

Peter Hennessey Oral History Interview

FLOYD COX: This is Floyd Cox. I'm a volunteer at the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas. Today is September the 5<sup>th</sup>, year 2011. I'm at the home of Mr. Peter Hennessey in San Antonio, Texas to visit with him concerning his experiences during World War II. This interview is in support of the Nimitz Educational and Research Center for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to this site. Now Peter, I'd like to shake your hand --

PETER HENNESSEY: OK. Thank you.

FC: -- tell you thank you very much for your service to our country during World War II.

PH: Thank you.

FC: I'd like to start the interview asking you a little bit about your background, where you were born, when you were born, if you'd tell us a little bit about your parents and siblings, where you went to school, and we'll just take it from there.

PH: OK. Well, thank you. (inaudible) I was an Army brat. My father spent 31 years in the Army and retired as a captain -- I mean, as a colonel. And he was in a number of wars

but [wasn't?] decorated much. His last station was here in San Antonio, and he retired here. And my mother and father bought a home out in Monte Vista on Hollywood Street. And I started the first grade here. We moved here, I think, about 1925. I was born in Topeka, Kansas, and never been back there. (laughs) So I had all my schooling here in San Antonio. Went to the public schools. I graduated from Thomas Jefferson High School in 1937. I was acquainted with a lot of the other Army brats, and I always thought I'd go in the military. And as I got to know more and more of them [about?] when I graduated from high school, I really didn't know what I wanted to do. I was just barely 17, and my father said, "Well, you're young," and they had a program out at Camp Bullis, where enlisted personnel and Army brats like me could go to West Point Prep School. And we lived in tents, and we were just part of the enlisted Army, really. And I finished that course in March of 1938 and took the exams. I was competing for a presidential appointment, which sounds pretty big, but I think there were, like, eight or nine of them that year around the world, so -- I mean, it was very competitive. And I passed, but I didn't score enough to be one of the top seven or eight that we had. And right after that -- well, when my father retired, he started a life insurance company

here that was mainly for military. It was called Government Personnel Mutual Life Insurance Company. And in such a long name we called ourselves GPM Life. He retired in 1929 and started the company in 1934. And then just a couple months after I finished at West Point Prep School and took the exams, he had a heart attack and died rather suddenly. And the company was just very, very small. And my mother became president. Her name was Blanche Lee Thayer, when she married. And back then women just weren't in business, really. So she was really a pioneer. And anyway, she became president of the company, and it was a very, very small company, and this was -- [that?] World War II -- well, to go on a little bit, I'll get everything in order.

FC: Sure.

PH: Well, when my father died, I decided I'd better forget this West Point thing and try to get myself ready to go in business and help my mother. So I went to the University of Texas at Austin. Out at the West Point Prep School, I thought I knew how to study, but I really learned how to study out there, I think. And when I got into college, it seemed kind of easy, really. So after my first semester, I decided, "Well, I've lost a year." All my friends had already -- the year I was [at?] West Point Prep School,

they were in college. So I thought, "Well, I'll catch up with them and see if I can go through college in three years and graduate from college same time as my friends do." So I started that, and I took extra courses, and I went to summer school, and I did graduate in three years. And it really turned out to be very good in lots of ways. And then the draft was on. In Europe Hitler was taking over, and England was trying to get us involved in the war, and we didn't right then. But everyone kind of knew that we very likely would be involved in the war at some point. And the government, to build up our armed forces, had the draft, they called it. You got a number -- they pulled numbers out of a hat or something, rather than [a big block?] of people. And they were all -- had to go enlist in the Army. And you didn't have much control over where you were going to go or anything. And I thought, "Well, I think I'm probably going to be drafted, so I'll enlist instead of being drafted, and maybe I can control my [lot in life?] a little bit better." So I enlisted in the Army, and I was sworn in at Fort Sam Houston in the infantry post, and that was in September, 1941. I graduated from college in the spring of '41. And so I got in the aviation cadet program. I thought I'd like to be a pilot. And I passed my physical and accepted in. So I got sworn in, and

then I was sent out to California for training. And the training back then had primary first. You got around a hundred -- let's see. I forgot exactly how many hours you got, but -- of flying -- but it was in a Stearman. It looked like a World War I airplane. It was a biplane, open cockpit, and really kind of a fun airplane to fly. And I was in training when Pearl Harbor came along. And I just had about one more week of training in primary, and then I went to -- in primary I went to -- it was civilian contract school, which they used civilian instructors. But every primary school they had a few military pilots, and they did the check (inaudible) and so forth. And if you didn't make it through there, why, back then they were just released from the Army. Later, when that happened, why, then, they weren't released from the Army; they went into something else, if you didn't make it through flying school. But fortunately I did, and my primary was in a little town in California called Tulare. And the school was called Rankin Aeronautical School, and the person that ran it was a well-known stunt flyer named Tex Rankin. And so we were not treated too good by our upper class -- (laughs) there was a lot of hazing going on back in those days. I mean, a lot of it. And...

FC: What were some of the things that they would do to haze you?

PH: Well, (laughs) I'll tell you, when you first got there, they issued your flying clothes and stuff. And one thing is the helmet and goggles. Well, we had to wear the helmet in the Stearman. They did not have a electric communications, and the communication between the instructor and the pilot was just through a rubber hose and a little thing that looked kind of like a funnel that you talked into. And the student could not talk back to the instructor. And so if he wanted to say something, why, they'd just put the plane in idle to kind of just cut down on the noise, and then he could holler at the instructor, and they could have a conversation that -- the instructor was in the front seat, and the student was in the back. Well, made it through primary OK, and then I transferred to a place called Gardner Field, which was in Taft, California, which is a little town about 40 miles west of Bakersfield. Well, on the hazing part, every place we went we had to run, and we had to put your arms out like you were an airplane, and when you made a turn, you'd have to look back, be sure no one's behind you, and then you'd make a bank and -- (laughter) and they had inspections all the time, and the deal was that if you got so many demerits,

why, you had to walk an hour in a -- just a area, and -- to work off one demerit. And the most you could do is on the weekends you could do three on Saturday and two on Sunday, so you could walk off five hours. Well, the first week, almost everybody got, like, 20 demerits, and so you couldn't get off the base as long as you had any demerits you hadn't walked off. So we didn't get to get off the base hardly at all. And about the only time that we'd get off base was to go to church on Sundays, and I had a car, and (laughs) I would fill it up, because a lot of them didn't have cars, and went into town to go to church. And I dropped the rest of them off at a place called Taylor's Tabernacle. Well, Taylor's Tabernacle really was Taylor's Bar and Grill. (laughter) So I'd go to church, and they'd go over there. And so on December the 7<sup>th</sup>, when they had the -- Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, I was actually in church at that time, and when I got out and picked them up, they had heard on the radio about the attack. [They were?] supposed to return to the base. And so that was kind of the beginning of all that. And I had some kind of [insane?] times that day. Tulare was in the San Joaquin Valley, and they did a lot of farming in there. And right around Tulare were a lot of Japanese farmers. They had small plots of land. And they never caused any trouble or

anything, but when this happened, when no one knew -- you know, a lot of them probably had family back in Japan, and no one knew whether these Japanese in there were going to try to do anything or not. I guess I have to say they weren't treated real well. They rounded up most of them and sent them to a concentration camp in Death Valley, and that wasn't very pleasant. But that day, we were issued guns. None of us had any training in guns, but most of our class were from Texas, and most of them had done some hunting, so they were familiar with some of it.

FC: Now what kind of gun did they issue, do you recall?

PH: It was a regular --

FC: Springfield?

PH: -- Springfield-type, uh-huh. I mean, no automatic weapons. And on the afternoon of December the 7<sup>th</sup>, why, a couple of trucks came down from Fresno, where they had munitions -- they stored a lot of stuff up there. And everybody was issued a rifle and (inaudible) in it, which is a very heavy grease to protect the rifle from rust and so forth. Well, we had to clean those. And I was sitting on an ammunition box, and the commander of the base was a West [Pointer?], was a Captain [Sturtevant?], and he was commander of the little base. And he came and sat down next to me, and they issued him a .45 automatic, which was the -- what the

officers wore. And he was supposed to clean it. Well, he looked at that thing, and I could tell he didn't know a thing about it. And it just so happened -- and I don't know how this happened, but when my father got out of the Army, he ended up with a .45 automatic. And so when I was a kid, in high school and whatnot, I used to -- I didn't fire it often, because it had such a lot of recoil, but I would take it apart and clean it and put it back together. And so I asked the captain, I said, "Captain, would you like some help?" And so he handed me the .45, and I took it apart and cleaned it and gave it back to him. And he said, "What's your name?" And they -- what they called "cadets" and "misters." I said, "I'm Mr. Hennessey." So that afternoon they posted the guard duty for that night. I mean, everything was very tense -- because we didn't know what was going to happen. You know, they used to put the airplanes in a hangar or line them up on a ramp, wingtip to wingtip. And they decided they'd better do [something else?], so that afternoon we pushed the planes all around and just put one here and one there and one somewhere else. And so they posted the sergeant of the guard, and who was the sergeant of the guard but Hennessey. And I knew it was because I'd helped him with his -- the revolver there. And it was a weary night. And there was a Lake Tulare south of

Tulare, and when the temperature was right and the wind was right, they developed a fog they called a Tule fog, and it was just really thick. It didn't go up more than a lot of times 20 or 30 feet high, but you couldn't see 10 feet. I mean, it was just really thick. And so I -- my job was to take some of the other cadets and march them out and leave one at each airplane. And then he was supposed to stay there about two hours, then be replaced. And so I did that. And then I had to go out every once in a while to check, make sure everything was OK. And everybody was nervous. And I'd be wandering around in the dark and in the fog, and I'd hear this thing in the distance: "Halt! Who goes there? Friend or foe?" (inaudible) "Friend, friend! This is Hennessey. Don't shoot!" And you'd hear them cock the rifle or something or other. But anyway, nothing happened (inaudible). It was a weary night. But then -- let's see. We were almost finished with the primary. And so we were just at Tulare about a week longer after Pearl Harbor. And then when we got to basic, why, it was at Taft, California, which is near Bakersfield, and we flew the Vultee BT-13, which was a single-engine, low-wing airplane. It didn't have a retractable gear; it had a fixed gear. And it was a [two-place?] in that the student sat in the front cockpit and the instructor from the back

cockpit, and it had a canopy over it, so you were out of the weather. I mean, a lot of people went through training in that [day?]. For some reason, the vertical stabilizer, the rudder, seemed like bigger than it should have been, and you had to put more pressure (inaudible), and they had a lot of trouble with people particularly coming in for landings on the last turn. You're losing speed, and if you lost too much, why, it would stall and crash. We actually got to Gardner Field at night, and we just slept where we could, and then the next morning, why, we were issued a footlocker and some stuff. And while we were in line getting that, why, one of our upperclassmen was coming in for a landing, and it was right in front of us, why, he just spun in and crashed and, you know, killed himself. And that wasn't a very good start to our training there. And then later, on advanced, our class sort of got split up there, because some went some place and some went another, but I went to Victorville, California, which is in the Mojave Desert and just north of San Bernardino. And that's where we took our advanced training. And one of the nice things there -- we were the very first class in there, so we didn't have an upper class. And I might go back to primary just for a second, but there was -- the upper class would inspect the rooms, see if everything was folded right

and check for dust and wear white gloves and one thing or another. And we got pretty good at keeping the things we were supposed to. And the last inspection I had there, there were two upperclassmen, and they went through and they couldn't find anything right. And what the guy did, finally, went and crawled under the bed, and it had slats to hold the mattress and spring, and along the side of the bed on the other side was a strip of wood where the slats fit on, and he put his white gloves and ran it along that strip of wood underneath the bed, (laughs) and they found some dust, so we got demerits. Anyway, it was all probably pretty good training. And then in advanced, we flew two airplanes. It was a twin-engine school, and the airplane we flew was called a AT-9, and it was a two-seater, side by side, and a pretty hot little airplane. You had to fly it. And it was good training, although it really wasn't a real good trainer, I'd have to say. And the instructor I had had not flown -- didn't have hardly any time in that plane, and he was really afraid of it. We learned to fly it together, in a way. (laughter) And then we also flew the AT-6, which is a fighter trainer. It's a two-seater, little wing, had the retractable gear and the [constant speed and pop?] and so forth. And a really nice airplane to fly. And so we finished all those -- everything we had

to do there, and then we graduated on April the 24<sup>th</sup>, 1942. And a lot of the parents came out for the graduation. My father had died by then, and -- but my mother came out. So she was my date doing all that. And we had a graduation party at the Mission Inn in Riverside, California, which was a real nice place. And (inaudible) -- this has nothing to do with training, but while we were at Victorville, someone showed up at the front gate and wanted to put on a show for the boys. And there was just one theater on the base, and no one lived on there -- no housing. Course, we were living in barracks, so we were on the base. But all the instructors and so forth had to live somewhere, and they were spread out a lot. And the instructor -- I mean, the commanding officer -- didn't know who this guy was, and he wanted to accommodate him, but he didn't want to cancel the show. So they got all the (inaudible) cadets in there to go to [ground school?] that night, and the entertainer came in, and it was Red Skelton. And he was just getting started; no one -- or hardly anyone -- knew anything about him. And so we got to be friendly with him, and when we had our graduation, we invited him to the party, and he accepted and came in and got a suite of rooms. And he had liquor; he had food; he had everything you want up here. And everybody, instead of being down at the party

downstairs, wanted to be up in his room, so we just sort of passed around the word. And we split up into ones and twos, and half would go up to his party, and the other half would stay down, and then after 45 minutes or something, we'd switch --

FC: Rotate.

PH: -- and that's the -- and it worked out very nice. So that was sort of my training. And then...

FC: Now, let me ask you this: were you commissioned yet?

PH: Well, we got commissioned -- when we got our wings was April 24<sup>th</sup>.

FC: OK.

PH: Well, we got to make a choice of where we'd like to go, (inaudible) type of plane. And I wanted to be a fighter pilot, and I put in for fighters, but I ended up as instructor. You know, you did what you were told to do. And so that's what I was. And we graduated one day, and the next day we picked a partner. The fellow that I had was a fellow named -- gosh, can't think of his last name. [Rancho?] -- I'll think of it.

FC: Sure.

PH: But he lived in the Valley, but he was -- anyway, we teamed up. And the first thing we did was take an AT-9, and when we were in training, why, the student sat in the left seat

and the instructor in the right. So I got in the right seat and made some landing and [stuff?], and Joe was in the left seat. (inaudible) then we switched. And that didn't take over, like, 30 minutes. I mean, it really wasn't much different than the other [seats?], except you used different hands for the controls and the throttle and so forth. But then we switched to the AT-6, and it was a -- in fact, both those planes were tail draggers. You know, [we were not?] tricycle gear. And the AT-6, the instructor sat in the back, and, like, on landings, why, the nose is up, you can't see forward, you have to look out the side of the plane, this way, that way, and then the instructor in the back had to do the same thing, but he couldn't see near as much as the guy in the front. So we started practicing landings from the back seat. And we spent more time on that, because it was -- you had to get a little used to it. You thought you had the tail down, you didn't, because -- but anyway. So we did all this in one morning. Next day we had students, and that was our -- (laughter) we had just graduated as students, you know, and then...

FC: Oh my goodness.

PH: Well, that's what we did. Now, later in the war, they had a instructor school at Randolph Field, but I was already an instructor and -- [I don't know?], I never went to that,

but later in the war they did get some training. Now today, the instructor school is still at Randolph, but it's about a five- or six-month course. And what they're doing now, we did in --

FC: One day.

PH: -- half a day. (laughter) I mean, they're better trained. I'll tell you, I think -- I feel like I learned as much about flying instructing my first students as I did all through training. And instructing is not easy. And [they?] were speeding things -- as a matter of fact, when we went through training, it was set up to have three students an instructor, and it was a year training. And I graduated from flight school less than seven months after I enlisted. You know, we did a lot of flying in a short period of time. And the problem was that they were trying to get as many people trained in flying as possible, because we didn't have a very big air force at that time.

FC: That's correct.

PH: And so we were busy. And when I was a cadet in advanced, we had -- well, when I instructed my first class, the fellow that had been my instructor, I was his assistant. And we had seven students, and one instructor cannot do everything that has to be done with seven students in that period of time. He didn't tell me this then, but later we

used to have some reunions of our instructor people and so forth, and he told me, "Well, you know, on that first class, when you were my assistant, I flew with all seven of them, and I took the best three and gave you the worst four." (laughter) Anyway. And then I knew as time went on, I was a better instructor than I was when I started.

FC: Now let me ask you this, talking about instructing: did you have some students that were exceptional students and some that maybe washed out?

PH: Well, I was going to say, in primary you worked out the most -- there were a lot of reasons. A lot of them were just not well-coordinated. Some were just scared. Some would get airsick. And so probably only about half that went into the cadet program in primary got through the first phase. Now basic there were quite a few washouts, but not near as many. And when they got to advanced, there were really very few washouts. When I say "washout" that was the term they used when you failed your flying course. And then what happened during the war basically was when a student was washed out, he didn't get out of the service. He stayed in. And some were put into bombardier training and some to navigation training. So quite a few that did not become pilots became part of the air crew.

FC: And they maintained their commission that way.

PH: Then they were commissioned -- well, after they finished that next course. I mean, we really worked hard. And what happened was we generally ended up with five or six students, and you really -- about four was about all you could really do and [train?] them properly. And this was no orders from anybody. We as instructors kind of got together, and at -- I was stationed at Douglas at that time, where I graduated -- no, no, this was at Victorville, where I graduated. And we flew 24 hours around the clock. We had four six-hour periods. That was 6:00 in the morning until noon, noon to 6:00, 6:00 in the evening until midnight, and midnight till 6:00 in the morning. And what we did was I would find somebody who was in the same squadron but their flying hours were different, and if I would instruct the student from, say, noon to 6:00 in the afternoon, he would take them from 6:00 to midnight. But he had already instructed a class in the morning too. And so we were flying over 12 hours a day, instructing. At one point, why, there were -- it seemed like more than usual aircraft accidents where an instructor was in the airplane, and they finally decided it was probably fatigue of some sort, and they did several things, trying to make it better. I mean, it didn't work any better than we did when we finally teamed up with another one. So it was hard back

then. And we didn't have weekends off. It was seven days a week. And so we were out at the base, like, 14 hours a day, you know? And at one point they said when you get a hundred hours, they were going to take you off of flight duty and you going to have to get a physical, and have to pass that, and then you go back to flight. Well, they didn't have enough doctors, and so it got to be a bottleneck. And you'd go in for your physical, and the doctor'd say, "How are you feeling? Are you sleeping OK? Do you have bad dreams?" They'd ask you a few questions like that, and they'd say, "OK, go back." (laughter)

FC: Requalified, huh?

PH: Finally they quit that. But the only time we really had off was in between classes. If we had enough airplanes and had good enough weather and finished the class a few days early, why, we'd get a couple days leave. I mean, it was tough. And I got married in August of '42, so when my wife -- well, the [way we?] instructed at Victorville for about six months or eight months, and then we were -- Victorville was both bombardier training and pilot training. And it was such a good area for bombardier training, because they had a lot of land and (inaudible) houses and whatnot. Well, we got shipped to three different fields, and I ended up at Douglas, Arizona, which is right on the border of

Mexico. And then I was there then most of the war. But, you know, it was tough on the wives. I mean, you know, we just weren't home any time. When you got home, you were so tired you couldn't do anything but go to sleep. And they'd tell you, "You got to get eight hours of sleep." Well, we weren't home eight hours. (laughs)

FC: Let me ask you this, Peter: was your wife from San Antonio?

PH: Yes. We got started dating in high school, and she went off to college, but ended up at the University of Texas, where I was. And we dated some. We never went steady, but we'd date each other more than we did anybody else. And so my first leave, after I graduated, was I instructed one class, and then I got to go home. And we decided to get married. Back then, with the war on, I mean, things were just a lot different. You know, most of the men were leaving town and going somewhere, and so anyone that was contemplating marriage, [then?] they went ahead and got married. Of course, a lot of them didn't ever come back, but it was a -- I mean, it was OK. And she was a lot of support and didn't complain. But it was really, really difficult.

FC: Well, let me ask you this: did you get married in San Antonio?

PH: Mm-hmm.

FC: And how did you pack up and move your brand-new bride to Arizona? (laughter) Tell us about that.

PH: Well, OK. Actually, we went to California, but -- we didn't have any furniture. Places [to?] live were hard to find, and there wasn't anything around Victorville where I was. But the closest town was San Bernardino, which is a nice little -- it was a nice little town at that time. And I was able to -- I found a duplex, a little house, and (inaudible) another instructor had the other half of it. And...

FC: Do you remember what the rent was?

PH: The rent -- it was -- well, when we were cadets, our pay was \$75 a month. And I sent most of it home, because -- I mean, I didn't smoke and I didn't drink, and I'd go to the PX and get a coupon book so I could buy some soap or shaving cream or anything I needed, and I'd send most of the money home. And of course, we ate in the mess hall, so there was no charge. But then when I became a second lieutenant, why, I got a -- let's see. With flight pay we got \$125 a month. But my rent out there, I was -- I really don't remember, but I'm going to say it was close to -- around 30 or 40 dollars a month. And I don't think I would have gotten that little duplex, except the lady that owned it -- it was vacant, but she had a lot of people wanting

it. And I was telling her I was bringing my bride out and so forth, and she was sort of romantic type or something, I guess. Anyway, so she let me have it. And when we got out there, why, there were a little bouquet of flowers here and there, and it had a nice little backyard with it, a grape arbor, and it worked out very nice. But while we lived there, the bedrooms were back to back, and the walls weren't very thick, and the fellow in the other side was a classmate of mine named Joe [Doherty?]. He was from Kansas City. We had to be -- early in the morning, why, if we had the first shift there, why, we had to get up about four o'clock in the morning and get dressed and then get to the field, which was about an hour's drive, and we'd each set the alarm, and whoever woke up first would knock on the wall, (laughter) and the one on the other side would knock back to let him know you were up. And we carpooled, and -- but it worked out all right. We were married at the Post Chapel at Fort Sam Houston, and spent the first night at St. Anthony Hotel, and then we left on the train the next day to go to California. And so our honeymoon was on the train, really, and (inaudible) I think, like, two nights on the train and -- going from here to California. And the stop was at a place called Colton, which is between San Bernardino and Riverside, and then the air base was up a

mountain and up into the desert, and I can say it was about an hour away. But everything worked out fine. And when we were sent to Douglas, the higher-ranking officers checked it out, and they told everyone, "Don't bring your wife or family, because there's no place to live." But that was on our way to San Antonio, so I decided that at no point -- we'd go to take our chances, and go, and if not, I'd get her to San Antonio somehow. And so when we got to Douglas, I went to the electric company, first thing I did, and I said, "Have you had any people call in to disconnect your electricity lately?" Said, "Yeah, we just got a phone call," and they gave me the address, and I went out -- (laughs) OK?

FC: Yeah.

PH: And so we went out and found the place, and we got to rent it. It was another duplex. It really was a -- one house, and they put a wall down the middle of it, and --

FC: (laughs) Made a duplex out of it.

PH: -- then that made a duplex out of it. Yeah. But see, back then, to get in the aviation cadet program, you had to have two years of college, but I already got my degree, so I was just fine. Later in the war, they were trying to get more people in, and they -- all you needed was a high school diploma, and then if you could pass the physical and stuff,

why, you'd become an aviation cadet. And when we were in, went through, you could not be married. Later they changed that. I mean, they just did a lot of things to make more people eligible to come in, because they really needed pilots so bad.

FC: Real bad.

PH: After a while, it got kind of boring in a way. I mean, you had to be on your toes. I mean, this being an instructor is not like sitting in the cockpit and flying from here to Dallas or something, really, because, you know, you're always training for something. And things can go wrong, and mainly because of pilot error. And then we had too many students, so we were in our double shifts and, you know, it was -- I mean, it really was difficult. And so I didn't get in air corps to fight, because we weren't in a war yet, but I mean, I knew it, you know, could happen, and it did. And after a couple years of instructing, well, I just thought, "I ought to be doing more than this." So I wanted to get into combat. I mean, fortunately, because I got in just a little bit earlier than a lot of people -- most of my friends that became pilots got in after World War II started. And so I had a little more authority and then a little more freedom, in a way, because I was at a little bit higher rank.

FC: And what was your rank at this time?

PH: At that time, I was -- well, I was a second lieutenant for seven months, I think, and then I became a captain about a year and a half after that or something like that.

FC: Captain?

PH: Mm-hmm. Well, I became a first lieutenant, and then a captain, yeah. Incidentally, I had a brother-in-law who was a West Pointer, and he was with the Flying Tigers over in China, and he was a pilot, and he became a brigadier general at age 29.

FC: What was his name?

PH: His name was Casey Vincent. And there was one other pilot, younger than he was, that became a brigadier general. And up at the Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio, why, there's a section in there where it has a little bit about his service and his life up there, with his medals and his picture and so forth. But...

FC: Now, let me ask you this, Peter: while you were instructing, did you ever have any mishaps? Crashes, or...

PH: Well, the answer is no, but I almost did. See, one of the problems with instructing is -- you know, I got to be where I could almost tell what kind of landing the student was going to make when we made the last turn onto the final approach, just kind of way he handled the airplane. But

things do happen, and I've got a article here from -- that I wrote, was published in the publication from Wright-Patterson. I'll go into that just a little bit. But you have to make a decision when to correct them or when to take over. And if you do it too soon, he's going to be thinking that, "Well, I could've handled this," you know? And so you kind of have to wait until he gets to be a little bit desperate where he really realizes he's in trouble, you know? And you're only talking about a few seconds in there maybe where you have the chance to let him get in there and then get out of it. But it got to be -- I mean, I just, you know, really wanted to do something else. They'd keep telling me, "No, we can't spare you," and that sounded like a lot of bunk, really. But someone gave me a book about the air training command from the beginning through World War II, and when I read that part about World War II, I mean, I realized that the training, you know, really was very, very important, and that we were understaffed. And so what they were telling me probably was true.

FC: Now what was your unit -- did you have a unit number --

PH: Well --

FC: -- designation?

PH: -- no, you just went by the field where you were [staying?]. But they did have different squadrons and so forth. But it was really not quite like your combat units where you have a fighter squadron or something else. And...

FC: You're just ATC for Air Training Command.

PH: Yeah, well, uh-huh. But I got a lot of flight hours, and...

FC: Bet you do, too!

PH: Yeah. I kept bugging them so much at kind of the headquarters there that finally later, why, they said, "Well, the next orders that come in that you want, why, you can have them." So they finally -- but this was way late in the war. And so in the meantime, why, I'd finish a class, and then here comes some new students, and you look at them, and they're -- like, seven of them stand there, and I'd look, and I'm thinking, "You know, every one of these guys are gonna try to kill me at some point."  
(laughter) And as you went through training, they learned, why, about the time they finished the course, [when?] you felt pretty comfortable flying with them. And then -- so they left, and then a couple days later, you'd look at another seven, "And here are these guys gonna try to kill me." And there was a lot to that, but, I mean, you kind of

learn. And I'll get into the B-25 thing (inaudible). What happened was that on the planes that we flew -- are you familiar with AT-9 at all? OK. Later we started flying the AT-17, which was a twin-engine Cessna. And they called [this?]...

FC: [Had?] a split fin, right? The tail was split?

PH: No.

FC: Oh, this one...

PH: No, it was a single tail. That was AT-11, I think. Yeah. The (inaudible). But they called it the Bamboo Bomber. It was made out of wood, and (inaudible), the struts and everything, and, you know, fabric-covered. And it was a five-place plane. They had a pilot, copilot, and then kind of -- like a car. They had a bench seat in the back, they had -- three people could sit there. But, I mean, normally we were just with one or two students, when you were flying. And then eventually all the AT-9s, Douglas ended up with all of them in the United States, the last squadron of them, because the rest of them either crashed or they were -- they took a lot of beating, because they were -- they had a high wing loading, which means you -- when you stall, you stall quick, and if you drop the thing, like, two or three feet, it felt like you dropped it from 10 feet. So they used that a lot. And then later in the war,

we switched to B-25s, which was a medium bomber, and that had a twin tail. And it was a good airplane. It was made by North American. And when they were going to switch to it, they took about, I don't know, seven or eight of us from Douglas, and we went to Sacramento, or flew the -- got checked out in it, just took two, three weeks doing that. And then the first -- we got two B-25s in the base, and they signed one to me and one to one of the other pilots. And what we were supposed to do with that was to take all the instructors up, not to check them out but to let them feel like a real airplane flew, like, (laughs) I guess you'd say. So we did that. And then after we -- all the instructors got to ride in it. And they got to fly a little bit, but -- and then we began checking them out. And then as time went on, they got more planes in, and everyone eventually got checked out in the B-25s. And that was the main plane they used for advanced training, which really was a lot better than what we had been using.

FC: Now how did you like flying it? Would you say that was a sweet plane to handle?

PH: Yeah. I'd have to say it was a fairly easy plane to fly. Now I like -- like the AT-6, the fighter trainer, it had a narrow landing gear, and it was subject to ground loops a lot, you know, where you land and you don't control it and

usually you hit a wingtip or something and so forth. But the B-25 was a nice airplane. And I flew every model that they ever produced. And they had about seven or eight different models. Every one got better, more comfortable, but slower. And the first ones we flew, the B-25As and Bs and then the Cs and Ds, they cruised at about 240 or something like that, 250. And when they came out with a new one, it was nicer to fly, but the last ones they came out would cruise about 180. I mean, they lost a lot of speed. And I think the thing about it was they did not have a tail gunner, originally. And that's sort of an interesting story, in that they did have a [gun turn?].

FC: Right. Top [turn?].

PH: And they had guns up in the -- the bombardier was a gunner in the nose of the B-25, the bombardier compartment. But to fool the enemy, they put a broomstick back there, sticking out. And it didn't do anything, except look like a machine gun. But a person couldn't crawl back there; it was too small. And later, the next step they took was they did put a machine gun down in there, and then they put bungee cords on it, and the pilot controlled it. He just pulled the trigger, and it would just kind of shoot around like this, you know, and scare everybody. But then eventually they made the tail bigger, the fuselage, where a

person could sit back there, and then they put a machine gun and a gunner back there. And I think that probably is what slowed it down the most. And I guess if I had a choice, I'd probably take the broomstick and a faster plane (laughter) than a gunner back there. But it was a good plane. And then, to go on a little bit, I finally -- well, at one point, they got orders in for one fighter pilot, and they sent -- and they let me have those orders. And I was happy with that. And they sent me up to Luke Field, in Phoenix, and then down to Gila Bend, which is a gunnery school. It's just all desert down there. And we got our gunnery there. We flew the AT-6 (inaudible). Then we were told up there that "Take your family home, and when you get home, you'll probably have orders to go somewhere. And you're going to get the rest of your training overseas," which is very unusual. And all of us there were either captains or majors, and they took one from each advanced-training base to do that. So it was sort of a special group. And they never did tell us where we were going or what we were going to fly. And the rumor was that the Japanese were having an offensive in China, and they were using a lot of the fighters to -- were strafing Japanese ground troops. And when you're doing that you're low, and everybody on the ground has a rifle, and they're all

shooting at you. And they were losing most of -- a lot of the flight commanders. They either went in two- or three-plane formations to do that. But I never found out (inaudible) came home, I took as much leave as I could, and ended up back at Douglas and still no orders. But I was frozen to the base, so they couldn't send me anywhere until they canceled that program, whatever it was. So I went back instructing. And then later, they got -- so this is when -- well, later they got orders for four people to go to A-26s, which was a brand-new light bomber, sort of a ground support. I mean, they had bombs and other stuff, but it was used for low level. And it was the closest to a fighter I was going to get, I figured, so I volunteered, and they let me. And then one of my good friends that I went through training with, I went to see him, and he volunteered, and another one. And then the fourth one that went was someone that -- another instructor we didn't know very well. So we were all sent to Del Rio, flying the Martin B-26. And that airplane had a reputation of being the most difficult plane to fly in the air corps, and they had a lot of accidents with it -- although it was very -- in combat they did real well. It was really a strong airplane. I think where they had so much trouble with it is that they started sending people that had gone through

training -- advanced in the AT-6 single engine, and they'd put them into a B-26, and it was just a lot more airplane, number one, and it had [bigger than?] 2000-horsepower engines, two of them, and a different kind of prop, and it was just a different airplane, and it took really a lot more skill. And some of them just didn't get that skill in training, and they were [all kind of?] (inaudible), [like when?] they trained over in Tampa, Florida, [too?], and what they say over there, "One a day in Tampa Bay," you've probably heard that.

FC: (laughs) I heard that, yes.

PH: Well, I don't know if that was true or not, but it was pretty close. (laughter) And so they lost a lot of people in the training in that plane. But after -- I'd flown quite a bit of B-25s; it was a easy transition for me.

FC: Now what was the main difference between a B-25 and a B-26 or A-26 -- the [prop?]?

PH: Well, now, with A-26 and B-26, entirely different. Right now, the A-26 is called a B-26, and there're no more old B-26s flying. They had one of them -- last one was in the Confederate Air Force, and it crashed up in Oklahoma some years ago and killed everybody on board. But they were both called medium bombers. The B-26 was heavier, had bigger engines, it was faster, but it had what they --

like, this higher wing loading. Down on a B-25 coming in for landing, why, you'd come in on the [approach?] around 130 or 120, and you'd touch down about 90 miles an hour. The B-26 you didn't put the gear down until you knew you could make the field. And you made the final approach at 160 miles an hour. And it's touched down about 130, which was fast in those days. But it had a wide landing gear, which made it easier to control on the ground. I mean, I really liked the airplane. But most people that know anything about airplanes that find out I've flown a B-26, they want to know why I was still alive. (laughter) Well, I never had a bit of trouble. (laughs) And then the A-26 was a Douglas -- it was a light bomber, and just a two-place. It had one pilot and one gunner. And you could drop bombs and fire rockets, but mostly machine guns, and it was for mainly ground support.

FC: You had a nose machine gun? Did you have a cannon in the nose also?

PH: No, one of the B-25s -- that was a B-25G, I believe --

FC: Yeah, yeah.

PH: -- had that cannon. I flew the plane, but I never fired the cannon. The people that did said that what it felt like, you were flying along and [far?] the canyon, the plane would stop and back up a little bit and go ahead.

(laughter) I'm sure that's not quite true, but...

(laughter)

FC: I'm sure it felt that way.

PH: And then the A-26 that came along was a -- they had a pilot and a copilot, and one more crew in that. But it was a low-level plane also.

FC: Now, let me ask you, Peter: as you're being an instructor, as a war goes along, did you happen to notice if the younger pilots coming up that you were training were getting younger and younger? Or...

PH: Well, sort of, but not really much. I mean, (inaudible) was when you had to have a -- when they got away from a college degree to high school, well, then, you know, a lot of them were, like, two years younger when they started. And there wasn't a whole lot of difference, really, I didn't think. Well, then, to go on a little bit with my -- I'm just about through with my -- (laughs) but on the A-26, we went to Del Rio for B-26s and we flew that, and then we were transferred -- well, we stayed at Del Rio, but we really didn't have much to do there. And they were waiting, I guess, for air -- to get enough of those produced to where, you know, we'd get an airplane. Well, when we were there, VE Day came along. European war was just over. But the Japanese war was still going on. And

what happened was they -- when you were in, you got points of, like -- like, if you were flying a month in the United States, you got one point, and if you were flying overseas, you got two points, for flying there. If you got medals -- you got five points for every air medal and for Distinguished Flying Cross. So many of the people that'd been in combat came back, had a lot of points. And I had a lot of points for people that -- about as many as you could get if you didn't go overseas. And so what happened, a lot of the -- well, the last job I had at Douglas was training the pilots that had been in combat and come back, and they were making instructors out of them. And so those were the people I was flying with. Well, I won't say anything about the way they flew, but, I mean, [if I was?] training command standards, they weren't real good. (laughter)

FC: They were flying by the seat of their pants.

PH: You know, (inaudible) they were in combat and back, you know. But they didn't really like that. Most of them -- a lot of them didn't. So when VE Day came along, why, they knew they were going to -- everything was going to slow down and then shut down. So they started letting some of the pilots out, and they took the ones that had the most points first. So a lot of the ones that were supposed to -- I'll go back just a little bit, but every once in a while

we'd get some people from [Worstin?] come down to give us a pep talk, and they'd always say, "Well, look, you guys that want to get in combat, you're going to have your chance, as soon as we get to a point where we can -- we'll get the ones overseas to come in and make instructors out of them. They'll replace you, and then you can go to combat." But they didn't get that going until the war was almost over. And so what happened was the training command didn't have enough instructors, and there was a -- I never met him, he was a Colonel [Gulf?], I remember, from Randolph, came down to Del Rio and start looking over the flight records and so forth of those of us who were waiting to be transferred. And, you know, there couldn't have been a better job description than me for that. So I ended back up as an instructor in the training command. (laughter) And I was transferred to Pampa, Texas, and spent the last couple of months there. Now, in the meantime, I mean, I'd become a flight commander and a squadron commander, and I -- so, like, when you're a squadron commander, you really don't have to fly hardly at all if you don't want to. I had an office, but I didn't like to be sitting in it. And so what I would do when we'd get together before our flight period and talk about things, I would ask, "Are any of y'all having any trouble with any student?" And if someone said

yeah, they would, I'd say, "Well, let me fly with them."  
And if no one was having any trouble with them, I'd just pick out a student somewhere and fly with him, and -- where that'd kind of help me, it gave me a little idea of how well the instructor was doing. And so I wasn't on the ground very much. And so then when I got to do Pampa, I was made assistant squadron commander. And they just had two squadrons up there training. And they were just beginning night flying. And I loved night flying, but...

FC: What were you flying? What aircraft were they flying up there?

PH: Any of them, but, I mean, we were flying B-25s up there. And so then I didn't get to see Pampa much in the daylight. And then one of the squadron commanders got transferred, and so they made me squadron commander of that squadron. Well, that was a real unusual training squadron, because all of the students were navigators or bombardiers that'd been overseas in combat, and somehow they picked them to go into pilot training, if they wanted to. And so they were all commissioned officers. Most of them were married. And, you know, it was just kind of an unusual group. But before they finished, the two squadron commanders were called in and said that they're shutting down the training program. And so these people, like, in my squadron had to

make up their mind that morning if they wanted to sign up for, like, five years or something, and if they didn't, then they were going to be out of the flying program. And some of them stayed in, and some of them, you know, didn't. But that was sort of the end of my career there, and then they closed the field, and I think I signed personally for 25 B-25s. And I [didn't even go?] -- that's how many were signed to our squadron. And I never went out and even counted them; I just signed the paper. Anyway, they had never come back and said I owe them one B-25. (laughter) But, you know, I do know that I was a much better instructor after I'd instructed for a while. And, you know, I tell people it's not a very -- I forget the word, term I use, but, I mean, you know, we weren't looking for any credit or anything, but, you know, when you talk to someone, the first thing is, "Oh, you're a pilot, where'd you fly? In Europe, or..."

FC: Unappreciated.

PH: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

FC: I think unappreciated might be the word.

PH: Well, that could be, that could be. But I'm sure the students appreciated it. (laughs)

FC: Certainly.

PH: But...

FC: Do you know if -- I'm sure you trained a lot of young men in your career as an instructor. Do you know any of specifically that were killed in action, after...

PH: No, (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)...

FC: Kind of lost track of them.

PH: I've never kept up with any of them, really. But the one that ran into -- the very first class I instructed, he wasn't the best one in the class. (laughs) And he came back, and he outranked me, and he had medals all over the place, and I finally caught [him one day?], said, "Well, what happened to you?" And he said, "Well, I was flying B-25s over in Africa, and we flew into Italy on a bombing mission, but there was a cloud cover, and we couldn't drop the bombs. So I headed back to Africa, and when I got over the Mediterranean, there was a break in the clouds, and I decided I'll go get under the clouds now rather than somewhere else." They had a chance. So he said he just went through the clouds, and there was a battleship down there.

FC: German or Italian, huh?

PH: I guess. I don't know that he knew. (laughs) But he opened the bomb bay and dropped all the bombs and made a direct hit. So he was a hero. (laughs) But I... in my time, I was checked out in 20 different aircrafts. I flew

a lot of others that I was not qualified to fly by myself.  
And that's a lot.

FC: Oh, (inaudible).

PH: And I had a lot of hours. I've got my file here. I think during the war I logged over 2800 hours, most of it either as pilot or instructor pilot. And then after the war, I stayed in the reserve for a while and got a few more, so I ended up with over 3000 hours -- which is pretty much for a short period of time. I was talking to one of the commanders of the Air Training Command, and he had, like, 30 years, 35 years of service, I think. He was a four-star general. And he was asking me about my flying, and so I was asking him about his. Well, found out that in his 35 years, he'd only flown like 200 hours more than I have during that short period of time. Of course, there were a lot of differences in the airplane and speeds and so forth, you know.

FC: Now let me ask you this: could you give an estimation of how many people you think you trained in your...?

PH: I tell you, there's something in here on that, on the file. I'll get that in a minute. But one other thing that happened was that in -- after I got out, I was released from active duty in October '45, and I had some leave I hadn't used, so I had, like, two months. So I actually

left active duty in December '45, and the war was over on September the 2<sup>nd</sup>, '45. And then in January I get a phone call from Randolph --

FC: Air Force Base.

PH: -- yeah, the Randolph Air Force Base. This person on the other end says, "[Say?], you're going to be decorated, and you're entitled to a parade and the band and all the troops and so forth." And I said, "You've got the wrong person." He says, "No, I got the right person." We went around and around; finally I gave up. And so I said, "Well, what's the simplest way to do this?" And he said, "Well, just come out to the commander's office, and we can do it there." And I said, "OK." So I went out, and I got an air medal. And I thought an air medal was for combat service only, and almost all of them are. But somebody up at Worstin, apparently, towards the end of the war, they thought, "Well, you know, these guys have been instructing all this time, I mean, they ought to have some recognition or something." And so there weren't very many of us, but there were a few that got their medal. Then later, we were having reunions of our instructor groups, and I ended up being in charge of almost all of them. And then I still was working at a (inaudible) and could do a lot of that there that [a lot of them?] didn't, you know, or completely

retire then. And so in one of the air force magazines, from Wright-Patterson, they had an article about a man that instructed at Douglas that we didn't have on our list. I mean, it was a big base. I have a feeling it was probably the biggest air base in the United States and maybe the world, but -- (inaudible) as far as the number of pilots. Anyway, so he wrote this article. It took two issues, you know, quite a long one. We were still having reunions back then, and so I was going to -- you know, wanted to find him. So I called Wright-Patterson and talked to them, and I said, "Could you give me his name -- I mean, his address or phone number?" And said, "No, we can't do that," but I gave all the information, and they said that they would contact him, which they did. And he called me, and then we got him on the list, and he attended a couple of reunions. But he called me one day and said, "Say, I understand that some instructors got the air medal of the Distinguished Flying Cross or something. Do you know anything about it?" (laughs) I said, "Yeah, I got one." And he said, "Well, I wonder if I can get one." Well, that got me thinking, and so I contacted all the -- well, first thing I did, I went out to the personnel center at Randolph, and asked them what the requirements were for that medal. Well, they didn't know. I mean, I have no way of knowing, but I just

have an idea there weren't more than 20 or 25 of those given. And they looked all of the records on all of them that had gotten one, and they came up with the qualification you had to have 2000 hours in the training command, you had to have some supervised (inaudible), you could not have an accident, and you had to be recommended for it. I mean, we had a couple hundred on our list at that time, so I wrote to all of them and told them what the requirements were, and "If you think you qualify, well, let me know and I'll work on it." Well, turned out we only heard from one who thought he was qualified, and when I gave the name out at Randolph, they said, "Well, he didn't have 2000 hours." And so he didn't qualify. There's one other person here in town who did, and he's still living, a fellow named [Lonnie Kale?]. And we were stationed together almost the whole war. And so that's kind of how that occurred. And, I mean, I think it was probably the right thing to do, but I -- you know, when they told, I thought they made a mistake first, because I thought it was a combat only. But as I, you know, think about it further, I mean, first, I wasn't really a -- I just didn't feel like I deserved it, you know? But when you find out that there were hardly any that were given, well, then, I felt a little better (laughs) about it, I guess.

FC: It wasn't your fault that you didn't go into combat --

PH: No.

FC: -- because you wanted to go.

PH: Well, yeah. You know, I've often wondered how I would be in combat, (inaudible), particularly in fighters, whether I'd be aggressive or not. You know, in training people, we did a lot of single-engine [on?] twin-engine planes, [so?] single-engine landings and doing a lot of different things, emergency procedures and so forth. And as an instructor, I would always wonder -- I mean, you know, some would get really excited, and some would stay more calm. And the thing that I always wondered is how, if that ever happened, how they would react. And maybe the calm ones wouldn't be calm. I don't know. You know? But, I mean, I had a lot of single-engine [landing real ones?], and I'd just practice and where an engine went out or I couldn't get a [prop and feathers?] or something. And had one engine quit on takeoff, which is the worst thing.

FC: Oh my!

PH: And I got through that, in a B-25. And...

FC: Were you already off the ground?

PH: Right at the end of the runway, yeah. I was off the ground, but like 10 feet. (laughs)

FC: Oh my.

PH: And...

FC: How did you recover from that, Peter?

PH: Well, what you have to be careful of is that you don't want to stall the airplane. You have to keep your air speed up as much as you can. And if you have too much throttle on it, it'll start turning into the bad engine, and you're going to get in trouble when that happens. And when that happens, if it does, there're just two things you can really do, and one of them is come back on the power, which if you're -- don't have much altitude, not very good, and the other one is put the nose down and pick up speed, which you can't do, you know? So it's a ticklish deal.

FC: Yes, it is.

PH: And I was able to climb up the -- I didn't actually go up to a thousand feet, I think it went up around 800, and then I made a turn and came back -- actually, I landed -- there were no other people flying that day, and I had a fellow with me, and -- anyway, I was able to turn and just come back to the field and make a landing. But that was the first real single-engine landing on (inaudible), and what happens is that when you feather the prop, you know, where it's not turning, you have less drag, and the plane glides further. So when I came back to make the landing, I came in too high, because I wasn't expecting -- I was expecting

it to be more like the practice [winds?]. And so I made a 360-degree turn on the final approach, and lost about two or three hundred feet and then came on in. There's just that kind of narrow place in there where you have the right speed and not too much power, and -- anyway...

FC: Now, that was a learning experience for you, wasn't it?

PH: Well, it was. See, what they did later -- you see, when we were first doing single-engine landings, we would just pull the prop back -- I mean, the throttle back -- on the -- what would be the dead engine. We never did cut the power off. But that causes drag. And so later what they did was on the dead engine, instead of pulling the throttle all the way back, you kept it at 1500 RPM or something, which gave you a little bit of forward motion, and it was more like a real single-engine landing with a feathered prop, you know. But the worst problem I ever had was when I was checking out instructors at Douglas, one of the two planes we had, I had -- one of the instructors would take that B-25 off and [pull?] it up like a (inaudible), you know. And I kept telling him, "I mean, if that engine coughs or quits, why, you're a goner." But he just kept doing it. And so I thought, "Well, I got to do something about that." And so we went up to about -- well, actually, 9000 feet. The elevation out there was 4000, so I was 5000 feet between me

and the ground. And I should've been higher, but, I mean, I wasn't expecting anything (inaudible). We put the gear down and the flaps and came back on the throttle and then gave it full throttle, just like a takeoff, and pulled the plane up. We pulled up the gear and the flaps, and then I pulled the throttle back on the right engine. And so he was there -- I mean, he was flying it. I wasn't. Well, he was like this, [well?], we started turning this way. And I was really getting nervous. But he was still trying it. You know, for years I thought, "Well, he was the most hard-headed guy I ever knew," but I realized I was the most hard-headed, (laughter) because I let him go. And we got that airplane [at a?] spin.

FC: Oh my.

PH: And you don't spin that airplane. And...

FC: Is it flat spin or [nose spin]??

PH: Well, they go into a flat spin. But you have to get it out of the flat spin in order to get the -- you have to get the nose down in order to get out of it. And the only other airplane that I knew of that had ever gone to a spin and got out was when I was checking out B-25s in Sacramento, some of our other -- rest of our group was in another airplane. They were about 10,000 feet, and the elevation was sea level. And they got the plane in a spin same way,

doing a single-engine stall. And they went into a spin, and they lost eight or nine thousand feet. And that's the only thing I could think of (laughs) when it went in a spin, but -- I have an article I'm [out of?], really, if you'd like to take it or read it or...

FC: Sure.

PH: It wouldn't take you very long. They asked me to write an article on that, and I did. But what happened was it -- if I pulled the throttle back probably 5 seconds sooner, maybe 10, this wouldn't have happened. And I was about ready to do it. But it just rolled over on its back -- we had four people on board. (inaudible) was on board, and then the flight engineer was on board -- he was up on the navigator -- I mean, the bombardier nose, just -- and I had a brand-new second lieutenant that, as we were getting ready to go out the airplane, he asked if he could go with us. So he got a chute, and so he was a passenger in it. And anyway, when it went over, what I had to figure I was going to do is just come back on the stick and (inaudible) out of it. But I couldn't operate the controls. And see, the B-25 had just cables and pulleys. There's no, like, power steering on it. And so when the thing was dropping, you know, it was just kind of going down in a flat spin, why, the air -- it was going through the air, pushing the elevator up. And

what you're trying to do is push it down. And I got on the control, and I got him on the control. We were both pushing. We could get the elevator about in neutral, but not down. You know, also, you have to use the rudder. And we both got on the left rudder with both feet, and we couldn't budge it. And so I started using the engines. And, you know, I mean, I've got it all in here, but -- you know, I'm (inaudible) about this later. I've wondered if you could get a twin-engine plane out of a spin with [engines?]. I've never read anything about it; I've never heard anyone talking about it or never heard anyone that had did it, but I thought about it. And so when we couldn't control the plane, that's the first thing I did. I said, "Well, I'm gonna..." And if I hadn't of thought about that before, I don't know if I would've thought about it then. So I finally came to the conclusion that, you know, God must have been preparing me for something I didn't know was going to happen. And so I started using the left throttle -- or the right throttle, rather -- to get it out of the spin. We were spinning to the right. And it got it out of the spin. But as soon as it did, why, we went into a spin to the left. I mean, what happened was we still didn't have any flying speed. And so it was still stalled. And so started using the other throttle, and I

got it -- it almost stopped, and I thought, "Well, I must have come back on the throttle too soon." I didn't think I did, but -- before, so I came back a little ahead of what I thought I should. And this time, why, the plane, it -- we went into, like, an outside loop, and the thing -- not outside, we were inverted. And I could see -- there was a mountain over there, and when we were up this way --

FC: Upside down.

PH: -- I could see the mountain between the nose of the airplane and the sky -- (inaudible) see the sky, rather. So the [attitude?] of the plane was the nose was still high. But then it kind of shook, and then it dropped, and then went into a really fast spin, but we had our nose down. And then I used the throttles again and got it stopped. And we didn't lose more than about 2500 feet in that. I just can't believe it could happen, you know. So I'm pretty lucky to be here.

FC: Well, after you got on the ground, and you got to thinking about it, did you start shaking? I'm sure you [weren't?]....

PH: Yeah, I was not nervous -- I mean, I was -- I don't know what I was, but, I mean, I was working. And so I wasn't just sitting there, waiting for something to happen. That's what happened to the other one. It came out by

itself, but it had dropped so far, and it had picked up speed. And we didn't have that much to drop. The plane was painted olive drab, and came in for landing, and the -- couple things that bothered me. One was when you're running up the engine before takeoff, well, that [whole tail thing?] (inaudible) shaking 'round, and it looked like a weak part of the airplane, but I never heard of one having trouble. But we had a situation that most planes don't get into. And I was kind of wondering whether could've hurt something on the tail. And we looked, and we couldn't find anything. Then I -- the one that they did spin that came out, they'd popped a bunch of rivets, and (inaudible) the [class 26?], that's the -- [junked the?] airplane after they landed. And so the four of us went around and looked to see if we could find any popped rivets, and where you would find them, if they were cracked, right around the rivet, the paint would crack. And we couldn't find any. But you're right, then about that time I started shaking. (laughter) So -- anyway. I mean, I still wake up in the middle of the night sometime thinking about that.

FC: I can imagine.

PH: Yeah.

FC: What Peter is doing right now is looking through a file of papers he has, looking for the -- if he can locate information regarding the number of students he had as a flight instructor. You kept a flight log while you were -- I imagine that was quite a flight log for every time you went up and came down.

PH: That's right. Uh-huh. Yeah.

FC: Did you maintain it -- did you keep your flight log?

PH: No. I mean, that's something you turn in. I...

FC: Did you wife go to Tampa with you when you went to Ta--

PH: Oh no.

FC: -- Pampa, I'm sorry. Pampa.

PH: No. Yeah, Pampa. Yes, uh-huh.

FC: So she moved with you every time you moved.

PH: Right. I don't know, somewhere in here it just says how many students, then it has to do with when I was a flight commander and a squadron commander, how many students were involved. Well...

FC: OK.

PH: I'll tell you what. I'll take a little time to go through this, and I can give you a call, if you're interested in --

FC: Sure.

PH: -- in that.

FC: Well, once you got discharged, you got discharged in Pampa?  
Or did you --

PH: No, I --

FC: -- (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)...

PH: -- at Randolph, actually. I was transferred to Brooks  
Field, where they had a -- kind of a holding pattern for a  
lot of ones that were trying to get out. And [I was  
afraid?] I was going to be --

FC: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

PH: -- way down at the end of that list because I didn't have  
overseas service. But when I got there, I found out I was  
on top of the list, because these others hadn't either, and  
most of them had just graduated, so -- you know, you go  
through a line and leave a bunch of papers and stuff. And  
I didn't make it all the way through the line. There was a  
-- (inaudible) one who was a director of training at Pampa  
was getting out at the same time, and he had taken his  
training and been an instructor at Brooks Field, and he ran  
into somebody there that he knew, and they said, "Well,  
what are you doing here?" He said, "Well, I'm getting  
out." And he said, "Well, [you really?]..." He said, "We  
can send you to Randolph till tomorrow." So we went back  
and picked up our papers and (laughs) we weren't stationed  
there very long. Well, I'm sorry, I don't know why...

FC: Oh, that's all right, Peter. We're about to conclude this interview. Is there anything you'd like to add before we turn off the machine?

PH: All of us were pretty young then. I mean, we really, I think, had a lot of responsibility for our age, without any really training for that. And the thing that I think has - - that was nice about this, if anything is nice, (laughs) is that almost everybody was behind the armed forces then, and they had hardly any -- there were a few, you know, but mostly everybody supported us. And I remember when I got to Taft, there was a Christmas there, and went into Bakersfield -- there were about three or four of us -- and stayed at this nice motel and had dinner there. And when we got the call for the check, one of the waiters came and said, "There isn't any." (laughs) And then say, "Well, these people over here did this," and that, so we went over and thanked them, you know. But we really had a lot of support. And the other thing I have noticed since then is (inaudible) I was head of the insurance company, really, for quite a long time -- which -- and then it did very well. But we would set goals, objectives, and things, and some people would take forever to get everything put together, you know, and they'd say, "Well, I need to talk to so-and-so," or "I need to do something." I mean, you

know. And I guess I'd get a little irritated for the length of time sometimes. I'd think, "You know, when you're up there in an airplane, and you have a problem, you don't call a committee together and, (laughter) you know, you can't go read a book and one thing or another to see what you're supposed to do." You make a decision. And it may not always be right, but I guess most of the time it is. I mean, I really enjoyed flying. And when I got out, I was called on a number of times by people selling airplanes, and when they found out I was a pilot too, why, they thought they had a sale. But I tried to figure out what it would really cost. And we didn't get the same tax benefit as some corporations did, but it just looked like it -- I mean, if you had, like, four people going to the same place all the time, well, yes, but I'd be myself or with one other, and the airline was just a lot cheaper, you know. But when I got out, the company was really very small, and my mother was having a lot of difficulty, and so I felt kind of obligated to come back. You know, I think I could've gotten a permanent commission if I wanted it, but I did not apply for it. But when we -- I had that squadron with all the navigators and bombardiers, we had a night cross-country and landed at Wichita, Kansas, just a touch and go. And that was a civilian field. And I flew up

there early and went up to the tower, in case somebody was having some trouble. And when I got up there, there was another man up there that was not one of the tower operators. And they had one of the twin-engine Beechcrafts, making night landings there. And he was up there doing kind of the same thing I was. If they had any trouble, why, he could get on the radio and help them. And he got talking to me, and he started asking about what I'd flown and so forth, and did I have a college education? Yeah. "What kind of degree?" "I got a business degree." And, you know, all my answers were just exactly right. I wasn't lying to him about them; it was the truth, you know? And said, "Well, you know, what we -- we've got all these orders for corporate aircraft, and we need some pilots that can deliver them and then train their pilots." And he said, "What happens is all the bigwigs want to ride in it, so you take them for a ride," and that Beechcraft was about a -- I don't know, a nine-passenger plane or something, I can't remember. The transport version. And he said, "We're looking for pilots, and what happens so often, why, you'll get to meet all the bigwigs, and [they'll?] take a liking to you, sometimes they'll keep you on as a pilot and put you through management training, and you end up in management somehow at these big corporations, and, you

know, we pay a thousand dollars a month for that." Well, I was getting about 500 as a captain with flight pay. I called my mother, and I said, "If I come there and work, what kind of salary can I get?" And she -- "Two hundred a month." (laughter) And I came home, and I'm glad I did, but it was sure tempting.

FC: I'm sure it was. Well, I...

PH: Well, do you have any questions that...

FC: No, sir, I think we've pretty well covered the subject, Peter.

END OF AUDIO FILE