

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
HUGH LEWIS
Navigator/Observer, Army Air Corps, WWII
1995

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Lewis, Hugh, (1918-). Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 60 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Recording: 1 sound cassette (ca. 60 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Lewis, a Madison, Wis. native, discusses his military service as a navigator and observer with the 80th Troop Carrier of the Army Air Corps and his readjustment to civilian life. Lewis talks about his life prior to the war including the effects of the Great Depression on his family, working at the Parkway and Strand theaters in Madison, decision not to travel to Canada to enlist, and memories of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Enlisting in the Air Corps in 1942, he comments on attending officer candidate school (OCS), incidents of hazing, and the Air Corps training regiment. Lewis mentions the different types of people in Air Corps training, being transferred to navigator, and flight and leave at Borinquen Field (Puerto Rico). He touches upon flight overseas, additional training in England, and studying the areas where his unit was going to drop troops. Lewis describes his unit's role in the D-Day Invasion of France including flying in formation to France, problems with flak, dropping the 377th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion into position, and his second trip dropping a glider into France. He touches upon his four missions dropping troops during Operation Market Garden and the Battle of the Bulge. Lewis comments on recreation activities, interactions with English civilians, flying equipment transport missions, and participation in the Air Force Reserves. He describes using several veteran benefit programs including the GI home loan and readjustment to civilian life including conflicts with his wife, service related nightmares, and membership in The Retired Officers Association (TROA).

Biographical Sketch

Lewis entered the Army Air Corps in 1942. He was originally trained as a pilot but was transferred to navigator. He and his unit (the 80th Troop Carrier) participated in many of the major European battles.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1995.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs staff, n.d.

Transcription edited by Adam Sahn, 2003.

Mark: Okay, today's date is June the 7th, 1995. This is Mark VanElls, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. Hugh Lewis, presently of Middleton, Wisconsin, a veteran of the Second World War. Good morning. How are you doing?

Lewis: Good morning. Pretty fair.

Mark: Good. Thanks for coming in. Why don't we start off by having you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to World War II.

Lewis: I was born in Beloit, Wisconsin and we moved to Madison when I was 4 1/2 years old and I was raised in this area, went to school here.

Mark: What part of town?

Lewis: We lived on the east side. To begin with we lived on Yahara, Thornton Avenue which is on the Yahara River there and then we moved farther out on Upham Street when my growing years, you might say.

Mark: What did your father do for a living?

Lewis: He was with Madison, MG&E, and worked in the accounting department as a bill collector.

Mark: Did the Depression affect your family terribly much?

Lewis: It affected our family very much. It made it necessary for all of us to do our part as far as working and doing things around the house. It developed team work really.

Mark: So you finished high school, geeze, 1939 or so?

Lewis: '36.

Mark: '36. I was never good at math. That's why I went into history I guess. So what did you do then after you graduated school? The Depression was on and all.

Lewis: Well, I was very fortunate. We graduated with the February class and then I took part-time--I went to school in the morning and I got a job working in a filling station at night.

Mark: Uhm. You went to school at the UW here?

Lewis: Yes. I went to the university here. Got it started out but then due to a money emergency I had to drop out and I thought it was going to be just a temporary measure but things developed which, one of the jobs I got was ushering. And about the time that I was getting ready to go back to school I got promoted to doorman so I thought another semester I'll have more money.

Mark: This was the Parkway Theater?

Lewis: Parkway and Strand.

Mark: I'm not sure where those are or were.

Lewis: They were on Mifflin Street. As a matter of fact Parkway was just down, in this block just down the street of the old city hall. The Strand, I'm sure you've seen that. That was in the next block over. They were under the same management. Then when I was getting ready to go to school the next fall I got promoted to assistant manager which was a lot of fun really. You got into exploitation and publicity and work as well as managing. It, I found it quite interesting. At that time the Parkway Theater was staging plays which oh, Helen Hayes, Richard Evans, and all the biggies used to come here.

Mark: Did you get to meet any of them?

Lewis: Oh, yeah.

Mark: You have some autographs somewhere tucked away?

Lewis: As a matter of fact, Helen Hayes wanted me to join the theater guild. She liked my work as a writer. I tell you, I don't know whether, what I would have done if I accepted that it would have meant going to New York and that was a big jump for a little guy.

Mark: Sure.

Lewis: At that time. Today they do it all the time.

Mark: So you got married somewhere down the line.

Lewis: Yeah, we got married in 1940. As a matter of fact, July 6 will soon be here.

Mark: Coming up pretty quickly. So, World War II breaks out in Europe in '39 and in 1940 the draft starts and the country starts inching its way towards war. Do you recall these days and remember what you were thinking because we discussed earlier you thought about going off to Canada.

Lewis: Yeah, there were four of us that were chums. Paul Hunter, Johnny Briggs, I can't remember the third party. He was killed during the war. I suppose that's one reason why I've got a block on his name. Johnny Briggs never made it overseas. He got discharged. He got shot down when he was flying or doing a target. That's one way to go. Of course, Paul Hunter made it overseas and stayed with the Royal Canadian Air Force and he made it through the war though. He has since passed on.

Mark: But you decided not to go.

Lewis: I decided not to go. My wife just, it was just a bit too much for her to take at the time.

Mark: What possessed you to explore such a thing in the first place? Was it an opposition to fascism or to do your part?

Lewis: No. One thing, we liked to fly. I had my first airplane ride when I was in third grade. I had a cousin, Ted Rundquist, who was in the Army Air Corps Reserve down in Illinois and he flew up here with a Douglas O2U. I don't know if you know anything about that or not. It's an old observation plane, big bi-plane. He gave me a ride in that and I was so small he strapped me in the observers seat in the back just around, I couldn't see out, I couldn't scout. The only thing I could see was up. He told me two places to hang onto. And we went around the field once. But that was my first trip and that hooked me. I've been partial to airplanes ever since.

Mark: So, in 1941, of course everyone knows the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Do you recall the incident?

Lewis: Yes. That was a Sunday that we got the word on that. It was a very solemn day, really. It was a shocker for everybody; I don't care who they were, in this part of the country. I can remember one of the persons that I talked to that day, Bill Sachtjen, was a classmate and prominent judge here in Madison in his day.

Mark: And it wasn't long after that you got in the American Air Force then?

Lewis: It was in April of '42 that I enlisted in the Air Corps.

Mark: Could you just describe for me the process of signing up. Your thought process and why you decided to do that.

Lewis: Well, primarily my wife was the one that we discussed it with because she was the one that was going to be most involved. One thing, a member of our family has been in the military from the very beginning and one thing I want

to do if I was going to get involved I might as well fly. So she finally concurred with that. When they advertised for cadets we went in and passed those examinations for getting in. I almost crossed paths with Ted Runquist at that time because they put us on a train to go to Santa Ana, California where he was commandant of cadets at the classification center there. That would have been very interesting. But they hauled us off the train down in Milwaukee and kept us overnight and then shipped us off to Nashville. So I had all my training in the southeast.

Mark: So, when you went in you didn't enlist like a regular enlisted man. You knew you were going into the officer corps?

Lewis: Yeah. Went in the cadet program. See, when I was and the university I also had ROTC which--

Mark: Oh, I see. That helped some. I was going to ask what sort of military indoctrination did you receive as an officer recruit? I assume it wasn't the haircut and screaming and yelling like the enlisted guys got.

Lewis: We had not a GI haircut but we had it close-cropped. We ate square meals. The discipline was very strict in basic. As an underclassmen, they had the class system. You had hazing but as I recall I can't see where any of it was out of line. Once in awhile somebody would get a little overbearing but there was no--

Mark: No terrible physical abuse.

Lewis: Physical or mental duress. It was to develop the system to correlate what was required.

Mark: Now, this was at Nashville?

Lewis: No. At Nashville we just were given classification tests and physicals and there my eyes ran into trouble. I had a little farsighted and you had to meet a certain criteria in order to qualify for flight training. And I was put on a program, a German program--

Mark: A German program?

Lewis: A German program which exercises the muscles in the eyes. Like calisthenics.

Mark: Oh, you mean an exercise program kind of thing.

Lewis: Uh hum. Your eyes move like this as your eyes go through the program to strengthen the muscles which control your vision. I did well in that so that I finally qualified. And they shipped me out for pilot training at Maxwell Field in Alabama.

Mark: In Alabama. And that's where your basic training was.

Lewis: Yeah.

Mark: And what sort of training did you do? A lot of marching, a lot of classroom, did you shoot guns at all?

Lewis: Oh, you marched to and from -- you got some shooting in the range but to me I don't recall to, I think it was rifles as I recall, and it was just one or two days of it. It wasn't very academic. As far as the program was concerned most of it was conditioning. And you had your classroom work which prepared you for flying.

Mark: This lasted how long? About six weeks or so?

Lewis: Let's see. I think it was three months.

Mark: And then you went to where?

Lewis: Then I went to Orangeburg, South Carolina for primary pilot training.

Mark: So now you get to get in the cockpit and start flying around?

Lewis: Yeah. It was fun. I enjoyed that all the way. It was a fun airplane to fly and had a good instructor.

Mark: This is what kind of plane again?

Lewis: It's German, PT-17, which was a bi-plane. Of course, the planes ran from exceptionally good to those that barely could get off the ground. And we had some pretty good experiences there too. We had, our squadron commander was a fellow by the name of Surgalia. He was about 6'2" even though he wasn't supposed to be more than 6'. But he had an airplane that was just a dream. We used to fly these various stages and I had been out for an hour or so and came in and my name was on the board for to do a 90 degree, no two 70 degree landings, dead-stick landings. I hadn't even tried them in practice yet and the operations officer told me I'd better go. And there was only one plane left on the line. That was Surgalia's. I took that, I hit three of them right in a row so the Lord had to be with me. They hand you different flags in the stages and if you get the checkered flag, you go home. And I think if you

get the red flag, you're supposed to come back. Well, the last plane in the stage was supposed to stop and pick up the instructor that was handling it. And this was Surgalia. First he stopped me with a red flag and wanted to know what the hell I was doing in his airplane and I explained that and he said, "Well, you scratch even so much as the wing tip" he says "you're through." which is a nice thing for him to say. But anyway he gave me the checkered flag when I hit the third one and so I flew home 'cause the sun had already set and we weren't supposed to be out after dark. I got back okay. I was in bed at 10:30, had been asleep for about a half hour, Surgalia came in and he raised the roof. He'd just gotten back to the field. 'Cause it wasn't easy to get transportation back in those days. I should say, we do these stages at auxiliary fields which are in the area and this was at Jennings Airport that this little instance took place. But we got along real good. He cleared me when I had 52 hours which left me with 8 hours of nothing to do but play.

Mark: I'm interested in who was in your pilot training with you. What kind of guys were they? Where'd they come from? What sort of backgrounds did they come from? Were they college guys like you?

Lewis: Most of them had college, some college. Some of them were college graduates. We even had, one chap was a pre-med. Now, he could have stayed out. We had professional musicians which made it very entertaining at times. A real good cross-section of people from all over. In the area that we worked, it was primary east of the Mississippi, people from that area, but north to south.

Mark: Were there many southern guys in there?

Lewis: Quite a few.

Mark: And there was no sort of re-fighting the Civil War, that kind of thing? Everyone got along?

Lewis: Oh, every day. But there wasn't a serious way. You know, my grandfather was a good example of that. He fought in the Civil War and he was wounded in the Battle of Bull Run. Eventually he was appointed the sergeant at arms at the house of representatives. Another chap was a Confederate who had also been wounded. The two of them became real good friends. There's no animosity--

Mark: A little ribbing but that's about it?

Lewis: Yeah. If you could rib in a good-natured way. I don't know of anybody that ever got rubbed the wrong way.

Mark: I see. So after South Carolina, first of all, how long did you stay in South Carolina?

Lewis: We were there three months.

Mark: And what happened after that?

Lewis: Then I went to Gunter Field for basic training.

Mark: Where is that?

Lewis: That's in Montgomery, Alabama.

Mark: And what happened there?

Lewis: Never got off the ground. I don't think, I washed out -- I think I was washed out. I think that was corroborated. We had some flight instructors who joined us when we were overseas and those boys I did rub. And so finally a fellow by the name of Smith was going to take me out and check me out. When we got through he said, "You can fly." Of course, I had been flying a C-47 almost unofficially sure for, every time we'd take off I'd be handling it because the pilots seemed to like a lot of rest. It's pretty dull for them to just be sitting there and just keeping the airplane going where to be told.

Mark: And so this is where you became a navigator then?

Lewis: No, I became a navigator, I got sent back to the camp, it was a concentration camp as we called it -- the classification center. Then there I was reassigned to navigation and went to Monroe, Louisiana for basic there.

Mark: And what sort of training did that incur? More classroom?

Lewis: That was basic just like pilot basic. It was pretty much a repetition of what we had in pilot training.

Mark: So nothing new for you in this?

Lewis: Just in a different vein I might say. We got through there, we went to advanced navigation which was, we were fortunate to be assigned to the PanAm School of Navigation which was at Miami University. There we had a couple of real good instructors.

Mark: And so after all your navigation training when were you ready to go overseas?

Lewis: We joined the troop carrier in the end of October.

Mark: Of '43?

[INTERRUPTION BY INTERCOM]

Mark: I wish I could shut that off but I can't.

Lewis: You can't?

Mark: No, I can't. I've tried.

Lewis: Do we keep on going then?

Mark: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. That's not me.

Lewis: Oh. We, through the fortunes of war I guess is a way to explain it even though we were expertise in celestial navigation we would up going to troop carrier because that's where the need was. The class went there. To begin with there was twelve airplanes, twelve navigators to each squadron. I guess there were fourteen navigators to the squadron. As it worked out the navigators were assigned to different flights. I was assigned to "A" flight. And recently I flew with a fellow named Bemis who was in a flight. Anderson, who was a flight leader, wasn't quite satisfied with the navigator he had so he was looking to find somebody that worked better with him. The first time I flew with him was on a celestial flight. We flew the course and came back and I'd made a fix and by the time I got it figured out we were right over the field so I went over and told him we were right over the field and he said, "No, we aren't going to be there for 10 minutes yet." I looked down and I could see a beacon 10,000 feet below and I said, "At least you could have the courtesy to go down and show me that I'm wrong." And we went down and it was Maxton-Laurinburg Air Base. So we flew together the whole, through the war then. I also flew with other people but primarily we were a crew.

Mark: And when did you get overseas?

Lewis: The 17th of January I think is when we finally made a go of it. We left here on Christmas from Morrison Field and we just hit the point of no return. Incidentally, we had new aircraft.

Mark: What did you have?

Lewis: We picked them up at Baer Field. They were C-47As. In briefing us they told us that we needn't rely on the oil pressure gauges because they were malfunctioning. We had just hit the point of no return when we lost the right engine. The oil pressure was going down. Talk about, once you lose the oil

pressure you can't feather the engine. So there we were over the ocean and couldn't feather the props, couldn't shut it off. I know we were putting 9" on one engine and 17" on the other just to keep it wind-milling so the plane could keep going. We started losing altitude. The plane did level off about 2,000 feet though. Of course we were getting closer to Borinquen Field. In that time we got over the radio a message that a B-24 had ditched and 20 minutes later air/sea rescue was there and taking on survivors. I just feel, you know, more comfortable. We did make it to Borinquen--

Mark: Where is this?

Lewis: Borinquen Field in Puerto Rico.

Mark: In Puerto Rico.

Lewis: Yeah. And the right engine should have exploded. It was just a solid piece of metal that screeched to a stop when we slowed down. It was the wind that was keeping it turning really. And that gave us a week holiday in Puerto Rico. And of course we didn't spend it on the field. We went into San Juan which has a lot of history. We were really enjoying that liberty. But then a crew on one of the other planes was flying in our group, our squadron, one of the crewmen came down with pneumonia so the group commander had us take their airplane and our airplane would be ready for them to fly when he got over his pneumonia. It isn't like it is today where they give you a shot of antibiotic and you're on your way. Back in those days it used to be sulfa, then you wait ten days. But then we ran into bad weather once we got to Africa. We went from Puerto Rico to Trinidad, Trinidad I think it was to Belem, to Ascencion Island and then Roberts Field, Liberia, then up to Dakar, Marrakesh, and then to England. And England was in a series of bad weather. Of course, we never had good weather there.

Mark: Uh hum. I've been there.

Lewis: We hit, finally got clearance to go, to take off, and we were supposed to land at Saint Mawgan which was in the southern tip. And we had a nice flight up to England and we got to Saint Mawgan, it was socked in. They wouldn't tell us where to go, they just say fly north. And we'd already been in the air long enough. But Andy weaned the thing down to the point where it was just running on as little fuel as possible and we headed north. We finally landed up in Prestwick, Scotland and we had about 20 minutes of fuel left. A little side story on that, one of the aircraft ditched in the Irish Sea, and these were new aircraft, they did a good job of ditching it, and they towed it in to Liverpool and it rejoined us, which is quite amazing.

Mark: Yeah, I would say. So you were based where in England?

Lewis: To begin with we were at Bottesford, then we went to Ramsbury.

Mark: Ramsbury?

Lewis: Temporarily. Membury.

Mark: Is this in east Englia somewhere?

Lewis: It's about 45, 47 miles west of London. It's just north of Hungerford and a southeasterly direction from Swinden, if you're familiar with that.

Mark: A little bit, yeah.

Lewis: It was a table-top. It previously had been used by I believe the Wellingtons and we used to catch them every now and then because being higher up they'd have fog in the lower areas and our field would still be clear.

Mark: And so once you got to England then what were your duties? Were you preparing for the invasion for example?

Lewis: We did some more training to the extent that we could. Most of it was operations. Wound up kind of snafued in one respect or another. We did an awful lot of formation flying which probably is one reason why I'm here today.

Mark: Why is that?

Lewis: They became real good, they became really expert at hanging in there. For example, our squadron, maybe I'm getting a little ahead with this story, but we dropped paratroopers in Normandy on D-Day at 0200, 20 minutes after midnight. We took off about 10:30 but when we hit the Caratran Peninsula we hit our IP right on the head, and then we were in embalming clouds. When we came out of the clouds the formation was still intact, all nine aircraft which I think is vital to the performance of the--

Mark: Very skillful, too.

Lewis: And the only thing is I was able to get a fix and then another fix which -- oh, incidentally prior to that, we spent two days looking over dioramas, photographs so we knew the Caratran Peninsula just about as good as anybody could. We were able to establish our track that we were going to be dropping the troops when the red light came on about two miles north of where we were supposed to drop them. And so I passed that information on to the lieutenant that was jump master on our airplane. I had about a minute to brief him

before they went out the door and I asked him to let me know how they make out. I guess it was about five or six weeks after that that we came back and he was waiting in the mess hall. He was a major. And he said, "I had to come back and tell you you're responsible in part for peace." And I said, "How's that?" And he says I was the only one who knew where we were. So I mean little things like that helped.

Mark: So, when it came to the invasion, as you mentioned you looked at maps and those sorts of things to prepare. When did you first put troops in the plane and drop them? I assume you had to practice that, didn't you?

Lewis: We worked with both the British and the American paratroopers. Daytime drops, you know, you could work out real well. No problem whatsoever. Nighttime drops were a different story. When we made our practice for D-Day invasion there was an error in establishing the proper time sequence for the various flights. By the time we got over the drop zone, now when you get over the drop zone, see you're normally flying at 155, 160 miles an hour, but you drop your paratroopers at 100 to 110 miles an hour which means these people here are slowing down and if you don't have enough distance between the elements they start stacking up. We had that problem with the war. The only time we didn't have it was on D-Day because everybody was scattered all over and we didn't see anybody else on that drop except our flight. But the fact was once we got out of the clouds the flack was so heavy you could walk on it.

Mark: D-Day.

Lewis: Uh hum.

Mark: I was going to have you just walk me through your experiences on D-Day. You said you took off about 10:00.

Lewis: 10:30 about. And it was really a form-up. It was in the middle of the night and, geeze, the flight over there was really a piece of cake because the moonlight move at night, you could see the aircraft. We had ships that were sending out beacons which we could, all you had to do was be within five miles of them and you could zero in on them but the weather was such that we were hitting them right on the head. Let me back up just a little bit. We almost didn't make that flight. I told you that our left engine pulled us in to Puerto Rico. Well, that left engine didn't want to start. We got out there, we had to crank the son-of-a-gun by hand and that was an awful lot of work. There were three of us on that crank pumping as hard as we could to turn it over. We came that close to, well, the airplane wouldn't have made the trip; we would have because we were definitely leaders in that. My job primarily was to say where we were and what we did, who did so forth, unless the

skipper got shot down then we would have to take over. In preparing for it we had, I think, it was two nighttime drops, and neither one of them was anything you'd write home about.

Mark: Nothing successfully--

Lewis: I guess the best way to describe them is "snafu." Well, first of all the weather was bad and we were leading an element -- I was flying with the operations officer that night -- and when we came out of the clouds we were the only airplane. We were where we were supposed to be but the planes that were supposed to be with us weren't. Rather than be out there all alone we joined another formation because we knew that once we got to the DZ that if you're out there by yourself, the chances of being hit would be 100 percent. We had paratroop dropping by us even as we were dropping our paratroopers. Because of that time element there wasn't enough distance between the elements. It was something they worked on though.

Mark: So, on the actual D-Day this really hadn't worked on it that well, did you have any trepidation about actually going out and dropping troops in combat for real since it hadn't worked out so well in practice?

Lewis: Each practice got a little better. If we hadn't run into the clouds, I think it would have been much better because we took an awful lot of flack on later missions, daytime missions. While they were rather hectic we did our job the way it was supposed to be done.

Mark: So, getting back to flying over the Channel. You said that was fairly smooth?

Lewis: Oh, yeah.

Mark: When did you start encountering the flack? Before or after you dropped the soldiers?

Lewis: Before. See, the Caratran Peninsula I think is about 30, 35 miles across and we hit the IP which was on the, which would be on the east coast.

Mark: And what's an "IP?"

Lewis: Initial Point. If you, that's where you start taking your directions for your drop zone or your landing zone. If hauling flyers, it would be a landing zone. If you're paratroopers or supplies, it would be a drop zone. And it generally is short distance so that if you hit that and you have your course right, you should hit your objective without any problems. But as soon as we hit the IP we got into clouds and we were in clouds for about half way across the peninsula. And then when we came out, see, you're flying about 500 feet off

the deck, and they threw everything at us. We were told they couldn't put heavier flack up at that altitude but you could count them -- one, two, three, four. It was so you could get out and walk on it if you wanted to. We didn't get hit on that trip but our wing man who was flying on the right side had over 90 holes in his airplane and he had a job that was built in Oklahoma and it was a son-of-a-gun to fly. We used to take turns to fly because the pilots would just get so tired. He had to have his right wing replaced and they found out that the aeron cables were twisted like this instead of being like this so it just doubled the workload. Fortunately, neither of the pilots were hurt badly on that one even though the windshield was shot out.

Mark: So, which division were you dropping, did you know?

Lewis: It was the 377th Parachute, Field, Artillery Battalion. They were supposed to secure passage over one of the causeways there. They were supposed to be in a position to knock out a battery of convoy. I guess that had already been taken care of by the Air Corps.

Mark: So, you dropped the soldiers and you fly back to England. And then what? You want to watch the progress of the invasion I'm sure.

Lewis: We had a debriefing. You're washed out. We had another mission to fly that day. We hauled a Horsa glider in that evening and we took off for that about 9:00, 2100 and dropped it at 11:00. That's double daylight saving time. So it was just twilight. That's a story in itself, too. We hauled Horsas in which are as big as a C-47 and the Horsa that we were towing lost a wheel on takeoff. We asked him if he wanted to go back because he had that option. He said, no he had to set it down someplace he might as well set it down over in France. When we talked to them later, he said it saved his life. 'Cause, I don't know if you read up on that at all, the Horsa glider was too big a vehicle to land in those little fields in Caratran Peninsula. It was just havoc all the way. But he said he got down on the ground and this hedgerow was coming up at him and he suddenly ground drooped. No casualties. So it turned out that if everybody had taken a wheel off their Horsa when they took off, they'd have been in much better shape.

Mark: So, after the Normandy Invasion--

Lewis: There's one other little thing I might mention -- after we hauled that Horsa in we dropped the ropes then we had to fly a certain pattern to exit the place and the two C-47s in front of us got shot down. There were two machine-guns that had them bracketed. And just as it became our turn somebody with a bazooka knocked out the one on the right. This panorama, you can see the whole thing happening down there. And the guy on the left stopped shooting. Evidently he'd run out of ammunition and had to re-belt. One of them that got

shot down made it to the ocean and we saw it go in and went down under the water. I've often wondered what happened to the crew. But the thing surfaced again and they were able to get out of the aircraft and they were saved. Which is a nice little story, I think.

Mark: As I look over the data sheet I had you fill out, you dropped troops in some of the biggest battles in the European Theater.

Lewis: Every one.

Mark: Holland?

Lewis: We made four trips into Holland. First we dropped paratroopers. We flew the southern route the first day. They had two routes. They were waiting for us. It was flack alley really.

Mark: Was this Market Garden by some chance?

Lewis: That was where we lost our first airplane and really had our first lost personnel on that one. Because it was such a rough trip going in they had us fly the northern route the second day because it would be a little different shelf. Nobody wanted to fly that southern route again. The flack was a lot lighter. It was over a longer period but we didn't experience any casualties on the second trip. And then the third trip we hauled gliders and they gave us the southern route again. And this time -- when you're hauling gliders, you fly two ship armaments and the weather was absolutely lousy. As a matter of fact, I don't know if it was officially called off or not but we never got word on it and when we came out of the clouds over the Channel, we were just about to Belgium, there were only two airplanes in our flight -- our wing man and the two gliders. We were hoping we would see somebody en route as we went on this southern route because we knew we had to fly in this flack alley again. The weather was still pretty lousy. You could see down, I guess visibility would be about 500 feet because you could see down but you couldn't see anything ahead. We thought with the weather being what it was, well, let's fly down where Montgomery's got all his troops and that way it would be the element of surprise would be in our favor. We might have a chance. We'd never had a chance going over flack alley with just two airplanes. So we flew down there and these guys were down there waving to us and cheering us and we hit the front lines and we only encountered one machine-gun. The guy evidently was friendly because he looked like he was trying to shoot the rope off. We didn't see Bill Jevne who was a glider pilot. He got a little worried and said they come down to the nose of the glider and then go back up to the tail of the airplane. It was just a couple of bursts and that was it. We never lost any of our glider pilots in the missions that we had. The fourth mission was quite easy. [unintelligible]

Mark: When did you go to France and Italy? Was this before--

Lewis: Southern France was in August.

Mark: Of '44?

Lewis: That was, I don't recall the exact dates on that.

Mark: That's okay.

Lewis: I can get them for you. We were down there for about six weeks. It really was a vacation. Even that -- we hauled gliders on the first day then resupplied just two missions. The first day we took off, we were flying from a dirt strip which made a different experience entirely 'cause there was so much dust raised that we took off in formation otherwise you'd never, you'd run out of gas before you could get your formation assembled. But we took off on that one and we were half way there and they recalled us. We started back and they figured the weather would clear before we got there. I don't know if you've heard any stories about that.

Mark: No.

Lewis: They had these scud clouds in there every morning. They figured the clouds would break by the time we got there. By the time we got there it was nice and sunny. We didn't see any enemy action on that one.

Mark: I would assume you did the Battle of the Bulge.

Lewis: Uh hum.

Mark: Why don't you describe that one.

Lewis: That was rather hectic. Nobody expected it and the weather was lousy, as you've probably heard. As a matter of fact, I missed the first one because I was at the flack-farm.

Mark: At the "flack-farm?" What's that?

Lewis: That's R&R. We up by a pool and never even knew it was on the seashore the weather was that lousy. But I got in on the rest of them. I came back. It was very interesting on the ground. These were daytime missions that we flew and we didn't get too much flack from the enemy. We had good fighter protection. That's one thing I should mention -- on all of them, our missions, we had good fighter protection. We made good drops. The biggest problem there was weather.

Mark: I see. I want to save the end of the war. I have some questions about what you did on your free time. You mentioned the flat farm, among other things. When you weren't flying, what sort of things did you do to occupy yourself?

Lewis: Play bridge. If we were field a flight line, we used to take our bikes and ride around the countryside, both in England and France. We did a little of that. Literally, we took our bikes down there with us. But we were out in the middle of nowhere there.

Mark: In France?

Lewis: Uh hum. No, in Italy.

Mark: Oh, in Italy.

Lewis: We were at Deltone which is north of Delvechia about 15 miles. I forget just how far, how many kilometers it was from Rome but we got in there a couple of times. It was very interesting. In high school I took four years of Latin and I found out I could converse with the Italians.

Mark: Helpful I suppose.

Lewis: Not real clear but you could make your words understood and I could understand them. We had a lot of free time where we'd have to report to the flight line and then we'd just sit and wait for the weather to break so we played a lot of bridge. Sometimes that bridge would carry over after supper.

Mark: Did you have much contact with the English?

Lewis: Yes. As a matter of fact, I had relatives over there. We were invited out a couple of times for dinner. We were, some doctor was Oxford would send an invitation and we got down there a couple of times when he was having guests and so forth. He wanted a couple of others to fill in.

Mark: I'd like to hear your ways of London story [End Side A, Tape 1] again if you don't mind.

Lewis: Oh, one of the pilots, the first time we had a three day pass into London, one of the pilots was an accountant for a life insurance company in New York -- I think it was National Life -- thought it would be interesting to go see what their operation was. One thing that I didn't mention, we met a navigator there who was with the RAF who was also an underwriting clerk as they called them. Hugh was a navigator on Wellingtons but we became friends. It was quite a fascinating operation that they have there. Dealing with numbers,

strictly numbers. They had a mathematical answer for everything that happens. And they've been doing this for years. They even were forecasting the end of the war for May 1945 which really impressed me when May 1945 arrived. That was the thing that got me interested in insurance and I made it my career when I got out.

Mark: So, as the American forces drive into Germany more, did you have any drops into Germany itself?

Lewis: Uh, yes. We dropped at Wassel. But one thing I should mention that we had a second mission you might say -- resupply and evacuation. I flew over 1,000 hours in Europe and I would say the biggest part of it was resupply and evacuation.

Mark: Why don't you describe some of those operations. What were you transporting to those spots?

Lewis: Primarily gasoline to begin with. We hauled gasoline and we chased Patton across France. He used to clear a path for us 200 yards on each side of a highway so all we had to do was drive down the roadway. Then they'd be shooting at us but they wouldn't even come close. It was fun working with Patton's Third Army. If he said he'd have a field at 10:30 in the morning, you could depend on it being in his control at 10:30 in the morning. And we had a couple of times though where we'd start to listen to where the gunfire was and if it was to the west of us or to the east of us.

Mark: So you're up there pretty close then?

Lewis: Oh, yeah. As a matter of fact, on one supply mission we hauled 105 howitzer shells to a battle that was going on up near the Niece River and we landed right there where they needed the shells. We had an interesting flight because we had twelve airplanes that day and we had a recall. The only person that didn't hear it was our radio operator. He was always listening to something else. The guys in the fight were getting kind of nervous because it came out clear that they finally said Captain Anderson, you're to return to base. The only place that this could have come from was the Germans. And how they got that information that quickly it's hard to understand but we do know that there were telephone lines from England to the continent because one of the fellows was calling one of his friends at one of the other bases and he wound up talking to somebody over in Holland on a long-distance call. That's all the interesting things that happened. Another time for evacuation we volunteered for a mission hauling people out of Czechoslovakia when the Russians were advancing. Well, it was towards the end of the war. The Germans still controlled the area east of Munich and we went in there with four airplanes, unescorted. We found out the element of surprise was the safest thing you

could have. We flew in there and these people were in a partying mood. We landed in a valley between two mountains but they were saying good-bye to their friends, probably some of them for the last time.

Mark: Now, these were Americans?

Lewis: Czechoslovakians.

Mark: Czechoslovakians.

Lewis: Yeah, but if the Russians got a hold of them, they'd be dead. They're their leaders. We finally had to tell them, we started the left engines and told them we were taking off either with or without them. We had no choice because we would still be getting back to England after dark. We were dropping these people off at Paris. I got that reversed. We dropped them off in England and then we were based over at London at that time. So they finally boarded the aircraft and we made it back. We got back out, we parked about a mile from the operations officer. Generally they would send a jeep out to us to bring us in but we had to walk in this day and they had us missing in action because we were late in returning. But the flight was uneventful.

Mark: So when the war ended, you were where?

Lewis: We were in France then. We were stationed at Moulin, actually the field was called Buttes de Roche.

Mark: And where was that?

Lewis: Just about 15, 30 miles southeast of Paris.

Mark: Do recall people's reactions? Was it a big party?

Lewis: Our moral was kind of low actually.

Mark: At the time you mean?

Lewis: Yeah. We had changed airplanes. We had Bs by then.

Mark: Bs?

Lewis: C-47Bs.

Mark: Oh, I see.

Lewis: And they were capable of flying the hump. And there was some talk that we were going to go directly to the CBI so our moral was kind of low. Of course, I was lucky I can fly. I spent a lot of time flying back then. I flied two missions every day. Also we had Moran coming in so they would construct at night. I kept myself busy.

Mark: So when the war in the Pacific ended, you were still in France?

Lewis: No, no. We wound up coming back to the States in July and we came back, we were supposed to get new airplanes and then go to CBI and they gave us a 30 day recuperation period. It was in August. The war ended in Japan. We were given the option then, well, I was offered a job and I had planned to stay in the service. But again, Glad intervened, she said, "It's either the Air Force or me."

Mark: Given that choice. So what did you do then? You got discharged from service.

Lewis: I separated. I stayed in the Reserves. That's a story in itself, too. I went in the Reserves and then somehow they got my name mixed up. I changed from Hugh Lewis, I became Louis Hugh and when we got it all straightened out I was in the AUS and with the Reserve. And they couldn't get it straightened out. Of course, back in those days you really didn't care. I got back into the Reserves and I'd been in them ever since.

Mark: So, when it comes to getting your life back in order then after the military, what did you do?

Lewis: Well, to begin with I was pretty fortunate. I had a lot of leave time to make up my mind. I decided that I wanted to get into the insurance business to begin with. The university at that time didn't have insurance courses as part of their regular curriculum. They had business course which was closest to it. So I thought I would try to get a job with an insurance company under OJT and this worked out. It was actually the beginning of a lot of training and education because then the university got into the business with their extension program and I took every extension course that I could get a hold of to learn all I could about what happens in the insurance. And it worked out well for me.

Mark: As we discussed earlier, this was something that you financed by yourself. You didn't use the GI Bill.

Lewis: No. As it worked out I didn't, under this OJT--

Mark: OJT program?

Lewis: OJT program I was supposed to be under the GI Bill, the VA. Mr. Whitwer who was president of Farmers Mutual at the time, didn't think I should wait for my money so he started paying me the \$200 a month total right away. I guess this in some way upset the VAs apple cart because they never reimbursed it. He finally wrote and told them that I was waiting for it and then he finally told them to forget it because things were working out so well.

Mark: So you got established then in your profession without the use of the GI Bill?

Lewis: Yeah.

Mark: When it comes to other benefits--

Lewis: Well, I can't say that really 'cause I don't know if I'd have gotten the job if it hadn't been for this benefit to begin with.

Mark: Oh, I see. Although it never materialized, the fact that it was out there?

Lewis: The fact that it was there I think definitely. I don't think I would have gotten the job to begin with 'cause they would only pay \$twelve5 a month. At the theater at that time I was making \$150 plus commissions on the publicity exploitations advertising. So it worked out that I was getting the same amount of money in the theater but the hours were better and I think the future was better. As it turned out, it was a good decision.

Mark: As for other benefits, you said you used the home loan as well?

Lewis: Yes. Used the state home loan when we bought our first home.

Mark: This was in the '50s sometime?

Lewis: Uh hum. 1950. You hit it right on the head.

Mark: Okay, I think we're back.

Lewis: I would have had trouble, even then I had trouble getting a loan -- I got it from Harrison Garner. I don't know if you know him or not. He was with Anchor Bank, it was called Anchor back in those days. And he also was a Reserve officer. He gave me a land contract which was a good deal so I would have bought it, yeah. But the thing is with a land contract he retains title and the house I bought was a piece of property that he had rented for a number of years and I wanted to make some changes -- in the kitchen, in the exterior, and in the basement. Those I couldn't have done with him, without his permission. He wasn't willing to go along with that so I was able to, with this

\$1,000 that I got from the government and through the influence of Ray Peck who was our attorney with Farmers Mutual, get a loan so we got started.

Mark: When it comes to readjusting to civilian life, did you have any sort of problems getting back in the flow of things? We watched the problems that the Vietnam veterans had and it was very public. I'm wondering in a more private sense, World War II veterans had some of the same problems. For example, did you have any sort of nightmares or restlessness or any of those sorts of things?

Lewis: Once in awhile, yeah. I think that's natural. You run some of these more extraneous moments. See things didn't always happen instantaneously sometimes. For example, what started out as an ordinary flight to go pick up some batteries over in Wales we had to cross that mountain pass. We ran into weather, clouds sitting on the mountains and we had a little difference of opinion as to how we should handle this. I wanted to above and over the mountains then let down on the other side. You can always let down. You can always find an opening. Andy didn't want to. We were about half way up the pass when we hit the clouds and we were 18 minutes in clouds flying between two passes where we had to make two turns. And the Lord was with us on that one too because we came out of the clouds and we were right in between the peaks. Those are scary moments.

Mark: And this is something that came back from time to time.

Lewis: It comes back from time to time. Not the way back to begin with but you'd have nightmares where you'd be carrying the C-47 up. It was rather extraneous.

Mark: How long after the war did these things continue to happen? Or do they still?

Lewis: Oh, I think they quit rather quickly because there were other things that took precedence. You just didn't think about them anymore.

Mark: You were married throughout the whole war? I don't want to get too personal but I'm wondering if the war put a strain on your marriage. Did you have some sort of difficulties?

Lewis: Coming back we had to go through a very difficult adjustment period. It, Glad was working and she had things all set up then all of a sudden there were two of us and we were strangers, really. I wasn't used to, I was used to doing things my way and she was used to doing things her way, I guess is the best way to describe it. We didn't have to go through any consultation or anything like that to make our adjustments but it takes awhile.

Mark: It was a little awkward.

Lewis: Uh hum.

Mark: I heard that the divorce rates shot up right after the war.

Lewis: I think if we hadn't had Steve it probably would have.

Mark: That's your son?

Lewis: Uh hum.

Mark: He was born before or after the war?

Lewis: He was born during the war.

Mark: Oh, I see. As far as the civilian people's reaction to you, did you feel appreciated as a veteran or did you feel that people really didn't understand what you had been through?

Lewis: Well, that's a mixed bag. There were, I remember I couldn't get a cab when I got back into town.

Mark: Were you in uniform?

Lewis: Yeah. I took a bus. When we came back we landed at Hunter Field down in Georgia, then we got sent home for our 30 days recuperation period and carried all our luggage. I took a bus and I was standing in front of the drug store just two blocks down to catch another bus to go to south Madison and a school chum that -- now, incidentally, we were a small class and just like family.

Mark: Was it East High?

Lewis: Uh hum. And this gal saw me, she was a little thing, and she screamed out my name and she came dashing over and jumped up and wrapped both legs around me and just hugged me and she just couldn't contain herself. A lot of people smiled. It was the kind of reaction that just made everybody happy for awhile. I think there was some resentment when the veterans came back on the part of a lot of people.

Mark: Among civilians? That they were taking jobs.

Lewis: Yeah. They had to start competing again.

Mark: Okay. I've got one last area I wanted to discuss and that involves veterans organizations or reunions and that sort of thing. Did you ever join any of the major groups like the Legion or the VFW?

Lewis: No, I haven't. I remember, was a member of TROA and ROA.

Mark: What's TROA?

Lewis: The Retired Officers Association. And before that it was the Reserve Officers Association and the Air Force Association.

Mark: When did you join those groups? And for what reason?

Lewis: Let's see -- ROA was in '49 and TROA was in '72, I believe, '73.

Mark: And what possessed you to do such a thing? I mean, what was the reason for joining them? Did you attend meetings and reunions and that kind of thing?

Lewis: I haven't attended any of their meetings or participate in their programs. I attended reunions of our squadron. We were able to participate in five of those.

Mark: You've pretty much exhausted all of my questions. Is there anything you'd like to add? Anything you think I've skipped?

Lewis: Well, not unless you want some more stories. Oh, on one of the Bastogne missions, I think it was number two, we were supposed to meet our fighter protection over the ocean. It was Colonel Murray's outfit, the P-51 group. And whoever drew up the flight plan gave us their speeds and our -- so consequently we didn't reconnoiter. They had sense enough to go to Bastogne 'cause they knew we were going there. By the time we got there they had a wall, from the deck as high as you could see, and they were stopping every German pilot that was in the area. It was really something to see. Can you imagine that, getting the flight plans mixed up on a C-47 and a B-51?

Mark: Sounds like something you'd want to have straight right away.

Lewis: Well, I'm glad they had it that way because if we had got there before the fighters, it would have been a different story.

Mark: Well, I thank you for stopping in. I really appreciate it. It's very interesting.

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