

The National Museum of the Pacific War Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Robert V. Green

B-29 Pilot

July 26, 2016

Today is July 26, 2016. My name is Floyd Cox and I am a volunteer at the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Robert Green, today concerning his experiences during World War Two. This interview is taking place in his residence located in Universal City, Texas. This interview is in support of the Educational and Research Center of the National Museum of the Pacific War, Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.>

Floyd Cox: I would like to start off by saying, "Thank you very much for spending time with me today Robert, and I would like to begin with asking you a little bit about your background: when you were born, when you were born, what your parents did for a living and we will take it from there.

Robert Green: I was born in a small town in central Missouri, near St. Louis. It was a Commune until 1911. In other words, everybody worked but nobody got any money, but they got food, lodging, etc. When they broke up in 1911 every man who had worked during the time period got \$29.00 a year and the women got 15.00. I was born August 7, 1920. I had two sisters. Wilma and Joey and two brothers, Jay and Phil. My parents were Harry and Vivian Green. I lived in a number of towns when I was growing up including, Quincy and Kokomo, Illinois and we moved to Chicago when I was twelve.

When we lived in Chicago, I got a job in a Greek food market where they taught me how to properly handle fruits and vegetables. That training kept in a job through-out my high school years. After high school I began going to North Western University at night. I also worked in the Palmer House in Chicago as a bell-hop and as an elevator operator. I was studying Cost Accounting and it was announced that "The Japs have bombed Pearl Harbor!". I did not even know where Pearl Harbor was. Now my draft number was way down the line and I could have stayed out another year before they would draft me. I thought I should go on into the service and my dad said, "You have always wanted to be a pilot, why don't you try to get into to pilot

training program.? So, I did. I went to the Post Office in downtown Chicago and took an exam for pilots. I passed it and was accepted into the pilot training program. I enlisted into the cadet program on the 19th of March of 1942; however, I did not go in until June. In June of 1942, I went to Santa Anna, California. Not long after we got there, we were tested and I tested out as being qualified for pilot training. I was selected to go to Thunderbird Field at Phoenix, Arizona. Our quarters at Thunderbird Field were almost like a motel. They twelve men to a section. It had two bedrooms with a bathroom in between. After 90 days of pilot training, I was the only one left in my area. I was there that I began training flying a PT-17 bi-plane. My instructor showed me everything about the airplane. What the ailerons were, what they did as well as brief instruction about the instruments and etc. He told me that we were going to do a take-off and that we would do a landing after flying one hour. Which I did. I do not believe that he ever touched the controls during this period. I made the take off and made the landing and he talked to all the time, while I was doing this. After ten hours, I soloed. Now, there was only one thing that I was afraid of: that was Hammerhead stalls.

Floyd: Explain what a Hammerhead stall is.

Robert: Ok. A Hammerhead stall is a stall where you start sliding down tail first. That's a Hammerhead. Now that is a difficult maneuver, so I decided that I would find out something about it before doing it. I talked to a fellow that had about sixty hours of flying and he told me how to make a loop. Later, I went out and made three loops in a row and after I completed them. I decided that I was going to be a pilot. There was no doubt in my mind that I could fly that airplane. I went through my sixty hours of flight training and qualified. From there, I went to Marana, Arizona. There we flew the Vultee VBT-13. After about twenty hours in the BT-13 they gave me a check ride. I thought I did a perfect job during the check ride except for one item. I made a forced landing and the instructor said that I picked out a good field however; if I had landed on the field on the right, we could have flown out. So, he had me doing this and that and I thought I was

doing pretty good. After we landed, he said I had not passed. About two days later, I went up for another check ride. I went up with another instructor and went through various maneuvers and after we landed, he said I did not pass. He did not tell me why. About three days later, I was flying with another instructor. We went through the maneuvers and I thought I did well. We landed and he told me I had flunked. Three next days later, my name was on the board. There were no instructions, just an airplane. So, I took off and a funny thing happened. About six months later, I made a forced landing, at Sweetwater, Texas as I had lost my engine. The Airdrome Officer happened to be at the field at Marana, when all that happened with the check rides and he said that I had passed all three rides. He said that the instructors were just trying to cool me off.

Floyd: They thought you were getting over confident?

Robert: They thought I was too hot of a pilot. And, they were right.

The next thing I did, I went to advanced training at Marfa Air Field at Marfa, Texas. There we flew twin engine aircraft and learned formation flying and things like that. When we were finished, I was in town when they handed out the assignments. When I got back the only thing left was flying as co-pilot for an airline or bombardier's school at Deming, New Mexico. So, I trained as a bombardier for over a year. It was during this time, when we were flying, we did a lot of things we shouldn't do; like flying wing-tip to wing-tip with the plane next to us and some other dangerous things. It was during this time that I really learned how to fly an airplane. It was at this time, that we got a notice that they were beginning B-29 training. You had to have a certain number of hours flying, and you had to meet certain physical requirements like height and weight. I qualified for all of them and I went to Hobbs, New Mexico. There, I received the best training I ever received while in the Air force. We flew B-17s and learned emergency

procedures. We learned to fly with a single engine, twin engines, three engines and four engines. We learned all types of maneuvers

Floyd: Now this was in a B-17?

Robert: Yes, a B-17. This was in 1944. Upon completion of the training, I went to Clovis, New Mexico for B-29 training. Now, before this, I met a girl in Deming, New Mexico and we got married right before I went to Clovis.

Floyd: Now, what rank were you at this time?

Robert: I was a 1st Lieutenant. I made 1st Lieutenant while I was flying at the bombardier school. I went to Clovis for B-29 training and we had an outstanding instructor. On occasion, he would pick up a chair and throw it across the room to make a point. We learned a lot about the airplane and I went through Bombardment training with no problems what so ever. When I completed Bombardment training, I was selected to under-go Recon training. You might not think that this is a big deal, but it was. It gave me 250 more flying hours than most people going into combat in a B-29. Now, 250 hours in an airplane is a lot of flying time. So, I ended up going into combat with 500 hours of B-29 time. When I went into combat, I had over 1500 hours of flying time. At this same time, people were going into combat with a total of six or seven hundred hours. One person was selected from each class as top of the class. I was selected number one of my class. Our group was given a B-17 to go anyplace where we, including our families, wanted, in the United States, for three days. I planned a flight plan for the B-17 flight to Chicago but this was cancelled by upper command. Soon after that, I was put on a B-29 with a new Major, as co-pilot, who had never been on a B-29 before. It was his first flight on a B-29 and he wasn't helping me a lot. We flew to the gunnery range; now air to ground gunnery is 100 feet. On my first pass my left hand scanner, Kelly, called and said, "We got a fire in number two engine that is the

biggest fire I have ever seen in my life.” I turned around and all I could see was fire. It was all the way back to the tail. I called to the crews to check their chutes and prepare to bail out. I gained some altitude in preparation for bail out. About this time, I cut back on one engine, which was running erratically. So now, I only had power on two engines. I decided to go in and land straight ahead. So, I called for my gear and my nose gear and my right main gear and my left main gear where still up in the well. At this time, I was only about 100 feet off of the deck. In the meantime, the warning horn was blowing because I only had two gears down but I made a slight turn of about 35 degrees and I came on in. I landed with a right main gear and a nose gear. I climbed out my window, which is fairly small, and crawled back to the astrodome. I kicked it one time and it shattered into a thousand pieces and some of the crew climbed on out. Now one engine is now burning, so the engineer and I didn’t know if all the crew had got out, so we threw sand on the engine and put the fire out.

Now the airplane was in pretty bad shape but our crew gathered and we found that nobody was hurt. Not even a broken fingernail. Now, about this time a L-5, a small observation plane, came by looking for us. We signaled him, not to land but he landed anyway and he is the only one that got hurt during this whole episode. He got tangled up in a barbed wire fence and got some scratches. They took us to the base hospital and they checked us all over and we had to spend the night. This up-set me because I still planned on taking off in a B-17 and going to Chicago. I got in touch with my Co-pilot and it was then that I found out that they had cancelled out any plans for a trip.

Floyd: So, you didn’t get to go to Chicago after all?

Robert: No, we didn’t get to take the trip. Now, my Polish Navigator called his wife and told her that we weren’t going to Chicago because all of the crew was in the hospital because of the crash landing and we didn’t have enough money to pay our own way to Chicago. The next day, I called my wife

and explained to her that we were all ok and that we would meet them in Harrington, Kansas. The next day I had to meet with the Accident Board and explained the loss of two of my engines and landing on two landing gears. They said that it was impossible. So, I finally had to demonstrate it. To make a long story short; I have never been scared in an airplane. Never. Now maybe two or three days after an incident, I would feel it.

We went to Harrington, Kansas and I picked up a B-29 and we flew to San Francisco. We gassed up there.

Floyd: Where you assigned a crew in Harrington.

Robert: I had my own crew, which I had picked up at Clovis, New Mexico. I kept the same crew in place until I got assigned to the 3rd Photo Group. I took off from San Francisco and landed in Hawaii. We stayed overnight and then flew to Kwajalein. There we gassed up and spent the night.

Floyd: Were you flying by yourself or where you in a group?

Robert: I was leading a group of twelve B-29's. From there, we flew to Guam. I was assigned to the 3rd Photo.

Floyd: Now, you said 3rd Photo. Is that 3rd Photo Squadron.

Robert: Yes. It was the 3rd Photographic Reconnaissance Squadron of the 20th Air force. I flew three mission with the 3rd Photo. One to Tokyo, Japan, one to Kobe and the last one, of which I cannot remember the name of, which was a milk-run.

Floyd: Where these called Photo Recon missions or just Recon mission?

Robert: These were Photo Recon.

Floyd: Would you explain how these mission work? What altitude do you fly? Do you crisscross your target area?

Robert: We flew directly to Tokyo. I flew four passes, taking pictures of the city and three passes over Kobe. We were flying at twenty-five thousand feet.

Floyd: What type of cameras did you use? Movie cameras, still cameras or Radar?

Robert: In a photo aircraft, we had what was called a Trimac.
This consists of three cameras. Two are oblique and one straight down. You had another camera which is a large camera which takes pictures straight down. So, you are taking pictures with four cameras. That is a normal Photo mission. Those were the only three missions I had. After I came back from the Tokyo run, I was informed I was assigned to the 29th Bomb group as a weather ship. This was something new and they were getting it ready to go. There were going to be six of us involved in it. It was different than a bomb run.

I arrived there and they changed out my Radar Operator for a Weather Observer. I picked up another Navigator and another Radarman. The Radarman I picked up was a graduate of MIT and he had been sent to the West Coast to establish a Radar Weather station. By, mistake, he was sent to Guam. So, he had nothing to do and I needed a Radarman. I picked him up and put him on flying status for a month. I couldn't put him on full time. He not only set our Radar up, he maintained it. He had his own tools with him and he kept it in top shape. I never lost our Radar during the time he was assigned to our crew. Another thing that happened was my Flight Engineer was a petroleum research engineer from Chicago. He decided that we shouldn't be flying between lean and max carburetors. He said that we should have different settings, so he

modified our carburetors. From then on, we flew our engines manually lean so we could get further on a gallon of gas and also maintain a better cylinder-head temperature through-out a flight. That was modification was adopted by all B-29s later on.

Floyd: Do you remember that Engineer's name?

Robert: Dupole was the name of the Engineer. He is dead now. He was from Chicago and he worked for a Petroleum Research outfit.

Floyd: On a Weather mission, exactly what did you do? What altitude did you fly on a Weather mission?

Robert: Ok. The bombing missions were encountering high winds and the bombs were getting blown all over hell. They were getting their weather from China and it wasn't very accurate and only came in part-time. So, when we flew, I made landfall at Hiroshima every fourth day that I flew. I flew at twenty-five thousand feet. I would pick up a North-west heading of about 280 or 290 and flew out of there for about an hour and picked up readings. Now all the time we are doing this, my Weather Observer is picking up readings on winds and everything else and my Radar Operator is determining exact winds, speeds and so-forth.

Now they were bombing at ten to fifteen thousand feet off the deck. The high altitude winds also affected the other elements of weather. Consequently; we were also taking readings all the way up to twenty-five thousand feet.

Floyd: Did you still have your gunners on board, even though you are a weather ship?

Robert: Yes. We had everybody on board, but we never got attacked by anything, except after the bomb run at Hiroshima. Then, we got jumped by five zeros but I just took our plane up another five thousand feet and left them. At thirty thousand feet they couldn't reach us. When we would have a longer flight, we would land at Iwo Jima. We would spend the night at Iwo and take off from there and fly over Hiroshima and then straight over the western end and fly a little over China and then we would turn around and come back. Sometimes they had us do that but we never knew what we were going to do. If we were going to Iwo or somewhere else. We only went to Iwo about four times.

Floyd: Now there is a lot of talk about: Was securing Iwo Jima worth all of the casualties that we took there. What is your opinion?

Robert: It was to me because it gave me a coming home station. It also gave a base for our P-51s to fly from. I think it was worth it. The loss of life was terrific on Iwo as it was so well defended. I think that if we had bombed Iwo more intensely before-hand, we would not have had such losses, but that wasn't in our war plan.

Or schedule was to fly over Japan on the 6th of August but we couldn't make it because I was missing an engine. An airplane picked me up and took me to the briefing, which was quite unusual, and I walked in there and there were two Generals and three or four Colonels and a bunch of other people. They asked why I wasn't going to fly as I was scheduled to. I told them I was missing an engine. The General turned to my crew chief and asked why I was missing an engine. He told them, "I am a Sargent and I could not get an engine." He turned to his Commander and said, "Why is he a Sargent and a Crew Chief on an airplane?" He said, "Well he was a Tech Sargent but he messed up and got busted." They had a conversation and all of a sudden, he was a Staff Sargent. Of course, in those days you could do on spot promotions. So, they made him a Staff Sargent. He got an engine that night and the next day, I took off. I took a

test hop and later that night, I flew over Hiroshima and it looked to me that they had sent three or four hundred B-29s over and firebombed the place. Everything was missing except a couple of concrete structures. So, we came back home. It was then I found the destruction was caused by one bomb.

Floyd: You didn't have any idea that this had happened, when you flew over Hiroshima?

Robert: No one knew. That was probably one of the best kept secrets of the war. Maybe some other people knew about it, but I didn't know about it.

Floyd: What was your rank at this time?

Robert: I was a Captain.

Floyd: When you were over Hiroshima and you are looking down and see complete devastation, do you remember what your thoughts were?

Robert: The only thing I thought was that they must have sent over two or three hundred airplanes. I had no idea that it was a single bomb. I had often wondered why they had not bombed Hiroshima before, because I flew over Hiroshima and it was ready target. There were quite a few rivers and streams which would have given great aiming points.

Floyd: Once you found out that a "Super bomb" had been used and that there was a terrific loss of life, do you remember what your thoughts were? Do you remember if you thought, "Well they deserved it." Or did you think that "That was a terrible thing to do?"

Robert:

No, I don't recall. I was fighting a war and I had no idea. In those days you didn't think about is the war be shortened by doing this or that. You just thought about the job to be done. I think our entire nation was like that. A job to be done. I think that everybody had the same idea. Fight it and win it.

The next thing that happened was: We have a peace time conference coming up and at the same time we had a typhoon. I had to go out and fly into the storm. The only problem was that no one knew how to do it. Nobody had ever flown into one. None of the weather people had any idea how to do it. The only requirement was that I had to take reading from fifteen hundred feet up to twenty-five thousand feet. So, that meant I had to go inside of the typhoon, and gradually climb up to twenty-five thousand feet. Now we have to do this at two o'clock in the morning. Now, we are up there, at fifteen thousand feet and I know where I am at because my Radarman is taking a bearing off of Iwo Jima. Several months before, they had put a Radar beam on Iwo and we could take a reading off of that. Well, we had a reading on that but we didn't know where the storm was at. We knew we were in the vicinity of the storm but we didn't know if we were in an up wind or down wind, so I made a point of flying in and I got into an up wind. I should have turned around and came right out, at that point in time but I didn't and I tried to penetrate. Well, penetrating 180 knot winds and I have 220 knots of air speed. Well, we are not making very good time. One minute I am at five thousand feet and the next minute I am a hundred feet off the deck. Now, when you near the bottom, the wind will bring you back up again. We would come up to five thousand feet and then back down again. I did that for an hour and twenty minutes. I came out and there was not a muscle in my body that was standing still. I was shaking from fatigue. If I had not came out when I did, we would not have made it.

Floyd:

Now, both your co-pilot and you are strapped in at the controls. What keeps your crew from bouncing around in such weather?

Robert: They are strapped down. Now, I got back and they postponed the Peace Conference about a week.

The next thing that happened was, I flew up to Iwo Jima to take some food up to them and I lost an engine on my Final Approach. It was decided that I was going to leave my airplane there because I was going back to the United States.

Floyd: Did you at any time, participate in what was called "Mercy Flights" dropping food to our people who were still in the POW camps?

Robert: No, I did not participate. I was given a plane to go home on and I had about twenty-two people on board the airplane.

Floyd: Now where were you at this time.

Robert: I was now on Guam and I picked up the airplane there to come back to the states. On the way to Hawaii, I had problems with my number three engine. I had to feather the engine. They told me to land at Johnson Island. I took one look at Johnson and the size of it and I said, "Oh no!" It's a little bitty thing. So, we went on into Hawaii. The next day we took off to fly home and just broke ground and the propeller on my number engine went out. Now, that's not too bad if you are heading out to ocean, but I am heading out over land. In addition to that there are flint hills to the left so I couldn't turn away from my dead engine. You always turn away from a dead engine. But with the hills there, I had to turn into my dead engine. Now we were only about one hundred feet off of the deck. So, I turned around and got back over the ocean. I called the tower and told them I was coming back in and they told me go out and circle until the rest of the airplanes got off. I was number one of twelve B-29 that were to be in the flight. They called me and told me to come on in. I went in and landed. The Engineering Office and everybody else met

me and the Engineering Officer said, "I personally tested out that airplane and there was nothing wrong with the number three engine." I said, "If you did that, why didn't you sign the log?"

Then all of a sudden it dawned on me that they had test hopped the wrong airplane and put the replacement prop on the wrong airplane.

This took place about mid-night and we were free to go to town, so we did. The next day, we flew back home. We had no problems on the way back home.

Floyd: Where did you land when you got back to the states?

Robert: I can't recall the name of it.

That's about all concerning World War II. I got out of the service.

Floyd: When did you get out?

Robert: My Discharge was 15, January 1946. I got out and after about three months, I talked to the 5th Army about going back in. I missed flying, so I was flying T-6's. I wanted to go back in but they said I couldn't but they finally put me on with the Commanding General of the 5th Army. Here I am a Captain and I am talking to a Two Star General. We talked and he took my name, address and so forth. Later I received an application. I filled them out but in the meantime; a friend of mine, who knew of my situation called the President of American Airlines, C.R. Smith who he had went to school with. Mr. Smith sent me a letter and all of a sudden, I'm hired by American Airlines. At the same time my application for the Army came back for an interview. I went to the interview and there were five Colonel. One of the Colonels asked me if I would be willing to accept a non-rated commission? I said, "Hell no!" without even thinking. I looked around and there was one rated officer and the other four were non-rated. Later on the rated officer and I

got to talking and he said, "You know, that deal about the typhoon brings back a memory. I was scheduled to fly with you on that mission." I said, "Yes, but you didn't show up." He said, "Well, when I found out you were going to fly into the typhoon, I thought that's not for me." They took a recess after the interview and as we were walking out, he put his arm around me and said, "You were stupid to fly into that typhoon." I said, "Yeah, but tht was my job." He told me he would have to think about that. I think that is how I got my regular Commission. As you know, one person can make or break a deal and I think he is the one tht put it over.

I actually went back into the Army Air Corps in December 1947. Guess, where I went. I went to Air Transport Command and I was flying a C-54 which is the same type of plane I would have been flying with American Airlines. I felt more at home going back in the service than having a civilian job. Since I had a choice, I took the one I thought was the best.

Floyd: Is there much difference between flying a B-29 versus a C-54?

Robert: Yes. For one thing, on a C-54 you are flying passengers and you have to follow strict procedures. If you are flying a B-29 you can go all out if you want to.

Floyd: With all your hours in a B-29, what would you consider the best points of a B-29 and the worst.

Robert: The power. You could do what ever you wanted in a B-29. I felt at home in a B-29 and I attribute that to all the training I received in a B-17. Most people don't realize flying with a single engine on a four engine aircraft and being able to maintain a level flight makes a big difference in you. It builds up a confidence in what you are doing. I think that affected me throughout my career. I had some real emergencies while flying a B-36.

Floyd: If you had choice today, would you rather fly a B-17, a B-29 or a B-36?

Robert: A B-36.

Floyd: Ok, we will get into that phase of your career in just a second. So, you went back into the military in 1947, now, take us from there.

Robert: I went to Chickopee Falls, Massachusetts. While there, I flew three flights to Germany flying passengers. I was in the 12th Military Air Transport Command. The aircraft were like a plush air liner. We took off and went to Germany on the 24th of December. We landed in Paris and another crew took the flight on into Germany. The next day we picked up another aircraft and went on into Germany. On New Years Eve, we didn't drink because we thought we were going to have to fly. We didn't receive any notice by eleven o'clock, so we had a few drinks and at four o'clock the next morning we got a call. We were told we were going to fly. So, that morning, we had three pilots aboard when we took off and flew to Paris. We landed at Orly Field at Paris. On my first tried to land about twenty feet off the deck, because I had had a few drinks. We went there to pick up Senator Alben Barkley. We picked him up. He had been to Paris to visit his son. His son was the Air Attache' in Paris. We flew to Longes, France and they didn't have a replacement crew there so we took off to fly to Bermuda. On take- off, we had a fire in number two engine. We returned to Longes and repaired a broken fuel line and then we went to Bermuda. When we arrived in Bermuda, we went to bed because of flying time, without rest, limitations. The next day, we went down to get our airplane and it was gone. The Base Commander had made a big mistake. He had put Senator Barkley on board the airplane, assigned a crew and headed it back to Washington, D.C. I know he did it because of Barkley's insistence. But that made no difference. He got fired. So, he was on the same airplane we were on when we went back to Westover, Massachusetts. We made a couple of more flights back to Germany. Nothing spectacular happened so we went on vacation. Pat Houser, another pilot that I flew with frequently, and I decided that we were going to take a vacation to New

Hampshire. We made arrangements for a hotel room and so forth. The telephone rang and I thought it was Pat. It wasn't it was Operations and they told me I was leaving for Germany that night. I said, "I'm going on vacation." They said, "Your vacation has been cancelled." We took off and went to Rhineland, Germany and flew the Berlin Airlift. Everything was fine with the Airlift until the weather moved in. Now when weather would move in, we would have to hold over the Rhine Maine Airport waiting for a spot to land. If you missed your landing, you would have to go back out and hold again. We didn't like that.

Floyd: What type of planes were you flying then?

Robert: C-54's. They were the cargo version. We ended up having a meeting with the Operations Officer and we decided we would fly at just two altitudes instead of four. If you missed your landing you went around again. The G.C. (ground control operators) knew exactly what they were doing. They had torn down some of the apartment building on the flight path into Tempelhof so we could come in at a lower angle. Before that, we had to come in at a very steep angle. They installed red and orange lights. One side had red and the other orange. When you were in the middle, it meant that you were in the middle of the runway. They had ILS (Instrument Landing System) and they had GC operators who were outstanding. When you are using ILS, you are watching an instrument in your cockpit that tells you if you need to go up or down and left and right. My first experience with Ground Control Approach was at Iwo Jima. Now, these GCA operators were good. I believe that they brought them in from all over the states to be there on duty as we came in. I made three Zero Zero landings at Tempelhof only because I was confident. I knew where I was at all the time.

Floyd: Explain what a Zero Zero landing is.

Robert: It means no visibility. If you are on the ground, you might be able to see ten feet in front of you.

Floyd: Basically, you are flying blind.

Robert: That's correct. Now they can do it by using Auto-pilot.

Floyd: What Squadron were you flying with when you were flying the Berlin Airlift?

Robert: We were flying with the 12th Air Force. We went over as a squadron.

Floyd: Now, that was the 12th MATS (Military Air Transport Squadron)?

Robert: Yes.

Floyd: Did you lose any friends during the Berlin Air Lift period? I know we lost a few planes and pilots.

Robert: No, I did not. None in my squadron were involved. There were some from other squadrons. On one occasion, I landed right after one had gone off the end of the runway and caught fire. I landed soon after it happened. I did not know who they were.

Floyd: When you are flying these air transports into Berlin, how many crewmen did you have on board your plane?

Robert: We had a Co-pilot and an Engineer and a Load Master in addition to my-self.

I came home and I couldn't land at Rhineland so I landed at Frankfort. When I landed, I went into Base Operations and one of the men asked, "Why do you have blood coming out of your left ear?" I told him, that I didn't know that I did. They grounded me right then. I had to take a car

back to my base. They made me and Engineering Officer for about two months, following that incident. One thing tht happened while I was Engineering Officer: We had a German pilot and he was so good at listening to an engine he could tell you what was wrong with it before anything happened. He would tell me, "Hey, you are going to have to change plugs in that engine." Sure enough, after a couple of flights the plugs would go out while the aircraft was in the air. He wanted to fly a few missions, so I took him on board and put him into the left (co-pilot) seat and let him make a take-off and landing. He was in 'Hog Heaven.' I told him what air strip to take off and land and that was all I told him. He made what I considered a perfect take-off and landing.

Floyd: Do you recall his name?

Robert: No, I do not.

Floyd: So, you flew the Berlin Airlift. How long were you there? When you return to the states?

Robert: I came back in March. I left in July and came back in March. I was assigned to a Connie Squadron where we checked out the Constellation (L1049) aircraft. I flew them for about a month and I got my orders to go to Carswell Air Force base at Fort Worth, Texas to fly B-36's. I was assigned as a Co-pilot for about two or three weeks and then I was assigned to a crew as the Air Craft Commander, even though I was not checked out. I went to the factory for my ground school for about two months to learn about the airplane. When I got back to the base, I had a crew waiting for me.

Floyd: How many were on the crew of a B-36?

Robert: It varies, but normally it is about fifteen.

Floyd: What is the difference between an Aircraft Commander and a Pilot or Co-pilot?

Robert: An Aircraft Commander controls the crew. In fact, for about two months, we had a sixty man ground crew that we controlled. They were experimenting with. It didn't work out so they decided to abandon that. I was assigned a crew and a airplane. About September, I was scheduled to report to the Squadron Commander at Albuquerque, New Mexico. The purpose of the flight was for the Mark IV Nuclear weapon. Now, you inserted the Nuclear part of the weapon during flight. They wanted to fly and make sure everything would work out. At this point, I had not been checked out. The Commander said if you have to fly, fly. We had to fly and we made a couple of mistakes and we had to go back in and get new material. So, it ended up that I made two landings at Albuquerque before I was checked out. I came back in and the Squadron Commander said, "Did you have to fly?". I told him I did and he said, "You were checked out when you arrived at Albuquerque." Then he made out the paper work.

The next major thing that happened was: I was scheduled to fly and they put another Aircraft Commander on, just to fly the airplane with my crew. I was in the right seat, as pilot. Now, we are about 30,000 feet and the left Scanner called over the intercom and said, "Number three engine is on fire. Whoops! We just lost it." What had happened was that the engine fell off of the airplane. It landed in the back-yard of a ranch. Now, we had lost an engine and still had a problem. The number one engine went into feather position but it was still turning and firing. Number two engine, we couldn't do anything with. It just sat there and wind milled. Now, we were still ok at being able to fly but we can't maintain level of flight because of the wind milling and so forth. Even with full rudder, we couldn't. The next thing that happened: we had broken a fuel line, which is six inches in diameter, and it was draining the fuel out of that wing. We came in for a landing and I am the last one to get out of the airplane and I tried to kill the engine again but nothing happened. The fire chief had to snuff the engines out because they were still firing.

One of the classic comments at the Board of Inquiry meeting was, "How fast did you come down?" The Commander said, "We came in like a turd out of a tall asses ass." That comment is in the official records.

The next flight that had problems happened was about the 17th or 18th of December of 1949, we received a message, from Washington, D.C., listing six airplanes and six crews that had fly a simulated combat mission. They had to take off at a certain time, and so forth. We could not exchange airplanes or crew members. My airplane and my crew were listed on the message. Now, at tht time the Air Force and the Navy were having a hassle as to who was going to the Nuclear carrier. At the time, my plane was a mess. I had been used for parts. It was missing two engines, ailerons and some other stuff. Within two hours of being advised that my plane was to fly, you could not see my airplane. They had assigned about one hundred and fifty men to work on my airplane. They got it ready and it was test hopped at 2:00 in the morning, the day before we were to take-off, which was the 22nd of December. I flew our mission and dropped our decoy bomb and I had some other things I was supposed to do on the way home. Soon after we dropped, I lost an engine. This was not too uncommon for a B-36. Then, all of a sudden, I lost another engine. Now I am out two engines. I can still fly on two engines. Now, all of a sudden, I lost a third engine. I decided I would go to Barksdale, at Shreveport, Louisiana, which was not as far as my base. Then, I lost a fourth engine. Now, I am down to two engines. All of a sudden, the prop on my number one engine went into reverse. I was flying West and all of a sudden, I was headed East. I got it feathered and by the way, the only line left was a feathering line. If it had also broken, we would have had to bail out. Now, I am down to one engine and I am pretty close to Barksdale by this time. I got over Barksdale at 12,000 feet and I pulled the number two engine to a simulated feather position, so I don't want to have to use it. We make all our plans, based on having no engines at 12,000 feet. I made a circle and came around and set the thing down.

Floyd: I'll bet you had quite a welcoming party down on the ground, with crash equipment and so forth.

Robert: Yes, but not only that. I got my ass chewed because I didn't have my crew bail out. After, we landed, my engineer told me, "Captain, you are a great pilot and I appreciate flying with you, but that is my last flight." And it was. I picked up a new flight engineer by the name of Murphy. Murphy always tried to catch me on something about the airplane. He would read old tech orders and he would ask me questions about the plane. I had some friends in Engineering and they would watch for him. If he would go into the tech library they would go in and see what pages he was reading. Then they would contact me and tell me. When he would ask me a question, about like, "If this happens what or how you would do this or that?". I would say, "Oh, that's not so hard. We would do this." He never did catch on that he was being watched.

Floyd: Did you like to fly the B-36?

Robert: I thought it was a good airplane to fly. It was good because as it progressed from the B Model to the H model. With every new model they would make improvements. They stripped out a lot of the guns and so forth. By getting rid of the gunners and scanners, we got all that weight out of the airplane. After the improvements, I could get the plane up to 57,000 feet. Of course, you had to use oxygen then. I think we might have been able to get up another 1000 or 2000 feet. I did it to get over a Thunder head here in East Texas. I was leading an operation and we were heading back home.

Floyd: It was about this time that the Korean War broke out. What happened to you during this time?

Robert: We went on Alert.

Floyd: Now, were the planes setting on the runway ready to go? Did they have all the weapons on board?

Robert: Yes. Everything was on board. All you had to do was jump in the airplane and take off.

Floyd: Did you have any instances where that happened. When you went on Alert with an A Bomb on board?

Robert: Yes. I had to go to school every month to learn about the A-Bomb. I had to be able to draw the circuitry of an A-Bomb. We often took off to fly. We would fly for twenty some hours and then return home.

Floyd: What was the purpose of that? So, you would be in the air in case you were called on a mission?

Robert: So, we would be ready to go. They weren't fooling around.

Floyd: People don't realize that how hot the Cold War really was.

Robert: That's right. It got hot. Real hot.

Floyd: Were you still at Carswell at this time?

Robert: I stayed at Carswell until about 1955 when I was sent to Staff and Command School at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. From there I went to Spain. I arrived in Spain and there I was made a Senior Controller. We had three in Spain, three in Morocco, one in Turkey and one in Algiers.

Floyd: What were at these bases, fighters or bombers or both?

Robert: It varied. In Turkey, they had the U-2 Lockheed Reconnaissance plane. I was cleared for the U-2 by the way. I was one of two people in Spain thus qualified. They had Boeing B-47 bombers at the bases in Spain and Morocco. They were all on Alert. In Algiers they had a transport base. We use to land there on the way over, when we needed fuel.

Floyd: Speaking of the U-2, were you on the job at the time Francis Gary Powers went down?

Robert: Yes. He took off from Turkey. We pilots were behind the "Green Door". A door to an area was painted green. Even the base Commanding officer could not get beyond that green door.

Floyd: It apparently was Ultra Top Secret.

Robert: One time I came out through the green door and my Sargant said, "What is going on in there?" I told him that if I told him, I would have to shoot you.

After Powers went down, I had been on a coordination flight. Every month we met in Spain, England or Germany and we talked about our Recon flights. Who was going where and when and so forth. We didn't actually make the schedule. We coordinated the schedule between the different units such as the Tactical units and Ground Control. We had a liaison in between. For example, when they decided to take Nuclear weapons out of France, they brought them to Spain. Now, as Senior Controller, I am in control of the units. I had two books. One said, "This book will never be in custody of the man that holds (the other book). I had both books. I had enough to send our troops to war. We finally got rid of one of the books. That is when I put a new command post in and used videos instead of a board. We used Tv to control everything instead of using boards. A company out of England set it up for me and I went to BBC and they taught me a lot about videos and TV and I came back and set it up. I thought it was a good thing and It was the only one in the Air Force. While in Spain, I developed a testing procedure for my Controllers to test them to see whether or not they could take a message and pass it on to the

crews to launch them to go to war, because that is what they had to be able to do. I developed the system and the Inspector General came over and found me doing that. He thought that it was such a good idea that he decided he was going to have me join the IG (Inspector General) team when I got out of there. Now, I had already made arrangements with the Commanding General of the 16th Air Force who was going to be Commanding General of the 2nd Air Force, that I was going with him to be his Senior Controller. This arrangement started a big fight between the two Generals and finally General Ryan got a message from the Commanding General of SAC (Strategic Air Command) stating "Jack. No more. Green is going to the Inspector Generals Office." So, I went to the IG team at Offutt Air Force Base and spent two years there. There, I developed testing for not only crews but Senior Controllers and for the Commanding Generals. I gave tests to the Commanding General. We allowed him to have his staff there because we did not want him to flunk. I couldn't afford to have him flunk. (laughter)

Floyd: What rank are you, at this time?

Robert: By this time, I am a Lieutenant Colonel. I was on the IG team for two years.

Floyd: How did you like that?

Robert: It was alright. I never had a job that I didn't enjoy. Each job was different. It might not have been what I preferred to do. But, I did enjoy every job I had.

Floyd: What years were you in the Inspector General's Office?

Robert: In 1952 and 1953. From there, I went to Vanover, California with the SAC Inspector Generals Office. Twelve of us went out there. I remember walking into the office and I was told, "I don't know what job you are going to have." About that time, the General walked in and said, "He is

going to be your Senior Controller.” As much as they used information at Vandenberg, they did not have computers. I used NASA computers to get some of my things done. Even communications were bad. I was there about two or three months and we decided we needed a new communication system. We took the mid-night flight to Washington, D.C.. We got there about noon and we are sitting in a room and a Captain gets up and says, “I think that it is about time that Vandenberg gets what they need. I recommend that Green get One Million Dollars for his communication system.” They gave me a million dollar budget. I didn’t trust the timing so and I went to Ohio and bought a communication system, that day. They came out to California and installed it. This system was quite efficient which allowed me to do lots of things I wanted to do. For example: Where ever my Commander was, I could get him on the telephone. My deal at Vandenberg ended up real nice. I controlled the launch of seventy-five missiles. I had a Senior Missile Badge as a result of those launches. I have never been to a missile school. This was because I knew the launch procedures frontwards and backwards. We had a train that ran down through Vandenberg. This train went right by some of our sites so we had to be very careful during our launches. Sometimes, we had to put up a helicopter so we knew where the trains were at. I ran into one launch that was gone right after take-off. It created fires at three locations off of base. A guy came by with a road grader and he made circles around all three fires, to control them. I took him to lunch in appreciation.

There was a nuclear power plant on board the missile. The missile belonged to the Test Wing, but once it was launched, it belonged to me. We got this squared away. We had this nuclear weapon out there and the only way you could kill it was with a rifle shot. We got a sharpshooter and he put a bullet through it and killed it. There were lots of things that happened that you never hear about. I went out with the Wing Commander who had went out to watch the missiles come in. I watched them come in. When a missile comes in it has four or five decoys so you don’t know which one is the real thing. It looks like a Roman Candle going off. After they hit the

ocean, divers go down and bring them up so they can be used again. I found that very interesting.

There is something I have overlooked that I want to discuss and that is the Cuban Crisis. We diverted all of our B-52s and B-47s to different bases. Like Niagra Falls would have four or five air planes up there and a number of other bases would a like amount. I went to every base where they had airplanes to test the crews to see if they could launch under the conditions they were under. I picked up the U-2 tape, because they had had to make an emergency landing at Lake Charles, and took it to Washington, D.C. And I came home from that trip in a T-39. During the Cuban deal, we came so close. Most people don't realize how close we came to going to war. If that Russian Destroyer had tried to push its way through, we would have gone to war. I sitting in the Command Post in SAC Headquarters, at this time, and I knew what was going on. I'll tell you people were very on edge about the possibility of having to launch missiles. That took place, while I was on the IG team.

Now back to Vandenberg: one interesting thing happened. We had a Commanding General who wanted to be close to a launch. He went out to see the launch, but getting out of his car he hit radio to a different channel. When the missile went out, we had to blow it up, close to the ground. We didn't know where the General was as we couldn't get him on the radio. One of the airplane pilots spotted him and so he was located. I told him, "If you don't know how to handle a radio, don't take it with you." We got along real well so I could kid him a bit.

I spent three years at Vandenberg and really enjoyed it. From there, I went to Randolph, here in San Antonio. In was in Motivation for the Air Force. We were in charge of projects to keep people in the service. We had one conference where we had the Commanding General of the Air Transport Command who was the official of the mission. It was a four year tour, but changed it to a two year tour and they sent me out to Grand Forks, Nebraska. I went up as the Commanding Officer of Grand Forks. When I got there, the base was really down. I walked into

the Officers Club and the Club Officer said, "You can't come in here because you don't have the proper shirt on." I said, "We are going to change things around here." He said, "We can't change things." I told him that I was the new Commanding Officer and he started crying. He did not know what an officer looked like. We closed the club for a couple of weeks and we changed everything. We assigned a new Club officer and to make a long story short, we took that club from nothing to be one of the finest in the Air Force. We put in a salad bar and added a lot of amenities and as a result we had people standing in line to get in. We had a group that put on a show and the show was so good that it downtown and they had it on TV. That year, our supply unit won an award, our Squadron won a top award for the Air force, our Metro squadron won an award and our aircraft squadron won a top award. So, it was quite a year.

Later, I asked to be relieved of my command because I had a family problem. The Commanding General, was brand new, and he was on his initial tour of the base fired me that day. They told me I was going to Turkey. I knew I wasn't going there, so I called up the Air Force IG's Office and told them I was going to Turkey. He told me that I didn't want to go there. I told him that was the reason for my call. Consequently; I became the IG for Operations at Ton Sanut, Vietnam. There was no other assignment I could have at this time other than Ton Sanut other than Turkey. They gave me a list of twelve prospective assignment about twenty minutes after I accepted the Vietnam duty. I blew my chance to make General. That is why I was sent to Grand Forks; to make General. General Ryan, the Commanding General of the Air Force told me that when he came to see me.

I was only in Vietnam for only about five months and I had to come back to the States for an emergency. While I was in Vietnam, I approved two missions and flew two missions, that were basically Milk runs, to keep up my flying status.

Floyd: Were you under fire, when you flew these milk runs?

Robert: Yes, there was some, but not much. Over there, if an airplane went down, almost immediately, there were Choppers there to pick up any survivors. As I said, I didn't stay in Vietnam very long. I came back and became the Commanding Officer for PERPON at Lackland. PERPON is where new recruits come in and get their haircuts, clothes, get their assignments and so forth. General Ryan came in to visit and we were all in break room and General Ryan told the Commanding General of Lackland, "I'm going to see Green's outfit." He was told that I was not on the schedule and General Ryan told him that was ok, he was going to visit me anyway. My assistant met with General Ryan and gave him a briefing which was excellent. General Ryan saluted him when he completed his briefing and I thought the guy was going to faint. He had made the briefing to a Four Star General, a Two Star General and another General and me. I had made Colonel by then. I was Colonel nine year while I was in the service. Later on the Base Commanding General asked me why I didn't tell him that I knew General Ryan. I told him because he didn't ask me.

Floyd: Was that the last job you had while you were in the Air Force?

Robert: Yes. I retired from there, in March of 1972. I served from 1942 to 1972.

Floyd: What a great story and thank you for your service to our country.

Robert: I enjoyed every bit of it.

Transcribed by

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