

**Interview of S. Bryan Jennings
by Claude Bass and Dr, Cynthia Stone**

Family came here in 1905. Before that they were in Tallahassee & Brooksville. Dad was born in Brooksville.

I don't really know. They lived over on the corner of 7th and Main Street in Jacksonville when it was the rural part of Jacksonville.

Of course you know they kept widening Main Street and it widened right up to their front door.

Anyhow they bought this property out here in Middleburg in 1912 to 1914. At the time about 80,000 some odd acres, they didn't live on it but my great uncle (that was grandfather's brother) came down from Illinois and I think lived out there for a while. My grandfather was the governor (Florida).

When my twin sister and I graduated from high school the folks moved out to the farm. I liked it. They didn't.

It was a hard way to get there then. You had to go through Doctor's Inlet on little narrow roads.

[We] graduated Lee High School. Landon was just starting. Then of course, college was starting.

At the farm there were plenty of chores. I thought my name was "get wood," fireplaces and things. We had some chickens and a few cows and a little back yard garden. Mostly fenced in timber. Then my brother in law and myself (he was in the Navy and I was in the Army Air Corp.) went to war. After that we came back and folks said, "We've got all this property diminished down some." Camp Blanding was on part of it.

I joined the Army Air Corp my third year in college. I took this CPT course which was Civilian Pilot Training and the fine print said that in the event of an emergency you joined some branch of the service. I went to Stetson, which is a small school, and the recruiters had been there and they'd picked up people from Navy, Marines. This was after Pearl Harbor, 1942, in Lakeland, Florida. When I got the news about Pearl Harbor on radio driving from Lakeland.

Little fraternity had a joint _____ with the Lakeland group. We were driving back and someone said "Did you hear about Pearl Harbor?" I said, "Hear about it? I don't even know where it is."

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In May 1942 the Army Air Corp recruiter came by and he was a real slick fella. Didn't say a thing about recruiting the first week. Took us out to one of our favorite lakes where we go swimming. We'd see him in our favorite little night spot.

We didn't have any money in those days and he'd buy a round of beer and that was a great deal then. Finally, on Friday in our chapel period they announced, Smith, Brown, Roseburg, Jennings report to the commons building so there were 10 or 12 of us went over and there were the recruiting vans. "Hello boys, how are you?"

We went in and they showed us a movie of air planes flying around. "Someday you're going to be the wing commander you're going to be the squadron leader." Gave us a little test, everybody passed. Multiple choice stuff like, if you cross a weak bridge do you go fast or slow? (Slow is the answer) Let it creak a little bit but don't cave it in.

Then we came home for the summer and in September had a little postal card from the service that said, "Is this your correct address?" And my father said "uh oh." 22nd September, I was on the Pullman train the only Pullman ticket I ever got out of the service. I never had been on a train before.

Went to Nashville, Tennessee. I saw 2 or 3 of my old buddies from school. Thought we all joined together but they went one way and I the other. Two weeks later I went to Maxwell Field, Alabama for pre-flight. And that was all aircraft identification, code, how [to] sight rifle, athletics and things.

Then went to Lakeland, Florida. Primary Civilian school down there it was great - month and a half maybe.

Sumpter, S.C. next. Snow on the ground, I didn't like that. All military, "Get that hat on straight." "Yes sir."

Then finished there, went to Albany, Georgia to advanced twin engine training. Nice there, sunny, people treated us much nicer.

After that to Sebring, Florida and B17 training. Then to ? Piques, Texas. They were just building the base then.

Strange thing happened between then and Piques, Texas. When we got our wings (Albany) there were 3 classes and each went different places. Those that went to Sebring didn't get leave and everybody else got a couple of weeks leave.

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When we went to Sebring they divided the class again and the other two groups got leave and we didn't. Going out to Texas.

So we stayed there on the base all afternoon and base commander said, "I'm trying to get leave for you guys." About midnight got on train and arrived in Jacksonville. _____ Jacksonville MP's saying everyone turn around and go back. And we'd already heard if you go back, they are going to send you right over as co-pilots and there were three of us, two from Chattanooga, Tennessee and one boy a little bit older he just slipped in a little under 26 years, an insurance salesman.

So we got our bags hopped a cab went to the bus station. We already had our orders (for leave) we went to New Orleans and stayed a couple of days. Then we got the train and went out to Piques, Texas.

They let us off at a flat platform by the railroad track and we couldn't see a thing. Way off there's a little shinny something and that was the little town of Monahans. A truck came out and picked us up and we went out to the base and there was a warrant officer there. [We] showed him our orders, OK but there's no one here that can train you. Our instructors were pilots from the 19th bomb group. That doesn't mean anything to anybody today. They were ones that had been in the Philippines when _____.

They were home on leave so after a few three-day passes they said go and we'll call you. We went to Odessa Texas, 53 miles east just a little bitty town then. It was nice. We played around the swimming pool and met a lot of local people.

Finally our instructors arrived and we started flying again. Picked up a couple of our crew people and went to Alexandria, Louisiana. Picked up a few more of the crew – just a month maybe.

Then we went up to Gander, New Foundland. All snowed in and we waited for other airplanes to come. There were bout 70 to 80 is guess. One night we all took off for England. And, it was almost a disaster really. I think they lost about 20 planes in that crossing. There were two weather fronts instead of one. Got over the first one and everybody let down and went right into the next one. But we stayed up all night till we just about ran out of oxygen and came down at daylight and we landed. Then landed Prestwick, Scotland and ferry crews took half crew at time to couple weeks.

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Claude – Hearing radio – planes ahead were saying “we’re going out, throwing out our baggage. Wasn’t any rescue.”

We landed at Prestwick got off airplane and a Navy airplane landed and skidded off the runway. A B-17 came in and they gave him a go around and he made a turn all of a sudden kablam a big bright spot. Here was a big island rocks out in the bay and he hit the rock. That ended that crew.

Then we went through a couple weeks training, not training, was customs and courtesies of the English. How to understand language and what to do and not to do. Navigational and emergency procedures then we went to our base. The other half of my crew hadn’t come yet. So after a few days of fooling around, I went as co-pilot on my first mission which was good ‘cause I knew how to get around a little bit then. We flew out of “Jinbolton” north of London.

There were millions of airfields. You could take off of one and they’d be taking off of another. Wonder we didn’t lose more just taking off. That first mission kind of a bad go. We got banged up a little bit and came back. I thought it was customary – we had all our brake fluid gone and ran off the runway.

Then the strange thing, when we got off in the grass here came some fellow on this bicycle just peddling out there like 60. Jumped in the airplane and looked around and you’d never guess who it was. Preacher from Jacksonville that baptized once when I was 5 years old.

Then we started flying pretty regular. In fact one of the buddies I went to New Orleans with, he came flying in one day said, “Look, Look I’m a 1st lieutenant.” And asked, “Are you still a 2nd lieutenant?” I said, “yeah.” He said, “Well, they promote us after we get five missions and I’ve been to the rest home,” and all this, “So how many missions do you have?” I said, “I’ve got 23.”

Cynthia – “You hadn’t been promoted?”

No I guess everybody was too busy flying. Anyhow left as a Captain – a going away present I think it was.

I think flack was worse (German fighters vs flack). All though the fighters got a few naturally, but you could see them but you had a jump formation they called it. You fly in formation, you see two or three commin’ around when they got real close you just

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pulled back, went up 20 or 30 feet and once you get on your pursuit curve the fighters got to adjust and they don't usually adjust that quickly.

Flew B17. The flack, when you got into that mostly you were on the bomb run. Going straight and level, grinding away on the same heading. To me going to Berlin wasn't one of the bad ones. The bad ones were Frankfurt, Swanfort, and some of the airfields.

That Ruhr Valley was terrible. That was their big manufacturing area and they had all kinds of steel processing.

I guess Berlin was so large and scattered, they never thought we were coming. You'll get flack here and flack there.

They had continually pointed flack as they called it. They'd just track you. Then they had boxed barrages they'd just send up a whole sky full of blam.

But my second mission was almost as bad as the first. Behind the pilot seat, they had three big tanks of oxygen. We were grinding away, we weren't even to the target yet and all of a sudden fighters showed and something went blam in the cockpit. It filled up with smoke then disappeared quickly. Looked around and oxygen gauge goin down and of course you can't stay up there too long. They had these little walk around bottles they said good for 15 minutes. They'd last four or five at least. I said, "OK guys we got to leave formation." That was kind of a deadly maneuver.

We left turned around and came back. Only thing we could do. We got in some clouds and stayed in them till we left the Dutch coast. I never had to ditch and didn't lose a single crew member. (Became proficient flying on three engines)

We used to get banged up. That was kind 'a customary. Here shattering on your airplane you'd look around. Everybody looked at the engines to see if oil was coming out. We would spend six to eight hours in the air on a mission. Each group put up 20 airplanes.

When I first got there, we couldn't put up a full group. They had composite groups – we'd put in one or two squadrons – whatever we could. You'd get up when it was still dark, get breakfast, go to briefing, get out to airplane, take off as soon as light enough to see good.

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Sometimes wouldn't get home till dark. But of course winters over there get dark early. "Controversial daylight bombing."

But sometimes in afternoon if it was bright and sunny they'd say, "Come on, come on" and have a quick briefing. They called them bombing ski runs – can you imagine? That's where those B2 bombs would launch. They were right across the coast. Some of those got kind of touchy. They'd fly along – can't see in the clouds and you'd turn around get shot at again. Clouds still covered. They'd tell us turn around again. Got to thinking, "Do something."

I got over there just before Christmas of '43 started flying missions early '44 and I was home by May of '44.

When got there only supposed fly 25 missions. Took it to 30. How quick you came back depended on how many losses you had in the group. We had a few and there was one time I went 14 to 15 in a row. (Get tired)

Some runs were longer than others. We went to Poland – that was back when they had Poland. We came out over Denmark and down low over water - that was a long trip. That was first thing when we woke up in morning. "How much gas we have?" If you got a full load – oh my goodness you knew you were going a long way.

Targets?

Aimed at some airports and some manufacturing centers ball bearing plants were a big target. Without ball bearings things wouldn't roll. We found out that they had a lot of home industries. A lot of the manufacturing they put into peoples homes. Garages. Someone turn out a hand full of ball bearings and someone else turn out _____.

A target that was easy for me might have been harder for somebody else, even though it was the airplane right beside you. Tail End Charlie – nobody liked it (plane) but me. No one was on your wing, you could move. Fighters came from one side. There was always a hole you could duck somewhere.

?What to keep alert on long flights?

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The fighters usually went after that man in the back. But it wasn't that bad. I liked it. You never did fly low and trail. Get right behind one they start (man in front) all the empties and the disintegrating clips would come out. You didn't want them knocking holes in your oil coolers and things. Always fly a little bit sideways.

But the first squadron only had six airplanes and the high and low or low and high whichever they had 7 and it was supposed to be like a diamond shape (formation).

Then had three of those groups to the wing and wing had three of those in a box- you call it. Sometimes you could look as far as you could see and there would be airplanes. Look behind you and there'd be airplanes.

(So these were the big bombing runs.)

But they all didn't go to the same place. You might start off together for protection. Somebody turn off and go to one target. Somebody turn off, got to another. But then when you'd all start back you don't seem to get together.

The first fighter escorts we had were the spit fires that had a very limited range. Then when we started getting the P-51s and the P47s things improved. But then they used to go out and circle the little group then they'd run out of gas and go back and somebody else (other fighters) would come out.

Finally stopped that and had this area coverage, which was much better. And radar was coming in also. They'd just fly back if anybody got in trouble. They could get there in a hurry. Could cover the whole segment rather than just limiting _____.

Lot of times you didn't see the escorting fighters. Radar would say group enemy fighters taking off from ground and your fighters would be going down after them before you even saw them.

A lot of people had all their missions painted on their jacket. I didn't want 'em painted on mine, in case I was caught. We didn't paint all those swastikas on our airplane either. Painted a bomb on plane for each mission.

One strange thing happened. We started off when we were little kids and lived over on Montgomery Place in Jacksonville. Our kind 'a back door neighbor was Warren Spratt. His family lived there and we all grew up together, elementary school and high school. And on my last mission, before we went in the briefing, the next highest crew member had eight missions and I was finishing at 30.

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Our commander, big nice gentleman, leaning on a stick, I thought he was going to break it, was just a pointer he would point at the map. He said, “Anybody have anything to say, Jennings you have any suggestions?” The lights went up and someone was tapping me on the back and I looked around and it was Warren Spratt standing right there behind me.

“My gosh, what are you doin’ here?” He said it was going to be his third mission. It was gonna be my last one.

There was another boy from West Jacksonville, but he was killed after the thing was over. He stayed over to be a gunnery instructor and was flying one day and ran through a haystack and crashed.

I got two weekends leave time in England. I was there from January to May. We walked around and looked at the sights. It was amazing. There was a lot of destruction in London. That’s about all there was to do I guess. Food was kind of questionable. They didn’t have big restaurants like we do where you have all kinds of choices. I think it was English peas and potatoes and I think it was pigeons. They had a lot of pigeons. You got the standard fare.

I don’t know if I was impressed with England or not. I thought they were being a little more progressive than they were. Well, for example, their outhouses. You had to pull a chain and if you didn’t get the pull and let go right you’d have to try again. They didn’t have much water. All the showers had a spring on them – they’d run get you wet then cut off. You’d soap up go again and rinse off.

Scariest mission?

Well, I was scared on the first mission and I don’t think I got un-scared till the last one was over. Actually, it wasn’t so much fright I don’t think. I often wondered about that. They’d say you were going and you’d go and have breakfast, go to briefing, pull up the map with the red string going in and the green string coming out.

You’d think “Ooh my gosh,” go out get in the airplane everyone busy putting the guns in and loading up. Time to go – you go. Did you have things to do that three to four hours flying to the target? Things to do? You had to fly the airplane. My co-pilot and I he was a little older fella. We’d swap off. I’d fly an hour and he’d fly an hour. We looked

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outside, watched the instruments. Everybody was always lookin. And look at the clock, “so many more minutes to go or we’ve got another hour and a half.”

Our instructions if got shot down were to try to get back. You had a little survival thing – a fishing pack, packet of money, English pound, French money. Had a saw that looked like a wire. Good little saw. Put that around the top of your boot, you know. Then you had a little compass that you stick in your belt buckle. But it’s amazing, a lot of people bailed out and got out and of course a lot of them didn’t.

It always made the hair on the back of your neck stand up sometimes when you’re flying along and you look over and shells going up and there’s a big ball of flame and smoke, engine flying off there by itself. Tail section going one way. But you know what always came out, the life raft. But well you know it was hooked up so if you pulled it, it would poof. You could see a life raft in the sky.

And the tail section seemed to hold together. Course, I guess all the explosion was up in the front. You would see sometimes a wing dome off. Everybody would look to see if parachutes opened. But you know, you’ve got to still keep flying.

When I first got to Las Vegas their little barracks was kind ’a long – just Quonsets with four beds on each side then a little stove about this big around.

And that was the four officers of the crew and when we first got there they said, “Just put your stuff on this bed” and there were clothes hanging and shoes. We said, “Somebody’s here already,” and they said, “Don’t worry about it.” And they didn’t come back.

I started taking care of the basics report into supply and here and there meet the boss. And I came back and everything’s gone. I said, “Where’s all that stuff?” and they said, “Go look in the big box.” They had a great big box there were all the papers, the orders, pictures.

Well, I had saved up some money all along in the service ’cause I didn’t spend much. They said we wondered where he got all that money ’cause he said he lost it all in a poker game last night. I said, “That’s my money.” So I got it back.

But we had quite a rotation in that little barracks. We lost quite a few. But my group stayed together.

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One group from Georgia had a footlocker they were very secretive about. Until we went down and knocked the lock off – bottom had bourbon whiskey, scotch and Jim B. I don't like either one, or didn't. But that Bourbon looked good. Stuck it in under our beds and tried to hide it. With the other stuff we had, a whole bunch of silk stockings and chocolate bars for trading.

But the adjadent came in with his people when we were doing our noble deed and he closed the locker and sat there on the bed. He asked, "Who's been tearing this open?" We just said, "I don't know." So they just got a few bottles and took all the clothes, naturally and then left.

So we went out to a little club that night and had this bottle of bourbon. And the group commander came over and spoke. He had a drink with me. Didn't get into trouble and everybody knew where I'd gotten it.

But these little Eisenhower jackets were popular. Little short jacket. And a crew would go down and you'd be surprised at the people who would walk in and say, "Did old so and so leave you a ticket for his battle jacket. He told me if anything happened that I could have his ticket." Then a few minutes someone else would come in saying the same thing. Everybody's lookin' for tickets.

[Every Single Day – 13 to 17 missions in a row?]

That I did that wasn't really typical. But there were a lot of losses. We just picked up the slack. More you lost, more you flew.

There were a lot of people that just seemed to keep going. I got a little bit skinny. You would have breakfast, but ... you wouldn't have lunch because you wouldn't be back. Get back tired go to eat supper and go to bed. Then they'd wake you up next morning. All the missions weren't long but you have to get up and go through the routine. Squadron was 376.

Came back went through instrument flight school. Should have done that before we left. Then went to instructor school and ended up at Avon Park as a standardization pilot. Then over to Tampa to the 3rd battle? Contrell Headquarters one day there were four of us from our base and this civilian pilot came out and spoke to us, Captain Lambsy. Wanted to know how we would like to get out of the service. I thought it was a pretty good idea. He was with Eastern Airlines.

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So he got us out and we went through with Eastern Airlines for a while. Flew to New York then they got a Jacksonville to Detroit trip. I jumped at that.

The folks were starting to build the sawmill and I thought, shucks I like this better than flying. So got out of the service and played cowboy for a while.

Then in 1951-52, I had another call. "We need you again." So I went down to Miami to a troop carrier unit. Lot of us airline pilots had their military leave – we could take a two year extension or something. We jumped at it. They/we were naturally more experienced then with a lot of flying time.

A recruiter came by looking for some people to go to helicopter school and I went to helicopter school. Then after that, I went to Korea. I was north of Seoul, Third Air Rescue. We had two to three different missions where rescue was the mission but we also supported the peace talks with a couple of helicopters. That was good.

See that's the 38th parallel and see this little island of [Chocto Chodo/Choto] On top of that little island was a radar site. They had helicopters there and the Marines had a little hand full of people down at the end of this little island. It wasn't very big but we'd do the pilot pick ups from here. We picked up pilots all along here. I picked up one up in here, one right across on the beach. Picked up one in this little river there, that was the worst. (You in North Korean territory)

Then we did the front line evacs all along here. Just north up here was the 8055. Then had the 8063 MASH hospital. There's where we got our front line pickups.

Then the peace talks were just over this way in here. 97 front line evacs and three pilot pickups out of the water. Strictly rescue – non combatants supposedly. We always carried a rifle. On that last ...got shot at but didn't get hit.

Two Helicopters

Well the pilot went down the helicopter went after him. Had no trouble. And I started off, had my medic with me, in fact, right there in that picture, that's him. And I couldn't pick 'em all up with him in there so I landed on this little roadway and he got out. I said, "Find your way back." And I started off and the helicopter went up and over and two crashed.

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The right wheel was slickin' just over the road and caught on what they call a trip wire. About this high off the ground strung all over and some of 'em were attached to land mines and some were not.

Anyhow, I crashed. I stood up finally lookin out the side of the helicopter. Some one hollering, "Don't move, don't move." And here came the mine sweeper with a roll of tape on his back walkin along and he said, "Walk on that tape out of here."

And it was just about supper time. So I went and crawled in their little cave back in the hill and got on the telephone. Told them I crashed the helicopter and they came and got me and the rest. It was an H-5 helicopter. The H-19 they were delivering rice.

I was taking rice to just outside of Seoul and came in to land it on the back end of the beach sloughed off. I should have just shut down and stopped. I didn't realize it was only about that deep. But the water was racing by there and I started to pick up again and the trail rotor hit the water. 'Bout the time I got up then we started going around. There was a little shack over there that most of 'em had built out of straw and things. It wasn't long before I had straw and sticks flying all over the place.

Then I went over to Northern Japan, Masawa?? and stayed there a couple of years. I still flew helicopters and got into transports. And we had a helicopter up here in Okido.??

Cynthia – Does the show MASH accurately reflect the war?

It was close I guess. But most of our work was done in the morning, just as soon as it got light enough to see. We didn't have instruments that you could fly on really. So when it'd get daylight you'd start out. Then, it go to where they'd give you coordinates and you knew exactly where it was. You'd just look at your map and say "Oh yeah, I know where that is." Fly down those little valleys and there was that little cross on the ground. We went down landed, haul the people out, put 'em in the pods and take off again for the MASH unit.

There wasn't anything to do in the afternoon sometimes they'd invite you over to watch operations.

???the ditch. They all had emergency suits and things.

[Why want to ditch there?]

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It's safer than ditching on land. They can't shoot at you from the water. Winter time it's kind'a hard to _____ with big ice chunks floating in the water.

But in the summer time it's amazing. We had these SA-16 flying boats from the Graumans and they were on patrol up there too. They would get the same message we would. We'd head out and they'd come over that way. If they got there first, they'd go down and land. But it was hard to tell 'em get over the water, get out over the water.

[Medals]

Got the Soldiers Medal for back at Japan. Airplane crashed right after take off and caught on fire. I went out and tried to get the pilot out. You know that poor boy was burned to a crisp. Legs burned, hands burned off and he was still alive, talking. Finally got him out. So airplanes are dangerous just like cars.

Come back from Korea went to Marksville Air Force Base 10 years. That's what the boss said when I got there. "Might as well unpack and make yourself comfortable."

First five years I was with the base complement, so to speak, then base operations. Then the last five years I was on SAC Evaluation Team - Strategic Air Command.

Then I had the – they called us the junk aircraft pilots. SAC was all bombers and tankers and missiles and us C47s, C54s, and all that stuff. We traveled to every SAC base with our flight evaluations. We had trips up to New Foundland. They had a base. England used to have two bases. Spain had three and North Africa had three. I didn't make all of them every year, but through five years you see 'em all.

But they got rid of the North Africa bases. Spain still had three and England was down to one.

After that I went up to SAC Headquarters for about a year and I lost a wife up there so transferred down to Orlando to McCoy and finished the service down there in 1958.

I enjoyed it. Some people don't like the service I guess but I think if you get with the spirit and enjoy it....

It's too bad that you don't have more time when you go someplace in the support aircraft. You always had trips somewhere to depot bases to pick up supplies or to take people to things. You sort 'a ended on the base and went in had a milk shake and a

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hamburger, and loaded the airplane and crank up and come back home. Just too bad that you don't have time to go out and see something.

I went to Key West one time and got there after dark and thought I don't want to come back here. Those mosquitoes will carry you off. Got off, went in to get a bit to eat and came back and settin in the airplane sittin up there trying to get it started swatting mosquitoes. Till you got the engine cranked up a little circulation, the mosquitoes were bad.

One time we were goin up to a small town in Montana had this co-pilot and he had had too big a party. He came out to the airplane and said, "Oh I can't make it today." Put the mechanic, they call him the crew chief fella that puts the gas in, he sat in the co-pilot seat. Went on ahead.

[Fly support for any major actions, like D-Day]

Oh yes. When they had the Cuban scare back in '62, they scattered planes, two tankers here plus one here in all these little places you never heard of before. And I'd take the paymaster around. They had us scheduled just down to the minute. Eight hours rest then you got ten flying then you _____.

We went to Niagara Falls. I didn't even know they had an airport. Then Bunker Hill, Indiana. I had never heard of that before. Fly the paymaster around just rain or shine get him around.

For Eastern flew DC3 and C47 from New York to Miami stopped according to where the passengers were. An all night trip. Take off at 9 o'clock from Miami always land Jacksonville, Charleston. I think Washington. But there was a customer in Palm Beach you'd land if someone wanted to get off, they got off. You'd be surprised how many people you'd pick up in Palm Beach and when they got off they'd be telling people they flew from New York.

Retired I started raising cows until I decided there was a break point. You had to have more than I had to get help so said I had too many to do it all myself so I started cutting down.

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We had the sawmill going. Around my retirement Dad died three years before and my brother in law and I were of course hit with taxes. My grandmother had passed away two years before that. Taxes on her estate were still due and you talk about people breathin' down your neck. IRS kept sending notices.

So we started selling lots. Duck Pond and Big Branch. That was some of our stuff out there. Developing then, you didn't have to do much. Didn't have to pave anything. It was all well & septic tanks.

So you just lay out a place and go out and get a bulldozer and a grader, scratch a road in and sell lots.

When I was a young man, Middleburg was quiet. One store in downtown Middleburg. Store at Palmetto and Main Street.

Two-story house used to be the [Buddington???] [Archie Budd] House. Budd Body Works. People that were in Philadelphia and Detroit. He married my cousin and he stammered and stuttered quite a bit. So his folks bought 20,000 acres down there and he was managing the timber.

Never knew my grandfather Governor. Knew Grandfather Brown. May Mann Jennings lived corner 7th and Main turned into kind 'a bad section – across the street was the Silver Dollar Saloon.

12 o'clock midnight she'd be leaning on her cane on the phone to the police telling them the lights were still on at that place and people still going in. She was quite a gardener and the old Imeson Airport had a circular driveway with rose bushes planted in the middle and they started disappearing. So she got these little signs made saying "A thief stole this one."

Edna McDonald lives next to you, Cynthia, and Mabel Leslie lives down on the creek. (Calvin Gnann Cousin)

One of my friends up in Jacksonville, he had been up in the mountains and he said "We would not have had any television unless we had cable." And another friend and Old Sandy Morris developer out here and Bob Wilson, Gordon Sandridge.

Bob Wilson & Bryon on Middleburg base ball team back in 1950s set a record that year (we played Starke, Palatka, and Drs. Inlet) that has never been beat. Played all summer and never won a game!

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by Claude Bass and Dr, Cynthia Stone**

After WWII I bought that old Middleburg Air Field where the new Walmart's going. (That's where baseball diamond was - county graded it off)

Had a few Chinese out there back of Hatcherville. I had an agent out in San Francisco I think and he was selling our property here and one of the Chinese bought it. I guess the palmettos whipped them. They couldn't beat them out fast enough to plant.

There was a man named Tarrata ??? that had 10 acres out there between Marvin Wilhite's development and ours. Five, six some years ago he came down and was looking to find his property. I think he thought it was swaying palm trees and sea gulls, waves on the shore. But it wasn't and I don't know what ever happened with that.

Blanding was cut and shaped up somewhat in 1943. WPA. We had the Black Creek Bridge. In fact, the first Black Creek Bridge my father designed when he was in college. In 1938 that was taken down and a new bridge was put up.

When Camp Blanding started that road was paved that quick. Paved in place it was. Scrapped up a space in the middle and this big machine straddled it, mixed the asphalt and dirt all together. Came out in the same pile except it was black instead of white. Then the graders graded it out and they rolled it flat and that was the road. No guard rails or paint stripes or anything on it. Used to be more accidents, people running off.

Another Huntley store on Blanding and Frisbee had a store on Blanding too but credit got him. Everybody wanted to "pay ya Saturday" you know.

One Thanksgiving Grandmother Jennings and one of the elderly aunts came out to the farm and we wee sitting around and they had on these big hats with flowers. We had a pet goat. Well, when you opened the door the goat would come in the house and you go to get in the car and open the door and goat was in the car.

Anyhow goat came in the house and saw those flowers on the aunt's hat. He ran up and put his paws on shoulders and started grazing on her hat flowers. She was saying, "Oh my Lord."

Mr. Lee had store at Drs. Inlet before Prices store. If he could get enough people he'd bring a movie out to Middleburg. Had a couple projectors and he'd start the first reel in Drs. Inlet.

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Then when he put the second reel on in Drs. Inlet he'd bring the first reel to Middleburg and get that goin. Then go back to Middleburg to get the second/ Showed in community house in Middleburg. The WPA house built in 1935.

Distinguished Flying Cross

Soldiers Medal

Air Medal with 5 clusters

Commendation Medal with 1 cluster

Triangle K Squadron

The Mighty 8th

These B24s were a little faster than we were but we couldn't fly as high. They were our best fighter escort. The fighters would go after them leave us alone.

The British mosquito bomber – was in those days really fast. Made of plywood. They had Rolls Royce engines. Didn't carry much of a bomb load because so small but good reconnaissance airplanes. We could hear them early.

Plane (B17) named Mary Jo his crew chief's wife's name. When we came down after our last mission he just cried and said "You're the first crew I've had that made it."

What want people today understand about WWII.

I think the biggest thing we should understand is that one person like Hitler can intimidate so many people and grab so much power because people are so complacent.

You know even today we're talking about Iraq. This keeps spreading and spreading and once it gets started. Somewhere you've got to jump in and stop it.

Britain was on the verge of collapse no support their pilots were gone, their fighters were gone. If we hadn't gone in there when we did they would have been part of Germany.

We better watch this country. We have some reckless people running for president.

Don't understand that this country has already been hit pretty hard. Lot of people wandering around this country, you don't know what they are up to. It's a shame.

I want people to know, you got to pay the price if you want the freedom.

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Where people talk about gun control and taking guns away, that's the first step to losing our power. That's what happened in other countries. People don't have a way to protect themselves. Gun crazies want to take it all away.

S. Bryan Jennings
Second Interview

By
Claude Bass & Dr. Cynthia Stone

Claude Bass – Question about the four to six Chinese families. North of west end of Old Jennings Road. (Where Linda Odum is developing her property now, north of that 2 miles. Didn't stay long. It appears they tried to clear and plant it, they couldn't fight the jungle growth up there.

Whales

I know just where the whales were. Walter Odum took 'em there. Had just stated on the grease plant at Doctors Inlet and these whales came ashore down near St. Augustine. He thought the whale fat would be a good source for rendering. He went down and had 'em loaded on a flat bed and they took 'em to the grease plant. Cut off a big chunk of the blubber and ran it through the machine. It clogged up the grinders. Wouldn't spin off the fat. Couldn't use 'em so they hauled 'em back down Long Bay Road. Use to be where the county relayed garbage before taking it to the dump. Use to call it the Middleburg Pick N Save.

They were all on a hill back there till it got so bad they said even the buzzards wouldn't fly over. It's all developed now, four to five hundred acres just slick as a whistle. The little roadway, curbs and sidewalks coming out of that up to Blanding, right next to where the old saw mill (San Lebrejdo) use to be. Land where whales were is still undeveloped, but it's all cleaned off.

That use to be big source of Clay and Sand for the county. In fact, Charlie Barco used that twice when he widened Blanding, used that fill dirt.

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Rendering plant was next to RR track in Drs. Inlet, just off 220. Stayed on till '68 when I retired.

Grandmother father = Senator

Bryan interviewing reporter

Behind pilot seat = three big oxygen tanks furnished O₂ for the entire airplane. We were flying along one day, suddenly there was an explosion and smoke filled the cockpit.

I jerked open the side window and smoke cleared. I didn't know what caused it till crew members started calling in saying, "I'm out of O₂." I realized I was too. We had these little walk around bottles, they said would last you 15 minutes. It was two or three.

Leaving the formation was almost signing your death warrant. Be by yourself. But I left the formation, had to come down. I couldn't stay up there, we were somewhere around 25,000 feet. And so we came down and fortunately we got into some clouds and I stayed in the clouds till we got to the coast, crossed the channel and came home.

We unloaded the bombs somewhere. We made it safely. I was very fortunate. Usually Germans would pick off the stragglers and strays.

I had 30 missions. It was 25 when I started. They upped it to 30 but I got home before the invasion started.

I'll tell you what was a good saver was those P51S that came over. Had longer range and they could fly in and out with us. Had British Spitfires, but they couldn't get too much penetration. They'd run out of gas. That was a big blessing to see those P51S first of '44.

New Foundland wait two week weather. Must 'a been 60 airplanes. Started night – before got to England lost 20 planes in two fronts. Could hear them calling in, "I'm iced up. I'm iced up."

Landed in Prestwick and it was foggy and terrible. I thought "good gosh, what have I got myself into." Strange weather. There were two fronts and we went up to 20,000 feet and stayed till O₂ ran out and near daylight, so we went over all of it.

We had ferry crews that took up over five of my crew were with me then five in another plane. And I didn't see my other people until about three weeks after we got

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there. It was amazing we couldn't find them. They landed at some other English Base and seemed to enjoy the stay.

Flight Squadron was seven airplanes. Helmet Leader one of three in front then three behind him, then diamond man in the back. Except for the lead squadron, they only had six because didn't have the diamond man. Because of the way it was either stacked in or stacked out, he would have gotten in the way. (Three squadrons = group)

But if you didn't have enough to fill up your three squadrons you could usually borrow one from someone else if they had enough. Or, if someone else didn't have enough and you had a few extras, you could send yours over. Its according to whether you were stacked up or down how the mission was planned. (Altitude??)

Sometimes you'd be all stacked down from the lead group or stacked up. Seemed to work out good – gave more coverage to be on the slope, either up or down.

Three groups make the box. Either one base or the other would be the leader and you'd tag on them. They'd lead the mission, but that didn't mean you'd all bomb the same target. You just went in together. Could divide up for different designated targets. Had target before got off the ground.

All seemed to work pretty good though. You just dropped your bombs and made your turns and get back together and come home as a box, all together till you crossed the coast and got back to England. And then they'd kind of veer off and go their way to their base and you'd go yours, then you'd land.

Were the Brits set up the same way?

I don't know. We didn't have any association with the British. They were the night bombers and they got hit pretty hard too. The Germans had a good spotlight system. They thought we were brave for going in the daytime and we thought they were brave for going in the night.

We'd take off in the morning and it would be pretty foggy. But seems like in the morning once you got up over the ground fog a few thousand feet, you could see very well. Course your flight varied, depended on the target. If it was south of France, you went that way. You crossed the Channel another way if you went to the north.

The airplanes were warmed up while we were still asleep. Hearing the engines was what kind of got you awake. You never really got back to sleep. When you came out

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after breakfast, the planes were all ready checked out and warmed up. You got your guns loaded then cranked ‘em up and left.

Use to, when you got up to altitude, you shot the guns to check them, but it made heat and at high altitude that condensed and could freeze up your guns. They quit test firing them.

You waited in line to take off according to where you fit in the formation. You were scattered around on the hard pad as a plane came by taking off, you’d take your little lamp and shine it on the tail number. When the right tail number came by, you’d taxi out and get in line. Usually dark when you started, but by the time you got out on the runway, it was getting a little light.

There was a little church down in the valley as you took off and, particularly if you were real heavy, and you’re struggling to keep from getting into the roof tops, you’d go around the little church and you could almost look out the side and see the top of that steeple. Nobody ever hit the steeple. It was close. You’d have to throw a rock twice to get there.

[Second part of tape]

[Growing up two sister, one being a twin]

No different from normal. We all seemed to get along well. They went their way and I went mine usually. I had my little group of boy friends and they had their girl friends.

John Gorrie Jr. High

Lee High School

Formations – You didn’t fly right behind a plane in formation, just slightly off to the side. Turbulence wasn’t a problem at all, unless you got in it. Control would be difficult, but not disastrous.

Flew with same crew entire time. My co-pilot, I saw in passing once in Kansas and again few years before I retired at Randolph Field. Ground crew chief named plane “Mary Jo” after his wife. He told us before we ever went up that two previous planes he’d given that name had crashed. Was in tears when we came back.

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Had a couple of ground crews that just worked on our planes. Minor stuff spark plug changes, minor patches from flack damage, bullet holes. If it got to be major they all went in the hangar. Called it production line maintenance or something. They'd tow your airplane in and work on it and it would be back the next day. If it wasn't you'd have another airplane.

How often you flew depended on how many crew you had to fly. If you lost a lot, you just flew and flew, but once you got back up to strength, you didn't have to fly as much.

Was kind of strange. Long about the middle of my tour, one of my buddies [I] went through training with came to visit. He was a brand new 2nd Lt. I was still 1st Lt. He said "You must not be flying anything. We fly five missions, they put us in for promotion and I've been to the rest home twice." He said, "I've got seven missions. How many do you have?"

I said, "I've got 21." That's the way it went.

The rest home was a kind of weekend resort area. I guess when someone thought you needed a rest, you go to the resort area. You didn't have to get up early, had food, and I guess there was golf and tennis and whatever.

Typical Day Flying

Heard warming engines, you knew what was gonna happen. Door barracks open and one of the clerks from the office came in and say, "Hey Jennings, get your crew up." Get up and get dressed, to the mess hall and have breakfast, then walk to briefing at 4:30 or 5:00 a.m.

Open up the screen and there would be the red lines going in and the green lines coming out. When they'd open it you'd hear all this "oh my goodness, oh my goodness" according to where you were going.

After briefing, go by your little parachute place get your _____. Get in one of these little jeeps and they'd take you out to the airplane wherever you were parked.

Then you'd have time to put the guns in and do what ever you did. Then getting close to time to crank up and start.

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Taxi out of parking place to watch for tail number of airplane to follow in take off. Fall in behind and taxi out for take off. If to Berlin, may get back 2:30 to 3:00 [in the] afternoon.

Return, go to debriefing and then get your little cup of hot chocolate and chunk of that old hard bread. Oh my. Later on we learned that we were supposed to get a two ounce shot of whiskey when we came home. Old Methusala, was the name of it. Worst tasting stuff. I didn't like so I didn't have mine.

When debriefing was over you either walk back or catch a ride back to your barracks, clean up. We kept a bucket of water settin' on our little stove which was about as big around as a broom handle. Didn't tend to put out much heat, but made the water not quite so cold.

If you wanted to take a bath, you had to catch a time that everyone else wasn't. They didn't have showers in our place. We found a window in the back of this kind of bath house affair that wouldn't lock. So we'd go over and go in the back window and fill up the tub and hop in and at least have a bath.

After supper, if there wasn't much going on, the little club was nothing but a bar. They'd have a little party or dance and they'd round up some ladies from around the neighborhood and truck 'em in.

Some of the people would get together and have a little orchestra or band. Oh, I don't know. When you flew a lot, you didn't feel like stayin' up late. When compliment was up and a few crews had days off with no missions, someone would get a little softball game goin' on out in the field.

Somebody'd say "briefing, briefing, briefing" and you'd come back and you might have a little quick afternoon trip to go out across the Channel to go after some of those sub pens or those ski slides we called them – rockets.

[Germans bomb U.S. Airbases, etc.?)

Those little quickies sometimes got to be very "hairy." Always clouds and you'd have to make a Passover and a cloud would come by and you'd have to make a circle and come back for another fly over. It seemed that the anti aircraft guns got more accurate every time you'd come by. They'd drop 'em somewhere.

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German resistance was according to which route you went in, fighters, flack, anti aircraft. Always go flying over big towns to get in and en route you always tried to miss the Ruhr Valley. That was big German industrial area and that was well fortified.

Sometimes the German fighters would come zooming in right at the coast, but the Spitfires could get over there. Other times you'd be flying along peacefully and all of a sudden out of nowhere. You never knew how many were coming. Sometimes just two would make a pass and you'd never see them again. Sometimes they'd get into what we called a daisy chain. Just fly kind of a circle off to the side and every time they'd come around, they'd shoot. Around again, and again. We'd start counting them hoping they were going to run out of gas soon.

[Pyote, Texas – 53 miles west of Odessa – 24 miles east of Pecos in the middle of nowhere. Town of Monihan's – shiney off in distance not even a RR station, just a wooden raised platform]

19th Bomb Group was the one that was in the Philippines when the Japanese came and they left the Philippines. They were home on their leave or vacation. While we were en route out to Pyote and they were our trainers.

Sebring – learned to fly B17.

Pyote got first crew training and started picking up our crew.

When the bombardier took over for bomb run – the auto pilot was set. The position indicator (PDI) needle, then the bombardier, as he would turn his little knobs and adjust his crosshairs, the airplane would adjust when he would adjust the bombsite. He wasn't physically flying the airplane.

Two types flac – continuous firing tracking the airplanes. Box barrage, everything would go up together simultaneous from different tightly spaced sites. All in a certain area, but you could fly out of that. But continuous tracking, they'd see you coming and just stay right with you.

But, I think the box was probably more damaging than the tracking. But it seems that all the shells came up in groups of three's. You'd see three explosions, boom, boom,

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boom. If you saw two and didn't see another, you started wondering where that third was going to go.

Flac was a bullet or shell that would go up and then it would explode. Then, all these little shrapnel parts would go flying out. Get into your engines. That's what got into mine a few times. Your oil line also. You didn't want that hit because of course you'd leak all your oil out.

The push rods that worked the valves in your engine on the front had oil in them and it circulated around and if you punctured one of them it would start pumping out your oil.

If any of your crew members in the back said, "You got oil comin' out" then you had to watch it closely. If I thought too much coming out, I'd shut that engine down because you didn't want it to catch fire. That was the main thing.

That scared me, thinking about fire. Course, you had a fire extinguisher. Once you gave it a shot, it was over. You'd shot your fire extinguisher.

Being on that B17 again was like going back to your grammar school and wondering how you fit in those little desks. I thought that was a big airplane until I got back in it. Then I thought, "Good gracious." You have to bend over and get narrow and us older folks can't fit between some of those spaces.

They've added a little something to that ball turret. I think they had put bullet cases on the sides since I'd been in one, because it seemed to me you could walk kind of over the ball turret to get into the front. Now, they have those big boxes up there to hold ammunition and you had to walk around the side.

You know, the early airplanes didn't have glass in the side windows. It was wide open. That's when the crew had heated seats, heavy gloves and face masks and all that stuff. Got cold back there I'm sure.

Ball turret most uncomfortable and dangerous place on the airplane. It is because you're sitting with your knees up under your chin and almost in your lap is the hand steering mechanism that you turn up and down.

Radio room kind of useless because when doing the kind of formation flying we were doing, you really didn't use it.

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Pilot and co-pilot kind of went up. Navigator and bombardier down in nose of the plane. Five in nose section of the airplane, including the top turret gunner (right behind pilots and above??). He was standing and would just rotate. Always thought those turrets rotated slower than some of those German airplanes came in.

Claude – Excited with fighters having 20 – 25 missions. [tape end]

There were quite a few Americans in the Royal Air Force. I guess we saved the day going over because the British were about out of business.

Red Cross would be there occasionally when we'd come down with coffee and donuts or hot chocolate. I think maybe the brass got to dance with the Red Cross girls because I don't remember it.

On base, when early spring played baseball, but you know it's amazing when you came down, you're stressed out and just mostly want to have a nap. If you were down a day you'd go to some training class, gunnery training.

During that time they were putting in what they called a "G" box. That was the first of the electronic navigation equipment, sending stations up and down the coast of England. The map that we would get in the airplane showed the circles going out from these various stations. (Red circles or green or blue circles, and numbers on the circles.) When you were flying, you'd turn on your G-box and you'd tune into one of the stations close to you. And, somehow you could pick out which number of the ring of the circle it was. Keep track of that circle till you go further, then switch to another color circle. Wherever those circles crossed, that's where you were. It was radar positioning.

You could stay with the formation with three engines. Usually never got to position of losing an engine till were already on bombing run. That's where flac was so just continued on mission and dropped bombs.

Most people lost an engine. Just pushed power up on three working and stayed with the formation. Safer. Didn't need all the power that all four engines produce. Did ok with three. You just figured out how much power you needed to stay in position in the formation and not overrun.

So many accordion formations. Everybody run up to the leader, then overshoot, then back off. Almost look like getting lost then come flying back up back and forth.

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Of course, one of your leaders does that, your wingman does the same thing. Some people just never could seem to calm down.

I swapped back and forth flying airplane with my co-pilot. He was a trained pilot too, except he didn't go to transition school. Formation flying was all a matter of power. If you get your power settings properly, he's going at a constant speed and just calm down on the throttle and you just fly along. It's not overly difficult.

Bombing run on Punta?? Mundy where had rockets

I think Frankfurt was probably a bad one and also Spydorf??. Manufacturing centers. Berlin wasn't bad. We went there a couple or three times. Only thing bad about Berlin was the long flight in and back out. And somehow the Germans were wanting to protect Berlin, naturally. But you just waited till you got some good fighter escorts.

But it was certainly a blessing to see those P51's come flying by. Had belly drop tanks and went all the way to the target with us. But when you'd see 'em in formation, you'd see all the drop tanks drop out of those airplanes and they'd turn and you knew the fighters were coming somewhere. They'd intercept them before we ever got there. They escort patrolled certain areas and at some times you'd see 'em coming back. A lot of that escort, you never saw. They'd be scootin' down somewhere. Amazing.

I understand that first the fighter pilots would come up and if they saw some Germans, they'd go chase 'em, get in dog fights, and they finally said, "Don't do that," because while they were off fighting, here would come another group. Just get em on the way, keep 'em away. Take care of the bombers.

Ike jackets popular and tailors over there would make 'em. If you went on leave like to London, and had a jacket fitted, you'd come back and say to a body, "Here's my ticket (receipt). If anything happens to me, you can get my jacket."

We had a crew. Co-pilot was from Atlanta. They were very secretive, I thought. In our barracks, tin sided, tin roof, cold as an iceberg, there were 16 beds. Four officers and the crew, four on each side as you came in, stove and couple of chairs in the middle, and four more beds on each side in the back.

These people came in after we'd been there a few weeks. They had two foot lockers that they guarded jealously. We never knew what was in them till they got shot down. They just left the formation and flew on off.

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I kind of thought that was a plan because one of those foot lockers had chocolate bars and boxes of silk stockings. Trade goods you know. One of 'em had bottles of good Bourbon. They didn't have Bourbon in England, just scotch and gin, foul tasting beer.

Well, when they got shot down or disappeared, we knocked the lock off and stuffed those bottles under our mattresses. And sortin' around through their stuff and here came the boys from the office with their mattress covers, putting their clothes and stuff in there and said, "someone busted into this foot locker." We just said, "We don't know anything about that."

Officers in one barracks, enlisted crew across the little street.

You know, they didn't park 'em [airplanes] in a row over there. They had these little hard stands they called them. You taxied off a way and had your little spot and someone else had their little spot. They were kind of scattered out. If the Germans attacked, the airplanes were not all together. Not like at Pearl Harbor.

We never had any raids on our base. We were North of London and North of Bedford. Kinboltonshire was the name of the town. I never had to land at any other base.

I lost an engine four or five times. That wasn't too unusual, I didn't think. It kind of gets your attention.

Scrapbook of B17 pictures – plane, crew, look through book.

First model helicopter with stiff landing gear on sides. Different landing gear [in] war in Korea and little island landing para rescue section. Have only tree on island.

Spitfire. Escape photo – shot down give 'em tat picture. Don't have one in a uniform with a good hair cut.

Stuck on beach in Hakaido. We had to get the Army to help us. They had these big _____ bags.

Claude – All B17 have in here, everything else looks like its all helicopters. Did you _____Korea.

Only scared once and that was on my first mission and I didn't get un-scared till I landed on my last one. Always a little apprehensive or nervous and the closer you got to finishing, the kind of more nervous you got.

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We had quite a few losses in our group. That's why we flew so much.

On the mission where we lost all our oxygen, I tried to call the navigator. Couldn't raise him and the bombardier down there with him called back and said, "He can't talk to you 'cause the wire on his headset's been cut." And something came through there and just cut the wire off his head set.

My first mission, I went as co-pilot and learned what it's all about. Brakes?? were shot out. You could land, but didn't have any brakes. You had a little hand pump brake and it was next to useless. We turned off the little parking spot onto the grass and really out of control. Still rolling a little bit and here came someone on a bicycle cuttin' across the grass. Just jumped up in the cockpit. And you know who it was? The Chaplin, and he was the one that baptized me here in Jacksonville. Everett Leissure.

When you stepped out of the airplane, your feet would be so cold, couldn't support and you'd just go to your knees. You'd have to walk around and get the blood circulating again. Also, when you were getting out of the airplane, there was a brace, kind 'a had to sort 'a swing out and drop. You were six to eight feet above the ground and when you dropped you couldn't even feel yourself hit.

I remember after we finished our first flying school and I saw my first B17. I just was amazed that there was an airplane big enough that you can just walk around under the wing. Sat in the seat and thought, "this is like a big arm chair."

When I went up there and looked this trip, it looked rather small.

We had two or three airplanes on our property. You know where Duck Pond subdivision is in Clay Hill on 218. Duck Pond is about a 40 acre cypress pond. On top of the sand hill it wasn't too deep. Use to see a little path through the top of the trees that went right down through the middle of Duck Pond. There was an airplane that crashed and made that path. The Navy got that out.

Then there's another one over there just South of Cecil Field. That crashed in the woods and it stayed over there. It might still be in the swamp.