

Wisconsin Public Television
Korean War Stories Project

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

ARTHUR J. GALE

Crew Chief, 49th Fighter Bomber Wing, Air Force, Korean War

2004

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Madison, Wisconsin

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Arthur, Gale J., (1930-). Oral History Interview, 2004.

Video Recording: 2 videorecording (ca. 55 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Arthur “Art” Gale, a Minneapolis, Minnesota native, discusses his service as a crew chief in the 7th Squadron, 49th Fighter Bomber Wing during the Korean War. Gale talks about enlisting in the Air Force just before he received a draft notice, staying at the new barracks at Lackland Air Force Base (Texas) during basic training, aircraft school at Oakland (California), and jet training at Chanute Air Force Base (Illinois). He describes the uses of the F-84 Thunderjet in the Korean War and talks about how different it was from WWII planes. Gale talks about assignment to the 49th Fighter Bomber Wing, being sent in an advanced party to Camp Stoneman (California), going to the bars during his “Cinderella leave” even though he wasn’t yet 21, having lots of KP duty on the ship, and taking a train through Japan. After arriving at the transit barracks in Korea, he recalls being surprised by the noise of all the airplanes taking off. He describes the airfield and, while watching some planes take off his first day there, recalls seeing a bomb accidentally fall off a plane; “That was the first and the last time that I went down to the runway to watch the airplanes take off.” Gale talks about playing cards in his spare time and not having much else to do. He describes his duties as crew chief of an airplane running three to four flights a day, and he talks about rules getting more relaxed over time so that he stopped having to carry a gun and wear full uniform. He declares he liked taking the plane to Japan for periodic inspections and details performing evaluation and maintenance on his plane. Gale talks about interacting with the pilots on the flight line, and knowing one who was killed in action. While flying to Seoul to repair an emergency-landed plane, Gale recalls the closest he came to combat was seeing some MIGs get chased off by a couple of Sabres. He mentions all the different people required to maintain the airplanes and describes teaming up with other crew chiefs to help with repairs. He reveals they never wore earplugs. Gale details checking over a brand-new airplane, which seemed to be running perfectly before a compressor went out and the airplane got set on fire. He reflects that when a plane goes down during a mission, it could be caused by combat or by mechanical trouble: “You don't know what causes these planes to all at once go down.” He states the sound of idling jet engines would attract locusts and they would get pureed in the engines. After leaving Korea, he requested assignment to the 433rd Squadron at Truax Field (Wisconsin) where he worked with F-89 Scorpions and F-86s. Gale declares the F-89s were not nice to work on. When the 433rd went to Alaska, he stayed behind at Truax Field as a flight chief in the 432nd Squadron. He describes being on 24-hour alert in the North American Air Command and residents of Madison complaining about noisy jets taking off right over the city; in response, for a month the Air Force paid the servicemen entirely in two dollars bills, which flooded into the city and made residents reconsider the economic wisdom of wanting the Air Force gone. Gale describes difficulties the corrugated sheet-metal runways caused by ripping up airplane tires during landing. He mentions log books and a preference for dirty-bellied airplanes because they made less of a target.

Biographical Sketch:

Gale (b.1930) served in the Air Force in Korea from 1951 to 1952, and was honorably discharged at the rank of Staff Sergeant in 1955. After graduating from the Dunwoody Institute (Minneapolis) in 1958 with a degree in refrigeration, he bought Lackore Electric Motor Repair in La Crosse (Wisconsin). He currently resides in Onalaska (Wisconsin).

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Related Materials Note:

Photographs of this narrator's military service can be found in Wisconsin Public Television. Wisconsin Korean War Stories records (WVM Mss 1389).

Interviewed by Mik Derks, Wisconsin Public Television, September 3, 2004.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Public Television staff, n.d.

Transcript edited and reformatted by Wisconsin Veterans Museum staff, 2010.

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, 2010.

Transcribed Interview:

Mik: How did you first become interested in the military?

Art: Do you mean you want me to say that I dodged the draft? [laughs] I did.

Mik: You just did.

Art: That's exactly--it was, hey, I lucked out. I got in the Air Force--I went down to the Navy, they were full. The Marines were full. Oh God, and I knew the Army was on my tail and so I, I jumped into the Air Force and I got in the Air Force and the day that I was supposed to go down and be sworn in I got my draft notice. I asked the guy what to do, he said send it back. [laughs] And so that's when I got in the Air Force.

Mik: When was that?

Art: That was February 2nd, 1951.

Mik: So, it was pretty hot over there?

Art: Well, yeah, but you see I didn't get over there right away. There was a lot of school that you had to go through because--I was grocery clerk and, and ah from that, so I of course it was--you know, out of school and, and then I worked for the National Tea for a couple years and had got to be where I was 20 old, pushing 21 kinda hard. Ah, that was, I was ripe [laughs] so in I went. Yeah. And then from, from a port down to Lackland. And there we got down there just in time to be not in Tent City. We were one of the first ones that got into a barracks. That was great. Those poor devils in the tents were just, that was--I, that was worse than it was over in Korea. Now that's no lie--living, living it, yeah. But of course that was basic training, so-- [laughs] that was what you were trained to do.

Mik: What's Air Force basic like?

Art: Um, eight weeks and, and ah--they take your ah, well what, if you're kinda cocky they'll take care of that real quick. And they, they humiliate you and a put you down to what, where they want to make something outta ya. It's great, it's absolutely--I think everybody, especially these young children now 18, 20 years old should spend a year in the service. A good DI would take care of that real quick. Really would. But anyway, you know--ah after that we went to Oakland, off to California. Boy that was great out there. Colder than the blazes in the morning, hot in the afternoon, colder than the blazes in the evening. You'd change your uniform three times a day. It was [laughs] it was so, but there was 15 weeks of school and that was pretty much aircraft, just--it was Oakland at Oakland Municipal Airport, which was very close to San Francisco, which was--if you have liberty, got off once in a while, it was kinda nice. From there we went to Chanute, Illinois and there's where I got my jet training

and I loved that. Jet engines were, I liked that, that was a good duty. Ah, I excelled. I was, I don't want to brag, but I was very good at it. Ah, but anyway ah--

Mik: It was a pretty new technology wasn't it?

Art: Oh yeah, yeah. That was, they had just built the ah, the B-47, which had the J-47 engine in it. The fighters had a, the, [F-] 84, that I worked on in Korea had the J-35 engine in it. Both of them made by General Electric. Ah, the airplane was made by Republic, it was a good airplane. It was a really a good airplane. It was the workhorse of Korea. It was a bomber, it would carry bombs, it would carry rockets, it would carry Napalm and it had ah--eight machine guns that could just rip up something real bad. So, they did a lot of strafing with it. Ah, they did a lot of low flying and of course that was where they got caught so badly. We lost a lot of airplanes, we really did. Our squad, this was the 4th, 49th Fighter/Bomber Wing. Ah, I'm getting ahead of myself, going back--

Mik: What did you say it was, the F-84?

Art: The F-84 was a Thunder Jet.

Mik: We're talking about the F-84?

Art: F-84 yeah, that's this one here. The ah, ah--we went from Chanute to a--

Mik: Before we go--[audio problems, long pause] You said you really loved the jet engine. What was it that you loved about it?

Art: It was different. It was new. Ah, you know, the, the gasoline engine, if you will, reciprocating piston engine had been around a long, long time. This jet wasn't. This was new, just like everything else. So, sure, it was new, it was different and it was something very few people even knew the principle--how it worked. And ah, this was great. They did a great job teaching it, they really did. The one thing about the, the American aircraft, especially, well, I'm sure all of them, they had two systems. Their main fuel system, if you will, and they had the emergency system. Both had to work. Ah--of course the Japanese Zero and I'm not sure if the MIG even has an emergency system, but I know that during WWII the Japanese, they didn't even have armament, you know, so we had, we had, we kinda protected our pilots. Ah, but, no it was a good engine. It was, I mean you know by today's standards it was like a model T, I'm sure, but, but at that time it was a Cadillac. Yeah. But after Chanute, why we went to a, took about two weeks vacation at home and then we went to Camp Stoneman. When you go to Camp Stoneman in California, your next step is Korea. And I was ah--November 28th, I was gonna be 21 years old. We shipped out about November 16th, I think it was or after that even. I wasn't 21, son of a gun, we were on advanced party, we shipped out on the Woodworth--I think the name of it was. It was a little one-stacker that was they a concrete liberty or victory ship I guess they called them.

But anyway, we were an advanced party so we had Cinderella leave. [Back at night] Man--that was great. But, I wasn't 21 and you had to be 21 in the United States at that time to drink or have a drink. We were going to be gone a long time. A year, to us at the time was a long thing. And a--Market Street in San Francisco was great, great place to be, especially in '51. Ah, I went into the bars and wherever we went, that guy looked--you're old enough [laughs]. They knew it, most of the guys that was in uniform, other than the Navy. The Navy were pretty much stationed there, but anybody else that was in uniform they knew they were--in transit, they were on their way. But then we got to Korea and ah--

Mik: What does advance party mean?

Art: Advanced party means that you're on their--you're gonna pull KP [mess hall duty] every other day all the way across. [laughs]. So, they kinda felt sorry for ya they'd give you a Cinderella leave before you left. But every other day we had KP, which at the time, at first it was kinda bad, but on the, after you got going--we had many privileges too, you know. The Town Hall was open to us, day and night. So, we had--it wasn't bad, it wasn't bad duty at all, really. Except for the Pacific Ocean is not a peaceful ocean. They may call it that, but it sure isn't. Especially in November. The front end of that boat would come out, course it's the little boat, it'd be like out here on the river going down the river in a 17 foot compared to a 30 foot, you know. But that little boat, the front end would come out of the water and it would come down and slam and when it did of course the back end went out of the water and it would just rattle it. And, and many of the guys were seasick of course, you know and that was--and being that you were pulling KP all the time you could tell who was sick and who wasn't. And so to have a little bit of fun--you'd see the guy coming, he'd looked a little green around the gills, you know, flop potatoes on there and some guy would take a real high pour the gravy on it and that would be all she wrote [laughs]. That would take care of it, the poor guy would take off. But, it was--we knew where we were going and so okay, have some fun on the way.

And we got to Japan and from Japan we traveled by train for a bit, seemed like days but it wasn't of course. That little railroad, the little thin railroad, they don't have the same gauge that we do. And, but the countryside was so different. Oh, you know, gee wiz, the houses were damn near paper, and they were right next to each other, you know, it was real close and it's--people everywhere. But, we got to an airbase, I don't even know which one it was, it may have been Azuki for all I know. Ah, but we flew over to Korea. We landed in the trench at--it was at night. Darker, you know, and what they put us in a transit barracks and there must probably have been maybe, oh I'm going to guess now, maybe twenty-five--thirty of us. We were the replacements for the guys that had been there and seen the worst of it. Ah, the night that we all got in bed, you know, got this one bed if you can call it that, but a, in the morning, about 4:30 in the morning, the God awfulest noise you ever heard in your life. And that was, there was three squadrons in the 49th and then the Air National Guard. Now, I'm not sure which one it was, I thought it was Alabama, but I couldn't

swear to it. But anyway, they had several flights there also. And if it was a maximum effort that would put somewhere like maybe, oh, 100 airplanes in the air. Now you get three different flights taking off, fifteen minutes apart, and anywhere from fifteen to twenty airplanes in each flight--that can generate a lot of noise--a hell of a wake up call. [laughs] This is what you're going to hear everyday from now on, you know. And, and that's the way it was.

From there we, we ended that morning then ah, that was the first flight. That was dark when they took off. Well, they got back in about two hours, we went and ate. The next flight would take off in probably another hour, hour and a half. Ah, we had eaten, we headed down the field. We were stationed at the, at the a 7th. And that was the closest one to the middle of the, the airfield, if I can put it that way. And the 7th and then the 8th and the 9th was up on the far end. Ah, the ah--taxiway was in front. [PAUSE] Am I going at it too long?

Mik: No. Your talk is great, wonderful.

Art: The, the taxiway was right in front of the three squadrons and then it went to either end of the, of the long runway. Well, this is the first time, I mean here we are, just brand spanking new, just green as grass, and we're going to go down and watch the airplanes take off, you know. Well, this is fine. Here they go. And we're probably about, oh I'm guessing, maybe the length of a football field away from the runway. And of course I'm eager beaver, I'm right up in front. I'm the point guard, I'm up there watching everything. Something falls off this airplane as it's taking off. And it bounces down the runway in front of us and I turn around, what the heck is that? Everybody's laying on the ground. [laughs] It was a 1,000 pound bomb. [laughs]. If it had gone off, that would have been the end of everybody [laughs]. But it, you know, it fell off, it wasn't armed, thank God.

And ah--we blamed that on the National Guard. That certainly wasn't one of our guys that left that go--happen like that. But, that was my introduction to--that was the first and the last time that I went down to the runway to watch the airplanes take off. A valuable lesson, I stayed back on the flight line. I made sure my bird got in the air--and, then we didn't go back. And if we had to work on other airplanes, that was fine, and a lot did. Or if it was real quiet and everything was good, we played pinochle. I got to play a mean hand of double pinochle too. But there was nothing, not much else to do. There was no--Taegu was close, I mean, by close I mean, maybe ten--fifteen minutes away by a pretty slow truck. But there wasn't much in Taegu either, you know, there was. So--we pretty much stayed on the base; that was a hell of a lot safer too. When we first got there they issued us a rifle. It was a carbine that was the Air Force armament, you know. Ah, so we had one of those strapped on us. And that got to be really a pain in the neck, and elsewhere, because of the fact that you, you were crawling around this airplane with that cotton pickin' gun strapped on ya. So after about three months of it, they kinda said, well, maybe we can let you guys, don't have to do that anymore. We got--whether the commander changed or what, I don't know, but we could fuel airplanes without a

shirt, we could run around there, not naked, but pretty close. You know, it was hot and it was nice, we had good--it was not bad duty. No one was shooting at us at the time. Ah, there was some guys that would say "Oh yeah," but no. I never got shot at, put it that way. Ah, but we had anywhere from three to four flights a day. Now they would be anywhere from an hour and a half to two hours gone. So, you went early and you went late. And you made sure your airplane was ready to go when it was supposed to, if you could, you know. The pilot would come back and if he had a red x on that puppy, you were, you had big trouble. That would be something that grounded it's done, you can't--he would write it up and say what it was, it was a red diagonal that could fly, it was perfectly, you know, safe. If it was a red x, you're done, it's on the ground. [Pause For Microphone Set-Up]

Mik: When you talk about your bird, and saying that your bird takes off. What were you in charge of?

Art: The airplane.

Mik: One airplane?

Art: One airplane.

Mik: One airplane per crew chief?

Art: One airplane. You're crew chief of one airplane. Ah, you were responsible for that airplane. You had help--now don't get me wrong, I mean, hell, I didn't take care of that airplane all by myself. There's a lot of guys who had instruments, you had armament, you had ah--anybody. You had other crew chiefs that when--well, let's face it, you had to pull a twenty-five hour inspection on that airplane. Every twenty-five hours. Now, twenty-five--fifty, that was a biggie. Seventy-five, small one. 100, it went to Azuki. So, you went over to Japan with it, which was great duty. Man, that was nice cause they, those guys knocked off at four in the afternoon over there. And you're the crew chief and they would just assume you not come. You know, these guys, this is a team that gets on an airplane and they go through it with a fine tooth comb. They know what they're looking for, they don't need you around there getting in their way and they would just as soon you stay out of their way. And, it was all right too, yeah. Japan was pretty nice duty. The guys over there would, I'm not sure just what the sequence was, but they would spend some time, two or three days a month or every other month in Korea, so they could get hazardous pay [laughs]. I don't know if I'm supposed to tell you that or not [laughs]. But, that was, that was what they did. And, it--but those guys were sharp. They were good. They were very good. But, you know, when you fly two hours to an hour and a half, three to four times a day, and maybe what, two weeks, you got another inspection going. And the twenty-five like I say is not bad, but the fifty, that means the tail end of the airplane comes off, the engine comes out, you make sure everything's okay, it goes back together, the tail section goes back on and maybe two days if you're lucky and, and it's back on the line. So, and this is what you strive for, is to know what's wrong

with that airplane, all those little diagonal lines, which is in the log book, there's something wrong. Now why is it, what's wrong with it? The, the big one of course was the air conditioning system in that thing and it was--they had a high, a really high speed compressor. Several thousand RPM and it, you know, the bearings in this thing just couldn't take it. This poor old compressor was, you'd put it in there and about 6 missions you could make sure it was going to go again. And that pilot the first time it goes in it's great. Afterwards he's in there, he's sweating to beat the band because then you're sitting on top of a jet engine for two hours. It's going to get hot. And they did. And you can't open the window to get cooled off either. You know, it was. But that didn't ground the airplane. But that was one of those things that when you took that engine out, you made sure you had one of those on hand, so you could change it. So, at least it'd make the guy halfway comfortable. Bad enough out there without him having to be sweating. So, yeah--but these are the things that the crew chief was responsible for.

Mik: So, the diagonal line meant that there was--

Art: There was a problem, but it could fly. If there was red x, it was grounded. It was on the ground til that was taken care of. Now, if it had a hot start, which lasted, that's over a 1,000 degrees and it lasted oh I don't know, so many seconds, that grounded it. Now you had to take the aft section off, and you had to crawl up and make sure that none of the combustion chambers were warped. You had to make sure that the turbine wheel did not have any of the buckets bent or warped. That was the big thing. And because if, well I know you can't see an airplane, but in the aft section of the airplane is round, red band painted all the way around that airplane. That's where that turbine wheel is. And if those buckets come out, there're going to come right through it. They'll come right out the sides. You don't really want to stand there [laughs] run that puppy up, because it can happen. Now the eighty-four wasn't a bad airplane to work on because of the fact that, that the intake was quite high. You know, you could walk under it unless you were seven and a half feet tall, you could walk under without your head being at the intake. The eighty-six, that dang thing was on the ground, that was low. You walked in front of that thing when she's running up and [sound effect] you're inside and believe me that did happen. Not once, but several times. Now walking around the back end of the airplane was a different story. That, you didn't get sucked up, you just got knocked over. Because--and hot--the gas coming out is pretty warm, you, you knew, if you got close to it once that was enough. You, you knew what to look out for. But, every--the planes would be stacked up on our ramp two abreast. And they would run up. And you'd have anywhere from fifteen to twenty airplanes. If you had twenty airplanes, it was great. You never had all twenty-five of them, well we didn't have twenty-five airplanes very long anyway, but if you had twenty--twenty-five airplanes in a flight, boy that was really a big day. That was really a big day. And that would be the day you'd play pinochle. Because there was nothing to do.

Mik: Cause everybody's gone.

Art: Everybody's gone, you know. If you--can't work on airplane while it's up there. So, so that was the part. But when we had five airplanes in a flight, then it was busy. You had plenty to do and that happened more than once too. We got--a lot of our airplanes got shot down. It was a, these guys flew sorties that was a ground. I mean, they were um--they talk about the bridges. We lost a lot of planes there--a lot of 'em. The ah-- otherwise a lot of just battle damage. They'd get--their wing man would come in too close to and one bomb would blow up and maybe hit something big and it would blow up. Hey, you had to fly through it. And, and if you did you're liable to get some dents, scratches, whatever. Ah--my airplane, the 537--the guy got it in the cockpit--didn't even know what hit him. Talked to his wingman and it was just one big puff. And that was the end of it. So, that was kinda tough, you know. I knew the guy.

Mik: Was it always the same pilot?

Art: No, no, no, no. We--had different pilots. I mean let's face--hey these guys flew, if they flew once a day, that was too damn much. Ah, with three flights or four flights a day you don't, you don't ask a guy to do that. You can't. So, each unit had an airplane that was a pilot assigned to your airplane but if he flew your airplane--three times a month [laughs] that was pretty good. Usually it was a different pilot, but you got to know these guys. You got to know 'em. And you knew where they were going. They had their little flight plan and while you're, you're strapping them in, you're getting 'em ready, you're running, he's running it up, you're, you know, talking with him a little bit, where you going today? Well, a milk run. Oh, great. You know, hey, good. And if he was quiet and really concerned and worried, it wasn't a milk run. He would be worried of course and a justifiably so. We--one of our planes got, I guess he had engine trouble and he landed up at a Seoul. I think that's called Kimpo, I'm not sure, now that's fifty years ago. But--he came in there and they had a real nice runway, but he came in a little hot. And, I imagine he was even worried too, you know, hey, am I going to get down or not. Ah, anyway, the ah--he took out two tires and the brakes and of course the engine. That's the reason was the engine was giving him some trouble so he had to land. Ah, we were sent up there with an engine and a dolly, some wheels, some breaks, myself and another guy. And we got into a C-119, this, you know, the back end comes open, you put all the stuff in, away we go. Good. We're going to see Seoul. We're about five minutes from Seoul and I've got my head stuck up in the--into the cockpit of the airplane, you know, watching these guys fly this thing. And a--a guy looks over and here's two airplanes over there. And he says, "Oh my God, there're MIG's." "Oh, what I am going to do here?" And so, all at once here that, those two are coming our way and all at once they turn and head away. Here comes two Sabres the other way. Why you could have kissed the-- them guys [laughs]. Yeah, so that was the end of a--that was as close as I came to getting shot at, but a, we got, we got the airplane put together. And American ingenuity there, the aft section dolly on an eighty-six is not the same as an aft section dolly on a eighty-four. And they--you have to have something pretty close cause it's gotta fit, you know, and then you have to pull it off. Well, we got an eighty-six and we jury-rigged it, we got it working. So, we got it done. It took

couple days, three days to get that engine in there and get it back together again, you know, because, like I say, you had to jury-rig the thing to make it work. But we got it working. That airplane, far as I know, maybe it's still around, I don't know. But a, yeah, that was a--that was one of the differences, you know, ya it was a duty that--I look back on and I remember lots of it. Like I told you before, one of them blown up an airplane. I'll never forget that, of course. But--the--it was something that I will always remember and cherish, but I really don't want to live it over, you know. I was over there, fine, I never gone back, I have no desire to go back. Ah, I'm not sure that maybe we won't be going back there someday, I don't know. But--I'm not, it won't be in my lifetime, I don't think.

Mik: Sort of feels unfinished, doesn't it?

Art: Yeah. Yeah.

Mik: Were the crew chiefs sort of a club?

Art: Oh well sure. You had to, yeah, yeah. If you were gonna be a wise guy, you know, you need some help, tough luck. You, you better help, you better help, it was, sure. It was, you know, it was the buddy system. Absolutely. Absolutely. And, and you couldn't do it alone, there's no way you could pull a twenty-five hour inspection alone. No way. You can't pull the aft section of that thing alone, you can't pull the engine alone, you need help. And we didn't have a crew that did nothing but that, like they did in Japan. Japan had these crews that just that's all they did. This was great, kind of a production line type of thing. But then they had these planes from our squadron and the 8th and the 9th coming back there all the time. Every 100 hour inspection, you--one going over there, you know. Well, ah, they had those planes backed up. So, yeah, these guys were, these guys were good, but over there for our inspections it was the crew chiefs. Yeah. Ah--you know, the armament, they jacked the airplane up, they'd bore sight it. You know, it's gotta shoot straight, I mean you may have a good sight, but if a bullet ain't going where they supposed to, it's--so yeah, they would bore sight the plane and the instrument guys would check all their instruments and stuff like that. That's stuff we didn't do. A hydraulics guy would come in there, it's pretty hard to check the hydraulic system, landing gear with the airplane on the ground, you know. So they would jack it up and--they had to do that, that was, and this is stuff that was kinda, oh I won't say farmed-out, but it was at the fifty hour inspection that's one of the things they did. Yep. Yep.

Mik: Well I had a question [Pause] **[End of Tape WCKOR033]**

Art: And I--I don't know if you can see it on the airplane, but they have ah--airbrake. That slows this thing down a bit for landing especially. And it opens up at the bottom of the airplane and it's probably ah--two foot by eighteen inch maybe opening. And ah, its hydraulically operated, so it goes down and it stays down of course. The--when the engine is running, its got a peep hole spot to get in and see what's going on. And so before the pilot would get in, start it up, run it up, and you'd

tell him "Wind it up." you know get it up to 100%, then you'd crawl under the airplane, stick your head up in that hole, and look around in there and see what was going on. Everything is fine--you look for hydraulic leaks, look for anything that could be, you know, either without it running you don't see this stuff. Ah, it's a little noisy, very noisy. And a--did that for four years. [laughs] And, and, I don't know, I don't blame that on--to my hard of hearing. I don't blame that at all because I think it's hereditary anyway. But ah, I don't think it helped it any.

Mik: I don't think it would help any. Did you have plugs?

Art: No, no, I didn't--this was back in 51', come on. [laughs]. We didn't know what ear plugs were. No, no, now of course they, they have these ear muffs and all this fancy technology. But back then it was, you could hear, "Does it sound good or not?" And that's, like I say, when I was running up that brand new airplane especially--brand new. It flew over from Azuki. It came over on an aircraft carrier. They hauled it off at Azuki, they flew it over, which is probably what--a twenty minute flight. Landed at Taegu and we pulled it into our little hangar. It was an open canopy is all it was. Ah, and we pulled an inspection check on it. Inspection check was still pretty thorough, you know, but I mean hey this is a brand new airplane, come on. The other thing is, of course, that if you're going to make sure everything is okay you'd better run this puppy up and make sure that, you know. So, we towed it up to the flight lines, started it up, and it sounded perfect. And everything, all the gauges were good, everything was working--the oil pressure, fuel pressure, everything, great. Took it up to a 100% and it was just smooth as silk. Man, that was nice. The other day--four--the F--the E would shake and shimmy a little bit you know at 100%, this one was just like sitting right here in this chair. Boy, this is nice. Well, then we decided well, you have to check the emergency system on this thing, because this is part of it. Switched it over to emergency, which is nothing more than the fuel systems. All you're doing is changing the fuel from the main pump, if you will, to the emergency one, it's all your doing. We changed it over and you can, you can feel a, drop in the RPM, you don't--not getting full, you're not getting the full benefit, but this is an emergency system that's gonna get the guy home, that's what it's for. Ah, it sounded pretty good. And all at once there was a bang. I mean this was like a shotgun going off in your ear. "And what is this?" You know. And, you look down and fuel running all over the place and there's fire coming all over the place and you get out of the airplane, run over, grab a fire extinguisher. Well, come on, that, you know, spoon empty the ocean, you know. But ah, there was a flight taking off at that time. God--thank. And they were, every time there was a takeoff or landing, the fire department, was out there in case there was a problem. Well, these guys are going by the run up area, just as this thing blows up. And they wheeled right in there and they get in there and they yell at me, "Get the fuck outta there," you know. Well, yeah, okay. [laughs]. If you say so, I'm gone. [laughs]. And they foamed this thing down. And about as far as I know--and I never got a chance to see the airplane again, but as far as I know, they salvaged the tanks. And that was it. The rest of it--is probably over in the salvage yard right now. Probably part of the landscape, I don't know, I don't know. But ah, that was it. The--cockpit

was, was I don't know, I mean you know we got out of there and, I don't know if the cockpit stayed intact or not. This thing was on fire. You know.

Mik: You were in the cockpit?

Art: Yeah. Oh, yeah for awhile. [laughs]. You know, yeah. And ah, got out of it. And ah, there's a ladder on the side of it to get out, or you can go over the side. We went over the side, yeah. The guy was on the ladder, he got down on over the side. It's the quickest way out.

Mik: I'm surprised you even remember getting out.

Art: Oh yeah. Yeah, cause it's a, well--probably what a seven or eight foot drop. Yeah, you remember, you hit the ground running, yeah. But ah, just before I left ah, they said ah, it was not my fault. There's nothing that we could've done that would have even foreseen this was going to happen. Well, I could just about picture this poor devil getting up in the air, five or six hundred feet and that thing happen. And he couldn't bail out, ain't got enough altitude, you know. So, it's a good thing it happened when it did.

Mik: Do you have any idea what it was?

Art: Yeah, the front stage the compressor went out. It's an eleven stage compressor. Its eleven blades circulated in stages. As they go back, at each stage is shorter the blade. The first stage let go. And it, so that one blade, if it was only one blade I don't know, but as many as it took out in the second stage on down the line, till it got to the 11th stage and that was a can and it's full now and it's becoming too full and it split. And when it did, it severed the fuel line. This thing is running at 100% or close to it. There's all kinds fire back into the combustion chambers. So, that JP fuel burns pretty good and burns pretty hot. And it just went up real quick--didn't take long. And those trucks were right there. And as it was, that there wasn't much left to it.

Mik: Was that a common problem?

Art: No. Thank God, no. And that was, I don't, the first ever it happened to me, you know. And ah--yeah, no. The ah, well you don't know. Ya know? You don't know. Um, you don't know what causes these planes to all at once go down. You think that maybe it got hit by--aircraft fire, you think maybe it got something else, but you know it could be, it could be an engine problem that took it out and you don't know. The guy at combat, you don't know what it was. So, I don't know. I know that on the shut-down, we didn't get no combat there. That was--that compressor let go. And that, um--course I maintain this was a newer engine. [laughs]. It wasn't my old standby thirty-five, that was--so, no, it was, it was a good airplane. The--the airplane that we got replaced were the F-84G, which was one that would refuel in the air. They could ah, I don't know if any of ours did because of the

fact that they were not that far away from where they were going. But they could, they could refuel in the air. Which was, I don't know, far as we were concerned, it was a gimmick because we didn't need it. Not there anyway. They probably needed it somewhere else, but they sure didn't need it there.

Mik: Because there weren't large distances?

Art: We weren't that far away from where we were gonna be. If you're going to go up there and--fly around for two hours then get refueled and fly around for two more, that's four hours of shooting something up, you ain't got that much ammunition, you ain't going to carry that many bombs. So, ah, that's all you could do. And that thing would, that thing would carry four--two rockets on each wing and two thousand pound bombs. And, the tip tanks, you had to have that to get fuel for any length of time, you know. Ah, if they, if they ever got into a jam where they were in trouble they could drop those tip tanks real quick--and they're gone. You use the fuel out of them first.

Mik: And if they didn't get in trouble would they return with the tip tanks?

Art: Oh sure. Oh yes, absolutely. Yeah.

Mik: But you must have had a huge stockpile of tip-tanks?

Art: No. No, not that many. Now, that did, that was not a common occurrence. I mean, let's face it, if the guy was shot up, he--maybe he was gonna ditch it somewhere else, you know and not just the tip-tanks but the whole thing. And this happened. We didn't--we lost some pilots, now don't get me wrong, a lot of them, but ah, not all of 'em. Not everybody that went down was lost. Some of them went down in the ocean, some of them went down in friendly territory, some of them made it halfway back and had to bail out, you know, it was that type of thing. So it was ah, we didn't lose all, all our pilots. Thank God.

Mik: What kind of damage did your bird come back with?

Art: Ah, bullet holes. [laughs] That was quite common. And ah, like I say, ground, ground fire ah, battle damage if you will, ground damage from, from--flying into and through a bomb explosion, you know. That would ah, sure, rocks and crap coming up outta there, this--you don't want that going down the intake of that engine, I'll tell you that. You know--if it hit that it was a goodbye. If it hit a wing or tail section or something like that, no, not that big of a deal, but they could get back. But if it went in the engine it was gone.

Mik: Who repaired the bullet holes?

Art: The sheet metal man. We had sheet metal guys. And if it was went through and hit something critical and you took it apart and got what was inside and, and ah--repaired that. And he patched up the outside.

Mik: Did you have any contact with the pilots beyond helping them strap in?

Art: No. No. Ah, no. I don't think they wanted to, and I don't think we wanted to. You know, don't get too attached. Don't get too attached. Ah, they had a separate barracks, an area that they were in. They had an officers' club, we had the NCO club. Ah, no. Not ah, very, very little contact other than on the flight line--and a lot of contact then. You got to know the guys pretty good. They got to know--that you knew what pilot was going to give you a hard time and what one wasn't, you know. Most of them did not give you a hard time, don't get me wrong. But ah, like I say, the guy had that airplane and if your little air conditioning compressor was out, he didn't want to fly your airplane. [laughs] And if he did, get this thing fixed, well it's gotta be fifty hours of flight before we can take it apart. And ah, made it kinda uncomfortable for them. So, yeah, some of the guys would be griping a little bit, but most of, most of the ah--diagnose you could take care of yourself or have, have it taken care of.

Mik: Were there helicopters on your base?

Art: No. Well, there I won't say there weren't helicopters. There were the--but they were not big Hueys we've got now and things like that. They were the little ones that would come down and pick up two guys and pick them up and take them to--the M*A*S*H units. You know, them type of helicopters, yeah. We didn't have any. We didn't have them there. The only thing we had there was 84's. We had the 84's and the, I'm sure it was the Alabama National Guard, and I don't know how many flights they had, their squadrons, but ah, they had a few of them. But we always said that they had the milk run. [laughs] A massive effort. The whole gang went out and boy that was something, that was a lot of airplanes left that field.

Mik: I know you went through that but how many ah--twenty?

Art: A squadron was, a squadron was issued twenty-five airplanes to start out with, I guess. At one time we were down to five. We had five, so--

Mik: There were three squadrons?

Art: Three squadrons.

Mik: Plus the national guard?

Art: Plus the National Guard. The National Guard ah, I'm not sure about this but I think that when we got our new airplanes, the National Guard got our old ones. You know. But ah, actually they were still alright, don't get me wrong, but ah they gave

the regulars the new airplanes. I'm sure they did. Because ah, and we, we got, we didn't get twenty-five new airplanes all at once either. You know, they would come in two and three at a time.

Mik: When they went out did you know when they were due back?

Art: Yeah, pretty good idea. Yeah, you could, you know especially, the pilots would tell you, you know, where are we going, if we're going to the bridges maybe we'll be back in two hours. Maybe we won't be back. But ah, if it was milk run, then that's, that's I don't mean by a milk run, I mean strafing ah, things like this that they were going to get a railroad track or something like that, that wasn't, that wasn't so bad. Although some of them got shot up there too because the railroad depots were pretty well defended. Ah, and ah, it was nice to hit them rather than just a single track because hell, they could fix that in a matter of hours. But ah, if you hit the switch engines and you hit all that good stuff, why then it takes a little time and this is what they would go after. And of course they were defended. And we'd get a lot of ack-ack [anti aircraft fire] there. And we'd lose some airplanes there. But it was, it was not the ah--death trap.

Mik: You mentioned the bridges and I'm not clear on what that means.

Art: You seen the movie?

Mik: Like "The Bridges of Toko Ri"?

Art: That was it. The Navy got a lot of credit in that movie but our guys did a lot too.

Mik: You said that, and I know this is uncomfortable, but you said something in the listening session about a lot of planes lost one day?

Art: Yeah. Maximum effort was--they'd go in there and just keep pounding them. And you know, you'd drop your bombs and then you strafe and then you'd drop--try to get outta there. It was tough.

Mik: And it was almost your whole squadron?

Art: Not the whole squadron, but damn near all that went. Yeah. That ah--[sigh] not every time, you know, but one time it did.

Mik: Yeah, that's tough.

Art: Anyway, I left Korea and ah, I was--one thing nice about it when you transferred outta there they gave you a choice, well they gave you three choices. Not guaranteed you are going to get any one of them. But, but you had three choices. Well, my first choice of course was Truax Field, Madison because they had jets. Ah, they didn't have the 84, they had the 89, but you use the same engine. Nice, I

liked that. Ah, they had two engines. [laughs] I didn't like that. But ah, the eighty-nine was called a Saberjet and ah I--that was where I ended up. And I spent, another truth, my last two and a half years there. And ah, the squadron that I was originally with when I got there was the 433rd and they had these Scorpion, they were called, made by Northrop. And ah, I don't want to bad mouth anything but that was a dog, I thought. Some of the guys said oh, great airplane, well, as long as you didn't have to work on it, it was okay. But ah, it was a big, it was a night fighter. You know, all-weather fighter and it was, that was, it served its purpose. But ah, Lockheed made a F-94, which had radar and it was a two-seater and it was a good airplane. It had one engine. It wasn't a J-35, it was a different kind of a engine entirely. But it was still a jet engine. Ah, when the ninety, the 433rd left Truax, they went to Alaska. And if you had less than I think it was something like nine months to serve you did not have to go. Or you could go if you wanted to re-up for a year. I didn't lose anything in Alaska, so I stayed in ah, at Truax. And ah, I went up to the 86's, the F-86D, that was one that had the radar in the nose. And that was, that was a good airplane too. It was a, it was a Saberjet with radar. Good airplane.

Mik: It had two engines?

Art: Nope, that was a single engine. That had the J-47. That was a good engine.

Mik: What didn't you like about two engines? Twice the work?

Art: Twice the work. [laughs]. Come on. [laughs]. Yeah, it was, and not just twice the work, but it was a twice the trouble. You know.

Mik: Did they have to be tuned?

Art: Of course. Yeah, you better. [laughs] You didn't, you didn't take off with one of them believe me. [laughs]. Yeah, yeah.

Mik: Were there any weather problems in Korea?

Art: No. Not really weather. Oh, we had a, ah, why I guess it was supposed to be a hurricane type, whatever it is, big wind. Ah, we tied them all down. We've had worse storms here in Onalaska. It wasn't that bad. But ah, what we did have over there was locusts. My God, did we have locusts. I guess that is kinda like what mosquitoes would be here. Only there're about hundred times bigger. And a jet engine when it's idling sets up a terrific oh, singing noise. It's not real loud, only when they take off, you know. But just idling, running, it sets up this thing. Well, you get fifty to twenty of them puppies sitting out there singing and they sound just like locusts. And, it attracts locusts from everywhere. And the hills of Korea were loaded with them. And, they, the beautiful part of it is that, that, that, the jet engine is made in such a way that these compressors, you know all these blades going around, makes a real good mixer. Yeah. [laughs] And those locusts would get in

there and the first thing you knew they were coming out the back end, but you didn't even see them. And that was just puree.

Mik: Must have been just pureed.

Art: Pureed real good. You know and it didn't even, yeah, they had screens on the front of them, but the locusts just start straining and go right through. They had no problem. [laughs] And they'd go right, right through it. And, and ah, the locusts did not get stuck. A duck or large bird, that's a different story. They'd get stuck in the screens. But the locusts would go right through. But the locust season, thank God was only about two months. But those two months, believe me, they were--you'd swat them, they were all over the place.

Mik: So when they came out the back was there--

Art: No. They didn't come out, they didn't come out the back. They didn't come out the back, smoke came out the back. They were well done.

Mik: Well done [laughs].

Art: Yeah. Yep. And so after ah--1955, February second, was when I left the Air Force. I was Staff Sergeant at the time. And ah, when I was with the 432nd now, which was the one that stayed in Truax. Ah, I was flight chief, not just crew chief, I had ah, oh four or five airplanes that had crew chiefs. I was Staff Sergeant. Wow.

Mik: I was wondering what that duty was at Truax. Was that just keeping Air Force trained?

Art: Same, same identical thing as Korea. You were in charge of an airplane and you made sure it works. Now, you have to remember something, we were the North, North American Air Command. Which--which has had flights right out of Madison. We were, we would scramble, who had two airplanes on, on alert every hour on the hour. Day and night 24 hours a day. And those two planes, and they were not always the same two of course, and it's not always the same crew and not, of course the same pilot. But, you, you took a rotation type of thing. You know, you, you, if it was your turn in the barrel, you were the barrel. And ah, so, these planes would--if there was a bleep on the radar and it seemed like commercial airplanes could do this quite often, there, whatever it is that they, where they fly into someplace without being recognized, well up would come two jets after them. And of course we took off our emergency--our scrambling runway was right over Madison. Now, when you start scrambling these two, especially the 89, that was four engines blasting away, coming off--taking off and they're going right over the city of Madison. Low. And you'd--wake you up at night pretty good. They can wake you up real good. People in Madison and I can, they got kinda tired of this. I mean, come on, why don't you guys scramble the other way. Well, you scramble to get off the ground not to make it easier for you, come on. So, ah, one month--the Air Force there paid us,

everybody, in two dollar bills. That's no lie. That Madison was flooded with two dollar bills. I still got several of them. And that was the last we heard of bitching about scrambling airplanes. That was it.

Mik: Is that why they did it?

Art: That's exactly why they did it. To show that, hey, yes, you want us outta here, economically maybe you don't. And certainly the Defense Department didn't want us out of there. But ah, the civilians that were being woke at night at night.

Mik: So that was cold war duty?

Art: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. And all weather--all weather. Yeah. Yep.

Mik: Tell me about the runways--corrugated.

Art: That ah, I don't know what they call PVC or something like that, don't they? I think that's this pipe that they have now. But it was, it was a, a temporary steel matting that was interlaced and it had a holes in it, for lightening, you know, you didn't want to make this thing so heavy. So, and they made our taxiway and our ramp was all that and our runway was that. Now that runway was many, many feet long. I don't know what it was, but it was long. And you, it wasn't so long that you could say, "Okay I'm going to touch down fifty feet further or 100 feet further or 100 yards this way or that way", you know. You touched down so you had plenty of room at the other end. Ah, you get these planes--sixty of them taking off. Um, three or four times a day, they've all gotta land. And as they do they're going to come in a little warm. They're not gonna-- and the, the tires that are made with little flaps, so that they're spinning as they land. Now lets face it, now we were coming in at 400 miles an hour, those wheels ain't going 400 miles an hour till you hit the ground and then they're going 400 miles an hour. And, they would just tear up anything that's there. So, they would end up on this steel matting and they would end up tearing it up. You know. And, and it would--as where they were put together, it would pop up. Now the next poor guy that lands on that thing that's popped up, he's going to tear up a tire. We were changing tires every flight. That's no lie. We had tires changing, the poor tire shack was working day and night just changing tires. And, of course, when your bird came back and you checked it and if you had a big ol' slit in that tire, you better change that puppy because the next time coming in if he hits that that same slip, it's goodbye. So, ah, they were all changed. Usually it was the main wheel of course, because they land first and then he noses it down on the front wheel. That one changed every 15 landings, the other ones you'd change every landing. Damn near every landing. You could, might get two out of it. If you got two out of it you were doing very well. Yeah.

Mik: Did that cause--

Art: That caused us to get--

Mik: Crash?

Art: That caused us--No, no. Ah, no not that I can remember of anyway. Ah, maybe you spun one or something like that, but it didn't, you know it didn't rack it up. Ah, but it did get us a new concrete runway. It did that. After about, oh I would say I was there probably about five, maybe five or six months, maybe not that long, we had us a new runway and that ended the tire problem. God that was great because now, I mean you were changing tires and this was the buddy system, I mean, you know, you couldn't change--this plane has to turn around in an hour and a half. You had to fuel it, you had to make sure the hydraulics stuff was everything, you had to make sure everything worked, and you had to change new tires. And you just can't do it in an hour and a half. You can't. So, you got the buddy system worked in great that way. If some guy's plane was laid up, I mean, you know, he'd come out and give you a hand and ah, that was great. Otherwise--and, let's face it, that tire's got a big slit in it. That's a Red X—you're done. They can't fly. Cause they can't land. You know. And this is--yea.

Mik: When did the pilots fill out their log books?

Art: After the flight.

Mik: Before and after?

Art: After, not before, after. Before he'd look at it, you know. And know that, well—it's going to be kinda warm in here today. [laughs] You know. But ah, afterwards if there was something that, you know, and it's hard, I can't remember what they were. Most of them were simple little things, you know. Maybe a, this toggle switch didn't work for that toggle, and it was nothing that was earth shattering, well, okay fine. That's not a Red X, no problem. And so the next guy looks at it and says, "Okay, I can't use that toggle switch." No big deal. Yeah.

Mik: So I still--I don't know, it just always surprised me that this is the way it was on carriers too. That pilots just got into any plane. They didn't have their plane, it was any plane. And I think when I get into a different car, it's different but it's like getting into another car like mine.

Art: Exactly. Yeah, yeah. Just like if you had '50 Ford, you knew where all the buttons were. The buttons didn't change. They were all there. And we did not customize our airplanes. [laughs]. They were, they were standard equipment. Yeah. Yeah. The only thing that we ever customized was and I had done this a couple times and I got told I'd rather you not do this, and I, you know, I have a nice little car that I polish and I keep it clean and everything and that I wanted my airplane polished and clean and you know. And ah, there's a certain amount of, of leakage that gets on the wings and on the belly of the plane and stuff like that, so if, you take hydraulic fluid would clean that off just beautiful. And it would make it shiny and sparking clean.

Hell of a target. [laughs] Don't do that no more. [laughs] Yeah, yeah. [interviewer says something] Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah, they would just as soon have a dirty airplane--within reason. You know, they like to have the cockpit canopy clean, but that was, they didn't care if under the wings were clean or not. Yeah.

Mik: When you talked about that red circle, was that there so you wouldn't stand--

Art: That was to let you know where it was. Yeah--and ah, if you didn't have enough brains to stay away from it, why then, alright. Now, I don't remember of anybody or being--told to stay away from it sure--I don't remember anybody getting hurt in any way with a bucket coming out through the side. But it was a possibility. Yeah. And that was just a good common sense.

Mik: So, you're up in the cockpit, you run the engine, did you ever have a desire to fly a jet?

Art: Oh yeah—sure, yeah. You ever sit in a car when you were a kid and want to drive it? Sure, absolutely. But, taking off I think I could've handled that. I don't know if I could have got the puppy back down again. You know, that ha, that was an art all on its own. You'd see these guys come in of course they don't fly into the ground, they drop in nice and slow and easy. I say 400 miles an hour, that's way too fast to land an airplane, but ah--maybe if you want to burn off some tires and brakes it might not be [laughs] But it's a little fast, normal, normal landings, especially on that concrete--steel runway. You want to come in slow there. You want to come in slow. And then you try to, you know, here's that spot that--and you can see it because it black from oil and everything else, you know, its just black. And ahead of it is not so bad, so you keep pushing the envelope. Little bit more each time, so that you can land on something that's not all tore up. Well, yeah that's great, but gee wiz, if you're coming down and you think you're, this is where it's going to land, I mean I don't know if these guys can land on a postage stamp, I don't think so. You know, this is, I wanna get down and I'm glad to get down. Here it is. Yeah.

Mik: And there was an end to the runway?

Art: You bet. You bet there was. Strange enough there's a Russian tank sitting on the end of it. [laughs] Yeah. Along the side of it there--before I got there, they were that close. Yeah.

Mik: They just stayed there--

Art: Oh the tanks stayed there. The Russians didn't. [laughs].

Mik: No, I didn't think that the Russians would stay there [laughs]. I think we're done.

[End of Interview]