National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Educational and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Kenneth J. Ruff
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Mr. Metzler: This is Ed Metzler. Today is the 7th of October, 2005. I'm interviewing Mr. Ken Ruff. This interview is taking place in Houston, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Parks and Wildlife, for the preservation of historical information related to the site. Let me start out, Ken, by thanking you for spending the time to share your experiences on World War II with us and to add to our archives. Let me ask you to start, if I would please, by giving us your full name, date of birth, where you were born, and little bit about your family life early in your life.

Mr. Ruff: Ok, my name is Kenneth J. Ruff. I was born in Kansas City, Missouri, back on December 10th, 1923. I was raised in St. Joe, Missouri. I went to school in St. Joe, Missouri all the way through elementary, high school and was in the St. Joe Junior College at the time of Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Metzler: What did your Dad do for a living?

Mr. Ruff: My Dad was an engineer but an engineer there, he was in a dairy, he ran all the boilers for the dairy. He did all the mechanical work on the machines in the dairy. As a matter of fact, at one point, one summer, he got me a job and I worked in that dairy before I went to, from high school to college. And, ah, we were poor folks like everybody else. And, ah, we never had a car; we used public

transportation all this time. And I had an older sister and a younger brother and a younger sister and three of us, three of the four all went to college so we managed to do it and we had to pay our own way through. Because back in those days, your parents were so poor, they couldn't help you. So you either did it yourself or you didn't go. So, I had one lifetime ambition as I was growing up, and I was always interested, was in flying. I built model airplanes and I read all the magazines about it and everything. So, I went to college for one reason at the time, the government required two years of college to join the Army Air Corps. Well, I had one year finished and I was in my third semester college when they came through our town and I went down and interviewed and signed up with the Army Air Corps. Ah, theoretically we were supposed to, let us finish the fourth semester, so I'd have my associate degree. However, in the mean time, they had lowered the requirements from 2 years of college to high school graduates, because there was need for more air crews.

Mr. Metzler: What year was this?

Mr. Ruff: This in 1942, when I enlisted. In the Army Air Corps, but I was supposed to wait until I graduated in, after the last semester which was in 1943.

Mr. Metzler: But the war had already started.

Mr. Ruff: The war had already started, yah. So what I did, I signed up, I knew what was coming, so I didn't plan on being drafted because I wanted to go fly. And fortunately I took all the tests, passed them, and the physical and everything so I was on the list to be recalled, I mean to be called in, but supposedly after I finished my fourth semester. Unfortunately, in the fourth semester, I got my

summons. Which is all right. So I got on the bus with many other kids and took off for Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, where the processing center was. So, I went through the processing center and we took a series of tests; this is the government starting what they called the Aviation Student Program. Where the first thing you did before you actually got in the Army Air Corps cadets, you'd go to college. And they had it set up so you'd go for five months. But since this is the start of the program, they divided the first group into twenty, forty, sixty, eighty and the last percent to get the feed started in the college. Of course, since I was in my fourth semester of college and the test they gave was for high school, I didn't have a problem. So I was in the first 20 percent and sent from Jefferson Barracks, Missouri to Eau Claire State Teachers College in Wisconsin. But we only had to go five weeks because the other group, the second twenty percent were already on their way. So I got out of that and went to San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center.

Mr. Metzler: So that was at Randolph?

Mr. Ruff: No, that was at, ah, well it was the cadet center. It was in San Antonio but it wasn't at Randolph, they had a separate place which is not there anymore. Which is part of the Army Air Corps basic for, all you did was march and exercise and go to classes. And the classes were no big deal because they were kind of oriented toward high school graduates only. So I had no problem getting through that either, fortunately. So out of that, then we went to our primary flying school, basic flying school, and then the advanced. So I went through Yukon, Oklahoma, a suburb of Oklahoma City for primary. This was civilian run, civilian instructors but Army test pilots who came in periodically and test you to see if you were

making progress. Then I went to Enid for basic and then I went to Altus, Oklahoma, Altus Air Force Base for advanced.

Mr. Metzler: Oh, you stayed in Oklahoma for the whole thing?

Mr. Ruff: The whole thing. Yah, very unusual. But that's just the way the cards fell. So I graduated out of Altus and then they were going to send me to, well, I was dispatched for B-24 pilot training. We got to Liberal, Kansas, is where it was. And we got there and we maybe made one or two flights and started the ground school. Then a requirement came in for a bunch of new instructor pilots, to go teach flying. So, unfortunately, the first class in, they hadn't put that much money into 'em, or had that much training into 'em, so they say okay, all you guys are going to become flying instructors. Shipped us out – I was shipped to Perrin Field, in Sherman, Denison Texas. We did, they didn't put us through instructor training or anything because of the requirements and they didn't have time. And I can remember walking in and they talked to us, threw a bunch of manuals on, this is what you've gotta teach. Next Monday you'll have your first students. Okay, I'm 20 years old! And they're putting all this stuff on us, but that's all right too. I came in to fly and I'm gonna fly but I didn't want to fly in the States. Hey, I came in to go over there and face the enemy. So, I went to Perrin Field in, I think I had three classes I had, I was an instructor pilot for. But the good part of that was, when you're an instructor pilot and you're teaching others, you learn with them. And because of their mistakes and everything. And each class I got a little better at the job and so I – that was all right, so I got plenty of hours of flying. And then, but every time something would come across saying they wanted

volunteers for x, y or z, I raised my hand. I said, okay, I want out of here. And so, low and behold, they sent me up to Reno, Nevada and we had a lot of time, but we didn't have multi-engine time enough, even though I graduated out of a multi-engine advanced school. So from that point they said, okay. I was sent with a bunch of them to Long Beach, California to the ferry command. In a ferry command you got in any kind of airplane so I got to fly the B-17s, C-47s, and one long trip with B-24 that was designated for the Australian Air Force. So we took off from Long Beach, flew the Pacific over to Hawaii and down through Christmas Island and island-hop to refuel bases all the way to Brisbane, Australia where we turned it over. The interesting fact from this; is the fact when we started back, the guy I was with who was an experienced pilot, had B-25 time and they had some war-weary B-25s they wanted to bring back to the U.S.A. So, they said, You guys are going to crew this, take this back. So, you know, a pilot has a prerogative, he can look at the airplane and decide that it's okay, he can fly it, but he can also refuse it. And so I had to trust him because I didn't know that much about a B-25. Later on I got time in it, but not then. So, he went out and checked it over and came back and said, "We're not taking this. That thing is war-weary and I don't think it will make it." So they said, Okay you guys. So we started island-hopping to get back to the States. We went through Guadalcanal, Beak Island, a bunch of them to get back there. But the funny thing we learned later, another crew came along and took that plane – they didn't make it. They ditched it. So, that was my first brush I got by with. (laughter)

Mr. Metzler: Intuition was right on that one.

Mr. Ruff: Well that guy – I trusted him, yah. So, we didn't take it, we got back to Long Beach, and low and behold, all my friends were gone when I walked into the barracks. What the heck happened? I went running into the Orderly Room and said, "Hey guys what happened?" They said, "Well, while you were gone, the orders came in to ship all you guys back to Reno for first pilot training and then you're going to go where ever you're going to be assigned." So, there I am by myself then, all my friends are gone. So it didn't matter, I was still anxious to get out so they went ahead and had orders issued and I went, I returned to Reno and went through their school up there and then headed for— When I completed the training, we went to Nashville, which is the staging area. And I had a friend that I was an instructor with and he was there too, he'd been assigned to a C-46, which we were going to fly over the Hump, we were going to take over—

Mr. Metzler: What is the date at this point?

Mr. Ruff: At this point, I graduated from flight school in February, 1944. Then I went from there to Liberal, Kansas and then on down in late '44 I was an instructor all during '44 up to late when I went to Reno and we transferred and all this training I got out at Long Beach. I came back after Christmas Day in 1945. So then I was sent up to Reno to finish to training, it only took about 30 days and headed for Nashville and found this friend of mine that had the, was assigned his plane. So then, I went in to talk to him and got on, I finagled onto the crew. So we'd have three pilots, that way it's easier 'cause you change; one rests, two fly and then change off. So we took off from Nashville, went through Puerto Rico; French Guyana; Natal, Brazil; where we jumped off and went to Azores Island and then

up the north coast of Africa. And we got into Marrakech and then they decided they needed a plane there. So once again, we got bumped off so we're all there and we gotta hitchhike our way into India, we were destined for India. Which is all right, so we hitchhiked a ride into Cairo and we were going to stay a day or two and they said, well we'll go over to the BOQ and check in and we'll call you. While we were there we decided, what the heck, so we took off on tours. We got to go down to the pyramids, go through the pyramids and we saw the sphinx, we saw all sights you should see when you're in Cairo and the environments around there. So that was an experience. Here I'm just now turned 21 so I'm learning a lot of stuff early in age. So then we went ahead and finally got into Karachi where we checked in and one of the first persons I saw was my brother-in-law. And he was over there, he'd, I knew him from Reno, he was at Reno same time I was, but he'd been shipped over ahead of time and he was a Staff Sergeant and he was in Processing. So, I walk in there and there's my brother-in-law, so I say, "Well, I'll be damned." And from there, I was assigned to Assam Valley, up in India. And I was flying over into various places, like all the rest of the Hump pilots, you name it. I was in Chabua. (looking at map) They don't have it there.

Mr. Metzler: It doesn't show it on here? I unfortunately don't have very good maps.

Mr. Ruff: (Looking at map) Chunking, Chengtu. Well, we're somewhere up in the Assam Valley because the flights I usually took are, not only Ledos but we'd go into Kunming or bunch of them, there's Chanying, (spelling?) Luoyang (spelling?), I've forgot what other cities were there. But, the main point was me getting into

Kunming. And a couple of times I managed to take our flights and we went clear up into central China into Luichow.

Mr. Metzler: So what group were you attached to?

Mr. Ruff: It was ATC, but ATC had what they called their, I was in the 1333rd AAFB or Air Force Base Unit. Army Air Force Base Unit. Every ATC base had them. ATC is Air Transport Command. I was there, I think I made 72 round trips on the Hump.

Mr. Metzler: Starting when?

Mr. Ruff: It was probably March of '45.

Mr. Metzler: We are talking, the war is almost over, and—

Mr. Ruff: But we don't know that yet.

Mr. Metzler: And you still ran 72? You must have been going 24/7.

Mr. Ruff: Well, we'd get our time in and go down and volunteer for more. I had a few experiences on the Hump.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me about the Hump. What it was like. We've heard all this business about the Aluminum Highway.

Mr. Ruff: Well, there's a book out called the Aluminum Trail. It documents over 600 planes that didn't make it. So, I've had, one day taking off in the, I had a new pilot breaking in—

Mr. Metzler: So we're flying what now?

Mr. Ruff: C-46. What I had was a C-46.

Mr. Metzler: And the C-46 is?

Mr. Ruff: It's the biggest twin-engine plane that they had built and it was built for that purpose.

Mr. Metzler: And it had a name, what was that name?

Mr. Ruff: Dumbo.

Mr. Metzler: That was the nickname?

Mr. Ruff: That was the nickname.

Mr. Metzler: But it was, okay.

Mr. Ruff: I don't know what they called it officially. All we knew--

Mr. Metzler: But it looked like a pregnant guppy. It looked like a C-47 on steroids.

Mr. Ruff: Yep. Big one, but it carried, I don't know how much more cargo than the C-46 did. But everybody had experiences. There's several books out that I've read and they just parallel exactly what I experienced. We were taking off one day, breaking in this new pilot, and all of a sudden he started running off the runway and we had workers along there, and I said, 'Whoa, let me have it." I grabbed it, pulled it off and barely got it off and wheels up and going along almost clipping the housetops off the end of the runway—we lost an engine. So I had to go a long way out and slowly climb up to come around. Finally came around, one engine feathered, came in and we made the landing okay. They took the plane in and checked it and said they couldn't find anything. Said, "Well there's something wrong, I know there is." So what I did then, they said, "Go back out again" and I went back out and took off, there it goes again. I cut the throttles, taxied back in, took the form and red-lined it. The pilot can red-line it so nobody else can fly it. So I red-lined the thing and said, "Here it is. It's yours. We're hitchhiking back." The co-pilot and radio operator, just three-man crew. So we get back to our home base and said, "There's something wrong. Nobody's flying." So we left and I

don't know, it was a few days, a week or ten days later, I was serving as the Tower Officer. That's when we weren't flying, we were given this kind of duty.

Mr. Metzler: At this point, what was your rank?

Mr. Ruff: I was just a Lieutenant. So I was up there one day and I saw this plane coming in and looked at and says, "Hell, that's weird. That's that one I left over there in China." So I was out and I was going to go find out what's wrong. They did. They had to fly an engine over there and change it. Because somebody, it was a new engine, somebody had screwed up and dropped some wire and washers down into the engine, in the impeller section. And it nicked all the impeller blades so it would power on the register but it wasn't giving any power. So I was vindicated. It was a problem and it was a good thing I red-lined it because they did have to replace the engine. And, you know, we had all kinds of troubles, I've had in-flight fires, we used to have, fly these—

Mr. Metzler: This happened on the Hump?

Mr. Ruff: On the Hump while I'm going over. Had a couple of occasions when we had nothing but 55-gallon drums of gasoline. And you'd go back there and all of a sudden you'd smell gasoline and you'd look and one of those dang drums is split it seams and is spewing gas up in the air. You know what that could cause. So we had to do, we'd go back and untie the tie ropes and roll it back to the door, open the door and dump it out into the jungle. Then we'd close it up, go back and tie it down and finish our trip. And then we got there, you'd make a report of how many; one, two, three or whatever drums you found, you dumped overboard. Because you dang sure didn't want a spark from the radio or anything could have

blown you out of the sky. So, I had a few of those experiences. At age 21 it's a challenge, you don't really, you don't really get scared, you just, you're trained to do this. And you do things automatically, just like losing that engine on takeoff. Whatever I did, must have been right because we got back safe okay. Without even thinking about it, you just go through this. If you're trained right and you take your training. So we did that. So I was there when they dropped the atomic bomb. The thing about it, Harry Truman my favorite president, because I know when they, we were going to be involved in the invasion of Japan. And my brother was over in Europe, younger brother, and he'd just gotten there when VE day so he was on a boat also going for the invasion toward Japan. So I figure old Harry might have saved both our lives.

Mr. Metzler: You bet. And probably about 400,000 others--

Mr. Ruff: Oh yah. Since we were over there, we didn't have that many points to come down. I knew very well, when we were going to be marked for the invasion. After VE day.

Mr. Metzler: Couple of questions. Did you ever understand why that pilot was letting that aircraft drift off to the side when you had to grab the—

Mr. Ruff: No, he was just inexperienced.

Mr. Metzler: He just wasn't paying attention.

Mr. Ruff: No, he was paying attention. He wasn't experienced enough, he didn't know what to do. So, you grab it and throw one throttle back and adjust them so you have power and fortunately the runway was long enough that I, I couldn't stop, 'cause we would have crashed, so I pulled it off. And barely, just ahh. It was

empty. If that had happened when I left Chabua, I wouldn't be here today. We would have hit with a load of gasoline and blown up.

Mr. Metzler: What was the C-46 like to fly? Was it a forgiving aircraft? I've heard stories from the C-47 guys—

Mr. Ruff: C-47 is the best plane, the best money the Air Force ever got for their money.

Mr. Metzler: I heard the C-46 was harder to fly, higher stall speed, etcetera. So tell me about the 46.

Mr. Ruff: Well, I personally liked the plane. It didn't bother me that much. It would fly, you're up and down drafts where you'd go up 2,000, 3,000 feet in a flash and down that much and stop and really shaking. It didn't fail, it kept flying. You'd get ice and that stuff and that thing would keep flying. So, I thought it was pretty good. I trusted it, I really didn't have that much trouble with it.

Mr. Metzler: And it carried a lot more than the 47.

Mr. Ruff: Oh yah. One time I was flying, after the atomic bomb was dropped, we flew into Myitkyina, Burma to pick up troops that were ready to come back. All these guys like Merrill's Marauders and things like that. And we'd really load the planes down, way past their max load, because we wanted to get these guys out of there. And so, and we made it. It would take off. It was difficult, but it would fly. So, I trusted it. I've flown a lot of different planes later in life because I, when we got back from the Hump, I was transferred to several bases as a base pilot around the country until 1947, they came along and said anybody who still on here that wants to be released from active duty, come in. I said, "Fine." I went, volunteered, so I got released from active duty because I wanted to go back to college. I wanted to

finish. So I got out and went back to college, I went to Iowa State for Aeronautical Engineering, but I was still flying in the Reserve. The Berlin Airlift came along. So, guess what? I got recalled, anyway. So I went back in and went through the same scenarios and going through additional training for C-54s. Then went to Germany, to fly into Berlin. I didn't count the trips, but I made a lot of trips into Berlin.

Mr. Metzler: Well, back to the Aluminum Trail for a moment. Usually what were your cargo? You mentioned aviation fuel—

Mr. Ruff: It could be anything. It could be ammunition, it could be all kinds of supplies of various kinds. It could be food, flour, whatever—

Mr. Metzler: Did you ever fly any mules?

Mr. Ruff: No.

Mr. Metzler: I've heard some of those stories.

Mr. Ruff: I know, I have too. No, I didn't get any mules. I've got some friends in this organization that were mule skinners. Yah, they were behind the mule, said, grab ahold of their tails when they climbed over the mountains in order to help them up too. Oh yah. There's a lot of tales about the mules.

Mr. Metzler: What was your destination, usually. Any particular airfield in China? Did you do any drops?

Mr. Ruff: No. No, I didn't do any drops. There was a series of them, basically around Kunming and there were off-shoots, other bases. It depended on what they wanted and what cargo you carried. I could go to Chengtu, Luliang, land anywhere. I forgot what load we had when I had to go into Luichow, that was

double the distance in flights, to get into there. Then they wanted the load into Shanghi and I was happy. I said, "Hell, I'll take it on into Shanghi." But they wouldn't let us do it. We off-loaded and they—

Mr. Metzler: It's a long flight into Shanghi.

Mr. Ruff: Oh yah. We'd have been gone for three days, but all we had to wear was our flight suit. That was it. And our jacket. We had no change of clothes or nothing. We'd have been filthy by the time we'd got back. But that's all right. Whatever they wanted me to do.

Mr. Metzler: What was the name of the base facility that you were stationed at when you flying the Hump?

Mr. Ruff: Chabua. C-h-a-b-u-a is the way it's spelled. That was one of the many—

Mr. Metzler: That was in India or Burma?

Mr. Ruff: That was in India, we were strictly in India. We went through the monsoon seasons, and flew in all kinds of weather, it's unbelievable. And a lot of times, the weather would be so bad you couldn't get your, tune in your direction finders, your beams that you wanted to fly by. You couldn't hear it, so you're sitting up there in all this storm and all this static and you couldn't hear anything and you're flying by the seat of your pants and you hope that you've corrected for the wind. And that's where a lot of, part of the Aluminum Trail, guys would get lost, ran out of fuel. I remember one case, one of my tent-mates, he was on a trip over there and they lost engines flying, they didn't have any choice. They couldn't unload their airplane because they had a load of pipe, for whatever, I don't know what kind. But they couldn't open the door and dump it out and hope they could keep

flying on one engine. They couldn't, they were losing it. It was raining, they went to the back, jumped out into the storm. All three of them. They made it down, found each other. And they'd been gone for about ten days trying to walk out when a search crew, looking for somebody else that had gone down, saw them, and landed and picked them up. It's a funny story, I can remember him coming in that night, and waking myself up and our other roommate and he says, "Where's all my clothes? Where's my bed?" We said, "Well, they came and took it. You were reported Missing in Action." They had taken it down to the Orderly Room. Boy, he went down there and raised cane about getting his stuff out and he got his stuff out and came back—

Mr. Metzler: So he wasn't dead after all.

Mr. Ruff: No, he wasn't. (chuckle) He wasn't Missing in Action either. So that was quite an experience for him. But he did survive, we all survived 'til the end of it. Then after they dropped the atomic bomb, of course then, we went to Calcutta, took about. I was flying C-47s out of Calcutta until they finally got us on a ship. So we took a cruise back to the States from Calcutta through the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean—

Mr. Metzler: What did that take you, a month?

Mr. Ruff: Almost. We went through the north Atlantic in the winter of '45, which had terrible storms and I had my 22nd birthday on that ship coming back from India to New York. So all this happened at a relatively young age but it helped me grow up. So, eventually I got twenty years in the Air Force and retired in the Air Force. So that was good experience and I enjoyed every minute of it and I wished the

hell I could go right back today and do it again. I mean with modern planes. Wouldn't it be fun now. Knowing what I went through to get there. I had a, as far as I'm concerned, a pretty good career.

Mr. Metzler: Did you ever come under enemy fire?

Mr. Ruff: No.

Mr. Metzler: Because they were pretty well pushed back by the time you were there.

Mr. Ruff: There weren't any more Japanese planes flying, the Flying Tigers and other fighter outfits had cleared the skies so we had nothing. But flying, the enemy wasn't half as bad as the weather. That weather, you could go out there at night, walk out after they'd pick you up, you'd go at any hour of the 24 they'd call you. Especially at night if you'd go out there and you'd look over and you could see the Hump, see all the flashes of lightning and everything and you'd say, "Oh shit, we're going to have, pardon my language, but we're going to have a flight tonight!" And that's what we'd do. You had no choice, you just took off, you just plowed your nose right in it. You can't circumvent, you don't have the radar like they do nowdays for the airlines where you can circumvent the storm. You don't know what you're gonna hit. So ya put your nose right into—

Mr. Metzler: What altitude do you have to get up to get over the Hump?

Mr. Ruff: Well, we went the low route going over, which is maybe 12, 14,000 feet because you had a load. But coming back you'd come the high route which you'd go as high as 20,000 feet. Of course you're on oxygen all this time. And the ceiling wasn't much over 20,000. I remember one time we got drifted off and ah, way off, because of the wind and we were flying by the seat of our pants and we could

see Mount Everest in the distance. So we were really way off. We managed to get back, got back to Chabua okay. I got feeling, like I'd say, we'd finish our monthly quote of hours and go back and say, 'Can we take more flights?" They wouldn't let us.

Mr. Metzler: Why?

Mr. Ruff: Pilot fatigue. I'd say, "I'm not tired. I can handle this." So that's what would happen. Food was terrible.

Mr. Metzler: How was the food?

Mr. Ruff: Got tired of powdered milk, powdered eggs. Well we'd get over to China though, because they had a lot of chicken and stuff I guess. While they were unloading, we could go over to the snack bar, they had real snack bars out on the flight line and go get you a quick little bit of eggs or egg sandwich or something like that. Fresh, not powdered.

Mr. Metzler: What was it like working with the Indians that were supporting you in the ground crews and that kind of stuff. Did you have much interaction with them?

Mr. Ruff: No, I didn't have any interaction with them because all ours the crew chief of your particular plane and the people he had working for him. All you could do was trust, trust that he was doing his job properly. And the plane was really air-worthy and you could fly it without getting yourself into big trouble.

Mr. Metzler: Who was your crew chief?

Mr. Ruff: Shoot, I can't remember. They changed, you weren't assigned a plane, you were assigned anything that was ready to go.

Mr. Metzler: It was kind of a pool then.

Mr. Ruff: Oh yah. So you could fly ten flights and never fly the same plane or have the same crew chief at all. And you rarely had the same co-pilot or radio operator. Because when you came in, you'd go on the bottom of the list and work your way up. You'd work your way up so if you didn't work the co-pilot or radio operator you had didn't climb the same steps that you did, you wouldn't have them. And that's rarely that you'd ever get with the same crew. So it's not like they were in bomb groups like in England where they, you had a crew and you stayed with that crew. It's not the same thing there—

Mr. Metzler: So it wasn't one of this where you were a tight-knit little group of guys that were always together. So you were working in a bigger pool of folks.

Mr. Ruff: It was the same way in the Air Lift. Because the same thing there, you didn't know who you were going to come up with because somebody might get sick, go to the dispensary and he's not on the—

Mr. Metzler: Did you ever get sick? Did you ever come down with malaria?

Mr. Ruff: Yah I did, for a short period of time.

Mr. Metzler: Seemed like all you guys did at some time or another.

Mr. Ruff: And I had re-occurrences of it after I got back to the States for a number of years. But that was one of the risks. You're supposed to take your Adabrin(spelling?) and I didn't take mine religiously, because I hated the stuff. It would turned you yellow and so I –

Mr. Metzler: It's attacking your liver function when it does that.

Mr. Ruff: I don't know what it did, but you'd see all these guys walking around turning yellow and I said, "I'm not going to do that." I'm strong enough. But I did go down to the hospital for a few days.

Mr. Metzler: What were the living facilities like at the air base where you were?

Mr. Ruff: We lived in, myself and two others; three of us, we lived in the British type tent which had a double ceiling, with the sides. But, what we did, we did a little midnight requisitioning here and there and we eventually floored it, because you were on dirt, we floored it. We built rails all around it so we could tap down our mosquito netting, put a front door on it, got a switch, some lights, we wired in our own light in the tent with a switch on it. We were doing that extra-curricular.

Mr. Metzler: Air conditioning?

Mr. Ruff: No, never heard of such stuff then, only when the wind blew. But we did have one other experience, not in our row of tents. They had a row of bashas, a row of tents, row of bashas. Our friends said, 'Come over here, we want to show you something." We walked over to their tent and looked and they still had a dirt floor, they didn't do what we did. And there's big footprints all around. They were asleep and some wild animal, a tiger or whatever, walked in their tent and went around sniffing and walked back out. And, ah, they had the footprints to prove it. (laughter)

Mr. Metzler: When you say footprints you mean like ah--

Mr. Ruff: Yah, paw prints all around. So, that was something. You know, little things like that keep things exciting.

Mr. Metzler: What was the most humorous occurrence that happened to you in your stint over there? If there was any. (laughter)

Mr. Ruff: Well, I really can't think of any except one night when we were getting ready to go on a flight, I was in there shaving or whatever I was doing, it was dark at night and dimly lit and I'm shaving and I look in the mirror and look back in the doorway and there's this beady eyes. And there was a wild animal, what kind I don't know, standing there watching me. And you know what they say. You get frightened and your hair stands on end, I think my hair was up on end. (laughter). You just freeze and just stand there and it backed away and took off.

Mr. Metzler: So what kind of animals are in the area?

Mr. Ruff: Well, you've got the Bengal tigers that were there in India and a few of our guys went hunting and shot them occasionally and some of them got some. So you never know, it could have been a jackal. You heard those every night, every night those jackals would screech around and keep you awake a lot. So that was all part of the doings.

Mr. Metzler: What was the saddest or most troubling incident that happened to you in the time you were there?

Mr. Ruff: Well, actually I can't think of any, except the fact that I knew my mother was worried about me and I made sure I sent plenty of e-mails home.

Mr. Metzler: E-mails?

Mr. Ruff: Yep, back then. Or V, v-mails. Victory mails. V-mails that you'd take down and they'd photograph it and then ship it back and convert and send it on to where you

wanted it to go. Outside of that, I wondered if I'm telling her "I'm okay. I'm going to be all right. I'll be back" and everything.

Mr. Metzler: So you had pretty good communications back to the stateside?

Mr. Ruff: Big delay. And then she'd send me letters constantly. So, you'd get 'em, two or three at once and then not any for a while and then you'd get a bunch again. That's just the way it was.

Mr. Metzler: Who was your commanding officer?

Mr. Ruff: Shoot, that was changed too. I have no idea.

Mr. Metzler: So they rotated those, they were rotating through?

Mr. Ruff: No, usually commanding officers were experienced pilot, he might have been one of those flying the Hump and he got his time in and did something else. So, I can't tell you who the commanding officers were. I can't even remember them later in life when I was in Germany, when I was stationed in Frankfurt and in Munich. I liked Germany. Of course all four grandparents came from Germany and Prussia so I had a little bit of background there. And ah, but all the years I spent in the Air Force has been worthwhile. It taught me a lot, made me grew up.

Mr. Metzler: You came back a different person than you went over there?

Mr. Ruff: Oh sure. I was much different, grown up. Experiences you had and survived. You can't help but grow up. If you don't, you haven't good sense. I did that. I managed to get twenty years and about 5,000 flying hours and made the progression on up until I decided, my wife decided I had enough. (laughter) When I got to twenty years, let's get out of there. So, okay.

Mr. Metzler: Get your pension and go.

Mr. Ruff: Get your pension and go. The government's paying me a lot of money. Since I'm still around, still collecting. So, based on that experience it made my whole life easier. No doubt about that. So I understand a lot more, and so, my kids and grandkids and great-grandkids, I enjoy teaching them. I've got a great-grandson that just bugged me for years, I had to keep telling war stories. He's always interested.

Mr. Metzler: So which stories did you tell him?

Mr. Ruff: Oh, I tell him the ones that we, that are a little exciting to him. As a matter of fact, his mother, when she was in college, she had a project and one of them was interviewing somebody from the war so she took me as a candidate so we sit down and went over the war and what it did for me and how changed everything so, ah, and she made a good project out of the whole thing. Got a pretty good grade out of it. I helped her understand. Well, fortunately they're all around, all my family is in Orlando—

Mr. Metzler: So you're right there and you can be with all your generations?

Mr. Ruff: Yes, I helping raise the great-grandkids. It's easier on the third generation than it was on the second then it was on the first. You learn as you go along.

Mr. Metzler: Finally get enough practice.

Mr. Ruff: Yah. (laughter) It's the same with flying. The more you get, the more problems you have and solve them, the better you are. Proof of it is that pilot that landed with the, remember, with the tricycle gear, the one in front that was sideways—

Mr. Metzler: The Jet Blue guy.

Mr. Ruff: Beautiful landing. Why, I saw that thing, I said, "Jesus, that guy's got a lot of experience." He was calm and collected all the way through that thing. The landing was perfect, what he did was perfect.

Mr. Metzler: Right down the line.

Mr. Ruff: See, and that brought back memories to me that, that's what you're trained to do. If you're really trained good and you've got the experience, you don't think about it, you just do it. Everything comes out all right. It's when you get to thinking too much, that's going to cause you trouble.

Mr. Metzler: What other experiences have you forgotten that you need to remember now so we can make this a complete tape? (chuckle)

Mr. Ruff: Well, I've had a lot of experiences after the Hump over and I'm back here—

Mr. Metzler: Well, I'm talking about during the war years.

Mr. Ruff: Yah, I know. I don't really know.

Mr. Metzler: It really surprises me the number, not surprises me but I've really noticed the number of flights that you guys have stacked up in a relatively short period of time. I mean, the numbers really get up there and quick.

Mr. Ruff: Yah, because each trip, the shorter trips were about, there and back were seven hours flying time, but by the time everything else, we're talking about 12-14 hours. 12-14 hour days. Now talking about going into Luichow, you're talking about two days, before you got back and turned over the plane for the next flight. So, ah, it took a lot of time. That's the nature of the game. They had no other choice. They didn't have the road open yet so the only way they could get there

was you fly 'em in. Just like we supplied Berlin. Berlin would have faded if it hadn't been for the airlift. We broke the Russians back with that thing.

Mr. Metzler: I just got this mental image of –

(end of tape, side one)

Mr. Metzler: I just flipped the tape over, but I think we're pretty well finished. But just again to mention that that imagery, that you just gave me of flying over the Hump through all the lightning and thunder up there and you just pointed your nose into it and went through. That's ah, that's going to stick for a while.

Mr. Ruff: Another show was St. Elmo's fire. That's the static electricity in these heavy clouds discharging and it would be, it would run around your windshield, run up and down your wings, going around the tip of your prop. You were flying, what do you call it, show of lights and stuff. And it would—

Mr. Metzler: Psychedelic light show.

Mr. Ruff: Yah.

Mr. Metzler: That's amazing. I've never experienced that.

Mr. Ruff: And the thing there was, while, if you had St. Elmo's fire, you were completely closed off from any radio. 'Cause that interfered, that static electricity would interfere with your radio. You'd just fly dead-reckoning, seat-of-your-pants until you flew out of it.

Mr. Metzler: How long would that tend to last?

Mr. Ruff: It varied. From a few minutes to maybe ah, 12, 14, 15 minutes until you fly out of this. You know, you're flying through and go through and then you come out it. Then you may go a little ways and then you come back into it. But, I've seen St.

Elmo's fire any number of times and you read other people's books, the flyers on the Hump, they will also allude to this phenomenon that you see there. So that was interesting too. It's, and the fact that you'd hit one of these clouds and all of a sudden the bottom drop out of you. You'd drop down and you'd put full power on the props to keep from falling because what's under you? The mountains. (chuckle) Then you'd stop and you'd go back up and then you'd go way high. And I'd have to go up high and drop my gear up in the air and pull back on the throttles in order to stop my ascent and get back down to level and then pick up the gear again. We had a number of those, up and down, up and down. It still, as I recall, it still didn't scare me. I just knew that this phenomenon of, after the first one, you know you're going to hit them. And that's just part of your trail. So we managed to handle them. I can remember those just as much as they happened yesterday.

Mr. Metzler: I bet the first one was a heart-in-the-throat thing.

Mr. Ruff: I wondered, 'What the heck's going on here. What's happening here." Then you go back and talk to the weather man and they explain what's going on. It happens that way.

Mr. Metzler: Okay, thanks for spending the time to share your experiences.

Mr. Ruff: Well, I don't know what its worth.

Mr. Metzler: I know what its worth. It's a nice addition to our collection so I thank you.

Mr. Ruff: Okay.