

## Richard Ford Oral History Interview

CHARLIE SIMMONS: This is Charlie Simmons. Today is the 25th of October, 2012. I am interviewing Dick Ford. This interview is taking place in San Antonio, Texas, in support of the Nimitz Education Research Center, Archive for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this site. Now, Dick, if you would, please, state your name, your date of birth, and your place of birth? And we'll take it from there.

RICHARD FORD: My name is Richard T. Ford Sr. I was born October 11, 1922, in Madera, M-A-D-E-R-A, California.

CS: Okay. And did you have brothers and sisters?

RF: I have an identical twin brother, who was born nine minutes before I was. That's the only other one that was born to my mother and father.

CS: Okay. What did your father do?

RF: He was a title insurance person, in Security [Title?] Insurance and Guarantee Company, in Stockton -- actually in Fresno first, and then part of the newly connived agency in Stockton.

CS: And did you spend your life there in the central valley, if you will?

RF: In the central valley, yes. I was born in Madura, and then at about one year old, for a year, went to Fresno, and then to Stockton till I was about entering the sixth grade, from which time we went back to Madura and stayed there through high school, and initial employment. Then [we were?] transferred all over the state.

CS: So where did graduate from high school?

RF: Madura.

CS: Madura? What were you doing December 7, 1941?

RF: I was attending a junior college in San Bernardino, and that Sunday morning, with some very close friends, having breakfast, when the news broke that the Japanese had struck Pearl Harbor.

CS: Do you remember what the feeling was like, with the people you were with?

RF: Shock. Even though there was knowledge of the problems within the Japanese government, but the treachery, really, in a sense, began when the attaché left Washington without saying anything, and the attack occurred, I think -- that may have been on Friday -- on the following Sunday.

CS: And so what did you do after the war began?

RF: At that time, our junior college was taken over by the Navy for training of Navy pilots in their academics. And I

returned from education leave to the California Division of Forestry, in those days, as a firefighter.

CS: You would have been 19 --

RF: That was in 1941. I actually left the educational leave on January 1, 1942.

CS: But you were already in the military?

RF: In those days, when I was attending junior college, Bob and I were both members of the State Guard, but not part of the military. We didn't join the military until -- in the latter part of 1942. As a matter of fact, on October 1, 1942, my brother and I took the examinations, both physical and mental, for the Navy V-5 program, which was their pilot training program. And on the 12th of November -- there was a lot of publicity about it as the first identical twins to be accepted for the Navy's pilot program. But on December 12, the Navy said, and Washington said, that we had childhood contact with tuberculosis, and therefore would not be accepted as a Navy cadet program. So we immediately applied and were granted cadet program in the US Army Air Corps, but were told, when we signed up on December 12, that, "Go back to your work, and we'll give you a call when we want you."

CS: Okay. So you are signed up officially, but you haven't been through any training?

RF: That's right. We were actually members of the -- but without being called, yeah, we were --

CS: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

RF: Yeah. So actually it wasn't until February that they called us and said report for active duty.

CS: Okay. So report -- you reported for active duty as a trainee? Did you go through --

RF: Actually, it was actually has a -- even prior to the US Army pilot program, we were basically just enlisted, and got one month of basic training in Fresno, basic military training. And from there were transferred to -- the group was taken to Washington State college for a five-month course as what they called a college training detachment, to provide the necessary technical and academic needs for a prospective pilot.

CS: What was the name of that program, do you remember? There was a number associated with the --

RF: I don't remember the number. However, it was the -- just the college --

CS: Yeah, it was called the A-12 or B-12, or something?  
(overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

RF: I can't tell you the name of that one, but that one was a brand-new program developed. They had -- it was a five-month program. However, they needed to have a continuation

of cadets -- or potential cadets -- go through this training, so I was placed in the two-month class, which was the shortest one. My brother was placed in the three-month class. And that's when we were separated in our military service.

CS: And so this two months, then, of your college training, and then you went to cadet training?

RF: And we then went to Santa Ana Army Air Base, which was basically a one-month introduction to the program. And if you passed that, then you were accepted as an -- in the cadet program, which lasted for two months at Santa Ana. And then continuing through two month-trainings in primary, basic, and advanced pilot trainings, it was a six-month program before you graduated as a pilot, and also as a second lieutenant.

CS: So you had ground training starting at Santa Ana, and you also had your flight training there?

RF: No. Actually, the flight training did not start until we actually entered primary, which was a two-month program. So we spent -- off hand, I'm trying to remember whether it was -- I think it was just one month after -- or two months in Santa Ana, I think. One was as a -- just basically an introduction to see if you could pass everything, and your high altitude and all, and physical and mental. And then

you began your flight training at -- actually, it was Cal-Aero Flight Academy in Ontario, that I took it. And that was for two months with -- it happened to be an ideal choice. We were rated the number one cadet group in Santa Ana, so we got the choice location for primary.

CS: So primary -- what sort of planes did you fly?

RF: It was the Stearman, PT-13s.

CS: Okay. And had you ever flown before then?

RF: While we were in Washington State College, we got 10 hours of flight in a Piper Cub, just to get us familiar -- just to, I guess, say that we had had some flight experience.

CS: A little coordination, at least.

RF: We really didn't do any landings or takeoffs, but merely just to be familiarized with the aircraft, or flight.

CS: Yeah, the concept. Okay. So how long did your primary training...?

RF: That's a two-month course. Each one of the progressive training courses was two months. Two months at Cal-Aero for primary in the PT-13. Then two months at Lemoore Army Air Base in the basic trainer, the PT-13 -- I think that's right. But only -- we were in an advanced program there, even, and so we only took one month in basic trainer. And then in the second month, our particular squadron was assigned to UC-78s, called the Bamboo Bomber, which is a

twin-engine electrically operated aircraft. That was for the second month. And we were on an accelerated program to train us for a brand new aircraft being developed.

CS: So this was multi-engine, then?

RF: Two-engine aircraft, and basic training, for the last half of the two-month program at Lemoore.

CS: Okay. So you were essentially being trained for multi-engine --

RF: Yes.

CS: Either bombers or transport, or...?

RF: It was -- we didn't know. All we knew was we were in an advanced program, and only some of the class was put into the special two-engine aircraft for the second month. From there, we went to La Junta, Colorado, for our advanced training in flying B-25s. It was a stripped down aircraft that actually had the armament -- or the armor taken off, but everything else was B-25. They called it the AT-24, because the armor was removed.

CS: The AT-24. That's a new one on me. So what did you think about the B-25? By this time, Doolittle had already done his raid on Tokyo.

RF: Yes. We realized that there was something else in the wind that -- we always -- we either flew the instructor or with another cadet, always, in the B-25, or the AT-24. And from

there, the entire class was, instead of given what we thought would either be the P-61 or the brand new B-26, both attack bombers -- one was a night fighter bomber -- we were -- the whole group was assigned to troop carrier. And we were all horribly disappointed, because we were looking forward so much to the combat in one of the brand new aircraft. But the instructor, or the CO, told us, "You don't know how lucky you are." So when we were -- from there, we took -- assigned to transition in the C-47 at Bergstrom Field, which is in Austin, Texas.

CS: So you went to Bergstrom. Now, what would be the time frame that you think --

RF: I graduated in March 1944, and I went and stayed -- I got some time off. I was married at that time. And I was in Texas for about six weeks, and left to go overseas to England about the first part of June 1944. And that's -- we were actually enroute overseas on board a -- I think it was the *America* -- a ship to England, when D-Day actually occurred.

CS: Okay. So you got to England. Did you have a co-pilot or a crew or anything, or were you just still an individual at this time?

RF: Well, I was taken early, and so I was -- in one month. It was a two-month course, but after one month, I guess they



decided that I was qualified, so I went over as part of a crew. But as an arrival in England, there was no -- they just took the crewmembers and no longer were a crew. They just flew as -- individually, the crew chief, the radio operator, the co-pilot, and the pilot.

CS: Okay. So you were assigned to a crew that had already had combat experience, or just (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)?

RF: No. Actually, in our troop carrier group, there was no assigned crews. There was a crew chief, of course, that had his own aircraft, or the aircraft that he maintained, and pilots would vary to the plane they would fly, or to who the members of the crew would be. However, the crew chief would either fly or have an assistant fly, so actually the airplane management -- or maintenance -- always had somebody with us in flight, and [then their?] maintenance. The radio operators did vary, because a crew was a radio operator, a crew chief, a pilot, and a co-pilot. And if it was a flight lead or squadron lead, a navigator was assigned.

CS: And what was your job assignment at that time, then?

RF: I was a co-pilot.

CS: Co-pilot. Okay. And you might be assigned to different pilots for different -- on different occasions?

RF: You never knew what plane or pilot you would fly with, except I was eager to fly, so I quite often flew when others said, "Hey, leave me out today."

CS: So this was flying training flights at this time, or...?

RF: This was mostly in training and resupply, taking supplies over to the Continent, as gasoline or some fuel, or some kind of supplies necessary for the front lines. And then in the earliest days, bringing back any injured as a medical aircraft.

CS: Okay. So on the C-47 you had the wherewithal to be able to put in stretchers for the wounded after you got your cargo offloaded --

RF: Yes. That's correct. And it did very depend on the degree of injuries that the people had suffered. But roughly it was about eight at the most, sometimes six. And then occasionally, even in Normandy, at the front lines at the beachhead, some of the people there would actually just put somebody else aboard the aircraft, knowing that they were critically injured and probably would not survive, but they didn't want them to die there. They wanted to get them back to England, where they would be properly cared for, and their body properly treated, instead of being just kept there on the beaches. They were trying to evacuate all those seriously injured that couldn't fight.

CS: Did you -- on either end, whether loading up in England, or offloading on the Continent, were you involved in any of the loading of the cargo, or were you basically just having -- were there ground crews that did all the [transport?]?

RF: The only people -- we -- no. The pilot, and co-pilot, and radio operator had nothing to do with that. But the crew chief, yes, was the one who directed where things were to go, and load the plane. And it was from various English bases where there were supply sources that would provide the -- whatever the emergency need was overseas in the combat area, that we would carry that to whatever the destination was desired. So we flew all over front lines advanced. We flew all the way across everything from central France to northern France, into Belgium and over to Germany. So as the front line advanced, we advanced with it, so we knew where the war was going, simply by where our emergency needs were. And toward the latter -- oh, mid part of the war, when it was longer distances, we flew, quite regularly, five-gallon gasoline cans to Patton's Third Army.

CS: Now were you flying into -- well, makeshift fields, obviously, because they had to be put together pretty rapidly. Were these basically just, knocked some trees down in a pasture, or what sort of conditions?

RF: Sometimes it was in German airbases that had been -- the runways had been taken care of. But quite often, it was nothing more than a grassy pasture, and you were at the front lines -- or just behind the front lines, where the need was for fuel. And some of them were kind of makeshift and short, to say the least, but we always delivered, so it didn't matter. (laughs) It was close, sometimes, the length of the field or the condition of the field. And finally in the muddy areas, they had what was called a pierced steel plank, where you'd land on that, and so the mud would go flying, and the muddy water would go flying, while you landed, and the bottom of the planes got pretty well muddied up. But we were able to manage, no matter what the condition was. If they needed it, somehow they arranged for us to be able to get there and deliver.

CS: Yeah. So, well, I mean, since these were sometimes new places -- well, they almost always were probably new places you were flying into -- did you ever have a problem locating your landing field?

RF: No. The squadron -- actually, we always flew in formation, and our whole group, or squadron, would always fly together under a lead navigator and the squadron lead or the group lead. So we always knew how to get there.

CS: Okay. So you were never flying solo. How many planes in your squadron on a typical flight?

RF: I would say probably 14 to 18. So that would be just one squadron out of the four. It depended, too, where some, maybe, we would -- only half of the group would go to some destination and the other half would go to some other destination. But generally it was always the same place. And there was a need, so -- you never knew where you were going until you were underway.

CS: So with all the bad weather that they can have in that part of the world, especially through the wintertime, that it must get kind of touchy, just trying to find the place, and then get it [down?]?

RF: Yes. That was up -- we followed. Only the lead plane is the one that directed where we went and how we went there. But yeah, we got into some horrible weather conditions. We would actually -- we got quite competent and confident in our flying, and we would fly in formation even in a solid overcast. We were using three flight lights behind -- on the back of the -- on the top of a wing, and that was your ground, and you just flew -- and under those conditions. In one instance, we were flying that, and I was in the -- what's called the left end of it. I was flying in the third echelon as the number two plane in the last three-

plane formation on the left, and a diamond flying behind us, when we -- in solid clouds, we saw a light flash beside our left wing. The co-pilot asked, "What's that?" I said, "Oh, that's the tower from the radio station." We'd flown that route so many times, we knew where we were. And the diamond behind me immediately went up to get away from it, but I knew that we were flying down the valley with this mountain range on our left. And somehow the lead plane or the formation was a little bit loose, so we were awfully close to that tower, and probably were about, I would say, 30 feet away from it when we passed it. But we were able to land successfully. But that was another story, landing in Épernay. That was the field, south of Reims.

CS: Wow. Did you ever get to -- find a field where you had to turn back, or find a landing location that you just simply couldn't put it in, it wasn't long enough, or other conditions?

RF: Never. We -- well, we had a reputation that we would always deliver. That was, I will come. That was our motto. And we came, every time. Even when a mission was recalled over Market Garden, we still came.

CS: Did you tow gliders?

RF: We towed gliders in practice, in training. We towed single gliders, the CG-4A. We towed double CG-4As in formation,

and they found that would not work. Then we flew, also, the British Horsa, towed it, and it was too much for the C-47. So in combat, we actually dropped paratroopers every time, whereas other outfits would tow the gliders.

CS: And so did you fly on any parachute drops, then?

RF: Yes.

CS: Okay. Which...?

RF: Actually, in -- those were the combat drops, and besides training. Yeah, we flew them in training as well, with different groups that were going to --

CS: What altitude?

RF: Just in practice, we would fly, maybe, at a couple thousand feet. But when it came time to drop, even in training, about six hundred feet. That was the intent. However, even in combat, we adjusted it, because if the ground fire was intense, if you drop a paratrooper at six hundred feet, he's floating up there for a long time, and he's a sitting, falling target for all of the German materiel. So we would vary it down lower, and we'd always slow down the aircraft so that it would be easier for them to drop.

CS: Did you drop the wheels, or the flaps, or...?

RF: No. We would -- normally the cruising speed was 150. We would drop it to 120, because the flap wouldn't come down till 120. We'd put down one-quarter flaps to deflect the

wind from the exiting door, which was the cargo door on the left side of the aircraft. Then would be as low as maybe 450 or 500 feet. We were told by some of the -- and in fact, "Just don't leave us sitting up there. Give us at least one swing before hitting the ground." But that was pretty short, so we would try to give them a couple of swings, and that would minimize their airtime, where, even though they were trying to fire on the ground, you can't fire very effectively from a falling parachute.

CS: Did you always drop in daylight?

RF: We dropped always in daylight, but on -- I wasn't there for D-Day, because I was a D-Day replacement, but they dropped at night. As a matter of fact, our group -- the weather was horrible, cloud formation over the intended drop zones. And the pathfinder planes that were supposed to identify, this is where we want you to land, this is the site, had a foul-up, and they couldn't -- either didn't get there, or their radios weren't functional. So a lot of it was done by the lead navigator, because we're always in formation. And it so happened that our particular group, the 315th Troop Carrier Group, was the only one that was on target, on time, and received the Presidential Unit Citation for that performance.



CS: From what I've heard, there weren't too many that were on target and on time.

RF: To my knowledge, only the 315th. And that was at Sainte-Mère-Église, flying the 82nd Airborne.

CS: Okay. What did it feel like, knowing that you had to fly straight and level at least for a period of time, and --

RF: You accepted the consequences without even thinking things about it. I had -- I was pilot over the Rhine in the Varsity mission, and I had a co-pilot with me. I was flying a number three of a squadron wing. And the C-46s ahead of us are getting shot at very heavily, and they were hydraulically -- a lot of the hydraulic lines, so there's a lot of fire, and a lot of explosions. And the shock of seeing that for the first time was too much for the co-pilot. He absolutely froze. He could not move. So I had to do both his job and mine.

CS: So you were the pilot by this --

RF: I was a pilot. And then so, meanwhile, at the same time, the -- this is an additional little story -- and we were flying British, and the British first one in the doorway fell down in the door. And the crew chief hollered up to me, "They didn't get out. The first one fell down in the door." So I had a few words to say, and then said, "I'll make another pass." So instead of making that whole 360, I

went over deeper into Germany and made a turn that would put me back on the reverse course, and flew back over the drop zone, and dropped that time. I got by pretty easy until the Germans realized that I was dropping paratroopers, and they just decided that was time to try to take action against me, so some German artillery piece and I had arguments, and he was 20 feet or 20 yards ahead of me with his explosions, and I kept dropping, or slowing down. And when we got to where he could no longer reach me, he was still 20 feet or 20 yards ahead of me, (laughs) right in front of my nose, but everything was going away from me and not to me. But we did get a lot of holes in the aircraft from ground ammunition, ground fire. So that was really not as eventful as it would have seemed. On the way back, I guess they weren't really concerned about me flying back toward the American lines, but we were over, by then, past the Rhine, over the main defensive -- but they didn't take exception to the fact that I was there. They were busy looking for incoming.

CS: They must have been surprised to see this plane coming from the opposite direction from all the left, though, (laughter) so that's a little surprise [for them?].

RF: I have no gripes.

CS: (laughter) So were you flying on Market Garden?

RF: Actually, in Market Garden, there were -- we had four different flights. We flew the 92nd, and I was to a town called Grave, G-R-A-V-E, which was part of the Eindhoven-- I beg your pardon, Nijmegen area. And that was -- again, I was co-pilot, flying on -- wasn't the flight lead. I think it was just one of the planes. We dropped on target, on time, and then -- that was on the first day. On the second day, we carried the British, but I did not go on that mission. This was to the north end of it, up toward Ginkel Heath, which was the British primary drop area. But it was still a long way away from Arnhem. And then the next trip was supposed to be the Polish brigade. The weather was horrible, and it was impossible to fly on that day. Although we were ready to go, and the Polish troops were sitting at the aircraft waiting to be loaded, nothing happened. And the second day, same thing. Nothing happened. But by then, the tension was getting pretty severe on the part of the Polish airborne, and one of them was arguing with his commander, and he just committed suicide. There was a --

CS: I understand they were pretty emotional about it. They said the Polish, that they were always worried about the Polish fighter pilots crashing their planes into the

Germans, because they were almost suicidal, that they hated them so much.

RF: I don't know that that ever existed with us, but this problem was, when this paratrooper committed suicide, was basically [detention?], and knowing that he was wrong by doing that, so he just committed suicide. I was flying co-pilot with the flight lead on that particular mission. Finally, on the third day, our formation, our group, the 315th, all of the planes took off. However, the weather was foul. They said it was supposed to clear up. So that was a situation whereby we all lined up nose to tail on the runway, with the lead plane taking off, and then everybody following. When the lead plane cleared the runway -- of course, we were loaded with paratroopers -- he had safely taken off. The next plane would immediately be firing up and moving down the runway. It was into a solid overcast, so the rule for that day was, once you clear the runway, you get to an airspeed of 120 miles an hour, commit yourself to a single needle turn to the left on a circular motion, climbing 500 feet a minute. So it was a staggered corkscrew of planes flying through about, I guess, five hundred to a thousand feet of cloud, before you broke into the clear. Then you formed the group formation up above that. I think we were about three thousand feet when we

finally were making formation. And despite the sensitivity of all those (laughs) conditions of getting off the ground, we didn't lose a single plane. We all were on our way, but had to -- the weather was unfavorable. We went to finally 10,000 feet to get above it, but in that process -- I didn't hear it. The radio was off -- but they said that there was a recall issued, and two of the squadrons turned back to England, to our base in England, but our squadron and the 309th did not. We were following our 310th's commanding officer. He was in charge of the [second serial?]. So we actually made our drop at Driel, just east of Driel, successfully. But meanwhile, because there apparently had been that abort instruction, there was no aircraft defense or protection. We were sitting ducks for the German artillery on the ground, which was already heavily involved with fighting their defense to hold the bridge over the Rhine, and all the key bridges. We took tremendous losses, and as a matter of fact, our crew chief and radio operator were both injured -- our crew chief seriously, almost critically. But the pilot and I were not hurt at all. But the experience of that flight and the number of holes in that aircraft were absolutely unbelievable. We had so much anti-aircraft and ground weapons fired at us, that there's a storage area at the

rear of the aircraft, behind the cargo area, and that door was absolutely riveted shut from the ground fire that came there. We also were (laughs) stuck above the formation, because our paratroopers were slower getting out, so we were the last one to leave the drop zone, and so we were being targeted solely at the end of it, as the only aircraft that would be available. While we were in a steep bank to try to get down under -- because our airplanes were flying underneath us, we couldn't drop down. We had to stay on the same elevation. We had an air burst explosion right underneath the steel plating that formed the bottom of the cargo area, and it basically rendered all the controls inoperable. We could take the wheel, which would control the rudder and the elevators, and it was absolutely no pressure at all, the cables had been stretched or broken so greatly. We finally discovered that -- I was flying co-pilot, but the pilot says, "We're going in." But he managed to use trim tab to maintain some vertical height, to keep the plane from crashing, and we then gradually got back the feeling on the controls, and got as far as -- meanwhile, our crew chief was injured, so I had to leave the seat and help try to save the crew chief's life. And we got as far as Eindhoven, and the pilot said, "Let's land here." Actually, he said it's the best glider drop zone.

I told him that on the way up, we had seen a field just west of Eindhoven that looked like it had work being done on it -- that's where the 82nd would have been. So I said, "Hey, I've got a child that I haven't seen yet." So I said, "Let's try it and see if we can get to Eindhoven," while we figured that we'd have a chance. But meanwhile, with the left rudder shot out and the controls bad, I couldn't get the gear down, and I was still back helping, trying to save the crew chief. And meanwhile, the navigator was sitting in the right seat, the co-pilot's seat. And I said to him, "You get out of the seat. Let me get up and see what's wrong." So actually our flight speed was too great to allow the gear to come down. The pilot apparently was distracted by the fact that he had no control on the turning to the left, but he couldn't turn to the right, because if we turned to the right that would have put us back in the German area. And we slowed the plane down and were able to get a little flap down -- some flap. Meanwhile, the gear wouldn't come down until you were under 120. So just as we were about to land, I saw the indicator. So I put the landing gear position down, and it was not over two to three seconds from the time we actually touched ground that I was able to kick down the locking lever that would keep the gear from collapsing. So

it was just two to three seconds. Otherwise we would've been a wheels-up landing. As it was, we were able to roll -- it was an emergency landing, all right -- and got the crew chief and radio operator into the hands of the medics of the 82nd Airborne. And so that was into that part of it. But that was the --

CS: Was this while the 82nd was still isolated from the US lines, or --

RF: Yeah.

CS: -- from the Allied lines [there?]?

RF: Yeah.

CS: So you were still surrounded. You were not out of trouble yet, just because you were on the ground.

RF: No. Actually, it was in the stages where they -- yeah, that night it wasn't, but the next day, there were American or Allied ground equipment that had come up from Brussels. So actually that night, we stayed with the 82nd, sleeping in straw matted bunks that the Germans had. It was an ex-German airfield. So then that next day, we actually got back to Brussels and let them know that we were alive and fine, and talked to the commander -- the American commander at the British -- the Brussels airport, which was Colonel Richards, and he told us just stay over here overnight. We wanted to go back up and see what we could do about the



plane. And so he said, "Tomorrow, I'll take you up." And so the next morning at ten o'clock, we met him back after staying at a hotel in Brussels. And he and a nurse took the three of us -- the navigator and the pilot and me -- back up there to the airport. And he made a decision about what equipment had to be replaced before we could take the plane out. So we said fine. So we were stuck there that day. And that's the day that we went to the front lines to collect souvenirs.

CS: Well, why not? [Once you're there?].

RF: (laughter) Yeah. And then, finally, after that night, the next day some British Typhoons had taken over the field, and their engineering officer would not allow us to fly it off. He said it's not safe to fly. But that night, we actually slept aboard the aircraft, the three of us.

CS: Did they have Marston matting down, or -- I mean, why wouldn't he allow you to take off?

RF: Just unsafe. There was only one strand of wire to the tail that would control the elevators. Only one strand out of a wrapped series. That's all that was left. So we were that close to not having any control at all over our altitude.

CS: Well, that would not be good.

RF: (laughter) It was -- we -- (laughs) it wasn't until we actually had landed and really looked over the airplane,

and removed the viewing cover in the cargo area, to realize how severe that -- and that actually, the actual impact of the artillery burst had occurred in that area. That's why we had no control, what expanded all of the wiring so you had -- I mean cables. And just to have one left. It's by the grace of god that it did. And so we always felt that -- I guess that luck was with us. And he -- I know the pilot always felt that I was going to get hit while we were going through all of this. Literally thousands of -- ground fire from both sides coming in on us. We had to fly at ground level. And when we'd come to a row of trees, we'd just pull up enough to cut the top of the trees off, then dive back to the ground again, because of the German's concentration along the access roads from Arnhem, and Nijmegen, and Eindhoven. Actually, Eindhoven always was -- from when we were there -- was held by the Allied forces. The town about five miles north, Best, was where the Germans were entrenched.

CS: So did you ever -- flying that low and so close to the lines, did you ever get fired on by Allied troops?

RF: No. They saw C-47s and knew what they were.

CS: Okay. Did you have that D-Day markings with the big, wide white and black stripes beneath the wings?

RF: There were three different ways that that was done. On D-Day, that's true. All the old pictures you see of the stripes on the front, on the top, on the bottom, on the wings -- I mean, around the fuselage, and tops and bottoms of the wings -- was done on D-Day. In Market Garden, it was removed on the bottom. So if the Germans were trying to use those C-47s -- I don't know why they ever would for intrusion -- it was done, so that they would know that -- that was done over Varsity, which is the Rhine drop. The coloration was changed and removed. So there was something distinctive about each of those three missions, about the marking of those aircraft. And as a matter of fact, the marking for D-Day was actually done the night before by the ground crews, so no one would have known how -- that's just to give the aircraft and ground fire an opportunity to identify, this is an Allied aircraft, not a German aircraft. All Allied planes were treated that way.

CS: Sure. If they'd let it out early, the Germans could've painted their aircraft with the same patterns.

RF: Fighter planes, particularly. So that was a way they would know who to shoot at and who not to. And from the ground, the same way. Also the 82nd had a unique system to identify their people on the ground. Everybody in the 82nd, to my knowledge, carried a cricket, one of these

little clicks. And so if you clicked, and somebody else that you saw did not click, shoot. But if they clicked back at you, you knew it was another 82nd, and you could join up together. So as a matter of fact, I do have a cricket, personally, that was given to me.

CS: Oh, that's neat. That's a nice souvenir. I just remember that when the 82nd dropped in Sicily, they got shot up pretty badly by the US Navy, because they --

RF: Lack of communication between forces, Navy and Air Force -- or Army Air Corps. That was a horrible experience. We kept learning, and finally, by Varsity, we learned everything we needed to. Up until then, there were some critical mistakes that were very harmful. One of the successes of D-Day was the fact that we did not land where everybody was supposed to, because the Germans were, in effect, waiting at those positions. But when they were scattered so much, the Germans didn't know where everybody was. They thought it was a massive force of people that had dropped into the area. So they said they were confused. And it was only through that malfunction that probably was a great factor in the success of Overlord.

CS: That's a good theory. Well, was Operation Varsity the last big paratrooper drop, then?

RF: That was the most massive in the history, and all done at once. I think, if I remember rightly, the formation of aircraft was 52 miles long. And after that was the -- we had the Bulge. And we took our aircraft into there, and supplies into there, but that was the last one from the Bulge. But that was the last -- Varsity was the last paratroop drop.

CS: Were you doing airdrops at Battle of the Bulge, then?

RF: I did not. Our group did not. We carried the 11th -- or one of the American airborne divisions -- to the -- as close to the frontline as we could. I think it was just east of Reims. And we dropped them there, in support for General Gavin's "Battle Bastards of Bastogne." (laughter) And then we, of course, carried supplies over there, too, but we would drop -- we didn't do much of that while -- I think -- I don't know why -- we were pretty badly -- well, we flew as much as we could, bringing in supplies, I think, for reinforcements, rather than to direct -- outside of the American Airborne division that we flew in. But it took a lot of the aircraft to do that -- to get the whole division in there. But we were landing short of Bastogne, and then they were advancing toward it as Patton was coming up from the south.

CS: So you were supplying the troops that were coming in to relieve Bastogne.

RF: To try to reach Bastogne from the west. It's also as a distraction to the Germans, because they had already flanked a lot of this area, and we were south of them, where they were making their advance toward the coast of France.

CS: Well, so after you got back from your little shoot down episode, did you immediately get back into flying supply missions, or what happened to you after that?

RF: Actually, when we finally got back, right afterwards, and reported in to our operations officer, he realized what we had gone through, and he said, "You three are entitled to some time off. Where do you want to go?" And we said, "Back to Brussels." So we had a three days given, and we were flown into Brussels, just to relax and rest. But as soon as we said, aw, to heck with this. We came back, I think, in two days rather than three. And then we were immediately right back into supply missions, because this was when Patton was advancing strongly. And it was too long a reach for anything on the ground to get there, because they used the same gasoline that the tanks and ground equipment did, whereas we had a different grade of gasoline. And so whatever we flew wouldn't affect -- every

gallon of gas we brought was used by whatever it was supposed to be, the tanks or whatever it was.

CS: Where was your base in England? Did you fly out of the same base all the time you were there?

RF: We stayed only in one base all the time, in the Midlands, called Spanhoe, S-P-A-N-H-O-E. It's located in the triangle bet-- in the Midlands, between Peterborough, Kettering, and Leicester. So we always flew there, except when we went on Varsity, we relocated overnight to a town called Boreham, B-O-R-E-H-A-M, which is near London. It was to put us closer to our destination.

CS: Okay. Well, did you have much time to take any leave when you were in England? In between flying missions, you had some down days. Were you able to get into any of the larger cities?

RF: Yeah. At any time that you wanted to, within a month -- every month, you could maybe take three days off. And I would go to -- very frequently to London. I was in several of the major cities just to visit and enjoy it. And even though there was bombing going on in London, and all of this, we enjoyed it. I saw -- thoroughly enjoyed visiting London, and it was just a relief from the daily routine.

CS: What kind of food did they have in the public restaurants there at that time?

RF: We didn't eat in any public restaurants. We ate, basically, in Red Cross facilities, or something of that nature, in London, or in some of the other cities, some of the picturesque cities in England, where there was a train. We'd be taken to a train depot, and we'd take the train wherever we wanted to go, and most of the time, it was always London. I went maybe half a dozen times; I was probably in London, whereas I would go to some of the other places maybe another six times or so.

CS: Did you feel pretty welcomed by the British people?

RF: Oh, yeah. They were very gratified. They were very friendly, very warm, very cooperative, very helpful, and very appreciative.

CS: Did you ever get used to the British beer at room temperature?

RF: (laughs) We all learned to drink warm beer and enjoy it. But we found that the British could not make coffee, but they made real good tea.

CS: Good point. And you did just as well by not eating the British cooking, either, by the way, so...

RF: Yeah, it was pretty bland. Still is, for our standards, our tastes.

CS: So as the war is progressing and we get into the springtime, now you're into the spring of 1945. And we're



still doing -- keeping supplies coming in behind the front lines, as close as you can, when you get into Germany?

RF: Yes, we did. I think as far as we ever took supplies was at Kassel, K-A-S-S-E-L, in Germany. But then it was -- by then, Patton was pretty free to run where he wanted to, and so it was -- oh, then we went twice to Magdeburg, M-A-G-D-E-B-U-R-G. I think it's about 80 miles west of Berlin; 80 or a hundred miles west of Berlin. But that was the flight whereby we landed and brought back refugees that had been prisoners -- or workmen used by the Germans. They were pretty horrible as far as their physical condition, the food they had. There were lice and bugs all -- so they were not healthy at all. As a matter of fact, after every time that we -- we never left the cockpit, the front of the airplane, while they were there, because of the infe-- I won't say infections, but the many illnesses they had, and bugs, and so forth. So as soon as we would take them back and land them at wherever it was supposed to be, in Brussels, or in Holland, or somewhere else, they'd fumigate the plane. And then we'd go back again. We did this, as I recall -- I only did it on one day. I think we actually, our group, did it on two different days. So we went two trips. By then, we had been moved, in March, from our base

in England to Amiens, France. So in -- I think it was in March. We were only --

CS: Okay, so in March you moved forward to --

RF: Let's see. Yeah, let's see. No, it had to be later than that. It had to be April. [Late?] April? Probably in first part of May, end of April. We moved to Amiens, France, into a former Luftwaffe air base. And that's when we were changed from Quonset huts to tents. Shortly before the war was officially over, we received notice that we would -- our group would become a part of what's called Green Project, which is an American airline flown from the Continent through Africa, South America, and up the Keys to Miami, returning soldiers back home. We did this --

CS: In a C-47?

RF: In the C-47.

CS: You flew across from West Africa to --

RF: We actually flew legs. One leg was from England -- we never flew that leg, because we were a part of the original flight. So the flight that a C-47 would do from Europe to Africa, to the west side of Africa, to Ascension Island, to Natal, to Trinidad. Then we flew to Puerto Rico, because that was where we were stationed. We again got the cream of the bit. So we flew from -- actually, our route was -- once it began operating -- and this is while V-E Day had

not been declared. We were already on our way to create this Green Project military airline. That happened until about the end of September. Then it was no longer needed. Also in connection, they did get bigger aircraft which were able to fly that distance, but this was one way of not only providing supplies -- or getting troops back, but also taking supplies back the other way, because those planes would double back.

CS: Well, now, were these VIPs that you were flying?

RF: No, GIs.

CS: Just GIs.

RF: Just GIs.

CS: Because that was a -- oh, because they had so many transport ships and converted liners that they could ship them back -- they could ship so many of them back so much more cheaply, I would guess, by --

RF: Well, it was faster this way. Because, actually, the planes would have a crew, say, fly from -- I'm not sure about the distance -- but say from Europe to Dakar, in Africa, and then some who -- the plane and the crew would -- the passengers would still be there, and then whatever the time was, the lapse, I don't know. Then another crew would take that plane onto the next stop, which was Belem. And then from Belem, the next end of -- that's where they

stayed. Let's see. From Africa to Ascension. Then they would keep all the way across to Natal. And then they would fly -- actually, even our outfit -- our troop carrier groups were actually no longer identified as troop carrier. But they were stationed in Belem, but they would fly from Natal to Atkinson Field. That was on the Oronoco River in British Guyana. We would fly from where we were stationed, down to -- taking supplies back to British Guyana, then pick up passengers, and fly them to Puerto Rico. And they would continue on with another crew to Miami. So we actually -- our route was from British Guyana to Miami. The greatest thrill that I had in the whole war was, when we were flying over the Keys from Puerto Rico, it's a beautiful sight to look down onto those Florida Keys, those islands, and see the sea and the sand. And so when we'd get somewhere where you could see the coast of Florida, I would -- I was a pi-- I had a crew. There's one place where we did have crews assigned. We had a pilot, a co-pilot, and a radio operator on this. So I would open the cockpit door and tell the GIs, "If you want to see what you're fighting for, come on up front, a couple of you at a time, and just take a look at what you were fighting for." They would come up, look out the front of the aircraft, and see the shiny ocean, the Keys, and the coast of Florida.

And I don't think a single GI left that cockpit without having tears in his eyes. When I finally did it -- when I actually left at the close of that trip -- our pilots would fly the aircraft back up to -- theoretically, to Atlanta, Georgia. But I was on the last flight, and those planes were pretty weary, and so were we. But when I got over that same area that I would tell these people to come up, I had tears in my eyes, because I realized that was my last flight. But I never made it, because the plane lost an engine in a violent thunderstorm, or monsoon, and I only made it as far as Savannah, Georgia, because of the engine out. And this heavy storm almost into Savannah. They said, "You have 10 minutes to get here." And so I made it but it was -- the winds were so strong. I never got it off the runway. I couldn't get it off the runway. So anyway, that was the last flight.

CS: Well, [that's quite?] a homecoming.

RF: It was. It was a homecoming.

CS: That's a tremendous, tremendous story, Dick. Gosh. I think we could go back and try to get some more details out of you, but I think that's a pretty good place to stop.

END OF AUDIO FILE