

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Randy Watson

Date of Interview: December 5, 2007

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Interview in progress.

Pete Jensen: Today is Wednesday, December 5th, 2007. I am interviewing Lieutenant Colonel Randy Watson. This interview is taking place at the Nimitz Museum in Fredericksburg, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to this site.

Mr. Watson: Okay, my name is Irvin R. Watson; I was born in Joy, Texas which is up north Texas near Wichita Falls. My moth...my father was Jake Watson; mother...Billie (sp?) Lucas Watson and I have two brothers and two sisters. I graduated from Joy High School in 1938 and in December of...I mean in November of 1939 I joined the...the Army Air Corps at that time which of course later became the Army Air Forces and later the...the Air Force itself. And I was assigned to Kelly Field for my basic training and from there I was assigned to Puerto Rico. They took all the new people that were being reassigned and every other name went to different places; one went to the Philippines; one went to Alaska and one went to Puerto Rico. I missed going to the Philippines by one name, so...so I was on the line there somewhere, so I thought I was real fortunate in that respect.

Pete Jensen: I'd say that was pretty good luck!

Mr. Watson: That really was good luck, and from...I was in Puerto Rico for...a little...about two years and...and then I...after Pearl Harbor, why they opened up for what they called Enlisted Pilots or Sergeant Pilots.

Pete Jensen: I don't mean to interrupt, but what...what'd you do in the...in Puerto Rico?

Mr. Watson: In Puerto Rico I was assigned to the Air Material Command down there...at headquarters and I was in the S-4 Section which is the supply...and section of that. And then, of course, like I went...came to Kelly in...in July of...of '42 and started my pre-flight training at Kelly. And from there I went to Cuero, [Texas] for basic; from to Brady for...I mean to Cuero for primary...basic was at Brady and flying was at Waco...uh, Waco...Blackland Army Air Field in Waco is where I graduated. And one of the highlights and one of my highlights of my career at that time was Tex Hill gave my graduation address at Blackland; that's the first time I met him...to be able to shake hands with a...with an ace and...and get my graduation from Flight School. From there I was signed into to TWA for three months to learn how to fly the DC-3 or C-47 they called them. And then from there then I went to Homestead for C-46 training; then from there I went to India. And I was stationed at Chadwa, India, and from there we flew The Hump in C-46s; they...they're called Curtiss Commando. From Chadwa to...mostly Kunming, but there's several bases in China where we flew into – Ching-Kung (sp?); Yang-Kai (sp?); Lu-Ling (sp?) and I had...so I...I was stationed at Chadwa and I flew The Hump from there until...I believe it was August of '44 that I was assigned to

Luoyang, China...transport. At that time the B-29s were stationed at Changtu (sp?) and we were flying gasoline to Changtu. And over The Hump from India to...to China, we had to supply all the material that they needed to keep the Chinese and the Ameri...or the...American Air Force or the Flying Tigers then...they'd become the 14th Air Force with General Chennault as the Commander. And we had to supply them with gasoline and all...all equipment, so we flew everything from passengers to jeeps; howitzers; ammunition; bombs and mostly gasoline. And we carried five...uh, fifty drums of gasoline in that...in that airplane.

Pete Jensen: How much did that weigh?

Mr. Watson: I don't know...about ten thousand pounds or whatever it was. That...and that's what we carried; our load was ten thousand pounds. But when we got to China then, they would siphon all the gas out of our main tanks; we had always left with full tanks, so they'd siphon everything out...just enough for us to get back to India and sometimes that was disastrous because we lost a lot of airplanes. I think...on...on a couple of things I'm going to give you here...I'll give you later, is...they said they lost over nine hundred airplanes in that route. And that...and we...our losses were as good...uh, bad as any combat losses because of the weather; Japanese fighters...mostly weather.

Pete Jensen: Mostly weather...what...okay.

Mr. Watson: All kind...all kind...you...you imagine all kind of weather – icing; thunderstorms with...real violent thunderstorms. I mean you would...they'd put G-meters on some of the airplanes and sometimes we...if you understand

that's a pull of gravity...sometimes we'd have (unintelligible) positive and three negative on that airplane. Well on the C-47 that'd snap the wings off of that, but this airplane was rugged enough that it...all the thing we could do was keep it right side up. And wind, we had...sometimes we'd have winds of...of over a hundred miles an hour. One time that...on a trip back from China to India I flew a leg which usually took forty minutes; I flew for fifty minutes and still no...no signal. Only thing we had to navigate by were...were radio beacons and...and with thunderstorms and everything...the thing would just spin...go round and round, so that...you never knew exactly where you were unless that thing pointed and...and locked on. Well I...I didn't know what to do because if I turned right, we'd end up in the Himalayas with mountains up to...you know Mount Everest is 29...over 29,000 feet, and there's a lot of them up there, oh, 16 and 18,000, so and our...our altitudes usually ran around 18, 19,000 feet. We'd go over it...we'd go over it at 19,000 and come back at 18,000.

Pete Jensen: You have oxygen?

Mr. Watson: We had oxygen, yes, but the air...airplanes were unpressurized, and...but the airplane was rugged. It had two Pratt & Whitney (unintelligible) twenty-eight hundred engines which was rated at two thousand horsepower each, and...but we couldn't maintain that altitude or anything on a single engine, so that's what...where a lot of the airplanes were lost because the...engine had failed and they couldn't maintain altitude. So they had to either bail out or...in lots of cases, I guess, they crashed. And probably a lot of people bailed out in the

jungles in there and...and didn't get out for some reason or another. Some of the people were rescued; some of them walked out, but we lost...we lost a lot of crew. (Telephone ringing). And... (recording interrupted momentarily)... that...material that we flew over The Hump the dif...different things that we flew. And the...real funny thing happened one time...that I went up in the airplane and they had bails of Chinese money, and here came this guy with a...with a can of kerosene and a box of matches, and he says, "If you crash, burn the money." And I said, "If I crash, I'm not going to worry about that money!" (laughter) Can you imagine that, though?! I'm supposed...it's supposed to be a million dollars in Chinese money on this airplane...just bails of it! And...and one other time, I went out and they were loaded...I was loaded with...with Kotex and I wondered, "What in the Sam Hill...we don't have any women over in China; why are we carrying this?!" So I asked and they said, "The Chinese use it as battle dressings," and that's what they were for...so all kind of things. And I always liked to fly the...I've always liked to fly passengers because they...it was easy to unload and I didn't have to worry about...worry about it.

Pete Jensen: Was there a co-pilot or just...?

Mr. Watson: Oh yeah, there was a co-pilot and we had...we had to fly co-pilot for about...we...it was six hundred hours we had to put in over there, and we had to fly anywhere from two hundred and...two hundred, to two hundred and fifty, to three hundred hours before they'd check us out as first pilots; we had to go with that. The first trip I made like to have scared me to death! I'd

heard of St. Elmo's fire, but I'd never seen it. And we were flying and...and all of sudden all these little blue streaks was running from the controls off the windshield and I looked out at the prop and it was just a big ball of fire! You could see the leading edge of the wing...just these blue streaks running up and down it, and I said, "What in the world is that?!" And he said, "Oh, that's alright; that's St. Elmo's fire; we get that all the time." ...and I...the pilot...this was my first trip.

Pete Jensen: St. Elmo's Fire?

Mr. Watson: Yeah, it...its static electricity...

Pete Jensen: Okay.

Mr. Watson: ...is what it is. And it...it's really...really frightening the first time you see it 'cause it looks like the whole airplane was...was on fire or something. Lightening all over the place; see little blue streaks...like lightening, you know, running all over everything. So...but anyway that was my first initiation to flying The Hump was that first trip and...and of course we got there and back okay. And...and several times, why a little bad weather and everything and...and we would have to divert to some other...some other field if...if we had enough gasoline to get there. And a lot of times when we got back to India and if the (unintelligible) was closed, we...had to...only thing we had, of course, was to bail out because those fields up there sometimes would sock in every time. And John reminded me awhile ago that I was the last airplane to get in...like (unintelligible) fog rolling in, and I could have landed another base right up the valley, but I...I thought, "Well Ic

an make this,” so I made...I made my instrument approach and...and they was socked in. Well that time I climbed up above the fog and the other...the other airports were socked in, so I said, “Okay, we’ll make a range approach,” which was in the opposite direction. So we made a range approach and I didn’t get in that time. So I told...I told the crew, I said, “We’ll make one more instrument approach.” The...the minimums were supposed to be five hundred feet, but it...they...they had a ceiling of about two hundred feet. And trees around the end of the runway were about that tall, too, so I said, “If we don’t make it this time, we’re going to pull up and bail out.” They said, “Okay.” So everybody got their parachutes ready and everything, so we made another approach and came in and...and we descended down to really about a hundred and fifty feet before we broke out, but luckily we were lined up with...with the runway, and I landed. And before I could turn off the runway, my right engine quit – fuel starvation. So I was lucky again.

Pete Jensen: You ever have to bail out?

Mr. Watson: Never had to bail out.

John Watson: This is...this is John Watson; I’m Randy’s son. Uh, two things on that; you might tell them how many airplanes on that particular day didn’t make it in and also tell them...tell them about your instrument approaches. It’s not like an instrument approach today.

Mr. Watson: No, instrument approaches then were radio beacons. The ranges...we had radio ranges back in the days...they...radio range...you had A and M quadrants and...and if you were on the beam...so to...they called it “on the

beam,” you’d lined up with the runway, why it was a constant tone and you’d line with the runway and you’d cross the station and you’d get a...a “cone of silence” they called it for just a...about thirty seconds and then you’d go over it and then you’d start...let...making your letdown to land. Well the approach we had...we had a radio beacon which was in the center of the field which would broadcast music and everything all the time. They called it “Victor George,” and we would come over Victor George parallel...we were...uh, perpendicular to the runway; we’d come over perpendicular to the runway and it Victor George and make a left turn and go down and we had...we had a beacon on the end of the runway that was about, oh, I guess it was about a half of a mile from the end of the runway. So we’d turn and we’d come back and we’d line up with that beacon coming back into the runway, and that’s when that...when we started letting down when we crossed that beacon...we just had radio compass. Well as soon as we crossed that beacon the co-pilot would tune in the radio range station which was on the other end, and as long as we could line up there with that then we’d come make our approach, and that’s the way we made our approach...and it was a very dangerous approach now that...we didn’t know any better in those days I guess and now...in these days, why, it’s nothing like that on approaches! You can...you’ve got a couple...or...(unintelligible) coupler you can fly it almost all the way to the ground before you break out. But that...those were some of the things that we had to worry about over there.

Pete Jensen: How many...how many aircraft did they lose that day when you (unintelligible)?

Mr. Watson: Oh, we lost...we lost, I think, twenty-three airplanes that day. We didn't lose all the crews; we lost some of the crews but they crashed or...or had to bail out and some of the crews, of course, walked out...before they bailed out. But we lost twenty-three airplanes that day because they didn't have any place to land and they ran out of gas. Because, like I said, in China...we had no weather forecasting that you could depend on at all. As we'd come back in off of a trip, we'd give...we'd give a weather briefing to the...to the Operations people before they'd pass it on to the next crew going out. But that's the only kind of weather we had; nobody had any way to...forecast weather over there.

Pete Jensen: What was...how long did it take you to fly from India to China?

Mr. Watson: Uh, about...three and a half hours.

Pete Jensen: So you made the trip...you'd make it in one day? I mean you'd fly down...?

Mr. Watson: Oh yeah, we'd go over and back, yes, uh-huh.

Pete Jensen: Right.

Mr. Watson: We'd go over there and back. And...like I said...they would...they would siphon the air...gas out of the airplane. A friend of mine and I one time...we landed about the same time and went into Operations and...and the...one of the linemen came in and said, "Whose airplane is such-and such?" And...and the guy next to me there in Operations said, "That was mine." He said, "Well you haven't got an airplane anymore," said, "it burned up," said, "all that's

left is the tail!” (laughter) They...something happened when they were siphoning the gas out and they...a spark got in there and caught it on fire and it burned his airplane completely up!” So he road to India with me. So...

Pete Jensen: You...you said there was a co-pilot, was there more than that on a crew? Was there more than two or...?

Mr. Watson: We had...we had a co-pilot and an engineer and...and sometimes...radio operator; we didn't always carry a radio operator, but sometimes we did have radio operators. Now when we flew...when we flew in China, we had...and flew to the bases down at Guilin (sp?) and Luojo (sp?), we had...we had radio operators with us then. And they would turn on the IFF and...and that...that's a little black box that's identification...friend or foe. And they use it today...the radio...I mean the controller...traffic controllers use that IFF to locate you if you're a particular airplane. You dial in a certain code and they can tell you what airplane...where it is and so forth.

John Watson: Called a transponder today.

Mr. Watson: Transponder, yeah, called a transponder now. And we called them IFF...Identification, Friend or Foe. If that thing was squawking, you were friendly. If they'd been squawking, they figure you're an enemy.

Pete Jensen: As you...you flew some missions in China...?

Mr. Watson: In China.

Pete Jensen: ...within China?

Mr. Watson: Within China.

Pete Jensen: And what would you do...what were the purpose of those flights?

Mr. Watson: Well those...those were just extended flights for (unintelligible) the bases down; we had a fighter...fighter squadron and a B-25 squadron they...we had a B-25 squadron at Luojo and a fighter group at Guilin, and that was Tex Hill's outfit at Guilin. I was stationed then at Luolong which is just right...little east of...of Kunming which was our main base over there we flew all that stuff into. And during...also while we were in China, our main job was...was flying gasoline up to Changtu for the B-29s. We had...we had several different type of airplanes; they had a 124 they called a 109. It was strictly a tanker; it hauled gasoline. We had a C-87s which were a transport B-24 and they hauled drums of gasoline just we did in the C-46, and those were the...those were the three main airplanes that we flew The Hump with. One time I was on another very harrowing experience I had; I was flying into Changtu. The B-29...well they had five 29 bases around Changtu up there, but Changtu was one of the main bases up there and I was flying into Changtu so I made my instrument approach and I was too far down the runway to land. So the wind was calm, so I asked the tower I said, "Can I make a ninety to seventy and...and land in the opposite direction?" And he said, "Sure." So I...I'm turning ninety degrees this way and went out and came back to seventy degrees back into the runway and while I was in this turn, the runway went out of sight and I thought well I'm back in the...back in the soup up here, but in just a minute it came back into view. Then what I didn't know was I had flown around the little mountains there...they're like cones. And what I'd done...I'd flown around one of these things that nobody told me it

was there and I didn't know it was there. But I flew right around this thing and the...lights of the runway went out of sight.

John Watson: This was at night?

Mr. Watson: This was at night. And I didn't it until I got on the ground. And I went in to have a cup of coffee and I was shaking so bad I couldn't even drink my coffee. (laughter)

Pete Jensen: Did you...fly every day then?

Mr. Watson: No we didn't fly every day, but we flew...usually about every other day was...was a normal schedule. But what we do...we (unintelligible) so much crew rest when we get back, and then we'd go out then the next day...usually. Like I said, we...we have one day...one day at the base and the next day off and...I mean the next day then we flew. And never knew who you were going to fly with. We didn't have crews; we had...they had assigned pilot and co-pilot, and engineer...and have a radio operator if we happen to have one.

Pete Jensen: Who assigned those?

Mr. Watson: The Operations people did; they had a crew scheduling in Operations that scheduled the crews...to fly. And you never know what airplane you were going to have; we didn't have certain airplanes assigned to us or anything else. And we...there wasn't a scheduled departure and landing; whenever they got an airplane ready and...and when they got one loaded and ready well they called a crew...night or day; didn't make any difference. We...we took off and went to...flew it to China and then flew it back where they could get it ready to go again...and...and they'd call another crew out to take that airplane

back to China. So that...that's the...the routine that we had over there to fly. And like I said, we were young and...and bullet-proof so to speak, so we...we did...we didn't think a whole lot about it, but now it would scare me to death to have to do something like that!

Pete Jensen: What'd you do on your day off? Was there anything to do there or...?

Mr. Watson: No, well nothing to do...except play cards or...or something like that, but there wasn't very much to...there wasn't anything you could do; wasn't any place you could go, so we...it...it...just routine. Have a lot of funny things happen to you over there. The first night I spent at this...at Chadwa base...the first night I was assigned...assigned there they didn't have enough billets for us up there, so I had to sleep on a...on an open porch. And all I had between me and the outside world was a mosquito net. Well along...early in the morning...I don't know what time it was...I hear this puff, puff, puff, puff, and I look up and I'm looking right straight in the eyes of a leopard! And my forty-five was hanging on the other end of the bed, and I thought, boy, I...I just be as still as I could and in a little while he padded off again. And what I didn't know...this was a pet that one of the guy's had there and he usually kept him on a chain, but he'd gotten off the chain and he was just prowling...prowling around that night! (laughter) But this was a pet!

Pete Jensen: I guess...

Mr. Watson: But that...that didn't help me any!

Pete Jensen: Yeah, the animal was lucky that the gun wasn't a little handier, huh?

Mr. Watson: Well I guess it was! (laughter) And...and another time I was stationed after...after China I came back to a base they'd called Daragon (sp?), and we...we had...there we didn't have billets; we didn't have billets there like we had like we had at Chadwa. There we had...they called them Bashas (sp?) – little houses made out of bamboo with a kind of a mud stucco or...on them and everything, and they were pretty...for that...it was...it was decent anyway. They weren't rich or anything like that, but they were comfortable place to eat...to stay. In Daragon we slept in tents; and the tents were built about...oh, they were about two...two feet high I guess on...on concrete foundations, and that was the reason to keep snakes out. And we had snakes all over the place down there. So one night it was a moonlight night and...and I heard all this commotion...all kind of critters going through down through the camp and I looked up and here came the most beautiful black leopard you ever saw in your life right down the middle of the street like he owned the whole thing! And all these other critters were getting out of his way. And I sat there and watched that...walk right through the camp! But we had all kind of pets; the guys had moneys and...and even one...even one of the men had adopted a Chinese boy when we were in China. And his...we called him Ding-how (sp?) which in Chinese meant "Okay." Ding-how meant okay. So they called him Ding-how and he was...his...all he did all day long was ride the gasoline truck. He'd ride a gasoline truck up and down; they made...they made him a uniform like we had and he slept with this...this man that adopted him over in China. He...he found him going through garbage can over there

and he adopted this kid; he was about...oh, he was probably nine or ten years old. We don't really...never did know exactly how old he was. So I asked this man...later...later years, I saw him and I said, "Whatever happened to Ding-how?" He said, "Oh," said, "when I left over there I turned him over to some missionaries and they said he turned out to be a doctor." Can you imagine that going from (unintelligible) garbage in China to (unintelligible) missionaries and turned out to be a doctor!

Pete Jensen: Lucky boy!

Mr. Watson: Lucky boy! That's...that's one...one lucky boy. Uh, I'm kind of running out of things to...

John Watson: You spoke one time about the...the value of the airplanes compared to value of human life over there.

Mr. Watson: Oh, well, I...I don't really know how to describe it, but, of course, human life was supposed to be better than airplanes so you bailed out if you could. And we had some people bail out in Bremmer (sp?) that...they...our Flight Surgeon and...and a couple of Medics parachuted in there to bring them out; one of the men was hurt. And they got some of the native Burmese...they called...they called them Maga (sp?) headhunters and they...they were! They were...they preyed on Japanese; they had a lot of Japanese skulls they tell me over there in their villages.

Pete Jensen: (Unintelligible)...were they cannibals?

Mr. Watson: No they weren't cannibals apparently and...and you could get anything you want over there for...for a tin can and...and a box of salt. That's one thing

they didn't have was salt. And that's...that's something they prized more than anything else.

Pete Jensen: Were the troops...when they...when they started this mission because the Japanese had cut off...

Mr. Watson: Yeah, they cut off the Burma Road which was the supply...after the Japanese occupied all the ports on the...on the east coast of China, they supplied China through the Burma Road which was a very treacherous, mountainous type road that wound around and around and I don't know how long it took to get there from India, but it took a long time for the trucks to get there. And speaking of trucks and everything in...in today's...we might have to go back...like the Chinese did during the war. You know what they ran their trucks on?

Pete Jensen: No.

Mr. Watson: Charcoal! They had like a...blacksmith's forge with a blower on it and they'd (unintelligible) and crank this and get the charcoal going and these...this fume or what it is from that...they...that's what they collected in a...in a tank and that's what they'd run their trucks on.

Pete Jensen: Hm!

Mr. Watson: They even used it in any automobiles they had over there...they used that.

Pete Jensen: With...these...some of these...the flight crews that had to bail out...depending on where they were at, I guess they had problems with the Japanese?

Mr. Watson: Oh yes!... 'cause we were flying over occupied territory...until...until General Stillwell and his Chinese army and Merrill's Marauders retook the northern part of...of Burma. And they reached...they took a...a town called Mishinaw that...they took the west river of this...on west of this river...and I can't remember the name of the river now...but it was the Mekong or which...which river it was, but anyway the air...they built an air base there and we also had a radio station there, so that's what we'd fly with...we'd fly that radio station and go over it. If we had leaky gasoline...gasoline drum is leaking real bad and we could get...get them out the door, we'd toss a...toss a can of gasoline out that was leaking to keep the airplane from, you know, saturated with gasoline. Of course you didn't dare smoke or anything in the airplane with all those fumes; we'd open the hatches over the window so we'd have at least...it would make a lot of noise with it...it...would...get the air out. And we said we innovated napalm because we dropped those gasoline...they hit anything...hit anything solid down there to make spark, why, you just like *poof!* like that...a big, big ball of fire. And the Japanese didn't like that because we'd wave...we got east of the river to kick it out, so...and all...speaking of...of pleasing the Chinese, let me tell you about the Chinese troops. We hauled Chinese troops back to...to India from...from China. And they got out and...and I guess you'd call it more like a press gang than anything else; these Chinese. We'd get some of the scroungiest looking people you ever saw in your on there! As long as they could walk and talk and...and breath, I guess, why they put them on that airplane. Well, I don't

know whether...it didn't happen to me that I know of...but we'd pick about fifty of these people up and bring them back to India for General Stillwell's army, and the...I've heard the story...that they'd take off over there with fifty and they'd get there with forty-six or forty-seven and they couldn't figure out what was happening to them. So they finally asked one of the...one of the interpreter's asked the Chinese why...why these people...said, "Well they died; we...we couldn't wake them up. They passed out we couldn't wake them up and we didn't see any use in carrying a dead man over there so we just tossed them out!" (laughter) And...talk about the people, and they'd get sick in that airplane and I'll tell you you couldn't hardly stand it. We'd close the front...we'd close the cockpit off and after we'd get to...we put them into a...a base called SuperTan (sp?); you know that's where they processed these people for...for General Stillwell. So one day while they were cleaning our airplane, they asked us did we want to go down and see them process these Chinese. And I said, "Sure, I'd...I'd like to see what they do to them." So they have these...like (unintelligible) tent, just...you know these...just...just walls of tents around this big area down there. And the first one that went in they stripped them completely...every...took all those clothes off and threw them over the fire and burned everything they had on them. They'd take all their hair off of them and delouse them; take all their hair off of them. The next place they went into, they had a great big thing like a horse trough and they had two of the biggest Chinese with brushes, and they'd take these guys and dunk them in that and they'd brush them and he'd come out real pink!

They'd dry him off and send him to the next one and issue him a uniform.

And I tell you when that man came out the other end, he didn't look like the one that went in!

Pete Jensen: And they fought from...India? (Unintelligible words)...

Mr. Watson: Yeah, they went...from...from India they went into northern Burma, and I...I...one of my roommates over there was a troop carrier...was a combat cargo pilot, and they dropped supplies to those Chinese down there. And he said they always dropped them about a hundred yards in front of them where the Chinese were so they'd fight like crazy to get to the...get to (unintelligible). (laughter)

John Watson: Let me...I just want to make a point of clarification on something he said earlier about the ones that were thrown off the airplane. They were passing out due to lack of oxygen and altitude.

Mr. Watson: Yeah, oxygen. See, they didn't have any oxygen; they didn't have any oxygen.

John Watson: So some of...some of the guys in the back would pass out and the Chinese, the officers that were in charge would think they were dead and just throw them off the plane. (Unintelligible)...waking up about half way down.

Mr. Watson: Well they say old...young men dream...dream dreams and old men tell tall tales, so I guess...I guess these are some of the tall tales that I'm telling today.

John Watson: You did...you told me one one time and this is what I was getting at awhile ago about the...the Chinese truck driver that backed into the (unintelligible) plane.

Mr. Watson: Oh yeah. We had a...I was at...at Changtu and...and they were unloading the gasoline and they backed the truck...and they hit the hard handle stabilizer and just put a dent in it about, oh, six or eight inches or something; it really didn't hurt the air flow a whole lot or anything...maybe a little bit, but this Chinese guard grabbed this guy out of the truck with a bayonet and run him around over there, and they told me that he took him on the other side of the field and he shot him! You didn't...it didn't dent the big airplane...directly he came back with another driver. So I don't know what happened.

(laughter) But say, the Chinese...can be...they can be real sad...I guess you'd call it sadistic or something, and they believed and it's in one of those stories I have there...telling them about the Chinese...they would run across the runway just trying to beat the airplane; they figured a dragon chased them all their lives and they could just beat that airplane...why, across there they'd hit the dragon...and a lot of them didn't make it. And the way they built the run...runways over there...the...you just have the whole runway would be covered with...with people, and they have these little baskets on their shoulders; some of them carrying rocks and some of them would carry a...a blood slurry and that's the way...a bunch of them out there with hammers...little hammers...they beating these rocks up and building the runways...built a runway. There'd be hundreds of people on this runway. And then they'd have...and some of the cases they'd have a big roller they was about...made out of concrete which was about oh, about ten foot in diameter, I guess. They'd have about a hundred people pulling these things

down the runway. And as you'd line to...to land, you'd see these people part...like this...and as soon as you landed, they'd close right in behind you again, and when you got ready to take off...same thing; start to take off, they'd start moving out of the way.

Pete Jensen: So you were landing before the landing strip was finished?

Mr. Watson: Yeah, in some cases they were. They were still working on it.

Pete Jensen: Pretty rough landing?

Mr. Watson: No, well, yeah they were a little rough, but it was...it was...like I say, they...they had the rock and everything there, but they were just kind of finishing it up. They...maybe they hadn't rolled it yet or anything, but they had these...these rocks and they had the mud and everything there. Well mud dry...like caliche, you know, it would get hard. I guess it was something like caliche, but it looked like clay to me; it was kind of red...reddish, and that's the way they built the runways over there.

Pete Jensen: Did you have...I...know...reading early on they had a real shortage of airplanes...for flying The Hump. When you were there, was there...did you have, as far as aircraft, did you have quite...quite a few aircraft or (unintelligible)?

Mr. Watson: Well, we...we didn't...while I was there...I was there in '44...they had the big shortage, I guess, was in '42 and '43 when they...when they had the...the biggest shortage of airplanes. By the time I got there, of course every crew that went over there would take an airplane with them. So by that time they were building up a lot of...lot of airplanes. And we...like I say, we lost a lot

of them. Now I think in that one article there it says they lost over nine hundred airplanes over there from '42 to '45. You know after...after the Japanese surrendered, why, they didn't need that...fly that anymore, so that...that ended the airlift to...from...India to China.

Pete Jensen: The Japanese, the Chinese, they didn't...I assume did not like each other.

Mr. Watson: No they didn't. They didn't like each other for sure. Well the Japanese, you know, they called it Rape of Nanking, you know. It was on the newsreels and everything back then, and I guess it...they were real rough. But like I said, Chinese were pretty sadistic people though. Because one of the fighter pilots bailed out not far from the base I was stationed at over there, and by the time they got to him, they had stripped him completely nude and just pulverized his body.

John Watson: This was the Chinese?

Mr. Watson: Chinese did, yeah. And at one time...I don't...I don't want to bring this stuff up because...because it...this is...this is not bearing...I don't think this would really be interesting to anybody, but some of the things we saw over there that really believed that the Chinese can be real brutal people.

Pete Jensen: Yeah, see, I didn't realize that. I've always heard, of course, the Japanese being...very cruel, but I didn't know the Chinese were...basically the same way.

Mr. Watson: Yeah.

John Watson: Well you know the old saying, the winner writes history.

Mr. Watson: Yeah. Oh we were...of course we were friends...and...the Chinese and they treated us great, but...if we were...if you were the enemy, why, I...I'd hate to be your enemy... 'cause I think they were almost as bad as the Japanese when it comes to things like that.

Pete Jensen: How'd you hear the war...war was over?

Mr. Watson: Uh, I don't...I don't remember. I don't remember where I was. I...I came back in December of...of '44. I went...got over there in February and I came back in December; I had flown my six hundred and fifty hours. I made, I think, seventy-eight round trips over The Hump which is...a hundred...crossed at a hundred...I mean at a hundred and...forty-six?...anyway, I...I crossed that many times plus I flew quite a few missions over in China. The missions in China weren't very long missions; they were anywhere from two to three hours...most of them.

Pete Jensen: Just from one base to the other base?

Mr. Watson: To the other base, yeah. They were very short.

Pete Jensen: Can...just flying or moving materials?

Mr. Watson: Yeah, we...we'd move materials and they...they have...they have one base that was stocking materials, and then we'd kind of distribute it out, and that's what we were doing when we were in China. Kunming was the main...main terminal there for the supplies.

Pete Jensen: So basically...when they flew from India over The Hump to China, they'd deliver basically to one base?

Mr. Watson: Yeah, well a lot of it was; a lot of it was delivered to the main base.

Pete Jensen: (Unintelligible).

Mr. Watson: Both of it was...through main base. And then from there then our job was to more or less supply the B-29 outfit up at...up at Changtu. Now the B-29s also flew to India to pick up all the gasoline and everything they could haul back with them, and they...they could get there with quite a few...good fuel left in them. So the...round trip, I guess, didn't take as much as...as they had circled us when they got back. But they didn't...they didn't make a whole lot because we supplied most of the gasoline for them in fifty-five gallon drum. And they had the old handle pump...that's the way they...serviced the airplanes.

Pete Jensen: Hm! I guess...how close did you come to...loosing the aircraft or...I mean, you never...you never lost one, but was (unintelligible).

Mr. Watson: Well there was the one...one I was telling you about was the closest one that I ever came to. Well I lost an engine one time, but I managed to get back to...field okay. Luck...luckily I was...had enough altitude that I could make turns and still get back on the runway. But that's the only problem I had was...was...that one airplane...was the only...well I did...I did loose instruments one time when I was going to China and we was above an overcast. When I got to Kunming and...and my instruments were completely out, and I wondered how in the world I was going to...thought I was going to have to bail out or what I was going to have to do then, and about that time another airplane came along and...and I...managed to contact them and I said...I told him...I said, "The ceiling at Kunming is eight hundred feet," I

said, "when you let down, can I let down in formation with you?" And he said, "Sure!" So we went out and...we made a big circle then came...I (unintelligible) formation with him and...and got in with that one.

John Watson: This is also the point of clarification for those that aren't pilots. Flight instruments are what keep you level; allow you to turn; allow you to shoot instrument approaches and if you don't have those when you get into a cloud, it's hard to...you get what's called vertigo and you can't tell which way is up and a lot of...there's a lot of civilian pilots today that crash because they can't...they don't...they don't know how to read their instruments.

Mr. Watson: Back...one day you had to learn to (unintelligible) your instruments, and if you don't...don't have any...why, what do you...where you been? But that...those two incidences are...those three I guess were the most...that I had as far as...as not being able to...to get in right, you know, and everything. Most the time...once you got over The Hump, why, the...landing in China and India were...it was just routine because they usually had enough ceiling that you didn't have to worry about...we...(unintelligible) approaches but you'd have to make instrument approaches all the time. And...and flying over The Hump itself, almost, oh I'd say fifty...over fifty percent of the time you were on instruments.

Pete Jensen: Did you...I guess...the hardest spot was getting up over, I mean, getting necessary altitude to go over The...The Hump.

Mr. Watson: Yeah, well that...of course...like I said, on both ends of it, the weather wasn't as bad as it was in the middle. And that's where we had the big thunderstorms

and everything...up in the mountains. And they'd go up...they'd go up to, oh, forty thousand feet or so...that...that the tops of those things would be. And you'd be going in there and it's like riding...oh, I'd say like riding...one...worse than a roller coast because you...you'd be descending this way and you'd hit the bottom and then you'd come back up this and...it might split you out at the top and...and one of the people...they came out the top of that thing...it was about, oh, twenty-five thousand feet upside down! So...there's all kinds of...those books down there...there's all kind of stories in there that...that probably beat some that I've told here.

Other Person: (Unintelligible sentence.) You...you (unintelligible) story you and your co-pilot dozed off...

Mr. Watson: Oh yeah!

Other Person: ...and when you woke up?

Mr. Watson: That was...that was in the States, so (laughter)...we...we had...we'd been up all night flying patients one night. I was in Air Rescue, I mean Air Evac then, and we had...we had gone to...to Mayo Clinic and we were coming back and it was...it was...just about sun up, you know, and we were sitting there and we were so sleepy, you know? When...at dawn...it's times that you get most sleepy, I guess. We was kind of dozing off and we were flying and we were on visual flight rules and...and we looked up and over here on a...on a hill...here's a windmill...just about even with us! (laughter) But that...that was foolishness, so (laughter). Oh, another little story that I have. You see this leather jacket?

Pete Jensen: Yes.

Mr. Watson: Hear it squeak? When we were waiting to come home; we'd finished our missions and...we went and visited a tea plantation over there to see how they processed tea...and the...one of the natives came in to see this tea...this man that was in charge of the tea plantation and said, "Tiger's killing our cattle; will you come up and kill him?" And he said, "Sure, I'll come up there." And he said, "Would you guys like to come up there with me?" And I said, "Sure, I've never been tiger hunting," so we go up there with him. When they'd hunting tigers they...they would built a platform up high and stake out a water buffalo calf or something like that for the tigers to come in...and when the tigers killed it, then they killed the tiger. Well, we did that for a couple of nights and didn't get a tiger. So they said, "Well the latest kill was right here." So they figured that the cow was still there; they figured the tiger would could come back for it, so they built a...under a big thorn bush they built a pit and they covered it with tin...with sheet iron and bamboo and laced it all together. And we had about this much that we could see out of, you know, to shoot. And somewhere that night waiting for that tiger to come in...and it finally came in...and here was...here was a mama and two little ones 'cause you just see the eyes glowing; here's two big eyes and here's two little eyes and here...over here is two little eyes...and they wouldn't come in for some reason. We could see them but they wouldn't come in, so they circled and when they circled I was afraid to breathe. This leather jacket sounded like a (unintelligible)...heard a saddle squeak? It...oh, it made a

terrible noise and I just knew that tiger was going to come after
(unintelligible) up there! (laughter) That was my tiger hunt though.

Pete Jensen: Did you ever encounter enemy fighters?

Mr. Watson: I saw...but they never got to...to me. Our evasive tactics was to go find the nearest cloud and get in it. And what the Japanese didn't know...they...they tried to figure out our schedule...which we didn't have a schedule. Like I said, we went when the airplane was ready to go and the load was ready to go, and they could only stay on station up there about ten minutes. And if an airplane didn't come by within ten minutes, they had to go back to their base, so they couldn't stay on station long enough really to...to...they...they got a few but not a whole lot of them. Some of them come in with bullet holes in the...in the airplane.

Pete Jensen: Why you only stay up there for ten minutes?

Mr. Watson: Because of fuel. Their...their base...their base was further down...in Burma...down around Rangoon. And they had to fly all the way up to northern Burma and they could only stay on station up there ten minutes to have enough gas to get back to their base. So that...that's why...we were...we were, I guess...reason we got by as much as we did. But a lot of them got shot at. And what their...tactic was...was pull up alongside you and wait till you got out of the cloud and then shoot you down. And my...one of the engineers we flew with always carried the M-1 with him, and he says, "If that guy flies up on my wing, I'll get him!" (laughter) So he was ready for him!

Pete Jensen: Here's a question I always ask everybody...what they thought about...the...dropping the atomic bomb.

Mr. Watson: Well I...I thought that...probably that saved a lot of lives; I think it...I think it was the thing to do at that time because it...it saved a lot of lives. And if we had gone ahead and invaded Japanese...Japan, it would have been a lot more lives in...in Japanese and American lost than they lost on those two bombs... 'cause it would have been fierce, real fierce fighting over there!

Pete Jensen: Did you...loss any friends there? I mean obviously flying like that you probably....

Mr. Watson: Well another time...one...when you said that...I lost..I lost four friends one night, and I was also in that same group that was flying gasoline in Changtu and the weather closed in up there...and they had all these airplanes holding in the holding pattern over a radio beacon. Well what was happening...the controllers lost complete control of the situation, and airplanes were running out of gas...getting low on gas and we're coming down through the stack and I just...saw...there was a hole in the clouds and I said...I saw an air...

(end of tape 1, side A)

Mr. Watson: There's a crew here from...from India...that's when I was stationed China...so there's a crew here from India that the pilot is ill and he can't fly back, said, "Would you take the airplane and crew back to India?" And I said, "Sure." So I went...I flew back to Indian and...and when I landed I...there was some friends there and so we...we had dinner and then we were shooting

the bull and talking, you know, and...and the man came in and said, "Lieutenant Watson, your airplane's ready to go back." And I said, "Why, I just got here?" And he said, "Well we're short of crews, so you're going to have to take this airplane back...over to India, and...and so they gave me a crew. So I said, "Okay, I'll go back...I'll go back to India." I didn't...(unintelligible) all day that day and...and...it was late in the evening when I got there. So I went back and...and when I got...when I got back to...to China, my base was closed! So I had to go up to Changtu. Well when I got to Changtu and started back to my base it was still closed in...the weather; so I had to land at Chungking, uh, yeah, Chungking. And they said, "You'll have to go back to Changtu." And I said, "Well I just got there and I've been back to India; I haven't had any sleep!" "Well, we got to go...we...this gasoline's got to go." So I went back to Changtu and this time I got into my base and I'd been...I'd been up over forty hours without any sleep at all. And so I...(recording stopped momentarily)...there, so they got on that airplane and went back...went back to...to India. Well here this airplane was sitting there and nobody knew where it was and...and I went...I went to bed. And they tried to wake me up to go on another trip and I'd said, "Wake me up." So they called the Flight Surgeon and he said...said..., "Well he...just asleep; let him alone...let him wake up." So they did and finally I woke up and they had reported the airplane and, of course, everybody on it missing because they didn't know where the airplane was; I hadn't parked it there at this base...and

I'll never forget the number...it was triple five...555. And...but that...that was the only time...there's another time that was real rough experience.

John Watson: They...they just lost track of you and you went back and forth so many times (unintelligible)?

Mr. Watson: Yeah, they lost...they lost track of me and...and the airplane didn't get back to India, so they figured it was missing. So they reported the whole crew missing!

Pete Jensen: (Unintelligible).

Mr. Watson: Well I'm about run out of wind here...unless somebody can think of something else.

Pete Jensen: Well...

John Watson: I don't know if you want to tell the story, but it was the...it was another one of those...rumors about why ya'll carried the Thompson machine guns.

Mr. Watson: Oh yeah. We carried Thompson machine guns, and they said, "You know if these...if these Chinese troops...if you had to get out of an airplane, well you just have to fight your way out. So one of the crews lost an engine and they knew they couldn't maintain altitude...this is another one of those tall tales...and I don't know whether it's true or not, but it...it was one of them told. And they said the...the Chinese came up and he could speak a little English and he said...pointing out there at this engine and...and he said, "Well engineer will go out there and fix that." So he put on his parachute and climbed out over the wing...hatch over the wing...and he fell off. So this Chinese came..., "That man fell off!" He said, "Okay, co-pilot go do it." So

co-pilot put on his chute and he went out...and fell off. And he came back up and he said, "They both fell off." And he said, "Okay you sit over there and hold this; I'll go fix it." And he left that Chinese holding the wheel there and he bailed out! (laughter) Like I said, this is another one of those tall tales; I have no idea whether it's true or not, but you know...

Other Person: Makes a good story! (laughter)

Mr. Watson: I don't know where I was when the war ended. I know where I was when...when President Roosevelt died.

Other Person: Well how did you...when did...when did you leave and how did you get home and what did you do when you got back and...?

Mr. Watson: Oh okay.

Other Person: ...stuff like that?

Mr. Watson: I left India in...in December of 1944. We...on our way to...to the States we stopped one night in Cairo.

Other Person: Did you fly your own plane back?

Mr. Watson: No we didn't; I...I rode back in a C-54. And...from there then we went to Casablanca; I spent Christmas in Casablanca. From there we went to Dakar back to...where'd we go?...Azores to...to Miami. And from Miami then we took the train...I took the train home on leave. And I got home in January; I can't remember what day...I think it was January the 2nd I got home. I think I was in Miami on...on New Year's Day...and I got home then. And from there I was...went to a little field in Dallas; that's where I met my wife and I was married in '45 and...and I got out...was separated from the service; went

to Texas A&M two years then went back into the Air Force again during the Korean War. And I spent two years...I spent...I spent ROTC duty at A&M and...and SMU. And then from there I went to Air Training Command at Keesler and from there to Air Rescue in Greenland. So I...that's the way I got around, and then from there to...AirVac in...in Travis. I spent ten years in AirVac in different things and (unintelligible) there tells a little bit about what I did after that.

Pete Jensen: What was your wife doing at Love Field?

Mr. Watson: Well she lived in Dallas, and I...

Pete Jensen: Okay.

Mr. Watson: ...his...my...my friend knew his sister...her sister rather and that's the way I was introduced to her. And we've been married now...many years...sixty-two years.

Pete Jensen: You just go back...you mentioned that...you know...how many missions you...how many hours you've flown...so there was a...a limit then? In other words you flew so many hours then you were eligible to go back to the...?

Mr. Watson: States, yeah.

Pete Jensen: ...back to the...

Mr. Watson: They rotated us to the States. Oh, another funny story...that I hadn't told. They sent a psychiatrist over to evaluate the pilots. You know a bunch of GIs they...they think all kind of things, and he'd hide behind a tea bush and jump out and holler boo at you and see how high you'd jump and everything...see what your nerves were. So one day he was hiding behind a tea bush and one

of the...one of the people snuck up behind and shot a forty-five right behind him, and he jumped over this tea bush! (laughter) We had a...over there...like I said everybody had pets; we had a mongoose and he lived on...we had a wardroom that had light in it to keep the humidity down to keep our clothes from molding and the mongoose slept on top of this and we'd always bring him some little goody or something. When we'd come in, he'd jump down on our shoulder and we'd give him this little (unintelligible). The...the psychiatrist had the habit of going into your rooms also and jumping out at you when you came in. And...and he went in and this mongoose jumped on him and they said, "I don't know who was most scared – the mongoose or the (unintelligible)! He was going out across the tea patch with this mongoose hanging on him!"

Pete Jensen: What's a mongoose?

Mr. Watson: He's a snake killer.

Pete Jensen: Okay.

Mr. Watson: He looks like a ground squirrel or kind of like a ground squirrel.

Other Person: Kind of like...kind of like a big ferret.

Mr. Watson: Yeah, something like that. (laughter) But the funny things happen, you know? And...and like I say GIs make the most out of anything (unintelligible) themselves! (laughter) But that...that was so funny though.

Pete Jensen: You'd think the psychiatrist would learn after a little while...

Mr. Watson: (Unintelligible)...they probably sent him back! (laughter)

Pete Jensen: Had him committed.

Mr. Watson: Yeah probably did. (laughter)...(recording stops abruptly)

(end of interview)

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