this is the way it's settled.

Meantime, while I'm working for them, after Mr. Jacoby died, Buddy (Leibowitz?), who was the gentleman I'm referring to, decided to consolidate some of the different plans. There was equity in them and it was up to the individual which ones they wanted to continue on and which ones they would back out of.

Well, I had one big one; I forget how much was in it. I decided to take that big one out and, at that particular time, interest was sixteen percent. I took it out and I reinvested it at sixteen percent and I lived on that. I'd still say some of my income today goes back to those days when I established that, but it was an interesting departure.

So, I get active in Cherry Hill politics through a blood bank. There was a blood drive in Cherry Hill. This was in '63, 1963, I guess it was. They had a quota, so many gallons, and so forth. In *The Cherry Hill News* at that time, they reported that they did not make the goal. I said, "I can't believe with," I think it was something like 36,000 people, residents of Cherry Hill, at that time, "that you can't make X number of donations."

The Mayor called me in--I wrote it up as a letter to the editor of *The Cherry Hill News*. The Mayor called me and asked me to come over and talk to him. He said, "We would like you to

help us," and it was with the (post?) Mayor of Cherry Hill at the time, "establish a blood bank board and if you'll serve on it."

Well, anyway, I served on it and we got it going. The very next drive, we exceeded our quota. That's how I got into Cherry Hill politics, and I stuck with that for a long while. Each one, we exceeded the goal.

SI: What were you doing that was different, that was getting more people out?

EW: Well, just good, practical publicity, working through the paper, working through the township--after [all], it was the township operation--and various notices that went out. There would be publicity about the next drive, and so forth, and where it would be. Originally, we conducted it in the [hall]--there was a hall in the front of the building and it was conducted there. So, it was convenient for all residents; just good, organized management of the board.

Then, somewhere along the way, because of that, I got tangled up--and I say tangled up--with politicians. There was an election coming up and they said, "Well, with your background and all and the volunteerism, we'd like you to run for councilman in Cherry Hill." So, I applied and I sent them a really extensive resume.

What they did, sometime before election time, they called a meeting of the Democratic Committee of Cherry Hill. There were twenty-six applications and they had a night when everybody would come before the board to be heard. I don't know how, whether they called us alphabetically.

Anyway, we had heard a story from the then Mayor of Cherry Hill. The time came for her to be interviewed and all, that she presented herself and they said, "Okay, go home and we'll let you know." She said, actually, she had her children with her and they're all dressed to kill. She went home. The next thing you know, it was early morning, like six o'clock in the morning, she finally got a call to come back, that they had rendered a decision and she was one of those selected.

So, she had told us this story. I went down for the interview and I forget how few of the twenty-six that applied showed up for the interview. Then, when I got called up, some of those interviewed went on--I forget how many minutes they gave us--and they far exceeded those minutes.

When I got called upon, I presented myself and I said, "I trust that each and every one of you has read my resume and are fully informed as to my background and what my goals are. I appreciate this opportunity to be interviewed and I trust you will render your decision based on my resume. I thank you," and I stepped down. It was like three minutes or four minutes.

The guy, the financial head of the Democratic Party, was sitting on the side. He says, "Wolf, you're nuts. You just talked yourself out of a job." Well, it came down to the vote. I was one of the three selected. This was like eleven o'clock at night and my wife and I are home. We had

settled down. I said, "Ruth, come on, we've got to go back," and, here, we're anticipating we wouldn't hear anything until morning.

So, we went back and we were one of three. Actually, a fellow by the name of Denny DiRenzo was one of them and Susan Bass Levine; you know that name because Susan Bass Levine was Director of Community Affairs for the State of New Jersey up until last year. Now, she's some big mahoff for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. She's a fantastic gal.

[Editor's Note: Susan Bass Levin served as Mayor of Cherry Hill From 1988 to 2002. From 2002 to 2007, she served as Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (DCA). In 2007, she became First Deputy Executive Director of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.]

So, we three were chosen to run for the party. We went around with teas and home parties and wherever we could be seen. When it came down to election, as Democrats, we won easily and I served for, then, part of a term.

What had happened, the Republicans challenged. They wanted [the] election to be along with the general election, coincided with a general election, which, somehow or other, it got through whatever the mill was that it had to go through. It would be that those of us who were in, if we won, had to go through another election procedure, and then, come up for a vote at the general election time.

I decided that I was satisfied with what I'd accomplished, but I just wasn't willing to go through all this harangue to get elected again. I found out that, having been in business, the government didn't work efficiently from a business standpoint. I just failed to run for another term. Of course, people have said they were sorry that I didn't [run], because they were grooming me to be mayor. I wouldn't want that.

As a matter of fact, I had much more pleasure with doing what I was doing. I got involved, deeply involved, with veterans' affairs and that sort of supported me partially. I did establish a cultural arts board for the Township of Cherry Hill. They never had any activities which featured cultural arts. There were no paintings or pictures on the walls in Township Hall. They had no actual place to conduct entertainment, concerts.

So, we established the Cultural Arts Advisory Board. We established Croft Farm, which, today, is a going place where there's concerts. We have artwork all over the Township. We have a program which [makes] awards annually to gifted artists of various types of art.

It's just been growing. The library has a lot of art posted in it, the new library there. There is art in the municipal building. There's sculpture; they commissioned a sculpture which is on the grounds of Croft Farm, which is the cultural arts center. Although I don't live in Cherry Hill Township, they wouldn't let me off the hook. So, they made me member *emeritus* of the Cultural Arts Advisory Board. So, I've been active in that and participating.

As far as other activities, again, I've been very active in the China-Burma-India Veterans Association. Until the August reunion in 2005, it was a going association, but, due to IRS regulations, where [you have] an organization that has a life membership, you have to designate--assuming that you're going to continue to get members in life membership status--you have to either liquidate the funds annually [or] keep the funds coming in and going out.

Here we were, no chance of getting new life members, because the war has long gone by. So, at the 2000 reunion, we designated the year 2005 as the end of the association, at which time the average age would be eighty-five years old. So, they dissolved the association.

Meantime, there was nothing presented in the various posts, or, as we called them, *bashas*. A *basha* was the type of accommodation (the building) we lived in in India. So, they decided each local organization would be call a *basha*. At that time, when they were calling it quits, we had something like 135 *bashas* worldwide. So, those who were smart were able to continue on.

Now, this one, we meet ten months of the year. We don't have a meeting in January and February, because of weather, and so forth. We meet ten months of the year and we're still going. We have about forty members. I think, at one time, we had 160 members and we're still going, having affairs.

As a matter of fact, in May, Nancy and I are going out to Scottsdale, Arizona, to the very last reunion of what's called the All-West Group. *Bashas* were grouped together in areas. They're having their final All-West, so, we're going out to that. Then, as I say, I'm eighty-seven, I'll be eighty-eight then. It's a problem to get around with your baggage and travel, but they have a well-planned program and [we] look forward to it. So, that's the way that association is going.

Meantime, I've been on the board here until recently. I was chairman of the Architectural Review Board, which has responsibility for all external changes on your property. I served [in] that for five years, and then, I felt it's time for some younger members [to step in]. This is a fifty-five-year-old development. So, when you look at eighty-seven, eighty-eight, there's a lot of younger people that are fifty-five to take over.

To fill my time, I just recently volunteered with Samaritan Hospice, which served me very well when my wife was dying. I felt an obligation, because they do so much good. I found out that they just got a five-thousand-dollar grant to pursue a program with veterans and make them aware of their rights as veterans, and, also, their family members who might require hospice service. The girl, woman, that's handling this program, I had a meeting with her last week. She's just thrilled with the fact that I would be giving time to that.

Of course, again, I am registered with both Burlington County and Camden County veterans' affairs as a speaker in whatever rights they would like me to pursue. So, this is a case where the gentleman who's director for Camden County, a Colonel (Barnhart?), I've been close with him all along, working in the educational part of the veterans' [affairs], because I used to speak--well, I say I used to, I haven't had one in a long while--at the various high schools, high schools and middle schools, to the students, because, absolutely, they know nothing about CBI.

I had developed a program with history or social science teachers which they just have eaten up. I'm so proud of the fact that they liked what I present, because, again, you talk to them and it's really a problem, because CBI, "What's CBI? What's China-Burma-India?" They're that age that, naturally, it's not common, they don't teach it. They teach World War II in Europe and Italy, and so forth, but not that theater of operation.

So, I'm going to spend my time now going around [educating veterans]. This Colonel Barnhart asked me to come to the next Veterans' Council meeting in Camden County. I will talk through veterans' organizations and to any senior group that will listen to me, because I have a card that the VA issues. I actually have no wounds or anything like that that I qualify for veterans' [services]--however, as a veteran, I do qualify for medical care and prescriptions.

I ask them, "How many of you are veterans of World War II?" and I say, "I want to see by a show of hands." I said, "Okay, now, those of you who have your hands up, I want you to show me your Veterans' Administration identification card." You see the hands go down and a few hands go in their wallet and come up.

About twenty-five percent have registered with the Veterans' Administration. Of course, it's very disheartening right now, or it's not disheartening, but I say, "Okay, I want you to get applications. Call your local VA clinic or hospital and ask them to send you an application. This is a form you fill out, history, and so forth, and send it back to them."

I said, "However, don't expect an early response, because their funds are all tied up with the veterans of today's conflicts. They have more than they can handle and their finances are limited. So, they're not taking on anybody new, except the fact you will be registered." I said, "Sometime, hopefully, Congress deems fit to give them sufficient money to cover those who are coming back now and those who have been there." Meantime, I had submitted and was accepted.

I think anybody that's unfair with the VA doesn't know the situation. They're in a tough position. I, for one, get wonderful care. For my initial visit, I went into the VA hospital in Philadelphia. There, I had a contract physician from the University of Pennsylvania who went through my history and gave me an examination and set me up as being qualified.

I then said, "I understand that I don't have to come to Philadelphia every time I want service, but I can go to Fort Dix." "Oh, yes, there's a clinic there." So, I said, "I would like to be transferred to the clinic at Fort Dix." Well, I've been there for quite a while. I have a wonderful nurse practitioner who gave me a far superior examination than this doctor from the University of Pennsylvania. I've seen her every six months or as required since then, and I just went recently.

I do get the benefits of prescription medication, if it's listed in their--what do they call it, formulary?--anyway, a list of drugs that they authorize and distribute. I went over there about hearing and I wear a hearing aid that they issued a number of years ago. At my last exam, this nurse practitioner says, "I think you'd better have another examination," because my wife is complaining and my children that I'm asking, "What did you say? What did you say?"

So, I'm waiting now for an appointment to go there for a reexamination. The doctor that I had been going to as an ear, nose, and throat person, he had to approve the first time I got this hearing aid. He had to approve of what their decision was. I carried with me a report of their tests. He said, "I'm surprised that they didn't say you needed two hearing aids," but I've been living--what?--I guess must be into the fourth year, beginning of the fourth year, that I got this one. Now, I'm waiting for them to reexamine me for what I might need.

Meantime, the prescription drugs've been okay. I haven't needed anything else from them because I'm covered by Medicare, AARP supplement. I have [had] a wonderful family physician for years; I've gotten excellent recommendations from him. Since then, I've had bypass surgery, I had a stent installed, I've had pneumonia, I've had cancer, recovered, I've had gall bladder emergency surgery--you name it, I've had so much--and here I am still bragging about it.

SI: Do you think most of the veterans haven't registered or haven't done much with the VA because of apathy towards the bureaucracy of the VA?

EW: No, I think it's because they're not fully aware of what's going [on]. I mean, I don't say that the government should take every veteran--there's a record of every veteran--that they should notify them, "Well, here's what you can get." They don't do that and it's by word of mouth, except for those where you have wounds that continually require care.

That's okay, but, even so, you read the paper about some of these guys coming back. They give them treatments to a certain extent, "Well, we can't give you any more," but they don't tell them how to go about the next step. Some of them are in trouble because there's retrogression and it's a sin, because there should be some program set up, post-VA--no, post government, because you're not VA until you're out of the government care.

Like this Walter Reed situation that was so much in the paper, it was unforgivable that it got to that point. I don't know whether it was part of the Army or part of [the] government and all that let the hospital care get so poor, but this is the way of life. It's not only that; I don't think it's exceptionally bound to veterans' affairs. There's other things in the government that are the same way.

So, that's where I am to that degree. So, as I say, my spare activities, we are great subscribers to cultural arts, like this past Sunday, we went to Philadelphia, to Walnut Street Theatre. We have tickets to Peter Nero and the Philly Pops. We join in with the Symphony of Southern New Jersey, which is an all-volunteer orchestra. It's fabulous. They have concerts at Moorestown High School and over in Eastern Regional High School. This is another group of volunteer-professional--what do you call it?--they're not amateurs, but they're not professional musicians.

SI: Does your involvement in the arts go back to your mother's involvement with music?

EW: No, I think this is an interesting thing, that you recall the situation, my grandfather, Dr. Brinkmann, graduate of the University of Pennsylvania. He worked his way through the

University of Pennsylvania with what was then the pre-runner of the Philadelphia Orchestra. He played clarinet, sax and flute.

When we lived on 18th Street in Philadelphia, in one of the closets there sat a saxophone, a clarinet and a flute. Meantime, in the parlor section--we had a bay window that overlooked Cherry Street--sat a grand piano, but I mean a full grand piano. Never once was it told to me or asked of me, "Would you like to play an instrument?"

I never had that opportunity. There was no desire created, so, therefore, I didn't ask, "Hey, can I learn to play this?" or, "There's that musician," and I never did. When I got into, I guess, the government, I realized I truly had an interest in the arts. From that is where I developed and I write the ordinance that established the Cultural Arts Advisory Board in Cherry Hill and from that's where it has advanced.

As long as we were married, my former wife and my current wife, we've always been interested in theater and concerts, and so forth. So, there's a tie-in there, but I think that's what it goes back to, that I never had an opportunity to learn anything. Same way, never was the idea advanced that I would go to college, but everybody was satisfied with the status quo, I guess. I didn't know any different.

SI: How did the Great Depression affect your family or your neighborhood?

EW: Very interesting question. We, as I say, lived with my grandparents in this big Philadelphia brownstone. My father had a very responsible position with the Stanley Company of America (as it was known then) and he drew a handsome income. He invested wisely.

My grandfather was a true physician. If a patient came in and they couldn't afford it, they got treated. I don't know how many surgeries he may have done and never got a penny for. He was a poor manager of money.

If it weren't for my father, we'd have lost that brownstone house years before, because my father, more or less, supported the household, not necessarily the everyday operations, but the maintenance of the property, the mortgage, if there was any.

I don't know, it was before my time of having any knowledge about it, but I know, when they both died, it was just a matter of fact, "Did we want to continue living there?" Again, I was nineteen or otherwise. It was arbitrarily decided that we were giving up the house.

Now, I know there was magnificent antiques in that house. I can't tell you what the value was. I know my mother and father called in an antiques dealer who was a friend and I think probably got a fair settlement on all the objects, but they were just almost all given out.

I still have a few pieces here from the collection, but I can remember, downstairs in the basement, there was trunks full of things wrapped in paper, in barrels. When it came time to give them up, they unwrapped some of them that I saw. This one gold piece in the center there, that's one of the pieces that I liked and it's carried forth.

We are enjoying what we have here, and Nancy brought some of her things. This is mostly the collection from her household. She lived over in Holiday Village, which was the forerunner of Holiday Village East.

We met on a very strange occasion, but it was a cultural arts activity. There was a concert of the, I think it was the philharmonic. She was with another gentleman. She knew very close friends of Ruth and mine who live in Holiday Village, who moved to Cherry Hill. We moved there in '63 together and we've maintained the friendship.

Anyway, they were at the same concert, introduced me to Nancy and this other gentleman. Somehow or other, I was smitten at that point. We belonged to the same congregation and we have an organization there called the Seniors. Once a month, on a Wednesday, we have a brunch. You bring your own lunch and they supply cookies and cake and coffee and all that. We have a program, usually.

I'm sitting there one Wednesday and there's a chair beside me, just coincidentally, empty. Nancy walks by and she says, "Anybody sitting here?" I always say, with an empty seat, "Oh, this is reserved for you," and I said that to her. I said, "Oh, this is reserved for you." Well, she sat down. We don't know what the program was--we talked that whole lunch.

Then, the next time, we made arrangements to sit together and that was the end. She had been a volunteer usher at the Walnut Street Theatre and just everything meshed together. So, one day, I said, "Well, may I call you?" and she said, "Yes." Further on, we went to everything together.

The most wonderful part about it is, her four children and my two children meshed together like it was never anything other than we were together. We just had a pleasure visiting one another, the children, and so forth. I just can't brag about it enough. I never knew life was so good. So, anyway, now, we're up to a different stage in life.

SI: Did you see the impact of the Depression on the city?

EW: Well, actually, we never felt it, because my father, again, had a very responsible job and income. Even though he was working, he was affected by the Depression. He had an income that was very healthy and we never wanted for food. He survived very well.

SI: Back in the 1930s and into the early 1940s, were you aware of what was going on internationally? How much did you follow the news about Hitler and Mussolini?

EW: I don't think I was smart enough to do that. I just went along with the tide, so-to-speak. I don't think there was any great discussions at home in politics or what the President was doing or was not doing. I don't think we ever delved into that. I was interested in youth group activities, which had nothing to do with national circumstances.

SI: When did you start thinking that the United States might be involved in World War II?

EW: I guess I never really accepted the fact that we're going to be involved, although it must've been readily available to me reading the paper. I don't think I considered [it]. I guess I had to be one of those who thought, "We stand by ourselves here, miles away from where all the activity or the conversation's about." We didn't see anything here which would affect me. I wasn't deep enough, didn't go into it deep enough, to how it would affect us, so-to-speak.

SI: Were there any discussions within the Jewish community, whether in the synagogue or the youth groups, about what was happening in Nazi Germany?

EW: Yes, yes. I had to say it was great, because what we did, we knew we had relatives, because the Brinkmanns came from Germany, and so did the Wolfs. Of course, there was no Wolfs to be concerned with over there, but there was definitely Brinkmanns to be concerned with.

I know that, in particular, one family, my grandfather sponsored them coming to the United States after the war, but I don't think, really, it was any great discussion about that until after the war. I have a cousin that lives in Alexandria, Virginia, who is the family historian. We have the most wonderful records that he's been [collecting]. Well, he currently works on it and he's published a book.

He started with me when we lived in Cherry Hill. One day, we got together and called, he said, "Well, I'm coming up. I want to talk to you about our family," and he came up, he put a computer on the table and we started talking. He entered into this [material].

Well, I had a lot of information that went back to this family that had been brought over and to their existence, and so forth. Then, I have the relatives that live out in the West Coast who are part of the Brinkmann Family. I kept up with them. So, I gave him basic information, which gave him an outlet to follow up.

Being he's a very wealthy man--he's a doctor, he owns quite a few buildings in the Alexandria and the Washington, DC, area, he has a PhD and he's been very successful--he had been able to pursue all this. Every few weeks, I would get an update on what he had gotten. It led me into giving him more information that he could pursue.

As I say, I have a continuing file on the results of his efforts. Now, he's gone beyond to his wife's relatives in England and this is very interesting, too. He travels. They've been over to England, and so forth, oh, all over the world. It's an interesting situation there. You get so much more information by giving information. I mean, like talking to you, it's just great; we talk to you and more things come to mind.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SI: Before, you described where you were when Pearl Harbor was attacked. You were speaking to this group. You knew that it meant that you would be going off to service.

EW: Service somewhere, yes.

SI: The actual scene that day--were people panicked by this news? How did they react?

EW: Well, I tell you, I can't remember if there was any reaction. I don't think I heard any, "Ooh, ahh," and so forth, because we were all teenagers, so-to-speak. I probably was the oldest in that group.

I don't remember what our conversation was at the conclusion of the meeting, because it was probably, well, talking about the next time we would get together for a dance or a program or we'd go off on a meeting, a state meeting of the organization we belonged to, state organization of youth groups, probably ran into that, because, again, I don't think we were old enough to really think of the consequences that this situation created.

SI: You went in the service pretty quickly after that.

EW: It was a matter of weeks.

SI: Were you able to see any changes in the city before you went into the service?

EW: No, it was too fast. It was too fast. I was trying to wind up my work. As I say, I was an apprentice there and I wanted to be assured that I wasn't sacrificing anything there, but the union assured me, "No, your apprenticeship is protected."

I don't know whether there was any legislation that had been produced which stated what protections had to be given to anybody that was involved in a job, and so forth. At that particular time, it was so new, I think most companies guaranteed that returning veterans would come back to their same jobs.

Of course, it didn't hold true that way. A lot of companies had no obligations; they weren't connected with the union who would assure them certain protections. Other companies just saw, "Well, there's a job opening here. I'm going to replace them with whatever I can get." So, many of the gals went to work to fill jobs. So, I don't think, generally speaking, there was really any security that had been evolved the few weeks before I went into service.

SI: Going into the service, how did you feel about going from the relative freedoms of civilian life into the discipline and protocol of military life?

EW: I think I was too dumb a kid to realize that that would develop. I guess I thought the uniform was attractive and the Air Corps was attractive. I didn't see any of the dark side--maybe it's just as well I didn't.

SI: Do you remember your first night or couple of nights in the service?

EW: Sleepless, because of strange beds, and I can remember the uniform that I was issued. That early in the war, actually, there was clothing left over of the type that they issued during World War I. It was all wool. I can remember I was just miserable with the wool shirts and the wool

trousers, because they were so itchy. I can remember that I would always like to wear my fatigues, because that was a high-quality cotton. They were comfortable.

Meantime, my physique was such that I had a problem getting comfortable clothes, because, at that point, I weighed about 210 pounds. They didn't necessarily have enough sizes to [fit everyone]. I don't say I squeezed into what I got, but I remember the jacket, uniform jacket, was full size, but my sleeves were down over my knuckles.

My trousers were too long. I had a very small inseam and the trousers that they gave me were uncomfortable. Of course, it was your responsibility to take them to the post tailor and have them altered, so that they accommodated you, because, then, you were responsible for looking spic-and-span and everything fitted you right, and so forth.

The belts they gave you, these web belts, I think I had about a forty-four-inch waist and they were probably forty-six-inch belts. Then, you had to go to take the brass buckles--they were solid brass you had--and they originally issued them probably with a lacquered finish. You had to wear that lacquered finish off, so [that] you brought them to a brilliant brass finish--all the beginning problems of a recruit.

The shoes were uncomfortable, because I hadn't been used to the boot type shoes that they issued, that I did get the right size. I didn't get any blisters from the new shoes and socks were no problem. Underwear was the khaki brown; that was no problem. It was just the outer garments that were uncomfortable.

Likewise, the overcoat that they gave you, to fit around my body, it was long and the sleeves were long. Those were all the things, I guess, you took care of in the first few--I won't say months--first few months, you were able to get corrected. At least there wasn't anything that was out of your pocket, because you went to the post tailor who had to fit them properly, supposedly.

SI: Can you tell me a little bit about the people that you met as you went into the service and were at all these different bases around Mississippi and California?

EW: Oh, it was very interesting. I can't say [for sure, but] I think each of us was interested in finding a compatible person who you would be with for the long haul. I don't think I had ever had any conflicts. Even in those days, you had a degree of anti-Semitism, but I think I confused them if they went by my name, because, usually, you never heard a Jew had a junior. Normally, it was [that] you were not supposed to be named after a living person.

So, I don't know whether that had any effect or not, but I can't ever remember any conflicts. The same way, I can't remember any conflicts where we were involved with blacks, where the average guy was down on the blacks.

I know when I got into further advancement of education that it was great, because I had, in a couple cases, where there was some black fellows who really looked to me to help them. I could never figure why they picked me, but I would spend time with them, on our free time, particularly when we're going to classes, explaining some of the stuff that, to me, was simple

and, evidently, they weren't mechanically inclined or had no previous training in mechanics. I was able to explain and rationalize with them about it. I have to say it was pleasant all the way through.

SI: The training schools were integrated.

EW: Yes, yes. It was a rare occasion that that was the case, but, yes, it was. I think it was more advanced at Spartans--no, I guess at Lockheed Aircraft Corporation--that that held through. No, I remember, at OCS, I had a gentleman there who was in my group who, really, I would've been twenty-two and he was about thirty-seven.

He was having problems comprehending some of the stuff. I remember I helped him through and we became buddies, so-to-speak, not because I helped him through, because he was a gentleman. So, yes, that wasn't discrimination; that was just being a good aide, good help.

SI: Was he African American or was he white?

EW: He was white. That was at OCS. They were all white there, yes. No, I can't remember ever seeing a black at OCS, nor in any of the pictures I ever saw afterwards did I see blacks there.

SI: In these classes that were integrated, there wasn't a problem between the white soldiers and the African American soldiers.

EW: No, no. I don't think we ever had any classes to teach the NCOs that they had to be practical about it, because, even then, it was too early for them to have classes along how you treat your classmate or anything. Whatever came had to come naturally.

SI: Were you an exception to the rule in that you had experience in mechanical arts?

EW: Definitely.

SI: Okay, so, most people came from other backgrounds.

EW: Definitely, yes. Yes, I can't remember anybody else, like, had been an automobile mechanic or a roofer or any of the trades. No, I can't remember anybody. I'm trying to think; some of the GIs that I buddied with, we're just on common ground. How much they spoke about it, now, I would never remember, if there was anything worthwhile.

SI: You came to specialize in P-38s.

EW: Right.

SI: You did that in Burbank. Did you do that overseas as well?

EW: Well, no, see, actually, the group went overseas and I was transferred domestically. I went down to--first, I went to March Field, and then, from March Field, I went to OCS. So, technically, my mechanical training *per se* ended at OCS, but I have to go one step further. I know that I didn't include [this].

When I was commissioned in Miami, there, again, the Air Transport Command was expanding. That was the old, really, commercial airlines that the government had taken over and called them the Air Transport Command. They had taken quite a few of the pilots, commercial pilots, and the aircraft and brought them into this command. Meanwhile, then, they had to educate officers in that category.

So, from Miami Beach, I got transferred to New York City; again, civilian schools. They housed it at the New York Athletic Club, which was a plush club where the citizens belong to that, had swimming pools and gyms, and so forth, but it was also residential. So, we were accommodated there at the New York Athletic Club.

Meantime, you were assigned to Long Island, to the airfield; I'll think of the airfield's name in a minute. There were classes there and I got assigned, in the first period I was there, to weights and measures. You were taught about aircraft and the capacities in loading.

Weights and balance meant that you had to know where the center of the balance was in the aircraft; you had to learn, approximately, how you would load on both sides of the center of balance, so that the aircraft would fly straight and level; tie-down procedures, what you would use, how would you use it, if it was a skid or if it was individual cartons; and you learned all about that. You used a slide rule. You had a manifest to fill out and to certify that the plane was safe for flying to the best of your ability.

Then, the other course that they put you through was that of an air control officer. This is like the tower operator of today, because, when you went over there, they needed tower operators for the field you were going to. So, there, we went into weather, all kinds of weather conditions, things which would affect your decision in giving aircraft instructions to land, and so forth.

It was then particularly as a tower operator, I guess, I must've made better qualifications, because I went overseas, flight orders to go to CBI, China-Burma-India, as a control tower operator, got there, got assigned.

I have a whole book that one of the correspondents wrote; it was called *A Flight to Everywhere* [(1944) by Ivan Dmitri]. This book told about your [experience] flying through different theaters of operation. It so happened he traveled on the same plane I was on the whole route from when we departed. We departed from Miami to South America, to Ascension Island, to British Gold Coast, to Cairo, and so forth, on down into India. What am I getting at here now?

We got over to Chabua--into Karachi, and then, to Agra, and then, to Chabua. Now, Chabua was in the Assam Province. It was like the center location of the Air Transport Command at that time. It was growing. From there, they assigned you to the various other Air Transport Command bases along the Assam Valley.

I stayed there and I ended up assigned to the base unit. They were trying to assign us to control tower operation and the pilots reneged. They would not take any instructions from us because we were not pilots. Even though I had flight wings as a flight engineer, they didn't feel that I was qualified, either.

So, they reassigned me as an aircraft maintenance officer. So, I pursued that all the time I was in Chabua. I got the responsibility, along with that designation, as I handled the refueling crews-- that was the gas and oil, and so forth--and I was responsible for transient aircraft, those aircraft which were flown in by ferry crews. Then, they were brought to a point where they left their plane there and they went back for other planes. They were assigned to crews from the bases along Assam Valley.

It was interesting, because I can remember, during that particular responsibility, they were introducing the C-46 Commando, which was, again, a very powerful twin-engine, greater capacity, greater ceiling. It had turbochargers in it.

However, it had gone from manufacturing into direct assignment to fields of operation. Previously, any new aircraft, during peacetime, would go through a period of operation of testing before it was sent overseas. This was the test period for [the] C-46s.

I remember the early ones that arrived in Chabua. We had problems, because Chabua was an unpaved runway and the tailwheels on it had been designed for operation domestically, on paved landing strips, paved runways. Well, on the C-46, as soon as it hit the rocky runways, the tire blew. Invariably, as it rolled down the runway, it damaged the hub for the tire.

We had more planes sidelined because they did not have spare tires and wheels. So, they actually arranged for a C-54, which were four-engine, great capacity planes, to fly directly over there. Nothing in there, in the planes, all they were, pre-assembled tires with hubs.

Being in charge of transient aircraft, I had keys to all the aircraft. Knowing the situation, I did what they called "midnight requisitioning." I went into those aircraft and I removed I can't tell you how many. I went down not in the top-loading [section], but I went down into the belly compartments, and I took out our inventory of wheels.

So, we had our planes operating when none of the other C-46s in the valley were operating. They all wondered how I accomplished this, but that's what I called "midnight requisitioning." When it came down to the supply department receiving the shipments, they were always short, but they didn't know why they were short. [laughter]

[RECORDING PAUSED]

EW: That was one of those unusual things. Again, another situation there was unusual in that our flight crews were highly overworked. They would come back from a flight, they'd be allowed a couple hours' sleep. Of course, after you did this for a period of time, you were really weary. The flight doctor would not necessarily approve your taking another flight. They

became short of crews. Then, it was decided that, in all conditions, the co-pilot's seat had to be occupied.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

So, the co-pilot's seat had to be occupied with a warm body. Well, it ended up that, on some occasions, I was put on the manifest as the co-pilot. I had wings, I had a knowledge of flight. I don't know, necessarily, I could've been able to control the plane, but at least I knew enough not to let it crash. It was a matter [of] you had to coordinate the foot pedals and the steering wheel, as they called it, but I did some flights there.

Also, I did some domestic flights in India on a B-25 that was a command colonel's vehicle, and inspector. So, I had flown with that one, but that was my experience as far as flying is concerned. After a year in Chabua I guess as a relief, they wanted to transfer people back sort of inland, so-to-speak, away from the front, although I received a combat bronze leaf on my theater ribbon.

SI: Like a Service Star?

EW: Service Star, yes. I never knew why I got it. What I found out after I got home--well, in more recent years--[is] that there had been a battle adjacent to the field where we were in Chabua. So, somewhere along the way, I got two of those and I never knew I was in danger. So, that was another shock to me, although I knew we must've earned them or they wouldn't have put them on the medals that they awarded us.

Anyway, after about a month there, I got transferred back to Agra, where the Taj Mahal is. I can't figure why. I guess they had to rotate troops, but why they sent me there, because it was really tough, because it was in the height of the hot weather. I remember, just one day, jokingly, we took a couple eggs out and cracked them on a wing and they fried immediately.

I only stayed there for a short while, and then, I got transferred back to Karachi. Actually, I was at Karachi for a year and, there, again, you were safe. We had a couple tragedies there, in that some of the ground crews, for instance, one ground crew--actually, he was an electrician, I think--anyway, I don't know exactly.

Anyway, we used to have the natives take care of the grounds, and so forth, and clean up and that. One day, one of our GIs was working at a workbench with an electric drill. He was drilling something and one of the natives came along with a wet mop and water.

In those days, your shoes, when your GI shoes were repaired, they put half soles on, they put nails in. Well, the water shorted him. He was electrocuted immediately. He was one of our specialists. That was one occasion.

Then, the other occasion, we had a C-46 that had had an engine change. After the engine change, you had a flight test crew that would take it up to test it, and so forth. So, this was one

of our prime [crews]. I think it was a lieutenant colonel and a major and maybe a tech sergeant or a staff sergeant on it, which were head of their sections on the ground, and so forth.

They took this C-46 up. One of the tests was that you would feather a propeller, which means you would put it in a neutral position where the air would just pass it. Well, what happened here, they flipped the electric switch--they were controlled electrically--they flipped it and it went in reverse. So, you had one engine pushing, one engine pulling.

Well, they just spiraled down to the Earth. It took us two days to dig the engines out. When we got the plane back and they took the propeller apart, they found out that, inside the propeller motor, there are rings. One of them is a dead stop; in other words, that you can't go past that stop. Well, that had been put in reverse, so [that] it went past dead center into reverse position, which was the part of the specialists that worked on it.

Well, anyway, all were killed. That was probably the worst thing that I witnessed, because I was out helping get the aircraft out of the ground, not so much of physical digging, but supervising. So, that was, I think, my two--well, no, there was another situation up in Agra.

We had, I guess it was a C-47 there; no, we didn't have C-46s in Agra when I first went there. Actually, what happens, when a plane's on the ground, you have a locking position in the instruments, so that when they're taxiing along, they don't shake. Before you take off, the co-pilot is supposed to take this instrument out of a locked position.

What happened was, the co-pilot did not do that and the pilot didn't check, which he was supposed to do. So, the aircraft starts taking off and there's an artificial horizon there. It's supposed to move as the plane takes off. It was fixed in one position. So, actually, they take off and it's fixed--he flies the plane into the ground because it's fixed. At the end of the runway is a native village. So, the crew is gone, hundreds of natives that lived there were gone.

Of course, the tough part of it to me was that the co-pilot was the son of one of my mother's sorority sisters. She knew that he was at the base where I was. Of course, the enquiry came to me, "What happened?" Of course, I can't say anything, because that was strictly pilot error. I said, "The investigator's inspection has not been revealed, so, I can't tell you." I got out of it that way, but they were the worst situations that I ran into in all the time in service.

SI: You said hundreds of natives were killed in the crash? Were they carrying something ...

EW: No, no, they lived there. It was a native village.

SI: Yes, but was the plane carrying fuel or something that it killed so many people?

EW: Well, I don't think that mattered one way or the other. It was a physical [strike], not fire damage, just the physical. As the wing swept the ground, it just took ...

SI: Oh, they were very tightly together.

EW: Yes. No, it was just an impact situation on the natives, hitting the natives that lived there. I can't say that there was five or six in each *basha* or each tent that they lived in, but that's where it was. It was physical impact more than anything, no fire. I don't remember that there was any fire at all.

SI: That was at Agra.

EW: No, that was in Karachi--oh, Chabua, in Chabua.

SI: You mentioned the problems with the C-46s and the wheel assemblies. Were there any other constant problems that you would have to deal with?

EW: Well, they had tech reps there. I think there was probably other mechanical adjustments that had to be made, but, having the technical reps, these were civilian employees of Curtiss-Wright or of the aircraft manufacturer. Of course, they had direct access back to the United States, anything that they reported, which were to be corrected.

I'm sure there were, but I don't think they were ever made known to the local people, because it didn't affect flight, daily flight. They could be something which could, in the long run, affect the operation or improve the operation. So, I think it went along that line, but these were civilians and they did a good job.

SI: The planes that you were in charge of, they would eventually be used to fly over "the Hump" [the Himalayas].

EW: Oh, yes, yes. They were never held back from operating over the Hump, because the main thing with the C-46 was, a C-47 had a service ceiling, a safe service ceiling, of about twelve thousand feet and the mountains were fifteen and eighteen thousand feet high. So, you had to go fly around them, whereas the C-46, I forget what the ceiling limit was on that, but it could fly over the mountains.

Of course, weather permitting, if they could get up high enough and didn't get iced up and all, they would go over, so that there was safety in the design of that aircraft, not necessarily--it was still affected by the weather, and so forth. That was one of the most brutal things over there. Between the fog and the icing, you couldn't get above that.

SI: Did you feel like, from what you could see in your portion of the operation, the flow of supplies and planes was adequate?

EW: Well, let me say this, it was enough to maintain the war effort. It was never sufficient to meet the needs that were over there. It was always--what do you want to call it? You'd get it and you would just about meet a deadline, so-to-speak. You never had a surplus.

In many cases, you had to salvage an aircraft to get parts for another one. If you had one that was down for one thing, you'd go rob the parts you needed from that. That would be grounded until you'd get all the parts to replace it. Of course, eventually, you did get them. I'm sure there

must've been some carcasses over there that they left because they had robbed it so much that it didn't pay to replace the parts and put it back in service.

I think that was an accepted thing with the Air Corps, the Army Air Force, and so forth, that, eventually, you had to use one aircraft as your supply base. I can't imagine what was left over after the war, because they just abandoned stuff over there. They tried to give it to the locals, to the Indian government, and so forth, and not only there, but all over the world.

A lot of the foreign countries, those who were part of our program of the war, benefited by our giving them property. It was the only practical way. It didn't pay to return it to the United States, because what would you do with it when you got back here?

I can remember, when I got recalled during Korea, one of my jobs was to inspect the reserve supply places. I can remember, out in Arizona, they had acres and acres of aircraft that were stored there, some eventually to be salvaged. They did recall a few of them into active service, because they were of a newer variety. Rather than buying new aircraft, they re-commissioned some of those, but it was an interesting study.

I know, again, when I was in during Korea, I worked with the Inspector General, Command Inspector General. One of the things that I did, I would go to various bases with the purchasing agents. They were complaining about certain suppliers who had bid on requests for parts that were needed. Some of these were old.

Let's say they bought a whole field--whatever was there, they bought it--for a flat fee and the government needed, I can remember, one time, they needed ramps to load these flatbed trailers. I think the government initially paid somewhere around a couple hundred dollars for them, each individual ramp. We needed more ramps.

This one purchasing agent went out for a bid to one of those who had bought it. They were bidding like fifteen hundred dollars or two thousand dollars for a ramp. He said, "I can't see it, but we need the ramps." So, after the inspection, I went back. He gave me the name of who the supplier was and all.

I know I got back to the base on a Sunday and I got a hold of the Inspector General. I said, "Hey, this is something we can't tolerate," and I showed him what it was. He immediately went to--I guess to Washington--reported them. Anyway, they were disqualified from doing business thereafter. They were stuck with a lot of stuff that they thought was going to be gold.

How they eventually got the ramps--they got the ramps, but at a more reasonable bid. This was typical after the war. There were some of these unscrupulous people who had bid on just lots, "I'll give you so much money for that lot." It was a government-prepared list of what was in the lot.

So, I didn't run into anything else, because, a couple bases I went to, this supplier was listed on there as their sources. In future visits to those bases, they were no longer qualified to bid. That was another strange thing.

Another thing, we had a number of Buick staff cars that were in these regional warehouses. They were out in the open. They were up on blocks to protect the tires, but I looked at the taillights on them--the taillights were filled with water. So, I reported that, because, evidently, they weren't prepared for storage. There must've been a defective seal by General Motors in manufacturing.

So, I felt, there, we had some regress with General Motors to correct that and save the cars, because, remember, their model was called "The Special." It was a beautiful, little, four-door sedan. I said, "Gee, I'd love to have one of those," but, as I say, that was the other thing.

Just walking through one of the surplus things, there were bins of, like, staplers and things like that, that were defective. I remember, I picked one up as a sample of a defective stapler. I looked at it, said, "This thing isn't bad. This is a simple repair job." So, on my own, I sent it back to the manufacturer. They repaired it, sent it back, no charge. I'm using it upstairs today, but that was the kind of stuff. There was no charge to it; it was just a defect in manufacturing. It was one of the brand-name staplers; strange things.

SI: Did GM fix those taillights?

EW: I never knew, because I got out of service. Actually, what happened, I complained. While I was with the Inspector General's Office, it was actually at Olmsted Field in Middletown, Pennsylvania. The Inspector General became elected club officer for the base. It was a very nice club there.

I didn't know--I had done so much good, and so forth, that he said, "I'm having you transferred to club officer." Well, that hit me the wrong way. Here, I'm recalled [for] active duty as a specialist, as an aircraft maintenance officer, and I'm managing a bunch of--well, I don't know what I would repeat to call them today--but all these officers wanted to use the club as a get-away.

Also, you were responsible for the transient officers' quarters. In other words, those officers who flew into the base needed accommodations overnight, and then, flew off; I was responsible for that. There were all kinds of difficulties there and I was correcting that.

They put an announcement up that the Air Inspector's representatives would be in to inspect the base. I figure, "Here's my opportunity," and I filed a complaint with the Air Inspector General that, here I am, I had just had [a child]. My wife gave birth to a child while I was on active duty there. I complained to them that they didn't need a highly-qualified aircraft maintenance officer as a club officer that was called back in the specialty.

I went before them, had an interview. In four days, I was out. They couldn't reassign me because I didn't have that much time left in that tour of duty. So, they just let me out. I came home one day--my family didn't even know I was coming home--came home with all my luggage and everything in the car. I had bought a piece of surplus equipment that was auctioned off as furniture in excess to the transient officers. I'd loaded that on the roof.

Here I come up one day and said, "I'm home to stay," [laughter] and that's how abrupt it was. At that particular time, a Reserve officer was appointed for periods of five years. My five-year was almost up and they solicited me to sign up [again]. However, when you signed up then, it was for indefinite. You were a Reserve officer indefinitely.

So, I sent it back. It was worded, "Refuse," and I didn't like that word. So, I crossed it off and printed, "I decline," and initialed it and sent it back. Finally, I got separated completely, no future obligation. So, that was the end of my military service, about, I guess, thirteen years altogether, including Reserve time, weekends, and so forth. That was the end of my military service.

SI: Going back to when you became an officer, did you notice any changes in your life in general? You had lived as an enlisted man and, now, you're an officer. Was it a better life?

EW: Well, I tell you, you had enough chance during those ninety days--like we used to nickname it "ninety-day wonders," "It's a wonder you even became an officer." Then, there was a wonderful book that was printed to give you the changeover. It was a smooth operation. If you read that and adhered to that, there was no problems--what you could expect, what you were giving up.

I don't know whether it's in print today, but it was a wonderful publication. It was recommended. I don't think it was a required thing, it was recommended. Anything that I thought would ease my life, I bought. It wasn't an expensive book. So, that was my transition period, so-to-speak.

SI: Did you have access to better quarters, more privileges?

EW: Oh, of course, of course. Within military obligations, you were unlimited, and as long as you were well-behaved, and so forth. I mean, plenty of officers got into trouble because they overdid their position. It was very easy. If you felt, "Oh, now, I can do anything I want," if you assumed that, you were in trouble.

I always had great rapport with my enlisted men. I often called upon them for their experience, because some of the tech sergeants and master sergeants had been in for a while. They were free to advise you. As long as you approached them properly, they were on your team. So, a lot of them made my life easy and I remained friends with them after I got out of the service. I corresponded with them. So, that thing maintained.

A lot of the officers--I just had a letter from one of my fellow engineering officers from Karachi. He was telling me what he's doing today, and of, likewise, similar ages, and so forth. It was more of a social report than it was a military report.

SI: When you were in a place like Chabua or Karachi, how big would your group be? How many men would you have under you? How many officers?

EW: Well, actually, I can't tell you the number of men, but I can remember, for instance, like the refueling crew, they had to be on call twenty-four hours a day, because it was a full-time operation in Karachi. I would say that, there, I had between twenty-four and thirty. The top man was a tech sergeant.

I had a private first class who was a wonderful mechanic. He built a little motorcycle out of parts that I got him. Of course, it was illegal on the base, because it was not one that would pass inspection normally. I had some pictures of that somewhere in my collection of pictures. Are you interested in any pictures?

SI: Sure.

EW: I've got a lot of duplicates I'll give you.

SI: Oh, sure, we love it, yes.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

EW: As far as India is concerned, my impression, of course, still remains that it was a rather harsh life for most individuals. The caste system was overwhelming--the fact if you were born a *walla*, as they called them, you were forever a *walla*. You couldn't get out of that. No matter what level, you were stuck with that--only those who had fortunately gotten an education, and I don't know how they got that or what level they were able to get it. They looked down on each caste below them as pure trash, if you want to call it that.

Conditions there were horrible, a mere existence for most of the natives. No matter where you went, they were begging, even to the smallest child would be. They would call it (*bakshi walla*?). They were constantly begging for money.

Fortunately, there was a level that we in service, particularly in Assam, were able to get some of the better educated and, in some cases, some of the servicemen from--I'm trying to think which service--were wonderful keepers of us. They would do our laundry and take care of our accommodations. This is officers' level. With mere, I won't say pennies, but it was so cheap, you could not have it.

As you further got into the cities and all, that type of assistance disappeared. They were mostly people out, if you want to call [it, in] the hill country, where they were available. As far as the food was concerned, we relied a lot upon British provisions early in the stages. The natives were able to cook.

They were kept under close watch as far as sanitation was concerned. Occasionally, you would get some diarrhea or something like that. Fortunately, I never got any of the bad dysentery. I was hospitalized a couple of times with dysentery, but it wasn't amoebic dysentery. They took us into clinics right away when we showed any signs of that.

As far as our accommodations, the early stages, it was a matter of tents on wooden platforms. Then, we went into these buildings, as I said, they were called *bashas*, because that was their name for buildings that we lived in. They were well-constructed. The roofs are such that they didn't leak. I guess, at one time, they started pouring cement slabs in which they constructed these facilities, so [that] you didn't get a lot of vermin, and so forth.

Mosquitoes were the biggest problem. We had mosquito nettings. Of course, if you got malaria and you didn't use a mosquito netting, you were subject to court-martial, because it was a case of you were being careless and not protecting your own health. Fortunately, I did not take Atabrine, I never got malaria and I always slept under the mosquito nettings.

SI: Did you have access to good medical facilities and medical care?

EW: I have to say they were adequate. I didn't require much over there, so, I can't say I was ever [in] a critical situation where I had to rely on them. The medics, of course, I guess, had their own problems. I never heard of any. I never bunked up with any of the medical officers. They sort of had their own hospital units that they lived in.

There was a hospital at Chabua. There was a hospital and, in fact, a couple of the famous doctors from the Philadelphia area were on staff there. One of them was by the name of (Shay?), Dr. (Shay?), and he was a well-known eye physician here. I'm trying to think of the other gentleman who was a surgeon who was with a hospital unit over there. I know they had wonderful reputations as far as the service that they rendered.

Let's see, what next should I bring up as far as the Indian natives are concerned? Actually, as far as local things were concerned, you could go into a village and they had all kinds of merchants there. It was interesting, and I can't describe it, it was almost like going into a tent area. They would be sitting with their feet crossed and showing their merchandise.

The variety was unique. For instance, well, these pieces on the wall here, actually, they came [from] when I was stationed in Agra. They are actually semi-precious duplications of the design of the Taj Mahal and they are accurate and true colors. It's a sandstone base, and then, how they got the precious stones, semi-precious stones, to adhere to them is remarkable. This, as I say, came from Agra.

Then, locally, in Chabua, I did purchase some things. They had a design that was carved in the image of what I describe as a maple leaf. I think it was chinara (sounds like chinara) leaf, was what they called it. They made all sorts of designs from that; shut it off a minute.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

SI: Put it back on?

EW: Yes. This is an example of what the merchants were offering to you in their little stalls, if you want to call them such. Then, there were some that displayed jewelry and all. I can

remember, I bought a star ruby from one of them. How did I send that back? I don't think I brought that back; I sent it back in the mail and it did get home.

What else? Oh, in the PXs [post exchanges] over there, they sold Zippo lighters. I can remember, I took a Zippo lighter--it was a crackle finish that you could grind off and it would come down to a stainless-steel case. I don't know whether it's stainless steel or what kind of metal it was.

Anyway, I know I took one into one of the native markets there and had them solder on it one of the Indian coins, and then, engraved on either side--that happened to be a 1944 coin--on either side, I had them engrave, "1943," was the year I arrived, and then, "1944," which is the year--I was still there, but I was getting ready to come home. So, I had all three years while I was over there. What was it? I was there from '45-'44, yes, the three calendar years, but not necessarily full years we were there, but they were very handy.

Had some beautiful ivory work--actually, carved imitations or representations of the bull ox carts, I just recently sold that at auction and got taken over by the auctioneer. Anyway, so much of that's Indian stuff and it was always pleasant. Also, I got some napkin rings in the same basic design.

Cloth, I can remember, when up in Darjeeling, when we were at rest camp, I bought some beautiful fabrics. One of them was interwoven with silver and I sent that home for my wife to make whatever she wanted. It just sat around so long that the silver had tarnished.

It's just the cloth--I had to throw it away. It wasn't any value. I never even thought about [that] I could've burned the fabric and turned the silver in for whatever you would've redeemed it for, what value it was, because it weighed fairly heavy with the silver woven in it.

So, the merchants, basically, that I ran into were honest. Just like anyplace else, I'm sure there must've been scams that went on, but I never heard of any and I never was involved in any.

SI: Were you warned by the military to look out for certain areas or certain people?

EW: Oh, there were certain areas were off limits. Yes, they had the typical areas, prostitution, just like anyplace else. They had pro-stations [prophylactic stations], or they had the stations where you went in to protect yourself, if you're so inclined. You had to report in when you got back to the base, and so forth. Otherwise, if you got any venereal diseases, again, you were subject to court-martial because you didn't protect yourself.

Transportation, had the vehicles that the coolies would pull you around. I don't know how they did it. They ran; you rode and they ran. It was protected, I mean, as far as against the sun or rain. Also, in the major cities or the larger cities, there were taxis. They were vehicles which they had been carrying on for years and [in] wartime and all. I guess they couldn't replace them. There was no replacements available.

Again, you saw some of the native carts that were hauling goods. They had rubber-tired wheels on them, real rough cart, but they had the rubber-tired wheels on them. We never knew where he got them, because, evidently, they weren't manufacturing tires--at least they weren't available to people like the natives that were doing that kind of work--but it was interesting.

I think in one of the pictures that you have in the collection is a bus. This was one of the busses that took us to rest camp, one of the closer rest camps. The other ones we would get to--for instance, I can remember, we flew to Delhi.

Then, we boarded a train that took us up to the mountains. Then, you got to a point where the trains no longer could take you. You got off there. They provided horses for you, or donkeys, it was donkeys, and they carried you up, up, up to the higher levels and to where you finally got to rest camp. Of course, it was gorgeous up there.

Rest camp, the accommodations were under contract to the US government. Actually, they were houseboats and luxuriously equipped, magnificent rugs on the floor. They had all kinds of attendants. The meals were good. There, they told you, you could eat anything that was served at that by your attendants on the houseboat.

Daily, the merchants would come alongside and bring their merchandise up and put on a big display for you and try to sell you whatever their specialty was. It was priced reasonably. You could bargain with them if you thought they were too high. You'd say, "No, I like it, but that's too much money for me," and, eventually, you would come to a happy medium. You'd come down to half of what you thought you were willing to pay. They would come down, you'd come up.

So, it was an interesting means of whiling away your time, because, when you're at rest camp, really, there wasn't much to do except [relax]. There were sightseeing trips around, particularly on the lake. There was taxis--a taxi, little raft, boats, anyway--would come along and take you for a ride around the lake and different places.

SI: How often would you be able to go to a rest camp?

EW: Actually, I'll tell you, I never found any specific program of how long or how much in between you would qualify, because I think, in Agra, I got to rest camps three times. So, we figure, that way, it would be a third of twelve months. About every four months, you would go, but not necessarily exactly four months.

They would post a list of periods where they were arranging [trips]. It would be more than one person, but, actually, when you went to a particular location, there was only one to a houseboat and they were pretty good-sized boats. So, it wasn't a case of where you had to share it with another officer or so forth.

I can remember, one trip to rest camp took me to New Delhi, to the Maharaja's castle or buildings, and so forth. At that particular time, Lord Louis Mountbatten was there. We had a reception in which he was present and it was very pleasant and very luxurious. I forget all that

was served there, but it was like an open house for the military. It was just by invitation. I don't know how we got the invitation, but we did stay in that area maybe two or three days.

I'm trying to think what other unusual place that we may have been privileged [to visit]. Of course, naturally, the Taj Mahal in Agra, that was a very unique experience. I don't know whether I still have it or not, but I have a big, big travel poster by an Indian travel company [on] which the Taj Mahal is displayed.

I used that once locally in the library in Cherry Hill, where I had a whole collection of things that were related to India and all. I had coins and I think I had some brass work. I had a very interesting lock that was typically Indian that I had gotten over there. It was a secret way it went, had no key, but you could lock it and take a piece away and they couldn't open it. That was a collection of stuff which made an interesting display at the library, coins and stamps. I still have a file on that. I had to go look at that; that's upstairs, too.

What else can I say?--about the different types of dress you saw, anywhere from the type of garment that Gandhi wore to the fancy Nehru jackets; trying to think what the ladies [wore], the shawl-type dresses that the ladies wore that were really gorgeous, depending upon how wealthy they were and the fabrics that went into them, how fancy it ended up. Of course, the color anywhere in India was from dark brown into very light brown to almost white. Some of them must've intermingled with the British residents there.

Actually, when we were in Chabua, we were physically located in the center of a tea plantation. I don't know whether they had removed any of the tea plants to put [up] our facilities, but it was sort of a protected area in there. Although, very close to where your barracks were, there were slit trenches.

We were warned, based on a signal, "Hit the slit trenches," but most of us were fearful of going into the trenches, because we had been warned there was a very small snake there called krait. It was almost a white snake, but its bite was poisonous. You're almost assured of immediate death. So, we had been told about this, and so, we were all fearful, if we'd ever had to go into it. I can't remember ever having heard the warning to hit the trenches, but we knew it was there and they had prepared for it.

Again, of course, actually, it was really in-between rows of tea bushes and they would pick the tea leaves. The packaging of the tea leaves was very unique. It was almost like a Masonite carton, really large-size carton, which they would seal. Then, that would be sent off to be dried and made into tea; plenty of tea to drink there, no milk.

We would have a ration of beer periodically. The pilots would bring it in by plane and they'd distribute it. Mail circulation was reasonably good, once it got to India. Your responses were the special letters that they developed for use during wartime. It was just a piece of paper that folded in and you licked the one fold. It became sort of an envelope type thing.

[Editor's Note: Victory mail or V-mail used a system of microfilming letter forms to conserve cargo space on ships carrying war materiel.]

We, as officers, were able to censor our own mail. I understand from letters I got from home that, occasionally, one of those had been re-censored, just to double check on the honesty of the officer. We could send packages back. I don't remember whether there were any restrictions except by sizes. We could send stuff back.

SI: How important was it to receive mail from home?

EW: Well, from a morale standpoint, it was very important. Between family members, I think we almost wrote once a day and, collectively, we would get maybe five, six pieces of mail at a time. I can't remember the length of time it took from the postmark in the States to our actually receiving it, but it was a period that that's what we expected. We were grateful that we got it.

Packages, I can't remember how we handled [them]. Of course, there was always a post office at the base and you could take your packages there. I did send back some interesting things. I can remember, I sent back one of the knives that the tribesmen up in the hills used as their protection. There was also a crossbow that was native to the Nagas, the tribesmen. I was able to barter [for] one of their crossbows and I was able to ship that back.

[Editor's Note: Naga refers to Tibeto-Burman ethnic groups in northeastern India and northwestern Myanmar.]

Both the Naga knife and the crossbow, to the best of my knowledge, are still at the University of Pennsylvania Museum. I contributed [them]. I didn't know what to do with them. They weren't things that you would normally hang on the wall. So, I contributed them to that museum. I presume there's still a display of that type material there.

SI: Did they restrict what you could send? Were they looking for people that were sending back things they shouldn't?

EW: Well, probably, you couldn't send back a firearm of any kind. Mostly, whatever you had in a firearm would be too big to package anyway, except for, well, we had forty-fives that were very inaccurate arms, but they were effective, that you had something to fire.

I can remember, on one convoy, I was responsible for sending some vehicles from one base to another. We camped out on the tailgates of these vehicles. I think at dusk, we heard some noises and I did fire up into a tree. I hit a big gorilla and I must've killed him right off the bat, because it came tumbling down and rolling down the hill.

We didn't go to see whether it was still alive or not, but that was the only time I think I ever fired that pistol over there. It was a successful convoy; we got the vehicles where they were to go safe and sound. It wasn't in a combat area, but it was in a native area.

SI: How often would you do something like that, go out on a convoy?

EW: Only once that I can remember, only once that I can remember. The only time I ever drove a government vehicle, other than a staff car--let's see, I'm trying to think of where it was.

When we were in Karachi, we had a problem getting fuel from the docks. The tankers would come in there. Normally, they would unload into barrels, and then, you'd haul the barrels into wherever they had to go. You used regular vehicles for that.

I remember, one time, we were in need and we took one of the regular tank trucks. I was the only one had a license to drive in town; in other words, you could drive on base, but you needed a license to drive off base. I can remember, I took an Autocar tractor and a I-forget-how-many-gallon tanker down to the docks.

When I got there, I didn't realize, the street was just about wide enough to get a tanker in there. The only way to get in there was that you had to back in or back out. Well, backing in, the vehicle was empty, and so, it would be easier to back in an empty one than try to back out a full one. So, I can remember, I maneuvered that tank down into the dock, and then, they loaded and I pulled out. That was the only experience I had in a very limited space with a big vehicle like that. I gained a lot of confidence in that.

Then, I can remember, one time, also--where was I?--in Chabua, they brought the fuel in by small tank cars. There, it was narrow-gauge railroad, so, the cars were much smaller. I don't know what my responsibility was that particular day, whether I was officer of the day or something. I went down by the railroad area where the tank cars were being unloaded.

Of course, the only illumination--the natives were responsible for unloading the vehicles--but the dumb people, they didn't know, they had kerosene lanterns. They're unloading this volatile gas. What happened was, a native either kicked or dropped the lantern into the flow of gas and there was a tank car there.

I was driving a weapons carrier that particular instance. I know I hooked the chains on the tailgate of the weapons carrier onto the tank car to pull it away from the scene. I'm sure I must've burned out the clutch of this vehicle just trying to get it out of the way. Fortunately, I didn't know how much gas was still in it. I figured if it was just vapors, that's an explosion; if it's gas, it's a fire, but I just pulled it away. Fortunately, nothing happened after that, but it scared me to death just to know what the potential was.

When I took the vehicle back, I told them what had happened (to the motor pool) and they said, "We'll take care of it." So, I don't know whether I ever burned the clutch out, because that tank car weighed pretty heavy. I don't know whether the brakes were off or whether I just dragged it across the tracks or whether it rolled across the tracks. I didn't care at that particular time. So, that was another interesting experience. What else can I say?

SI: It sounds like the natives did a lot of labor around the base.

EW: Well, as much as physically they could give them, they were capable of doing. For instance, like repairing runways, what they did, the men crushed rock on the side. The women

took trays of rock on their heads, took it out to wherever they were paving the runway or repairing the runway.

So, it was all native, I guess. I don't know whether they paid them anything or not, but there's always labor available whatever you were in. Again, another caste, so, that's what they were subjected to.

SI: Most of the GIs, officers or enlisted men, how did they treat the natives?

EW: I feel some of them did it with disdain. They just couldn't tolerate them because they didn't understand them. They didn't understand they're poor people trying to get along. First of all, the English did not treat them kindly at all. They were brutal. So, if you observed what the English did, you had a tendency to follow them. The natives were used to that and they never argued with you about it. So, I guess that's an answer to that.

SI: What did you think of the Indians in general, the people, the culture, at the time?

EW: I don't think I ever could--how do I want to say it? Whatever level I was approaching or involved in, I accepted them for what they were. I didn't expect something from the low caste street sweeper; if I was [dealing with] a merchant, I did expect certain things. If it was one of the ruling government people, I had respect for them because they had the responsibility. I think whatever level it was, I had to take them as I found them.

SI: Did you have to interact a lot with the British or were your operations pretty much separate?

EW: We did not, because, actually, there was a level where they had their office and our equivalent. They would meet somewhere to have the discussions over the various subjects that each was responsible for. They had certain supplies that they were under contract to provide us. Our supply officers dealt with that.

If there was a matter of a problem with a native, and so forth, there was the court system. I can remember, there was one court-martial to a native on the base accused of doing something. I sat as a member of the court. It was a case [where] I honestly didn't think that they had enough proof to convict this native. It was so much hearsay and other things that I voted against any conviction. He was not found responsible for whatever the crime was.

That was only once that I got involved in a court like that. I never got involved in a court-martial of either an enlisted man or--well, of course, as a first lieutenant, there was only the second lieutenants--so, I didn't stand any courts where there was an officer involved. Usually, I don't know whether there was a specification that you had to be a major to sit on a court-martial of another officer, but I never got involved [in] that, or an enlisted man, either.

SI: Were there ever any problems with the men underneath you, either discipline problems or just general morale problems, being away from home?

EW: I probably had some discussions with some of my men, but there was never any serious problem that had to be resolved. There was a case of maybe something that a man was unhappy with. It wasn't really within my realm to say, "Well, here's a solution," but I know I could talk to him and say, "Well, this is such-and-such. I think you ought to go talk to So-and-So. He's in a better position to help you."

I think I probably had many conversations like that, some of them involving rank, that they felt that they were entitled to a promotion, they'd been in so long. I said, "Well, a promotion doesn't necessarily come along with certain months with your rank." You said, "Must be other things considered. If I recommended you for promotion, I have to substantiate that with overall opinion of you and your work and whatever goes along with that."

I said, "If you feel that you warrant a promotion, you'd better go talk to the person who's responsible for signing that promotion or recommending it, because I don't know all the working conditions in which you're responsible and how you carried them out." So, yes, those situations came up.

SI: You mentioned the rest camps. Did they have any other entertainment options, like movies or USO clubs?

EW: Oh, yes, oh, yes. For instance, in the major cities, there were theaters that you could go to and there were English-speaking movies. You'd have some of the movies from home that had been made and copies sent overseas. There were good restaurants; there were good Chinese restaurants.

I remember, although I never got to Calcutta or Bombay, I can remember, in Calcutta, they'd often talk about this one restaurant there that was wonderful. They also made fine candies. I remember some of the fellows brought back the candy from this candy store. It would be just like the finest chocolates, and so forth, that you could buy at home.

It was very successful. It was always sold in tin cans. I know a lot of them bought it and sent that back home, just because of the novelty of it. I think it was reasonably priced. I'm trying to [think]--it began with "F," was the name. Anyway, it was a well-known candy manufacturer there. As I say, they had a restaurant, too, where this candy was sold, this quasi-combination restaurant/candy store.

SI: What would a typical day be like for you? How many hours would you be on duty? What would you do in that time?

EW: Well, I guess you pretty much had a routine that you're responsible for. Again, as an engineering officer, it would vary from day-to-day based on what came up--let's say you'd have an aircraft assigned to one of your crews and they would have a specific problem. You, being the engineering officer, were supposed to be the expert, although I felt some of my crew members were far more qualified than I, because they were in it every day. If I thought I knew more than the crew who was working on it, I would make my suggestions, how you take care of the matter and coordinate between operations office and your crews.

Planes had to be ready, the planes that did scheduled flights on a regular basis, that they were serviced and ready to go. Let's say it came in late afternoon, you'd have your crew go over it and check the condition of the tires, check all the fuels, all the safety equipment--just to be sure that it hadn't been stolen at some base where the plane landed--and that the windshields were clear.

Anything that was put on the operations report, where the pilots said, "This has to be taken care of," or, "I found this to be true," then, you would be sure that a qualified member of your crew ran up the engines, to check out if there was a gauge not functioning properly, as far as that particular aircraft was concerned

At Karachi, with your refueling vehicles, I know I had a tough time in the beginning, because, for vehicles, there's also an inspection list that you had to perform. You take a big, five-hundred-gallon trailer, it has multiple tires on it and you have a major-sized tractor pulling it. When it came time to inspecting it, it was impossible to get underneath, to drain certain things that had to be drained, wheel bearings that had to be treated after so many hours of operation or miles of operation.

So, I finally got together with a base engineer and, together with my crew chiefs, we designed a ramp that the vehicle could drive up on and they would be high enough. The tracks would leave the underbody of the vehicle available for workmen. Together with the Corps of Engineers and the British there, they constructed a ramp that would take it.

Actually, it was designed for multi-sized vehicles, because we had oil trucks, which were much smaller, much narrower as far as the wheels were concerned, so that we could drive either the small vehicle up on there or we'd take a sixteen-wheel big tanker up there, all of which could be serviced. They constructed this. The vehicles were in wonderful condition once we had that available, because the project received a citation for the best of its kind in the theater.

I had pictures of that. I forget where I gave the pictures to, but I had official Air Force pictures taken, or they took them and gave me copies. I've since distributed them somewhere where I think they were [of] more value than me holding them, because they were original Air Corps photos.

So, I got a great deal of pleasure out of that, because, there, I saw something [to improve], which, of course, had nothing to do with combat. Indirectly, it was important that they be inspected properly, because, when the gasoline sat out in the sun, it got very hot; at nighttime, no sun, it cooled down--you got condensation inside the tanks. So, you had to drain that daily before you fueled any vehicles. So, that's where this ramp aided tremendously.

As far as the daily maintenance of the vehicles, as far as mechanical things, that the hoses were in good shape and the nozzles were in good shape and that your ground wires were connected, because, any time you fueled a plane, you had to connect the ground wire from that truck to the vehicle, so [that] there would be no electrical sparks while you were fueling.

Things, just little minor things like that, you had to check on, because I don't think the GIs were particularly careful in handling the wires. If they disconnected the wire, they'll let it fall on the ground and run along the ground. You could get damage to the wire. I'd say it's all minor things that you looked for, safety; your life depended on some of them.

SI: How many hours a day would you be working?

EW: It depends on how many planes, I think, you were responsible for. I don't think we worked any shifts, because most of the engineering officers were responsible for certain categories and I think you took care of your category. If you had to work late at night because the plane came in late and had to be ready, you did so.

It was unspecified. I don't think they ever checked on how many hours you worked. I think, possibly, if the demand was extremely hard, you could get some relief, like one engineering officer would cover for another if there was extenuating circumstances; so much for that.

SI: Did your crew change at all or was it the same guys all the time?

EW: No permanent assigned crews. Yes, they knew their responsibility and, like you, whatever it called for, that was their responsibility. I don't think any of them, any of us, were really overworked at Karachi.

You may get a series of flights come in close to one another where you didn't expect them, because the incoming aircraft were subject to their departure at their previous base. If it wasn't your own base aircraft--in other words, transient aircraft--there could be a flight of four C-46s that all came over together, new planes being delivered.

So, you had to take care of them as they arrived. Of course, the crews that came in, the ferry crews, were really good pilots, but miserable guys to deal with, because they'd demand such attention. They brought the plane in, they wanted to get [home], once you'd accept it; let them get out and get a flight back to the States as quickly as possible.

They were the toughest people to deal with. If you didn't have a car there to meet them when the plane landed, they would bellyache. The operations officer kind of cooled them down and put them in their place, said, "When you're on our base, you're under our command, so, let's not have this nonsense." It calmed them down a lot, those who were unruly.

They were the young guys. They had the crushed hats. If you'd see the difference between, like, the hats that I show in there and these guys, there's a rim in the hat that keeps it out. They'd take that out and crush the hat and it would bend down. You could tell where you could potentially get trouble. They were hot shots.

SI: So, it was the same guys that came with you from Chabua or Karachi.

EW: Not necessarily. It wasn't a transfer of your friends; otherwise, it was just piecemeal. I don't think I ever experienced where there was common transfer. Now, you got into a whole new bunch of people when you got transferred.

SI: When you're overseas, did you have to constantly learn about new aircraft coming on to the scene, like the B-29?

EW: No, not so much, because, actually, when the B-29s came in, usually, there was no maintenance on them. They may have been war weary, but they had been kept up from their original base. I don't think they even came in--on an aircraft, you had certain hourly inspections that you had to perform. Usually, the war wearies they would send back, they would have, let's say, a five-hundred-hour inspection before they left the previous base, figuring that within that five hundred hours, they'd be back [within the] Continental limits of the United States.

Because we were an interim base, you would be subjected to some of these scheduled maintenance things. We did have, like at Karachi, across the field from us was a balloon hangar that had been made up as part of the service anticipated like with ships like the *Graf Zeppelin*. It was that sized capability. Of course, naturally, there was not anything in operation during World War II, so, they converted it into a service depot.

What they were doing there, ships would bring crated fighter planes, let's say P-47s, P-51s and a couple of other aircraft, in crates. Then, they would assemble them there. They would be test flown from Karachi Air Base, and then, sent on to combat areas. So, that was something that was very unusual, having it in the area.

I think, in this DVD you have, you'll hear the experience that I related, which was, like, my last seventy-two hours in Karachi. It was a case where I was on officer of the day, and the circumstances around the celebration of Japan surrendering and the information that got down and how people reacted, that, under certain circumstances, I was on duty for thirty-six straight hours.

You're only supposed to be on for twenty-four, and the problems that were generated by the surrender and the way the military handled themselves, particularly the GIs, and the fact there was aircraft that was supposed to take off the next day, schedule aircraft, and what I had to do to guarantee that some of the aircraft could take off, the condition of the crews, the pilots, and how I instructed the flight surgeon to be in operations office, inspect every crew that reported for duty and signing off [on] those who were capable and those who were still carrying over their load of booze from the day before.

There's a prolonged explanation about that and the reward I got for the job I did. As I say, it was seventy-two hours from the time I went on as officer of the day. [After] about seventy-two hours, I was on my way home to the United States as a reward. That's all spelled out in that. Let's see, what else can I say?

SI: Was there ever any black-market activity or anything like that in India?

EW: Yes. It was very interesting, and I say black market not necessary with the natives, but with the military. For instance, there was one pilot who was a major and he did a lot of maneuvering around, for which he generated a lot of cash. Of course, you could only send so much home.

In the end, he would travel around, he looked like he'd gained fifty pounds in weight, but he was loaded down with cash. He finally got caught up with [the MPs] and he was court-martialed and discharged from service for what he was buying and selling.

I didn't get into the intricacies of what he was buying and selling, but I know, for instance, he would buy up from the GIs their ration of cigarettes. We each got a generous ration. I didn't smoke and I always sold my ration. I think we paid a dollar a carton for cigarettes. He would take them on the plane over to China and he'd sell them for--I don't know what he'd sell them for--for a fortune.

So, every time he went to China, he took a load of cigarettes over and he came back with cash. How he got US cash, I don't know, but he was able to sell it for US cash. That's what he was generating, this cash. Of course, he'd send home, each month, the allotment that they allowed, but that had to go through official channels. So, you couldn't say, "Well, this time, I'll send five hundred dollars," when you're only allowed to send a hundred.

So, he generated the cash. Of course, as I say, they finally caught up with him. That was probably one of the unusual circumstances I heard of; I'm sure there were other, smaller ones, but of such level that they never got caught. Look, that was like a game. You didn't have much else to do, so, you generated things like that as pastimes and you made it profitable for yourself.

SI: Was there a lot of gambling and drinking?

EW: Oh, usual crap games, payday, money would change hands. Then, you would have the GI, was strictly legal, one GI would borrow five dollars, "Okay, next payday, you pay me ten dollars." There's a lot of that went on, profit sharing. The GI didn't know enough to say, "No, I won't pay you that much," and the guy asked for it and he got it, because he was ready cash.

So, he was a "banker." There was always a "banker" for the troops there, another GI. Banks, I don't know whether banks existed that you could put your money in and take it out in Indian money. I'm sure there was, but they weren't intelligent enough to protect themselves.

SI: You were always in India; you never took a flight to China.

EW: Not for pleasure. In other words, those opportunities I had were sort of as co-pilot. We would land, they'd unload the plane. If necessary, they would put fuel on. Usually, when we got over there, we took fuel off the plane, because there was a fuel shortage. We'd always left enough on to make emergency landings on the way back, but it was a means of transporting fuel--so, whatever time it took to unload the plane and load it with whatever the replacement cargo might be.

I can remember, lots of times, although I wasn't on one of the flights, we brought back a product called (wolf ride?). This was a red, dusty thing that we used in the making of steel. We'd bring back bags of this and they would be burlap bags. The stuff, [with] the vibration of the plane, it would be all over the plane, where it'd seeped through the burlap. We'd bring back hundreds of pounds of that.

Oh, I can remember, once, we brought back a Japanese prisoner--why this one was selected to be brought back--and he came back with MPs escorting the plane. He was really a frightened soul. Anytime anybody approached him, you could see the fear he had that somebody would do something to him. That was one exception where we brought back human cargo.

We would bring back sick who would be headed back for the United States, not any surgical cases, but just different things. We had one case where, oh, we brought back--let me stop and think a minute, where they had so much trouble breathing--infantile paralysis.

One fellow developed infantile paralysis and we didn't have a machine to put him in, a machine to breathe. I tried to make one with barrels and pumps, but I just couldn't get enough stuff together to make a pump. He eventually succumbed at our base. Then, after that, we got the United States to ship over a half a dozen iron lungs, which were distributed throughout the theater.

It would've been [bad] even if we tried just to hope on holding they would direct ship an iron lung to us, but it never came. That was another sad situation. That was a rare exception. There was no comment, one way or the other, about our success or failure in trying to save him, because we did everything we could physically, with the talent we had available, and so forth.

I mean, I had the GIs weld together barrels and we were able to use aircraft windshields for glass to look into the lung, but we couldn't coordinate an accordion-type pump. We did iron rings and leather and tried to develop it that way, but it was just taking too long, even with the guys working long hours trying to devise a system.

SI: It's kind of remarkable, as you're telling these stories, how much stuff you had to improvise and come up with in the field. Are there any other examples that you remember, things you had to come up with?

EW: I'm sure there were plenty of "Rube Goldberg" things that I was not necessarily involved with, but I knew about, certainly in shop equipment. Basically, your test equipment did come from the United States, because there wasn't anything new as far as equipment that had been developed for the common tests. It was the unusual things that developed that you couldn't take care of because they didn't have the means. I'm sure a lot of stuff developed there, later on, became standard equipment in the United States.

Entertainment, of course, we had the various troupes, USO troupes, that came over. I did get to meet some very wonderful people. That experience is, again, [because] I always welcomed the planes when they came into the theater, when I was at Karachi. Then, they went on to perform in different bases throughout the theater. In other words, they arrived at us first, and then, they

were distributed throughout India. I don't know the Special Services officer who was responsible for their performing.

SI: Do you remember anybody who either was famous or became famous later on?

EW: Oh, well, most of them were already famous before they came over there, [actor and comedian] Joe E. Brown. There's one gal, a gorgeous gal. There was a [actor] Pat O'Brien. I have a list of them somewhere, but I don't think Bob Hope was ever [there]. He may have come over there. I can't remember him if he ever did, but, of course, after that, I heard stories of how much good he did.

There was a gal that traveled with him who was well-known, a gorgeous creature. She's still alive. I can remember, during one of our CBI reunions, she appeared as a guest, but they did so much good. Of course, they're still operating. I still financially support them, because they do so much good. Like in Philadelphia Airport, they handled a lounge there for the military people in transit.

SI: What about the Red Cross? Were they in India?

EW: Well, Red Cross really was the basic part of the operation. However, they only functioned in major cities. They did help if there was an emergency, let's say back in the United States. They did have a contact person at each base.

In the major bases, of course, they operated lounges, but, at the smaller bases, it was just a contact, that if a message came from the United States that such-and-such was the case and it was determined that the individual over here should be returned, they were sort of the object of that message and the information to get to the commanding officer wherever the individual was.

Yes, they were there and they did a lot of good, operated refreshment bars at the better bases, where they had the space for them. Yes, I have to commend them for the work that they did.

SI: When you transported this POW back, what was it like to actually see the enemy up close?

EW: Well, I was curious, just like anybody else. I went up into the airplane to take a look at him. I can't remember--he was under restraint of some sort. I don't know whether he was an ill Jap or whether he was just [ill at ease] because of his restraint, but he's just like any other human being except Japanese appearance. I can't remember what clothing he had on, but I'm sure it was something that would be standing out if he tried to get out of the plane. No, he was nondescript, so-to-speak.

SI: Was there anything that I skipped or missed about your time in India?

EW: Probably, but I can't think of it now. [laughter]

SI: That always happens. I can ask all these questions and we still might miss something that might be important. You only worked with P-38s when you were in California.

EW: That's all.

SI: It's interesting, because, looking around your house, there's so much P-38 stuff. Why are you so in love with that plane?

EW: Well, I tell you, in its time, it was the finest fighter aircraft in the United States' service. It was the fastest, most maneuverable, had the ability for high altitude. It could be escort for bombers, it could be a fighter, it could do low-level work. Overall, I was intrigued with the basic design of it.

Of course, at the time (and I think, I can't say for sure), it was the only aircraft designed in such a way that the left-hand propeller and the right-hand propeller went in opposite directions, so that they were both pulling the plane forward. It was a liquid-cooled aircraft. Most of them, up to that time, were air-cooled. The basic ability, because of its design, made it easier for the pilot to maneuver. Having twin tails and twin rudders, and so forth, each operating independently, if one had been shot out, the other was still operational. It was still a controllable aircraft.

There's just so much about it that forever has been in my mind as being the most unique. Of course, now, today, you can't compare with the stealth aircraft and all. I went through, on either NJN or HYY, a whole series of programming of developing how the stealth has stepped up and what it does today and how it's designed today and the change in materials that have been used to construct it, so [that] it's almost radar proof. It can't be picked up by radar, and its speed capabilities, how fast they go today, that it was just unique by comparison.

I still think, in its day, it would be the equivalent of today's best stealth aircraft. The pilot had a great opportunity of bailing out of it--turn it upside down, fall downward, if you had that ability to control it. The problem was, if you bailed out while it was in steady flight, there was a chance that the vertical stabilizer could hit you as you bail out. That was the only failure of having the booms attached at the rear, but, like anything else, it had its disadvantages, but there were so few and it was so successful.

Of course, they eventually came into photo models of it. All the armament and construction in the nose was removed and all types of fancy photo equipment was involved. It came up with some beautiful photo recon work that aided in many of the battles. That's probably why, and it was unique. It was a specialist, especially in the Air Force. I guess I was looking for something different.

SI: In these other interviews, you talked about the last couple of days in Karachi and how you were sent home. Basically, you were sent home because you kept a level head during the V-J Day celebrations.

EW: Yes. Actually, after this particular thirty-six-hour session, I was on twenty-four, from six o'clock one morning, technically, to six o'clock the next morning and at the next morning, a replacement officer of the day is supposed to report in to you and relieve you. Of course, that was not coming. So, I stayed on until, eventually, the relief showed up.

Meantime, the Commanding Officer had a staff meeting; everything was critical because they had information that the war was over. Somewhere in that, there was a discussion about me. That was when he sent his chief clerk over to me, early in the afternoon, to wake me up and tell me he wanted to see me.

So, as I said before, I was worried, "Now, what did I do wrong?" So, I went to his office. I reported in, "Lieutenant Wolf, reporting as requested," and he said, "Relax, Lieutenant, sit down. You're not in trouble." He said, "At the staff meeting, I found out what transpired during your tour of duty. Accordingly, I have issued orders for you to return to the Continental limits of the United States as quickly as you can do that, in appreciation for what you did."

I cleared the base in another twenty-four hours. You had to go to all the departments on the base where you were connected, turn in your equipment, get a release that you returned [it] in, you're free to go. Then, when you had that release, you went to the transportation office to book [travel]. He had issued a "by air return;" most people went back by boat. The Transportation Officer issued me a ticket to return to the United States by air.

I then went to the operations office and find out what next passenger aircraft would be departing; found that out, presented my papers with my release from the base. Then, I boarded that plane. That was a C-54, which was comfortable. It wasn't a military C-54, so, you had a seat, and so forth. It made its normal stops back to the United States.

You have to begin, the first day was unofficial V-J Day. In the course of things, I arrived back in Miami airport on official V-J Day. So, that's approximately a week from when I started. Of course, there was a gigantic celebration going on there, because it was officially announced the war was over.

[Editor's Note: V-J Day was declared on August 14, 1945, in the United States and August 15, 1945, in the Pacific. Japan formally surrendered on September 2, 1945, in a ceremony held onboard the USS *Missouri* (BB-63) in Tokyo Bay.]

They had arranged a tremendous celebration for all the returning servicemen that were landing there. Of course, as you got off the aircraft, people greeted you. There was a celebration that evening. They wanted you to stay to be part of the celebration. So, my comment was, "Thank you, but no thank you. I have, but one interest, in getting back to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and my wife."

So, again, I went to the transportation office there and I requested air transportation from Miami to Philadelphia. I got laughed at and [they] said, "You're kidding. You don't think you're going to get air transportation?" So, I said, "I do expect it." He said, "Well, Lieutenant, forget it. I'll give you train tickets to Philadelphia. You go to the local train station," I forget what the name of the railroad was down there, "and you'll get your seat there."

So, I got transportation, with a trunk and a barracks bag, to the train station. I presented my ticket order to the ticket office and they said, "There's a train leaving now. You'd better go ahead

and get on that one," and didn't tell me anything more about seats. So, I thinking, "Oh, okay, yes." I'm figuring, here, I'm going to get on the train, there'd be a seat available. So, I put my footlocker and my barracks bag on the platform as you entered the train, the car.

I was looking for the conductor and I said, "I'm looking for a seat. Here's my ticket." He said, "Sir, I don't mean to laugh at you, but, if you expect a seat on this train, forget it." So, I said, "You mean there are no seats available and there's no," I forget what they called them, "nothing in the observation car?"

He said, "Every seat, there's a body in it." So, I said, "You mean I have to stand?" He says, "You got it." I said, "Well, can I come inside anywhere?" "No, there's no space inside for you." So, I stood from Miami to Washington, DC, until the train pulled in there, and then, quite a few people got off now. He said, "Lieutenant, help yourself to a seat." So, I sat from Washington to Philadelphia. [laughter]

SI: How long did it take to get from Miami to Washington?

EW: Oh, it was an overnight, more than twenty-four hours. At that point, who kept time? I was looking outside every time they stopped, "Where am I? Where am I? I'm getting closer to Philly," and, again, I probably have it recorded somewhere. I know that's another thing--I have my flight times for every place going over. It's another file.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

EW: Okay, as I said, once I got to Philly by train, I had expected somebody to meet me, because I had sent a telegram ahead that I would be arriving at six AM. At 30th Street Station, I came up from the platform and figured, where the vehicles pulled up, I would wait there or meet whoever was coming.

So, after about a half an hour, nobody showed and an empty taxi pulled up. Strange as it may be, there were taxis available then. I had retained the keys to where I left from. That, of course, before I was married, was my parents' residence. So, I got the taxi to take me out there. I went up to the door and I put my key in and opened the door.

I hear somebody upstairs sort of rushing down. My wife had come out there, knowing that I would be returning there when I got back to Philadelphia. My wife was there and she came running down the stairs, combing bobby pins out of her hair. She said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "Well, I'm supposed to be here." She says, "Well, no, you aren't, because the telegram said you'd be arriving at six PM." So, that's why nobody was there to meet me.

Of course, it was fortunate I arrived that way, because my father was recovering from a serious heart attack and he was in bed at that point. I went up and I took him in my arms. I said, "Dad, I'm home," and, excuse me, we kind of both broke down.

So, anyway, my wife had come from her parents'. She was staying at her parents' home while I was overseas. So, while I was there, my dad's car, of course, had been up on blocks, because he

wasn't capable of driving. So, I made arrangements for me to get the car operable. The garage where it was stored got it ready for me in a few hours and I used that as transportation.

So, we went back to where Ruth's parents were, but I had to stick around, because I was assigned to New Castle Air Base down in New Castle, Delaware. That was my assigned orders. So, I went down there and drove down there and reported in and immediately processed for separation from service. My commission was still valid.

So, I went into--at that time, you had the choice of staying in the Reserve, getting in the Reserve or separation. I decided, "Here I am, I'm a first lieutenant, I'm an apprentice typesetter--here's a good chance for some income." They gave me the whole story, "You go one weekend a month and two weeks during the summer for active duty. You'd be paid the full wage for that full [term]," whatever it was, for that period of time. I felt, "Well, let's go ahead. It supplements my income as an apprentice."

So, I got assigned to a Reserve organization at Olmsted Air Force Base and that was the 19th Air Material Area. It was a command. When I got there and reported in, they said, "Well, with your background, we need an inspector, an assistant inspector general in the supply division." So, I got assigned to that. I did my Reserve time up there with them.

We got into a very interesting project there as a Reserve officer. The various air services, the Marine Corps, the Navy, all wanted to delegate a system whereby each had the same aircraft, but it was under a different designation in each of the services. The parts, accordingly, were given different part numbers. So, they wanted to consolidate [them] in one, make one master list of the aircraft, common description of the aircraft.

Each service would remain having its designation, but the part numbers would be common. If you needed a brake shoe, regardless of whether it was Navy, Air Corps or Marine Corps or whatever it was, they were all the same number, so that, in your purchasing, you could stockpile one common thing. The manufacturer would supply one common thing and the cost of procurement would be less.

So, I got involved in that during the Reserves. Of course, the particular situation there was, the Air Inspector General for the command was elected president of the officers' club. At this point, he had me transferred over to be club officer, which had a different military specification.

I'm saying to myself, after I was there, "I don't want this. Here, you recalled me in a critical specialty, MOS, and I'm nursemaid to a bunch of officers in the officers' club. I had the responsibility for the transient officers' quarters. See, this is what I'm assigned for."

Anyway, shortly after I'm in that for a while, the announcement came that the United States Air Force Inspector General would be visiting that base. I immediately signed up and filed a complaint. During the due course, they called me in. They interviewed me and they agreed that this was a misrepresentation of responsibility, and so forth. They immediately had me separated from service.

So, in a matter of days, I'm on my way home. It was so fast. I cleared the base there again and I take my car, I drive home. They didn't even know I'm coming. I arrived at--where was I living then? When I got recalled to service, we rented our house. The individual who rented it had just released it. They bought their own house. So, we moved back into our original house up there.

As I say, I declined a commission because, at that point, when I got out, the commission went from a five-year appointment to indefinite. I said, "I do not want indefinite appointment." Your paperwork said that, "I refuse that," and I didn't like the word "refuse." I crossed it off. I printed on there, "I decline an appointment in the Reserve," and I initialed it "EW" where I crossed off the refuse. That was the end, in 1955, of my total service and I don't regret it.

Today, everybody said (at that point, I had thirteen years' service), "You're crazy. You ought to stay in, get the benefits, because, when you reach age sixty, you'll get the full benefits of retirement." So, anyway, I don't regret it and I didn't lose anything, and here I am, today, shouting about it. [laughter]

I went back to being an apprentice typographer for a short while. At that point, the typographical union went on strike. I went to work, through family connection, with Everybody's Supply Company, which was a wholesale distributor. I worked my way up there very rapidly to become sales promotion manager.

When I found out that they were not likely to stay in business, I sought another offer, accepted it. I was with that company, retired with that company, very successfully, and got into politics. That's my life up to today.

SI: I just have one more question. Did you ever use the GI Bill?

EW: Yes, yes. I guess I was still as an apprentice. I went to this Charles Morris Price School of Advertising and Journalism. I completed courses there in marketing and merchandising, and so forth, and completed those courses, which were just another addition to my education. They enhanced my future, because they helped me when I finally left Everybody's Supply Company and went into Aisenstein & Gordon, where I became, actually, a sales manager for that company.

So, yes, that was the only time that I took advantage of it. I did take--I don't know whether it was with the [GI Bill]; no, I think it was before--anyway, I did go to Penn State Campus and took a course in--it wasn't computers then. It was before computers.

SI: Your bio says data processing.

EW: Data processing, right, punch cards, yes. Then, I went to work for this firm that produced--first time it was ever produced--continuous punch cards. Up until that time, because it was a bastard measurement from the top of the card to the bottom of the card, they couldn't do it that way.

So, this company, Forms Incorporated, devised a system where they put a perforated stub on there, which adjusted for the depth of the card and the base of one card to the other. Then, they

produced a continuous card. That was an interesting thing, although I was not directly involved in it. Although I had knowledge of how it worked, I didn't sell any of them. I sold business forms and things like that for Forms Incorporated for a while. That was another short-lived period in my life, okay.

SI: Is there anything else you'd like to add for the record?

EW: I don't think so. This has been interesting for me.

SI: It was very interesting for me and very pleasant. I appreciate both your time and your service.

EW: It's good. I appreciated having lunch. It was good company.

SI: I appreciated lunch, too. It was very tasty, very nice. This concludes the interview with Edgar Wolf, Jr. Thank you very much.

EW: It's been a pleasure indeed and I look forward to the future value for someone.

SI: It's definitely valuable, believe me.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Keith Dobrow 3/1/2025

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 3/28/2025

Reviewed by Irene Golembiewski 5/15/2025