

**THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR**  
**(Nimitz Museum)**

**NIMITZ EDUCATION AND RESEARCH CENTER**  
**Fredericksburg, Texas**

**Interview with**  
**PETE LANCHAK**  
**U. S. AIR CORPS**  
**CBI**

## ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

LANCHAK, PETE

This is Ed Metzler and today is the 7<sup>th</sup> of October, 2005. I am interviewing Mr. Pete Lanchak. This interview is taking place in Houston, Texas. This interview is in support of the Nimitz Education and Research Center, archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to this site. Let me start out, Pete, by thanking you for spending the time today to share your experiences in the China Burma India theater during World War II and let me ask you to start by giving us your name, birth date, a little bit about your family.

MR. LANCHAK: I'm Pete Lanchak. I was born July 4, 1920. I'm the first generation. My mother and Dad came from the old country, Ukrainian descent.

MR. METZLER: Ukrainian?

MR. LANCHAK: Ukrainian descent. Dad worked in the mills around Pittsburgh there.

MR. METZLER: Have any brothers and sisters?

MR. LANCHAK: One sister. She's passed away now.

MR. METZLER: Where did you go to high school?

MR. LANCHAK: I went to high school at Mc Kees Rocks, Pennsylvania. It's about five miles outside of Pittsburgh.

MR. METZLER: Right on the outskirts of Pittsburgh then.

MR. LANCHAK: Right. Went to school there. When I graduated I worked in one of the mills in McKees Rocks. My job was to get these pans that they were making and now it's what they call a "curler". You take the edge of the pan and curl it over so it's not sharp. So I worked there for a little while and I figured well, there's no future here. I

turned around. My dad never owned a house; never owned a car, which is typical of the young. We lived in that part of town that they called the “waddies” because we were down there on the Ohio River. A buddy and I went down to Pittsburgh and joined the army.

MR. METZLER: Now this is before the war started?

MR. LANCHAK: This is in 1939. I got out in '38, worked a little bit, '39 we went down. So we joined and the fellow asked me “What do you want to do? Do you want to take foreign duty which is a two-year service or do you want to stay in the States here somewhere that’s a three-year service and you can re-enlist or get out?” He took foreign duty and he took coast artillery down in Panama. I figured, well, I’ll join you but I’ll take the air corps. They had the Air Corps there so I went down. Panama had all but filled. He was in the Coast Guard. I used to like to visit him because we weren’t too far apart. He was down in the ground where they had these big guns up above, you know when you fire the big gun it disappears. Where he lived it was nice and cool where in the barracks we didn’t have air conditioning in those days, just the fans going around.

MR. METZLER: So this is in Panama?

MR. LANCHAK: In Panama.

MR. METZLER: Now where did you do training? Where did you go to basic training?

MR. LANCHAK: At Fort Slocum, very basic. About maybe two weeks we had some marching and things like this. So when we got shipped out, we went by boat to Panama then we took some training there at Corazal, Panama, with some of the ??? down there. So we got a little training over there. Back on Abbott field airplanes and all, they had planes down there called the A-17. It was what they called an attack plane. the pilot in

the front and the gunner in the back. I enjoyed that. You got a ride back there and a lot of fun.

MR. METZLER: So you were a gunner?

MR. LANCHAK: A gunner on the back, anybody took a chance. You were not considered a gunner in the yellow suit. We didn't have all kinds of MOs and whatever you want to call it. But that plane didn't last very long. The other planes we had over there were in those days they called them "pursuit planes", they weren't fighters. It was a P, P as in Peter, 26. You can take the tail of the plane while it is in the hangar, walk out with it, it's so light. When they landed they landed looked like sixty miles an hour. You could probably run alongside. Then they come in with the first all metal type plane, B-18, and that's a bomber, two engine bombers. So then I got to flying in those.

MR. METZLER: You were flying what as pilot?

MR. LANCHAK: I was a crew member. Call you up and say you want to go up today, yep, I liked to fly. So I'd go in there and they had a turret in the back, not a turret, it was like enclosed parts and you crank up. It's smooth with the fuselage but when you crank it up and you're enclosed in glass I had a single gun, a great big 30-caliber. In those days that was a big gun. We'd go up and shoot and that's the way you got training. Another airplane flying alongside there and you shoot at a target they have. So I enjoyed that, too. After the B-18s, we had no duties at all. So I would clean guns and like that and fix things up, so then they brought in the B-17s. One of the early B-17s had a big bath tub on the bottom, and at this time that's when war was starting going overseas. We weren't at war yet so when he brought these B-17s in we started flying patrol looking for German submarines supposedly. We never saw one in all the time.

MR. METZLER: Was this on the Caribbean side or on the Pacific side?

MR. LANCHAK: No, Caribbean side. No, I was in Balboa.

MR. METZLER: I can't tell you which side Balboa is, I don't know for sure.

MR. LANCHAK: Panama City is Balboa.

MR. METZLER: I think that's on the Caribbean side.

MR. LANCHAK: Okay.

MR. METZLER: We'll say it is anyhow.

MR. LANCHAK: On these airplanes now they take off and fly a mission from Panama, we'd fly over to Galapagos Islands, that's about six hundred miles out there in the ocean and flew with a certain pattern. Then they wanted to expand some of the territory they covered..

MR. LANCHAK: Yes, with the big lizards and everything?

MR. METZLER: That's over on the Pacific side.

MR. LANCHAK: That's where we would land; spend the night, gas up. In fact, we lost one airplane over there but nobody knew what happened. It was gone. They don't know. So even today I ask has anybody heard about it, no. Anyhow, from there they decided they're going to expand the deal so they transferred a squadron. At that time we were called the 74<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron, we were transferred to Guatemala that big airfield there, Aurora Air Field.

MR. METLER: What was the name of it?

MR. LANCHAK: Aurora. We flew from there again certain pattern to Galapagos and looked for someone. In those days in the early B-17s we had the new radar from Canada.

It's the type of radar, all it did, is have blips and you'd pick something up. We had antennas on the wings and the nose and if you picked something up you'd get blip and would go back and take a look at it. So then the squads broke up, Ray Lands was a close buddy of mine, he was the one that activated the longest TBI here in Houston. His squadron went to Ecuador. And then we had another squadron go over to Trinidad, so the three of us were flying different routes of patrol. Well, then war was declared, so we kept flying this time looking for...

MR. METZLER: Tell me what squadron, what wing, what air group? Give me a feel for where you are in the organization.

MR. LANCHAK: I was in the 74<sup>th</sup>.

MR. METZLER: Seventeenth?

MR. LANCHAK: No, I can't recall what it was. All I can recall is our insignia then had a pirate's head and on our airplanes we had the bird that they have over there in Panama supposed to be able to fish real well, just dive from the sky right on down into the water. We had that bird as an insignia on the plane. I flew as a gunner all day. All we did was look out the windows to see what we could see. War was declared so we flew some more missions so they decided well, we're going go overseas but they didn't tell us where. So they flew us from Guatemala and outfit Ray Land's crew from Ecuador. Three crews got together into Florida. When we got to Florida we stayed overnight. Then they woke us up one day and said we're leaving. When we left we had no planes, they wouldn't let us take the planes out of the Caribbean. Here comes a civilian airplane, Pan Am with a stewardess on board so all the crews got on there and flew us down to South America, Belize, and the usual route over to Ascension Island over to Africa.

MR. METZLER: So this was a flying boat, Pan Am Clipper?

MR. LANCHAK: No, it is not one of them; it's a C-54. So we flew until we come to India.

MR. METZLER: That's a lot of flying.

MR. LANCHAK: Yeh, and with the stewardess on board we had a lot of fun. When we got to India there was no place to put us. We're some of the first squadrons getting there.

MR. METZLER: When is this, early '42?

MR. LANCHAK: No, it's '42, 'cause I came home in '43, ??? our missions at that time. When we got to India they told us we're going to pick up some airplanes.

MR. METZLER: Were you in the Calcutta area?

MR. LANCHAK: No, we're in Karachi. We flew into Karachi, so we went over there and here's six brand new B-24's first ones over that we knew of. When we got there the pilot never flew in one. I never had a turret before like in the back end of the plane, have a turret and all, so everybody got checked out. They had instructors come over and check our pilots out, etc. We got checked out then they moved us to Alabad and that's where we flew missions, out of Allahad for awhile.

MR. METZLER: Allahad.

MR. LANCHAK: Allahad, I think it is, sorta in the center part. So we flew missions up there, from Allahad we'd go over to Calcutta some dumb airfield we'd fly over it to Burma.

MR. METZLER: So you're kind of alternating back and forth between Burma and India.

MR. LANCHAK: Well, when we got there the flying Tigers were taking off because the Japanese were coming in. We thought maybe we'd go into Burma into Rangoon but the

Japanese had it so we couldn't go in. So our missions were flying from there to Rangoon bombing Rangoon the majority of times.

MR. METZLER: So Rangoon was held by the Japanese.

MR. LANCHAK: Yep.

MR. METZLER: So that was one of your primary bombings sites with your B-24's.

MR. LANCHAK: Right, B-24.

MR. METZLER: Now at this time were you still in this same air group that you don't remember the number?

MR. LANCHAK: Yeh, my whole crew.

MR. METZLER: Your guys all coming together then. How many of them?

MR. LANCHAK: Three different crews and then on one mission they said it was okay everybody pack up we're going some place and this is the time they had that big Plerwleski(sp?) raid. Remember that, they're gathering B-24s from various areas so we packed our bags thinking we were going somewhere.

MR. METZLER: Don't go to Plerwleski yet, let's stay in Ragoon.

MR. LANCHAK: We didn't go to Plerwleski. They cancelled that and then brought in another crew from Africa. If I remember his name I think his name was Fenell. He was brought in because he was familiar with China. He had spent some time in China, I presume. He had his own crew, his airplane was the desert-type color and we called it the Pink Lady.

MR. METZLER: This was an American?

MR. LANCHAK: Yeh, he was American G. I., a major at that time.

MR. METZLER: So this was from the North African campaign.

MR. LANCHAK: This one more crew so they came in and they brought them in because five of us plus his crew six of us were going to go bomb what they called Plerwleski mines, so we took off and flew into China went over the Hump and landed in Kunming and then Kweilin and then we ended up at Ghengtu. Finishing the field at that time, still rolling the stones whenever we got there.

MR. METZLER: Can you spell that for me?

MR. LANCHAK: I think it's Ghengtu cause later on that became the B-29 base for planes.

MR. METZLER: What was it like flying over the Hump?

MR. LANCHAK: Over the hump, when we got there it was cold weather. You know we're from Caribbean and never had much cold weather. We were flying pretty high and my pilot was in the lead there. I looked behind me and I see one of the planes starting to go down so I called the pilot. Hey, there's a plane going down there, I don't know why, it looks like he's just under control going down. The pilot I could hear him talk 'cause he was still hooked up ??? his controls are getting tight. We were icing up and didn't know it at the time. So anyhow we felt it a little bit but not that much.

MR. METZLER: He pulled out?

MR. LANCHAK: Yeh, the other guy pulled out, too. We were high enough that we could let down until some of the stuff melted. So we flew into China and when we got to Ghengtu, we're supposed to take a mission for the coal mines. They had coal mines on the shore, not too far from Peking 'cause we were obviously flying over the big wall of China.

MR. METZLER: That's further north so you got pretty far north up there into China.

MR. LANCHAK: Anyhow, Ghengtu had mines where ships pulled in for coal and in those days I guess they had a lot of ships that still burned coal. Our mission was to bomb the power houses. If you bombed the power houses then the pumps can't pump the water out and the mines will become flooded.

MR. METZLER: So these are shallow under ground mines, not surface mines.

MR. LANCHAK: No, these are all under the ground. So we got over there and it was a cake for us because there was no anti aircraft around there and no fighter field near there. So they decided we'll just form a circle and drop a bomb at a time, huh? So one plane took off and bombed half of his load and then another plane behind him dropped in, we really hit the power plant. They told us when we come back, from the information they had gotten, that the mines would probably be closed for four or five years or so.

MR. METZLER: You did a lot of damage.

MR. LANCHAK: So anyhow we come back to China, back to the field there and threw us a big party.

MR. METZLER: So this was just one run that you made, one mission.

MR. LANCHAK: One mission in China.

MR. METZLER: And you got a party for this mission.

MR. LANCHAK: We had a party right there and one of our crew members, Joe LeBlanc, a Frenchman, was going to be a priest. He got to boozin' around so they kicked him out. When we got to that party they had rice wine over there and all and ole Joe really got stewed, he was stewed cold. I'll never forget that going back to the barracks Mike had to carry him.

MR. METZLER: So how did you like that rice wine?

MR. LANCHAK: I wasn't much of a drinker, cause a lot of missions we'd come back and he'd offer you a shot of Seagrams VO or something like that. Sometimes I'd give mine away because I didn't care too much for it. I was just about nineteen or twenty years old. Anyway, after that mission we were supposed to go somewhere else but the weather was so bad when we come back didn't drop any bombs. Then we got recalled to go back to India so we all flew our planes.

MR. METZLER: Back over the Hump.

MR. LANCHAK: Back over the Hump, went back there.

MR. METZLER: Roughly how long would you guess you were there in China? A couple of months or was it a shorter period?

MR. LANCHAK: Oh, I would guess maybe three weeks.

MR. METZLER: What about the Chinese guys on the ground or the people there? Did you get any exposure to them? What was it like at the time?

MR. LANCHAK: We didn't talk much to the Chinese over there. In fact, the only time we had any close contact is with the guards that would come around the plane over there. Then we would sleep in our own plane.

MR. METZLER: Because you were there for such a short period of time they didn't barrack you. So you're back in India.

MR. LANCHAK: We're back in India and we flew again hit some airfields.

MR. METZLER: Were these Japanese airfields still?

MR. LANCHAK: Yes, just to get to Rangoon, if you went over the land to Rangoon, you hit about two or three air fields over there. So our missions were you come along and flying over the water all the time then you come up the river there, I forget what they

call it, you come up the river and guides you right into Rangoon. Then after you drop your bomb then you go over land ??? get over there. What made it easy, too, once you get over water generally the fighters would not chase after you. Afraid of getting probably lost out there if you lose sight of land or something. I don't know but generally if you got over the water they let you go.

MR. METZLER: So how much trouble did you have with the Japanese air force, was it a major factor?

MR. LANCHAK: Yeh, as a matter of fact, one time there was four of us went on a mission and we got jumped with maybe twenty, twenty-five zeros on us. It got so that they couldn't make runs, coordinated runs, say one's coming in and another one's coming in, and...

MR. METZLER: So they weren't very well coordinated.

MR. LANCHAK: No, not at that time, no.

MR. METZLER: I was going to say you told me you had twenty-five zeros on you; I'd be worried for you.

MR. LANCHAK: Well, we were worried, too, but nobody got hit on that mission, nobody got hit, no holes, no nothing.. In fact, I didn't fire very much. I had nine hundred rounds in the deal and I still had ammunition left in there. You can only fire when they're coming in at you, you don't want to fire when he's way out there and waste your ammunition.

MR. METZLER: I've been told how maneuverable the zero was, how fast it could move around.

MR. LANCHAK: In fact, I've seen one come through later on near the end before we left. I guess these were pilots coming up for a rest out of the South Pacific coming into Burma there. I don't know if it's a rest area or what but they were pros you can tell. I saw one guy come in. We had a formation, you know a V with the tail end ??? down here coming right through the middle. You couldn't shoot down because the plane went right on through all silver that shiny fuselage, you know. Most of our bombing was airfields. We laid mines a couple of times. We come up the river and the mines that we laid had a little shoot on them, you'd drop them in the river and a couple of big ships coming in that the mines were set towards the hull of the ship maybe the second hull over before she blows ??? time. Those missions would be at night because you'd come in real low and you'd drop them and you'd scoot on home.

MR. METZLER: It must be a lot different flying at night than it is in daylight.

MR. LANCHAK: Yeh, oh yeh.

MR. METZLER: As a gunner you aren't going to see anything.

MR. LANCHAK: No, no.

MR. METZLER: You just sit there in the dark and wonder what's going on.

MR. LANCHAK: Even at night when we hit some airfields sometimes at night, the only time I saw something I could shoot at was an I 45, a two-seater job they had over there. I guess he was going across the moon or something but it was a silhouette like over there. I fired a couple of rounds and he was gone.

MR. METZLER: Was the B-24 a good plane?

MR. LANCHAK: Oh, I liked it but the B-17 I liked better because it could take punishment.

MR. METZLER: More than the 24?

MR. LANCHAK: Yep. Remember seeing pictures of them coming back from Europe tails half gone and this and that. The B-24 was a faster plane, it had the Davis wing, the narrow wing, the B-17 had the big wing like that. Our whole concern with the 24 was watching that gasoline. Every time you sat by the ??? behind the bomb bay there was always the smell of gasoline there and we were always afraid that somebody was going to light up a cigarette. You know we would smoke in the plane, too. When we got over there our concern was running out of gas. We flew this one mission and I'm thinkin', trying to think of the other, it was Ray Lent's crew. The other missions I was on was Ray Lent. When we got over to India we were the 436 Bomb Squadron. So we flew high of Alabad and then after several missions we got replacements. They decided to make two new squadrons so they made the 492<sup>nd</sup> and my pilot Joe Pierce Shovel was commanding officer. Our good ole friend Major Werner, oh, he was a captain then, too, Captain Werner, docked at 493<sup>rd</sup>.

MR. METZLER: So there was a 492<sup>nd</sup> and a 493<sup>rd</sup>.

MR. LANCHAK: Right.

MR. METZLER: And they superseded the 436.

MR. LANCHAK: Right. Then later on the 9th come in and my pilot right before I got shipped home we flew a mission with the 9<sup>th</sup> because he took charge of the 9<sup>th</sup>. He was transferred from 492<sup>nd</sup>. So when the pilot went everybody with the crew goes on with him.

MR. METZLER: Right.

MR. LANCHAK: 492<sup>nd</sup> and 493<sup>rd</sup> flew from the same field. Ray Lent and I were real close together because from Panama we used to play cribbage going overseas and all.

MR. METZLER: How do you spell his name?

MR. LANCHAK: Lent, Ray Lent. On the mission that we're flying, our squadrons' six airplanes and Ray Lent is on the side of us six planes flying, too. We got hit by the zeros and we were over on the left. I could see the planes coming in advising my pilot the view from back there and here goes another run by the zeroes on Ray Lent's plane. And Ray Lent got hit in the arm, blew his arm off, and his tail gunner got hit in the head and it killed him. Anyhow, Ray Lent was sent over to the hospital in Calcutta and every chance we got to go to Calcutta we would stop over and see Ray. Then they shipped him home. Then about, oh, I don't know...

MR. METZLER: But your air craft wasn't hit during that raid?

MR. LANCHAK: No.

MR. METZLER: You were a blessed boy.

MR. LANCHAK: Yes.

MR. METZLER: That's one reason you're here today.

MR. LANCHAK: That's about right. Major Werner, now, his crew and a real close friend of mine, Joe West, 'cause he come up from the Caribbean. When I was leaving they had a mission to Rangoon and a couple of the airplanes got shot down. Major Werner with his crew got shot down and two gunners got out of it. They could see what was going on, they were captured. So Joe West and Frank Rodriguez, Frank and I and Joe used to play cards at night and all and they were in the 493<sup>rd</sup>. I saw Joe one time at a convention, 'cause when he got shot down I wrote down in a little book. I had a little

book, not a journal. When you come to Chicago look me up I'll have a restaurant, you'll get a free meal, you know little stuff like that. I wrote down that he was killed on such and such a day over Rangoon. Then later on I saw him at one of the conventions years ago. I said, "Joe, you're not dead. You're supposed to be dead, what the hell are you doing here?" Joe told me what he had to suffer, so I asked him about Frank, what happened to Frank? He said Frank died while he was in prison.

MR. METZLER: Two of your three buddies there from Panama.

MR. LANCHAK: One of our longest mission at that time, the longest mission in the war, we flew from India to Bangkok. It was sixteen hours and thirty-five minutes round trip. We left before the sun come up and we landed didn't even put the lights on. We were all sweating it out on how much gasoline we had even though we topped the tanks off and everything else on that long flight like that. We flew twice to Bangkok. The first time we went over there and dropped our bombs and I went back in and the pilot says what do you see? I don't see nothing, no fires, no nothing. Anyhow we come back and landed and found out later on. I don't know how they do it but they had intelligence of some kind, there was a flood in Bangkok and all the bombs fell in water. So we had to go back.

MR. METZLER: So Bangkok was held by the Japanese at this time?

MR. LANCHAK: Yeh, yeh. Japanese had it all. All Burma was Japanese. A big push one time getting pretty close to India but then they were stopped and pushed back.

MR. METZLER: Never made it into India. So you dropped your bombs in the wet and had to go back and do it again.

MR. LANCHAK: Yeh, this time we went for an armory but we dropped bombs and there was fires and all, and we come back home.

MR. METZLER: Any air resistance or anti aircraft?

MR. LANCHAK: No.

MR. METZLER: That's amazing.

MR. LANCHAK: We flew along the water all the way down and around. We had to drop some of our bomb load because we had tanks we put there. You only carry so many bombs.

MR. METZLER: So you had extra fuel tanks in the back because that's a long run.

MR. LANCHAK: Yeh. Sixteen hours over there, boy, I'm telling you trying to keep your eyes open, too, you know.

MR. METZLER: Sixteen hours is what, 250 miles an hour, that's a long run. So you made the two runs to Bangkok.

MR. LANCHAK: Yeh, two runs to Bangkok. The rest of the missions were shipping and ???, we dropped some ships over there. I understand Japanese convoys we were trying to hit those. They claim we sunk a concrete ship.

MR. METZLER: A concrete ship?

MR. LANCHAK: Yeh, ship carrying concrete for building bridges and airfields were ours but Mike Power being CO took chances. We get a bombing run and everybody's ready to go home but Mike Powers making a run brings the cameras out and he takes some pictures. Most of our deals we bombed, we separated. We all headed home. We didn't stay in formation. Over in England and all this they stay in formation, going and coming.

MR. METZLER: Well, that's funny because they had so much fighter resistance there that they had to kind of band together.

MR. LANCHAK: Like I said, when you hit water they generally didn't follow you. At night I could tell when we were coming back from say some field like ??? field, we used to bomb there, coming back over land and you could see they were plotting our course with fires. See the fires start, everything is back in a straight line ??? I could look up from the turret and see these fires. I guess they set fires up so the firing squad could know which way you're going I guess.

MR. METZLER: So these are the Japanese ground troops setting...

MR. LANCHAK: I don't know who they were but whoever was setting the fires straight lines along with our course ??? Looking from the turret, I figured they were setting the fires in case the fighters are after us they have a trail. And that's about it. I flew about forty-seven missions or so and got orders to come home. I come home at the end of '43.

MR. METZLER: So if you had a certain number of missions then that got you sent back or what?

MR. LANCHAK: No, they mentioned hours, too. I had over four hundred and some hours in the air.

MR. METZLER: So you were replaced by somebody?

MR. LANCHAK: We were the first to go home. We were the first ones over and making room I came home. Ray Lent came home ahead of me because he got wounded. We kept in touch with each other for some time. Scalloveno(?) and his crew, one of the guys married, one of the guys coming back. Everybody was concerned about the gas gauges we had with the old monitor Twos, remember the old Twos. They measured the

gas with that and we weren't used to that in B-24. So by the time you learn everything about it, we had a maintenance engineer, what was his name, on the tip of my tongue, then we lost a co-pilot, young fellow.

MR. METZLER: How did that happen?

MR. LANCHAK: They brought more planes in; they took some of the co-pilots who had the experience and gave them their own airplane with another crew. Henny, the one I was thinking of, was our co-pilot. So when he got his crew and wherever he went I don't know, different squadron from us. The last I heard, and it's true because it was confirmed, Henny went over to see a buddy of his at a B-25 field. From what I hear he coaxed his buddy to let him fly a 25. And on takeoff he crashed and Henny got killed.

MR. METZLER: What caused that? Do you think the aircraft was that much different?

MR. LANCHAK: I don't know. They tell me that he was flying it, somebody that survived it, I don't know. All I heard is they crashed and Henny was killed.

MR. METZLER: When you were there in those airfields, what were your living quarters like? I mean were you in vashers?

MR. LANCHAK: We had like at Alavant, we were in the old Bengal Lancer barracks, beautiful barracks, and they had what they called punka wallas on the opposite side of the building. You pulled this rope and you had the big fans.

MR. METZLER: The big swinging fans.

MR. LANCHAK: And we were all down in there and the barracks long and what got me, I enjoyed taking a crap, to take a crap there you had to go in sheds, whole rows of them, there's a bucket under you there. I enjoyed just sitting there and reading where some of these Bengal Lancers from years ago had carved on the wood.

MR. METZLER: Oh, their graffiti on the wall was interesting reading.

MR. LANCHAK: Yep. And some of them were talking about the king and queen and all kinds. I enjoyed going and taking crap and just read...

MR. METZLER: Read the Bengal Lancers notes from the past.

MR. LANCHAK: Then we got moved to Pandabeswar(sp?) and we had a regular little village, enough for two crews in there. The officers had the old quarters and one thing that I noticed, we got along fine with the officers, but there wasn't that real close comraderie like they had over in England where the pilots and would come together. When we flew missions they went their way and we went back to our ???. so you were always with your buddies there. The billets we stayed in we had regular, each room would hold probably about four of us and that's where like two by fours with some rope strung across and you put something on top of that. It was comfortable and then we had a regular mess hall we'd go to.

MR. METZLER: How was the food?

MR. LANCHAK: I enjoyed it, I liked it. I had a helluva time with butter, it was from Australia. Even in the hot sun that baby didn't melt, it was hard as a rock.

MR. METZLER: And it was hot there, too. How did you adapt to the heat? I guess you'd gotten used to it when you were Florida.

MR. LANCHAK: We had light clothing, you know, light khakis and at that time we always had the pierced helmet, ????. When we got to Karachi we had no place to go. We had some tents set up English style with little windows; you blow up the tents themselves so that wasn't bad.

MR. METZLER: So all in all that was a pretty interesting experience.

MR. LANCHAK: Yeh, flew our missions and come home, nobody in our crew got hit. After the war, Phipps, that's his name, engineered it, you have a guy that works on the engines, you know. We had a drop crew, too. Come back, he stayed in, he was an old timer. He was maybe eight to ten years older than we were. After the war he came over and I was going to school at the time in Detroit, went to school under the G. I. bill. He dropped over in New York and shot the breeze about the good ole days and all. The reason he came up to Detroit is they had some bad weather down in Florida, a hurricane or something, they flew their planes out and he managed to get over to Detroit and looked me up. Then I hear about a year later that he was on a mission training gunners, firing and someone misfired and killed them all dead, told them target shoot and he was a master sergeant.

MR. METZLER: So you came back in '43. What happened then were you discharged or did you help train?

MR. LANCHAK: The war was still going on. I have some beautiful pictures I took. I had an Argus camera and on these missions I took pictures, beautiful pictures, and I had a little Canfield 35mm, I betcha I had about ten or twelve cans like that. So we come back to Miami. They took them all, they took the copy scan everything you couldn't ??? if you had 25 you had to turn it in. Then they give us a leave. Okay, we want you to report to Atlantic City, so on my leave I went to Atlantic City. They said according to records over here you never went to a gunnery school. We're going to send you to a gunnery school. Some of the guys that were with me over there "Hell no, we're not going to gunnery school. We've already got gunnery."

MR. METZLER: We've got forty-six missions you're going to send us to gunnery school.

MR. LANCHAK: He said, "When you finish gunnery school, you'll get a furlough." So we said, okay, we'll go. So we went to the gunnery school, it was a snap. You take the guns apart, you do this and that, and when we graduated, they said where would you like to go? You had your choice of fields. I said, "Boy, that's nice. I've never been in the States." I asked a couple friends of mine "Where's a good place to go?" I should take Colorado Springs, he said. Colorado Springs. Boy, that was nice. Give me Colorado Springs. School was over, I had my furlough, reported to Colorado Springs, wonderful! I was an instructor gunner over there. You flew two days and you're off two days. So you took a crew up with a pilot and all, and they would train the pilots to go up and have the stalls and everything else. Then after the pilots finished with them they'd fly over the gunnery range and fire the guns. Let the guys shoot and get the feel and so forth. So I stayed as a gunner over there and I loved it so much. Then here comes orders in. The whole squadron is gonna be moved. The B-24 squadron was going from Colorado Springs, Peterson Field is the field it was. They transferred us over to Mountain Home, Idaho. Nothing out there, couldn't bring your wives or anything else like that because it's a small one-store town, a big cactus area over there and right along the foothill of some mountains. So if you take off you start peering away from the mountains over there. So I stayed there until Germany surrendered. They say, "Okay, we're going to discharge. You've got so many points you can go home." I had my points, I got the DFC and the air medal, and so many years for service, remember these little starched ??? you put on over here. I had enough points to get out. I went to the CO, I said, "Okay, here's

how many points I have. When can I leave?" He said, "You're considered essential at this time."

MR. METZLER: You got too important.

MR. LANCHAK: They held on to me. So I went home, got married, and on my honeymoon I got a letter or a wire come to us, the family there, come on back. So I come back and was sent from there to Ft. Dix to be discharged. So I got out, then I went to school.

MR. METZLER: Tell me about the DFC that you got.

MR. LANCHAK: DFC almost automatic up there. You flew so many missions and so forth and some hot like the battle I talked about. We had some hot fights over there, other planes got hit. We were lucky and we're always ??? ever since he became the CO, we're always the lead plane. We had our engineer up on that top turret. It's hard to say who shot what down but he was a pretty good shot and I believe he got a couple of zeros.

MR. METZLER: The whole crew basically.

MR. LANCHAK: Yeh, basically. Like in a tail end two where you fly in formation and a perfect shot is when they're coming at six o'clock for tail gunners ...(side B)

MR. METZLER: Okay, sorry. Keep going.

MR. LANCHAK: Okay. So when all three tail gunners are firing and you cease, the plane hits smoke or something like that and you start heading down. Who hit him?

MR. METZLER: It's hard to know.

MR. LANCHAK: It's hard to know who hit him. One mission I used all of my ammunition up and had some more tossed over to me. I had a lot of ammunition each company you know, twin guns. It's hard to say did you hit him or not. You fire away.

At the beginning it's quite easy because when they're coming in to make a run on the zeros they start out there. They start what they call a pursuit curve, they come in a certain way and start coming in. You can tell a green pilot because when he starts that pursuit curve and you fire your guns I guess he sees the lights tinkling, nine times out of ten they peel off and take off, they wouldn't come on and pursue. So, I presume that by the time they learned, you can tell a green pilot normally.

MR. METZLER: So you saw both kinds. You saw the greens ones and you saw the pros. Have you ever been back over to that part of the world since the war?

MR. LANCHAK: No. Nothing there I'm interested in.

MR. METZLER: You ever think much about the old days or just when you come to the reunion?

MR. LANCHAK: Yeh, when I get together with the group and talk and we shoot the breeze. Fred Lentz and I were, he wanted to come back here to Houston. He wanted to go to graduate school and work for Shell. He and I got together. When we get together I recall when he adopted a little boy and I saw him the other day. We had a meeting and he's a doctor today, that little boy, and he's at Park Plaza and doing quite well. We had a lot of good times together because Fred Lentz' wife, her sister was a concert pianist, and we'd have a meeting at her ranch. A great big pecan ranch over there near Rosenberg, I guess, and at that time we all had some little kids, bring out the tractor with some hay on it give them a hay ride. We had a lot of fun.

MR. METZLER: What do you think is the funniest remembrance you have of World War II, the funniest thing that happened to you, anything that comes to mind?

MR. LANCHAK: I can't think of anything that we really enjoyed laughing about but we were a very close bunch. Some of them are gone. A pitching buddy of mine, he was a bombardier on our plane, Oaf Shumante, and he started off in the Caribbean with us.

MR. METZLER: So he goes all the way back to Panama with you.

MR. LANCHAK: Yeh. He would come down here to Houston, he lives in Longview. He stayed in and he was a Lt. Col. when he got out. He'd come down and we'd go fishing together here at Seabrook area. He'd stay with me a week or two fishing. I had a lot of room because I'm living alone, my wife passed away some time ago. We'd go fishing, go out eating, restaurants and all. And I got a call here about seventeen months ago that his fishing days are over. He had a stroke and couldn't drive, still gets in a car but no long distance driving anymore. At night he won't drive at all but he and I were pretty close when he got out.

MR. METZLER: Anything else you want to share with us while we've got the time?

MR. LANCHAK: Well, I didn't have any exciting raids or anything like that. I think anybody that got hit several times with zeros but we were lucky. Other planes got hit and the only plane I know that was real close to me was Oaf Raylands. I remember that 'cause when we landed I ran over to his plane. We knew that they were hit. We were all on the same field so we landed. I got a little bit of his plane and that's when they took the tail gunner off, got hit in the head. Otherwise most of my buddies got through okay.

MR. METZLER: Okay, thanks for taking the time to share your experiences with us.

That's a lot of missions and you're a lucky man.

MR. LANCHAK: I am. I'm grateful.

MR. METZLER: Well, thanks for spending the time with us.

MR. LANCHAK: I'm sorry I'm not as exciting as some of these guys out there.

MR. METZLER: You missed the thought here. We're not just looking for exciting.

We're looking for every view of what went on, so thank you.

MR. LANCHAK: I'd like to mention one thing about one of our early missions coming back. It was one of our night missions. We bombed in daytime but by the time we got back it was starting to get dark. Darby's crew is the one that figured out they're gonna run out of gas and we were sweating gas in our plane, too. Darby's crew was told to get ready, we're gonna bail out. When the engine started sputtering, the whole crew bailed out. Everyone got out okay. Plane crashed and what we remember about the crew is Faith, his name. When he got on the ground he landed near a little village where the people took him in, you know, and we're on the friendly side over here. He met this girl and he got to going with her. He went up to his pilot after some time and told him he wanted to quit flying. He wanted to marry the girl and quit flying.

MR. METZLER: He went native on us.

MR. LANCHAK: Yeh, and the pilot okayed it. I would guess maybe after ten missions real early in the deal and he's a ground crew. He married the girl and brought her back home after the war. Another good friend of ours became an executive for one of the airlines down in Florida. So that's about it.

MR. METZLER: Okay, thanks.

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Transcribed May 18, 2012, by Eunice Gary