

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Lee White

Date of Interview: August 18, 2015

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Interview in progress.

John Fargo: Today is August 18, 2015.

Mr. Lee White: 18th.

John Fargo: My name is John Fargo and I'm a volunteer at the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas. Today I am interviewing Mr. Lee White concerning his experiences during World War II. This interview is taking place in Mr. White's home in Austin, Texas. This interview is in support of the Educational and Research Center for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Okay, I ... I hate to do that, but ...

Mr. Lee White: That ... that ...

John Fargo: ... I always have to. Okay, Lee, let's start off a little bit talking about your early years. Can you hear me okay?

Mr. Lee White: Uh, yes, mostly ... mostly I ... I ...

John Fargo: Okay.

Mr. Lee White: ... you ... you want to be getting with my entry into the service?

John Fargo: Yeah, well, let me ask you ...

Mr. Lee White: Or you ask a question?

John Fargo: I'll ask you questions about this.

Mr. Lee White: Okay.

John Fargo: Uh, when were you born? What's your birthday?

Mr. Lee White: My birthday is the 14th of August, 1925.

John Fargo: (Pause), okay. Where were you born?

Mr. Lee White: Sonora, Sutton County, Texas.

John Fargo: Native Texan!

Mr. Lee White: Native. My grandfather, my great-great grandfather came in 1831.

John Fargo: Wow!

Mr. Lee White: And he actually fought at San Jacinto.

John Fargo: Is that right?

Mr. Lee White: On the other side, my mother's side, they came and ... in 7 ... 1840 during the republic, so they've been here since the days of the republic (laughter).

John Fargo: Yeah, that's great. What was your father's occupation?

Mr. Lee White: Uh, (pause) stock raiser.

John Fargo: Stock ...

Mr. Lee White: Rancher.

John Fargo: Rancher.

Mr. Lee White: Goat raiser, primarily he raised goats.

John Fargo: Do you have any siblings?

Mr. Lee White: I had four brothers. They're all deceased now, but I did have four brothers.

John Fargo: Where'd you go to high school?

Mr. Lee White: Sonora High School, graduated in 1942.

John Fargo: You go on to college?

Mr. Lee White: I went ... I graduated ... everybody in ... graduated when they were sixteen then. We only had eleven grades. So, I went out to Sul Ross State Teachers College in Alpine, Texas in August, 1942. And ... and I stayed there until I enlisted in the Air Force or the Army Air Force in August, 1943.

John Fargo: Okay. Uh, did ... you enlisted as a opposed to being drafted then?

Mr. Lee White: Oh, I am both ... definitely enlisted for the Aviation Cadet Program. In fact (chuckles) ...

John Fargo: Okay.

Mr. Lee White: ... I enlisted at Goodfellow Air Force base up in ... it wasn't the Air Force base then, but Goodfellow Field.

John Fargo: In San Angelo.

Mr. Lee White: Up in San Angelo.

John Fargo: I lived there for a while.

Mr. Lee White: Oh, you did?! Well, you're familiar with it. But I had to make six trips because my teeth (chuckles) were not up to the standard that they wanted for their Aviation Cadet. So, I would hitchhike up, and back and forth during the summer of 1942. But I ... uh, '43. But finally, I met their approval.

John Fargo: So, how many years of college did you have when you enlisted?

Mr. Lee White: I just had the one year.

John Fargo: (Unintelligible). And was that a requirement to get into the Cadet Program?

Mr. Lee White: Actually, no, just high school at that particular time. They didn't ... they didn't require it; it was plus, but it ...

John Fargo: (Unintelligible).

Mr. Lee White: ... but I was seventeen when I enlisted and that later became very important. And I ... I'll probably get to that later.

John Fargo: Okay.

Mr. Lee White: But they reduced the number of Cadets in the spring of 1944 just before the invasion of D-Day ...

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Lee White: ... the Invasion in Europe. They had found that we had more pilots than ... than ... when more were being killed.

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Lee White: So, they had all of these qualified Cadets so they just took ... some (unintelligible) up to thirty-six thousand and put them in the Infantry for (ringing tones in background) the Invasion (chuckles). So ... but (pause) your question was about my enlistment.

John Fargo: Is ... is that the telephone?

Mr. Lee White: (Ringing tones in the background). Is that a phone or something?

John Fargo: Yeah, I don't know. So, is that yours?

Mr. Lee White: Oh, I ... I don't hear anything (laughter).

John Fargo: Okay. Okay, uh, so, you got into the Cadet Training Program in '43.

Mr. Lee White: Uh hum.

John Fargo: Uh, where'd you go to basic training?

Mr. Lee White: I went to Sheppard Air Force ... it wasn't Sheppard Air ... at Sheppard Field, Wichita Falls, Texas.

John Fargo: And was that Preliminary Flight Training?

Mr. Lee White: It ... it just was a ... it was a ... just general basic training. Uh, I stayed there (pause) ... I reported for active duty on the 24th of August, 1943, and I stayed there till October; it was not a long basic training. But then they sent me to ... they didn't ... it normally ... if I had gone right straight into the Cadet Program, it would have taken about forty-weeks, but the Army gathered all of these qualified Cadet but they didn't have space in the Flying School, so they sent us all to college to ... they sent me then to the University of Chattanooga.

John Fargo: Really?!

Mr. Lee White: (Laughter). I'm mean just (unintelligible) of what they were doing ... is they were just (unintelligible) ... (laughter).

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Lee White: And they sent us there until February of 1944; they had just ...

John Fargo: Well ...

Mr. Lee White: ... just uh, I mean, we studied a little physics, a little weather and ...

John Fargo: Just about one year?

Mr. Lee White: Pardon?

John Fargo: About one year at Chattanooga?

Mr. Lee White: No, I spent ... it was only from uhm, October to February.

John Fargo: Oh, I see, okay.

Mr. Lee White: And then they sent us on over to Nashville for classification, and we went through all of these psychological examinations and medical examination, two or three days of testing. And they'd determined that I was highly qualified to be a pilot. So, in effect, I should have been classified as an Aviation Cadet at that time.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Lee White: Still didn't have room in Pre-Flight and Primary (laughter), so they sent me to Blytheville, Arkansas in March, 1944, and I became an Aviation Trainee.

John Fargo: Not a Cadet, a Trainee?

Mr. Lee White: (Laughter), a Trainee, yeah. After I qualified (unintelligible) an Aviation Cadet but then I become an Aviation Trainee, and what that means, we went on the flight line and we learned how to pre-flight the aircraft that they had assigned which were the AT-9s which is an advanced trainer. So, we learned how to refill them, wing walk, and ... and all of the different things that you could learn on the flight line.

John Fargo: Boy, mechanically you need to learn mechanics and how the airplane was ...

Mr. Lee White: Well, we didn't do any of the mechanical work although we did pre-flights of the aircraft. They taught us how to ... to run up the engines and ... and to service them, but we would help the mechanic, but we were on ... basically, on the job training on the front ... learning how to operate on the flight line.

John Fargo: How long did you do that?

Mr. Lee White: (Chuckles), it was amazing. And finally, come the summer of 1944, they sent us to Pre-Flight.

John Fargo: Wow!

Mr. Lee White: And that was at Maxwell Air Force Base, or, not air ... but Maxwell Field then. So, late spring of '44, I finally arrived where I should have arrived the previous (laughter) October. So, I completed my Pre-Flight then of ten weeks; then they shipped me down to Arcadia, Florida. Arcadia was a little base called Dorr Field.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Lee White: And there I learned how to fly the PT-17.

John Fargo: PT-17?

Mr. Lee White: Yeah, that ... it was a Stearman.

John Fargo: Stearman?

Mr. Lee White: The Stearman PT ... uh, bi-wing.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Lee White: And I'd ... I'd ... didn't get air sick. I just ... no problem whatsoever. And I finished my pre ... my ... my Primary, then they shipped me off to my Basic Flying Training which was a BT-13. This was at Greenville Field in

Mississippi. Instead of ten weeks, they still didn't have ... they still weren't (unintelligible) enough Pilots, so they extended us ... we ... kept us in ... in Basic for another extra five weeks.

John Fargo: What kind of airplane were you flying then?

Mr. Lee White: It was a BT, basic trainer, B ... BT-13.

John Fargo: Uh, the Pilot and the Trainee?

Mr. Lee White: Yeah, they were tandem, a Pilot and ... and an Instructor Pilot. There's two ... two of us in ...

John Fargo: Alright.

Mr. Lee White: ... that single engine.

John Fargo: Single engine?

Mr. Lee White: Yeah.

John Fargo: So, you ... they extended that training?

Mr. Lee White: Oh, we just extended our training; instead of getting a hundred hours then ... no, we just had an extra six weeks of training.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Lee White: So then, finally about the end of December, 1944, they shipped me to Advanced Training ...

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Lee White: ... which was over at Columbus, Mississippi. There we flew the AT-10, advanced trainer. This was a ... a twin-engine aircraft.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Lee White: So, I learned how to fly the twin-engine aircraft, and ultimately March the 11th, 1945, instead of commissioning me as a Second Lieutenant, they said I was going to be a Flight Officer. There I was all of nineteen years old; I had just completed all of the requirements for ... for the Aviation Cadet Program, had never failed a check ride, academics were good, but I was nineteen years old.

John Fargo: So, you were not eligible to become a Second Lieutenant?

Mr. Lee White: They, well, I was, other people weren't.

John Fargo: Well, you were too young.

Mr. Lee White: (Chuckles), well, they just happened for whatever reason, and it was always very kind of quiet how you became a Second Lieutenant. And I always thought that it was because I was nineteen.

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Lee White: And, you know, checking to some of the other Cadets is not ... not ... that was a ... but not one soul in my class in 45A, not one received an assignment. The war was that close to being over. So, what happened then ...

John Fargo: What ... what month was that?

Mr. Lee White: This was March, 1945.

John Fargo: March, '45.

Mr. Lee White: See, the war ended in ... in Europe in May, but by the middle of March, they realized that the war was almost over, so we stayed right at Columbus until the summer of 1945. And then I received orders to report to Laurinburg–Maxton, North Carolina for Glider Training. Here I had just spent ...

John Fargo: My (unintelligible).

Mr. Lee White: ... (chuckle) the past year and a half learning how to be a power Pilot, anything from single-engine, twin-engines to four-engine, then all of a sudden, and they (unintelligible) ...

John Fargo: (Unintelligible) you are a Pilot.

Mr. Lee White: ... here ... you are a Glider Pilot.

John Fargo: Let me ... let me ask you ... the war was over at that point?

Mr. Lee White: Uh, not quite. The war was still on in Japan.

John Fargo: Okay.

Mr. Lee White: By May the war was over.

John Fargo: Right.

Mr. Lee White: But the war ... I was set up ... my assignment ... I arrived in Lincoln for Overseas Replacement Depot, that's what they called it, the ORD, and my assignment ... these gliders ... we were going to invade (unintelligible) Kyushu in October of 1945.

John Fargo: That's what the plan was?

Mr. Lee White: That was the plan. We'd ... you know, they didn't tell us all of these things then, but after we were able to find out what the plan was.

John Fargo: Well, you had no choice in terms of what your assignment was; you were going to be a Glider Pilot.

Mr. Lee White: I was going to be a Glider Pilot. That ... I was learned what (unintelligible) of the service meant (laughter).

John Fargo: (Laughter).

Mr. Lee White: It meant (laughter) you're subject to worldwide, any type of airplane, you'll just have to learn it (chuckles) on the job, and that's what it was.

John Fargo: Was that difficult how to learn to fly?

Mr. Lee White: Oh no! No. No, I ... is it difficult to learn how to fly? No. I think anyone could learn how to fly. It always, the Army or the Navy as far as that, you always have to learn how to fly in a certain time because it ... it was the way things flow. You have people coming in and going out, so they have only so much time allocated to teach somebody to fly.

John Fargo: That's true.

Mr. Lee White: So, I like I ... that's the reason I say almost anyone could be taught to fly, but ... in fact, longer than other, so they figured out pretty well how long that it should take. But anyway, it ... to ... to wrap this up, uh, in this particular part, I ... I arrived in Lincoln that evening of the 14th of August. Now, you know, the 14th of August was the day that the Japanese ... said, "That's enough, we quit."

John Fargo: Yeah. Yes!

Mr. Lee White: And always people ... I hear even this year at the 70th anniversary of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, "Should we have dropped the atom?" I says, "That's my friend, the atom!" (laughter)

John Fargo: (Laughter).

Mr. Lee White: It *was* my friend! Who in the world wanted to be driving, uh, GC4A car, uh, wacko glider into Kyushu with fourteen infantrymen (laughter)?

John Fargo: Oh I ...

Mr. Lee White: And I think of ... something else a little better than that!

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Lee White: But anyway, I didn't ... that was ... obviously, what are ... what are they going to do with all of these Pilots and Navigators that they had? So, they finally sent me to Kessler in October, 1945.

John Fargo: Where is that?

Mr. Lee White: Uh, at ... in Mississippi ...

John Fargo: Mississippi.

Mr. Lee White: ... Houston. And they sent me to the Air Rescue Squadron and I was flying the PBY. Now, here we are ...

John Fargo: (Unintelligible) PBY.

Mr. Lee White: ... can you imagine? The Navy Catalina.

John Fargo: Okay.

Mr. Lee White: The Army called it the OA-10A. But it was the old Navy PBY Catalina, twin-engine flying boat.

John Fargo: Yes!

Mr. Lee White: So, I was doing fine. I ... I was enjoying learning ... learning to, you know, go out onto the Gulf and land, and the War Department issued ... War Department circular number 290. They said, "We no longer authorize the rank of Flight Officer (laughter)."

John Fargo: (Laughter).

Mr. Lee White: "Therefore, audios, you're gone!" That's it!

John Fargo: Really?!

Mr. Lee White: You're done!

John Fargo: Is that a ...

Mr. Lee White: I ... I could hard ... hardly, you know? There I was ... I had ... I thought I had my career that had taken so long and I was flying airplanes, what I wanted to do. They said, "No, there's no longer ... is that an authorized rank." So ...

John Fargo: So, October, 1945 that was, huh?

Mr. Lee White: That's when I was first ... what started flying the Cata ...

John Fargo: The PBY?

Mr. Lee White: The ... I started ... I flew the PBV in October of '45. Then in April of '46, they sent me to California for separation.

John Fargo: Oh, let's see; after all that training ...

Mr. Lee White: All that training, I was done ... not, I really ... had ...

John Fargo: You had qualified fighter pilot.

Mr. Lee White: Fighter Pilot, uh ...

John Fargo: Qualified in two-engine planes.

Mr. Lee White: Yeah, I was fully qualified.

John Fargo: Fully qualified for everything.

Mr. Lee White: So, I was stunned. I thought, "Well, maybe I'll go to college," and then something came to mind and I had an opportunity of re-enlisting in the Army as a Master Sergeant. Now if you can believe, there I was a Flight Officer who had just been kicked out of the service, but then they welcomed me as a Master Sergeant in the Army. When the (unintelligible), I was nineteen-year-old Master Sergeant. If you can believe in those people. They won't accept ... they ... they won't believe that.

John Fargo: Well, a Flight Officer is a commissioned officer, is it not?

Mr. Lee White: Well, not commissioned; they're appoint ... they called them appointments.

John Fargo: Appointments.

Mr. Lee White: As opposed to being commissioned.

John Fargo: Okay, so they ... they offered this to you?

Mr. Lee White: They offered me to ... that I could re-enlist as a Master Sergeant.

John Fargo: Doing what?

Mr. Lee White: Well, this is the important part. I thought, "What (cough) what can I do?" And they said, "Well, we're going to send you to Alaska, and you're going to fly C-47s as an enlisted man."

John Fargo: C-47s.

Mr. Lee White: So, they sent me (chuckles) they sent me then to Salt Lake City to be shipped, this was all in the ... in June of 1946, and I was going to be shipped to Alaska and I would be flying C-47 (throat clearing).

John Fargo: Had you ever flown those?

Mr. Lee White: No, I'd never had flown them.

John Fargo: They give you any training in it?

Mr. Lee White: But then ... I ... I would have received training once I got up into Alaska for it. But, before I able to get to Alaska, the Army decided, "We no longer are going to use enlisted men (laughter) as Pilots."

John Fargo: Okay.

Mr. Lee White: So, they eliminate ... no, at first they eliminated no Flight Officers in the Army; second thing, they eliminated no enlisted Pilots in the Army. So, anyway to ... to not ...

John Fargo: So, where were you?

Mr. Lee White: ... not to go (laughter), it looked like I was snake bit for sure.

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Lee White: But ...

John Fargo: Well, you had already enlisted!

Mr. Lee White: I had ... I would have ... I ... I was already enlisted.

John Fargo: You'd enlisted in the Army.

Mr. Lee White: So, they had me. And they said, "Well, you know something about ... so we'll make you a Control Tower Operator," which sounded ... that's reasonable. I ... you ... I ... you know I'd been ... I'm familiar with the operation, uh, tower operation, but it ended up (throat clearing) it was a really one of the most interesting assignments I had in the old ... the ... in the whole uh, Army, but they sent me to Barksdale, Louisiana and we worked with General Disosway in the Army's Instrument Flying School. Now, we were not flying, but what we did ... the Gildfilden (sp?) had built this radar set, and by sitting in the ground, you could look at the radar information and as the aircraft direct them to come into the pattern, fly around the pattern, you know, the filed approach, and you could tell them how far above the glass bath they were or Athames was, whether they were lined up when they were over the end of the runway. So, in effect, we and a ... a group of ex-pilots who were now Master Sergeant, we tested that GCA is what ... that's what it was called.

John Fargo: GCA?

Mr. Lee White: Ground Control Approach.

John Fargo: GCA.

Mr. Lee White: And we tested it, and we were so successful that in 1948, when the Berlin Airlift took place (throat clearing), that operation would never have been successful without the Ground Control Approach. They were flying in ... all day and night. You could take an aircraft and bring them down to the point of touchdown, so they never stopped because the weather got too bad. So, I think that's one more important things that I, you know, actually every did.

John Fargo: Yeah, definitely! Yeah!

Mr. Lee White: And ... but see, I wanted to be a commission (throat clearing). So, I said ... I know ... I said ... I looked and OCS was available, Officer Candidate School. So, I said, "I'd like to go in the (throat clearing) this ... the summer of 1947, I was shipped down to Lackland and for six months I went through Officer Training for the second time (laughter); December of 1947, I was commissioned a Second Lieutenant (laughter). But I still wasn't on flying status, but I was commissioned.

John Fargo: Did ... did they talk to you about being able to fly?

Mr. Lee White: They never did, and I ... and I don't know why I was so reticent, but (throat clearing) they said, "You look like you'd be good air ... uh, Airborne Radarman or Radar Maintenance Man." So, they sent me to Radar Maintenance School at Keesler Air Force Base. And While I was there, the personnel officer one day called me up and he said, "You're a Pilot, aren't you?" And I said, "Yeah!" And then, you know, of course, I was wearing my wing, and he said, "Let's see if we can't get you put back on flying status."

John Fargo: Wow!

Mr. Lee White: Wow! Just ...

John Fargo: (Laughter).

Mr. Lee White: Here I'd ... all of this time (chuckles), and I met a flight out of (unintelligible), and they took me out (throat clearing), put me in this old B-

25 and I'd never flown a B-2 (laughter), and so we shot three or four landings and they said, "Well, okay, you passed!" So, from then on then I had my flying career; it finally came to fruition (laughter).

John Fargo: Oh, isn't that something?! How many years?

Mr. Lee White: Yeah, all of those ...

John Fargo: That was ...

Mr. Lee White: ... from '43 and here it was the middle of '48 before I got ... well, up to about five years.

John Fargo: Five years!

Mr. Lee White: Five years.

John Fargo: (Unintelligible).

Mr. Lee White: But I made it. But really made me appreciate being a Pilot.

John Fargo: I'm ... I'm sure.

Mr. Lee White: And ...

John Fargo: Did you enjoy flying, Lee?

Mr. Lee White: Oh my, yes! I ... I ... when I retired I thought ... I'd just miss it so much, but, you know, just like anything else ...

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Lee White: ... when you can't see as well, you can't hear (laughter).

John Fargo: I know, right.

Mr. Lee White: So, I don't know how far along you, I mean, I ... I should go with this but I ... I ... once I was commissioned, then I ... I taught in electronics what was called ... the people who became weaponeers who ... who armed the atomic bomb ... we trained them at Keesler as weaponeer. And what happened is it ... when the ... when a ... a atomic bomb is put aboard an aircraft, it's not armed until they get over the target at which time the weaponeer then does whatever they do to make it operable. So, we trained these weaponeers in the ... in the Ground School at Keesler. Then I received my assignment in 1949; they shipped me to this radar site that I mentioned earlier.

John Fargo: Yes.

Mr. Lee White: Between Japan and Korea, and we as ... we set up a ... the first radar that we used to hit the moon and measure the distance to the moon was called the SCR-270, the Signal Corps Radio 270, and that ... we set that radar up on the site and it was a wonderful piece of equipment! We could see out two hundred and fifty miles, and up ... sixty thousand feet, so ...

John Fargo: Where exactly were you?

Mr. Lee White: It was called Fukushima.

John Fargo: Is that in Japan?

Mr. Lee White: It's an island ... if you ... if you look Kyushu, there's a southernmost island ... there's a little, a big air ... Navy base called Sasebo, are you familiar with Sasebo?

John Fargo: Yes.

Mr. Lee White: Well, it would be directly west ...

John Fargo: Okay.

Mr. Lee White: ... of Sasebo (throat clearing).

John Fargo: Okay.

Mr. Lee White: ... about ... between ... halfway between Japan and Korea.

John Fargo: Was ... uh, were ... was it populated?

Mr. Lee White: The Japanese lived there in a little town called Focuring (sp?). I had thirty-eight airmen, and probably about the same number of Japanese that they ... to operate this particular site. But when that war began June the 25th, 1950, it was in an ideal location because as I mentioned earlier, we were having to fly a lot of our fighter sweeps out of It azuki (sp?), and when they were coming back in, they'd always be low on fuel. We could pick them up and control them from the ground as they ... as they made their approach. Let's say they came ... would come in at about twenty thousand feet, we could tell them how far they were from the runway, and take them right down, turn them over to the ground control approach. So, it was not a matter of having to come in and circle the field.

John Fargo: Minimal gas usage then, huh?

Mr. Lee White: Pardon?

John Fargo: Minimal gas usage, save gasoline.

Mr. Lee White: Oh! We could bring them in, you know? All of them, about half of them, I say, we met them on fuel that were bingo when bingo and ... airplane talk means (chuckles), we got to laughing ...

John Fargo: (Unintelligible).

Mr. Lee White: ... so, well about half of them were bingo when ... by the time ... but we could bring right straight in, so it ... it burned the money on that one, too.

John Fargo: How long did you stay there?

Mr. Lee White: We stayed there (throat clearing) until '52.

John Fargo: Did ya?!

Mr. Lee White: And then they shipped me back to the States, and then they sent me ... they ... they put me in Comm School up at Scott Air Force Base in 1952. And I stayed there till '55. And I volunteered then for the F-86D Program, All Weather Interceptor. So, in (pause) the spring of 1955, I ... I was ... I was shipped down to Craig Air Force Base and I checked out in a T-33 which is a ... which is a jet trainer. And then that summer they ... I went through flying through F-86D, All Weather Intercept School at Tyndall Air Force Base.

John Fargo: Now that was a jet ... that was a jet plane.

Mr. Lee White: That was a jet that you had ...

John Fargo: Is that ... is that your first exposure to flying jets? Is that the first time you flew jets?

Mr. Lee White: First time I flew jets was at Craig where ... when I flew the trainer, the T-33 jet trainer.

John Fargo: I see.

Mr. Lee White: And then that ... that qualified me then to fly a jet fighter. Then I checked out in the jet fighter, the F-86D Sabre. Now the Sabre was a ... the aircraft became so famous in Korea up ... when it fought against the MIG-15. That particular version was the A and the F version; I flew the D version which ... only difference ... the fighter version in Korea they had six machine guns

and we had twenty-four rockets that we fired. They all located internally, so ... well, you could drop them six at a time, twelve or all twenty-four, so ...

John Fargo: This is the F-86?

Mr. Lee White: F-86D Sabre ... Sabre jet.

John Fargo: F-86 ... F-86 ... I want to make a note of that.

Mr. Lee White: Yeah, it ...

John Fargo: Uh, Sabre jet.

Mr. Lee White: In fact ...

John Fargo: So, did ... did you fly that during the Korean War?

Mr. Lee White: I didn't fly during the Korean War. I ... I ... during the Cold War. When I finished checking out in the fall of 1956, they sent me to England and we were flying the F-86 ... we were providing the air defense for the United Kingdom, and we were stationed in Manston, England. We were under the operational control of the Royal Air Force, although they're ... our American ... our Commander was an American, and our whole operation, but they scrambled us and provided the ground-controlled intercept information, all of the ground operation, but we would go up. One of our primary jobs ... the Russians used to fly and airliner into London about twice a week.

John Fargo: Yes.

Mr. Lee White: We'd go up, intercept, and find out ... and make sure that it was a ... (chuckles) a camel and not some (unintelligible) or something else (laughter), so we actually ... we trusted and verified as much as we could.

John Fargo: That sounds like good duty!

Mr. Lee White: It was good ... oh, that ... just the best ...

John Fargo: Well, you know ...

Mr. Lee White: ... because ...

John Fargo: ... you were flying and you were living in London.

Mr. Lee White: It was ... it ... it was a ... ideal. And then during the winter months, we would go down ... we would deploy down into Libya and fire rockets, you know? We had all of these twenty-four rockets. Then we'd go down there out over the Mediterranean and prac ... practice shooting.

John Fargo: Uh huh!

Mr. Lee White: So ...

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Lee White: ... we ... we were there about half ... half of our ... my tour, and then eventually they shipped us over into France into Phalsbourg in 1958. So, in '58 and '59, uh, we aggravated the East Germans (laughter).

John Fargo: (Laughter).

Mr. Lee White: Periodically ... periodically about two in the morning we would scramble and we would head full burner towards the German border (laughter). And before we got there, we'd turn and come back, and they'd do the same thing (laughter), so just aggravating ... kept one another awake up half the time.

John Fargo: Where were you stationed in France?

Mr. Lee White: in Phalsbourg which is in Alsace-Lorraine .

John Fargo: Okay.

Mr. Lee White: Near Strasbourg.

John Fargo: Okay.

Mr. Lee White: So, it's in the eastern part of France just almost on the German border.

John Fargo: So, you had four years in Europe?

Mr. Lee White: Oh, I ... and of course, we got to travel all over Europe, oh ...

John Fargo: Were you married at that time?

Mr. Lee White: Oh yes, yeah, I was married (throat clearing).

John Fargo: Your wife was with you?

Mr. Lee White: My wife and my daughter. My son came later, but it was ... it was a wonderful tour.

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Lee White: And I thought I'd get another assignment because it was ... it was my time (laughter). So, when I got my assignment, they found out that (throat clearing) I had a degree, uh, (pause) because (pause) let me ... (pause) ... oh, (pause) I ... I ... when I was at Scott, I went to night school and under boot ... Operation Bootstrap and ... and received a Bachelor of ... of Science degree ... because this was extremely important at that particular time whether you

were a regular officer or whether you were a reserve office. And in order to qualify as a regular officer, they liked for you to have a degree, so I went (throat clearing) I got a degree, and as a result, even though I had a real good flying assignment in France, I expected one back in the States when I left, but they found out I had a degree. They said, “You’re just ... we’re going to send you to the University of Alabama as an ROTC instructor.”

John Fargo: Really?!

Mr. Lee White: Assistant Professor of Aerospace Science (laughter).

John Fargo: No kidding?!

Mr. Lee White: So, there I was four years at the University of Alabama.

John Fargo: Four years?!

Mr. Lee White: Four years! Bear Bryant was the coach (laughter).

John Fargo: (Laughter).

Mr. Lee White: They won everything in sight; Joe Namath was my student.

John Fargo: Is that right?!

Mr. Lee White: Can you ... most people say, “Oh, that’s not possible; you didn’t ... you ... Joe Namath wasn’t your student in the ... in the ...” ... he wore an Air Force uniform!

John Fargo: He was ROTC?!

Mr. Lee White: He was in ROTC. The University of Alabama required every male to take either Army, Navy or Air Force ROTC.

John Fargo: Ah!

Mr. Lee White: Joe Namath was in Air Force ROTC (laughter). He did what he was told. If he didn’t ... get on the phone, call the Academic Advisor.

John Fargo: (Unintelligible).

Mr. Lee White: Bear Bryant would speak with (laughter), so ...

John Fargo: How ... how good of a student was he?

Mr. Lee White: Pardon? Oh, he ... a fair C student (laughter).

John Fargo: Fair?

Mr. Lee White: I mean, he didn’t pay any attention to aerospace science (laughter).

John Fargo: (Chuckle).

Mr. Lee White: He ... he ... he was a football man.

John Fargo: Right.

Mr. Lee White: So, anyway let's see, that four years there ...

John Fargo: What rank were you at that time, Lee?

Mr. Lee White: Uh, I made Captain in April of 1950; I made Major in January, let's see, 1950 ... '52 I made Captain. I made Major in January of 1961. I made Lieutenant Colonel in April of 1945 (incorrect date) and that's where ... that's what I retired as a Lieutenant Colonel.

John Fargo: What ... what was your rank at Alabama?

Mr. Lee White: I was a Major.

John Fargo: A Major.

Mr. Lee White: I ... I was promoted from Captain to Major at ... at that time.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Lee White: Our PAS, our Professor of Aerospace, was a Colonel (throat clearing). So, most of us were Captains.

John Fargo: Did you enjoy that? Did you enjoy that tour?

Mr. Lee White: I did ... if ...

John Fargo: No flying though.

Mr. Lee White: Yeah. I flew but I mentioned the T-33, the trainer, all jet trainer.

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Lee White: I ... the PAS was Colonel and I ... I would drive down (throat clearing), and then in order to keep our flying time, we had to have a minimum of eight hours a month of flying, so on weekends we would go down and across country somewhere and ...

John Fargo: (Unintelligible).

Mr. Lee White: ... to get our flying time.

John Fargo: (Unintelligible).

Mr. Lee White: So, we did maintain proficiency.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Lee White: And the T-30s, they really are the ... it ... the original jet fighter in the Army Air Force was called the P-80, uh, the P-80; that was the name.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Lee White: Shooting Star.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Lee White: So, we did maintain our flying ... with ... with that ... with the T-33, the jet fighter trainer. Then I ... my last (pause) assignment (pause) let's see, this was ...

John Fargo: You got out of Alabama.

Mr. Lee White: ... Alabama, then they said, "You've been doing such a good job, we're going to put you back into a flying assignment." So, they sent me to Saudi Arabia as the Chief Fighter Advisor to the Royal Saudi Air Force, and they were flying F-86Fs.

John Fargo: Sabres?

Mr. Lee White: The Sabres. This was the one that they used in Korea.

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Lee White: So, then I ... I was assigned with the Royal Saudi Air Force for a year (pause), and remember the Arab-Israeli war of 1967?

John Fargo: Yes!

Mr. Lee White: A mob came on our base which was Dhahran on ... in Saudi Arabia, and they literally destroyed our quarters.

John Fargo: Really?!

Mr. Lee White: They came in ... into the ... and threw stuff through the window. My wife was hiding inside the (chuckles) inside the apartment behind a deep freeze, and the mob came in.

John Fargo: What kind of people ... who ... who were they?

Mr. Lee White: These were just Saudis ...

John Fargo: Saudi?!

Mr. Lee White: ... the Arab. Our friend, but they were mad because the Israelis ... Egypt was fighting up in ... in ... now, you think well what happened to your squadron? (Throat clearing), the ... the fighting was up in Israel; my squadron went the other way (laughter). They deployed back down to Taif

(sp?) on the ... which was all the way ... as far as they could get away from Israel as they could. They didn't want to have any part.

John Fargo: Right.

Mr. Lee White: Of course, they were flying old, semi-obsolete Sabre, and the Israelis were flying brand new Mirages or F-4 flyer, the latest type of equipment. So, they ... if they had gone up there, they wouldn't have lasted half a second.

John Fargo: So, there was no security around your quarters?

Mr. Lee White: Uh, we didn't ... there wasn't a pistol in the whole ... what we called the United States Military Training Mission (unintelligible). There wasn't ... we were not allowed to have any arms whatsoever. So, in answer to your question (throat clearing), we depended upon the Saudis for ...

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Lee White: ... protection. And up until the time they ... allowed the ... the base commander ... when the mob came in from town, he could have stopped them at the gate, he waves them right on in.

John Fargo: Waved them in!

Mr. Lee White: Waved them right on in. So, our General immediately took our flag down and a lot of didn't want to take the flag down, you know? If they wanted it, they were going to have to tear it down, but he did. So, they moved on pretty quick with ... just tore up that uh, (pause) so the General thought maybe we should evacuate (throat clearing), so we had a C-54, got people onboard, all of the dependent[s] then they ... we never did.

John Fargo: Never flew them out?

Mr. Lee White: Nev ... they didn't fly them out, so, they stayed. Later ...

John Fargo: Was there any ... anybody hurt during that time?

Mr. Lee White: No, not ... not a soul. It was ... that was the part that, I guess, that caused them then to decide, "Well, we're not going to evacuate, but if any of the dependents want to go, then we will let them go home or fly them home." So, my wife and daughter came on home then, and (pause) I received my assignment then to ... to Bergstrom.

John Fargo: To Bergstrom?

Mr. Lee White: To Bergstrom.

John Fargo: That was your final assignment?

Mr. Lee White: That was my final assignment, not my final adventure, but my final assignment. I was assigned, when I got to Bergstrom, in 1967, the summer of 1967, and that was the year then that I moved here. Within six months, in February of 1968, Commander Bucher and the spy ship was captured off of Wonsan harbor in Korea, north ... in North Korea, and they were being held prisoner. So, our group sent a tactical air control center with ... with me in charge to Osan, Korea and I set up this tactical air control center and then we began flying reconnaissance flights up into North Korea not knowing what they were actually going to do because they had Bucher and his eighty-nine sailor[s] already in prison up in ...

John Fargo: That ... that was the commanding of the ship?

Mr. Lee White: That was ... was ... Bucher was the commanding officer of the ... of this ship ... because ...

John Fargo: I recognize his name.

Mr. Lee White: Yeah. Yeah, well, he ... he was criticized, but for not destroying all of the classified materials. But I ... I don't know whether the Nav ... whether the Navy allowed him to continue; I suspect that his career probably ended with that assignment.

John Fargo: So, you were ... you were actually flying reconnaissance in ...

Mr. Lee White: Our ... well, we were ... I was controlling the reconnaissance that was being ... taking place over and around Wonsan where they were holding these prisoners. So, we flew all over Korea, all the way up to the Yalu (sp?). In the ... in the event that something ... we kept con ... we kept vigilant on all of the bases up there, make sure they weren't building up for another ... another one of their little invasions.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Lee White: So, I spent about six months there, and I said, "Well, I think I'll get out of the service, and go out to the University of Texas and get a PhD." So, (chuckles) in 19 ...

John Fargo: How many ... how many years did you have in the service total?

Mr. Lee White: Twenty-eight years.

John Fargo: Twenty-eight years.

Mr. Lee White: Twenty-eight years.

John Fargo: Uh huh. So, did you get your PhD?

Mr. Lee White: I did in 1974. I received my PhD in Texas History and ...

John Fargo: Texas History?

Mr. Lee White: (Laughter). I went over, how naive I was, I went over to Southwest Texas and I thought I'd get me a job over there, and I think they're still laughing (laughter).

John Fargo: Why?

Mr. Lee White: A ... they just ... at that time, there was a surplus and there still is there, but a surplus of PhDs. And they didn't need anyone at ... Southwest they said, but I had ... while I was over taking some ... getting qualified to be a high school teacher, or to be a teach ... get a teaching certificate, I quali ... I qualified to be a Superintendent, to be a Principal, and to be ... and to be a Teacher, so I had certificates that I could do anything at ... around a public school. So, the professor said, "They're looking for a science teacher at Del Valle," and I said, "Well, that's my specialty." So, I went over, signed up for one year as a sci ... as a high school science teacher; a little physics, a little chemistry and uh, (pause) like I say, I ... I thought I ... I'd just be there one year. And then my wife we ... we got to talking and we said, "Do ... do you want to leave Austin?" "Certainly not! (laughter)." So, we decided ... one year became two, and John, if you can believe this ...

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Lee White: I received five years credit because I was ... had been in service at the University of Alabama ... I received four years teaching credit (laughter).

John Fargo: (Laughter).

Mr. Lee White: When I signed on in high school, I had nine years of teaching experience.

John Fargo: Is that right?!

Mr. Lee White: So, I served nineteen years, I retired out of the Air Force with twenty-eight years' service, I retired out of the public schools of Texas with twenty-eight years (laughter).

John Fargo: Is that right?!

Mr. Lee White: You ... you figure that one out (laughter).

John Fargo: Yeah, that ... that's fabulous!

Mr. Lee White: So, that was it. I taught then un ... for nineteen years. Finally, in 19 ... uh, '93, my wife said, "That's enough."

John Fargo: That's enough, huh?

Mr. Lee White: That's enough (laughter). So, I've been here not doing anything since ... 1993.

John Fargo: You're enjoying yourself!

Mr. Lee White: I'm retired (laughter).

John Fargo: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Lee White: Yeah, I was sixty-nine years old.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Lee White: If I'd of stayed in public school ... you can stay ... you ... until you're seventy.

John Fargo: Can you?

Mr. Lee White: Then you're forced out at ... so, I could have stayed one more year.

John Fargo: Uh huh.

Mr. Lee White: On the active duty, I could have stayed five more years before I would have been force out.

John Fargo: So, you were a Lieutenant Colonel when you actually ...

Mr. Lee White: I was a Lieutenant, a regular Lieutenant Colonel.

John Fargo: Of ... of the regular ...

Mr. Lee White: In regular ... in the regular Air Force, right.

John Fargo: ... the regular Air Force.

Mr. Lee White: So, I had come a long way from being a Flight Officer (laughter).

John Fargo: (Laughter).

Mr. Lee White: But it was a wonderful experience; I'd recommend ... anybody that has the determination just to stay with it.

John Fargo: Just stay with it, yeah!

Mr. Lee White: When you run into a wall ...

John Fargo: Yeah, keep going.

Mr. Lee White: ... go around it or something (laughter). So, I ... having a good wife helps a whole lot.

John Fargo: I talked to her on the phone; she's a charming lady.

Mr. Lee White: You got ... so many of my fellow pilots ... especially when things would get bad, they'd want to ... their wives want them to bug out, you know, get out.

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Lee White: And they did, yeah, so many of them.

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Lee White: But Jo (sp?) you say, "Well I got an assignment," I had an assignment before I went to Saudi Arabia one time - Republic of the Congo. I was going to be on the Embassy in the Republic of the Congo. I didn't say, "I'm not going," but somehow or other, somebody said, "Why are we sending (laughter) Lee White up to the Congo?" So, that was cancelled.

John Fargo: Yeah ...

Mr. Lee White: That would have been a bad one.

John Fargo: Now, that would have been!

Mr. Lee White: Yeah, and that was ...

John Fargo: You wouldn't have wanted to bring your wife there.

Mr. Lee White: Saudi Arabia seemed bad enough.

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Lee White: But it was close enough to Europe.

John Fargo: How ... how long were you in Saudi Arabia?

Mr. Lee White: Only fourteen months.

John Fargo: Fourteen months.

Mr. Lee White: Only fourteen months. And ... and that was my normal tour.

John Fargo: Yeah, uh huh.

Mr. Lee White: No, I think it was eighteen months with a dependent.

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Lee White: But because my dependents came home early, I ... I may have served that fourteen months.

John Fargo: Uh huh. Well, Lee, you had a tremendous career ...

Mr. Lee White: Well ...

John Fargo: ... both military and civilian.

Mr. Lee White: And ... I just (pause) I think God was looking out after me because somebody was.

John Fargo: Yeah.

Mr. Lee White: If ... if I had planned it, I don't think I could have done any ... any better.

John Fargo: No, no.

Mr. Lee White: My ... it just ...

John Fargo: No, no. (Unintelligible).

Mr. Lee White: ... it was a wonderful career, and I made three voyages across ... two across the Pacific. No, I went ... I went to ... to Europe on a ... on a ship, I went to Japan on a ship, came home from Japan on a ship, so I had three voyages.

John Fargo: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Lee White: But, in addition, but it was a good career.

John Fargo: Yes sir, it certainly was!

Mr. Lee White: Did you spend a whole career in or ...

John Fargo: Let me ... let me end this, and then we can talk a little bit more.

Mr. Lee White: Yeah.

John Fargo: I want to thank you for your time today, and I want to thank you for your tremendous service to the United States. So, I think would conclude our interview, Lee.

(end of interview)

FINAL copy
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