

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

The Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With
Floyd H. Trogdon, Brigadier General (Ret.)
Melbourne, FL
November 14, 2013
449th Bomb Group
719th Bomb Squadron
Navigator B-24

My name is Richard Misenhimer: Today is November 14, 2013. I am interviewing Brigadier General Floyd H. Trogdon (USAF Ret) by telephone. His phone number is 321-255-6626. His address is 1596 Pioneer Drive, Melbourne, Florida 33940. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Nimitz Education and Research Center for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Floyd, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today and I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II.

Mr. Trogdon:

Well, thank you very much.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK. Now, the first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the museum to make sure it's OK with you. So let me read this to you. (agreement read) Is that OK with you?

Mr. Trogdon:

That's OK. There's no identification kind of problem in the questions you ask, right?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Right. All right, thank you. Now the next thing I'd like to do is get an alternative contact. We find out that sometimes several years down the road, we try to get back in contact with a veteran, he's moved or something. So do you have a son or daughter or some one we could contact if we needed to?

Mr. Trogdon:

I do. I'll have to go elsewhere to find the telephone number but I'll give you my oldest daughter.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What is her name?

Mr. Trogdon:

Linda Trogdon Donahue. She lives in Arnold, Maryland. Her phone number is 410-757-7743.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Thank you. Hopefully we'll never need that. What is your birth date?

Mr. Trogdon:

My birth date is 7 May, 1924.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you born?

Mr. Trogdon:

I was born in High Point, North Carolina.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Trogdon:

I have one brother and one sister living. One older brother is deceased.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were any of them in World War II?

Mr. Trogdon:

Yes, my oldest brother was. His name is William Howard Trogdon.

Mr. Misenhimer:

He is no longer living. Is that correct?

Mr. Trogdon:

He's deceased.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now you grew up during the Depression. How did the Depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Trogdon:

Well I guess we were poor at the beginning and poor during it. It affected us as it did all people in what I'll call the bottom of the heap.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your father's occupation?

Mr. Trogdon:

My father was a telephone technician and he had reasonably substantial employment. However, wages were very, very small in that time and always were.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Trogdon:

I went to high school in Asheboro, North Carolina, Asheboro High School.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you finish high school?

Mr. Trogdon:

Finished high school in 1941.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you go into the service?

Mr. Trogdon:

I went into the Army Air Corps on active duty in January 1943. My actual service date was October 17, 1942, the date that I successfully passed the Aviation Cadet Physical and Mental tests and was sworn into the Army Air Corps.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do between high school and the time you went into the service?

Mr. Trogdon:

I didn't have the finances needed for college so I applied for and got a job with American Telephone & Telegraph Company (AT&T) as a telephone technician, an on-the-job training position. Incidentally, I was hitch-hiking a ride from my home in Asheboro, NC to my AT&T job in Charlotte, NC on December 7, 1941 when the driver who picked me up asked if I knew that the Japs had just bombed Pearl Harbor. I had not and after the driver had given me all the information he had, I suddenly was hit with the realization that my life was changed and, at my age, I would very soon be involved in this war—not a happy thought. When I reached my boarding house in Charlotte, I ran into one of the other boarders, an elderly gentleman whom I respected. He told me that he had a son at Pearl Harbor and that he had been trying to reach him since he heard the news. (Later, he learned that his son was killed in the bombing attack.) The next day I began lobbying my father to sign the paper that I needed to apply for the Aviation Cadet Program which I had been reading about for some time. My father was adamant; he would not sign papers that would ultimately send me to war. It was another ten months before he agreed, just before I became a candidate for the draft. Subsequently, I went to the Charlotte Post Office, applied for the Aviation Cadet Program, took the rigorous flying physical exam, the complex written exam, grilled by a Board of Senior Officers and passed it all with ease, and was sworn into the Army Air Corps as an Aviation Cadet, all on the same day, October 17, 1942.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's when you actually are considered to have been joined, enlisted?

Mr. Trogdon:

Yes, that's the date I passed the exam and became a cadet.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go for your basic training?

Mr. Trogdon:

We went out to San Antonio and did all the exams they give you for the flying training program and I was eligible to become a navigator. Also I could have selected pilot training, but I selected navigation at the time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go to navigation school?

Mr. Trogdon:

Principally Hondo, Texas for Navigation School.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What all happened in that school?

Mr. Trogdon:

At Hondo, we were taught how to use the various navigation instruments and to calculate the exact location of the aircraft at any time throughout a flight. The various instruments we used: Sextant, for navigation by plotting position relative to certain stars (Celestial Navigation), mostly used on clear nights; Radio Compass for calculating position relative to known location of a radio station; Drift Meter, which allowed the navigator to calculate wind effect on the aircraft which with the Altimeter (for Altitude), and Airspeed Meter allowed the Navigator to perform

“Dead Reckoning” calculation of the aircraft’s location. Many hours were spent on the ground being taught the math and the techniques to use all these aids followed by many days of flight using specially equipped aircraft (for several navigators) to practice and show their ability to perform. So a Navigator could flunk out for failure on the ground or in the air and some flunked because of airsickness. It was a tough school but I got through it and graduated as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Army Air Corps on December 24, 1943. Incidentally, even graduation was a sweat job because at that time you could either be appointed a Flight Officer (a Warrant Officer) or a 2nd Lieutenant (a commissioned officer). I was lucky!

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant at that point?

Mr. Trogdon:

I was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant at that time, given some time off and in January 1944 reported back to Biggs Air Force Base, El Paso, Texas, to join a B-24 flight crew to train for the war.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Biggs is at El Paso, right?

Mr. Trogdon:

El Paso.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what all did you do at Biggs Field?

Mr. Trogdon:

Well, at Biggs Field, it’s primarily training to get the crew used to working together as a team and we all lived in close quarters. That is, the officers all lived in a couple of rooms adjacent to

each other. My pilot was a very experienced pilot which was very lucky for us. His name was Charlie Harton and he had already been in the military for several years so we were a very lucky crew because we got an experienced pilot who led us through our paces and got us to operating as a very well-coordinated crew. That consisted of many, many flights during practice missions, practice bombing missions, practice navigation missions. Every crew member, one way or another, was tested. Incidentally I should mention, which I did not do before, when I was waiting to get into the navigation school at Hondo, they sent us off to gunnery school so we could learn how to operate the machine guns on these airplanes. So I got a set of gunner's wings in case I flunked out of navigation school.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where was the gunnery school at?

Mr. Trogdon:

Harlingen, Texas. It was a well-operated school and we all felt like when we got through that we knew at least how to professionally "man" and shoot the 50-caliber guns we would have on the B-24.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That was in Harlingen, right. Now, again at Biggs when you're getting your crew together, working together, anything particular happen there?

Mr. Trogdon:

No, I think that we operated very well, got to know each other very well, got to...one of the good things about that kind of an exercise, you get to know your comrades that you're going to fly with very well, including while we were there, our pilot married a girl from his home town,

Charlotte, NC. He brought her out to El Paso and we all attended the wedding. It was a very interesting as I'd never been to a wedding before.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, I can imagine.

Mr. Trogdon:

Also, there's an anecdote I'd like to tell about the training out there. One of the things that they do is you practice all the different things, including preparation for emergency "bailout". The pilot would say, "This is a practice, this is a practice." And he'd push the bell and he would ask the crew, "What did that mean?" Everybody of course had been warned that when that bell went off, that was the signal to bail out. So one of the pilots out there apparently didn't brief his crew well enough and he rang the bell and some of the crew jumped. They survived!

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were there any accidents of any kind while you were there?

Mr. Trogdon:

I think there were one or two crashes. I don't believe there were any fatal crashes that I recall but there were various accidents. You know with that many airplanes, there were several. I don't remember how many were there but I would guess there were 25 or 30 B-24s there. Some of the pilots were very new to that airplane so they had some problems. Our crew operated very well because we had a well-trained, experienced pilot to keep us in line.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you think of the B-24?

Mr. Trogdon:

The B-24 was a wonderful airplane. It got me through 50 missions in combat so I have to say

that it was a very, very good airplane from my point of view. Our World War II association of members of the 449th Bomb Group, we have asked and been asked that question hundreds of times by various people. To sum it up, everyone that flew in the B-24 liked it and everyone that flew in the B-17 liked it. In comparison, the B-24 flew higher, faster and carried more bombs than the B-17.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's one reason they used the B-24 so much in the Pacific. Because it could go so much farther.

Mr. Trogdon:

Right. They could. It had quite an extended range.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything else happen there at Biggs Field?

Mr. Trogdon:

Well, I think that was about it. When we finally finished our training there, we were pronounced eligible for combat. We all shipped off by train directly to Kansas City. While we were there, we picked up a new B-24 and practiced a couple or three missions in that area. From there we got our orders for West Palm Beach, FL. Landed there and got our orders. We stayed a couple days in West Palm Beach but we were not allowed to open our orders until we took off from West Palm Beach. After we were at altitude, we were allowed to open our orders. We found out when we opened our orders, we were going to Grogtaglie, Italy. So our route of travel was from West Palm Beach to Puerto Rico and then Trinidad to St. Georges, British Guiana, Fortaleza, Brazil, Dakar, Africa, Marrakesh, Morocco, Tunis, and then Grogtaglie. We went across the

Mediterranean from Africa to Grogtaglie. It is located right near Taranto Bay, Italy which is right in the instep of the boot.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long did it take to fly over there?

Mr. Trogdon:

Actually it took nearly a week as we had overnight stops along the way. At Fortaleza, Brazil, we waited until close to nightfall, primarily because the navigators then had a good chance to use celestial navigation to navigate across the Atlantic Ocean.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were the navigator doing that, right?

Mr. Trogdon:

I was the navigator. I always joke when we got to altitude, the pilot put the airplane on the bombsight because the bombsight was flying the airplane. I was guiding the airplane and making the changes myself using the bombsight. That was probably not up to policy, but it made it easy on the pilot.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now did the plane have an autopilot?

Mr. Trogdon:

Oh, yes, the bombsight was connected to the autopilot.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Through the bombsight to the autopilot, OK. Anything happen on that trip over there?

Mr. Trogdon:

No. We made the trip over the Atlantic without any incident and got to Dakar. From there we

flew on up to Marrakesh, Morocco which is on the northern shore of Morocco on the Mediterranean Sea. An interesting incident happened there. I had been using celestial navigation and had used my sextant for the flight to that point. I had put it back in its storage box and under my navigation table which was right in front of the cavity in the nose wheel. Somehow, when we were approaching the landing, the box fell into the nose wheel cavity although we didn't know it, when the pilot started to put the wheels down, the nose wheel wouldn't come down. He asked me to look and see if I could tell what the problem was. Sure enough, I could see that my sextant box was caught somehow so that the wheel couldn't get out of the wheel well. The only way I could do anything about it was pound on it with my foot and, when it came loose, it fell out of the airplane. At that point we were just over the field. The pilot went on around and landed and when the aircraft came to a stop, we were surrounded by a bunch of Moroccan police and, you guessed it, they had this old, beat-up sextant box. They were afraid to open it and they wanted to know why we were trying to bomb them. To make a long story short, they took me off to the police station on the field and I had to explain what happened to a number of people who didn't understand English very well. Finally, they decided it was all harmless and that we had to do that to save our own lives so they let me go back to join the crew. That was a scary thing for a nineteen-year-old "boy".

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did it damage any of the equipment?

Mr. Trogdon:

Oh, yes. Banged it up.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you couldn't use it any more then, right?

Mr. Trogdon:

That's right. We had a daytime hop on east from Morocco to Tunis and spent a day there and then went into Grottaglie the next day. Nothing very momentous happened in Morocco or Tunis other than my dropping my sextant out of the plane.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then when did you get that equipment replaced?

Mr. Trogdon:

It was replaced after we reported to Grottaglie, Italy. Grottaglie was an old dirigible base that had a prominent landmark, a huge dirigible hangar that had been destroyed earlier, leaving only the metal skeleton. The base has been in the hands of Americans less than a year and was still quite primitive. The original 449th Bomb Group had taken possession of the base in December 1943 and the one building still standing from a previous bombing was occupied by the 449th Headquarters and one of the squadrons for quarters. The other three squadrons were spread out over the airfield in tents. The 719th Squadron officer tents were on a hillside in an olive orchard. Our crew was a 719th replacement crew and the four officers (including me) were given a tent that had been vacated a few days before by a shot-down crew. This fact brought reality to us quite quickly. The six enlisted crew members had tents in another location on the airfield. I finished my missions and went home in November 1944 but the base was occupied by the 449th until July 1945. By the way, I want to say something about the 449th record in the war at some point.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Whenever you want to, go ahead.

Mr. Trogdon:

When we arrived in Grottaglie, the 449th had already been flying combat missions since January 1944, a remarkable combat record. They had really had a bad day on April 4 with one-third of the 719th B-24s and several B-24s from the other 449th squadrons, shot down. Many of the crew members were killed and most of the others were made prisoners of war. For this mission, the 449th Group received a Presidential Unit Award. I will say more about the 449th record later.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK, good.

Mr. Trogdon:

Our crew started flying soon after arrival. We flew a few practice missions to refresh the crew and to familiarize all of us with the airfield and our new role as combat airmen.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Ten in the crew?

Mr. Trogdon:

Yes, ten in the crew. Except for the Pilot and Co-Pilot, all the crew had gun positions. We had the nose turret in the Navigator/Bombardier compartment and the Navigator and Bombardier manned that turret at times. Also, at times, on particularly important missions, there were two Navigators and one was in the nose turret most of the time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Let me ask you, on your trip over, were by yourself or were other planes with you?

Mr. Trogdon:

No other planes were with us. There may have been other planes that went that night but they

were launched at different times. Of course, when we were at Grottaglie we flew our combat missions in tight formation with each aircraft assigned a specific position in that formation.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your first mission?

Mr. Trogdon:

My first mission was to Treviso, Italy. It was about a six-hour mission, round trip. I think we were bombing marshaling yards there. Marshaling yards were a favorite target, because in the larger towns, that's where they get their cargoes together and back the trains back and forth to get them connected, etc. Of course for rail movement of cargo for the war it was absolutely imperative to have railroads working. That was one place that you could knock out a huge section of rails and cut down the traffic through that area until they could get it fixed which would take them a few days.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What were the dates of your first mission?

Mr. Trogdon:

That was in April, in fact it was April 20, 1944.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on your first mission, did you fly with your crew or did you fly with a different crew?

Mr. Trogdon:

I flew with the same crew, my crew. The pilot had flown with another crew the day before we did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But your first mission was with your crew then?

Mr. Trogdon:

Yes. That was a fairly easy mission. We called them milk runs, meaning that you think it's going to be easy but none of them are easy because all these places had guns and shot these 88MM shells at us which exploded up at our altitude and then broke up into little pieces that we called flak. Flak penetrated the skin of the airplane and got the vital organs of the airplane and vital organs of the people involved. If one of those got close enough to you, you were going to have some serious damage. Treviso was guarded and the difficulty of our mission was often rated on the basis of how many guns they had. I don't remember how many guns Treviso had but it was not as well defended as some of the more important targets. However, it introduced us to combat quickly without punishing us too badly. It was about 6:30 hours.

You've heard of Ploesti? I went to Ploesti on my second mission.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, wow. That was a tough one.

Mr. Trogdon:

Yes. That was really one of the toughest targets in Europe. That was almost an eight-hour mission for us. I believe almost all aircraft had some damage, but there were also airplanes that were shot down. I don't remember how many. We were flying in a much larger formation; we had joined up with many other groups for that mission. We were just a few groups in the earlier mission to Treviso.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was this the first or second Ploesti mission?

Mr. Trogdon:

This was the second Ploesti mission. The earlier, or first mission, was flown in 1943 out of North Africa. It was a low-level mission which added to the losses.

Mr. Misenhimer:

They lost about a fourth or maybe a third of the aircraft. They lost an awful lot.

Mr. Trogdon:

Yes, we lost a lot of airplanes over Ploesti over the time I was there. I went to Ploesti seven times. Actually, I went six times and one to another target near there, Constanta. So Ploesti then introduced me to real combat. We had fighters in the air that were after us and the flak got some but we didn't get hurt. Nobody got injured, the airplane had a few flak hits but nothing that was vital. So we got back from that one. I don't think you want me to go through all these missions that I had. I had fifty of them or actually you know we say we had fifty missions but we didn't really have fifty flights. Some of the flights counted for two credits. Ploesti was two credits.

There were several places that were really long, in hours out and tough targets and the combination gave us two credits. But most of our two-credit missions were to Ploesti or places like Ploesti, Vienna, Budapest, Bucharest, etc.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What were some of your tougher missions?

Mr. Trogdon:

Well, you know every time we went to Ploesti was tough. There was a mission on the 5th of May to Ploesti which was really tough. We got shot up quite a bit but at this point we didn't have any crew injuries. We had holes in the airplane but we got by. One of the incidents that I remember very well was on the 26th of May to a place called Var River Bridge in France. There was a railroad bridge that was very vital and there were quite a number of guns that protected it. I just

happened to be looking out my side window when our wingman got hit directly from one of the ground guns. I've never seen anything like it. The airplane, which looked like it exploded, became a big wad of aluminum. It looked like somebody had taken aluminum from an aluminum roll and just mashed it all up. No parachutes. So that was the first of my comrades that I saw directly hit.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did it do? Did it explode the bombs in the plane or what?

Mr. Trogdon:

Yeah, everything. Correction, we had passed over the target. We had dropped the bombs and were making the turn off the target when that happened. Another mission that I recall vividly was on the 4th of July, 1944 at Pitisti, Romania. It turns out that for some reason that day we had two navigators. We traded back and forth in the turret, I was in the gun turret when there was a tremendous air battle. There were German ME-109s and of course our P-51s were in there and had left at this point but one of these attacks was the kind where the Germans flew beside you at a distance and then turned and did a run right through the formation. They tried to stay out far enough that you couldn't shoot them accurately. When they turned nose in, it's a difficult target but when they're turning, if they turn within gun range they were good targets. That day I got one of them turning. I'm one of the few navigators that has a kill to his credit. An ME-109 and it's in my record. One of the newspapers back home headlined: "Trogdon celebrates the Fourth with an ME-109 kill." They were all tough and by the time you got to your last mission, you were praying all the way. My last mission was on October 7th, 1944 over Komarom marshalling yard in Hungary and we got through without any incident. Mother's prayers were answered. Looking back, I was lucky and prayers did help. I was selected as the Squadron Navigator and

promoted to Captain before I was twenty years old. Of course I had new and increased responsibilities such as working with the Navigators in the squadron to keep their skills improving and being the Lead Navigator on most of the missions I flew thereafter. Lead Navigator meant that you had the responsibility to be in the lead airplane and keep the Group, Wing or many Wings on course to the target and back home. Some of the leads I had were for the 449th Bomb Group itself, sometimes it was the four groups of the 47th Wing and sometimes it was all the groups/wings that could be mustered to fly. For each mission, there was a precise rendezvous procedure that placed each plane in a specific formation position. Once the entire formation was formed, it was off to the target. Most of the time, I flew only when I was Lead Navigator. I only got to fly with my original crew when they were selected to be the lead aircraft. On one of the missions that I was not with my original crew, they were badly damaged with flak, killing one of our waist gunners, Walter Sanders, and badly injuring our Flight Engineer, George Higgins, and another waist gunner. They got the injured and dead crewmen back to Bari where there was a hospital. Later they returned to Grottaglie with a badly damaged aircraft. I visited the injured in the hospital and both were recovering nicely. In fact George was doing quite well as he was being visited at the same time by a beautiful movie actress, Carol Lombard, then Red Cross nurse. I did get my short-snorter dollar bill signed. I still have it somewhere.

I finished my 50 missions in October 1944 and departed Italy for home in November 1944. We traveled by luxury liner, the SS Mariposa, that in peacetime worked out of Hawaii. Luxury it wasn't as we slept nine captains in stacked bunks per stateroom. The enlisted didn't fare as well. Our course was varied to avoid German submarines but we got back to Boston without major incident. From Boston, we were trucked to Camp Miles Standish where we stayed a few days, getting oriented to freezing weather, American food and volumes of paperwork. From

Massachusetts, we traveled by train to Richmond, VA to a processing center for military returning from overseas. After officially being processed back into the United States, I was given leave to spend Christmas 1944 with my family. I was to return to the Richmond Center to receive new orders after New Years. My father and mother, brother and sister lived in Asheboro, NC and that was HOME. Of course in that small town I was greeted as a hero and spent my leave trying not to, but having to, tell war stories.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK, so you spent the holidays with your folks and then what happened?

Mr. Trogdon:

OK. We now are on leave at home and of course everybody greeted me; I was the local hero and had been in combat and came back safe. A lot of people back home were curious about the war. So the newspaper and radio station interviewed me. It was kind of fun for a twenty-year-old that had been through all of that.

I then went back to Richmond, Virginia center at the end of my leave and they gave me a couple of days there before they gave me my next orders. My next station was going to be navigation school for advanced training at Ellington Field, Texas, near Houston. So on my way I used the train transportation that they gave me to New Orleans. In New Orleans I decided to go out to the Naval Air Station and see if I could hitch a ride to Houston, Texas. When I went into the base operations, the airdrome officer that day was the famous movie star, Robert Taylor. Remember him?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, sir, I do.

Mr. Trogdon:

I said, "I'm looking for a ride." He said, "Well, I don't have anything right now but later in the day we might." So I sat there a while and he came back and sat in this kind of crew's waiting room and talked for a while. Finally lunch time came and we went to the officers' club and had lunch together. I learned all about Hollywood and he learned all about the war. So when I finally got an airplane, he saw me off and that was the last time I ever saw Robert Taylor. But I did get to my base, reported in and they had an Advanced Navigation Course that I would eventually end up but I had already decided back in the war that I was not going to fly in the back seat anymore. I was going to go back and go to pilot school. So I applied there, went over to San Antonio to the Aviation Cadet Center and took all the exams. Qualified as a pilot candidate and got sent off to "Primary" and started training. My first training as a pilot was in Lakeland, Florida. Lakeland, Florida had a primary school called (back in those days all the early training was done by civilian companies). The company, called the Lodwick School of Aeronautics, had some space at Lakeland, Florida, a little base for the PT-17 Stearman, a bi-wing airplane. Looked just like the old ones that the "old guys" flew in the early days of aviation. It was a very, very important trainer for the Army Air Corps in 1945. I remember very well the instructor pilot who checked me out in primary training. I hadn't soloed yet so we got into this alternate base where we were practicing landings. We had landed and he said, "Stop the airplane. The airplane's all yours now." He got out. "Go out and fly some and come back and land." Very eventful day. I remember it very well. I came back and made a suitable landing. He let me do that two or three times before he got in the airplane and said, "You got it all the way." I then flew the airplane back and landed at the primary base at Lakeland, Florida. That's the principal thing you do. They go ahead and let you have a lot more time solo but the main goal in "Primary" is to get you solo

experience. From Lakeland I went to Spence Field, Georgia which had the AT-6 trainer which was also formerly used as an advanced trainer. So I flew the AT-6 in basic and Advanced Training also. When basic training was finished, I was transferred to Craig Field, Alabama for Advanced Training. Graduated from there after the war (WWII) ended. I'll never forget when the war ended. Two-thirds of the pilot class quit. We had only five people on graduation day. We went ahead, did the rest of our training and graduated as pilots in October 1945 from Advanced Flying School. I was scheduled then to come back to Craig and fly P-40s and P-47s.

After graduating from pilot training, I took a short leave and returned to Craig for further training. I flew for a short while and decided there was no purpose in what I was doing. At that time, I had no college -- I had come into the Aviation Cadet Program with only a high school education. I needed a college degree. So I got out of the Air Force, retaining my commission in the Reserve (Captain), in November 1945. I applied to Duke University and was accepted for start in January 1946. While waiting for school, I worked for AT&T to bridge my service with them. More importantly, I met my wife, Berenice McManus, who now has been married to me 67 years. In January 1946, I entered Duke University in their Electrical Engineering Program. I was given a number of college credits for my Air Force service. I was doing well at Duke when later that year, the Army started recruiting certain former officers to return as regular officers in the Army Air Corps. For no good reason at that time, I applied, took the exams, and met with a Board of Senior Officers at Fort Bragg. Surprisingly, in a few weeks I was advised by the Army that I had been given a regular commission and had thirty days to decide. In that thirty days, with my future wife, sweated over the decision. In the end, we turned it down, recognizing that I still needed that college degree if I was going to succeed in this complicated world.

In early 1947, I had been doing well at Duke although I was not satisfied with the quality of the Electrical Engineering Program there. About that time, I was visited by a couple of my former World War II flying comrades who were still in the Air Force and had key positions in personnel at the Pentagon. They chastised me for not having accepted the regular commission and strongly recommended that if another opportunity came, take it, and they could assure me that the Air Force would send me back to school. In April 1947, that opportunity came and I re-entered the Air Force at Shaw Field in July 1947, just after my marriage to Berenice McManus (Berry). At Shaw I flew P-51s and later P-84s in the 20th Fighter Group, 55th Fighter Squadron. There I was surrounded by Aces from World War II, not the least of which was Col. "Gabe" Gabreski, my Squadron Commander, who was one of the two or three leading Aces from the war. I certainly had great professionals training me to enter that world of military flying.

In September 1947, the Army Air Corps became the United States Air Force (USAF), a separate service equal to the Army, Navy, etc., reporting directly to the Secretary of Defense. At that time I was in the Air Force Tactical School at Tyndall Field, FL. In December 1947, upon graduation from the Tactical School and after a short Christmas leave, I returned to Shaw AFB to continue my duties as a Pilot. I stayed at Shaw until May 1948 when I received orders to report to the University of Maryland, College Park, MD for full-time duty as a student. I stayed at "Maryland" until June 1951 after receiving Bachelors and Masters Degrees in Electrical Engineering.

My new assignment was to the Atomic Energy Commission at the Naval Research Laboratory. My job there was as Scientist-Engineer working on instrumentation for measurements of certain physics properties of explosions of nuclear weapons. These measurements were made at the Nevada and Pacific Test Sites where newly designed nuclear weapons were test fired. (I attended all the nuclear tests from 1952 through the test of the first of the "Hydrogen" Bombs in

1954 (Bikini). My project was moved from Naval Research Lab to Los Alamos, NM in 1952 and I went with it. At the test sites, I assisted in preparing the instrumentation of the nuclear reaction (at the time of the explosion) which was located in small buildings (highly protected) a few hundred feet from the bomb. These buildings were not manned during the test. Workers and observers were positioned miles away, the distance depending upon the expected size of the explosion. In the case of the first "Hydrogen" Bomb, we were on ships about thirty miles away. After the test and as soon as radiation was low enough that we could go into the instrument buildings safely, of course, with heavy duty protective clothing, we recovered the recordings from our instruments. At the Pacific sites, we went in by boats. For the first "Hydrogen" Bomb test, I volunteered and led the first of these recovery missions and will never forget what we observed. The island was essentially destroyed and what was left were our buildings and millions of dead fish. Our recovery mission was successful and our recordings were in good shape. Something new was always learned from these tests including in this case why the explosion was about two times what was expected.

We were transferred from Los Alamos to Kirtland AFB, Albuquerque, NM in May 1954. My wife could not travel with me as our third daughter had been born at the Los Alamos Hospital just before I moved everything to our new home in Albuquerque. Three days later, my wife established a new record on the little airline that served Los Alamos by traveling to Albuquerque with a 3-day-old baby. I was at the flight line to receive this precious cargo that was handed down to me from the wing by the pilot.

At Kirtland AFB, I was assigned to the Weapons Development Directorate and there involved in designing the equipment that had to go on or in aircraft or missiles to carry/operate nuclear weapons. I was on flying status and had the opportunity to fly many of the planes they had at

Kirtland as a part of my job. I also became an instructor pilot and spent some time in giving instrument checks and checking out other pilots in aircraft that they had not flown before.

In 1955, we were beginning to experience incidents with the nuclear weapons inventory that suggested more safety features were needed. At Kirtland, we established a panel of experts who examined every possibly safety vulnerability of nuclear weapons in inventory and those being introduced. We called the panel “The Nuclear Weapon System Safety Group”, (NWSSG) and it became an institution in the Air Force. I was Chairman of this group. We quickly became very busy with studies, briefings and visits to incident sites but we got it all done. Many of our recommendations were acted upon positively in the services and some resulted in major policies. For example, the “two-man” rule is the cornerstone of security and safety for all nuclear weapons. This rule requires that two men be involved separately in any action that might affect security or safety of nuclear weapons. There are electronic and other features implemented that help enforce the “two man” rule. I was Chairman of the NWSSG from its beginning until I was transferred to England in 1958. I was a Major and was replaced by an Air Force Brigadier General.

In July 1958, we were transferred to London, England to a little known office titled “Engineering Liaison Office”. Our job was to work with the British Ministry of Defense and the RAF to cause certain of their bombers to have the hardware and electronic interfaces that would make them capable to carry our weapons in the event that such was ever necessary. In the early days of nuclear weapons, the mission was classified so we did our work with very little public fanfare. It was a very interesting job that also allowed me to get some pilot experience with RAF bombers. I was promoted to Lt. Colonel during this tour of duty.

I was selected for attendance at the Army War College in 1961 and accordingly was transferred with family to Carlisle Barracks, PA. While there, I did extra duty attending the George Washington University International Affairs Masters Program, mostly at night. Although I already had a Master of Science Degree in Electrical Engineering, the Air Force insisted that I take advantage of the opportunity. Hence when I graduated from the Army War College in June 1961, I also received a diploma from George Washington certifying that I had a Master of Arts Degree in International Affairs. My thesis for the graduate degree was fairly complex and classified Secret. Hence, very few people will ever be able to read it—probably a good thing! After graduating from the Army War College, I was assigned to the Pentagon in the Air Force Research and Development division. My job was Nuclear Staff Officer, met a lot of important people and soon became well-known throughout the staff as an “expert.” When the Research and Development Commander, General Bernard Shriever, commissioned a study to be conducted in Los Angeles (Project Forecast) to project the Air Force Weapon Systems needed for the next 25 years, I was selected to be a member of the Weapons Panel. (I eventually became Chairman of the Weapons Panel.) I had a chance to meet with General Doolittle who headed the Aircraft Panel on several occasions. Aside from agreeing on several plans that affected both committees, Doolittle was interesting and certainly “down to earth.” I was privileged to hear some of his experiences. Incidentally, the Doolittle Raiders survivors had a tradition of meeting once a year and having a brandy toast as part of the ceremony. Recently, the four survivors met in Nevada, cracked open their last bottle of brandy and declared it their last meeting.

Another critical experience I had during Project Forecast was precipitated by an unclassified letter from a college professor who, in great detail, reported a serious vulnerability of one of our existing weapon systems. After consulting with appropriate scientists, we confirmed the problem

and classified the professor's letter Top Secret. After I personally briefed General Shriever and General Lemay, immediate fixes were made by the manufacturer and the problem was solved. I was given credit but the real hero in this episode was the professor. Forecast went on for about a year and just a few of the recommendations that came out of the study were: The C-5 and F-15 aircraft, the Minuteman Missile and from our panel several new weapons.

When I came back from Project Forecast to the Pentagon, Lt. General Ferguson, Director of Air Force Research and Development, thanked me for my service at Forecast and advised me that he had transferred me to his office to serve as Assistant Executive to him and General Kinney. In 1963 I was promoted to full Colonel, I stayed in that job for about two years and in June 1966, Lt. General Ferguson was promoted to four stars and took over as Commander Air Force Systems Command at Andrews AFB, MD. At that time I flirted with the idea of taking over an F-100 Group that was headed for Vietnam. Instead, I accepted a job with General Ferguson as his Executive Officer at Systems Command. One year later, I was transferred to the Electronic Systems Command at Hanscomb AFB, MA as Vice Commander. I enjoyed the job very much but after one year, I was transferred back to Washington to be Deputy Director of the Defense Communications Agency responsible for all programs in that organization. In June 1971, I was transferred to Vietnam to become the Assistant Chief of Staff (J6) for MACV responsible for Command, Control Communication in southeast Asia.

In that job I had a major role in the Vietnamization program which was training and turning over to the Vietnamization program which was training and turning over to the Vietnamese as much of our equipment as they could use in their military service. So when that war theoretically ended out there in 1973, there were eight General officers that had become the only officers left in command. We walked out with the flag after the cease fire. We were down to that because they

made us stay until they got the last prisoner out of North Vietnam. It should be noted that our office stayed there for logistic support to the Vietnam military. Then I went back to the Pentagon and eventually was Director of the Aircraft & Missile Program in the Pentagon in the Headquarters, Department of Defense. Then after that the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense who was my boss retired, I was appointed to his position until I retired. I would have eventually been replaced by a civilian but I was holding the office and it was interesting. I had four daughters to educate at that time. I needed more money than I was making as a one-star or even a three-star. I had a solid offer from GTE so I retired. After I retired from the military I worked for GTE and several other companies, had very important jobs. Ended up, helping put together a company called Sprint and was the Senior Vice President in Sprint until I retired in 1991. I was a consultant for Sprint for the next eight or ten years. In 1989 I bought a house down here in Indian River Club, a club _____ for retired military still working in several projects.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What date did you retire from the Air Force?

Mr. Trogdon:

In 1974.

Mr. Misenhimer:

At what rank?

Mr. Trogdon:

Brigadier General. From the Air Force but I was in a three-star position called Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense when I retired.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Back when you were in Italy, did you have quite a few escort airplanes when you were bombing?

Mr. Trogdon:

Yes. Not in the early days. We had the Tuskegee Airmenn as our fighter escort after a while as you know.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The Tuskegee Airmen?

Mr. Trogdon:

Yes, the Tuskegee Airmen were our support. We also got some support from some other organizations but that was the primary organization that escorted us for quite a while.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The Redtails, they called them?

Mr. Trogdon:

Redtails. We had others. Sometimes there were P-47s and P-51s. Depends on where you were going.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The 51s had longer range I think.

Mr. Trogdon:

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you were in World War II, did you ever have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Trogdon:

Every time we flew a mission when we came back we had a donut or something and a drink if we wanted it. The Red Cross was present. I think they had one or two Red Cross representatives, ladies, on the airfield.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on May 8, 1945 when Germany surrendered, you were back home then. Did you have any kind of a celebration then?

Mr. Trogdon:

Yes, when Japan surrendered.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK, what happened when Japan surrendered? What kind of celebration did you have?

Mr. Trogdon:

It was the biggest celebration I ever saw. We went downtown to Selma, Alabama. Remember Selma had that bridge that was so famous during the segregation battle. We went into town and sat on the side of the road with a lot of other people. The whole town turned out. I would guess there were six or seven blocks along that main street of Selma, Alabama, that had people standing on the side of the street, sidewalks, that spilled out into the street, probably ten deep.

You know I would say at least eight or ten blocks. I think there wasn't a person left in a building anywhere and that was in the evening of that day, V-J Day, August 14, 1945.

Mr. Trogdon:

That's the day that we sat out there and I'll never forget it. There were cars coming along with people, pickup trucks, people standing up in the back of the trucks and waving flags and it was, I think, the most joyous celebration I've ever seen.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, people were very happy.

Mr. Trogdon:

They really were. Of course anyone in uniform was cheered and of course I was in uniform.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get home with any souvenirs from World War II?

Mr. Trogdon:

You mean like medals?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Any souvenirs like a flag or a rifle or anything like that.

Mr. Trogdon:

I did not.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what medals and ribbons did you get in World War II?

Mr. Trogdon:

Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal, all of the other things that came along, the Theater ribbons, etc. I got the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal with five Oak Leaf Clusters.

Our Group received two Presidential Citations which were medals to the members.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever hear Axis Sally on the radio?

Mr. Trogdon:

Yes, many times.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you think of her?

Mr. Trogdon:

Well, Axis Sally was an interesting lady but certainly we all felt that she was a detriment to our well-being.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What would you consider your most frightening time in World War II?

Mr. Trogdon:

I think I was frightened every time I went over Ploesti. It had such a fantastic defense. You cannot even imagine how capable but they were capable in sending up flak. We used to laugh and say the flak was so thick we could let down our wheels and taxi. They sent it to our altitude. So usually we were just high enough above where they were and it looked like a black cloud cover. This was for many miles. Most of the cities we went to had guns and thus flak, but Ploesti I think was the worst. They had more guns than anybody else.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything else you recall from your time in World War II?

Mr. Trogdon:

Yes, there are a few more things I would like to say about the 449th Bomb Group. I flew with a lot of crews but in observing the hundreds of men on combat missions, I saw only one, a Co-Pilot, who was incapacitated by his fear. I am sure that all of us in those jobs had fear, but we carried on and did our duty and the 449th Bomb Group was one of the most decorated in the war. We flew missions to targets in Italy, France, Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, and Romania. The Group flew 254 missions in 475 days of combat. We lost 103 B-24s. We shot down 199 fighters, ME-109s and other fighters. We lost 388 airmen. We had 363 POWs and we had 169 that were shot down but evaded capture. We were awarded Presidential Citations, two of them, for Bucharest, Romania on April 4th and for Ploesti, Romania on July 9, 1944.

In 1983, one of the 449th Bomb Group veterans, who had been searching for 449th veterans for years, got a charter approved for the 449th Bomb Group Association, a 501C19, Not-for-Profit organization. The obvious mission of the organization was and is to perpetuate the tradition and legend of the 449th and promote the continued comradery of the 449th Veterans of World War II. (My words) To that end, we held the first reunion in Tucson, AZ in October 1983 with about 600-plus veterans and wives attending. We are about to hold the 21st reunion at Dayton, OH and expect about 40 veterans and 150 wives and 2nd generation. Incidentally, we have made the second generation full voting members and they are carrying the heavy load of the 449th mission. Currently, I am the President.

In the last several years, two of the World War II 449th B-24 crash sites have been discovered by Italians. The first aircraft had gone down in 1944 and was buried in the mud on a small island near Udine, Italy. There was one survivor, Harvey Gann, age 93, living in Texas. Research has determined that of the other crew members, two perished when they parachuted, and the other seven are probably buried with the airplane. Although this B-24 was discovered in 2008, and in spite of intense pressure that has been put on the JCAP, the recovery organization, the only action that has been done was the original confirmation mission in 2010 and a survey team that is there now (May 2014). Unfortunately, recovery will not take place until 2015. The other crash site was discovered in 2013 and it is known that Italian divers have pilfered many parts from the aircraft which is in 30-35 feet of water. Of more concern is the fact that some of the divers have brought up bone fragments and one skull (which is a no/no). The recovery organization is there now and will recover the remains that are easy to recover but I assume that they don't have the heavy equipment with them to do more now. We are making this a national issue and we are getting help now from other organizations. There are 73,000 missing from World War II and

recovery is going at the rate of about 100/year. Since we vow that no American will be left behind, this is **MISSION IMPOSSIBLE. We believe the recovery organization's capability and assigned budge is severely inadequate to the mission.**

It was an interesting time, don't you think? Now have you got all you want out of me?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, sir, as far as I know. Thanks again for your time today and thanks for your service to our country during World War II.

Mr. Trogdon:

Thank you. I got a lot more in there than World War II so you can cut the rest of it out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

It's all on the tape.

End of Interview

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March 8, 2014

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