

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
Richard X. Chabalowski  
Pilot, Army Air Corps, World War II

2005

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**Chabalowski, Richard X.,** (1921-2007). Oral History Interview, 2005

User copy: 2 sound cassette (ca. 65 min); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 65 min); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

**Abstract:**

Richard Chabalowski, a Mercer, Wisconsin resident, discusses his experiences during the attack on Pearl Harbor and as a transport pilot in the Army Air Corps during World War II. Born in Chicago (Illinois) to Polish immigrants, Chabalowski attended Lane Technical High School and spent two years at Wright Junior College. In 1940, he voluntarily enlisted in the Army so he could continue training as a mechanic. He was sent to Chanute Air Force Base (Illinois) to become an aircraft mechanic. In 1941, Chabalowski describes traveling on the troop train from Chicago to New York to California. He covers the sea voyage from Angel Island (California) to Hawaii. He touches upon basic training at Bellows Field (Hawaii) and his assignment with the Tow Target Detachment squadron at Hickam Field (Hawaii). Chabalowski discusses in detail the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Hickam Field was adjacent to Pearl Harbor, on Oahu.

Chabalowski recalls that on December 7, 1941, he was in the barracks after breakfast and was contemplating whether to go to church when he heard aircraft flying overhead. He ran outside and saw Japanese aircraft torpedo Pearl Harbor then fly over Hickam Field, strafing the base. Chabalowski describes the aircraft as flying so low he could see the expressions on the Japanese pilots' faces. Chabalowski states the American soldiers "just sat there and did nothing" because they were unable to get to their Springfield rifles and shoot back. Chabalowski criticizes his sergeant's orders to leave the barracks and help out at the hangar line. While running towards the hangars, Chabalowski and his friend Vincent Benina were caught by strafing fire, and Chabalowski incurred shrapnel wounds on his thighs. He was in the hospital for a couple weeks, where he was given alcohol for the pain. Chabalowski relates rumors and fears of Japanese espionage that circulated around the hospital and base. Chabalowski explains that the Japanese had damaged most of the Army's airplanes, so after the attack, he assembled B-26s at the Hawaiian Air Depot, a civilian organization. In 1942, Chabalowski applied to be a pilot and went through basic training in Santa Anna and Bakersfield (California). He discusses close calls with landings during his training and his fears of being kicked out of pilot school. His pilot training was postponed when Chabalowski contracted Valley Fever and went home to Illinois on sick leave. He eventually finished pilot training in New Mexico, where he graduated in the same class as Charles "Chuck" Yeager (a noted test pilot who became a general in the Air Force). Chabalowski discusses his disappointment when he was assigned to be a transport pilot instead of a fighter pilot. He was sent back to Chicago to train with American Airlines, and he married his childhood sweetheart there. Chabalowski speaks well of the American Airlines flight captain who trained him. He describes hauling cargo all across the United States to Maine, New York, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Montana. Chabalowski briefly touches upon regional differences

and race relations in Memphis (Tennessee). He tells a story of African-Americans stepping aside for Southern officers on the sidewalk. Chabalowski speaks at length about his service in Karachi (India) in summer, 1943. He and another soldier had to hitch a ride on a C-87 that was transporting hardware to India, sitting on top of the cargo because there were no seats. On the way, they stopped at Ascension Island, Accra (Ghana), and Agra (India). Chabalowski finally arrived in New Dehli where he was commissioned as a pilot with a second lieutenant warrant. Positive experiences he recalls include flying around the Taj Mahal, seeing Mount Everest and Mount Kachenjunga, and making lifelong friends. After his time in India, Chabalowski made several roundtrips from the U.S. to Africa, hauling gasoline and supplies. He explains his route went from Miami (Florida), to Bermuda, to Belem (Brazil), to the Azores, and on to Casablanca (Morocco); turning back at Dakar (Senegal) to cross the South Atlantic Ocean. He details many close calls flying various aircraft, including: an engine catching on fire as he was flying to Pakistan, a gas leak on the way to British Guiana, and lightning hitting the airplane in the South Atlantic Ocean. Chabalowski also tells a humorous story about piloting for a major general and his men in India after he'd been out drinking the night before. Chabalowski "bounced the landing" and was too embarrassed to meet the general afterwards. In 1944, Chabalowski was reassigned to the United States and flew troop transports; taking wounded soldiers home or to hospitals after the Battle of the Bulge (Belgium). He also describes flying troops back to the U.S. at the end of the war and feeling sorry for the soldiers coming from Europe who were (or thought they would be) reassigned to the Pacific Theater. Chabalowski briefly touches upon differences in flight and landing protocols between the Navy and Army Air Corps. He repeatedly emphasizes the importance of relying on instruments to make landings. After the war, Chabalowski says that he attended reunions of his flying class at Wright-Patterson Airfield (Ohio) and Mackinac Island (Michigan). He mentions he received a Purple Heart but does not elaborate upon the circumstances.

### **Biographical Sketch:**

Richard X. Chabalowski (1921-2007) was born in Chicago, Illinois to Polish immigrants. He was involved in the attack on Pearl Harbor and served as a transport pilot in the Army Air Corps throughout World War II.

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, 2006

Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, 2006

Transcript edited by Darcy I. Gervasio, 2008

Abstract by Darcy I. Gervasio, 2008

**Interview Transcript:**

John: This is John Driscoll, and I am with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Archives. And this is an oral history interview with Richard Chabalowski. Richard is a veteran of the United States Army Air Corps and this is at the Vets Museum Conference Room in Madison, and, Richard, thank you for taking the time and driving down from your home to do the interview. Why don't we start at the very beginning? When and where were you born?

Richard: I was born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1921. July 11, 1921. And my parents were foreign-born, came from Poland; immigrated to this country. Settled in and started building family, and eventually bought themselves a little home, and actually the family grew, because I am the youngest of ten children.

John: Oh, okay.

Richard: So, I had eight sisters and one brother. Who, incidentally, was in the service, too. My brother. And, I'd say, after that I attended a parochial school for, oh, about a four year period, and I wasn't too happy there. So I talked my mother into going to a public school. Which I liked very much, incidentally. Name of the school was Burr School, in Chicago.

John: Burr?

Richard: Burr. Jonathan Burr. Yes. And, after graduation, why I started at Lane Technical High School which was, at that point in time, a great school. It was all boys and I got a well-rounded education. If an individual wanted to through Lane and become a mechanic, or a carpenter, or whatever, the facilities were there to learn. I went there and then, after high school, I went to Wright Junior College. Okay, I missed signing up for my second year, and that was in, I am trying to think now. Let's see, I got out of Lane in '39. 1940. I have always been interested in aircraft. As a boy, why, I build model airplanes, and used to go out to Municipal Airport in Chicago, and watch them come in, and so forth. And really enjoyed them. And because of the fact that I missed getting into the second term at Wright College, why, I decided to go into the military.

John: Okay.

Richard: So I interviewed with the Army on the basis of going through mechanics school. And I was accepted, and was sent to Chanute Field, in Illinois.

John: Let me ask a question. This was 1940?

Richard: 1940.

John: Okay. Did you know the draft was coming? And that?

Richard: Not at that point in time. This was like September.

John: Okay.

Richard: In fact, the exact date was September 18. I'll never forget that one. And, you know, supposedly for a three-year period. And that was extended. So I graduated from Chanute Air Force Base as an aircraft mechanic. The course there ran in two-week segments. Instruments, air frames, and so forth, and so forth. Every two-week period you would get into some other phase of the construction of an airplane. After that, why, graduation. I was sent to Hawaii. It was still peace time. I am thinking about June, no, it was in May when we shipped out. We shipped to New York and, knowing the way the Army did things back in those days, after a while we took a troop train straight across the United States. Nine days. And if you never been on a troop train, you should. It was quite an experience; washing in little bowls in the men's room. And, of course, the entire train was ours. That was pretty well taken care of. And well fed, incidentally. Taking into consideration that we had regular chow line, and they had a mess car, and so forth, see. Got to California, and we were sent to Angel Island, for shipment over to Hawaii. Angel Island is an island in San Francisco Bay. Very close to Alcatraz.

John: Okay.

Richard: We used to call it, kind of, the Army's Alcatraz, at that point in time, because you couldn't get off. There was only one way off and that was by boat, of course. And, yes, we did go into San Francisco when we could get leave. Well, from there, we shipped out by boat on the S. S. *Cleveland*. I still remember the name of the ship. It was a good ship. But it had been converted already, at that time, into a troop carrier. Because they stacked them, I don't know, I believe, four high, or something like that; five high, whichever the case may be. But fortunately the Pacific was very, very quiet and it was as smooth as glass for the four days, or four and a half days, that it took us to go to Hawaii. But it became very, very hot.

John: Yea, okay.

Richard: And they put sails on the ship to divert air down into the holds.

John: Oh, yea, sure.

Richard: Just canvas sails, to trap the air and bring it down in. Okay, we got into Hawaii and we were sent to Bellows Field. Bellows Field is on the eastern side of Oahu. And there was an observation squadron that was based there. Well, knowing the

way the Army did things, they sent us right through basic training all over again. We had a couple of infantry corporals came in and trained us in the use of the Springfield rifle, and marches, and whatever else, for a period of time; gas masks, and the whole bit. Well, after that, after Bellows Field, they broke up the deal and people were sent to various places. I was sent to Hickam Field.

John: Okay.

Richard: Into a, actually, it was a detachment. This squadron I was in. It was called Tow Target Detachment.

John: Oh, okay.

Richard: We towed targets for the field artillery to shoot at us. Aircraft gunnery. And, probably, even for, there were a lot of fighter planes on Oahu at the time, based at Wheeler Field. Plus air gunnery range ranges were scattered all over, you see. And everything was fine. Things were going real well, and we had an old B18. Today, there aren't too many pictures left of those ones.

John: I think I've seen a picture.

Richard: Actually, what it is, is would be like a DC-3 converted into a bomber. That is the best explanation I can make. Twin engine. Has one gunner up front; one .30 caliber gun. And they could have put two .30 caliber guns, one on each side from the waist. And that was their extent, plus x-number of bombs. Whatever they could carry, see. But we were fitted for towing targets, which we did. We also had an old BT2A. The BT2 was a basic trainer and it was radio controlled, at that time.

John: Oh.

Richard: And some of our pilots would fly it on occasion. It was an old bi-plane. When I say old bi-plane, I'm not kidding. Because at that point in time the basic trainers were up to, I think, the certain BT13s. BT15s. So you can imagine how far back this airplane was constructed. Well, anyway, they did have the airplane, and had some fun with it. We also had an old B10 bomber. That was used originally for towing targets. The B10 was an old Martin bomber, kind of almost open cockpit for the pilot, up front. And it had a radioman in the back and probably had, at that time, a couple of .30 caliber machine guns on it. But it was basically given to us for the simple reason to tow targets, see. Well, that was all well and good. And there is where I got my first airplane trip; really.

John: Oh, yeah?

Richard: Our line chief. Well, I guess he must have taken a liking to me, or something, or other, and asked whether I'd like to go for a ride. Oh, I'd love to! I had never been in an airplane. He says, "Okay, we'll give you a chute." So he found a parachute for me, and then showed me how to use it. And he said, "If you pull this rip cord, and you bring it back, we'll give you a new one." You know the old one, famous last words. Well, anyway, I sat right up in the bombardier's compartment, and I really enjoyed it; the take off, and flew around Oahu. Some of the pilots apparently had to get some flying time in. And we came back and landed, and it wasn't too many weeks after that, it was a Sunday, December 7. And I went out and had breakfast, like all of us did early in the morning. Then came back to our barracks, and were just sitting around. I was going through some things in my footlocker. And I was kind of planning on going to church. I had been to church. I am of the Catholic faith. I had been to church the previous week, or two weeks prior to that, see. And then we started hearing this noise, which was coming from Pearl Harbor. Now, not being familiar with Hickam Field, most people don't know where it is located. Now, where the sea wall ends for Pearl Harbor, Hickam Field starts.

John: Oh, it is right there?

Richard: In fact, I sat on the sea wall and watched ships come in, at times, before the war started, of course. And heard all this racket and, all of a sudden, we hear aircraft coming over Hickam. In fact, the back end of our barracks faced a main street at Hickam that led down to the hangar line. Well, Hickam field was constructed with two hangars, side-by side, with parking areas in between. In total, there were probably ten hangars, two in a group, spaced far enough apart so they could pull in their B17s, and so forth, and so forth. Hickam is basically a B17 base. But they had the old B17s, before they had any turrets. They were all manually operated, all the guns. Okay? Well, anyway, the back end of our street, as I said previously, faced this main street. The aircraft, the Japanese aircraft, after they dropped their torpedoes on Pearl Harbor, would come over and strafe us.

John: Oh, wow.

Richard: And the rear gunner, we could almost reach out and touch their airplanes, they were that close. You could see the pilots, you know, with the expressions on their face, and so forth. And the rear gunners were just spraying, from side to side. And we, like a bunch of idiots, just sat there and did nothing. We never did get any arms where we could shoot back; nothing. Not a thing. If we had had Springfield rifles, I think we could have brought down several of those airplanes because we were all qualified, you know, on the Springfield. Well, anyway, the first sergeant came along and said, "Hey, I think what we should be doing here is going down to the hangar line and see if they need some help," which was the biggest mistake in the world.

John: Oh, yeah?

Richard: Well, this friend of mine, I still remember his name. Can I mention his name?

John: Sure.

Richard: Well, his name was Vincent Benina. I still remember him. We were pretty close. And we were running toward the hangar line, which we could have probably made it in five minutes, or so. We were that close to it. Well, what had happened, after all this strafing was going on, we looked up and here comes a whole bunch of level bombers flying right alongside our hangars. We looked up and I could see the bombs coming.

John: Oh, wow.

Richard: Well, we immediately turned, see. And reversed our positions, and started running back toward our barracks area. And you could hear the bombs coming closer, and closer, and closer. And we both dove for the ground at the same time. I said, "Vince, come on! Let's hit the ground!" Which we did. Of course, it was all gravel; we were really lucky, see, so that didn't help. And I got hit right there. I got hit and that put me in the hospital. And I was in Tripler General, if I am not mistaken, and spent some time there. And you could see the fires from Pearl Harbor, all the way over to the hospital; just blazed all night long. And the shrapnel hit me on both of my thighs, and kind of floored me. And I just had trouble walking. I couldn't walk. But, strange, they took some GI trucks. The old big BG trucks and just picking up wounded all over, see. And I ended up first of all at Hickam Hospital, on the floor. The rooms were all full, by the time I got there. Then there was a guy coming along, one of the aides, and he had a bottle of Old Granddad.

John: Oh, wow.

Richard: And he said, "Would you like one?" And I said, "I'd love one." I wasn't a drinker at the time. But it sure did help. Or, I thought it did. Well, late that afternoon was when I was transferred to Tripler General Hospital. And spent, let's see, I got out of there just prior to Christmas. I think it was the 23rd, something like that. And, terrible rumors that were going on at Hickam at that time, you know. They thought Japanese paratroops came in, and so forth, and so forth. And they were supposedly dressed in dark blue. And, of course, wouldn't you know, they gave me dark blue dungarees to walk back. From Hickam Hospital back to my barracks. So here I am. I took off my top, exposing a white t-shirt underneath. Not taking any chances. Everybody was shook up, really. We were scared. We were scared.



John: You didn't know how to handle this.

Richard: We didn't get scared until, actually, things, you know, until something happens to you. That is when the scary part takes over, see. Odd things happened. A friend of mine was next to me at the hospital, at Tripler General. Fellow by the name of Chaplicki. And as the story goes, he and I ended up flying together later on. That came later. Well, after that, I worked on the line. Our aircraft were all gone. They had all been destroyed. I worked on what they called the grave yard over there. They tried to salvage whatever we could off the aircraft. Instruments, mostly. Some hydraulic things. And things like that, see. And I think I spent a couple of weeks doing that. Then I was assigned to go and work at the Hawaiian Air Depot. We received, supposedly, by ship, ninety B26s. Without the wings on them. The engines, of course, were mounted in the air frames. And it was our responsibility to put these things together. And they were eventually destined to go to Australia. The B26 was a very, very hot airplane at that time. And not, we didn't have too many experienced pilots. But we did a lot of work. The Hawaiian Depot was run by civilians, substantially. We reported to this civilian individual who, his name was Wolfgang. I still remember it.

John: Okay.

Richard: I don't know why I still remember it. He was a good aircraft mechanic, and really knew his, he really knew airplanes, and we learned an awful lot from him. Because we really hadn't been out of mechanics school for too long a period of time, anyway. Well, that continued. And I have to cite you this one thing. One of the B25s, or B26s, I'm sorry, was ready to take off and leave Oahu, and start heading out down the Pacific, island jumping, going to Australia. Well, the pilots were inexperienced at that time. They were all second lieutenants. There was no rank amongst them. And they were fully armed. They had machine guns. Tail gun, they had a turret on the top. And what had happened, going down the runway, he snapped his nose wheel.

John: Oh, wow.

Richard: And just was skidding down. It threw the propeller blades. I swear, they could have gone almost a thousand feet into the air, when they came loose from the hub. And then the people started bailing out. I think everybody got out. But then it caught fire, and the ammunition took off.

John: Oh, yea. Sure.

Richard: And there was just stuff spraying all over Hickam Field. Because they were all .50 caliber machine guns on those airplanes, see. And, well, I continued to work over

at the Hawaiian Air Depot for several more weeks. And a directive came through, they were looking for people who were qualified with x-number of credits in mathematics and sciences, and they could apply for training as pilots. So, I put in for it, and I sent home, and wrote to my family back home in Chicago, would they please get over to the schools and get the credits for me, so I could have them. And I applied, and I was accepted.

John: Good.

Richard: Went through the physical at Hickam, and passed that. And eventually got on a ship going back to the United States. If you think back, earlier, I said it took us four days coming over. This one took us nine days, and I swear, we must have been up in Alaska. It was awful cold. And this was April. Well, anyway, we got there. And we had a few scares. The destroyers whooping and hollering going around the convoy. And eventually came in to the Golden Gate. And almost rammed into another ship directly in front of us. Because of the fog. We weren't that far. We could almost touch that ship. Off of our bow to his stern. It was that close. Well, anyway, we did get in there. Back to Angel Island. There I go. And sat there for a while, and waited for things to happen. Well, they sent me to Santa Anna, California. And we had some basic training in navigation, and a lot of marching, and that sort of thing. We had big parades on Sunday at that time, pass in review. The dust was maybe two or three inches thick and you carried a rifle. And it was clean when you went out, and it wasn't clean when you got back. You could shake off probably half a pound of dust or more off your uniform when you were through. Well, that lasted for a period of time, and then, finally, I was sent to Hemet, California. Which was a Ryan school.

John: Okay.

Richard: There were PT22s, is what the aircraft was designated. And I took my primary training there. I was doing very well for a while and I soloed, and I came in for a landing. And I never really did that point in time in my training wasn't too adept at using the flaps on the aircraft. My fault. Well, anyway, it ended up I came in a little hotter than I should have and I set that thing up on its nose. And I figured, well, "Bye-Bye, here goes cadet training." Well, it didn't happen. I went for a check ride with an Army pilot and he cut the engine. And here we go. And he says, "Okay, forced landing." All right. And we are looking for a place to come landing, and so forth. And you know me, real sharp. I picked out one with baled hay in it.

John: Okay.

Richard: Of course, you don't actually land. When you get down close enough, you hit the throttle and you go around. And I did finish primary.

John: Good.

Richard: And it was something. It was a fun airplane. You could, it was great in the air. Acrobatics. You take it up to ten thousand feet and purposely kick it into a spin, you see, and then bring it out after about three turns. And do a few loops, rolls, and whatever else, see. Well, from there, I was sent to Bakersfield, California, for basic training. And that was in an aircraft known as the BT13. Good airplane. Lot of power. Not too much air speed. I guess we'd cruise at about 135, something like that. But we did learn how to fly instruments.

John: Okay.

Richard: We had excellent instructors. They would take you out and, instrument flying, they would put you under a hood in the rear seat. And he would take the aircraft and just get it in the most horrible position you could probably figure out, and he would say, "You got it!" And you couldn't use any of the flight instruments. Artificial horizon. That was caged. So we learned to fly on what was called needle ball airspeed altimeter. You would go from one instrument to the other. And get yourself leveled off, where you could maintain a constant air speed and hold your altitude, and the ball, which would be centered in a tube in one of the instruments - oh, approximately six inches long. It was in kerosene. A black ball. And if you centered that, watched your altitude, and your air speed, you were fine. You were flying straight and level. And, believe me, it paid off later on in life, when I was overseas.

John: Yep. Yep.

Richard: Well, from there we went to, I was transferred, we finished. No, I became ill in California. I got something that is called Valley Fever. There is a medical term for it. It is called coccidioidomycosis. I still remember it.

John: I believe you. Okay.

Richard: I am not even going to try to spell it. We went and checked into, I passed out. In the reveille in the morning. And I didn't know why. I was feeling fine. I was in excellent, good shape. Because they sure made sure we were in excellent shape. Physically. Okay, so we went on sick call, and this one lieutenant looked at me, and he said, "Well, you just went in winter uniform." He said, "Well, those look like spider bites on your legs." And I thought to myself, "I don't think you know what you are talking about, lieutenant." Okay. I went back on duty and it happened to me again. I just passed out. The second time I went on sick call, this colonel came along and took one look at me, and he said, "You are going to the hospital." I said, "How come?" He said, "You've got something I am very

familiar with.” And he really was. Well, I just stayed there. Fortunately, a lot of the people this disease had occurred to, they had to tap their lungs periodically. To bring the liquid out, you see. I didn’t have to have that done. I was lucky. Apparently, he must have caught it soon enough. Anyway, I finally got out of there, and I figured, boy, this would be great. Maybe I could get leave, a little sick leave here. My classes already gone. Incidentally, I was in flying class 43A, which would have graduated in January of 1943. Because I became ill, why, I was set back and I could have got into 43B. But I finagled a sick leave, and I went home. I jumped on a GI truck out of Minter Field, and I no more cleared the gate, I am told, they started looking for me, because I could have finished flying in Class 43B. Well, I wasn’t aware of that at the time. So, well, this truck luckily took me right down to Los Angeles, to the railroad station. I got off, I went in there, I bought a ticket and in about ten minutes, I was on the train heading for Chicago.

John: That was good timing.

Richard: It was perfect. Really, it was perfect. And I spent some time in Chicago. Fortunately, it was during the Thanksgiving weekend, and so I got to see my family, and so forth. And had a good time. Even met some of my old friends back home who were also in the service at the time. Well, here I come back to California, back to Minter Field, and did some flying. But what had happened, every time we would go out in the San Joaquin Valley to get in the airplanes, it was that time of year with the fog was usually settle in. So we finally went over and went into Demming, New Mexico. Dry weather. Took our airplanes with us. And finished our flying up there, which was very nice. Excellent place. Beautiful area. Lot of mesas, and when the sun went down, they were just pretty.

John: Oh, yea.

Richard: From there I went to Luke Field, which was an advanced training center. Single engine. And I had aspirations of being a fighter pilot. Okay. Well, went through Luke. Graduated, in fact, with Charlie Yeager who became a general.

John: Oh, Chuck Yeager?

Richard: Sure. He and I flown together once. We would take buddy rides, instrument training, okay? After we got pretty well fixed up with AT6s, you know exactly how to handle the airplane, and so forth. And you got a lot of instrument time in that way. And Yeager was a good pilot. He, like me, I was a buck sergeant at the time. Yeager was a corporal, if I am not mistaken. We were called aviation students. They wouldn’t give us the rank of aviation cadet because we were enlisted personnel. At that point in time, we were to graduate as flying staff sergeants. Never really worked because some of the original ones, yea. The earlier ones graduated as staff sergeants and had commissioned officers as co-pilots, and

that didn't go over too well. So they made all of us what they called flight officers, which is the same rank as a warrant officer.

John: Okay.

Richard: With a serial number. Mine was T952. I still remember it. I actually had three serial numbers when I was in the military. You tell that to some people and they would look at you kind of strange. What is this guy trying to feed me here? Are we doing okay?

John: I am going to flip this.

**[End of Side A of Tape 1.]**

John: Okay. Go ahead.

Richard: We were at Luke Field and I figured, oh, well, we finally graduated and one of the officers at Luke Field approached me once and he said, "How would you like to be Cadet Colonel?" I figured, "Hey, that is a pretty good deal." Well, I didn't know what the job entailed. Well, what it really did was going out into Phoenix and soliciting some of the merchants for funds so that we could have a dance for the graduating class. Plus the room. They paid for that. So I made all these merchants that I had this list of and collected a few dollars from each one, and so forth. And came in, we had a nice meal, and so forth. Then I was, after graduation, I married. Married young. Really. Childhood sweetheart, so to speak, from Chicago.

John: Oh, okay.

Richard: And what do you know? They send me back to Chicago. So I go to Chicago, sort of a delay in route sort of thing. Then they send me to San Francisco, and send me right back to Chicago again, for training with American Airlines. Now, I am not going to end up being a fighter pilot, I am going to be a transport pilot. And naturally there is some disappointment connected with that. Well, I did. I got some of the finest training that an individual could ask for from this one American Airline captain. He was just one of the nicest and, as far as being a pilot is concerned, he was a pilot's pilot. And that is really saying something.

John: Yea. Sure.

Richard: In fact, one day, well, we got, first we looked at this airplane and looked at it. And, boy, I was going to love this.

John: What kind of an air plane was it?

Richard: A C47. Okay. An old beater there, and believe me, it was an old beater. And it was the only aircraft they were using for training us. So there was another fellow that, he took two students, so to speak, on board. The other fellow was an Air Corps captain. I was a flight officer. And we were there for training. Well, the first thing you do when you get into a new airplane is you get them up high enough and stall them out, purposefully. To see where, at what air speed, they fade off. And you have to be careful, especially with big airplanes. You have to know when to dump them. By that I mean, you shove the stick forward just as soon as they start shivering. Well, this Army captain was flying. It was his turn. And I am standing in the companionway. The airline captain is in the right seat. And he takes it up, and he let it go too far. And it spun. Well, you don't spin C47s. They are not made for that. Well, you want to really see an individual work to get that thing out of the spin. This airline captain did, and did a fantastic job. But here I am, hanging on for dear life in the companionway. Hanging on to both sides with my arms and my legs, trying to support myself. It finally came out of it. And probably turned about three turns and we must have lost four or five thousand feet. But we were up high enough where we finally broke out of. Well, after that, after the training with American Airlines, I was sent to New York, and we had regular cargo hauls, out of Mitchell Field in New York. We ran all the way up the east coast. Bangor, Maine, was our far one on that side. We'd go down to Memphis on occasion. The Air Depot in Pennsylvania. We made those trips. And got additional training all along. Once I'll never forget, this captain's name was Cunningham. He was one of these with a moustache bit. The kind of a guy you'd see walking down the street with a crop, a real Fancy Dan. I think he was a Southerner. Because when we went to Memphis this one time, some of the black people there would actually step aside as he came down the street, see. I didn't have a good opinion of him, right there. That is my opinion. I came from a different era, or different upbringing.

John: Yea. Yep.

Richard: Well, okay, after Memphis, we flew out of there for a while. Out of New York. Then, from there, I was sent to Billings, Montana, for transition training in the C46s. C46 was a bigger twin-engine airplane. We used to call them Dumbo. They looked like whales.

John: Yea, with the round front.

Richard: Made by Curtiss. And in the early days they had a bad habit of losing their generators, so now you are running on batteries. And every so often an engine would take off and really start revving up. So you would have to cut the engine. They finally got all those bugs out of them and C46s were used very extensively in India.

John: Okay.

Richard: Well, that is where I ended up. I ended up in India. I went, we were sent to Karachi. We flew over, we went down through South America and we kind of cooled our heels. Couldn't get a ride out of there but there was a C87, which was a big converted B24, hauling hardware. He was going to India. And he said, "You guys want to come along, okay, but you will have to sit up on top of the cargo." Well, we cared less. So there was a major and a captain that needed a ride, and they were going to India. And this other fellow and I. We were an air crew. So we jumped in and we flew from there to Ascension Island, which is nothing more than a spot in the South Atlantic. There is not a blade of grass on it. It's an old volcano that they cut in two, so to speak, and built a runway right through the middle of it. It is quite an island. You don't miss it going over, otherwise you got problems. But from there then we went to Accra, I think we landed in Accra, in Africa. On what was then called the Gold Coast, I believe. Then across Africa in through the Arabian areas, there. And finally into Karachi, India. Okay, we stayed in Karachi for a while, and then I was sent to Agra, India. Well, Agra is south of New Delhi, India, about ninety miles, and we were on kind of so-called detached service. Which is not bad. Because of my rank, I was getting additional pay. I was getting per diem pay. So I was sending home a couple of dollars every month. It wasn't great but, at that time, a dollar was a lot of money. The country was just coming out of the Depression. Well, I stayed at Agra and on one of my first flights out, it was going to be an evening flight. And I got in with this one pilot, who was a good pilot. I still remember his name. Smedley. Who, we were flying along, and the weather wasn't too bad. There was a few clouds up ahead. We kind of unbuckled our seat belts and kind of put the auto-pilot on, until we hit this one cloud and the whole bottom dropped out. Well, and we ended up right up to the top of the cabin. Reaching down for the steering columns. Both of us. We finally pulled ourselves down and hit the bottom. And then you go up, you see. And finally we worked through that. It could have been worse. We could have done worse. But there was still daylight, which makes it a lot easier. Well, anyway, I flew there for, oh, let's see, we got there in about July, of '43.

John: Okay.

Richard: Yea. '43. Hot! Agra is located right on the edge of a desert and the temperatures there would hit 130. Very hot. Well, finally, I got checked out as a pilot and went to New Delhi, and they commissioned me. They gave me a second lieutenant's warrant. Which was fine. Anyway, now I am a first pilot and didn't have a regular air crew. You always change air crew. In those days, we carried an engineer and a radio man, and eventually dropped the engineer because we could haul more cargo, and that was our only reason for being there. To haul cargo or troops, and we hauled both, see. Some of the stories I can tell, this one night we were flying and it was a terrible night. A lot of thunderstorms, lightning. And what you do

when you got a lot of lightning, you turn on all your lights in the cockpit, so that a flash of lightning close to the airplane doesn't blind you.

John: Oh, sure.

Richard: See. So, in fact, sometimes you put on your eyeglasses, I mean your sunglasses, see. And just strictly follow your instruments. Well, all of a sudden we hit this one thunder storm and the bottom fell out. When I say the bottom fell out, I mean the bottom fell out. Down we go. I always liked to fly eight or ten thousand feet, purposely. Altitude meant safety. Well, the thing kept falling and falling, and I am watching the air speed, and it is getting very, very close to the stall-out speed. And you got full power on. All of a sudden, you hit the bottom and up you go, and you start pulling your power off and you can see your air speed increasing with the nose down. Almost up to the red line of the aircraft. The red line of an aircraft means you should not exceed that air speed, see. And it kept that way until we finally got ourselves out of that storm. But, scared? It's an extremely scary, and things like that happened later, where you almost get flipped over. And at one time, I swear, that airplane was at a ninety degree angle to the ground. Wing tip would be just facing the ground. And the only thing you could do was just rely on those instruments. And you have to do that. If you once think you can fly by the seat of your pants, you just kill yourself. Because you are going to become disoriented.

John: Yep.

Richard: And you could kill yourself. Very easily. So that is one thing we did learn in flying, learning good instrument procedure. Okay, and after a while, I was getting to the point where I had, we had to fly in our area, we had to put in a thousand hours of flying time. Before we would be rotated back home. The fellows up on the Hump, and we used to fly up on the Hump. We'd drop our cargo. Chabwa. Mismari was another air field. There is a group of airfields up in that same state in India. And there must have been at least a dozen airfields up there. Very close to one another. But there we would transfer the cargo onto C46s and C87s. Four engine C87s. And they would take it up over the Hump. I never got to fly the Hump. I wish I would have. If for no other reason to say I had been there.

John: Yea.

Richard: Yea. So to speak. But, and then I was transferred from Agra back to Karachi, India, finishing up my time there. And we left Karachi this one day, beautiful day. Fall flying after the monsoon season is not bad in India. Rarely see a cloud. You can see, at altitude, you can see Everest.

John: Oh, wow.



Richard: Quite a sight, really. And there was a big another mountain in front of Everest called Kanchenjunga. I hope I am pronouncing it. And you could see the snow blowing off the top of it, see. Excellent visibility at that altitude. Those signs. Well, anyone, this one day I was telling you about. I left Karachi and moving right along. Put it on auto pilot. And all of a sudden you hear a big wham! And I figured what in the heck has happened now? And the co-pilot sort of looked over and he says, "That engine is on fire." Just as nonchalant as if nothing had happened. I said, "What?" Well, what had happened, one of the cylinder heads. We blew a cylinder head and blew the cowling right off the engine. And it caught fire. Well, on a C47, there is a procedure you would go through to shut the engine down. First of all, you feather the prop. Cut your gasoline off. And then if the fire is still going, we had two CO2 bottles on a C47. I turned one on and fired it, and it didn't go out. The fire didn't go out. Now we only had one CO2 left, so I said, "Well, let's do it." We slowed the airplane down, as slow as we possibly could. On a single engine. Cut down some of the wind coming across. We're through it, see. And fired the other one. The other one, fortunately, put the fire out.

John: Oh, okay.

Richard: But, at that time, they had pulled all our chutes. We had an airline captain who came over to India. I think he was a full colonel at the time. Reserves. And he said, "We don't fly DC3s in the United States with parachutes." So we didn't. We pulled all the chutes. We had chutes on board for every passenger, and for crew. So, after that, there was no if, ands, or buts. That airplane that I was in that blew that engine, I had to do something in a hurry. And I was heavily loaded. Full compliment of gasoline. Eight hundred gallons of gas. That is a lot of gasoline. So I said, "We are going into Chore." Well, Chore was an emergency landing field about thirty minutes flying time east of Karachi.

John: Okay.

Richard: See. And we are heading for Chore. It is a gravel field. Okay. Twelve hundred feet long. It was very short. Because normally four thousand feet, you know. Especially with a loaded airplane. Well, we are coming in and I said, well, the one engine, the one that went, it was almost a brand-new engine. It only had about two hundred hours on it.

John: Oh, wow.

Richard: The other engine, which was running, had over a thousand hours. And I figured, I am not going to push that thing that hard, because if that one goes, we really got a problem. See. We've had it. So, I jettisoned some of the cargo over the desert, and told the radioman and the co-pilot, I'll tell you when to stop, when I can hold the

airplane, get a decent airspeed, when we weren't losing altitude. And we headed back to Chore. Well, single-engine procedures, when you are coming in, you always come in with your wheels up, until you are absolutely sure you have got the airfield made, that you can make a decent landing, which we did. And I swear I didn't waste one inch of that runway. Those wheels touched down right at the very end and, in fact, I had to give it some throttle to get it down to the other end of the runway. Which kind of surprised me. I'll bet we didn't use maybe five or six hundred feet. We were heavy, first of all. You put some flap down too, if you need it. And we sat there and called Karachi. Told them what we needed. And they sent an airplane out and put me on it, and the co-pilot, and the radioman stayed back with the airplane, because there was another ship coming out with some food for him, and with another engine. All they had to do, actually, just change the engine. Pull the prop, change the engine, put the prop back on. They could have flown it out of there, which they did. Well, after India, I came back to the United States. And I was assigned to Memphis, Tennessee. We did some flying out of there. We would fly up to Mitchell Field in Long Island, and we were hauling troops after the Battle of the Bulge. Very, a job you really didn't care for too much. We had a lot of frost-bite cases on board, and we had a flight nurse. And the bunks were on both sides of the aircraft. And we would fly into those towns where a lot of these servicemen came from. And one of the hospitals. As close as possible to their home. So we went into some weird, weird airfields. And we went into Navy airfields. And we would have people at the end with their paddles trying to tell us our wing is low, or it is high, or whatever. Well, we weren't trained to fly that way. We weren't Navy pilots. We were trained to fly differently. Well, anyway, we did that for a while and then I was sent to, after that, to Homestead Air Force Base. For four-engine training, in C54s. C54s, excellent airplane. It was a large C47, if you wanted to call it that. And we flew some C87s, or B24s down there, just for training purposes. Got some time in them. And finally got all checked out. And went back to, then I was stationed in Miami. And we ran a regular air wing from Miami. We flew to South America, probably to Puerto Rico at times. Belem, in Brazil. There was another airfield, I am trying to think of the name of it. Belem was one. Recife, I believe.

John: Okay.

Richard: In Brazil. And from there we would jump across the South Atlantic, going to Africa. And the C54, we could carry 3,600 gallons of gasoline. And we would go over there and we would haul cargo, and drop it off. Our destination was Casablanca. From Casablanca we would go, from Miami to Bermuda, to the Azores, and Azores into Casablanca. And from Casablanca, sometimes we would fly down along the Sahara. And make a ninety-degree turn due west and flow into Dakar, Africa. And from Dakar, the following day, we would probably jump off and then cross the South Atlantic. In fact, the South Atlantic, in that particular area, always had thunderstorms. You would constantly sit there and get bounced

around. This one, it was daylight when this happened. We were flying along and you could almost, you could hear the thunder, it was that close to some of these storms. Well, we got hit by lightning.

John: Oh, wow.

Richard: Right in the middle of the ocean. It was a white ball of fire between the pilot, I was flying co-pilot. And between both of us, and the navigator, who was sleeping in a bunk right behind us, he jumped out. He didn't know what happened. The ball of fire went right through the back of the airplane and burned a hole in one of the elevators, about the size of a quarter. And that was the only thing that happened. Didn't destroy our radio equipment, which would have been tough, you see. But those are some of the kinds of things that happen to you out there, see. We were in Miami and there were hurricanes coming in. This was in 1945. And so we had to take all the aircraft and evacuate them out of the airfield, wherever. Well, we went down to British Guiana, in South America. And we not more than cleared the airfield and we hit a thunderstorm, and it really gave us a shock. We must have shot up to four thousand feet before you could say, you know, uncle, so to speak. We came into British Guiana and landed, and I looked out and I said, "Hey, Sam," who was the pilot. I knew him from India. We were friends over there. I said, "Take a look." There was gasoline pouring out of our left wing like you wouldn't believe it. We never knew it. Well, a C54 has what they call a wet wing. It is a gas tank, the entire wing. They are just cells and that is it. C47, on the other hand, it had tanks inside the wing. Individual tanks.

John: Oh, I see. Okay.

Richard: Yea. The wet wing on a C54, and that apparently, we found out later on, was quite common. These things did happen, see. But, overall, it was a heck of an airplane. Well, the war, eventually, was coming to an end. We were picking up, the European war was. We were coming back and we would pick up troops who were coming out of Italy, and they were on their way to the Pacific. Ground troops. So we would pick them up and haul them back to the United States, see. Never said much to the kids. You kind of felt sorry for them. Going through one war, and going into another was what it amounted to. Well, fortunately, by the time they got over there, they had dropped the atomic bomb and, of course, that put an end to World War II. It was interesting. I don't know if I would want to go through it again. But I am glad I did. I saw a lot of country I never would have seen. The Taj Mahal, for example. We used to fly right around it coming into our airfield in Agra, see. Interesting time, in the service. Met a lot of friends. In fact, one of them, we still communicate. A fellow by the name of Bert Tuttle, a fellow who unfortunately has developed Parkinson's Disease.

John: That is too bad.

- Richard: Yea. Yea. Bert and I, he and old Pappy Pappish, and I, we always played pinochle together when we were together, see. At Agra. And after we broke up, and we kind of lost our ways. One went one way and the other another way, trying to make our own lives as be got on.
- John: Yea. Any reunions?
- Richard: Yes. Yes. We has some reunions from the flying class I was in. And we had two of the, in fact. One was at, I am trying to think of the airfield in Ohio.
- John: Wright-Patterson?
- Richard: Wright-Patterson, yes. We had one there, and we had a wonderful time, really. We stayed right on the grounds. There is a hotel there called the Hope Hotel, at Wright. Wright-Patterson. In fact, I remember driving in there and I drove right through the gate. I figured, well, I'll just go to the hotel, until this guard started chasing me. So I stopped, and I happened to catch him in my rear view mirror. And he said, "Sir, I have to have a pass, or something." I explained to him why I was there, and so forth. I did have an old Reserve card with me. I showed that to him. He said, "Okay, fine." In fact, he even saluted me, after all those years. But we did have a fine reunion. So a lot of us went through the museum there at Wright-Patterson. They have an excellent, excellent museum there. All kinds of aircraft. And there was one more. We had another reunion in Michigan, at the Glen Hotel, at Mackinac Island.
- John: Oh, way up?
- Richard: Excellent. Oh, I would recommend that place for a weekend, for an individual and his wife. It was just the greatest place in the world to go. Very, very relaxing.
- John: I've never been there but I've heard about it.
- Richard: Food was excellent. Service was out of this world. I pulled my car up there and they picked up my bags, and so forth, and the next time I saw my bags they were in our room. Never had to touch a thing. We just had an excellent time there, for three or four days. I forget which it was. Had good reunions. One guy in particular, from Texas. I'll never forget him. He had his card with him, and he would pass it out. The card read, "Ernie, An Authority." And that is all. That is the only thing he had on his card. It was funny. He was quite a guy.
- John: That's great.
- Richard: He'd tell stories about after he got back to the United States, he got a B29, and he

stayed in the service for a while. And they reinforced the wing by putting in a heavier spar through it, around the entire wing. It was strictly built for flying into clouds, hurricanes, that kind of thing.

John: Oh, okay.

Richard: He told us the story, they were flying, I believe, it was over the Rockies. Pretty good altitude. And before they finally leveled out, they came up from about 20,000 feet to about 40,000 feet when they hit this one storm. He said, "You wouldn't believe the up-drafts there. Coming off the Rockies there." Because the wind comes up the mountains, and just builds and boils, and, of course, you get these terrific up-drafts there. And, of course, on the other side of the mountains, you get the down-drafts. You have to know how to fly the mountains. But it was great. It was a great experience. But, unfortunately, all of us are getting up in years.

John: Yes. These stories are so, so precious.

Richard: I hope there is something in there that is worth while, for someone to look at. Or listen to. You know, we had one of our men, going back to Hickam Field, and finally was able to get ahold of a .50 caliber aerial machine gun. Well, if you've never seen one, they have like a piece that comes around your back. You can lean into it. He finally downed an airplane.

John: Did he?

Richard: Yea. He shot down one of the Japanese airplanes. And got himself a Silver Star for it, too.

John: Oh, man.

Richard: The Silver Star is quite a medal.

John: That is quite a medal.

Richard: There aren't too many people that walk around with Silver Stars on their chest. Well, I ended up, the best I did was a Purple Heart which, you know, I could have done without that.

John: Yes, I am sure.

Richard: But, interesting.

John: This is interesting.

Richard: I hope this gives some people some information, you know. If I can think of anything in particular. Well, of course, we eventually got all those B26s out of the Air Depot up there, and they went on to...

**[End of Side B of Tape 1.]**

John: Okay, go ahead.

Richard: This is a story I had, a flight I had out of Agra, and went out there. The night before, we had a few drinks. Call a spade a spade. And I probably should never have been flying. I wasn't inebriated, no, but with a fair hang-over. And I wasn't scheduled to fly. And, "Well, you got to go. You are the only guy here." So we went. We had a brand new DC3, with plush seats in it. It was strictly an airliner. It wasn't for hauling cargo, see. Whether it could have been converted, I imagine it could have. But, anyway, so I fly up to New Delhi and the operations officer up there is an old buddy of mine. One of my pinochle buddies, Pappy. And we land and we shot the bull there for a couple of minutes, and I said I had to get going. I was on my way back to Karachi. Well, he says, "Hey, hang on for a second. There might be a party that wants to go back to Karachi." Okay. The airplane is empty. Well, it just so happens it is a major general and his party.

John: Oh, well.

Richard: And so we take off and I had a co-pilot that I wasn't, he wasn't my favorite person. Let me put it that way.

John: Okay.

Richard: He always told me how hot a pilot he was, and all this sort of thing. Well, anyway, we are on our way back to Karachi, and the weather is kind of marginal. There is clouds, but we are flying in between them. It was smooth. Not too much turbulence. And coming into Karachi, we were on top, so I figured, well, I'll make an instrument approach. Probably could have broken through the clouds but we come in to make our instrument approach, come in for a landing. Come right in, set it right down. And, you know, I must have not been paying as much attention to my landing ability as I thought I should have been. And I bounced it a little bit. And I bounced it. And I bounced it. And the funny part about it is, I finally pull up to the operations building. And I wasn't about to go back there and talk to the general after that terrific landing. That, incidentally, was the only time I bounced a C47. So help me. Pull up to the operations building, and here is all my buddies. They are sitting out there. And I slide the window back, and they said, "Hey, Chab, why don't you put a saddle on that thing?" So I thought I'd throw that out for a little humor. But I waited until the general cleared before I got off the

airplane. I remember once, we were at Agra at the time, and I had a load of troops that were going down into Burma. Infantry troops, with all their gear. Well, whoever loaded the airplane loaded it incorrectly. There is a bulkhead at the tail end of the C47, and back of that bulkhead there is a urinal. If somebody has to go on the airplane, they go back there. Well, what they did, they took that whole back compartment and loaded all their heavy gear in that. Unaware to me. And it eventually happened that when we started going down the runway, I said, "Boy, this thing is not coming off the ground." The tail end usually comes up first by itself. Well, it wasn't coming, so I pushed the yoke forward and finally got the tail up. And I thought, boy, this is bad. And it was too late to abort the take-off. Well, I finally got it off the ground and just cleared the trees at the end. Believe me, I think my wheels may have rolled into the leaves, it was that bad. That was how bad that airplane was out of trim. As soon as I got up to altitude, I told the co-pilot to go back and tell those guys to start bringing all that stuff forward, and I'll tell you when to stop. Well, what had happened, we were flying about six degrees tail-heavy. One degree tail-heavy is one degree too many. One degree nose-heavy is not bad. It makes for better landings, really. Because once you touch it down, you release the yoke, it'll stick right there. Well, we finally got that thing to the point where it was flyable. It cuts down on the air speed, because you are mushing through the air. You aren't really flying the way airplanes are meant to fly. Well, as soon as I came in for a landing, there still was enough stuff back there that your tail would stall out first. And you would hit tail-first, and then your wheels, creating kind of a jackrabbit effect, see. We thought we had enough of the gear out of the back that we could have avoided that. Well, after that landing, of course, the troops got off. That was in Andal, India. Andal is an airfield approximately thirty minutes flying time west of Calcutta. It's a kind of staging area, apparently. For sending troops down into Burma, and so forth, see. But it was a terrible experience. Very frightening to have an airplane that reacted this way, especially on the take-off. Bad enough on the landing.

John: Yea. Yea.

Richard: But at least we had better control at that point in time, see. But I just thought I'd throw that out. For what it was worth.

**[End of Interview]**