

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
JAMES R. O'DAIR  
Army Air Corps Bombardier, Interned in Russia  
1997

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**O'Dair, James R.** (1923 - ), Oral History Interview, 1997

User copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 80 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 80 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

### **ABSTRACT**

James O'Dair, a Madison, Wis. native, discusses his World War II service as a bombardier with the 28<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, 77<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron and his experience in Russia after his plane was damaged during a bombing raid on Japan. Prior to the war, O'Dair tested aircraft at Langley Field (Virginia) and comments on airplane technology and changes at the field when Pearl Harbor was bombed. With patriotic intent, O'Dair enlisted in the Army Air Corps and talks about aviation cadet training, bombardier training in Albuquerque (New Mexico), and assignment to Alaska. Stationed at Adak in the Aleutian Islands, he depicts military life, morale, his first bombing mission on Kiska, and daily training runs. O'Dair details the mission skip bombing Japanese ships where his plane was shot down. He talks about preparation, what he saw through his window, separation from the rest of the squadron, being fired on by the Russian Navy, and landing in Russia. Once in Russia, he recounts interrogation, conditions at camp, food, escape attempts, and feeling the U.S. government had abandoned the Americans there. He touches upon the awkward status of his group and the need to make it seem as though they escaped from Russian internment so that Russia could remain neutral toward the Japanese. O'Dair talks about following the Silk Road through Russia to Iran to Teheran and ending up in Tunis. Upon his return to the U.S., O'Dair mentions debriefing by the Secret Service, pilot training, assignment to court martial boards, and decision to leave the Air Force. He also comments on use of the GI Bill and attending veterans reunions.

### **Biographical Sketch**

O'Dair (b. July 10, 1923) was interred by Russians for six months before being smuggled out of the country. He served in the Air Force from 1942 until he retired as a Lieutenant Colonel in 1947.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, 1997.

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

Transcript edited by Abigail Miller, 2003.

## Interview Transcript

- Mark: We'll start with a brief introduction for the transcriber, and then we'll start with some questions.
- O'Dair: Okay, fine.
- Mark: Today's date is December the 9th, 1997. This is Mark Van Ells, archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview with this afternoon over the telephone with Mr. James R. O'Dair, originally of Madison, presently of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, a veteran of World War II. Good afternoon. Thanks for taking some time out of your day.
- O'Dair: Fine. Thank you, Mark. Appreciate. Go ahead.
- Mark: Why don't we start by having you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised, and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor.
- O'Dair: Okay. I was born in Madison. In St. Mary's Hospital, I think it was. On July 10th, 1923. And went to St. James Grade School, and Madison West High School.
- Mark: You were in the Bush Neighborhood, there, somewhere.
- O'Dair: I lived in Southside.
- Mark: Which is near there, again.
- O'Dair: Yea. Uh-huh. Not too far from there. In fact, I lived right out near the old gun club, which was a skating rink, eventually. And I think, as a youngster, I was very active in model airplanes, back in those days. So that whetted my interest in aircraft, I'd say.
- Mark: Yea. What did your father do for a living?
- O'Dair: Well, my brother, all his life, or most of his life, has been in the meat business, as a butcher, but most of the time he had his own business selling portion cut meats to the supper clubs in that area up there.
- Mark: I was just wondering about the Depression, and how that may or may not have really affected your family life.
- O'Dair: Well, yes. They had just moved into a new home on the south side, at the time. And, of course, my father lost his job. He was a steam-fitter, at the time. And he

lost his job. My mother worked up at Kessenich's. If you know where that is.

Mark: I do, actually.

O'Dair: And she worked there for fifty-five years, in fact, as it turns out. But my father got a job on the WPA [Works Projects Administration] and eventually he worked for the city of Madison at the water department, for many, many years. But it was pretty tough back in those times. I carried two paper routes, one in the morning and one at night. And I think my brother did about the same thing. Plus carry golf bags in between times, in the summer.

Mark: So, if you were born in 1923, by the time of Pearl Harbor, you must have been about seventeen, or eighteen?

O'Dair: Yes. I was nineteen at the time.

Mark: You had just finished school?

O'Dair: Yes. In fact, after I got out of school, we weren't that well off. I couldn't go to college so I got in the NYA [National Youth Administration] Program and worked out of Morey Airport for a little bit, aircraft engine mechanic training. And I answered an add from what is now NASA, N-A-C-A [National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics], they were looking for model builders, for their wind tunnels. And I answered that, and I got a job down at Langley Field, Virginia, I think, in 1941.

Mark: So, when Pearl Harbor happened, you were not in Madison, you were in Virginia?

O'Dair: No, I was in Virginia, right at Langley Field, near Hampton Roads.

Mark: I'll come to Pearl Harbor in a second. But I am interested in what the predecessor to NASA was doing prior to World War II?

O'Dair: Well, Langley Field was probably the earliest one. It had a tow-basin for ship hulls and seaplane hulls. It was about a mile long. And it had a number of wind tunnels down there, for testing aircraft. And they were working on airplanes that I didn't even know existed, at the time. Testing, testing these in the lab, and we built scale models, and they test them in the wind tunnels.

Mark: Just for like wind resistance and that sort of thing?

- O'Dair: Ah, stability, all that kind of thing. You know, that primarily, get the best configuration, you know, like sea plane hulls, how good those are going to be for take off and landing.
- Mark: Yea. Now, I would imagine this would be considered a vital industry, for defense.
- O'Dair: It was a draft-deferrable job, yes.
- Mark: That's what I mean, yea.
- O'Dair: O didn't have to go in. I saw so much activity around there, and I wanted to fly. So I finally enlisted in, well, let me get back to Pearl Harbor, if I could.
- Mark: Sure.
- O'Dair: I'll never forget that day, because I was sitting out on a Sunday morning. I had rented an apartment with three other fellows, and you had a lot of widows in that area. And this was a navy widow, and she had a big home right on, near the waterfront. And we were just talking about things, beautiful morning. How well she knew a lot of people in the military, including Admiral Kimbel, Kimmel, wasn't it? And she was telling me how well she knew him, and, man, it couldn't have been more than an hour later when we got the news on Pearl Harbor. And that place just became alive. You never saw so much happen at one time in your life.
- Mark: You mean, posting guards and —
- O'Dair: Yea, and airplanes taking off, and ships steaming up, you know getting ready to leave. Everything just sort of exploded around there.
- Mark: Yea. No time for reflection, or sorrow? It seemed to be pretty business-like, is my impression, from what you are telling me.
- O'Dair: Yes. Very much. They seemed like, bang everything--all of a sudden they were mobilized there. Everything was happening.
- Mark: And how long was it from that point until the time you entered the service?
- O'Dair: I went in in April of '42. I didn't know what to do, for a while. And I decided, ah, I need to get in it. Everybody else was. So I enlisted up there. In the Air Force. Wanted to be an aviation cadet.
- Mark: And, did you get that?

- O'Dair: Yes. They sent me out on down to Selma, Alabama, to Craig Field, and took the initial test. Got in as an aviation cadet. And then eventually out to Santa Anna, California. And I wanted to get in in a hurry, get into action in a hurry, so I chose bombardier training rather than pilot training. Pilot training took about a year.
- Mark: Yes. It was more competitive, too, from what I gather.
- O'Dair: Yea. Yea, it was. So I went out to California, and ended up going to Albuquerque, to bombardier training.
- Mark: If I may interrupt for a second.
- O'Dair: Sure.
- Mark: You said you were anxious to get into it.
- O'Dair: Yes.
- Mark: Perhaps you could explain a little bit more about that. What made you so anxious to want to get into it? Was it patriotism, or duty, or —
- O'Dair: I think it was patriotism, at the time. We would read what was going on, and all we wanted to do was to be part of the action. And that, I think, was fairly common back in those days. And it wasn't any concern, everybody, if you are young, you are going to live forever.
- Mark: Uh-huh. The mortality issue hadn't really come up yet?
- O'Dair: No.
- Mark: In a young person's mind. at this point, anyway.
- O'Dair: No.
- Mark: So, bombardier training, it was at Albuquerque, you said?
- O'Dair: Albuquerque. Uh-huh. Kirtland. That is the, that was one of the main bombardier training bases, early on. In fact, the bombardier that was on the Enola Gay graduated there, probably about a year before I graduated.
- Mark: And this sort of training consisted of what? I mean, did you get in the plane and drop bombs? Or was it a lot of classroom?

- O'Dair: Yea. We did a lot of, we had a lot of class work. You had to be fairly good in math, because a lot of it was working with your drift. You had to know your drift, and you had to know, calculate, you know, the altitude, true air speeds, all that stuff. And we did a lot of ground training with the bomb sights. Just on a little cart. But when you got in the air, we trained in twin-engined training planes, and we carried practice bombs. And this went on for about four months of training. And night bombing, day bombing, different kind of altitude bombing. And you're graded by your circular average, error average. You would have a target set up, and you were graded that way.
- Mark: And what can you tell me about the accuracy of your bombing? Today, they have the smart bombs, and the missile guided computers, all that sort of thing. It was much more simple back then, wasn't it? Dropping bombs.
- O'Dair: Yea. But I don't think they were as accurate as they say. Every once in a while, we'd get one right in the middle, but it's pretty difficult because of so many variations. And even though the aircraft may be on autopilot, it still doesn't correct that readily.
- Mark: Yea. Like a gust of wind, or something like that?
- O'Dair: Yea. And, yea, you get a real windy day and it is very difficult to hold things steady.
- Mark: Yea. And what sort of young men were getting in the ranks of the bombardiers, at this time? I mean, you hadn't had any college, from what I gather.
- O'Dair: No, I had no college. There was just a good cross-section. I was one of the younger people in it, at the time. Most of them were older than I was, going in. And it was a pretty good cross-section. Some people had been to college, some were part-way through. And I'd say, maybe twenty-five percent were like me, with no college.
- Mark: That's a sizeable, but very distinct minority.
- O'Dair: Yes. Uh-huh.
- Mark: How did you end up getting into that group, without having any college? Did you have to qualify on some tests, I'd imagine?
- O'Dair: I had to take tests. And, of course, you had to be in pretty good physical condition. And your physical reactions, and your testing. I'm not sure what, you know, made

the difference but I was happy to make it through the, you know, through all the testing.

Mark: Yea. Was there much of a wash-out rate? I know, in pilot training, there was.

O'Dair: Yea. In pilot training. In ours, probably about I'm going to say a 25% or 30% wash-out rate.

Mark: Yea. That's still pretty significant.

O'Dair: Yea. Yes.

Mark: What sorts of things would make people fail?

O'Dair: Well, a lot of times, maybe air-sickness. They couldn't take it up there.

Mark: Well that's important in a bomb crew.

O'Dair: Yea. And fear, you know. A lot of times, people are scared. And sometimes, they just don't have the coordination, because you got to stay on your toes, you got to stay calm, because you are working with a bomb sight, you know. Adjusting that, and being able to think at the same time. So it's--I guess those are all factors.

Mark: Yea. And you said this training was, what? Four months, you said?

O'Dair: Yes.

Mark: I guess what I am getting at is how long was it from the time you were trained until the time you went up to Alaska?

Mark: Ah, okay. I got out, I was commissioned in November of '42. And I was sent, initially, to a B-17 group. The 96th Bomb Group, which was being formed to go to England. And I went to Washington state, first, and then down to Blythe, California. They finally got us to our final place, in Pyote, Texas, January 1st, of '43. And we did all of our B-17 training, and put in two or three hundred hours of B-17 flight training. And we then went to Wichita, Kansas, to depart for England. That was early in '43, March of '43. And I got there, and they detached thirteen crews for a special B-17. It was called a YB-40. And they sent us down to El Paso, to Biggs Field. We got there and it was an escort kind of B-17, with armor-plate. Carried no bombs. Didn't carry a radio operator or bombardier, so I got dropped off the crew after all that training.

Mark: And this was supposed to be like instead of fighter escort, if they couldn't go that



far in, or something?

O'Dair: Right. They didn't have fighter escorts, you know, to go any distance, at the time. And it turned out, these airplanes had the drawbacks, which I found out flying them a little bit. They were so heavy, I heard later from the people that used them, that the rest of the bombers would take off and they'd be left by themselves, because they were so heavy. They couldn't keep up with it. On the way back. So it didn't work out very well. So, anyway, I was, there were thirteen bombardiers and radiomen stranded down there. So they sent two of us, rushed us up to Alaska. I thought it was a real urgent need. Two of us went up there. By then, we flew on commercial airliners. You carried your own parachute when you transferred. And went up to Seattle, then by ship to Seward. Flew down to Anchorage, and we flew down on a B-24, to Adak Island. And I got there, and there were no B-17s. They had B-24s and B-25s. So they said, 'What kind of airplane you want to fly in?' So this other boy took B-24s, and I took B-25s. And that is how I got there. In--that was in April of '43.

Mark: I want to come back to that, but I'd like to go back to your experience in the States. When you weren't training, you know, the country had started to mobilize for the war, and that sort of thing. Had you traveled around the country before the war started?

O'Dair: No. No. My only travel, I had never been out of the state until I went to Langley Field. Well, I was down to Freeport, I think Illinois, once, and Chicago. But that was about it.

Mark: Yea, but you traveled pretty extensively around the country, then. Once the war started.

O'Dair: Yea, once the war started. I, yes.

Mark: Any impressions?

O'Dair: I loved Albuquerque. I thought that was a beautiful area, there. I still love it, out there. Washington state, of course I've lived in the Seattle area. And that's great, too. But where I was originally in Washington state, that was out in the prairie country. It wasn't too pleasant. We were living in a tent, in winter time, with snow up to your ears.

Mark: Yea. See, one of the reasons I asked was is that you settled in the South, eventually.

O'Dair: Yes. That was for a different reason. Okay, later on.

- Mark: Okay. The South, in particular, was a different culture. Particularly back then. You know, segregation and all those things. Things you hadn't really, probably hadn't seen in Madison.
- O'Dair: Right. Because we only had one black in our high school class. And, of course, when I was down at, well, I learned that when I got to Virginia, in a hurry.
- Mark: Yea, that's true.
- O'Dair: Because they had the white lines on the busses. I didn't know what they meant. You are only supposed to sit one side or the other. You're supposed to sit up in the front, you know. They had trolley cars and all that, with the white lines. People would look at me. I guess I didn't know the difference. I'd jump on there and cross over the line, and the blacks would sort of want to push me out of the back section, because I just was ignorant of those kinds of things.
- Mark: Now, as you traveled around the country, and these different bases, there perhaps sometimes when you weren't on duty, when you had a little free time?
- O'Dair: Yea.
- Mark: How did you spend that?
- O'Dair: Well, like in, when I was at Blythe, California, we didn't have airplanes enough to even train in and so I just hitchhiked to Los Angeles and had fun. I had some people I knew there. And sort of, you could hitchhike back in those days. Anybody would pick you up and take you in. So, I'd visit, I loved certain areas of southern California. Had some friends near San Gabriel. That was always a pretty area, back then. And the coast, you know, the ocean area. I think around Albuquerque, it was a matter of just going around and visiting the sights. Didn't have much time, though. We were training and we didn't get hardly any time off, there. Pyote, Texas, there was nothing to see there. You were out in the middle of nowhere. If you know where that is.
- Mark: No, I don't.
- O'Dair: Near Monahans, Midland.
- Mark: Okay, I know where that is. That is out in the middle of nowhere.
- O'Dair: Yea. It's just a spot on the side of the road. You can see where the base was, still, to this day. The Interstate goes by there.

- Mark: Yea. Now, you talk to guys in the old Army, like before World War II, they'll tell you that sometimes the communities weren't always friendly toward military people. You know, there is an incident, I don't know if it is true, but there would be signs in the park, "No dogs or soldiers," and that sort of thing. Did you experience any of that sort of thing?
- O'Dair: No, I really didn't. With the kind of things I was doing, we didn't have enough time off. When I was stationed, or working, at NACA, that was an old military base. People were very nice. Of course, they relied on the military. And, in all, I didn't see any antagonism towards the military around there. So I would say, I didn't hit any of the places where there was any antagonism. I had nothing but support everywhere I went.
- Mark: So, Alaska. Adak?
- O'Dair: Adak.
- Mark: That's out in the boondocks, too.
- O'Dair: That is in the Aleutian Islands. Yea. You didn't see a woman from the time, if you went down there, there were no women. And it was kind of a pretty tough area to live in.
- Mark: Yea. In what sense? I mean--
- O'Dair: Well, we had a little hut. If you wanted to wash clothes, you'd go down to the creek and sort of pound it on rocks. We didn't have any facilities. Use gasoline, maybe, to rinse your clothes out, if you had to. It was real, real crude living up there. And it was, the weather was miserable most of the time. You were always losing some people, either due to weather or due to enemy action. It was pretty depressing.
- Mark: Yea. It was isolated.
- O'Dair: It's so isolated. And I feel, really felt for the ground crew people, because a lot of them are up there for years and, you know, it's just terrible.
- Mark: Well, you got up there in early '43?
- O'Dair: Yes.
- Mark: When was the attack on Dutch Harbor?

- O'Dair: That was in '42.
- Mark: I see. But still, there was the thought the idea that there might still be action in the northern Pacific up there.
- O'Dair: Yes. That's when they occupied Attu and Adak. And so, I got up there, and they just kept pecking away, of course, trying to take it back. But they didn't allocate many troops up there. We only had one bomb group up there. That was a mixed bomb group, heavy bombers and medium bombers.
- Mark: And your targets there were supposed to be what?
- O'Dair: Okay. We were bombing, initially, my first five missions, the first time I was in a B-25 was a combat mission. We were bombing Kiska, at the time. In April, the invasion of Attu didn't start until May. So I spent the first three months bombing Kiska, and it was still occupied by the Japanese. And we'd go in about 5,000 feet, which is a good invitation to a 20 millimeter right up inside your airplane. We never got hit. We never really got hurt at all around there. But they were still losing airplanes there. This other fellow I went up with, he was in a B-24 and in July, coming in in a B-24, and he had a 20 millimeter go off between his knees, and it killed him. He died. So it was a pretty dangerous place, and they kept losing. In fact, up there, they were losing, we had about 50% mortality rate.
- Mark: Yea. You said the first time you flew in a B-25 was a combat mission?
- O'Dair: Yes. Never been in it before.
- Mark: Do you recall this mission specifically? This so-called birth of fire? Or does it all sort of blend together?
- O'Dair: Yea, well, I remember it because they put me in a crew where I think the pilot had been up there too long. And they always put him at the tail end of the formation. And so, here I was sitting up in the nose and we were just coming in on our bomb run. You know, we had about twelve airplanes in formation, and he gets excited and flies through the whole formation, and scatters it. And we were sitting there all by our self. And every gun on the island shooting at us. And I'll never forget that one.
- Mark: So what is going through your head at a time like that? Does your training kick in?
- O'Dair: Yea, training kicked in, absolutely. And I wasn't scared, I was sort of fascinated.

But the training, you stay down and that is the only thing that saves you, is training. Where you do things by rote. Rather than by, worry about fear, or anything like that.

Mark: And you flew how many missions overall, until you were eventually shot down?

O'Dair: I only had six. I had the five over Kiska. And then they moved our squadron, part of our squadron, out to Attu Island as soon as they had controlled the Japanese enough on the island and had a landing strip down. And put six B-25s out there to ward off any Japanese fleet that might come in to try to rescue them. Of course, they would have killed us, real quick. But we were stationed there and we would fly missions. We didn't even attack Kiska any more. We just, we were trying to guard the area, to keep any Japanese from getting onto Attu. And, so that is, and it was here, you know, we were on call twenty-four hours a day.

Mark: Yea. Well, I want to talk about the mission where you were shot down, but before that, I want to talk a little bit about the plane and the crew.

O'Dair: Okay.

Mark: You were trained in a B-17 but you then flew in a 25?

O'Dair: Right.

Mark: I just wonder if you could sort of explain the difference between the two, and which one you liked.

O'Dair: Well, the 17 was comfortable. You know, it was a nice big airplane, and you had a different man for everything. I had to learn navigation real fast. I had quite a bit of navigation in bombardier training. And, but where you only have one person on board to do both navigating and bombing, you got to know both.

Mark: Yea.

O'Dair: So, I had enough books with me, and I studied like mad all the spare time to learn navigation. And that was one of the bigger things. I liked the B-25 better, really. You could see a lot more what was going on. You were down closer to the action. And you were a lot more maneuverable. As far as fighter susceptibility, it was the same whether you were in a B-17 or a B-25. The fighters could get to you pretty easy.

Mark: Now, did you have fighter escorts up there yet?

O'Dair: Yea. We had fighters around there. Sometimes they would show up and sometimes not. Usually, the fighters were just acting as dive bombers most of the time. Because they had eliminated all the Japanese fighters at that time.

Mark: Oh, I see.

O'Dair: So all you had was anti-aircraft.

Mark: And a B-25 has a crew of how many people?

O'Dair: We had five, let's see, six. I'm sorry, six. You had two pilots, then bombardier-navigator, you had like a top turret gunner, you had a tail gunner, and a radioman.

Mark: Did you fly with pretty much the same crew the whole time.

O'Dair: No, no. I had just a varied crew when I was on Adak. I never knew who I was going to fly with. But once I got out to Attu, we had the same crew from then on. And we got pretty close.

Mark: Yea. I'm sort of interested in the personalities, and the inter-play between the people. And how they all got along. So, would you just describe some of the folks?

O'Dair: Well, I had, my pilot, he spent a lot of time gambling. I mean, he didn't have much else to do. He was one of these high-rollers. Married. Older. All these were older. I was the young kid on the crew. And my co-pilot, same way. He was older. They were probably three to four years older than I was. And he was, a lot of Indian ancestry, from Florida. Pretty high-strung individual. My crew, uh, the enlisted men were pretty quiet. They'd work, but they stuck together. Usually, the officers stick together, and the enlisted men stick together. And we just didn't, we all had different huts to live in. And I probably knew more of the people in my own profession, like the bombardiers and navigators, than anyone. Then that's about how we'd line up. We had little huts that would hold four people. And we were right in this little strip, air strip. And were basically sitting out with water on both sides of us. And just wide enough for the airplanes. So, most of the people I stayed closest with were the navigators and bombardiers. I guess that is because we had similar training and similar things to talk about.

Mark: Yea. Yea.

O'Dair: But the, our crew, was, I'd say, we practiced so much out there, we got pretty close. Pretty good working team. Because what we had to do, what made it so close, was once we saw the things winding down on Kiska, they decided they

were going to try to make the Japanese believe there was going to be an invasion from the north.

Mark: Yea.

O'Dair: In fact, they even created some false divisions, and everything. Had radio messages. And I guess they decided what they would do, they would just peck away at them with the bombers at the Aleutian Islands. And so we did a lot of practice. While we were, like, we were on alert most of the time. If there were no signals or no indication of any enemy ships anywhere around, we would go out and practice our low-level skip bombing. Against, there were a lot of small, rocky islands around there.

Mark: Yea. Why don't you tell me a little bit about skip-bombing? I mean, I think most people understand the traditional, from 5,000 feet dropping bombs. But what is skip-bombing, how is that different?

O'Dair: Okay. You go down, pretty low to the water, you're probably within thirty or forty feet of the water. And you drop your bomb, and the bomb actually skips across the water because of the forward velocity. And what you have to do is put about a four and a half second delay fuse in that because you don't want the bomb going off under you. Because they'd lose. And you have to be careful if you go after an empty ship, because that bomb could go in one side and right out the other. Because, see, ships usually only have a quarter-inch plate. And an empty ship, you'd go right through the hull with that. Into one side and out the other. And it could go off underneath you. So you'd try to pull up, soon as you release, you try to pull up and get away. Bank away from it.

Mark: Yea. And, skip-bombing was used against what sort of targets? You mentioned ships.

O'Dair: Ships were the primary target, because you had nothing but water, you know. Flat surface. So you would go in, and go as close as you can, and release your bombs, and then pull up over the ship and back down on the other side.

Mark: Was it effective?

O'Dair: It was a lot more effective. It was a very highly effective way of hitting. With bombing from any altitude, you may or may not hit. But, I'd say, here, you probably put, you probably had a fifty-fifty chance, or even better than that, of hitting. You know, the ships. And it's pretty hard to miss if you are a good pilot. We had some, and I'll get to later on that one mission, that pilot, usually the pilot drops it on the skip-bombing. He's got the button. And we had some of them

freeze up, and they couldn't even release their bombs. That was, again, people getting scared.

Mark: And so this is the kind of bombing you were doing on this final mission?

O'Dair: Yes. Final mission, what we did, we had eight B-24s took off first, ahead of us. And they were going in high altitude to try to draw the fighters up.

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

Mark: Now, this was the Japanese —

O'Dair: Right. Paramushiro Naval Base, which was really, you got two islands there. You got Shimushu and Paramushiro. And the harbor is right between the two islands. And to get to that, we were to approach from the north, but we had seven hundred miles to fly over water. To it. Which is a pretty long, that was one of the problems. And, when we got there, on the way over, I was doing my navigating, but we stayed together, the whole group did, pretty well. But I was still navigating. Had our land-falls about when we expected. And we made, actually, we made a run up over Russia, their peninsula. Pulled up as low as we could, and went over it. and then back, in the Sea of Okhotsk which is on the far side. To come in from the rear, rear door. Of the harbor. And by then we only had eleven airplanes, because one had dropped out. So we all went in, eleven airplanes abreast. You could look out and see the whole line across there, right down on the water. Which was a pretty impressive sight. And we ran into one fishing boat out there. And they immediately strafed that. We had five .50 caliber guns in the nose of our airplane. Because you go this, you want to have a lot of guns. And so they strafed that one boat just in case it was going to send any messages, you know. And we sort of caught them, not totally by surprise. They were cleaning their guns from the B-24 raid. And then turned them on our airplanes as we went down through the harbor. And on that, you couldn't hardly see the water. You go after ships and that, and the water just looked like it was churned up, total. Because all you saw were tracers and water and flak exploding in front of you. But, it was a pretty exciting time.

Mark: Yea. I bet.

O'Dair: I was, well, I was lucky. Because I was doing the navigating and I had set all my bombs, before we left, I had pulled all the pins. You know, set all the arming wires on them. Incidentally, let me retrogress just one bit. Before we left, when we did all that practice work, I would have to take the five hundred pounders. We would use five hundred pounders, normally, of we were going after enemy ships. And we carried four of those. And when we practice bombed, we had some old



bombs. They had some old two hundred and fifty pound bombs. And so I would, pretty well by myself, I had one crew member help me. And we would have to unload and load these bombs every day. Whenever we were on alert, I had to have the five hundred pound bombs in the airplane. If we were off alert, we'd put these other bombs in and go practice. And as soon as we landed, everybody would take off, and I'd have to reload the five hundred pounders. Every day. But that is what we carried, four five hundred pound bombs. And they were pretty effective bombs, of course. But, back to where we were, going through there. When we first started, I had a good friend of mine that was a first lieutenant, bombardier. He was in the plane just to the left of us. And we were waving to each other as we were going in. And then, man, the next thing I saw was his airplane blew up. He was in front of us. And he went cart-wheeling across the harbor there, that airplane did. And I know, we tried to, we bored in on a freighter, and we were just, I think were just releasing one bomb, and then we about collided with another airplane. We all saw this wing coming up to the left of us.

Mark: One of your own I take it?

O'Dair: Yea, one of our own. So, that pushed us off to the right, by ourself. And we were left, all the rest of the squadron kept going straight on. And we were off to the right, and the only thing in front of us was a light cruiser and a heavy cruiser. So, naturally, you take the light cruiser. Don't go after, because all you could see on those ships was like a Christmas tree, you know, with the guns.

Mark: Yea.

O'Dair: They were just solid fire. And then the ground fire from each side. There were cliffs. And they were firing down on us from above, going through there. So it was kind of fascinating, because I was standing between them, and I could watch all this stuff, and see the gunners on each side, each shore over there, shooting at us. And our radioman bent down to see what was going on back there, and he straightened back up again, and a burst of fire had come through and wiped out our radio. And I heard another one, an explosion, and heard like somebody had run into a pile of gravel. We got hit on the right side pretty bad. But we made it through all that, and dropped three bombs on that cruiser. And I remember going over it because I watched all the sailors jumping off the deck. And then we high-tailed it as fast as we could. And by then we were all alone. And it may have been we were lucky, because the fighters were after the other B-25s up ahead. And they hit one of those, and it went down. The crew got out, and the fighter went in and strafed all the crew members as they were trying to get their, you know, inflatable raft. They just, there were no prisoners taken up there. It was a pretty cruel war. And I guess we were fortunate. We must have had some dumb, darned Japanese pilots. We went by, going out, a bi-plane went by us, in one case. And then I saw a

single float-plane get hit in front of us, and that knocked the float off it. And by one of our other airplanes, the gunners. And there was one fighter just kept pecking away at us, and our top turret was useless, because we had tumbled the gyro. You couldn't, so all we could do was to keep turning into it. And, Lord, they had the speed on us. We were, you know, going as fast as we could go. But I guess we were just darned lucky. We were. Because we were all by ourselves back there. Yea, but we passed this one plane that was down in the water. In fact, the crew were getting in, they were waving at us when we went by. That was before the fighter strafed them. My pilot, to this day, he wondered if we should have circled and tried to protect them, you know. He felt bad, because he knew the pilot pretty well, on the other plane. We knew what plane it was. But, by then, we'd be dead, too.

Mark: Yea.

O'Dair: So--anyway, we never did catch up with the rest of the group because we were so far behind, and by the time we started back, we had, our right engine was smoking. Our fuel was, on the right side, the tank was down half of what it was on the other side, and no way could we make it, you know, seven hundred miles back home. And they had modified those airplanes, and you couldn't transfer fuel, anyway, the way they had set it up. So we decided to start heading up to Russia. They had told us, you know, if we couldn't make it, to head up that way. So I got the maps out, and we started to find our way up there. And we finally joined another airplane. I think Wayne Mariu was in that one. And Wayne is from Merrill, Wisconsin. I got with Wayne when I was up there this time.

Mark: And you eventually did make it to Russia?

O'Dair: Yea. We made it to Russia. We made a pass in with this other airplane on our wing. And their bomb bay door was stuck open. And we started to get a lot of anti-aircraft fire from the Russians. And then they sent their fighters up after us.

Mark: Why was that, do you think?

O'Dair: Ah, we were going over a submarine base, and I guess they thought we were going to bomb them. So, anyway, we turned around and went back out to sea a little bit, and then we split up and worked our way another. And we saw another airplane, and we sort of followed it around, and we found a little fighter strip, and set down there. And that is how we ended up there.

Mark: Yes. And, so, what was your reception like? I mean, obviously, getting shot at by the Russian anti-aircraft wasn't very good.

- O'Dair: That wasn't very good. And we had a fighter come up, and I said, "Boy, don't even aim a gun at it." Because we didn't want to get shot down by the Russian fighters.
- Mark: Yea. It sounds like a pretty tense situation.
- O'Dair: It was.
- Mark: What did you do, considering? Well, the Russians weren't involved with the war. At this time. Against the Japanese, anyway.
- O'Dair: No. And we didn't know what to do, you know. Nobody, there had never been any agreements, or no one had ever talked on this. Our only word from the people who briefed us was, well, if you have trouble, go in there, you know. And there never had been any talk between the two countries, or anything.
- Mark: And so, what happened?
- O'Dair: Well, we, I know, we were told when we got on the ground, if we had to go there, just tell them we were on a training mission. Well, I was up in the front, opened the front hatch, and, of course, we had about two thousand empty .50 caliber cartridges come tumbling out, before I got out. They knew we weren't on a training mission. And, of course, our airplane was shot up pretty badly. You know. And, soon as we got out, they, we had to surrender our guns. And then we just sat around and, eventually, they took all the crews up to, they found a place for us to stay. And we spent, I'd say, about a week in interrogation. Just like your regular POW.
- Mark: Yea. Was it like, enemy or--?
- O'Dair: They didn't, the Russians were, they didn't trust anybody, you know. You were, by definition, an enemy if you weren't a Russian. And they just treated you like you were there maybe to spy on them.
- Mark: Yea. I mean, were you roughed up, and that sort of thing?
- O'Dair: No, didn't rough us up.
- Mark: But you were definitely treated with some sort of suspicion?
- O'Dair: Suspicion, yea. And I don't think they knew what to do with us. See, I think that was the thing. They were totally at a loss what to do with us.

- Mark: Do you think, or do you know, if you were the first Americans to come into Russian territory like that?
- O'Dair: No, there was one that came down a month before. And it crash-landed in the southern part of the island. And one of the fellows was killed, died from that crash. And another one was hurt pretty badly. So, they had been there and, I think, had already moved out by the time we got there. So we just started a parade, because after that there was quite a few.
- Mark: Yea. And so, you then went to central Asia, somewhere?
- O'Dair: Yes, we went across Siberia. We went into Petropavlovka and then they took us by seaplane. If you remember the old four engine Martin China Clippers.
- Mark: Yea.
- O'Dair: That had one. Russia had one of these. The only one with long wing span for extended range. And we flew in that. Spent the first night in the island of, let's see, Sakhalin, there at Okha, which was half Japanese and half Russian, at the time. And then we went from, the next day, in fact I remember that was cold. It was getting cold that time of year.
- Mark: Yea. It was September.
- O'Dair: And then we went to Khabarovsk which landed the seaplane there at Khabarovsk at a river. And we spent a bit of time at Khabarovsk, probably a week or more. They had a rest area for the Russian soldiers there, and they put us up there. And then we loaded into C-47s, which were the old DC-3. And I think we had about three airplanes, because there were sixty of us, all together. And split us up into three airplanes, and they started flying us across Siberia. And we'd stop to refuel. In fact, we stopped near Kursk, if you just saw that airplane crash?
- Mark: Yea.
- O'Dair: I was in Irkutsk. And then we spent the night at Novosibirsk which is a little bit further. We spent the night at Omsk. And then we started heading south. Spent the night at Omahata [?]. Now there may be a different name for Omahata now. It was like their Hollywood, or their movie capital, way back when.
- Mark: Oh, is that right?
- O'Dair: And we ended up down at Tashkent.
- Mark: Which is now Turkmenistan?

- O'Dair: No, it's still Uzbekistan. That was the province at the time, Uzbekistan. And then we went about sixty kilometers from there to our camp at, I forget the name. Oh, boy, can't think of the name of the little town. It's in the book. I gave Jim a copy of the book on that.
- Mark: Yea.
- O'Dair: And, Westraya [?], yea, that was the name of the town. And things were pretty crude there in that place. It was like being in Arizona.
- Mark: Yea. Now, what kind of camp was this? Like a POW camp? How would you describe it?
- O'Dair: Well, it had been. It had housed some kind of, what was it, some kind of refugees at one time. It had a fence around it, barbed wire around the thing. It had been, I think, at one time, an old school house. And so they put us up there and gave us beds, and came in and sent their women soldiers in to dig latrines. And they set up a kitchen. And part of the cooking was done outside. Good part of it. We had, in fact, just a big old iron pot. And I'd go out and see what we were having. The same every day. It was something stewing there. There was a cow's head with hair, horns, eyeballs, and everything on it.
- Mark: Didn't sound particularly appetizing to the American palate, anyway.
- O'Dair: Well, we got so hungry, everything tasted good. Cause they were having a tough time, too.
- Mark: Yea. I was going to ask you, do you think you were treated poorly, or is this the way that a number of people there lived?
- O'Dair: I think that is the way most of the people lived. The sanitation conditions were terrible. We didn't have any medical thing. The only thing that saved me, I had some sulfanella tablets in my flight jacket, you know. And I still had dysentery for five years after I got out. And a lot of people did. Dysentery was probably the worst thing, because sanitation was unheard of. They just had like a ditch by the side of the road where you get your water out, and somebody else was doing their business in it downstream from there, you know. And a lot of them used camel dung, you know, to heat with, around there. A lot of camels down in that area. But they were, and they also had their usual suspicions. But they did let me go out and wander, eventually. They'd give us like two hours to wander, after a couple of months.

- Mark: Uh-huh. I was going to ask, this camp, was there other Americans, or were there other nationalities in there?
- O'Dair: No, we were all by ourselves. It was just hardly big enough to handle the sixty people. And the crew, I think the previous crew, that one Doolittle crew, had been there at that same camp. And it was used after that for the other groups that came through.
- Mark: Yea. And what was the daily routine? You were there for six months.
- O'Dair: Not much. We'd just sit there. We had a couple of interpreters, so I, one of them offered to teach language, so I took Russian while I was there. I figured I might as well learn something. So, I attended classes every day. And got so I could speak pretty fluent Russian, by the time I got out. And writing, and I could read and write. In fact, they would let us, like I say, later on, wander for a few hours. But there was always, the NKVD was in charge of all this, incidently. They did a good job.
- Mark: In what sense? What do you mean?
- O'Dair: They, some of the people tried to escape. They got them back. No one was ever injured or hurt, you know. They were a pretty powerful group. But when I'd wander the town, you could spot them. You knew they were following you, all the time.
- Mark: I was going to ask what the mood of the camp was, among the Americans? I mean, you were not quite POWs, but you were not quite free to run around, either.
- O'Dair: That is right. It was pretty depressing, because nobody knew what was going on. We had no contact with our embassy, or anything. And they knew, my parents were notified I was missing in action. And all they knew, I was dead or something. You know. And they didn't know for, I think, two months or more before they were notified I was alive. And all they had was some hope. And everybody was pretty well discouraged because they thought we were sort of abandoned by our own country.
- Mark: You said there were a couple of escape attempts?
- O'Dair: Yea.
- Mark: What was the idea behind that?
- O'Dair: Well, they thought they could get across the border into Afghanistan, you know.

And escape. And the only problem is, they told us that there was a German prison camp nearby, and they offered the Afghans so much a head for any German prisoner. A head. That's all they brought back. And they got a reward for that.

Mark: Do you think that was true? Or did you find out later that that might have been true?

O'Dair: I don't know. Afghans are pretty, that is pretty rough tribe around there.

Mark: Yea. Well, the Russians certainly had their troubles there lately.

O'Dair: Yea. And I guess some of these people thought they could escape and get some where, but Lord, there was just too much to overcome in that area. So we just had to learn to be patient. That is all I felt. Be patient, and it'll work out. And it did.

Mark: Yea, I was going to ask, what eventually transpired?

O'Dair: Eventually, around, I think it was some time after Christmas or later, it may have been in January. I forget just when. But we finally got word that someone from the embassy was coming, you know, down there. And it turned out they sent down a doctor to visit us. And one of the people they actually took out of there and flew him out to Walter Reed, because he was so badly injured. And he wasn't getting any better. And the Russian doctors were terrible, you know. They didn't have any decent medical attention at all around there, if they had any, they were all up at the front, you know. And so we started getting treated a little better. At least, in fact, we knew when someone was coming, they finally made us a uniform to wear. Because we were wearing Russian uniforms by that time. And we'd get a bath once a week. They'd take us to a public bath house and we'd, they were using old Model A trucks over there, you know. That was their modern truck. And they'd take us to a bath house once a week, and then you'd get your clean uniform, again. You'd get your foot wrap. They didn't wear socks. A foot wrap, and you'd just wrap enough to make the boots fit, because my shoes were worn out. You know, all our clothes were just gone by then. And so, but after the first visit, we, medical attention was better. I think they shipped supplies down there, and all that. We still didn't know when we were going to get out. And I was trying to remember, I think it was the latter part of February when we finally said we were going to, they were going to go somewhere. They didn't tell us where. The rumor was they were going to move us over to a place where they were ferrying airplanes, American airplanes, and we were going to work there for a while. They didn't tell us we were going to escape. I guess, technically, they had to make it look like an escape, like we did it on our own.

Mark: Why was that?

O'Dair: They were afraid of the Japanese retaliating. They were afraid the Japanese would get in the war at the time. And I think you had, then we heard it was our departure was delayed because of some, I think Walter Winchell, or somebody, commented about the people that escaped from Russia on the Doolittle crew. And that made everything real nervous. And it held up our release. And so eventually, they put us on a rail car and the train took off, and we were one of the cars. Of course, people over there ride all over the train, you know, the top, sides, everywhere. And we went down through Samarkand, down that way. The old Silk Trail, isn't that it? Down around Samarkand.

Mark: Yea.

O'Dair: And, the middle of the night, about two in the morning, they detached our car and put it on the siding. Pitch dark. Nothing, you know. We didn't know what was going to happen then, because, you know, they wouldn't tell you anything. And finally, about an hour or two later, you'd start seeing some lights of trucks coming across through the hills. And there again, we didn't know what was happening, whether they were going to shoot us, or what. And turned out they were Russians, and they were driving the old 6x6 trucks, and they loaded us into the back end of these trucks and covered the whole thing up so no one could see what is inside. And I think we rode for two days, or more, across the Iranian desert, before we got to Teheran. And they finally turned us over to the American authorities in Teheran. Which was a great day. I think the best meal I ever had was that powdered eggs.

Mark: Sounds strange, compared to ox heads, or something.

O'Dair: Yea, the food was pretty bad, and I can't hold that against the Russians because everybody was hurting over there.

Mark: So, you were repatriated.

O'Dair: So I was repatriated, and then apparently, they had some deal. They still couldn't get us back to the United States before certain dates. So they flew us to Alexandria, then over to Tunis, and put us up in a big old mansion for two or three weeks there, in North Africa. And they gave us, that's where we got our new uniforms, and got our clothes, and everything, and gave us some cash advance, anyway, that we had some money to--

Mark: You had some back pay somewhere.

O'Dair: Well, that didn't show up until I got back to the United States. But, again, we still



couldn't correspond with anybody. All we were told was everything was secret. You don't talk to anybody. Where you been. And I had a chance, they said, if you want to go out and wander around, so we got, our crew got a B-25, and we flew around North Africa for a while. Just to see what was going on there. Because the fighting was going on in Italy at that time. And then I went up to Italy. Flew up there and went to Naples, and got caught in a German bombing raid up there. I thought, Oh, boy that would be something, go through all this and get killed in a German raid.

Mark: While on R & R, or something.

O'Dair: Yea. And the battle of Monte Casino was going on at that time, so there was still a lot of hard things going on around there. So, but, we just sort of loafed. Went back down there and loafed, and eventually they took us over to Casablanca, and then we got on a ship to come back. And it was, then, all the traffic was coming to Europe, and this was a new ship, the second crossing it had made. One of the new troop transports. And, Lord, we all had staterooms, and everything going back. It was practically empty. Wasn't anybody on board. And went back unescorted, because this was a pretty fast ship. Came back into Newport News about two years to the day I had left Hampton and Newport News. And I ended up in a hospital there, in Newport News, for two weeks. Veterans hospital, there, Kikotan [?].

Mark: Did you have any problem or some other sorts —

O'Dair: The whole group. No, they had us in there checking us over, trying to handle it. Plus, the Secret Service, military secret service, was there, and they debriefed us, day after day.

Mark: They had questions about the Russians?

O'Dair: Yes, they wanted every single detail. And they kept reminding us, "Don't you open your mouth. You can't even contact your home. You can't tell anybody you're back in the United States yet." And I was in the States two weeks before I could even contact anyone. But I knew, getting back there, I knew a lot of the people locally.

Mark: Yea.

O'Dair: So I was able to go out. And I hadn't stayed in touch with them, but I was at least able to see some people I knew and enjoy life a little bit around there, while I was stuck there.

- Mark: Now, you weren't out of the military yet? I mean, there was still a war going on.
- O'Dair: There was still a war. Okay, what they told us then is, we are confined to the continental limits of the United States, for the rest of the war. You are not going to get out, you're confined to it. You will not be reassigned outside of this country. Your war is over, basically. So they sent us, as a group, assigned us all down to Florida, to the Tactical Air Center down there. Most of us. Some of us they split up. But we all started there, at Kissimmee, Florida, and Orlando, there at Pine Castle, flying demonstration missions, and stuff. And I said, to myself, well, I'm going to be stuck here, I might as well do something worthwhile. So I asked for pilot training. So I took tests on that and got assigned to pilot training. And so I started all over again, training. Because I felt, I am not going to do anything but sit around the officers club, and get boozed up every night.
- Mark: Yea. Now, you had done this training early in the war, and now we are talking like late '44.
- O'Dair: This was late '44, yea. This is August of '44, now, we're talking.
- Mark: Were there any differences that you noticed in the training programs, and that sort of thing, in terms of their size, or their scope, professional behavior, anything like that?
- O'Dair: Oh, they were much more organized, you know. Everything had been built up by then. I was going through as a student officer so, in a way, it was easier. My whole training group that I went through with, we were all returnees, you know, from overseas. Either prisoners, or had finished combat missions. Things like that. So we would go, but when I went to, like to Wichita Falls, and I went to San Antonio, we were still confined to the base, just like the cadets were, even though we were officers. And it got easier, once we got into primary. You know, primary and basic, and advanced. We had a little more freedom then.
- Mark: And what did you learn to fly?
- O'Dair: I started out, of course, in these Stearmans, you know. Bi-planes. And the difference then was, when you got to basic, you didn't fly a basic trainer any more. You flew an advanced trainer. You flew an AT-6. So I flew AT-6s at Paren Field and had a ball. No problems at all, going through pilot training. Because I had, you know, been around airplanes enough. And then I got to advanced, and I was flying B-25s. So I was right back in 25s again. And it was, well, I finished up at Enid, Oklahoma, in '45. I got out just before the end of the war.
- Mark: Yea. So, you became a pilot, and your mission was supposed to be what?

O'Dair: I just wanted to get the technical skills to give me a better opportunity in the Air Force, because I didn't know what my future would be with them.

Mark: Yea. But the Air Force didn't give you a specific mission, like ferrying planes?

O'Dair: No, because that was the end of the war, and the last thing they needed was more pilots.

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

Mark: I suppose that's true. Yea.

O'Dair: They had too many then. They were wondering what to do with all of us. And a lot of people were getting out.

Mark: And, so, the war ended, then?

O'Dair: Yes.

Mark: And, what happened after that?

O'Dair: Well, I stayed in until January of 1947. I was undecided whether to make the Air Force a career, or not.

Mark: What were you debating in your head? What were the pro's and con's?

O'Dair: Ah, trying to see, if there a future and whether or not, since I didn't have my college education, I was trying to figure out in my mind whether to try it that way, whether the government, whether I could get my education that way, or not. And I went through, I finally, I was even assigned up at Truax before it closed up there. And I was, I think, a supply officer. And then I went down to Chanute Field, and I was the commanding officer of the administrative squadron and Group Adjutant. And I sat on a lot of court-martial boards, you know, things like that.

Mark: That was in the late '40s?

O'Dair: Yea. This was in '46.

Mark: What were people being court-martialed for?

O'Dair: AWOL [Absent Without Leave] mostly. They closed all these bases, like Truax, and there were a lot, a whole bunch of bases. And the squadron I had, absorbed all

these people who were AWOLs.

Mark: These were people who decided to end the war on their own?

O'Dair: Yea. A lot of them didn't know any better. You know, they took a lot of kids in there that could hardly read or write. They didn't know, if their mom or dad called them and said, "Hey, we need you around here," they just took off.

Mark: Well, that was fairly common in the Civil War. I am a little surprised to hear that from a modern Twentieth Century war.

O'Dair: Oh, yea.

Mark: That the guys would just take off when the war's over.

O'Dair: Oh, yea. You ought to, I used to get these letters from the mothers of fathers, usually. Unbelievable. You know, they couldn't hardly, if they wrote, it was very illegible, what they were writing.

Mark: Well, what happened to these guys? I mean, were they lenient to them?

O'Dair: Oh, we were lenient. Most of the kids didn't know any better. We'd usually just discharge them, rather than fool around. Now, we had some, you know, where there were crimes, you know, things like that. But, by and large, we were just happy to get rid of them. Let them go back home. That's where they wanted to be. But, I could still fly, put in my hours every month. But it wasn't, I really wasn't that happy with the life, you know. [Pause on the tape.]

Mark: Okay, we are starting to talk about your decision to leave the service.

O'Dair: Yes, I decided I wanted to get my college and get into aeronautical engineering. That's what I did. I went out to the West Coast and took a sort of quickie course with Northrup Institute of Technology. And had, got my certificate in aeronautical engineering from them, and went to work for North American Aviation, whose airplane I had flown. You know. They built the B-25.

Mark: Yea. Now, this training in aeronautical engineering, was it?

O'Dair: Yes.

Mark: I mean, you didn't to the traditional, or what has become known as the traditional GI Bill type of class for four years, and that sort of thing?

- O'Dair: Yea, I went on the GI Bill. It took a little over two years.
- Mark: [Unintelligible.]
- O'Dair: And it didn't have the humanities, things like that in it.
- Mark: Right.
- O'Dair: Again, my time was running out, and all that stuff, you know. So I wanted to, and I was married then. And wanted to start to have children, so I had to get to work.
- Mark: Did the GI Bill cover your educational expenses?
- O'Dair: No, not all of it, because I worked then. I'd worked four to eight hours there at the school. We were reducing data on missiles they were running out in the Pacific. And so I earned money, and my wife was working, too, at that time. We weren't too, you know, weren't living bad.
- Mark: Yea. This was out in California, you say?
- O'Dair: Yea. Out in Los Angeles area.
- Mark: So, you got your training and then it came time to find a job. Did you have trouble finding work?
- O'Dair: No. Hold on, just a second. The door.
- Mark: Yea. Absolutely. [Pause on the tape.]
- O'Dair: Let's see. Go ahead and get back to your question.
- Mark: I was just talking about finding work. After you got your training, then did you have trouble finding work?
- O'Dair: Things weren't real, there wasn't a boom of jobs. But I didn't. Fortunately, I was number one in the class, so, you know, it helped. I immediately got an offer from two companies. From Rohr Aircraft, and from North American Aviation. And I chose North American.
- Mark: Which was based where?
- O'Dair: They're in El Segundo, right, you know, in the Los Angeles area.

- Mark: Yea. So you stayed out in California, then? At least, for a while.
- O'Dair: Yes, for a while. And I ended up about where I started, and I was in charge — I started in the model design, and the model building for the wind tunnels. Which is back to what I had with NASA.
- Mark: Yea. How long did you stay in California?
- O'Dair: Well, they transferred me to the Columbus, Ohio, plant in 1955. This was, I went out there in '47.
- Mark: Yes. You were out there a good eight years, or something.
- O'Dair: Yes.
- Mark: Now, there was a lot, after the war, there was a lot of migration to the west. And that sort of thing.
- O'Dair: Right.
- Mark: Particularly to California, and southern California. I'm interested in your observations on how the place was changing.
- O'Dair: It was getting so crowded. And I didn't, you know, it wasn't too bad living there, but I, when I saw the opportunity to go to Ohio, I loved it, because, like I used to say, you could drive for three hours, way back then, in California, and thought you'd be in some remote place to see things, and you still got to put your money in the slot in a parking meter. You couldn't get away from people out there. It was just jammed, everywhere.
- Mark: I'm sorry. You were saying?
- O'Dair: Go ahead.
- Mark: I was just wondering if you had any, if you ever gave a thought to coming back to Wisconsin at all.
- O'Dair: Ah, no, because I didn't, I did at one time yes, but I thought, well, there just aren't opportunities there. In the field I was in. And the opportunities seemed to be in California, or Washington state, or, you know, Texas. And I think Ohio. Those general areas.

- Mark: Yea. The aerospace industry. Generally, in the Sun Belt area.
- O'Dair: Yea, down, and you know, Georgia, and Florida area.
- Mark: Yea. Now, in terms of readjusting to civilian life, we pretty much covered the vocational rehabilitation, as it was called. You got training, you got work. What about some of the medical problems you mentioned earlier? The dysentery problems, and that sort of thing?
- O'Dair: Yea. I had them, but you just sort of live with it. I stayed in the reserve, military reserve, and just missed by one day getting called up to go to Korea. In the war.
- Mark: Yea. Did you have contact with the VA medical system at all? And did you get a disability or anything like that?
- O'Dair: No, no, I didn't. I just felt, you know, just go forward. I didn't worry about stuff like that.
- Mark: Yea. Any sort of psychological readjustments?
- O'Dair: No.
- Mark: Some veterans that come back, with nightmares and that sort of thing.
- O'Dair: No, the only nightmare I ever had, I remember one time flying, when I first got back, I was flying on an airplane. I guess I dozed off and I was about beating the person to death next to me on the airplane. I had some nightmare on it. But, by and large, it's, you know. I know, when we first landed in Russia, I was shaking like a leaf afterwards, you know, after everything was over with. But a lot of people were.
- Mark: Yea. But nothing that came back to plague you after the war?
- O'Dair: No. No. I felt lucky, I guess. There were a lot of people who had a worse time than I had, by a long ways.
- Mark: One other area, and the last area that I really have in my standard questions, and that involves veterans organizations, and reunions, and that sort of thing. In the first few years after the war, did you join any groups like the Legion, or the VFW, or anything?
- O'Dair: No, not really.

- Mark: Any particular reason? You too busy?
- O'Dair: I was too busy. I was trying to get my profession going, over there. And I was, again, even when I started at North American, I was doing consulting work on the side for CalTech, in their wind tunnels. And so I had a fairly good reputation for instrumentation design. And so I was kept pretty busy on the other things. And staying active in my Air Force Reserve took some time, every week.
- Mark: Yea. As you got older, and you had more free time, and perhaps more disposable income, have you joined any of those groups since?
- O'Dair: No, we've had our own reunions, now. Finally. Just in the past six years, or so. Getting back again, which nobody thought much about.
- Mark: Do you attend those?
- O'Dair: Yes, I usually do.
- Mark: For what reason?
- O'Dair: Ah, just comradely. Trying to compare notes, you know, with people that we really never took the time when we were younger, to do it.
- Mark: Yea.
- O'Dair: And now you can think about it, and weigh it. You know, when you are raising kids, and all that, you don't have time, I don't believe, to worry about that kind of thing.
- Mark: Yea. Well, that is pretty much my standard line of questions. Is there anything you'd like to add, or anything?
- O'Dair: No. I just, one thing about it, I always loved coming back up to Madison. I think it is a great city, and I debated a few years ago, returning, after my previous wife died. You know. But, I thought, no, I like the South. I'm conditioned to it, down here, now.
- Mark: Yea, I should warn you, I got two inches of snow and icy roads today.
- O'Dair: Oh, boy. And, I love, of course, the Packers. I follow them religiously.
- Mark: Well, now, I was going to ask you, that is where Brett Favre is from, isn't it?



- O'Dair: Yes. This is his home. My daughter-in-law, here, decorated his home.
- Mark: Oh, is that right?
- O'Dair: So he is pretty close to my wife's children, around here. So, Brett is pretty well known in the community, here. Belongs to our country club. That's where I live, right here on the country club part.
- Mark: Oh, you've met him before?
- O'Dair: Yea. Oh, yea. Yea, he's pretty accessible in the off season. People, he plays golf here when he is back down here, in the off season.
- Mark: Yeah. Lots of Packer fans down there in Hattiesburg?
- O'Dair: Oh, yeah. All over the place.
- Mark: Would have expected as much. All right. Thanks for taking some time out of your day.
- O'Dair: Okay, Mark. Thanks very much.
- Mark: Sure. It's always good to get some of you lost souls who have migrated on. It happens. In fact, an uncle of mine was that way. I was glad to get him back on tape, and everything.

**[End of Interview.]**