VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

John M. Jacus

Conducted by Deb Barrett

November 23, 2013

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This interview is being conducted on November 23, 2013 with Mr. John Jacus at the Indian Prairie Library in Darien, Illinois. My name is Deb Barrett. Mr. Jacus was born on November 12, 1932 in Chicago, Illinois. He is a retired manager for a food machinery company and learned of the Veterans History Project through the library newsletter. Mr. Jacus has kindly consented to be interviewed for this project. Here is his story.

[A second interview was conducted on December 7, 2013. Sections from the second interview were inserted into the first to make the narrative more chronological.]

Life Before Entering Military Service

John, where were you living just before you entered the service? What was your life like?

Well, I'm going to say that I went into the service when I matriculated at the University of Illinois at age 18, because it was required that you go into ROTC. All males had to take ROTC training at least for the first two years in land-grant colleges. So I took that first two years because it was required of me, just like physical education was required.

That was 1950?

That was 1950.

Because selective service was still being used for military manning, it was a matter of staying in college or getting drafted. So my first two years was roses – I was exempt because I was in the ROTC. Then in my sophomore year it was decided by the powers-that-be in government, whoever they are, that if you were going through the second…[phase] of ROTC – advanced ROTC [two more years] – you would still be exempt. …

Advanced ROTC enabled you to become commissioned at the end of your bachelor's education, which I was. And in the senior year the pre-requisites became ever more strict because now the Korean War had been wound down and they didn't need the manpower they had prior needed. So they were making more strictures. If you wanted to stay in the Air Force ROTC and get commissioned, you had better sign up for flight training.

I always wanted to fly anyhow. As a kid I used to lie in the grass and watch the Piper Cubs land in places like nearby Midway and…[others], back when Piper Cubs landed at Midway in the 1950's.

When you were in the ROTC in college, was it organized by the branch?

[Yes]. I should back up [in the narration].

I hated standing in line. So as a freshman on the campus I had to sign up for ROTC…[courses]. I went to the armory where you did the sign-up after signing up for all my…[other] courses. I saw a great big gob of young men in one corner of the armory, and a lesser gob in another corner and in the third of the four corners there was a little dinky line of people – and that was the Navy ROTC. So I went there because it was the shortest line. …

When I went…there…[I was told] I had to have a congressional appointment for [Navy ROTC] because they paid us while we were in college!

So I looked at the next shortest line, and that was the Air Force. And that's how I went into the Air Force ROTC. And all the sequential things brought me to flight training in the Air Force, because why be a desk jockey if you could learn to fly! And that led me to deciding through flight training to go into single-engine jets. That was the option between multi-engine bombers or cargo planes, helicopters or single-engine fighter jets. And being a young jockey-type guy I went for the fighter jets.

So you were in the Air Force ROTC all four years of college. What did you major in?

I had a split major. I was a Chicago kid in the school of agriculture, which is paradoxical. But I was a very mechanical kid. I had purchased junker cars – like three or four of them – before I graduated from high school. I'd had two of them before I even had a driver's license. But I'd work on them in the garage…to my parents' grief. I was very mechanical.

I have two older brothers, both of whom were in World War II. They were both trained as engineers, one [served] in the Navy and one in the Marines – the Marine Air…[Wing], as a matter of fact; a ground-type person, an enlisted man. He…[chose] to enlist…[and] like me, rather than go into the Army, he went into the Marines in 1943.

So the Air Force looked the best to me of all the options to consider at that time.

Oh, I missed a point. I was mechanical and they were engineers, but from my limited experience with them – mind you, they are seven and eight years older than I – they…[appeared as if] they didn't know how to fix a faucet. Now, what kind of engineers don't know how to fix a faucet! And I was completely at ease with wrenches, faucets; I'd take anything apart. So I saw myself as an engineering candidate, but I'd be darned if I was going to go to an engineering school that admits them!

So I found a scholarship to the school of agriculture courtesy of the Chicago Dairy Tech Society, and then another scholarship came along that enabled me to have all my expenses paid. I was a very bright student as a kid, if I must say so myself. I was double-promoted twice and was actually only 17 when I…[graduated from] high school.

So what did you think you were going to be when you graduated from college? What was your plan?

I wasn't absolutely sure. I liked the idea of the dairy industry and the food industry *per se* because I figured whether the economy goes up or down, people have to eat. Therefore somebody has to fix food…[that] people eat. I figured, in a sense it was stability. I was a Depression baby – not that we thought the Depression was hard times. We didn't know any better because I was born in 1932. We learned things at home that kids these days can't possibly learn because they have everything done for them, [with] easy credit and "maxing it out." I don't have to go there with this story.

So the stability of the industry appealed to me. But when I got out of the service and decided which way I should go with my flying experience, I thought maybe I should go into the

airlines. I applied to three of the major airlines at the time. Two of the three responded and by the time they responded I thought this was the wrong time to go into the airlines. They were just going to convert to jets, and we had already proven that jets in the military were highly efficient, fast and carried big loads and so forth. And I knew that all the World War II pilots would flood the market, and I'd be at the bottom end of the totem pole and wouldn't be able to support my growing family. We wound up having five children in all. But at that time of decision making I already had two.

Let's back up again. You were in college, and you said ROTC was mandatory for state universities?

Land-grant state universities. Those were schools that were given federal lands in order to provide education for the growing population in the United States. And each of the major schools like Michigan State, Penn State, Purdue, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin – were all land-grant schools and they all had ROTC organizations in them. Some had all three; some went with just Army, some Air Force. To this day Purdue has a very big Navy ROTC – "Navy" in Indiana; get that one! In fact, [a few years ago] I went to the Navy ball with a young lady who graduated from ROTC there, and today is a helicopter pilot somewhere in the Middle East.

So your ROTC experience: What were your requirements? What did you have to do at Illinois?

They had a prescribed curriculum. Everything was mandatory in each year, and you progressed. And while I was in the advanced ROTC during the last two years of school, I was promoted to the executive officer of the organization. I was the second in command. There are some funny stories about that, but I won't go there.

What did your ROTC involvement entail while you were there? You had your regular classes that were required, but what did the ROTC require?

We learned the military protocol – marching, saluting. We had drill once a week. I think that was an hour-long course. And we had classes – perhaps three one-hour courses on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday (or something like that) to learn the history of the organization and [such] things… There's a lot to learn about the military. Of course you [interviewer] were born into it, so you wouldn't care!

When did you have to wear your uniform?

On those days that you had drill. You didn't wear them for the academic classes of ROTC, but only for drill. And that leads to one story.

As executive officer, when the troops assembled for parade on the armory floor one had to inspect them first to make sure they had black shoes instead of brown and not white socks like I'm wearing today and so forth. You have to be highly presentable yourself, since you're the inspecting officer.

This one day I had forgotten on the weekend to get a haircut. So my wife at the time didn't have any shears or scissors except for a little cuticle scissors. She said, "I'll do the best I can." It was Sunday evening and I had parade inspection on Monday morning, first thing – no

barbershops open at that time. So she did what she could. And when I showed up, my commanding officer, the number one guy and a friend, could see me walking from the other end of the armory to the center of the parade floor. And although I had my hat pulled down as low as I could he saw me and said, "John. What do you have? Mange?" He had seen big clumps and bare spots. But she had done the best she could.

So you were married while you were in college.

I was married in the beginning of my senior year in college, yes. We immediately started having babies like rabbits!

And this was someone you had met in school?

Yes. I had met her that spring before we married, and she was not a very good student. But that's too much of a story for this.

But you married her your senior year.

Yes. We married in my senior year, but it was her freshman year. But she didn't want to go to school. She was expected to, but didn't continue. So once we married she was going to support me. But she got pregnant right away and had terrible morning sickness and wound up in the dispensary at school – the school hospital… . I've forgotten what they called it.

The clinic?

No. That was when she got seriously sick. But there was an on-campus clinic of sorts that would dole out pills, aspirin, band-aids and stuff like that. But when she got really seriously sick … in fact, we had a baby down there; our first baby.

While you were still a senior?

In one week my wife turned 21, I graduated with a bachelors' degree, was commissioned a second lieutenant, and became a father – all in one week! Skyrockets went off that week!

So you were 22. That's a whole lot to happen in your life.

That's right.

Entering Military Service

When you graduated you said you were commissioned.

I was commissioned right away, and I applied for flight training. I had to wait for my flight school to open up – a class. So I did blacktop paving. I had a massive $300 debt owed to the University because I had given up the all-expense scholarship. I thought somebody…[more needy] would need that. But I did that before we married. I didn't realize that I was going to be married that soon. I had told my wife that my life plan was that I would marry her – I knew I loved her right from the start – but we weren't going to marry until I was 26 because I had three years of military and a couple of years to get established in business. Then I'd be 26.

But it didn't work that way! The juices were flowing too profusely. So we married kind of early, and I needn't say more.

The best laid plans! So you did blacktop paving. That was a civilian job.

Yes, because I had to get a temporary job while I waited for the flight class to open. It…opened in October.

So I…[first went to] Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio for orientation. And then the first flight training was at Hondo, Texas – right down the road from San Antonio.

Where did you live between college and going to flight school?

Various places. Actually we rented a place in Hinsdale which was a house behind a house that was occupied at the time by two teachers – Hinsdale teachers. They had gone off on a sabbatical, and they were going to be gone for all summer and a little more. After they came back we vacated the little house and lived with her relatives…in Hinsdale. She was from Hinsdale. That's why we were there.

Flight Training

So you went down to Texas – to Lackland, Texas.

Yes, for orientation, and learned to deal with the troops… .

How was it going down to a base as opposed to ROTC? What was the comparison? Was it a smooth transition?

Pretty smooth, yes, because we were the officers who were conducting the enlisted recruits – some of them coming right off the bus, train, or plane. And the first thing we did was to have a shake-down inspection. They had to empty their pockets and so forth. You might have 60 people coming in for induction into the Air Force from all walks of life. Some were from the city, some from the country. Some had brass knuckles because momma said "You better take care of yourself." But they had to be inspected before being allowed into the military life of the Air Force [and stripped of potential weapons].

Then we had to teach them how to drill – how to march, how to parade. I'm proud of the fact that I had the champion marching troop, … [doing "monkey drill"] where you had to flip the rifles around. I never carried a rifle myself.

What happened to all the contraband? Was it sent back?

No. It was destroyed. What are you going to do with brass knuckles! They didn't have guns, thankfully. At least I didn't discover any guns. But I'm sure they had them from time to time.

So what were your responsibilities? You brought these guys in and then …

We trained them in marching and military etiquette. And by the time you got through that, a lot of it was casual time, waiting for the class to start. Then you just packed up your gear, went to Hondo and started your flight training: the academics and hands-on flying.

What was a typical day for you like when you had these men under you? How many men were you responsible for?

I think it was more than a squad. I don't even remember the military organization. I'd say maybe 24 or something like that; maybe a handful of squads if squads were indeed the terminology of the time – I've kind of blocked a lot of that out.

What was your typical day like with your men?

That's a hard question to answer because I don't remember that. All I remember was the drilling of them so they knew how to salute and how to dress, how to put your insignia on your uniform. A lot of that stuff is basic, but a person off the street wouldn't know any of those basic things – the sort of thing you learn in the military academy as a "plebe." And a plebe is like dirt!

How long were you with these men?

That period of time at Lackland was only six weeks or so. As a matter of fact, …Carol and I rented a house on the far corner of town. So it might have been more than six weeks. It might have been three months there before the flight class opened in Hondo, Texas.

So had your 24 men graduated to the next level by that time?

Oh, yes. And we probably had another crop. Because their period of time was only six weeks or something like that, and then they went off to some other training.

So you had several of those.

At least two that I remember.

Then you went over …

To be trained, myself, in…flying [skills].

Tell me what your life was like when you got there. Where did you live? Did you live in a house or on base?

It was a civilian contract school selling its services to the Air Force. It had been an Air Force training school during World War II. The barracks were abandoned and rented out to a chicken farmer. So the barracks were chicken housing! They had been cleaned up when we moved in … but not very well! So we had a little clean-up work to do. I think there had been a class or two ahead of us, but there was some "residual."

It was bare-bones housing. It wasn't Quonset huts and not Wherry housing, either. You're probably not familiar with Wherry housing; you were a kid then. It was some senator or congressman who decided the military should have decent housing and not live in dirt. And in Panama City, Florida, later, we did live in Wherry housing. And the officers' quarters were all

occupied, so we were in enlisted quarters because that was available. As it turned out I liked it better anyhow. It was nicer stuff.

So you're in Texas right now.

Yes. And these barracks-type houses were one-family units, really. They had no facilities. They had hot and cold running water, and heat was by way of the oil-fired free-standing stoves.

I'll remember one thing very vividly until the day I die… . In Texas they're not built for winters. San Antonio is pretty far south, and Hondo being at that same latitude was not equipped, especially these jerry-built houses were not built for winters. So we had the best we could afford – you remember shag rugs and some of them were pretty thin. Our living room was spread with a shag rug. And when a 'blue norther' – that's what they called a cold front, and they were cold because you were used to warmer weather – came in the cracks in the floor [and the shag rug would] levitate… a foot off the floor! I had never seen a levitating rug before that time.

So it was you and your wife, and how many kids did you have by that time?

In Hondo I had one. She was pregnant with number two, who was delivered between Hondo and Laredo.

How long were you in Hondo?

The better part of six months.

And that was your training for flight school.

That was for primary training. There are three levels: primary, [basic and] advanced… . [In] the third one, you learn shooting and bombing and all that stuff.

So what were you learning?

I learned how to fly a Piper Cub without killing myself – solo. You learned how to do these things in the air. And after the Piper Cub came the T6 Texan, which is a radial-engine job. And from the T6 there, you graduated into the Laredo…[basic] flight training, which then brought us into the T28, which was a tricycle-gear North American aircraft, which was great for night flying. And once you got through the T28 you went into the T33, which is a jet aircraft.

So you were there maybe six months?

Yes, in each of those. And you got your wings after graduation from the jet training at Laredo, and you got an assignment somewhere.

Duty Assignment

So you went from Hondo to Laredo.

And from Laredo to Tyndall Air Force Base in Panama City, Florida.

And that was your final …

Not quite. It would have been my final [station]. But we're kind of leap-frogging because there was one [noteworthy] incident between Hondo and Laredo.

We were due to have Suzanne, our second child, but I had not been to Laredo yet and Carol was imminently due to have this child. I wasn't sure they had decent facilities down there and whether it would have been delivered on the Air Force base or in the town. I knew that border towns on either side of the border were not that great, not that well provided. I knew I was madly in love with this lady and I was going to be absolutely sure I was going to take the best care of her that I could.

So what we did was to take leave between those two bases, …[going to Carol's] home with the young child. I left them with the in-laws – her mother and recently married second husband. The point was they were going to be delivered at Great Lakes Naval Hospital, which is close to Chicago. And the step-father-in-law would be the person to look after her during delivery, and …[thereafter]. So, Suzanne was delivered at Great Lakes at the grand total price of something like $4.58! That was for the telephone or …[incidentals].

But she was a bouncing baby, and I got to meet her at San Antonio when the three of them, after only about three or four weeks of life on Suzanne's part, came flying down on a Constellation. I had said to her on the phone – to my wife – "Don't get off the plane. I'll get on the plane and will help you off with Mary and the infant and we'll do what needs to be taken care of."

So your wife flew down with your little girl and the baby.

The baby was in a basket. And I said I would come on and help them off. Well she couldn't find me and she wouldn't get off! So the stewardess said "Lady, if you don't get off now you're going to Mexico City, because that's where we're going next."

So when I got there – I was delayed; I left the base at Laredo in plenty of time, I had already gone there to start my training – I'd left the [base] in plenty of time [to meet my family in San Antonio]. Except in that part of Texas, at least at that time, they had "dry washes". It's a river with no water in it. Those dry washes were built right across the roadway, the U. S. highways. So that when the heavy rains came, … [a torrent would cross] the road; then … [the road would dry up], because it was [rapidly] going to a river [downhill] somewhere. They didn't need sewers everywhere. And darned if I didn't get stuck by a flood in a dry wash. It had rained hours before, and the dry wash was so full of water on the roadway that I couldn't pass until the thing drained a little bit. It delayed me about two hours.

By this time …[Carol is escorted] off the plane and in the terminal trying to get a telephone call to me – she had my number on the base at the bachelor officer's quarters where I stayed at the time. When she left Chicago my step-father-in-law asked her if she had money. He was going to give her money for travel. She said, "Oh, yeah. I have money." It turned out she had one five-dollar bill that she was traveling to Texas with. She couldn't stuff the five-dollar bill in the phone slot so she was sweet-talking the operator, pleading her case for the operator to

connect her to me at the Air Force base in Laredo. She got the call through to the bachelor officers' quarters and my classmate, Roger, answered. He wanted to play a trick so he said, "John? I think he's having a few drinks over at the officers' club." And about the time she's hanging up I came behind her and put my hands over her eyes and said, "Guess who!" What timing! I was a master of timing.

But the green grass grew all around after that. We got everything loaded in the car and the family was all together. And we …[proceeded] to restart our life in the military.

And this was still down in …

Laredo. Once we left from Laredo – we took leave between bases and went to Chicago for a holiday and then went to Tyndall in Panama City, Florida.

And what year was that?

That would have been 1956 or the end of 1955. I was through training and got a couple weeks leave. We went to Chicago and …[then] to Panama City together in the car.

You, your wife and the two girls.

Yes – an infant and a toddler.

And this was another six months or six weeks?

In Panama City? I was there for the rest of my three-year hitch. As a matter of fact, before I got my wings at Laredo I was given the opportunity to go to further advanced training to learn bombing, strafing and all that good stuff in the high performance planes of the time. Mind you, the F-80 I showed you was used in Korea, but it was ineffective because it was too fast for ground support and too slow for aerial work. The F-86 had come out at the time and that was the one that could dog-fight and cope with the Russian MiGs, which were the North Koreans' armament of choice. And the Russians kept…[North Koreans] trained and supplied. [Taking advanced training] would have meant that instead of a three-year hitch I would have had a five-year hitch and with this growing family in my hands I thought, "Nope, that's not for me. I'm not going to go shooting and strafing people." As it turned out I got lucky…[upon graduation] from Laredo as a new pilot to get a flying assignment.

Korea had wound down by then, and they didn't need a lot of pilots. So they had very few flying assignments given out to the brand new pilots. And I was lucky to have a flying assignment at Panama City. Other guys had quartermaster assignments or administrative duties elsewhere around the country because they didn't choose to go on to fly [top-of-the-line] war planes. …The T-33 is a war plane. It's a converted war plane. It's a stretch body, and I have some history of it here for you.

It was first manufactured in 1944 as a prototype, but it wasn't in active duty until 1948 or something like that. In 1948 it was re-engineered. All they did was stretch the body and put an extra cockpit in, but left the nose section with gun-mounts and everything else …[because it was needed] to have balance on the plane. And that's what I was flying. It had all the switches and

tip tanks, and you could drop bombs with all these switches and stuff but there were no bombs to drop.

What were you doing with that?

The mission pilot's job – what they called AFSC, Air Force Specialty Code; in the Army with would have been called MOS – the specialty was mission pilot. And what did I do down there? Well, surprise surprise! I got to fly every day. Every day I got to fly that T-33, and I racked up close to 900 hours in about a year.

The flying was this. Mind you, at that time the federal government thought that the Russians were going to fly over here and drop bombs with their intercontinental bombers – military bombers. Later on that whole idea was displaced by the silo missiles that were going to cause mass destruction. We hate mass destruction now, but we were building our own mass destruction and doubled the force the Russians had. We were aiming at each other …[with ICBMs]. But at this time before they were built, at the place you were born in Alaska, the Distance Early Warning System [(DEW line)] with all these radar sites [was in place]. Well, somebody had to man these radar sites to see what these blips were all about. Was this an Eskimo out there just flying his prop-plane, or is it a military plane coming across the North Pole to bomb Chicago? Well your father had to figure that out because he was in the radar business. And we had to train people like your father by actually having airplanes in the air. I flew one of those airplanes. We would fly missions of intercept – here comes a "bogey," bogey being an enemy coming on a track. Some of us would fly bogey missions and some of us would fly interceptor missions. And we'd fly two aircraft in a flight, first to identify if it was friend or foe and the second to shoot it down. This was all pretend – all war games. But it was a training mission. Although for training radar operators, some… [use] was made of computer simulations, there is no computer simulation that can give you the actual hands-on stuff like bodies in the air. And we were the bodies in the air for the advanced level of the radar trainees. And that's what my mission was.

The next [chapter]…of my story is like this, and it happens in Panama City.

[Paragraph omitted]

So John, in our last interview you described your life at the time you went into the service through your discharge. You said there were a few things you'd like to add.

Right.

…In the summer of 1956 I was a mission pilot flying out of Panama City, Florida into the area of west Florida and South Georgia. That's where our maneuvers and exercises took place …Our mission was to fly airborne blips for the radar screen of students learning how to do intercept work by radar. That was called 'ground-control intercept' so that fighters could be vectored to intercept incoming bombers or fighters of bogey caliber – 'bogey' being vernacular of the Air Force for possible enemy, but unidentified. So the tactic was for two planes to go after the bogey. The bogey in these exercises would just go back and forth in a prescribed track of maybe 50 miles – go to one end; come back to the other end. And the pretend fighter-

interceptors were to be vectored by the people on the ground as the last phase of their education before they were commissioned and sent off, possibly to the DEW line. The DEW line was the 'distant early warning' which were positioned in places like Nome, Alaska and Fairbanks, across Canada, Newfoundland and so forth to give us early warning of any impending inbound mission from Russia – USSR at the time. So these training exercises had to have the bogey and two interceptors.

I was flying the second intercept after the lead plane was to identify. Now flying in the lead plane was a man who was recently assigned to our unit. He was a veteran of World War II and was a very accomplished pilot. But he didn't fly jet airplanes in his earlier career. He was flying propeller planes. He had recently transitioned into jet fighters in order to fly these missions. He was my lead plane, and he was going to identify my bogey as we were being vectored toward the bogey by the ground radar. …

But he, not being familiar with the plane as most of us were, was given the lead position. Once you identified the plane as friend or foe, then you advanced your throttle to 100% so you could go past his track, behind him, and then turn back around at about a 90^{0} so you could intercept him [again]. The principle being the second plane would shoot down the enemy, and if he missed or wasn't successful then the identifier who had already crossed the track would come back and fire at the bogey.

Anyway, [when] the major… advanced the throttle to 100%, the plane sped up, of course. In the life on the ground these planes were subject to intense tropical sunshine and heat. They had Plexiglas quarter windows, but eight or ten-ply bullet-proof glass front windows. You had protection from the front but not from the side. The crazing of the Plexiglass, over time, would [require it] to be replaced. But in this case, one wasn't replaced in time. So when the major advanced the throttle, the quarter panel blew out, his helmet blew off. He was carrying a passenger—a non-commissioned officer who was along for the ride. We did that to increase the morale of the troops. If anybody wanted to ride, he could ride if there was space available. They were instructed to bail out if the pilot said to bail out. But in this case he couldn't say because his helmet was blown off and the communications are through the helmet and boom mike of the helmet. So the helmet blew off, and he blew off the canopy. And the passenger ejected successfully as well. So there's two people ejecting from this plane, and the plane fell to ground.

Meanwhile I'm up there …[not in sight] of them because I'm about ten miles back. At those altitudes and distance with the end-wise profile of the plane you don't see much. The reason I was alerted was because the ground controller couldn't maintain [radio] contact with the lead plane. They kept calling and calling with no response. I started to circle – I told them I would break off the exercise and keep circling – and I found two parachutes way down, maybe 5,000 feet below me, going to ground. So I circled around those two parachutes and saw that they were safe. One landed in a tree and the other on the ground. They both waved at me that

they were okay, and I told the base that they should send a plane over to take my place in the rescue so I could go back now with a low fuel problem and be safe myself.

A …[Grumman] twin-prop plane came over. Helicopters were not in much use yet, and those that were in use were small and couldn't carry a lot of people. So the …[Grumman] circled until the helicopter came. I saw the helicopter coming as I returned to base. These two fellows were rescued and brought to the base hospital. One was checked over and released, and the other was kept overnight and the "green grass grew all around."

…I was 'Joe Cool' the whole while through the rescue. But the next day I woke up with an uncontrollable tick in one eye. It would blink and blink, and I couldn't stop it. That lasted about a day-and-a-half, this nervous tick, and finally it dissipated. Evidently the tension that might have built during the crisis did not, and it came afterward.

It was delayed until everyone was safe. Then your body took over.

While I was circling, seeing if the fellows were safe, I could see that the plane had crashed, and it was burning off in the distance, and there was no need to take any action for that. I did tell the rescue plane where to look for the burning wreckage if they were interested. They [noted its] position so that somebody on the ground could take care of the wreckage.

But it didn't crash into anything.

No. But the next story is similar.

Taking things in sequence, first I was taken sick and brought to the base hospital. I had run a fever somewhere between 102^0 and 103^0, which was awful. So they took me in. I think the rule was that if a pilot had a fever over 101° he had to go see the flight surgeon, and the flight surgeon did whatever treatment he deemed suitable. I was in the hospital with a high fever. This was early August, 1956.

So you were 24 years old?

Yes. I was …[bedridden] for three days. I had run a fever to such an extent that I was in delirium, so much so that I was told afterward that I tried to get out of bed and chase after a Navy nurse who was on the base. She was going down the hall. She said, "You were uncontrollable!" Anyway, they restrained me and put me back in bed, and they discharged me [from the hospital] three days later.

When I went home to my wife and kids, it turned out that she was starting to run a fever. Hers was about 101° fever. So I had a housekeeper come over and watch the kids while I took her to the same base hospital. They wouldn't admit her because her fever was not high enough. The Air Force had standards, and I don't know if the pilots and dependents had different standards but they wouldn't admit her. So I took her back home and looked after her. The next

day her fever was up another degree. Now it was beyond the admission standard. So I brought her into the hospital, and she didn't come out for 23 days. She was hospitalized and had a similar delirium such that she thought the children were in the lighting chandelier in the room. It wasn't a fancy thing – it was just a bowl …– but she thought the kids were in there and kept wanting to get out of bed to stand on the bedside stand to get the kids out of the chandelier. It is the profile of the delirium that I wish to impart. It was a problem.

Once she was discharged, the diagnosis was that she had had encephalitis, superimposed with meningitis. And they determined it by doing spinal taps and determining that there was no bacterial infection visible, but that it was aseptic and viral. I'm getting into a medical area where I don't belong. No, I do belong…I had to take her home [impaired].

I got her ensconced back home with the children with the housekeeper, and I went back to fly my missions on the base. Meanwhile, the promised after-care for dependents seemed to fall [short]. The after-care was supposed to consist of bringing her in every other day to the base hospital where there was a very lightly trained therapist technician. He had two stripes and all of six weeks of training in physical therapy. His equipment consisted of a plywood circle bolted onto a 2X4 on the wall with a handle on it. Carol was supposed to turn the thing around clockwise several times and then reverse. She was affected in her upper extremities – her arms and shoulders and all her muscles there. She couldn't even make it go one turn. So much for the apparatus and the training of that guy. So, in counsel with the medical people, they said if she was that bad they should suggest transferring her to Montgomery, Alabama where there was a decent size hospital. I said, "Me and the kids here …[while she's] in Montgomery, or …[she's in] Montgomery with the two kids she can't take care of because she has muscle problems; something didn't work." I had accrued some time that I could take a four-day weekend, and took Carol and the children to Chicago to seek civilian, non-military, help.

Well, we counseled with a couple of physicians in Chicago, one of whom was a distant relative of Carol's. He said there were only two places he would suggest her to go, and they were fairly new. There was the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, which grew to be the number one place of rehabilitation in the country if not the world. Or, Billings where they had inpatient care. He said if she was bad enough to be an inpatient, she should go to Billings Hospital. But it turned out she could manage, with help, getting to the Rehabilitation Institute which was about 600 East on Ohio Street at the time, in a restored factory building.

So she was here with her parents.

I left her and the children with her parents in Old Town in Chicago. They had a little two-floor apartment rental place. They were social animals and were extremely wonderful as far as being there for the rescue of my family. Later on I came and joined them, but I'll get to that point in a moment.

So Carol went to the Rehab Institute.

Yes. They…had her as an outpatient for the better part of two years. At first she was there daily, and then three times a week, then a couple of times a week as she progressed in restoring her strength.

So I brought Carol to Chicago to establish temporary housing with her parents – her stepfather and mother. They helped getting her to and from [therapy]. And as she progressed in her ability to stand and walk, and grab hold of a bar and things like that, she was then able to take a bus from where they lived in Old Town to the east side to the Rehab Institute. She was fairly independent for a while in the last of that year-and-a-half or two-year phase between 1956 and 1958.

In the meantime I had gone back to Panama City to Tyndall Air Force Base, to serve out my time. I knew this was not a good plan to have her living there dependent on her mother and me down there with a lot of free time on my hands and not being able to be helpful. So I tried to get a compassionate transfer through normal channels with the base – the pilot… [must get approval] through the flight surgeon. Well, the flight surgeon had to buck that up to the commanding officer and the base officer. Well, the commanding officer and base officer said the only way it was going to happen was if the [chief] flight surgeon said I...[would be allowed] Well, he didn't give permission. He was a kind of hard-hearted fellow as I look at it. He said things, I'm paraphrasing, like…"Gut it out, lieutenant." He was tough with me and wouldn't give me a compassionate transfer.

So, in counsel with my bachelor buddies with whom I was then living on base, they suggested I write to my Congressman. Well, I wrote to my senator, Paul Douglas. In five days he had given me a telegram in each of those five days that he was working on it and it looked okay. On the fifth day I had orders cut to transfer me to O'Hare, and I spent the rest of my time at O'Hare Air Force Base, which was a combined [civil] airport and Air Force Base at the time. There were F-86D's stationed there. .... …

Wonderful! That's about as close as you could get.

That's right. That was as close as I could get.

I'm going to back up in time to [autumn] of 1956. At this time I'm living in bachelor quarters with other pilots and officers, [hoping to get compassionate transfer].

This was while your wife was in Chicago.

This was while my wife was in Chicago. So I thought it would be a good idea if …we could … check out an airplane and fly anywhere we wanted to in the continental United States, if we got back in time for our next duty. So Paul and I chose to go to Chicago.

Paul was your buddy.

Yes. He was the guy I counseled with and we were close forever. Today we're close, although he lives in Central America now. He said, "Wouldn't it be great to go to Chicago for the Christmas party." I knew by telephone communication that Carol's family was going to have a Christmas party, and they were going to have all kinds of folks. I mentioned earlier that they were social animals, and they lived in a social area in the Old Town triangle. So we thought it would be neat to have a weekend in Chicago.

We took off on a Thursday or Friday with no duty involved at that point. It was early evening, and it gets dark early in December so it was a night flight to O'Hare. It was bitter cold, much like it is today, and there was ice on the runway. But I didn't realize that until we were landing. I was the lead pilot in the front seat, and Paul was in the back. As we were approaching Chicago, we could see the Palmolive Building tower which rotated once a minute or something like that and would flash two flashes. Civilian beacons were one flash and military beacons were two flashes. We could tell that was the tower. We could see the glow of Chicago lights from Evansville, and then from Terre Haute we could see the beacon. I was in touch with the tower as I was approaching and asked if they would mind if I made a pitch-out landing because there was hardly any traffic.

What is a pitch-out landing?

I'll describe it. If the runway is straight ahead of you, you approach the runway straight ahead at pattern altitude which is about 1,500 feet above ground. As you approach the tip of the runway you're still at 1,500 feet and do a sharp 180° turn until you are going away from the runway but beside it. Then another descending turn to land on the …[runway].

So like a quick spiral.

Almost, but you straighten out – like an oval racetrack. But you don't descend until you start to turn from the second or downwind leg. Then you come in.

So I did a beautiful pitch-out landing with so tight a turn that we almost blacked out. It was a real tight turn! The control tower had cleared me to do that. And when I touched down only then did I realize there were ice patches on the runway. Now, in those days the longest runway at O'Hare was 6,000 feet. That was the minimum I could use with that aircraft in order to land safely. On Air Force bases we had barriers at the end of the runways with anchor chains from the Navy that would be picked up when you hit a net at the end of the runway, and that would slow you down if you overran it. But there was no such thing at O'Hare! But I was able to keep the plane on the runway and from skidding sideways on the ice patches. That was a bit of a sweat for about 30 seconds, but it was a successful landing. It was not that I had landed too fast, but that there were ice patches there.

Had you landed on ice before?

I don't think so. This was a first for me! It was my first ice night landing.

And your last?

Yes!

But we had a wonderful time at the party. Paul dated a former Navy nurse who had been a WAVE. She had been at the party. They had a good old time. And we overnighted there and the next day checked out the plane at O'Hare and flew back to Panama City, Florida.

Was the runway still icy?

Probably not. It didn't matter because there was plenty of space to take off. So the take-off was not a problem.

The other issue I neglected to point out was that at the point where Carol was in the RIC for rehab, of course she didn't get in there without being analyzed the by the physicians with whom we came up to consult. They said they would take another spinal tap to duplicate what was diagnosed down in Panama City, which wouldn't necessarily be the same thing because she was no longer in the critical phase. She was now healed over, as it were. But they decided it was polio she had contracted, and therefore it was probably polio with a very light case that I had contracted ahead of her in that same month. But I was turned loose, free and clear. And she wound up with muscular damage that took half a lifetime to take care of.

Polio was a big scare at the time.

Yes. Not only that, but it was debilitating. She recovered pretty much to the point where she could raise three more children against medical advice – three more beside the two she already had. She wanted twelve. I didn't think I was up for twelve! Her ambitions were much greater than her grasp! But she was a wonderful mother to all of those five. At the end of her life – she died at the age of 72 – but in the last ten or fifteen years came the onset of post-polio syndrome where the neurological damage that was repairable through therapy and rehabilitation of the body for itself is no longer possible. You can rehab until you are blue in the face, but once post-polio syndrome occurs you're just on a steady downhill run. The involvement of her lungs and such wound up leading her into hospitalizations with pneumonia. I would say it was four hospitalizations over a period of four months. Finally in February of 2007 she expired. By then our children were grown. She had gone to college herself and got a master's degree. She had become a social worker and had a full life. But shortened by polio.

Did you have any after effects from your bout?

No, except that I'm half loony. Otherwise I wouldn't be here!

Lest I repeat myself, I might mention a couple of things about my life at O'Hare once I was transferred there courtesy of Senator Paul Douglas and a reluctant Air Force.

The first assignment they gave me was as a recruiting officer, to go to high schools and speak to senior classes – males of the senior classes who were not required to be drafted anymore at this point. And the idea was to keep the Reserve forces at [what was] felt to be full strength so they had back-up in case discharges of active duty personnel decimated the forces. That was my chore – to go to places like Senn High School on the northwest side and several other high schools.

By the time I had lectured at the third high school, the six months Reserve option for high school seniors was closed. It was full. It was so popular.

What was the advantage of going to the six-month Reserve?

They wouldn't have to do two years of active duty. They would have six months of active duty instead of two years. Anybody in their right mind would go for the six months and then the Reserve duty stretched out for eight years. But that was only once-a-month for training weekends. A weekend a month was what was required for active Reserve. So they filled that right away and I worked myself out of a job as a recruiting officer.

Then they assigned me as a taxi pilot for a bunch of navigators who were assigned to the unit that I was assigned to. It was a troop carrier squadron of Reserves. So I would fly things like the C47, C46 or C119 – a great big boxcar thing that had to be checked in right there at O'Hare in order to be even a co-pilot while carrying these navigators around – or paratroopers. But they didn't parachute out of them – at least not…[while I was flying].

But the big boxcar things were suitable for drops of parachute troops, and many of these parachute…[reservists] who live in Chicago or Chicago suburbs were actually stationed at Camp Campbell, Kentucky where there was a parachute training facility – although they didn't go there for their weekend warrior work; they went there for their summer encampment to do parachute training.

So we would fly people around in the boxcars – and they were called boxcars; flying boxcars. It's like driving this room around! It was awful. Being the hot pilot I was, landing on ice at night at O'Hare, I thought it was a terrible downgrade for me as a pilot to fly these garbage wagons.

So what was at O'Hare? There were two facilities there. One was F-86D Air Defense Command with the bullet nose F-86s. And I thought, "Won't I be lucky to get to fly those!" No, that wasn't going to happen. I became a permanent part of the personnel of the Reserve crew there. They had a paratroop group there, but I forget the number of the parachute squadron. These were the carriers of the troops – the Air Force ran the planes and the Army ran the personnel. So I got to fly those wonderful machines called C46, C47, and C119. That was like driving your garage around town!

Those are those big ones.

Yes, really big. If you want to get the feeling of it, try flying this room, and you're in the cockpit. They were about as streamlined as this room, too.

What was the purpose of the flights?

The purpose of the flights was just to keep the reservists as sharp as you could on a once-a-month basis. They had once-a-month training.

In the meantime I did personnel type things. In fact, while there, the six-months reserve program was started, and I became the presenter to seniors in high school. So at places like Senn High School in Chicago, I would go to their assembly and tell them what the six-month program was all about. You had six months active duty and eight years Reserve duty. We filled the program in about two months. We got as many people as we needed, because who wouldn't go for six months instead of two or three years.

That was an interesting time. And one little vignette I might mention: I was airdrome officer from time to time. Somebody had to be on the base at the off-hours when the full complement of people was not there. And one guy in charge of flying missions to make sure the aircraft was assigned and everything was proper protocol. So I had that duty a couple of times.

One time when I was airdrome officer, Chicago was hosting the Thunderbirds. They had done their [air show] things on the lakefront, then came back and overnighted somewhere – probably a fancy hotel somewhere near O'Hare. They took care of themselves, and I had to look after their logistics. Those aircraft that they flew were now flying not with gaseous oxygen, but LOX – liquid oxygen. And they had smaller tanks, less weight and liquid. Where do you get refills on the LOX at O'Hare? They didn't even have jet commercial airlines yet. And I don't know if today the jet airlines use LOX or not. So where do I find it!

I got on the phone and started calling people – an Air Reduction Company, Lind Air, and so forth – people who were in the oxygen reduction business. It turned out that any one of them could bring the stuff out, but they didn't have liquid oxygen because it wasn't used in hospitals or other places – only gaseous oxygen was used; at least at that time. So what happened was we had to get a troop carrier aircraft bring a trailer with a tank from Fort Campbell, Kentucky to refill the oxygen port of the one aircraft that was low on oxygen. And he couldn't take off for someplace to go home without the oxygen tank being full. You just don't go on half a tank! So that took a couple of days to transact. It was an interesting time in my Air Force career.

You said when you were in Florida and your wife got sick and you came back you had a year left. So you were up in Chicago at O'Hare.

I rented an apartment in Chicago and commuted from the near north side where she was close enough to the Rehab Institute, and she could commute daily. Sometimes she'd go by taxi, but most of the time she'd take a bus and get there. As time went by she got stronger and stronger through the rehabilitation and reconstruction of her own body.

How long were you at O'Hare? Did you just finish out the year or did you spend more time?

It …[transferred in] somewhere in the winter of 1956, and I was discharged in September of 1957. I discharged from active duty, not from the Reserves. I wasn't taken out of the inactive Reserve status until I think 1970. I don't know why they kept me on. Maybe I was just super good stuff. I want to believe that, anyway!

You said you were in the inactive Reserves?

Yes. And they would send…[a notice of status] to me every once in a while. And surprise, surprise – somewhere in the middle to late 1960's I was promoted to captain in the inactive Reserve. I had been second and first lieutenant while I was on active duty. In fact, while I was at Panama City I had enough hours and good marks – I don't know what those were – that …[I was] made an instructor pilot.

This is an interesting thing and kind of out of the time sequence. … Back at Panama City [in late 1956] I was an instructor pilot. And what does an instructor pilot do? Well, he gives check rides. Annual check rides are given to pilots to make sure they are still proficient, that they haven't gotten any bad habits or forgotten things that had to be done. The commanding officer had been transferred or retired and a new guy came in – a major. This major was what I'd call a "retread." He was from World War II, and he was a pilot who had had a lot of missions mostly in multi-engine flying. Then he'd had a desk job in Washington or some place. Then he was reactivated and sent down to be commander of this group of young jet jockeys. But he really needed to fly jets himself to become qualified to fly.

This guy had the… [rating] of command pilot. A mere pilot has silver wings. The Navy has gold wings. Ours are made of tin, if you listen to the way they sing it: "Air Force wings are made of tin. Navy wings are made of gold." Anyway, his wings had a star above the shield. That's a senior pilot, and a wreath around the star a command pilot. You don't get a command pilot rating until something like 3,000 hours [or more] in the air – a lot of hours.

Anyway, I was going to give him a check ride that day. I looked at his wings and thought, "I'll bet he's got more time in the air than I've been alive!" I told him what I wanted him to do. I said, "You're going to go under the hood, and I want you to go from Panama City to Tallahassee and then to Dothan, Alabama." Or, vice versa; I don't remember which. I do remember that the identifier code for Tallahassee was TLH, and the identifier code at Dothan is DHM. They both have "H" in them. And you had to identify them by Morse code in those years. We had very primitive radio equipment. Although this was a 500 mile-per-hour jet aircraft, some of the early ones had crank radios from 1942 or so. But that's how they had outfitted those planes – you could put anything in a training plane. Anyway, that was the rationale, I presume.

So he went under the hood and did a nice job of flying, and he started settling on the radio. He started settling on the radio, found the radio direction and got over to what he thought was going to be Tallahassee. Well, it turned out to be the Dothan radio he got tuned in on, not being aware they were two different directions on the compass. It was an identifier with an "H" and the rest a little bit tangled. So I let him go all the way down as if we were coming down through the clouds to the minimum descent height, and I said to pop the hood. So he did and looked around, and there was nothing but forest and swamp! He had let down on the wrong radio station. So I said to him, "Technically this is a flunk, but I'm not going to flunk you. I'm

going to give you a pass on the premise that you, with a command pilot rating, are smart enough that you will promise that you will take at least three instructional rides in the next week and then take a check ride again for your own purposes after that." Those were not my exact words, but to that effect. He swore he would do that. But I never ran across him again! He was at least two or three steps above me in rank.

And that was down in Florida. So you came back from Florida with your wife and your two kids, and you were in the apartment in Chicago and working at O'Hare.

By the way, we had planted a third kid who was born on Christmas, 1957; a few months after I was out of active duty.

So, was this the last assignment you had?

That was the last assignment I had. In September I was discharged from active duty and left on Reserve for the rest of the term of eight years. But it was more than eight years for me, because I was promoted to captain – I think I mentioned this before – I had been promoted to captain before I was dismissed from the Reserve program.

What was your rank when you were in active duty?

I entered as a second lieutenant and was discharged from active duty as a first lieutenant, and discharged from inactive duty as a captain.

How old were you when you left active duty?

I would have been…[age 25]. I was discharged from inactive duty [at age 38] on 4 March 1970, so I was in combined active and inactive duty for…[sixteen] years.

For some reason they thought I was useful to hang around. As matter of fact, while I was in Panama City I was given the opportunity by way of a folio about the size of your notebook there, leather bound, with a presentation: "Second Lieutenant John Jacus, we invite you to become regular Air Force instead of Reserve."

By now I had seen that some of the dependent care was not what they had promised, so I said, "I don't think so." I had harbored thoughts of maybe staying in for a career in the Air Force. But by this time I was disgruntled and thought, "I don't think so. If they treated us like this as reservists, I don't think we'd get much better treatment." Because you can't tell by looking at a person's uniform if they are reserve or regular. Only in the officers' club would you be able to do a little bragging.

Anyway, that was the way it all happened.

So you left active duty and went into the Reserves. Did you have any specific responsibilities while you were in the Reserves other than to show up?

No. I just had to open the mail that showed me what my status was. I think I got mailings once every-other year for that period between 1957 and 1970. In that period I think I got mailings from the Air Force every-other or every third year.

They changed their records from St. Louis to someplace else. [Records for] services were stored in a warehouse in St. Louis, Missouri. Later on – this has nothing to do with my service, except it [did] when I filed for Social Security in…civilian life. I had to have a discharge paper. Well, I couldn't find mine and had to apply for another one. And after a long period of time they said they couldn't find mine…because the record center in St. Louis burned down and all the records burned with it. Fortunately, from digging more deeply into the pile of papers that I live with, I did find my original discharge. So I wound up getting a substitute and original. The government has curious ways of operating and keeping records as well.

[Paragraph omitted]

Anyway, that's my experience with the Air Force.

Reserve Duty and Civilian Life

You were still in Chicago, out of active duty and in inactive Reserves. How do they figure out how long you were to be in inactive Reserves? How long is Reserves at all?

I have no idea. I had an inkling that the total Reserve commitment after commissioning was going to be eight years, but it turned out to be more than that. It turned out to be 13. I was given my discharge on 4 March 1970. That's what the discharge paper says. So from 1957 to 1970 is 13 years.

And you had no responsibilities to show up for meetings or anything?

No. I didn't think I even had to reply to anything. They sent you about once a year something like orders. You were on a line on a page that said they didn't want anything from you at that time.

So during this time what business did you go into?

That takes me to my career.

I said early on that I had applied to three airlines. And by the time I got back, I decided it was not the time to be the low man on the totem pole in the airlines, earning the least amount of money a pilot could. They weren't making a great deal of money then.

The World War II pilots were still out there.

Yes. The market was flooded with World War II pilots looking for a pilot job, because they were pretty cushy – you don't fly every day. There were limits by FAA requirements just as today. But some of these guys stayed on. And later on, after my kids were mostly grown, I

bought an airplane. I couldn't afford one before that. And I ran across some of the guys I had been avoiding getting involved with in the 1950s. They were World War II pilots who had gone to work for United or American. And I flew out here at Brookeridge. I had found a place to park my plane there. I had a plane for about six years.

I found it was a lonesome pastime. My wife liked to go if we were going someplace, but it turned out she didn't like the 'attitude adjustment' of the airplane. She'd say, "Do you have to swoop when you land?" I said, "What's swooping? You have to bank the plane. You can't fly it sideways!" I knew she was uncomfortable, but she never let on about that until I was about ready to get rid of the plane anyway. She never did care that much about it. It bored her.

You started your career. Did you go right into the food business?

Yes. When I decided against the airlines stuff I was also applying—this was the summer of 1957 and … [faced] impending discharge. I wrote to a few companies. One was Food Machinery in downstate Illinois—they are internationally known people with harvesting equipment in Hoopeston, Illinois.

And Foremost Foods in California. They were recommended to me by one of my professors at the University of Illinois, having a couple of alums there in their international service doing reconstituted milk plants in Japan and the Far East—the island nations out there. So, on that basis I thought Foremost Foods might be a pretty good place to work. It turned out it wasn't. When I decided to have an interview there, I was in touch with a vice president at Foremost. He said to come out and we'd talk and see what we could do with one another.

So at my expense I got a military plane to take me out to Denver. And when I got to Denver I…[took] a commercial [flight] from Denver to San Francisco, to their Battery Street headquarters. I showed up, and they didn't know who I was. I said I had an appointment with the vice president, and they said he was out of town, but they got somebody to interview me. And after all was said and done he said, "Maybe we can get you on as a bottle washer at our plant in North Dakota at about $325 a month." Well, I had been earning $750 in the military.

It turned out that the company I [next] chose was a perfect match for me, and I stayed with them for thirty years. … They were in the machinery business as I had mentioned earlier. It was all mechanical. There were problems to be solved with applications in each place, even though they were similar or even identical, there are different people and different circumstances in the market. It was a wonderful choice for me because it …[used] both the chemical/scientific part of my training, and the mechanical aptitude that I showed early on and continuing to this day. I'm always trying to fix things. I will not tolerate anything not working in my household! Or in your household if I'm at your house! If you have a bum screen door I'm going to fix that before I leave.

Anyway, that was a good fit. In fact, it was so good a fit that when I retired early at age 55 I went into consulting business in that same industry. And much of my work was done for that same company at greatly inflated prices! We became, after a number of mergers, part of an English owned company which was our world-wide competitor at the time. They sent me as a consultant to run the office in Hong Kong, and I was there for three years. I took my wife along.

By then my kids were all grown and gone. It was a wonderful experience. Some of the best decisions I ever made were along the trail that I just described for you.

It sounds like you did more traveling as a civilian than you did in the military.

I did. My primary work was in a training context here for the first couple of years. I was very youthful looking. In fact, you would not guess that I am 81 by looking at me – nobody does. They usually guess me to be ten or twenty years younger – lucky hair and lucky face and oily skin.

Anyway, my first job there was to get accustomed to the industry and what the company made and for whom they made it. So I did a lot of time on a drafting board laying out plants for reconstruction or conveyorization. It turned out that we were in the business of mechanizing and robotizing a lot of …[systems]. We were early-on in the computer business and even built our own computers because the PC hadn't been invented yet. Our own computer for the company was a room about this size – about 12' X 20' or something like that – full of computers from North Central Airlines. They were upgrading and sold us their computer. We had to air condition the room. You know the story – you were with IBM. We started with punch cards! And they went the way of the American Indian, I guess.

Keeping in Touch

In your civilian life, did you still keep in touch with anybody you'd met in the Air Force?

One guy. I should mention another, though. The fellow was in our flight class at Laredo. He had already gone through jet training, and you had an option to go on to advanced and learn fighter bomber high performance aircraft, or helicopter school. He chose to go to helicopter school and became the traffic copter in New York City. He was there for many years. I, one time, was sent a cartoon from one of my colleagues in New York of this guy in a helicopter. Unfortunately after a dozen or more years of doing that he crashed and killed himself. To this day I don't trust helicopters.

And you said there's one other guy you keep in touch with.

This other guy was my seat-mate at primary school and advanced school – both at Hondo, Texas and at Laredo. He actually coaxed me into going to single-engine jet school instead of multi-engines by becoming a bomber pilot…with SAC and living in the air for days on end. When we were choosing which was to go at Hondo, and we had a few days to make up our mind, I would come to the flight line table. We had a table like this with four guys on each side and the instructor at the end… [to give us] our assignment for the day. I would come walking in from wherever my wife, child, and I were living. And I'd walk in and he would look at me and rotate two propellers in the sky with his hands, coaxing me to live my life of security in the air with propellers. He irritated me the point that I went to single-engine jets with him!

He lived a whole different [life] and didn't do anything with flying afterward, either. He lives in Central American now after a very successful career here. He's originally from Boston. The reason we became so close was that at Hondo the officers' club – a pretend officers' club

like it would be at a real base. It was a dry county there and the only way you could have something to drink was if you had a club and you had your own bottle at the bar. He looked so much like me that the bartender there thought it was me. He was a bachelor, but I was married. I wasn't out drinking. I had to answer to my wife! So I had a bottle there so we could have a drink from time to time. … He had a bottle there that he would drink out of all the time.

One day I came and thought I had three-quarters of a bottle left. But it was almost gone! "What happened?" I asked the bartender. He said, "You were just here! You came back." I said it wasn't me who was just there, it was Paul. So my buddy Paul had been drinking from my bottle. The bartender didn't know it. He had mistaken him for me; we were that similar in appearance. It's funny how things come together.

At times we would welcome him into our home because he was a bachelor throughout his military. In Panama City he would come over sometimes and have breakfast with us. He'd bring groceries because he felt guilty about eating our groceries. So he'd bring eggs and bread and whatever. We were that close.

You said you haven't joined any veterans organizations.

No. I didn't take a veterans loan for a house. The GI Bill was useless to me because I already had my education when I got in. The one thing I did get, a year ago I convinced the bureaucracy of the Veterans Administration at Hines that I was qualified by virtue of all those little situations. I could afford to buy them, but I'd be darned if I wouldn't get something out of the government. So I got two hearing aids from the VA. But it was at great expense of my own time because you don't do things…easily over there. You have to go through all the protocols, with appointment after appointment. You can't do all the things in one day. Everybody has jobs over there – the catchword being 'jobs.' No matter if they're important or not, they make you feel like they're important. The thing that gets me is all the things you get from the VA in Washington or wherever the VA lives, say "We really appreciate all the service you performed for your country." There's so much wrapping of the flag around people. It makes me sick. I did my job and I feel I was a contributor. The war wasn't raging at the time – it was the Cold War between Korea and Vietnam. And I don't think people in the government even knew how to spell Vietnam when I was in there. Later on, when I was establishing civilian life, here comes another war. They would send troops over there, 'agent orange,' mass bombings and etc. It made me sick. And we're still doing it. We're the world's bullies.

Lasting Impressions from Military Service

How did your service affect the way you see the world?

Well, it confirms my opinion that we are doing a terrible job as citizens of the world. We think we're doing well for everybody because we want to spread democracy around. We're teaching democracy to people who don't even understand the concept. They probably are better under a totalitarian government than under ours. That's heresy for me to say that, but I do believe that. We have no business getting into other people's lives. It's not our mission on earth. I don't think God put us here to spread democracy. We're here to look after one another, not beat each other up.

Is there anything we haven't talked about that you'd like to add before we finish?

You run across little vignettes from time-to-time.

While in flight training for the T33, one of the things we were taught was if you were going to come down with one gear not locked down, bring them all up and land on your belly. But in doing that, have the dive brake up too so you land smoothly on the fuselage.

Well, this was once, a student was …[flying] and his gear wouldn't lock down. It probably was down, but he didn't know if it was locked. So he brought the gear up, but left the dive brake down. It was a big plate. And he landed so beautifully, while I'm watching – I'm standing on the tarmac – he ground down that plate to where it was about one-third of its length! There was no damage to the plane except the dive brake and a little bit of scratching on the housing around the engine. It was a beautiful job, and I watched all these sparks flying as he came to a stop. The reason you have the dive brake up is that it could cartwheel you over. It would be like tripping on a curb on foot. But he did it. He knew exactly what to do, and I thought it was a wonderful job. But he probably got reprimanded for that even though he came home alive and safe, and the plane was in as good a condition as it could have been.

There was another situation where the guy who gave the bum steer to my wife on the telephone, his father was a general in the Air Force. And Roger smashed two aircraft on different aircraft on different occasions.

Air Force aircraft.

Yes. And usually in a situation like that, if you smash one plane you're out of flight training. You're disqualified. But he went on to get his wings. It illustrated to me it's not what you know, it's who you know. These people with pull in all walks of life – whether it's in politics, the federal government or the military – that has given me a lifelong attitude that it's who you know. And there's more to that story.

Do you think your military experience had a positive influence on your life?

Oh, yes. It was a growing experience. As a matter of fact, while I was [serving] and long after I was out of the military, I felt it was imperative that the United States have universal military training for girls and boys alike. It worked in Russia. It worked in Israel. It worked everywhere – Switzerland; they had it, at least they did at the time I was in Switzerland. It's a growing experience, and the government could not spend money in a better way.

Some advantaged people go to college, go to a fraternity or sorority. These are transitional experiences from home. I did it my way because I was married right away. I wasn't living alone until my wife died seven years ago. It was my mother's household, my wife's household and now I'm single. But I'm living the experience in my 70's and 80's that I might have lived in my 20's. And I thought that military training would be the right way. To have the hierarchical structure of the Reserves doing almost nothing throughout their Reserve career and the active duty people in a skeleton force. I didn't think that was a very effective way to deal with it. And it turns out it wasn't. Now we have mostly Reservists going off to these bogus wars that we have in Iraq and Afghanistan and everywhere. I don't think the Reservists deserve that.

On the other hand, if you're getting money from the Reserves you should serve your country. I …[served] for the money I got in that period of time [for which] they paid me.

There was one experience—there were war games going on during the Cold War. There was one that was initiated for all services to be prepared for a possible invasion either by submarine, from the Atlantic or the Gulf, or by air over the Poles. And all of the military was marshalled into a war game. It had a name, but I don't remember the name. I happened to be in Panama City and was on duty. Most everybody was given leave for the holiday, but I was on duty as a pilot at the ready to do whatever was required. Well, they had an early warning—although it was down south—it was a simulated part of the war games. They had to find people coming by air—maybe they had carriers out in the Gulf or Atlantic. So …[everything] had to be operational. Everything had to be front-line operational during this …[span] of about a week in war games. The generator in the [local] rotating antenna for the radar went bad, so they put a new set of brushes off the shelf and into the generator. Everything was working, doing what it was supposed to do. But they didn't have a spare one on the shelf. So they told me to go to Rome, New York to get a spare set of generator brushes so we'd be fully backed-up. This was all solid thinking.

So I dutifully got in the T33 and headed for Rome, New York. I couldn't make it all in one flight, and I had to stop at Patuxent Naval Air Station for refueling. Between me and Patuxent was a line of thunderstorms. It's nighttime, and the storm went all the way up to 43,000 feet. That aircraft wouldn't make it past 41,000. But I had burned off enough fuel that I could wallow at the tops of the thunderstorm. I got through it and landed at Patuxent and went to Rome, New York. I overnighted at Rome, New York and went back in the morning with the brush package in hand. And that was my mission for the war games—to keep the radar antenna going.

So this was, overall, a good experience for you. You felt like you grew.

Oh, it was a very good growing experience that I could never have bought any other way. There was no way in civilian life that I could have bought it. So that has something to say for it.

I'm not against military. I'm against war. The military can do a lot of things which they do [well] during disasters now, without going to war. I'm just very anti-war. I would have done my part if I'd been equipped with bombs, but I'm glad I didn't have to shoot anybody, strafe anybody, or drop any bombs. I'm glad of that.

Is there anything else?

No. That would be a good place to stop.