

## ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

BOB FAGLESON

This is Eddie Graham. Today is April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005, and I'm interviewing Mr. Fagleson, Bob Fagleson, and we're doing this interview at the Crown Plaza Hotel in Dallas, Texas. This interview is being done in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War Center for War Studies for the preservation of the historical information related to World War II.

Okay, let's start off Mr. Fagleson, when and where were you born?

MR. FAGLESON: I was born in Alexandria, Virginia, May 16, 1920.

MR. GRAHAM: What was the name of your parents?

MR. FAGLESON: My father was Sam Fagleson and mother was Tilda Fagleson.

MR. GRAHAM: Did you go to school there?

MR. FAGLESON: All my schooling was in Virginia, elementary and college.

MR. GRAHAM: What college did you go to?

MR. FAGLESON: I went to Virginia Pyrotechnic Institute which was a military school, a very famous one, too.

MR. GRAHAM: Where were you and what were you doing December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941?

MR. FAGLESON: I had gone up to what we called a skirt barn which was the girls' dormitory and picked up the date I had and the date that has been with me for sixty-three years. We were walking around the drill field and this freshman came running up and he stopped. He saluted and said, "Sir, Pearl Harbor has been bombed and we're at war." I said, "What did you say, Lester?" He said, "Pearl Harbor has been bombed and we're at

war.” I said, “You’ve been listening to another Orson Wells program.” He said, “No, sir, we’re at war.” And then he saluted and took off again.

MR. GRAHAM: Were you a junior, senior, what were you at that time?

MR. FAGLESON: I was a sophomore.

MR. GRAHAM: You were a sophomore. Were you about eighteen, nineteen?

MR. FAGLESON: No, I was twenty-two.

MR. GRAHAM: Tell us how did you end up in the United States Army Air Force?

MR. FAGLESON: They had a course up there that was extra curricular called, CPT, Civilian Pilot Training, which was to train pilots at the time with ferry command. I got that, and one day while we were at lunch they said all personnel, all cadets with the ??? was to report to the military building, which I did. They said, “Let’s see how many of you could pass the entrance exam for flying cadets. We’re just curious.” Well, as I recall, and this I’m pulling out of thin air, three out of a hundred passed it. They said, “That’s fine. We never expected that many.” I don’t know why. We’re all sophomores or better in college and that was it.

MR. GRAHAM: Were you one of the three that passed it?

MR. FAGLESON: Yes, surprising. Then finally two weeks later they called us all in again and they said if you want to continue flying you have to join the army or naval air corps. Well, I had thought about going into naval air corps and I called mother and told her that I was enlisting in the air corps. She said, “Well, if you have to fly, do me a favor.” I said, “What’s that?” She said, “Fly over land.” Yeh, sure. I have to laugh every time I see that. I flew in god awful places on earth on, god’s earth. Then about a week later the navy took over the field. They wouldn’t let the army boys fly. So we sat

there knowing that sooner or later we would go. It was about six months later the army called up thousands of aviation cadets that they had signed up in colleges for active duty. They sent me to Nashville, Tennessee, for classification. Well, the physical exam that I had astigmatism in one eye. Well, I'd been flying before and whenever they took my physical there, the doctor said I see no reason why you can't fly. They were trying to weed out, they had more cadets than they had places to put them. So if you combed your hair on the wrong side they washed you out. I found out after the war that had I been called up six months sooner or six months later I couldn't have washed out if I wanted to. They sent me to reclassification, so they sent me to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. There was ten of us washed-out cadets in this squadron and everyday they'd send a group here and a group there. After all of them had gone in basic training there was ten of us left there. So the CO said get those men doing something. If the general comes by and sees them up there it is my butt. So he called in and said how about your basic training? I said, "Well, I've had basic training, four years of high school ROTC, three years of college ROTC, I had all the..."

MR. GRAHAM: You were way ahead.

MR. FAGLESON: The army couldn't teach me anything. He said how much time did you spend in basic training? He said marching. I marched for seven years everywhere I went. The 1<sup>st</sup> sergeant looked at it and he said, "How many times did you take basic training?" I said, "Well, I've had my share of it" and let it go at that. He said, "I see the only thing you haven't had was the rifle range." I said, "Oh, no, I haven't been on the rifle range." That was the first lie I told. So they sent me down to Arcadia, Missouri, for the rifle range. I qualified with the Springfield, and qualified with the ??? Thompson.

He said, "Well, you passed your test." So save the close order drill. VI I had laryngitis, he said any of you can drill a slice. I said, "Yeh, I can." He said ??? I went down to the end ranks and came back ??? so that was the first part of basic training. Then they handed me infiltration course and wanted to know what people that were supposed to run that didn't show up. So he said can any of you run the ??? I said, I'll run it. So that was the rest of my basic training.

MR. GRAHAM: You were running what again?

MR. FAGLESON: An infiltration course. Then they classified us. I made the mistake. You never tell the army what you want, number one. What you want you put number three. You've probably heard that before.

MR. GRAHAM: Oh, yes, been in the service.

MR. FAGLESON: I thought I wanted to go into aviation mechanics, engine mechanics. Well, they sent me to radio and I just couldn't get code. The best I could do was nine words a minute and you had to get fifteen to qualify. So they washed me out of that and sent me to Truax Field in Madison, Wisconsin. I had basic radio mechanics. It was twelve-week course and the eleventh week if you had eighty or better on your average one week they'd send you to radar school. The next week they sent you to CNS, Control Net System. Everybody knew what radar was even though they may not have known how it worked but CNS was a hush, hush deal. I happened to get into radar, which I was delighted, because that was at Boca Raton, Florida. I had spent a year in northern Wisconsin, I spent a whole winter in Wisconsin. Three days into radar they changed their minds, knocked us all back to the beginning and put us in CNS which nobody knew what it was, so I graduated CNS and they sent me to Homer, Wisconsin. The army had

taken over an Indian reservation and was training boys for control net system. That was a six-weeks course, two weeks you went to learn not only the radio and the sense of semantic of it but also talk on line, small engine repair, high wire, you write your electric company, because you controlled everything that had to be done with hush hush. In fact, they told you if you wanted to go to the head when you were in class an MP took you down to the latrine and brought you back. Any notes you took in class you couldn't take them out of class, you put them on a shelf and that's where they were. They told you when you're in your barracks don't talk about what you're doing, that is off record. When you're going on leave on weekends into town and somebody asks you what you are studying out there just tell them the truth you're studying radio and let it go at that. That satisfied them. So that's what it was.

MR. GRAHAM: So you had to be cleared for top secret.

MR. FAGLESON: Well, my brother was a Naval Intelligence and I was half way there to begin with. Control Net System was what saved England during the battle, now this is my opinion. During the battle of Britain, the CNS is what saved England because they could leave the squadrons on the ground. As soon as radar picked up a flight coming into from the mainland they could ???scramble them and they could ???. With us we could ??? them to where they would intercept that. The Germans never could figure out why the British were always there when they came across the channel. It was because of control net system. In the movie Battle of Britain, they show one picture of a control room. Most people wouldn't even know what they are looking at. So when we graduated from there they sent me, I had ten days delay in route, to Greensboro, North Carolina, Seymour Johnson, which is where I wanted to go for aircraft engine mechanics.

We stayed there about two weeks and they moved us all to Greensboro, North Carolina, and we were there for a couple of weeks and we got orders to pack up. When we left, everybody said where are you going, where are we going? I said, “Well, you give me a half hour and I’ll tell you where we’re going.” Didn’t know whether they were going to Fort Dix or Patrick Henry. I was on home ground then in Virginia. The train was heading north I could see the sun coming through that window I knew we were heading north. When we got up to Bristol it switched tracks and headed east. I said we’re going to Patrick Henry. How do you know? I said, “Believe me, we’re going to Patrick Henry.” We were at Patrick Henry for a week or so.

MR. GRAHAM: Is that a military base or what was it?

MR. FAGLESON: It was an embarkation point, Newport News. We got all the shots and what have you. One incident that tickled me. They had a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. telling you what you could do in ????. He asked “Are there any questions?” I said, “I have a question?” He said, “What’s that?” I said, “What is being permissible?” For me to say that at this present time I’m still on native soil. He thought a moment and he said you can say that. Why? I said, I only live about a hundred miles from here. Oh, no, you can’t tell them you’re a native son. We left Newport News and headed due east and that night oh, about nine or ten o’clock you could hear those engines kick in and started quivering and made a ninety degree turn and headed south. We went through the, I forget the name, between Port Oranson(sp?) and...

MR. GRAHAM: So you caught a ship now.

MR. FAGLESON: Yeh.

MR. GRAHAM: Where did you catch the ship? I missed that.

MR. FAGLESON: Newport News.

MR. GRAHAM: Okay, go ahead.

MR. FAGLESON: We went down through the Panama Canal and we stopped there for one day to refuel and get supplies. Then we headed down southwest over the Pacific and somebody opened a lock on one and we saw Kuranchie orders, so we knew within ten minutes the whole ship knew we were going to India. Forty-five days later we ran into Karchi. We were there for a couple of days and somebody called me into the orderly room. I said, "What's the matter?" "Call this number in Bombay. They want you to call that number." "I don't know anybody in Bombay." What it was was the Red Cross. My oldest daughter was born the day I landed in Karchi, Bombay rather, I beg your pardon, in Bombay. I always remember her birthday.

MR. GRAHAM: Well, that's good. Go ahead.

MR. FAGLESON: Seven of us were put on a list to go and they took us down to Churchgate station in Bombay. This British transportation officer said, "This is your compartment, and here's your rations." As I recall, there was a case of K rations, a case of C rations and a box of D rations for seven of us. He said, "Here are your tickets. If anybody asks you how many are in the compartment you tell them twenty-seven." I said, "Where are you going to get twenty-seven in here?" "Well, that's what you're supposed to have." The British would have put twenty-seven in there and so we left. They said, "Where are we going?" So I looked at the tickets, I said, "It says Harah Station". "Where's that?" "I don't know where it is."

MR. GRAHAM: What was that again?

MR. FAGLESON: Harah Station.

MR. GRAHAM: How do you spell that?

MR. FAGLESON: Harah or something, think it was a double r or something. I know the train we're on was Calcutta Mail which was a crack train across coming back it was the Bombay Mail. So I said I'm going to Calcutta. If I go too far they'll send me back. I found out later that Harah was the suburb of Calcutta where the train stopped. When we got there four days and three nights traveling about fifteen hundred miles and that was a crack train.

MR. GRAHAM: It had to be to cover that distance.

MR. FAGLESON: When we hit Harah the British transportation officer said, "Get your gear in the truck there." I asked him, "Where are we going?" He said, "We're going to Dum Dum Orphanage." I said, "What's that?" He said it was in Dum Dum which was the airport for Calcutta. The army had taken over this orphanage and it was the god awfulist place I've ever seen. You'd be tickled to death to get back in combat if you had to stay there an extra day.

MR. GRAHAM: Tell us what was it like?

MR. FAGLESON: Food was rancid, nobody knew anything.

MR. GRAHAM: Was this a town or what was it?

MR. FAGLESON: It was supposed to be a rest camp just outside of Calcutta. I asked somebody, I think he was a Merrill's Marauders, "How do you get out of this place?" He said, "Why? Who you boys going to be with? Are you going to be with the Chinese?" I said, "I don't know. They haven't told us." He said, "Well, let me tell you. If you're with the Chinese first thing you do is shoot yourself 'cause those bastards are gonna shoot you sooner or later." Worth something to see the act. I said, "How do you get



out?” He said, “Well, you could take a train which takes about three days to get up to Chabour or you could go by river boat which takes another three days. If you’re lucky, you can fly out, that takes about two hours.” I said, “We’re flying.” “Go over to the airport, Dum Dum airport, and get on a flight.” I went over and this sergeant said, “No way.” He didn’t tell me that a box of paper clips was more important in Asam than a colonel, a colonel got off and they put a box of paper clips there. I said, “Look, my orders for seven of us says first available for air.” He says, “I don’t care what it says.” After arguing for about a half hour, he said, “I’ll tell you what, if you’re here at six o’clock in the morning three of you on one flight and an hour later I’ll put the other four on another flight to arrive an hour later in Chabour.” I said, “We’ll be here.” As far as they were concerned I ??? So when we landed in Chabour, I called the squadron and they said, “Sit tight, we’ll have somebody come and pick you up.” When the others landed, they sent a weapons’ carrier down and picked us up. I walked into the orderly room I said, “Here are our orders.” He says, “Boy am I glad to see you fellows. We’ve been waiting for you.” I said, “What’s so special about us?” He says, then he dropped the other ???, “Where’s the equipment?” What equipment? “You were supposed to be train guards and bring our equipment up.” I said, “Nobody told me. They told me to report and I have reported.” About two weeks later that equipment coming up by train you got up to I think it was Panvoo on the Adoma Pierce(sp)River, there were no bridges across the Adoma Pierce. ??? Pass they had to unload everything, put it on barges ferry it across the Brama Future, put it back on the train and take it the rest of the way. Transportation was the epitome but it was not that next one. We stayed there until Hallmans and boys assembled. What it was the British had said that a man in that area

and weather began to lose his efficiency after two years and should be sent back. So we were replacing the boys that went over in '42. When he got us all together we went in the mess tent and the communications officer said, "You don't know me and I don't know you. I tell you what we're going to do. I want you to break yourself up into six-man groups, six man crews, take your friends because you're going to be together an awful lot" and that was the understatement. "I'll be back in an hour." So he came back and he said, "Okay, I don't know you so I can't, there's stripes for everybody, but to be fair the crew that has the best record the first one will get their stripes first." That sounds okay. So they had a base at Mowenberry, Muckleberry, Macaduly, and Chabour all right around within fifteen miles twenty miles of headquarters. So the boys that were in there were over there every day. We were about eighty-five or ninety miles down the road, in fact, we never got back to the squadron after we left. At the end of the first month we had received a commendation from the 33<sup>rd</sup> fire group that was presented to us by General A. H. Vinkleson, brigadier general, for the work we were doing with the squadron there. No other squadron nor the unit in the squadron got any. We were the only ones that got that commendation, we were the last ones to get stripes.

MR. GRAHAM: When you say stripes, you're talking about promotions.

MR. FAGLESON: Yes. General Davidson is going to Washington and has to approve your stripes. Since when did a brigadier general have to approve stripes for a pfc? Finally, we said if you won't give us stripes at ??? then give us a transfer. He said, "A transfer to what?" I said, "The ??? medium bomb squadron. They need radio operators. We worked with them." What makes think you'll get stripes any faster there? I said, at least we'll get flight pay. Then they gave us the stripes. Thirty days later I said when do

we get another stripe? He said, "You just got a stripe?" I said, "Army regulations say that the waiting period between pfc and corporal is thirty days. We've been in our stripes for thirty days." Wait until the middle of the month and I get another stripe. With all my ROTC, I knew army regulations better than some of those second lieutenants they had. In fact, regressing a little bit, when I was at flying cadets I was officer of the day and he said, "Post the guard. I want the 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenants I want a formal guard mount." I said, "You don't want a formal guard mount." "Yes, I do." I said "You know what's entailed in a formal guard mount?" "Yes." "You still want one?" "Yes." I said, "Okay, when are you going to get the band?" "What band?" "Well, that's part of the formal guard mount." He said, "Well forget that." So I started in and he said let's hurry up and get posted. I said, "I'm not even half way through." Finally, he said, "Forget about it."

Another time when I was at Shumacs, somebody stole my blouse. So Saturday morning I get a pass, lieutenant came in with a quartermaster, he says, "Where is your blouse?" I said, "It was stolen." He turned to ??? and said, "Issue this man a blouse and charge him for it." I said, "No, sir.?" He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I'm not going to pay for it." He said, "Well you were issued a blouse it is up to you to take care of it." I said, "You give me a locker that I can put it in and lock it up then it's my responsibility. When I'm in open barracks and anybody can walk in any time they want to, I'm not going to pay for it." He said, "Well, you have to for now." I said, "I have one request lieutenant." He said, "What's that?" I said I want to report a survey." He looked at me and said, "What the heck does this guy know about a report of survey." He says, "Issue him a blouse and forget about it."

MR. GRAHAM: What was a report of survey?

MR. FAGLESON: He had to hold inquiry at why that blouse was lost, and why...

MR. GRAHAM: Had to be investigated.

MR. FAGLESON: That's right.

MR. GRAHAM: Alright, go ahead. What else?

MR. FAGLESON: I knew regulations. From August to New Year's day we were at Narin.

MR. GRAHAM: What were you mostly doing there?

MR. FAGLESON: We were bringing aircraft back from bombing and giving signal directions.

MR. GRAHAM: Did you have shifts that you served or how did that work?

MR. FAGLESON: Well, there were six of us by ourselves. Fact, one of the boys kept packing a bag. I said, "Johnny, where are you going?" He said, "I'm going to Calcutta." I said, "Did you get a leave?" He said, "No, but the squadron you're attached to flies a plane down twice a month. They take boys down for two weeks leave and bring back vegetables and take another group down and bring them back with vegetables. I'll be back in a couple of weeks." So he went. If you wanted to go somewhere, they were just sitting there anyhow. He says, "I'll pull your shift." We could come and go anytime we wanted to and they gave us a pass that said we could go anywhere when not on duty. And who's to say we're on duty? You pull my shift I wasn't on duty. I got stranded in Dipper Gau(sp?) one night.

MR. GRAHAM: Dipper Gau?

MR. FAGLESON: It's on the Brahma-??? River in Asam and I said I can't stay out in the street so I went down to the police station. A little corporal sitting behind the desk

said, "What are you doing in here?" I said, "I'm stranded and I can't get out. I want to stay the night." He said, "You got a pass?" Nobody ever had a pass, if you weren't on duty you went into town. He said, "Who signed this?" I said, "I don't know I never could make out his signature." He said, "Who's your CO?" I said, "I don't know I never met him." He was about ready to call the meat wagon. At that time the MP Sergeant came in. This guy started mumbling, he says, "I told you I'm on the road. You won't get a ride after night. You can stay here." I said, "First of all, I've taken all the crap I'm going to take off this corporal, all I want from him is a yes or no." He said, "Don't worry about it. You can stay here. You can sleep on that wooden bench if you want or back in the cells is a concrete slab, it may be softer." So I spent the night there. We got away with murder.

MR. GRAHAM: That's where you spent most all your time then?

MR. FAGLESON: I spent part of it in Maran and the rest of it in Michenau.

MR. GRAHAM: After you finished up your tour of duty, what happened?

MR. FAGLESON: We were packed up ready to ship into China for the invasion when...

MR. GRAHAM: The invasion of Japan?

MR. FAGLESON: Not the big one. I don't know if you remember seeing the agenda for the invasion. One of them is operation Coronet and the other one is operation Summit. In other words the invasion was a small island off the tip of Honshu and commandoes were to go in and secure the island. Then we were to come in right behind them and set up a homing station. They dropped the big one and we didn't go.

MR. GRAHAM: How did you get back to the States?

MR. FAGLESON: We flew back to Karachi and took a ship back. I took sick aboard ship and wound up six months in a hospital. I was partially paralyzed and I told the boys the ward doctor said, "Well, we're returning you to duty." I said, "When am I going?" I had planned to make a career of the service. He said, "You're going home. You're getting a medical discharge."

MR. GRAHAM: End up back home then? Well, let me ask you now, you told me quite a bit are there any particular experiences or people or anything that happened that you still think about now more than the others?

MR. FAGLESON: In Maran, I was bringing this P-47 in and I gave him my bearings and the procedure was every four or five minutes you gave him a correcting bearings because our ??? and center was a frontal shape and you are more or less bouncing him down. I answered, "Do you want another QDM?" He says, "Fellows, the one you gave me was no good, forget about it, I'm out of fuel." I went outside and listened a couple of minutes. I could hear this train coming in. He came running over to the station, hit the runway, rolled halfway down and the engine cut off. That's how close he was.

MR. GRAHAM: Boy, that is something. I guess you do think about that.

MR. FAGLESON: You know Chuck Lanham?

MR. GRAHAM: Yes.

MR. FAGLESON: Chuck was coming back from a range and he may have told you this.

MR. GRAHAM: The one that crashed on the beach?

MR. FAGLESON: This is the one before. Everybody was running out of fuel there. Fuel was hard to come by. I got this one story, it wasn't Chuck on that one, this fellow called in for bearings, and I gave him a bearing, and five minutes later I said, "You want

another bearing?" He wasn't coming towards me he was going across the bayou. Something wrong here, so I called him again, I said, "Do you want another bearing?" I gave it to him and the next time I said, "Where is your destination?" He said, "Chilihi" He was flying toward Chilihi. "What was your point of departure?" He said "Chilihi. Give me a bearing don't worry about where I've been or where I'm going.?" What he was doing he was getting a bearing out of Chilihi. He was giving barrier Michenau and where they crossed on that line was approximately where he was, so he was seeing how far out of ??? he was by following my directions, so to speak. Another one, if you asked these fellows where were they the first week in January of '45, that's when the mother logs fell on sister hump. You had three fronts. The prevailing west to east winds joined bands, the Siberian front coming down, and one coming out of the Bay of Bingof bringing up moisture. All three converged over the Himalayas at the same time.

MR. GRAHAM: What was the height? Any particular height that they were converging?

MR. FAGLESON: The Himalayas went from zero to twenty-nine thousand feet. To find the northern route you were up to fifteen to eighteen to twenty thousand feet.

MR. GRAHAM: At that time planes didn't go much above twenty thousand, did they?

MR. FAGLESON: Well, they couldn't. Later when they started getting super chargers in, but planes were calling in Maydays faster than I could handle them.

MR. GRAHAM: Did you lose many planes?

MR. FAGLESON: Well, I've heard the record they set anywhere from seven to ninety planes were lost in that two days. General Turner, I think it is, was head of the Hump route and he said, "You will find that there was no such thing as weather over the

Hump.” So when that storm hit, he said, “Stand down, there is weather over the Hump.” That was one time they were coming in crying and pilots crying, they’re icing up and going down. I have a friend, in fact I buried him a week ago, two weeks ago, he was coming back from China. He took off at midnight and he hit a two-hundred mile crosswind and finally he couldn’t get anybody to answer his call, so finally he got somebody to give a signal and he asked for a bearing and they asked, “Where are you?” He said, “I’m trying to get back.” “You are two hundred miles inside Japanese territory.” That’s the way it was.

MR. GRAHAM: Well, you had a pretty exciting story now. I don’t know anything else to ask you. So is there anything else you would like to add that maybe we’ve missed.

MR. FAGLESON: Of the six of us that were in the crew, there are four of us left.

MR. GRAHAM: That’s still a pretty high percentage.

MR. FAGLESON: Of the four of us that are left, one boy is in pretty bad shape. He’s going blind and he’s almost bed ridden and the other boy has had prostate problems. Don’t we all? I have found seventy-eight boys that were in the squadron, by hit and miss. I’ve heard of so and so, did you contact him? I found seventy eight.

MR. GRAHAM: That’s pretty good.

MR. FAGLESON: That’s about it.

MR. GRAHAM: Well, on behalf of the Nimitz Museum, I want to thank you very much for sharing your story.

MR. FAGLESON: One other thing, I bring one thing back. My wife said, “Don’t get me talking about it. She’d be at the door all day long.” This one pilot I gave a bearing, and the wind was blowing him off. I’d give him that corrective bearing, it’d blow him off,



finally I said, "Son, have you any idea where you're at?" He said, "I'm not even sure where the tail end of this aircraft is." That happened to another fellow and he said, "You'd better check your equipment 'cause I'm flying such and such and you're giving me a bearing of this." I told him, "I'm down here on the ground. I know where I'm at. Do you?" He never called back.

MR. GRAHAM: I think you got his attention on that.

MR. FAGLESON: We were unique, come and go when we wanted to; we refused to sleep in the enlisted man's quarters because the officers' quarters were closer to our unit, so we convinced them that we ought be in the officers' quarters.

MR. GRAHAM: Well, thank you very much. Hope you have a good day and God bless you.

Edited copy typed November 16, 2011, by Eunice Gary.