

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
LEONARD J. GRIFFITH  
USAF B-26 Pilot, Korean War  
2000

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**Griffith, Leonard J.**, (1928 - ), Oral History Interview, 2000.

User copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 70 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 70 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Videocassette, 1 videocassette (ca. 70 min.), color, 1/2 inch.

### **ABSTRACT**

Leonard Griffith, a Janesville, Wis. native, discusses his Korean War service as a B-26 pilot with the Air Force. He talks about basic training at Lackland Air Force Base (Texas), flight training at Columbus Air Force Base (Mississippi), and training with international soldiers. Griffith describes the differences between flying single engine and twin engine planes and the difficulties of dive bombing. He comments on the mission he remembers the most vividly, rotating shifts on the landing strip, and changes in the war as it became a stalemate. After returning to the United States, Griffin touches upon serving as an Air Force instructor and service in the Reserves. He also mentions his regrets over not using the GI Bill and opening his own business.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Griffith, (b. April 3, 1928) flew B-26 airplanes with the Air Force during the Korean War. He was honorably discharged from service in 1958.

Interviewed by James F. McIntosh, M. D., Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2000

Transcribed by Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer John K. Driscoll, 2002

Transcript edited by Abigail Miller, 2003.

## Interview Transcript

McIntosh: Why don't you just feel comfortable. We're talking to Len Griffith. It is the 24th day of August, year 2000. Where were you born, Len?

Griffith: Janesville, Wisconsin.

McIntosh: Okay. And when did you go in the service?

Griffith: Well, I think I can remember the very day. I think it was November 20th, 1950.

McIntosh: Okay. And were you drafted, or did you volunteer?

Griffith: I volunteered. What happened was--I received my call for the draft in--it was supposed to be in the October draft call, in 1950. Of course, the draft was on in those days. And then I had even received my call to be drafted and then I decided, I thought I wanted to join the Air Force, because I had a brother who was a pilot in World War II. And so I went to the draft board and they said I could be released from the draft if I joined the Air Force. So I went to the Air Force recruiter and joined the Air Force. And was released from the draft then.

McIntosh: Sure. So where did they send you first?

Griffith: I was, well, we went to Milwaukee. There were about eleven of us, I think, in the Group from Wisconsin. And I felt quite honored because they gave me the packet of, I guess, the information for the eleven inductees. And I know there was another fellow who was also a college graduate, and I think he thought that he should have been in charge of the group. But they gave me the packet, and we went by train then. From Milwaukee to San Antonio, Texas. And I was stationed at Lackland Air Force Base. Took my basic training there.

McIntosh: How long did that last?

Griffith: I think it was either four or six weeks. Basic training.

McIntosh: And then, did they start breaking you into specialties? Training, or not?

Griffith: Well, I inquired either during or after my basic training about pilot's training at Lackland, there. And they made arrangements for me to take both the written and the physical exam. For pilot's training. And I did that. I wore glasses in those days. I wore glasses all the way through college. And I had my degree by that time?

McIntosh: In what? The degree?

Griffith: I had an education degree, and probably would have gone into teaching had I not

gone in the service. But, any way, on the way over to take my physical, I had heard that you could not wear glasses. So I took off my glasses that very day, and I did pass the eye test. And I only passed the written test by a couple of points. And I thought I was pretty intelligent, in those days, having just got out of college a few months before that. But, I just barely passed the written test. So I had to - - want me to go on, then?

McIntosh: By all means. That's why we're here.

Griffith: They told me that it was quite a wait to get into pilots' training. I think, because of the Korean War had started by that time. And I think they told me it would be about a year. There was quite a back-up of applicants for pilots' training. So I spent a few months there at Lackland, and then they shipped a bunch of us who were waiting for pilots' training up to, I'm trying to think of the, no, it's not even on there. Northern Texas. I'm trying to think of the Air Force base. I can't think of it. Anyway, in northern Texas. And we waited there at that base for about a year before I was called in to pilots' training. I was called into pilots' training, I think, in September or October of 1951. And my first assignment in pilots' training was at Columbus Air Force Base, in Mississippi. And there we trained in the single engine T-6. With a student in front and the instructor behind.

McIntosh: Did you get with those little smaller planes, to begin with? The Piper Cub?

Griffith: No. No, we started right in the T-6.

McIntosh: That was a pretty advanced airplane.

Griffith: Well, it probably was, in those days. It was, of course, a conventional aircraft. Prop driven. It was a World War II aircraft. And we had six months of training in the T-6. I think they soloed us in about forty hours of training. And we had, in addition to the American students, we had foreign students. I don't know. From Netherlands, France, some of the European countries. And in my group of, I think, three or four students, with one instructor, we had two foreign students. And we really enjoyed being with them. And trying to learn their language. And they were learning ours. Since then, I have found out that at least one of those students have died. We do keep up with students through our newspapers and so forth. Then, at the end of basic training, after we were through training in the T-6, we had a choice. And we didn't necessarily get out choice. But we had a choice or either going into jet fighters or the conventional light bombers. And I, and who turned out to be my best friend, my roommate there in basic training, between the two of us, we decided we wanted to go into the small bombing, the bombers, rather than the fighters. And so, then, I did get my choice. We were sent to Reese Air Force Base, at Lubbock, Texas. We trained in the twin-engine B-25. Again, that was an aircraft left over from World War II. And I think they even bombed Tokyo off

some carriers with the B-25.

McIntosh: Oh, yes. The famous Doolittle Raid, with the B-25s.

Griffith: Yes, that's right.

McIntosh: They had sixteen airplanes in it.

Griffith: Yes. And, so, we trained in the B-25, and that took about another six months. So we graduated as second lieutenants, and pilots, in October of 1952. Then we had a short wait there at Reese Air Force Base before our next assignment. Our next assignment was back, I think now, I can remember, the base I was trying to think of in northern Texas. So, because I went back there now for B-26 training. It was Shepherd Air Force Base. I am trying to think of the city, but I can't.

McIntosh: That's not important.

Griffith: Shepherd Air Force Base, in northern Texas. So at Shepherd Air Force Base, we transitioned into the B-26 that we were going to fly in Korea.

McIntosh: Now, you have to stop there.

Griffith: Yes.

McIntosh: Tell me a bit about learning to fly a twin-engined versus single-engined. What were the problems that you had to overcome?

Griffith: Well, with the single-engine T-6, of course, it had just a stick to control, for the major controls. I think that was the major thing, except that in the T-6, the single-engine trainer, you had one engine. So you had torque to deal with, both in take-off and in landing. Torque is with the prop pulling you, it pulls you to the right a little bit.

McIntosh: So you had to constantly fight that?

Griffith: Yes. Yes. Both in take-off and landing. With the twin-engine, then you have the wheel that controls. A little bit easier with the wheel.

McIntosh: With take-off and landing?

Griffith: Yes.

McIntosh: Because of the balance and--

- Griffith: Yes. And, of course, with the two engines, why, there is, as you say, more balance. And I think it was a little easier to fly both the B-25 and the B-26 with the two engines.
- McIntosh: But you were prepared and capable of landing on one engine?
- Griffith: Yes. I did do that one time in Korea. And I suppose in training they did shut off an engine. I don't remember that, but it was supposed to be able to land on one engine.
- McIntosh: Of course, you couldn't take off on one engine?
- Griffith: No.
- McIntosh: I assumed that. Now, we got that done, tell me the difference between the -25 and the -26, which is a hotter air plane.
- Griffith: Okay. That was fairly easy.
- McIntosh: Oh, really?
- Griffith: Because we were quite skilled in flying the B-25, then the transition to the B-26 for us cadets right out of flying school, it was a lot easier. Now, when we got into the B-26 training at Shepherd Air Force Base, there were other students who were just coming off a desk job, and maybe they were captains and majors. And they were trying to transition into the B-26. And they had a much more difficult time transitioning to the B-26 than we did as cadets.
- McIntosh: It was a shorter jump for you.
- Griffith: Yes. So, it was quite easy for us to fly the B-26. It was hotter.
- McIntosh: Right. Went faster, right?
- Griffith: It went faster.
- McIntosh: How fast did it go?
- Griffith: Well, it was red-lined at 425.
- McIntosh: That is a lot faster than the -25.
- Griffith: Yes, it is. I don't know what the -25 was red-lined at. But, of course, you never reached the red-line speed, except in the B-25 in the days that they were doing glide bombing. You had to be careful not to exceed the 425 miles an hour.

- McIntosh: How about the bomb capacity? How would you compare the two?
- Griffith: I don't remember. Of course, in training, in the B-25, we didn't carry any bombs. In the B-26, when we were in Korea, we might have carried maybe six 500 pounders.
- McIntosh: That was the maximum?
- Griffith: Yea, as I recall it was.
- McIntosh: And you couldn't carry anything heavier?
- Griffith: I don't remember that we did.
- McIntosh: So that was sort of a standard load. Six of the--
- Griffith: Yea. I would guess that was the standard load. And I only had, in Korea, I only had three combat missions, so it wasn't a matter of my going on a lot of missions.
- McIntosh: Right. And, I got off the track. For the crew. Both planes had a crew of how many?
- Griffith: Well, again, the B-25, in training, we didn't carry a crew except the instructor. It was the student in the left seat and the instructor in the right seat. The B-25s in training, of course, had the dual controls. The B-26, in training, had dual controls, with the student, and the instructor on the right of the student. But then when we got into B-26s, from our training base at Shepherd, and I don't, I think I am wrong in saying Shepherd. I think it was another base in northern Texas, where we trained. It may come to me.
- McIntosh: Sure.
- Griffith: From there, we were sent out to Langley Air Force Base, in Virginia.
- McIntosh: Don't forget. Tell me, now. How big a crew?
- Griffith: Oh, I am sorry. In the B-26, we had just three men crew. The pilot and the navigator-observer. And he would either sit in the right seat or in the nose of the aircraft. Some were equipped one way or the other. And then we had a waist gunner. A three man crew in the B-26.
- McIntosh: One waist gunner?

- Griffith: Yes. Yes. And when we went--
- McIntosh: The bombardier was the navigator, too?
- Griffith: Actually, yes. But actually the pilot dropped the bombs in the B-26. The navigator-observer would bring us over the target, and then the pilot--
- McIntosh: But you could do this with your control, in other words?
- Griffith: Yes.
- McIntosh: Did you do any dive bombing, or was this straight level?
- Griffith: We practiced, again, at Langley, when we went to Langley Air Force Base, we did pick up our crew then. Our navigator-observer and our gunner. And we trained with them at Langley Air Force Base. In training there, because most of our missions, we thought most of our missions in Korea, where we were heading, would be night missions, then most of our practice was done at Langley at night. So we did do some dive bombing at night and--
- McIntosh: That was exciting.
- Griffith: Well, it was. And, I'll tell you, one of the first nights I was out, it was a pitch black night. Fortunately, I had an instructor with me. It was a pitch black night and, of course, you get out over the water, and you can't tell which is up or down, or sideways, with the--
- McIntosh: You can't tell where the bottom is, can you?
- Griffith: No, no you can't. And we did, you pull most of your power off of the engines. And we did go into a dive. And I don't know whether we had nose guns in that aircraft or not. But anyway, in pulling up, the person in the right seat would tap you on the shoulder when it was time to pull up. And in pulling up, then, of course, your instruments are all over the place. They are just, you know, your altimeter and--
- McIntosh: Just going nuts.
- Griffith: Yea. And just spinning. And I got a little mis-oriented. You've heard of vertigo, of course?
- McIntosh: Sure. [Unintelligible.]
- Griffith: Yes. I've got some vertigo. And I couldn't tell. We were in a climb. And the



instructor kept telling me to push down on the wheel, to level off. And I thought I was. And apparently I wasn't. And the aircraft started to shudder.

McIntosh: And the tail.

Griffith: Yea. And then he took the wheel and got us leveled off. And as a result of that, I had to have a check-ride with another instructor. But I passed that all right. So, anyway, we did train there at Langley. We had six weeks of training with our bombardiers and our gunners. And then we were shipped to Korea.

McIntosh: They had guns in the, on both sides of the middle of that craft?

Griffith: Yea. I don't, well, I think maybe it was a bottom turret.

McIntosh: Oh, then he could just swing around?

Griffith: Yea. I think it was a bottom turret.

McIntosh: Nobody in the tail?

Griffith: Ah, no.

McIntosh: Like the B-25 had somebody in the tail.

Griffith: Ah, yes. No.

McIntosh: I think there were fewer, I think there were more people in the B-25 than the 26. My recollection, talking to these people, I think five for sure.

Griffith: Could have been. Yea.

McIntosh: I'm not sure. The B-26 had solved the wing problem by the time you got to fly it. You know, early in World War II, when they were developing that plane, you know, they had trouble with the short wings. They tended to slip. And then they were difficult to right back. And I think they extended those wings a bit.

Griffith: I guess I don't remember that. I do remember seeing early models with shorter wings. But we didn't have any problem with the wings. The problem with the B-26 was that the front of the engines were about the same height as you sat in the cockpit. So in order to look out either way, left or right, you had to tip the aircraft a little bit. Because the engines were in your way.

McIntosh: In your view, huh?

Griffith: Yes. they were.

McIntosh: I'll be darned.

Griffith: And, so, anyway, we were sent to Korea. I think I had a thirty-day furlough before we went to Korea. And we arrived in Korea, I think in May of 1953. And we did have to get checked out in the B-26 there in Korea. And then, unfortunately, right after I got to Korea, it was that time of year when the spring monsoons. It rained so much. And was so damp and humid and hot. And I got an bad ear infection. I no more had gotten there than I got a bad ear infection. So I was off flying status for about a month. And then by the time I got back in flying status, I only got three combat missions before the war ended.

McIntosh: Did you fly in formation with several other planes? Or did you do solos? And mostly at night on a solo basis?

Griffith: Yes. Yes. There were basically two types of mission that the B-26 flew on in Korea. And one was called a tadpole. I don't know how they got the name tadpole. But anyway, you flew up to the front lines, which was the 38th Parallel. And then ground radar would take over. You would call in and make your contact with the ground radar. They would contact you and direct you over a target.

McIntosh: They would pick the target?

Griffith: Yea. They would pick the target. Some area that they were having trouble with just north of the line. Then the other type of target was the, ah, we flew targets of opportunity. And the way they had North Korea, at least the lower part of North Korea, mapped out into segments. And, as I recall, they had a B-26 flying over each segment, one of those segments, twenty-four hours a day. So it did include some daytime flying.

McIntosh: Did you notice that at the bases? There was always somebody in the air?

Griffith: No. No.

McIntosh: They didn't always come to your base then?

Griffith: No. There were two bases of the B-26s in Korea. I was stationed at Kunsan Air Force Base, on the west coast of Korea. And about half-way between the 38th Parallel and the tip of Korea, on the west coast. Then the other B-26 base was down at Pusan, at the tip, the far tip of Korea. And those were the two B-26 bases. And so, with those targets of opportunity, we dropped on anything we saw. Any lights at night. I suppose in the daytime you dropped on any trains or trucks.

- McIntosh: How could you determine if the lights came from a village or from a collection of soldiers?
- Griffith: We left that up to our observers, our navigators.
- McIntosh: That was their responsibility?
- Griffith: Yea. The one mission that was the most vivid--
- McIntoshL Yea, tell me about that one.
- Griffith: --in my mind, we flew up the west coast of Korea and, I don't remember what the target was, but it was not too far over the 38th Parallel. But because they were used to U. S. aircraft flying at night, looking for places to drop bombs, naturally, they had their lights out in North Korea. And I don't remember as we approached the target any lights at all, but, of course, our navigator knew where we were. And just about the time we were over the target, I have Inchon in mind, but I don't know if it was actually Inchon.
- McIntosh: That is pretty far west.
- Griffith: West?
- McIntosh: That's on the west coast.
- Griffith: Okay. We were up on the west coast, then.
- McIntosh: That is where my hospital ship was, near there all the time.
- Griffith: It could have been Inchon. But, anyway, just as we approached the target, and it was pitch black, pitch black night. Three or four of the beacon lights lighted up on us. And then they started--
- McIntosh: From the airfield, do you think?
- Griffith: I don't know if it was an airfield or the city itself. But then they started firing at us, .50 calibers. And, as you recall, every fifth shell is a tracer. So we could see the tracers coming at us, and, fortunately, we must have been up maybe ten thousand feet. So we were high enough that you could see the tracers dropping off, but it gives you kind of an uneasy feeling.
- McIntosh: But, of course.
- Griffith: You raise up in your seat a little bit.

- McIntosh: To get away from them.
- Griffith: With those tracers coming at you. But we were taught in training, if the beacon lights opened up on us, and we were trying to get out of the beacon lights, not to turn the aircraft one way or the other, because you could see that from the ground, and they could follow you. So what you did was kick in a rudder, either left or right, depending on which way you wanted to go, and would slide, keep your aircraft fairly level, you would slide out of the beacon light.
- McIntosh: Sideways, sort of.
- Griffith: Sideways. It was an uncoordinated sort of maneuver, and your needle went one way, and your ball went the other, so it was very uncoordinated. But it was one way you could get out of the beacon light. So we did, then, we did drop our bombs. And then we turned and went out over the water. I think that is called the East China Sea, just east of China. And we went out over the water and flew back down to our base after dropping our bombs.
- McIntosh: Landing that aircraft at night, was there any special problem with that?
- Griffith: No, except, again, when we approached the Kunsan radio tower, we called in about thirty miles out. And so many times after we passed over the beacon, the radio beacon there at Kunsan, if we were going to make a GCA approach — ground control approach — they would direct us out over the water. And you had to be very careful. You had to go on instruments because, again, going out over the water.
- McIntosh: At night.
- Griffith: With a few stars up in the sky, and a few boats in the water, you couldn't tell where the horizon was. So after you got over the water, it was strictly instruments. And, you know, in flying training, they told you to bleed your instruments. We did lose some aircraft. In fact, I was in the ground control unit one night. There had to be an officer in the ground control unit out on the runway at all times.
- McIntosh: Oh, so you rotated duty in there?
- Griffith: Yes. Yes. And you'd pull that duty maybe once a month, four-hour shifts, or something. But one night I was on duty in the ground control unit and a pilot called in, and, again, they took him out over the water for a GCA approach. And after the instructor gives you instructions, you immediately acknowledge the instructions. And any time you make a maneuver, either in a turning maneuver or descending, you would acknowledge that. And the pilot failed to make the

response. Acknowledge the response. And from the runway I could see a bright red flash over the water. And he had crashed.

McIntosh: [Unintelligible.]

Griffith: Yes. And, unfortunately, his name was Griffith, the same as mine. And I found, and then there was another, I think a navigator at our base at Kunsan by the name of Griffin, and he was killed in a practice mission. And I heard that there was some talk about not flying with this Griffith because--

McIntosh: Bad luck.

Griffith: Because it was bad luck.

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

I was taken off flying status with my ear infection. They went on and got missions with other pilots. My navigator got seventeen missions. So he left Korea in about six months.

McIntosh: Was there a standard number of missions that would send you home?

Griffith: Well, in the early days, you had to fly fifty missions.

McIntosh: Fifty?

Griffith: Before you were rotated. But, then, I think it was kind of a reduction type of thing where if you got less than fifty, then you spent, as I say, my navigator, because he got seventeen missions, he went home in six months.

McIntosh: So, as the war quieted down to a stalemate, there was less opportunity, wasn't there?

Griffith: And in those days, President Eisenhower had just been elected president, and before he was elected, I think he said that he would go to Korea and try to initiate the armistice. And he did then. I think the war ended July 1, of 1953.

McIntosh: Right.

Griffith: And, so I had to stay until May of 1954, in Korea. And then I was rotated. And fortunately, while I, in my college days back here in Wisconsin, I had gone to an Indianapolis 500 Mile Race, when we were college students. So, when I was over there in Korea, I had a few extra dollars, so I sent to Indianapolis to get tickets for the 500 Mile Race. In fact, we got them. In those days, I think penthouse seats at

Indianapolis were only like \$40 apiece. They are probably \$500 these days. But I did send and get penthouse seats, thinking that I was going to be rotated back to the States in time to go to the Indianapolis Memorial Day Race. Well, unfortunately, when we rotated from Korea back to Japan, there was a big backlog of people waiting to go back to the States. So I had to wait in Japan more than thirty days, and missed the 500 Mile Race.

McIntosh: That was too bad.

Griffith: Yea. But, I finally rotated then. I got back to the States in the summer of 1954. Again, I had a thirty day leave. And then I was supposed to go to Austin, Texas, I can't think of the base in Austin, Texas. But I was supposed to get into the C-93, -94?

Interviewer 45?

Griffith: No, I'm thinking of the large cargo aircraft. Anyway, when I was--

McIntosh: C-130? How about that?

Griffith: No. It wasn't the 130. I'm thinking about a 94 or 93. Maybe that's not right. Anyway, when I was home on leave, they diverted me to, instead of going to Austin, Texas, they diverted me to Fort Worth, Texas. And in Fort Worth, they had the big B-36, large bomber. So, in the summer, I think it was like July, June or July of 1954, then I went to Carswell Air Force Base, in Fort Worth, Texas. Should I go on with that?

McIntosh: Sure.

Griffith: Oh. Okay.

McIntosh: So you trained in B-36s?

Griffith: B-36. For those that don't know about the B-36.

McIntosh: Oh, we know about that.

Griffith: Okay.

McIntosh: Unusual airplane.

Griffith: It was the largest bomber, in those days. Had ten engines. They had the six pusher engines at the rear of the wing, and then on the tip of each wing they had two jet engines. I think the jet engines were just used on take-off for extra boost.

- McIntosh: It was qualified to fly the atomic bomb.
- Griffith: Yes. In fact, I can tell you about that. When I was at Carswell Air Force Base, I was assigned to a special weapons unit. Because I had a teaching degree, I suppose they knew that from my record. So I was assigned to a special weapons unit. And we had a building actually out on the flight line where we taught air crews in how to handle their nuclear weapons. And about once a year, I think, the air crews had to take this training. And I think it was like two week training that we taught then. We taught them how to, and, of course, we had to have training too, to know how to do this. But we taught the air crews how to load their weapons. I think by that time, instead of having atomic weapons, we were actually into nuclear weapons. I believe we were. That would be in 1954. And first, when they had the atomic weapon, they called it the Little Boy, or something. But, I think, when we got to training the crews, we were into nuclear weapons, and I forget what. There was the Big Boy, and others.
- McIntosh: Fat Man.
- Griffith: Fat Man, okay. That was their names. But we taught the air crews how to load their weapons into the bomb bay. And the B-36 actually could handle four nuclear weapons. You know, the bomb bays were huge in the B-36.
- McIntosh: I'll bet. How big were those bombs? Eight to ten feet?
- Griffith: Yea. I would say ten to twelve feet long. You know, the nuclear, or atomic, weapon was built around a sphere. And the sphere itself was TNT. And then on their missions, and, again, we taught the crews how to do this, when they were approaching their target, then they would arm their weapon. They would insert their nuclear ball inside the weapon. And we taught them how to do that, and all the nuclear electrical work that went along with it. And we told, taught then how to handle their weapons up until the time of drop. And, after the drop, they were on their own.
- McIntosh: So, is one man assigned in each aircraft to arm the weapon?
- Griffith: Yes. Yes.
- McIntosh: Just one fellow.
- Griffith: Who would actually go out into the bomb bay and insert this nuclear--
- McIntosh: Right. How would he protect his hands from the radiation?

Griffith: I suppose he wore gloves.

McIntosh: Lead gloves?

Griffith: I imagine.

McIntosh: Have to be.

Griffith: I imagine it was. But I remember them wearing gloves. So I did that in Fort Worth. I was stationed there four years. To get my, I was never checked out on a crew on a B-36 however I did fly with them.

McIntosh: But you never drove one of those?

Griffith: I got into the pilot's seat but I was never checked out on a crew. Now, on a B-36, I think you could log about seven pilots could log time. There was an aircraft commander and I don't know whether it was an assistant commander. There was a first pilot, second pilot, I think it went all the way to like fourth pilot.

McIntosh: So you just kept changing seats while you were in the air, and everybody got some time.

Griffith: And when we were up at altitude, why, I got to sit in the seat.

McIntosh: Was it like driving a house, or something like that?

Griffith: It was probably like that. By the time I got into the seat, they had it on autopilot. And it was beautiful the way those autopilots work. You know, you could just see the aircraft tip just a little bit one way or the other. But many of those B-36 missions were for, well, you saw either two sun rises or two sun sets. They were for maybe thirty hours. And you could fly to Canada, and out over the Atlantic Ocean and back to Fort Worth again in thirty-six hours. And so you could make--

McIntosh: Ten thousand miles?

Griffith: Probably. I forget what air speed the B-36 flew at, but it was, you know, 300-400 miles an hour, nautical.

McIntosh: Taking off was a long, drawn-out affair?

Griffith: Yea. It was, and, of course, when the B-36 is loaded with weapons, and they did have training flights, probably the civilian populace around didn't realize it. But we did have training flights where the crews actually flew with their weapons. Now, they weren't armed with the nuclear.



- McIntosh: They do that when they're upstairs.
- Griffith: Right. But, I know in once case, after one of the B-36s took off with their weapon on a training flight, they got into some trouble, it was engine trouble or something, and they had to come back in and land. And that aircraft, because of the weight with the weapons and the full load of fuel, blew a couple of tires trying to get stopped on the runway. We had, there at Fort Worth, we had a ten thousand foot runway, two miles. And it took that length for the B-36 either to take off or to land. There at Fort Worth, at Carswell, we did have a Convair plant right across the field from the air force base. And that is where the B-36 was built. So we were handy for maintenance purposes. They just took the B-36s across to the big Convair plant for maintenance.
- McIntosh: Now, you were in the service for a lot longer. You must have joined the regulars, I mean, somewhere.
- Griffith: Well, I didn't.
- McIntosh: Because you are talking, you say, four years. So you were right around there. The standard service tour.
- Griffith: Yea. I was actually in a little more than seven years.
- McIntosh: I see. Well, you re-upped, then?
- Griffith: Yes. But not into the regulars. And I don't remember how that went. When you graduated from flight training, you had to sign up for, I think, for four years. But then they were after us to sign up into the regular Air Force. I never entered the regular Air Force. I never did that. So, I did have to leave the Air Force because I didn't sign up for the regulars. And so I left the Air Force in January of 1958, after seven years of service.
- McIntosh: What was your last rank?
- Griffith: I made captain just before I left the service. And then you spend a year in the inactive service. And, again, looking back, I probably should have joined the regular reserves and stayed in and got--
- McIntosh: Done a little flying.
- Griffith: Yes. And I could have retired in the active reserves, and got some retirement. But I didn't do that. After I got out, I did go into business, and I thought I was going to get rich. I didn't do that, either. But I enjoyed my seven years of service. I think I

am a better person. When I think about what values I attained in service, I think probably discipline is the biggest value.

McIntosh: That is always number one. Having to do things you really don't want to do.

Griffith: Yea. And, I'm always on time. As you know, I was here half an hour early.

McIntosh: Me, too. I'm the same way.

Griffith: Yea. So, I got a lot of value out of the service.

McIntosh: You mentioned the C-45 in your suit. Tell me about that.

Griffith: There at Fort Worth, I did get checked out into the C-45. The C-45 was a small cargo aircraft, a twin engine with just two main gear and a tail wheel. So, it was not a tricycle aircraft. So when you were taxiing on the ground, why, you know, you were taxiing on your tail wheel. I enjoyed the C-45.

McIntosh: It also had a short life.

Griffith: It did. But we used it not only for training but we did take some small cargo parts to other Air Force bases. I remember flying to Barksdale Air Force Base, in Louisiana. We took, that was the Second Air Force headquarters in those days. So we flew down there quite a bit, down to Barksdale. And then I remember flying up to Little Rock, Arkansas, to take parts up there to their Air Force base. And we even flew to California a couple of times, with a C-45. It was a, I enjoyed flying the C-45. It was easy to fly. [There is a ten-second gap in the interview.] To get your flying pay. So sometimes we would just take an aircraft up for four hours and fly around Fort Worth and Dallas. Dallas, of course, is just thirty miles to the east of Fort Worth. And a lot of times in our training flights we would, you know, back in those days, the Milwaukee, were they called the Braves in those days? They probably were. The Milwaukee Braves did play in the World Series a couple of years. So they were a good team. And I would crank in my little radio receiver and see if I could get the Milwaukee Braves in their games. So, sometimes those training flights were just four hours of flying around the area.

McIntosh: So, when you got out of the service, then what did you do?

Griffith: Well, I had visions of getting rich in business. Unfortunately, I did not take advantage of my GI Bill. I should have done that.

McIntosh: You could have got some graduate training.

Griffith: Yes, I could have.

- McIntosh: On the government. That's what I did.
- Griffith: Yes. And, in hind-sight, you always realize the importance of those things, and I did not do that. I did get a job, just a, I got out in 1958 and there was kind of a recession in those days. And jobs were not too plentiful. So my mother-in-law was working in a bakery in Janesville. And got me into the bakery. And I worked on the oven for several months. And a shopping center was being built. In those days, shopping centers were fairly new. And a shopping center was being built on the north side of Janesville. And it was strictly my idea. My wife was against it. Opening a store in this shopping center. And, again, I thought I was going to go into business and make lots of money. Like some people think business people do. So I worked about nine months in this bakery before opening up our retail store in the shopping center. And we were in business for twenty-seven years. We made a living at it.
- McIntosh: As a baker?
- Griffith: No, no. In the retail store.
- McIntosh: What kind of a store was it.?
- Griffith: Well, we had, in those days, small mom and pop stores could make a living, make a go of it. You can't these days, very well.
- McIntosh: Were you selling notions?
- Griffith: No, we sold, we had children's clothing. We finally went into not only clothing but nursery furniture. And collectively, we were called the Young Folks Shop and Carriage House. We called the Carriage House our part where we carried carriages and strollers, and we got into cribs and high chairs, and wheeled goods. We did pretty well. There was a store here in Madison in those days that I kind of designed our store after. And I can't even think of the name of the store. It was on West Regent, near the stadium. And if Sy Levy ever sees this film, he will remember me. We designed our store after his children's first store.
- McIntosh: Sy Levy used to live next block from me on Midvale Boulevard. I know him well.
- Griffith: Oh, really? Well, we got to know him well, too. He was a nice fellow. But he had a children's wear store on West Regent there. I can't think of the name of it. Not too far from the stadium. And it was very successful.
- McIntosh: Dr. Schoenenberger and I built that building at 1219 Regent, which is close to there.

Griffith: What Dr. Schoenenberger?

McIntosh: My partner. He and I built a building at 1219 Regent to practice medicine in.

Griffith: I knew an Ed Schoneneberger from Jefferson.

McIntosh: No.

Griffith: Not the same one.

McIntosh: No, we were physicians together.

Griffith: Okay.

McIntosh: Right across from the Tile Works. You know, there is a tile store.

Griffith: Yes.

McIntosh: Lumina Tile. Well, we were right across the street from there. And right next door was a repair shop. Shoe repair. Not the one where the [Unintelligible.] but another one. John something.

Griffith: Yes. I think I do remember that. So, anyway, we were - - you want me to go on?

McIntosh: Yea.

Griffith: Okay. We were in business twenty-seven years, in that business. We finally got tired of it and we sold the business in 1985. We had always, we had traveled a lot and enjoyed staying in motels. So we thought we would like to manage motels. And we did answer a classified ad, I think, in the Wisconsin State Journal for a company here in Wisconsin called the Hillmark Corporation. And they owned about twelve motels here in Wisconsin. They went by the name of the Road Star Inns. There were two or three in Madison, here, Janesville, Green Bay, Appleton. And so we trained here in Madison for a month. And then we became, they moved us around to different motels for training purposes. And we took the motels when the regular managers went on vacation. Then we finally were assigned to a very nice motel here in Madison out on the East Side. And it is called something else now, but in those days it was a Road Star Inn. On Hayes Road, out on the far East Side. Had a clock tower. The motel is still there, next door to a--

McIntosh: Ramada Inn?

Griffith: It's in that area. I'm trying to think of a restaurant that was next door. Perkins

Restaurant is right next door. We did that for two or three years. And we finally then had a new owner of the motel chain. Then we went to Door County and managed resorts in Door County for two years, in Egg Harbor. Kind of enjoyed that, but it was very stressful. Being between the board, which ran the resort, and the owners, which owned the condos. We had sixty condos that we rented out just like motel rooms. And then we did that for a couple years and then we finally again answered a classified ad in the Wisconsin State Journal for a managers for an apartment building here in Madison. And so we came back to Madison and we liked Madison, and we managed that apartment building, out on the East Side, for nine years. And we just retired, then, about three years ago, and moved back to Janesville.

McIntosh: You've done a lot of things.

Griffith: Yes. And so, now, we're retired. I'm pleased to say that I'm very active in Kiwanis. I am going to be the president of our Janesville Kiwanis Club in October.

McIntosh: Did you join any veterans' groups?

Griffith: I haven't. I haven't joined any veterans' groups.

McIntosh: It's a little late now, isn't it?

Griffith: But I am a veteran, and I'm proud of it. I was flattered when you called me and asked me to come up for the interview.

McIntosh: Yea, most guys are indifferent about veterans' groups. They're not as popular now as they used to be. VFW I think is losing favor. Times are different. They just don't seem to fit in. They were important back in the Second World War, and then less so with the subsequent conflicts. They are sort of dropping out of favor. And, people communicate so much faster now, I think. Somehow, it just doesn't seem to fit.

Griffith: Well, of course, our generation is getting older. And less able to get around. In our Kiwanis group in Janesville, my club is the Black Hawk Golden K, and from that you can assume it is older people. We have, if I can just spend a few second talking about our Kiwanis group, we have the largest Kiwanis club in Wisconsin. Wisconsin and Upper Michigan is our district. We have 140 members. But our age runs from anywhere from like fifty to I think a little over ninety in age. So we lose ten or twelve members every year. We gain that many members, so our membership stays at about 140, but we re very proud of your club and we do some great things.

McIntosh: Do you have your own restaurant and that?

Griffith: Well, no. We meet in, have you heard of Sons of Norway? They are--

McIntosh: I eat lunch with Gene Nordbey frequently and he is Mr. Norway around these parts, you know. Do you know him?

Griffith: Gene Nordbey?

McIntosh: He's in with the representative from Norway.

Griffith: I went to high school with a Nordbey in Janesville.

McIntosh: No, he's an orthopedic surgeon who is retired. He's even older than I am, and I am old.

Griffith: So am I.

McIntosh: Well, you're younger than I am.

Griffith: No, I'm not. I'm seventy-two.

McIntosh: Next month I'll be seventy-seven.

Griffith: Is that right? Oh, dear, well, you look better than I do. You look younger.

McIntosh: You're in great shape. But he talked about them.

Griffith: Yes. We meet at the Sons of Norway building in Janesville. They have a nice facility. And we're a morning group, mostly retired people. We meet on Wednesday mornings. And so we just have coffee and rolls.

McIntosh: Sure. That's nice.

Griffith: But it is a nice building to meet in. And there is plenty of room for the hundred and--well, every now and then there are a hundred that attend, but usually it's in the nineties that attend each meeting. And we have some great programs. We have some people from Madison that come down. When I was, two years ago, when I was program chairman, we had Spiro, he's head of the Wisconsin, oh, I think he has a nickname. He's the head of Wisconsin Tourism. He would be mad at me for not remembering his name. But, anyway, we had him come down and put on a program on tourism. So we have speakers from Madison and Milwaukee. We have a lot of medical people because we're older in age, we like to have medical people who can tell us what our problems are.

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

McIntosh: A little clinic, right?

Griffith: Yes. Right.

McIntosh: Yea, we have that too. I do that a lot. People I eat lunch with. I'm solving their medical problems every time we have lunch. Even though I say, "I don't know anything about that. I know about something else." "Well, tell me anyway."

Griffith: What was your specialty?

McIntosh: Urology.

Griffith: Oh. I think we've had urologists speak to our Kiwanis group. I can't think of any names right now.

McIntosh: There is a guy from the Janesville Clinic. You've probably had him. Leonard something. I forget his last name. First name is Leonard.

Griffith: I guess I don't know him. That is my first name, Leonard. I go by Len. I prefer Len. But I guess I don't know him.

McIntosh: Well, very good. Did you win any decorations from your trip in Korea?

Griffith: I think I got a couple of ribbons, but I don't remember what they were called now.

McIntosh: Fighter ribbons and that sort of thing.

Griffith: But, of course, when you are in a combat zone, like I was in Korea, when the war was still on, you get a double time for your time in ranks. So you get, you know, when you are in a combat zone, you get promoted much faster that way.

McIntosh: I was promoted [Unintelligible.]

Griffith: Were you? Okay. So your promotion came--

McIntosh: [Unintelligible.]

Griffith: Good.

McIntosh: So being in the war zone, you got extra money for that, too.

Griffith: So, you spent time in Korea?

McIntosh: Yea, I was there a year.

Griffith: And what year was that?

McIntosh: 1950.

Griffith: Oh, you were there right at the beginning.

McIntosh: Yea, I came at Inchon. Right after the landing.

Griffith: Oh, jeez.

McIntosh: On a hospital ship.

Griffith: Yea.

McIntosh: [Unintelligible.]

Griffith: I'll bet it was.

McIntosh: All right, sir. I can't think of any more questions to ask. You're free to go.

Griffith: I'm tired of talking.

McIntosh: Are you? All right.

Griffith: Thanks. I appreciate it.

McIntosh: Well, I appreciate your coming.

**[End of Interview.]**