

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
DONALD L. PAULSON
U. S. Army Air Corps
World War II

2005

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Paulson, Donald L., (1922-2009), Oral History Interview, 2005

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 50 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 50 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Donald Paulson, an Albert Lea, Minnesota native, discusses his World War II service in the Army Air Corps as a China-Burma-India Theater pilot. Paulson talks about deciding to volunteer after graduating high school in 1941. He describes being turned down by the Navy Air Corps for being too short and signing up with the Army Air Corps instead. Paulson talks about boot camp at Fort Snelling (Minnesota), pre-flight at San Antonio (Texas), primary flight training at Bonham (Texas), and advanced flight at Altus (Oklahoma). He talks about his first solo flight and being trained by civilian pilots in groups of six cadets. He says they flew a lot, and were taught “to be able to fly everything and anything that is manufactured in the United States, in the way of airplanes.” Promoted to second lieutenant, he speaks of heading up the instrument flying crew and enjoying work as an instructor. Paulson discusses being placed in a C-46 crew and being given envelopes with locations to open in the air instead of being told where to go. After stopping at several locations, he speaks of getting to Chittagong (Burma) where he delivered supplies with a “ComCar” (Combat Cargo) unit to Merrill’s Marauders. He discusses being a Hump pilot, flying supplies and hundred octane gasoline over the Himalaya Mountains from Myitkyina (Burma) to China. He details flying the hump with no lights at night and often having difficulty landing due to fog. Of the five person crew, only he and another pilot would go over the hump, allowing the rest of the crew to stay at the camp. He states they would be so tired when they arrived back at Myitkyina that they would land in an auxiliary field and sleep in the airplane. He talks about navigating the plane, sleeping in tents, using cleverly engineered showers, and eating dehydrated food. Paulson emphasizes the heavy amount of rain, which at one point washed his foot locker into the Irrawaddy River. He states he and another pilot named Ben Clayton would occasionally fly General Wilson to Calcutta and back. Paulson describes how sailors would trade places with the pilots so the pilots could occasionally sleep in actual beds. After the war ended, he discusses policing the area by dumping warheads in a lake, and he speaks of taking a China Burma India Theater reporter up in a plane to take photographs of equipment that was being abandoned. He recalls sailing home on a troop ship and seeing the Golden Gate Bridge. Paulson states that he made use of VA hospitals and joined the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Hump Pilots Association.

Biographical Sketch:

Paulson (1922-2009) served as a pilot in the China-Burma-India Theater of World War II. He eventually settled in Dodgeville (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2005.

Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer, 2005.

Transcript edited and abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2010.

Interview Transcript:

John: Today is July 21, 2005, and this is John Driscoll, and I'm a volunteer with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Archives. And this is an oral history interview with Don Paulson, of Dodgeville. Don is a veteran of World War II and Don, thank you so much for coming in and agreeing to the interview. Why don't we start at the very beginning? When and where were you born?

Donald: Okay. I was a baby, at one time. And in 1922, I was born in Albert Lea, Minnesota. Yes. And I was brought up by my family and we went through high school in Albert Lea. I graduated in 1941 and, of course, in 1941, that would produce a boy of about nineteen years old. So the war was going on hot and heavy at that time. World War II, of course. And, of course, I got the usual mail from Uncle Sam that said, "Don, we need you." And so, I thought the best way to get into the service would be to volunteer. But that way you could, perhaps, pick what you wanted. And that is the long shot of what happened. Are we doing all right?

John: You're doing fine. This is great.

Donald: So, it got to be 1942, that was the year after I graduated from high school in Albert Lea. And I read in the evening paper that cadet training for pilot training was going to come to an end, so I took that in advisement. And I went down to find out, and first of all, there was the Navy, and there was the Army. And I thought, if I get in the Navy, at least I'll have a piece of bread with a little butter on it, with not a whole of dirty feet. So I went down to see the Navy recruiter. Fine fellow. And he was quite an intelligent fellow. He said, "What did you have in mind?" I said, "Navy Air Corps, sir." "Oh," he looked at me like this, and he said, "Before we go any further, I am going to have to put you on this scale over here, and we'll weigh you." So they put it on the scale and, of course, I weighed whatever it was. And then he dropped the measuring device on my head. And he said, "Mr. Paulson," he says, "I've got the answer already. You are an inch and a half too short and we can't use you. Sorry about that." And I simply said, "I'll try again, sir." And I left. So then I had no alternative but to go to the Army thing. Is this interesting?

John: Yes. Absolutely. Oh, yeah.

Donald: So we went down to the Army recruiter and he says, "Young man, what are you here for?" "I am here to join the service." "Oh, okay. Very good. So, I'll tell you what we will do. Do you have something in mind?" And I said, "Yes. I have something very much in mind. I want to Air Corps. I want to be a pilot." "Oh," he says, "that's good. Now, in you want to be a pilot in the Air Corps of the United States," he said, "I've got a piece of paper here. There is an X at the end of it. I

want to see if you can write. I want to see your signature.” So I applied my signature. I had been to school so it worked out quite well. And he said, with a very sober, he was very sober, he said, “Are you sure this is what you want?” “Yes, sir.” And he says, “Now, young man, with your name signed at that X on that piece of paper, you are now in the Army of the United States Air Corps.”

John: Air Corps. Good.

Donald: Yeah. So, that is all it took. It was on a Thursday, and he said, “There will be a free bus pass you can go to Fort Snelling, St. Paul, and if you will be ready, ride up on the bus, you go up on Monday morning and you get there,” he says, “and when you get there, be ready to change clothes.” So then I got on the bus and I went up to St. Paul, and then I was in the Army.

John: You enlisted in Albert Lea?

Donald: Enlisted in Albert Lea. That was my home, of course.

John: Okay. Then Fort Snelling.

Donald: Yep. And I have to mention it was a time when families were very close. In those days, the families were this close. There wasn't TV, there wasn't anything but to have fun. And my mother, ultimately, passed away at ninety-seven.

John: Oh, wow. That's great.

Donald: And my daddy left me at ninety-nine.

John: Oh, wow.

Donald: That was almost two hundred years of good, good living. Don't you see? Anyway, I got into the service, and then we went to a little boot camp to start with. You see, we were pretty fresh, and we didn't know the rules, but they put us a couple, three months in a boot camp. Then we became soldiers. And then after boot camp, I was talking to the CO, the commanding officer, and I said, “Now, really, I'm in the Air Corps, and I kind of wonder what is going to happen.” “Well,” he said, “you'll just be here for a few more days and then you'll get your orders on where to go.” So then I got orders to go to San Antonio, Texas, to pre-flight. So we went down to San Antonio and we spent some time there in pre-flight, and then that was where we studied many things: weather, theory of flight, why airplanes fly and why we fly them, and all this and that. It was interesting. And then they asked, us, “Sir, here I have been in the Air Corps for a few days and I haven't even looked at an airplane.” “No,” he said, “it is going to take some time. You pre-

flight for that about two or three months.” So to make a long story short on that one, I got orders to go to primary. Now, this is physics that enter into the thing. We went to Bonham, Texas, a little town in Texas, very small, and anyway, they had a few airplanes there, and a few civilian pilots. So they put us in groups of six. Six youngsters. And at this point they never called us soldiers any more. We were called Mister. That was our designation. Mister. So after seven and a half hours of flying time, we finally got with that, the civilian pilot patted me on the back and said, “It’s all yours. Take it away.” So I took it up and that was my solo flight, of course.

John: Wow.

Donald: From then on, we flew a lot. We flew and we practiced in these smaller airplanes. It was a little airplane with two hundred horsepower. And that was the last two months at that. And then we moved to primary, to basic, would be the same one. And there we got into an airplane that had seven hundred horsepower.

John: That is a difference.

Donald: And we took a big leap there, with a canopy over the top like this. And there we flew every day it was permissible because of the weather, see. So then we flew there a lot, but what I noticed, before I got there, I mentioned there was six of us in the original group. Somehow or other, I was the only one that made it through. Yeah. Five of the fellows washed out. Something went awry, something went bad. Not bad necessarily, but somehow or other, they just didn’t get in. And so I was the only one out of the six that got through. Then we went to basic training, which was bigger aircraft, and ultimately, we were chosen to fly either single engine or multi-engine. And the instructor says, all of us says, “We are teaching you young men to be able to fly everything and anything that is manufactured in the United States, in the way of airplanes.” And, of course, that is the way it was. They just taught us how to fly. Then we went through advanced. This was kind of interesting. I love it, this part of it. We got to Altus, Oklahoma, advanced flying, and we were twin-engine, at that time. And as we flew, this is not necessarily boasting, but I had pretty good luck flying. I was a pretty good pilot and I kind of knew it. That was the main thing. And so, after we graduated, actually, it was the end of ‘43, we graduated and became an officer. I was a second lieutenant. But the best thing about me was they said they were going to send home for three days. I went to Albert Lea for three days, visit mother and dad. And I got back on the third day. I was picked to head up the instrument flying crew.

John: Oh, okay.

Donald: Yeah. I was no longer a cadet any more. I was one of the instructors. And it made

you feel pretty good to be an instructor. So I did that for, I would say, two or three groups of young fellows that came through. Young fellows. I was twenty-two years old. But anyway, we taught those boys how to fly. But then, the war, I don't know, it wasn't going too good. They were losing a lot of people, a lot of airplanes and a lot of ground troops. It was pretty bad. So they needed some replacements. So they took some of us from this training command and put us into regular service. Okay. They put together crews, and the crew, this is kind of interesting. The crew was to fly a C-46, which was a monster. Big. You probably know about 46s. Yeah. A big aircraft. And we had a crew of five. There was the pilot, co-pilot, radio operator, navigator, and crew chief. Five of us. And we, they said, "You be at Fort Wayne, Indiana, and you will leave the United States and go someplace." Just go someplace. So, we got to Fort Wayne, Indiana, and had our transition in the big airplane, then one more time, I said, "Captain, where are we going?" He said, "I'm sorry, I can't tell you, because it is classified and if I knew I wouldn't say anyway." But he said, "You will get an envelope and you take that envelope, and you get up five hundred feet in the air, or someplace, open the envelope and it will tell you where to go." So the first envelope that we got at Fort Wayne, Indiana, was to West Palm Beach, Florida. Pretty nice little spot.

John: Yea, right.

Donald: Yes. And then subsequent, take off, we got a new envelope. We had no idea where we were going to go. We knew that we were going overseas and the Atlantic Ocean was out there. And we didn't know how we were going to do this. So we went from West Palm Beach, we went to Puerto Rico, and we went to British Guyana, which is South America. And then down to Natel, Brazil. And then we went from there to Ascension Island, to Liberia, and we still didn't know where we were going. I was thinking all the time we would end up in Italy. But we got to Cairo, Egypt, and we kept right on going east, and we got to India, and then we got to Burma. A little town called Chittagong. It was a seacoast town, Chittagong, and they could bring large transport ships in there, unload them, and then here is where we came in. We were at the airstrip at Chittagong. And inland, was the Burma Road, and it was running north and south. And they had some soldiers in there at the Burma Road to defend it, but Japan, our dear friends, Japan, had sent fifty thousand troops down through Indo-China to cut off the Burma Road because they didn't want the Burma Road to supply China. They even thought they could whip China at one time. They were pretty stupid about that. But anyway, we supplied the troops. They called them Merrill's Marauders.

John: Oh, yeah.

Donald: You've heard of that, I'm sure. We supplied them with ammunition, food, bridges, anything that they wanted. And we were classed, the name of our outfit

was called ComCar. Combat cargo. If they needed cargo, they were combat troops and they needed help, so we brought it to them. And at the same time, the Japanese did cut the road and it stopped all that truck traffic. So then we had another job to do. We were carrying supplies right dead into China, right over the Himalaya Mountains, right over the Hump. The Hump trip. You've heard of that, I'm sure.

John: Yeah.

Donald: So I was a Hump pilot. And we flew a lot of trips over the Hump. And the touchy part of that, and this is quite important, we were supplying hundred octane gasoline over to China. That was our job. So we would put it in fifty-five gallon drums, put them in the airplane, fly over the Himalaya Mountains. Touchy. Touchy. If something went wrong, it was our loss. Anyway, that went along pretty well and then, about half-way through this thing, we moved from Chittagong to, well, I can't remember the name of the town, along the Irrawaddy River.

John: Was it Myitkyina?

Donald: Myitkyina, yeah. Yea, that is it. And then we flew out of Myitkyina, a lot closer to China so we could take a lot more loads over on that side, when that happened. And then I had, at Myitkyina, I am a little bit of a booster, but I had two fellows, Ben Clayton and Don Paulson got to fly General Wilson around. If he had to go to Calcutta, it was Ben and me that take him to Calcutta, and back.

John: Now, I just, weeks ago, interviewed a fellow who was a radio operator flying the Hump who flew with him. I'll get his name when we go upstairs.

Donald: Really?

John: He was the radio operator in an aircraft, but then, you mentioned this General Wilson. Wilson would pick him every now and then to go somewhere. General Wilson would pick him, this fellow, to be his radio operator sometimes. I'll get his name. It's upstairs. Isn't that something?

Donald: Yeah. We were over there. We were flying out of Myitkyina, and down to Calcutta, lots of times, Ben and I. I don't remember having a radio operator with us, but maybe we did. I think the general was asked about that. So, anyway, we flew many trips over the Hump. A Hump radio operator, huh?

John: Yeah. How many missions did you fly over?

Donald: Oh, I would say, probably twenty-five.

John: Oh.

Donald: Lots of them. Anyway, it wasn't so much the Japanese we worried about. We always, this is important, we always flew at night.

John: Oh, I didn't know that.

Donald: Take off at eight thirty. We turned our lights out. And we were alone out there. No lights. No nothing. Just fly along like we knew what we were doing. And I don't know if that radio operator mentioned this, but they turned the lights out or not, but I was the pilot. I knew we turned the lights out. We didn't want to be seen. So we go over to China, unload the load, and go back again. The big problem was once we got back, the fog would move in. And this fog was so thick. Did the radio operator mention about the fog?

John: No.

Donald: That fog was so thick you could slice it off like baloney. You know. We'd come in, it wasn't unusual at all, just par for the course, I would come in, call the tower at Myitkyina, "This is number so-and-so, requesting landing instructions." And they'd come back and they'd say, "Well, the fog just moved in, and the ceiling is zero. And you hold at twenty-four thousand feet. So we'd hold, forth and back, forth and back, forth and back, and then every five hundred foot was an airplane. Down to a thousand feet, so this was quite a few airplanes. And we had to wait our turn. Finally they'd get to our number and they'd say, "Now, you can lower down." You'd go down in five hundred foot sections. As this guy found the field, everybody moved down. And then we'd wait until it was our turn. And believe me, that put us on trial. But anyway, we would set down at anything that was lighted. Often times, we landed in an auxiliary field. But the tower would come back and say, "We can't see you. How come you're down?" And I'd say, "I'm on the ground and I'm okay." But I'd say, "I've got blankets in the airplane and I'm sleeping right here. I'm not even going to worry about it until tomorrow. We'd sleep in the airplane until it was morning. All night long we were flying, and that is the only way we flew was at night. So, then this went on and on, and we flew a lot of trips. I don't know, I'd guess, probably twenty-five or thirty trips. We didn't really keep track. And then after a while the war was over. And that was it. So, what they had to do then, we were still in the Air Corps. And we had to, what they call, police the area. You're way ahead of me, I know.

John: Yeah.

Donald: Police the area. So they had whole stacks of hundred pound warheads. They were

about this long and this big around. And they had to be disposed of. So they put a few of them on a truck and they carried them out in the country and blew them up. And here come the natives. "Can't do that because you are wrecking our houses. Our houses are falling down." So, in the shadow of Mount Everest was a big lake. Oh, I would say bigger than Mendota. Big lake, anyway. It was probably ten, fifteen miles long. So we'd put just a pilot, myself, and the crew chief. That is all that went. We'd put these in the airplane and we'd fly low over the water, and we'd dump them out. Come back and get another load. So we were policing the area. We got rid of any trash and it went into that lake up there. Anybody will be able to find it, of course. It is there. And then pretty soon, it was over, and then instead of getting to fly home, we left the airplane and we got on board a ship. And, once again, we went east across the Pacific on the troop ship. And we went around the world. And that was Uncle Sam that did it.

John: He paid for the trip.

Donald: Yeah. And then we were on the ship for thirty-six days. A long way across that Pacific. Slow boat. And they said that it was morning, and in an hour, you will see a beautiful sight. So about an hour we were standing and, sure enough, here comes the Golden Gate. Sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge. And then, I tell you, there were some misty eyes.

John: I'll bet.

Donald: Oh, it was really something. And, of course, we split and we went home. The war was over, and now we were no longer, and I didn't fly anymore because there were family troubles. So, I think that is about the long and short of it.

John: Wow. What was living like over there? How did you live? Barracks?

Donald: Oh, okay, that is interesting. Tents. We had two men tents. That was for two people. One on one side, and one on the other. And I can't even describe the weather. Okay, in this country, out in Kansas, which is the middle of the United States, you get twenty-five, thirty inches annual of rain. Over there we got three hundred and fifty inches. It just rained, rained, rained. And the tents. Of course, we were on the ground. One day it rained so hard, my friend, that I couldn't find my foot locker. It is still floating down the Irrawaddy River. The rain, it was that much. The Irrawaddy River came up about eighteen feet. Oh, yeah. And this gully-washer, if you can call it that...

John: Wait a minute. I'm going to flip this tape.

[End of Side A of Tape 1.]

John: So your foot locker is still in the Irrawaddy River?

Donald: I think that it is still in the Irrawaddy River, to the best of my knowledge. It took my shoes. They were standing beside it. Took everything I had. And then, you have to keep the body clean, so the engineers were very clever. Up on the bank of the Irrawaddy River they put a water pump. Half inch pipe going down under ground to the bank of the river. Well, I looked at that. I thought that looks pretty good. I think that is fine. Down there they put an elbow up. Put an eight foot piece of pipe up that had a T at the top and put pipe on each side. And they drilled holes in it. And on the ground, that is where we took our shower. Kept our body warm and dry and clean.

John: Yeah. Great.

Donald: I got another report that might be interesting.

John: Absolutely.

Donald: Okay?

John: Yeah.

Donald: We were eating dehydrated foods. Potatoes, beets, anything that they could dry, they would send us in bags. Little plastic bags. Dry bags, you know. So if they would get some water and they put them in the potatoes, it came out white. If they put it in beets, it came out red. Pudding. So we ate pudding. And then if we had carrots, they came out orange. And orange pudding.

John: So you could always tell what it was.

Donald: Believe me, it was not home. Let's put it that way. So, one night, here is what happened. We went into China and we landed over there in China, and I didn't want to see them unload this load of fifty-five gallon drums of hundred octane gas. They would just roll them out of the airplane, and let them hit the ground. If one of them had ruptured, I was afraid that was to be disaster.

John: Sure.

Donald: So I walked off about a couple hundred yards. And here was a building that looked like a garage. It would be a garage in this country. And there was a light on in there. Two o'clock in the morning. So I kind of came up there and I rapped on the door a little bit. Nothing happened. I rapped on it a little bit louder, and here

come a little Chinese fellow. And I knew it was my friend because he was smiling. So I said, "Hi." He didn't know what we were saying. A complete different language, you know. And I noticed that he was frying eggs. Oh, Don, here we go. So I said to the man, "Eggs." I did this. I rubbed my belly. He picked that up. So he held his hand up like that, how many? Want two, so I got two eggs. Before it was all over, I had ate half a dozen eggs. So he fried them for me. Bread was as black as that stand back there. Here is what the bread looked like. But I had four pieces of that. It didn't make any difference what it was. I was going to eat it because I was hungry. So, anyway, I ate those eggs, and I never was able to forget that trip. I finally went back to the airplane. Oh, now, when we flew over the Hump, I don't know who, anybody will differ with me, but we flew the pilot and the co-pilot, and the rest of the people stayed home. The radio operator stayed home. The navigator stayed home, and the crew chief stayed home. So we were two people, pilot and co-pilot. Every other time we were pilot, every other time we were co-pilot.

John: Okay.

Donald: Okay? So, the people who would stay at home, they weren't cowards. No, they weren't cowards. This was survival, that's about it. They just didn't want to get lost. And I don't blame them because they were human beings. And they were my buddies, and they were part of the crew. Except that they stayed home. But nobody felt bad about that. So the crew on the Hump trip was the pilot and co-pilot.

John: How did you navigate?

Donald: How did we navigate? Okay.

John: You didn't have radar.

Donald: No, but what he had was this, sir. You had a big dial about this big with a needle on it, see. And what we would do, we'd get up in the air and, we'll say at twenty-four thousand feet, or twenty thousand feet, or whatever we were supposed to fly at. And we could tune in the radio station in China.

John: Okay.

Donald: Yep. There was this radio station over here, and if it was over this way, the needle, we'd tune it in and the needle would go like this. That is where we had to go. And what we had to do then, of course, we flew the airplane. We didn't put it on automatic pilot because Mount Everest was thirty thousand feet, and our service ceiling was about twenty-three thousand feet. So we couldn't get over the

points. So we had to go between. But it matters not what the weather is down underneath. It can be foggy, it can be stormy. But we were generally above the weather. And if it was lightning, we'd look down and watch it lightning. Not up. And we knew what the storms were. And there were a lot of them. With three hundred and fifty inches of rain a year, my God, that's like, you can't imagine that. And the mosquitoes and the bugs were thick. Now, you asked about living there. We were in the tents and if it rained, it was moisturized. Everything got moisturized. There was no question. And it was just a matter of existence, that's all. Yeah. And we had a job to do. And it's kind of interesting, sir. But I don't think anybody was necessarily afraid. I don't think there was any fear. You'd get into that airplane and, if it was raining, we'd take off. If it was not raining, we'd take off. We just, regardless of what the weather was. See, now, birds cannot fly in clouds. They lose their equilibrium.

John: I didn't know that.

Donald: Yea. They set down. I mean, when it is really thick. But human beings are the same way, except we have an artificial horizon and, you are way ahead of me. When you bring it back up like this. And you fly that way. And when you see it, when you are above the weather, it's surprising how much you can see. It's midnight or two in the morning, maybe, but you can still see the mountain peaks. They are out there on the horizon, you see. So you fly between them. And you kind of say, God help me. You know.

John: That is remarkable.

Donald: And there are times when you ask for help.

John: Oh, yeah.

Donald: Maybe you are way ahead of me. I don't know. Maybe you did a lot of flying.

John: No. No.

Donald: I see. But, anyway, that is the way we lived. And then, I mentioned first of all we went to Chittagong, that was the first place we went, and supplied the troops with ammos and stuff like that. And they brought in ship after ship, ocean-going ship, they were like two or three football fields big. Huge ships. And a couple of times the sailors were good guys. They were American sailors. And they came on shore, and they said, "Hi. How are you? Good." Then they said, "You know what we'd like to do? We'd like to trade places with you for the night. We'll sleep in your tent, and you can sleep in our beds."

John: Oh, wow.

Donald: Yeah. What a relief. Often times they would exchange with us, and they would stay in the tent, and we would sleep in the ship. Butter on the bread, you know.

John: You got your butter on your bread, finally.

Donald: Oh, yeah. And they were really grand people. They were American, almost all were American. So other than that, just living was just living. We were putting in our time. And we did mostly fly. And then we had some observation airplanes. We had two. And once in a while, a CBI reporter would come into town, into Myitkyina, and say, "I need a pilot to carry me up to take some pictures." I said, "I'll go. I'll take you up." So we go out and we checked the gasoline gauge in the little single engine airplane, and he says - and the reason I'm telling you this is that he was not used to flying - boy, when we got up five hundred feet, and he was, I mean, he lost his cookies. And I said, "Man, we have to get back home." "Keep right on going," he said, "I'm taking pictures." So we went and saw Jeeps lined up to be stored, just to be left there. Jeeps, couldn't take them home. Well used and worthless. Trucks. Aircraft. We just left them. There were aircraft left and he was taking pictures of this, and they came out in the paper. And he sent me a lot of pictures. And, oh, I loved those pictures, but then my house burned down.

John: Oh, terrible.

Donald: Oh, God. Happened a little ways out west, here. So, anyway, I lost my pictures, and I felt bad about it.

John: That's terrible. Yeah. That's too bad. What did you do after you got out, Don?

Donald: After I got out, that's rather a pretty sad story about me. And I don't think you'd want to hear it.

John: Did you, you had the GI Bill. Did you use it? The benefit program, when you got out.

Donald: I'm not sure what you are referring to, sir.

John: The GI Bill, a loan on a house, education. The veterans benefits. You didn't use those?

Donald: I don't know. I do know this. If I become ill, I come right in to the VA hospital. And let me tell you, my friend, you can tell the world this. That is the finest institution.

John: I've heard that.

Donald: That is anyplace. They are grand people. If they need help, they go over and borrow people out of the university. And I have nothing but high praise for those people.

John: That's great.

Donald: Just grand.

John: Don, what about vets organizations? The VFW, or the American Legion? Did you ever get in on that?

Donald: Oh, I'm a life member of the American Legion, and I am a life member of the VFW. Yeah. And I am also a life member of all of them, and I'm also a life member of the Hump Pilots Association.

John: Oh, okay.

Donald: Yep. You will see, I think Ted might bring my little brief case in. And I've got one of the flyers from this Hump Association. I signed that up and am a life member there.

John: That's great.

Donald: Oh, yeah.

John: Did you ever get together with any of the guys? Reunions?

Donald: Say that again.

John: Did you ever go back and get together with any of the fellows you were with? Did you ever have a reunion of that kind?

Donald: No. They had reunions around, no question about it. But they were in Florida, and they were in California, and that. And that was a little bit, a little too, shall I say, rich for my blood. I would have loved to have gone back. Like I say, I had my first wife has schizophrenia.

John: I see.

Donald: She was in a mental hospital. All her life. Yeah, that was a tear-jerker.

John: Yes, I can imagine.

Donald: Oh, yeah. I didn't want to mention that, but that's where I had that trouble. And if a man can come out of the Army alive and live in hell, this is what I was in. And I feel bad about it, but I took care of that girl until she passed away.

John: What a remarkable story.

Donald: It is great to have someone to talk with.

John: Oh, listen. I had a good friend, the writer, Stephen Ambrose. And he just passed away a few years ago. And he was giving a talk to a bunch of World War II veterans, and most of the guys were saying, you know, "I really didn't do much. I just did my job." And he said, "Would you all stand up?" And the guys stood up. And he said, "You were giants! You went out and you saved the world. And you did." They did.

Donald: How about that.

John: Okay, this is a remarkable story. Wow. Anything else you want to touch on before we wrap up here?

Donald: Oh, goodness. He hit it rather briefly. On the way over, like I mentioned to you before, we didn't know where we were going. We had no idea. We left Fort Wayne, Indiana, and we had a little piece of paper that says this is where you go. Well, we got to Cairo, and we set down, we came in over the pyramids. Just like, there they were. Then the Sphinx. And all that stuff. I said to the fellow, "When we land, we'll get a bus and go out and look at the pyramids." Well, it didn't work that way because we didn't have any time. We had to get going. So, anyway, we didn't see them, except if you looked right down on them. And it was a thrill, believe me.

John: I'll bet.

Donald: Yes. And I remember, I had been in the training command for a little while teaching fellows this fly in the fog. Anyway, one of the fellows who had got through this bunch that was my student, came up to me and he said, "Don," and he gave me a terrific compliment. He said, "Don, you are the best pilot I ever flew with." And I don't think he was kidding.

John: That is great.

Donald: I don't say that. You're the only man that has heard that. But he told me that. And I said, "What in the world are you folks doing now?" And they said, "Well, we are up in Italy, and we are flying B-25s." I said, "Well, good. How is it going?" "Okay." They were down in Cairo, Egypt, for something, fuel, or something. But we were in Cairo and it seems almost impossible that we could go around the world but that is what happened.

John: That's great.

Donald: You're a veteran?

John: Yes.

Donald: Of?

John: I was in quite a bit after you were. I was in 1955, '56, '57, '58. And I was in the Marine Corps. And I was a radio technician.

Donald: Beautiful.

John: Hauled a radio around on my back.

Donald: You can relate to many of your woes and cares.

John: Especially the rain and the mud.

Donald: Yes, I know. You were in Vietnam, then?

John: No, I got out right before Vietnam. I tell people my mother and father were considerate enough to have me too late for Korea and too early for Vietnam.

Donald: So you were right in the hammock.

John: Right. Okay. What a wonderful story. This is great. Well, Don, what we will do now. I need to get this release. I am going to--

Donald: I hope I was intelligent.

John: Oh, this was wonderful. This is a great, great story. Let me--

[End of Interview]