

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Vernon Oates

Date of Interview: Unknown

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Interview in progress.

Mr. Oates: I'll start over. The date is October the 21st, 1942. I'm in San Antonio, Texas waiting to go into the Army Air Corps. My name is Vernon Oates, and I suppose that I'm, to get real honest about it, I...I think that I could truly say that I'm just ahead of the draft. I'm...I was born in 1924, so I'm eighteen years old. I'm all excited, I staying right at the present time, while I'm in San Antone with my brother...brother in law and sister, and so a couple of days I'll be sworn in.

Before I go into the service, I will give some background on where I came from. I was raised around Veribest in Tom Green County [Texas], not far from San Angelo, Texas. And we varied from close to Wall to almost a mile. They didn't own different farms, working for different people, but truly we could not be qualified to say oh, the last ten, fifteen years that we done this that we were farmers. We were more a migrant and without a farm, just living in other peoples houses and working for them some. And honestly, times were hard. Altogether, when the family quit...started one, wound up with ten; I was number five. So, we had a tough time, and I can truly say that we were poverty level or lower than that. In fact, I told someone one time that we were so poor that even the rats starved to death at our house. And I wasn't kidding; it was pretty close to that. So, I know what it means to be poor. I left home when I was seventeen, worked a while at Goodfellow Air Force Base at San Angelo, and now I'm going into the Air Corps. So, here goes.

I decided that I was getting close; Uncle Sam's finger was pointing towards me while I worked at Goodfellow. So, I contacted a buddy of mine and asked him

if he wanted to go in. He was about the same age; I went to school with him, and he said, "Okay." So they had taken us down to the recruiting station and they sent us to San Antone, so that's where I'm at, waiting for my first day in the service. So, I'll begin from there.

Now, as you know, we all got a good haircut. That was a...that was the first good haircut, and you know, I'm not sure how clean my head was because I don't remember washing it...a week or two before or there at (unintelligible), and any...anyway, I'm not going into that, but I did get a haircut. And so, we were in the Army now. So, I...I was proud. I had always, and this is my greatest desire, and I'll have to say, that it was some desire that couldn't be fulfilled. I only got a tenth grade education, and at...when I graduated in 1941, the tenth grade was high school; I got a genuine high school...high school diploma. So, I wanted to be a pilot, but no way. You at least had to have a couple of...a year or two of college, so here I was going in the Army Air Corps wanting to be a pilot, and didn't have no experience whatsoever outside of being a...I was raised on a farm, farm boy, worked a while at Goodfellow Field, and knew nothing of life. So, my first experience in the Air...Army Air Corps was...I had been in a couple of days and had went down to the PX to get something, and I was walking back and I passed this gentleman; he was kind of reading a paper, I paid him no mind, I knew he was an Army man, and I hadn't...went by him about two steps, well he says, "Soldier!" I turned around and I says, "Yes sir?" He said, "How long have you been in?" I said, "Well, two days." He said, "That's what I thought." Said, "Do you know what...what I am?" I looked at him, I said, "Well, you're in the...I noticed you're in the Army." He said, "Yeah, but do you know what rank I am?" And I said, "I have no idea." He said, "I'm a Colonel," I think that's what he said now. I could be wrong on that, but I think he said Colonel. And he says, "You are supposed to salute...salute an officer, do you know that?" And I said, "Well, I think they said something about officers, and enlisted men were...were different." He smiled and he said, "I tell you what, Soldier," he said, "if I had been a Second

Lieutenant, you might be in trouble, but just remember,” and so I was...I don't remember whether I asked him what he was, but he...he had told me he was a Colonel, so that was my first experience with what I'm...had a long row ahead of me to learn these...some things, and brother, I had to learn the hard way! So, there we were. We got...we got introduced to Army Air Corps.

So, I had signed up, when I signed up, I signed up to come back to Goodfellow Field. We had the choice to pick out by volunteering, and that was one thing that I liked about it, and this was during World War II now; I remember World War II was going strong – Germany, the fighting over there was furious. Over in the South Pacific, Japan was taking over everything in the South Pacific; the war was going strong over there. It had made it...Pearl Harbor, December the 7th, so you can imagine what was going on in 1942, even at that late of time of the year in October.

So, we came back, and my buddy had signed up for Mathis Field; I signed up for Goodfellow. So, I learned later that he stayed at Mathis Field during the war. So, here I am at Goodfellow Field, and I signed up to be an Airplane Mechanic. And I didn't know one end of an airplane from the other; I'd never been in a cockpit; didn't even...what made them fly, and really, I was interested in learning, and that was my desire.

So, we're...here we are; they...they started us out, and gave us...of course, they'd already gave us some issue clothes and they...they were them old woolen, uh, Army fatigues, whatever you call them, clothes, brand new shoes, and then we were to...have our basic training. Well, I...when the good Lord passed out talents, it was one time that he left me...uh, left out on me was coordination or any musical ability or any timing that I could remember. So, I had...I had a little bit of trouble even keeping in step with the rest of the people. So, here I was brand new recruit, and we were taking our basic training at Goodfellow Air Force Base. So, I don't remember the Drill Sergeant's name, but he was a

booger, and he sort of reminded me now that I look back, he sort of reminded me of the ole Sergeant on Gomer Pyle, USMC, uh, Marines. You remember how he yelled and stamped...stomped and everything. This guy was a Staff Sergeant, so he informed us that if we didn't like him, that he would take his stripes off any time of the day, and we could see what we could do about it. And none of us took him up on it. But anyway, he was...he was pretty strict on us. So, here we are, and I'm trying to learn to stay in step with the rest of the people and stay out of trouble at the same time because I'm...I'm determined, I'm going to be an Airplane Mechanic. So, we have two guys, two more guys that I personally know from San Angelo, taking the basic training at the same time. I didn't know this till I...we...we started. One of them was my brother in law's nephew, and the other one was a...a friend of my oldest brother, or he knew him, and I knew him, too. And I don't guess they would mind me naming...naming their names, so I'll just tell...tell you the words. It was Leroy Garman (sp?) was my brother in law's nephew, and O.D. Heflin (sp?) was the other gentleman. They were in the same outfit that I was, so we were marching together. Well, Leroy Garman smoked a pipe, and you know, you don't fall out with a lighted pipe in your mouth in formation. But he did this particular morning; he fell out with a lighted pipe in his mouth. So, the Sergeant was very polite about it. He said, "Garman," he says, "what have you got in your mouth?" And of course, Garman had to take pipe out before he could talk; he tried to talk with it in him, like spit out...spit it out, so he said, "I...I've got my pipe." (Unintelligible), the Drill Sergeant didn't use very...I won't quote what he said, but he told...he was...he told him, "Get rid of it." So, Garman stuck a lighted pipe in his pocket. Well, that's a no-no, I guess, because I don't smoke a pipe, but I'm sure that it was hot and it was...it was lit! So, he couldn't stay still because he...it was burning him. So, the Drill Sergeant told him, said, "Well, get that thing out of your pocket, dump it...dump it out, get rid of it!" So, he did, and he says, "Alright now, Garman," says, "I'll tell you what," said, "maybe if you double timed down to the," and he pointed towards the fence down at the...we...where we was at was out on a...I think it would be the

northeast uh, no, it's east side of Goodfellow. Anyway, that's what the Drill uh, where we...where we were drilling...taking...taking training. And he said, "Double time down there," says, "and come back." So, ole Leroy did, and then...when...when he got back, he was still...and Leroy had a habit of having a grin on his face. So, he take...he told him, said, "Wipe that so, and so grin off your face and get...stand at attention." He said, "I'm going to give you a little bit more punishment," and he told him, said, "Now, at your barracks down there," he says, "you know, you seen those guys out there marching and saluting the telephone post, say about a hundred yards...a hundred foot apart, not yards," and said, "you put in the hours tonight after we get off." And says, "You just go down...you...you salute the one post, you about face, then you march, salute the next one, and about face, go down and do this for an hour." So, that's what happened. So, low and behold, me and I...I'm thinking it's my buddy, or the one I knew; it could have been someone else. I bet...I remember I think it was O.D. Heflin...our barracks is right beside where...in there, and Leroy had a fri...there was somebody else out there saluting, and there's two of them, and so we...are at the open window in the barracks watching them. So, they passed right by our window, so we make fun of them as they go by out there drilling and...and have a...they got in trouble. What we didn't know, and this is kind of comical. What we did not know was the fact that the Drill Sergeant had walked in the barracks and he was standing listening to us about twenty foot from us, and so he comes up and he says, "Well, gentlemen," says, "you guys seem to be enjoying those guys marching out there." Says, "How about you two just getting out there and join them?" Said, "You can finish out...finish out their hour; get out there!" And said, "Don't say nothing!" So, we went out and it wasn't quite as funny as we thought. Well now, that...that was really the first time that I got in trouble, but that's only the beginning.

We, needless to say, we...we put in a hard two weeks basic training, and you can imagine what...how good we were at taking only two weeks of basic training. They gave us nothing else except just drill...drilling; we didn't even...I don't

think we went through the obstacle course, and we certainly didn't do too much running; we didn't have no backpacks. We didn't even know how to salute the flag or...or go out to stand and retreat or anything. And...but we were in the Army Air Corps! So, still I had to...(unintelligible) to be a mechanic. Since I couldn't be a flyer, I wanted to be...I wanted to be part of the planes, so I wanted to be a mechanic! So, I had to accept that. Of course, the Drill Sergeant, he didn't have nothing to do with it. But anyway, we finished there, the basic training. Boy, I tell you what, I was (unintelligible). And guess what? They announced to us that we were Airplane Mechanics! So, they gave us a...I still remember this, they gave us a red rag; it's just a grease rag, I guess, is to wipe up...wipe our mouth on to the...got dirty, and then we wiped the grease off of our hands if we had any grease.

And so far, I still didn't know one end of a plane to the other, but that's what they did. And so, they put us out on the line, and they were...they were...Goodfellow was a training...was a basic training school, and they had these, what they called the old BT-13As; I'm...I think I'm right on that. That's...that I got to...complete number to them, I guess. So, that's what we were on. They were single engine, they were single-engine planes, and a...and a real good plane, and they were a little bit fast. They had just one, I still remember this 'cause I'll go into detail on why I got in trouble, but they had one exhaust coming out the side of it, and this exhaust came right down the side of the...outside of the plane and it would smoke up the whole side of the plane, and this was...this was part of our job was to keep that clean. And so, here I am, I've got a red rag in my pocket, and I'm an Airplane Mechanic!

So, it wasn't long till they...they taught us. We come out, and we had to go out, and what they called (unintelligible), and then the...the part of the (unintelligible) line was to turn the propellers around...around, you know, and we'd turn them to kind of get the oil from the bottom of the...bottom piston up and kind of straighten it out. And so, that's what...that's what we started out as.

So, we doing pretty good, about...about a week, week or two we done this, and I...I found out what a plane looked like, and I didn't even know what made them fly, but I was learning; I was going to be an Airplane Mechanic, so here I am! So, low and behold, the next step, and he assigned me to do this, the next step was Pre-flight. And so, he told me, says, "Hold the stick in this position, keep the tail from coming up, and the propeller from meeting the ground," and so forth to hold it down, you know? It...it was one of those things that uh, you...the...tail wheel was on the back; there wasn't no tricycle type landing gear at all. So, here I am Pre-flight in planes, so we...he instructed me in how to start it, and the basic instruction that we gave him after we pulled the prop through was to start them and let them warm up a little bit. Then, in testing it, they had the...left and right magneto, and these magnetos controlled the spark and the...and the rpms and so forth of the engine. So, we would, uh, the directions were that we were to check, rev it up to a certain rpm and I...I don't...I don't remember the exact r...rpm, so I won't...won't say I do. And then we were to cut the left...say, we cut the left magneto off and the right one would be controlling the pla, uh, the engine, and if the rpm dropped more than a hundred rpms down, then it was something wrong with the engine. But if it stayed...if it...it could drop a little bit, but not over a hundred rpms, so then, we would turn the left one back on and the right one off, and that's, you know, back and forth to check it. But above all in this...and this Line Sergeant and I...I swear I don't remember the Line Sergeant's name, but he was a booger, too. And apparently he never did like me or he didn't act like he did, but he told me, said, "Now Oates," said, "when you get in there now," said, "be sure that if you check the right one, turn the left one back on before you turn the other one off." But..., "And if you happen to forget and turn both of them off, *do not* turn them back on...not...not then because you might blow the engine up or blow up a piston or ruin it." He said, "That puts such a tremendous amount of pressure on the engine itself to turn the other one. If you turn...happen to turn...have (unintelligible)...say you're checking the right one, and you accidentally turn the left one off, that makes it dead. And then you turn it back on, then you've built

up some excess gasoline in that engine and *do not* do that!” Well, guess what? Here I am Pre-flight, and I got my mind on something else. So, I’m checking the magnetos; I turn the right one on, I check...I check the left one – it...it’s good. So rather than turning the right one back on, I turned the left one on. So, I realized what I’d done, so I turned the left one back on and also the right, and there was a sonic boom! I mean, that thing backfired and smoke just boiled out down the runway, I guess, and of course, the Sergeant heard it, Line Sergeant. Here he come running out there. Well, needless to say, I didn’t...didn’t damage the engine, but I was in trouble. So, he calls me out and says, “Now, I...I stressed the fact that I tried to tell my mechanics,” and said, “you’re supposed to be a mechanic,” and he looked at me. And I nodded, you know, “Yeah, I’m a mechanic.” And so, he says, “I have to learn you...I always says...the best thing is to learn...is to...get on KP.” Says, “I’m going to put you on KP for a week.” Well, he didn’t know it, but before I came in the service, and when I worked at Goodfellow Field that’s what I would call myself, a genuine KP. We worked...I worked at the Cadet Mess Hall. I washed pots, I’ve peeled potatoes, I...I washed dishes, I...I did this and that and I cooked some, and I was a store clerk man and so forth, so I was pretty well acquainted with KP which I didn’t like, but he put me on a week’s KP for messing up on the plane. So, that...that wasn’t too bad. I got...I got a little more experience in the KP. And most of you people know what a KP is is kitchen police, and that’s what we were called; we was on KP. So, here I am, uh, hadn’t been in the Army Air Corps very long, I’m an Airplane Mechanic and I’m on KP. I’m not learning anything about planes; I’m learning things about pots and pans again which I already pretty good experience in pots and pans!

I want to continue my little story. Now, remember I’m not a professional storyteller, so I’m just telling it like it is. If I...if I go, some things I’ve already done, don’t worry about it. I’m not going to back up. I just apologize now, but I...I meant to mention when I came in the service when we were signing in...signing up the papers...you know, they ask you a few questions. And one of

the questions was – what is your occupation? Well, I put farm hand, but I...any experience in mechanical I said I was a tractor mechanic. Well, that's all I could think about is tractor mechanic, and I had never worked on a tractor. I'd been around them all my life. The guy that we lived on his place had an old John Deere tractor and I felt like that I possibly knew what made them run. I...I did know one thing – they were loud rascals and the engines...a lot of dirt come up from the field up in your nostrils and your hair and everything when you're driving one, but that's about all. But anyway, that's what I put down. Airplane...air...to be a Airplane Mechanic, I put down I was a tractor mechanic. So, I thought that...that must have been why they made me an Airplane Mechanic.

So, here I am, I get off of KP-ing, so I get back on the line again, and we have an auxiliary field out at...close to Wall and its named uh, guess what? I...my last name – Oates' Landing Field; they'd go out there and land, take off, practice landing, taking off, and so they would take us out there and by truck, and let us off, and I was one of the guys that was supposed to...Cadets would come in there just...they'd just land and sometimes they...they didn't go...come back to Goodfellow Field, they'd just land and take off and another...another group would come out, land, and take off, and they'd pick them up and take them back to...to Goodfellow. And so, they just parked the planes in different positions while they were doing this during the day...landing. And so, I was to uh, park the planes, taxi them around and line them up. And they're supposed to be lined up when the nex...the other crew came in to start flying, and that was my job. Boy, I was proud! You know, here I am, I'm checking them out, I'm a genuine Airplane Mechanic 'cause I'm parking the planes.

So anyway, to get back to my problems that I...I ran into, I went back to the line and the next thing, I...I think this happened. Maybe it didn't happen in the way I'm telling it, but it did happen that we had a policy in our barracks that each one of us...if...if we had a tendency to oversleep, the other guys would wake us

up. So, I didn't wake up that morning, but those guys I guess they didn't like me 'cause one of them was from Brooklyn and the other one was from Minnesota, and you know, us Texans don't talk...didn't talk like them guys. We thought they were foreigners, and they thought we were...I don't know what they thought. Anyway, that...that's the way it was, so they didn't wake me up, so I overslept. Well, guess what? I got another tour of KP, and I don't think this was a week, I'm not sure. Anyway, he put me back on KP for oversleeping. So, I wasn't making too much headway. I...I had thought well maybe while I'm in this...this Army, I might make Pfc, you one, one stripe. That's what they called Pfc back there then. I'm...I'm not sure they still got a Pfc, but that's what they called them or would call us; I wasn't that, I was a Private, genuine Private. So anyway, here I am back on KP again. So, when I get off of that, I'm Pre-flight a plane one morning, and after I get through well, O.D. Heflin comes along, and I'm talking to him. And in the meantime, I...I've got to say this one thing – they do give you, if you're...this is part of the Airplane Mechanics, I guess, or that's what I...that's what he gave me, he gave me a...another rag, a brush, a bucket and some soap and I was to take care of the...the, you know, different planes, get this smut off the side of it, that was part of it. And I think that maybe that was part of my punishment that I didn't a full week KP. I'm not sure about that. But anyway, I had a bucket of water and I was doing this, and I was bad-mouthing the Line Sergeant. Well, this guy, O.D. Heflin, he was a big tease, and he was always had a grin on his face, and I understood later he become a Baptist preacher and I could understand because he was windy, and no, no offense on the Baptist ministers because that what I...I am a Baptist. But anyway, it...it was kind of comical, but he was...he...he was questioning me on the Line Sergeant, and man, I was telling him how that Line Sergeant was doing, he was...he was no good and all this kind of stuff, and I did not know that the Line Sergeant was on the other side of the plane listening. Now, this is how stupid I was and how mean that O.D. Heflin was. So, here come the Line Sergeant around, and he says, "Well, Oates," says, "I...I understand that you don't like me." And I says, "Well, I guess there ain't no...ain't no use trying to

deny it; I guess that's what I was saying, wasn't it?" And I says, "I...I guess I don't like you. Your...you seem like you're after me all the time; I can't do nothing right." Anyway, he says, "Well," he said, "you're doing a pretty good job I understand down at the, uh, (unintelligible), I think we would (unintelligible) mess hall." I started to say officers' mess, but that's what I did before I come in. I'm thinking it was a regular mess hall, and KP, so he said, "I...I understand the guy down there says you're a pretty good hand, so I'll just send you back down there for a week." So, he sent me back down for a week. So, here I am...still trying to be a Airplane Mechanic.

So, I come back; I don't know how long it had been and all this time, I hadn't been at Goodfellow Field too long, and we really didn't get too much time off, did get some time, you know, to come into town and so forth. It wasn't just a...idea that they kept us on the field all the time; they did while we was taking basic training. But after we got out of that, we...we were free to come into town. But anyway, so here I am back on KP and I get through with that tour and get back on line again, doing pretty good I thought. And then all of a sudden, I get this idea that it looks like I...he's going to throw me on KP about something else, I don't remember what else. Anyway, every time I turned around, I was in...I was in the lines for KP and getting off, so I decided well, I'm just about tired of this; said...I'm not ever going to amount to anything like I'm going, so I'm going to go talk to the commanding officer. So, I found out where he was at, and I don't remember what his name was or don't even remember (chuckles) where the...the Quartermaster place was at or whatever you called it where...where officers was, but I went down. And so, I waltzed in and there's a lady at the desk and she asked me what I...what I needed and what...what was, and I told her, I said, "I want to talk to the commanding officer," and she said, "Well, he's in his office." Well, low and behold, I didn't know the rules and regulations, so I just waltz in just like I owned the place. Well, that's not the way you do it in the Army, not near...perfect way! So, here I am, I'm a Private, I'm an Airplane Mechanic and I'm...been in trouble, so I

waltz in and I...I don't even salute him; I just walk up and I says, "I want...I...I need to talk to you." And he looked up kind of surprised; I think he's a Captain or a Major...something. He just...he just a lot higher than I am, so he looks up and says, "What can I do for you soldier?" I told him, I said, "I want to...I want to talk to you; I got a complaint." He said, "Well, do you know that the way you came in this office, that's not the way you do. You're supposed to get an appointment the first...first place. You going to...supposed to ask for an appointment to see me. And then when you come in, you're supposed to salute." So, I stood there, I saluted him. I said, "Well, I'm sorry, I'm sorry." And I saluted him. And he says, "Well, the damage is already done." Said, "What's wrong?" So, I told him, I said, "Now, me and the Line Sergeant," and at that time, I knew his name; I don't know...I don't remember it now, I've kind of pushed it out of my mind, get rid of it! And so, I tell him what I've been doing, and I says, "I'm staying on KP more than I am on the line, and I signed in to this Army Air Corps to be a Airplane Mechanic, and that's what I want to be, an Airplane Mechanic." And he said, "Well," he says, "I understand." And he says, "I can see your point." But says, "I think you...I think you're going to have to learn some few things – what the Army is all about," and then he says, "I tell you what," he says, "if you think...you don't want to go back to KP again, I'll get you something else to do." So, I said, "Oh boy, I...that sounds good!" And he says, "I will call," and he got on the phone or something; I guess he called the Line Sergeant; I don't know who he called and said, he said, "I...I just made arrangements," says, "you got two weeks latrine duty (laughter)." Oh boy! I go from KP to cleaning the, uh, I started to say outhouses, but we did...we did have modern plumbing at...at Goodfellow Field in 1942. So, here I am, I graduate from washing pots and pans to washing commodes! And that is...that's a pretty good advancement, I'd say. I'm...I'm moving on up this man's Army! So, that's...that's a (chuckles), it's kind of funny, but I think that that time, and...in the meantime, while I was talking to him, I told him, I said, "Well, if I'm going to stay on KP and on detail, and I can't be what I am, I want to get out of here; I want a transfer!" So, he said, he had told me (unintelligible)

says, "I think I can get you a transfer," but in the meantime, I'm on latrine duty. And so, I learned something there. I learned that I maybe would rather have been a kitchen policeman than a latrine policeman because, and it was in the officer's quarters. And they are real...uh, they're more strict, I think, or supposed to be more strict. But anyway, so I go to...I struggled through that.

And then, I...I...anyway, I...I have to say this. I...my desire had always been, I mentioned this earlier that I...I wanted to be a Pilot, so we could...we could...get a...check out a parachute, and I'll go back and tell about this. We'd check out a parachute and if they were flying...if the student was not in the plane with the instructor, then we could get a hop, see what I mean? And most the time, these formation flying, there was the...the students was on either side...on either...either wing of the instructor and he was leading the formations, so that we could get us a hop. So, I lined up with the rest of the guys, and we would go up and I really enjoyed it. That's when I got my first taste of flying, and I loved it! I can still remember, and I'll report this, this is strange. This instructor...I was in the back...he was front...cockpit, I was in the back, and he told me, he said, "Be sure and buckle yourself in. You got your parachute and everything, and you're ready." "Okay, I'm ready," and I buckle myself in, you know? So, here we are, we're flying around over San Angelo, and I'm looking down and trying to figure out where we're at and so forth, and its night. And these...these two students are following in formation, and they're supposed to stay so far away. So, I'm watching them, and all of a sudden, one of them...he turned...looked like he turned upside down and disappeared. And I thought boy, I hope that plane didn't crash! And I looked on the other side and the other student, he just turned, and about that time, I looked...well, I thought I was looking up...and I seen looking up, I seen the ground, and the other way the stars were shining, and I thought what in the world's going on?! And we were...the...the instructor had turned the plane upside down and was flying bottom-side up (chuckles), and about that time my...my stomach changed

positions, I think, but that was my first experience...in flying. (Recording briefly stops at this point.)

So, here I am in this man's Army and I'm moving up fast! I'm...I'm a KP Technician, I'm a Latrine Orderly, I'm an Airplane Mechanic, and also I'm a, you might say, I've been up flying, and brother, that is moving on up! And all because I think I put down on my application that I was a tractor mechanic; you think that's what it is. Anyway, so I'm doing...I'm moving on...I'm learning some things, I'm...I'm...my qualifications are moving up. In other words, I'm qualified for several things. When I came in I did...I wasn't qualified for nothing, so here I am. And also, I probably qualified for being probably the...one of the stupidest guys that we have go about getting things done.

But then, guess what? About in January, I don't remember the date, I got my orders to be transferred; that's exactly what I had requested, so here it was. I had been in the...at Goodfellow Field and came back in October of '42, and it was January of '43 and I was to be transferred. So, I think that they gave me a pass or something; I got two or three days off before we went. And so they...I got my orders to go to Sheppard Air Force Base in Wichita Falls, Texas to go through a Tech School. So brother, here I am, I'm...I'm getting...I'm getting up in this man's Army! I'm already qualified for these other things, so now they're going to send me to school. And so, that's exactly what I needed...needed to do was go to school because apparently I wasn't learning very much in...where I was at except just stay in trouble. So, they...well, it was...they put you on a bus. So, they put us on a bus and guess what? They put me in charge of the group! There was, I think, there was twelve of us. I still remember two of the guys. One of them was named Frederick Johnson (sp?), and I'm sure and...and there's nothing wrong with me naming the names. He was from, I'm...I'm thinking Cross Plains; no, it wasn't Cross Plains; somewhere in Texas, I'll just put it that way. I...I went...went blank on that. The other guy's name, his last name, was Miracle (sp?); he was from Brady. And so, there I was, I was to...every

place...and I learned this later, every place we went in Sheppard Air Force Base, we marched. And they...he would pick the...the only guy that did not know anything about marching was me; I could not march right. But, I was the guy! So, it didn't take me very long to...to get loud mouthed like ole...the ole Sergeant and hollering and...and I...half the time, I was out of step with the other guys; they were doing a pretty good job because they could march, but I couldn't. But here we...we wound up. We got to Sheppard Air Force Base, Tech School, and so, we started to school. And I enjoyed it. I never could learn in...in grade school or high school; I didn't learn very much. Well, I...I didn't learn too much, but I decided...and we were studying...well, where we were at, there two different type of planes – one of them was a B-26 light bomber, and they also had a B-25 light bomber. And we studied...most of our studying was uh, it had to do with the B-26, not the '25. I don't...I'm not sure why they had the '25, but it was there. But we were studying on the B-26 light bomber. It was a twin-engine bomber. And so, I decided, and it had a lot of hydraulic equipment on it. Most of the...the...say they had alerions and struts and the breaks, and all that kind of stuff, and the...and the rudders and so forth was controlled by hydraulic pressure. And so, I got kind of interested in that, so I...I wanted to put down that I wanted to qualify not as a...a...genuine, you know, just overall mechanic or engine mechanic or...or on electrical part of it and so forth, but I wanted on the hydraulics. So, that's what I...that's what I put down. So, then we started, and I'm...I'm not for sure, I don't remember how long the course was, but I stayed in Wichita Falls.

And in the meantime, I'll tell a little bit about my background on my love life. I didn't...when I was going to high school, I wasn't the most popular boy. In fact, I was the one who had the stinkenest feet when we left out to...ever amount to anything; that was my title at Veribest when I finished high school. So, that...that didn't help my prestige. I...I didn't have a very high opinion of myself, so uh, but anyway, I...I got this girlfriend, and she, and I remember this, but she lived...was living in San Angelo when I met her, so we went out,

and...and, you know, thought a little bit of each other. I mean, that was one of my first ones, that wasn't the first one, but one of the first. And so I was about half thought I was in love with her, but I got a pass from Good, uh, from Sheppard and came back to San Angelo, and she had moved to Nixon, Texas. And she was kin to, at that time, my sister just older than me had married a guy by the name of Denver Mosely (sp?), and she was Denver's, I believe...I'm wanting to say cousin. I might be wrong on that. This girl was his cousin or something. So, when I came in, I made a deal with Denver and Millie (sp?) and that I was going to hitchhike to Nixon, Texas. It was below...below San Antone, so I was going to hitchhike down there on my pass while I was in and see my girlfriend. So, if they would come...they said, "Well, we'll come down there; we'll drive down and pick you up and bring you back." So, I hitchhiked to San Antonio, went to Nixon and that was her old stomping ground. When I got down there, I...I found out one thing, that I had a lot of competition in Nixon which I didn't have in San Angelo. So, it didn't...it didn't...I was a little bit, you might say, a little bit jealous, I guess. It didn't...didn't pan out. So, when Denver and Mil...Millie came and picked me up and brought me back to San Angelo, I decided that little love affair was over with. So, I went back to Wichita Falls. And Wichita Falls was overpopulated with airmen, soldiers (unintelligible) separate; it was a training, it was a...they had all kinds...they was coming in there by the thousands training them, and day and night. And so, the girlfriends was a little bit hard to...hard to get hold of, but I managed to find one that she was a...she was a...a...in a quartet, and I don't remember the name they called it. And they sang on the local station, and I met her at a, I think it was a bowling alley in the basement of one of the hotels, and I'm not...I don't even remember the name of the hotel, to tell you the truth. And so, that's the way I met her and went out with her a while.

But anyway, we finished our...we finished our...our course. Not very much happened. The only thing that I remember happened...that they...somebody had the mumps, and we were supposed to be quarantined, and I had a three-day pass

for San Angelo, and I hadn't met another lady, a girlfriend, on the streets of San Angelo, waiting for the bus, and I...I still remember her, and I got acquainted with her and started...so, I was going...I had a three-day pass; I was going back because we were getting close to finishing and we didn't know where we was going after we was finished with school. So anyway, they quarantined our barracks, and it didn't...didn't set well with me, so I slipped out, went out and caught the bus and came back to San Angelo. Didn't...hadn't been quarantined for a month. And so, I came back, and when I...three days later, I came back to Wichita Falls, Sheppard Air Force Base, so I went down to...to check in and go back to my barracks. And the whole crew...the...my whole class...the barracks was empty. And here I was; I had left my double bag and, you know, everything that I had which wasn't very much. (Switching to a different cassette). This is cassette 2B. I'm going to continue on my story. Now, when I got back from...from San Angelo on my three-day pass, like I say, I...my whole class was gone! The barracks was empty. And I had been...supposed to have been quarantined, so I slipped out, used my pass and came back, so I was in trouble, seemed like. So, here I was, so I...I decided...I...I'd go down to the PX or maybe the rec hall, something, and maybe I'd see somebody. So, I was walking down the street, here come a guy that was in the class. "Boy!" I said, "am I glad to see you!" "Now, where in the world did you guys go?" He said, "Yeah," said, "I heard that you was missing," says, "the instructor was looking for you." Says, "Where you been?" And I said, "Well, I've been on a three-day pass." "Well, we were supposed to be quarantined, he says, "so you may be in trouble." I said, "Well, where in the world are you?" So, he told me the number of the barracks. He told me, says, "One of your buddies," said, "I'm not sure what," said, "he...he gathered up your stuff and your duffel bag; it...it's down there," said, "you got a place to stay, you got a bunk. Says, "We was ready for you, we knew you was...you was coming back, but I didn't know you'd slipped out. But the quarantine's over with." Said, "It wasn't nothing to it." He didn't have the mumps; the guy that they checked didn't, so there I was. So anyway, boy, I...my heart had fallen, I could just see myself getting throwed

in the brig. And I graduated from school, and still, I wanted to be an Airplane Mechanic, and here I was...it looks like I was on my way. I really had the credentials to be something, had some qualifications on all those things, and so we were almost through with our classes. And of course, I had learned very little. All I knew...that I knew was very little, but I was ready to get out of school. So, sure enough, I think that we all passed. I...I'm not sure that they ever failed anybody in that school at Sheppard Air Force Base. Anyway, if they did, we didn't hear about it. We got out.

There wasn't nothing really bad happening. I know that they had an obstacle course, and I'll tell this while I'm thinking about it. And we used to have to go through there. And also, they had a...this...this obstacle course had a...a rope hung over some water, and the water was about knee deep. And you grabbed a rope from the other guy that he swung across like Tarzan, then he would turn the rope loose and you'd catch it, and you know, follow the leader. So anyway, the guy that was ahead of me one day, and it was cold...probably...probably below freezing, well below freezing, 'cause it did get cold in Wichita Falls, anyway, he...he slipped, fell in the water, and when I grabbed the rope, I started across. Well, my legs hit him standing up, and so I fell in the water, both of us fell in the water. And I swear that I...we liked to have froze to death before we got to the barracks and changed clothes. But that was one of the deals.

Then we were on bivouac, I remember this. And one of the guys that we...we were out there, and we was living in tents, and so we was living real primitive, so we built...we had fire...places to build fires. So, the wind got up something...blowed some sparks over on some grass next to the fence line and it caught on fire. Someone called the fire department from the field; they came out there and I still remember...there they came, you know, making all kinds of racket and they was from the fire department. They pulled up there and rolled their truck up there and rolled the hose off and turned the pressure on and started the engine, and there was about a half a gallon of water come out of

the...the hose and quit. They had forgot to fill up the tank, and so we had to...we had to work to put the fire out ourselves. And that's the only two exciting things that I can remember at Sheppard Air Force Base.

So anyway, we graduated, and guess what? Boy, was I proud! Here they came. We...everybody made Pfc, can you imagine? One stripe! Oh man, now, I...I had already moved from Private to Pfc. I'm not even sure they have a Pfc ranking in the modern day Army Air Force at all or any...any part of the Army. I...I've never seen one guy with one...one stripe. But anyway, that's what we had. And they said, "Sew it on, boy, sew them on!" So man, I put mine on; I was proud of that one stripe. That's...almost than I had ever figured I'd make. So, here we were...brand new Pfcs; we had our...we had our graduation from Sheppard Air Force Bases; we was ready, we was real, real mechanics now! And I was, guess what, I was a Hydraulic Mechanic! That's what I went to school for.

So, they loaded us on a train, and I never will forget, we got on that train late one evening, and you know the Army, they always, if you've got leave the next day, they put you on the day before and let you sit. So, that's what we did. Well, of all the outhouse rumors, is where we were going; nobody knew. They had us going to San Francisco; we was going to New York City. We had one guy said we was going to Maine. Another one said we...heading for Florida, and so all that kind of stuff. But anyway, the next day the train started out, and after about four hours of stopping and starting and backing up and so forth, with the troops already on there, we finally cross the Red River in Oklahoma. And then we knew we were going north anyway. So, we went through Oklahoma and finally got out and wound up at Dodge City, Kansas, the wide-open town known for its gunslingers in the old, old wild west. Had a boot hill. The boot hill was something that you need to see. So, and so was killed by so and so, and somebody else killed this so and so, and then it just went on down. And it seemed like the bad guy, whoever killed him, it wound up the last guy had

killed one, so they wiped out all the bad men. But that's the way it was. We...the city of Dodge, out at the air base, there was more airmen or Air Corps personnel out there than there was...population of the whole town. So, here we were in a small town, community, and outnumbered the citizens. So, I don't know that they thought they...too much about...they...they didn't have too much of a respect for the Air Corps people, and that...that's that I got. Well, they had one beer joint, and this was the main one. It was a kind of a saloon downtown and reminded me of when Matt Dillon was playing the old song, uh, Gunsmoke, and that's where the...saw all of the airmen or soldiers, servicemen, whatever you want to call us, that's where we gathered on Saturday night. Well, you know, at that time, Kansas was dry as far as liquor was concerned, but you could buy a beer. So, that was what they sold, keg beer, and back then in the 1940s everybody, I say everybody, I didn't, but everybody smoked. So, on Saturday night when you gathered down at the saloon or beer joint on Main Street, when you got off the bus to go...walk down the street, you could smell the smoke, cigarette smoke, and the smell of beer on the air. If it was blowing that way, you knew where it was coming from, it was coming from the...the one big tavern. So, here we go. And if you got drunk, now this is almost the truth, when you got drunk, and you had no...there was no problem of the people falling if they got too drunk to stand, they couldn't fall because it was too many in there. It just...just stacked like cordwood. That's how close it was. And the smoke was so thick, it came down from the ceiling and went out the swing doors. And brother, and that's...was the gathering place for all the soldiers drinking beer. At about ten or eleven o'clock, they...they wouldn't even, oh, they just throw their...sometimes they'd just throw their glasses on the floor and bust them. So, we had glass, broken glass, all over the floor, a nasty place, smoke, cigarette smoke would kill you when you walked in, but that's where they gathered. So, that...that was the starting of the...the Dodge City, Kansas tour or duty for me.

They...we worked in a hangar. There were several squadrons, so they assigned us to one of those squadrons. They were training, and it was B-26 light bombers, they were training at that time, I think, most of the ones that were training was French Pilots. And that's what, I guess, that's what somebody told me, so that's what we were...we were keeping the planes up to date, keeping them flying, and I worked in the hangar. And we had two shifts, they were twelve-hour shifts. We worked I'm wanting to say, we worked two weeks on the night shifts starting at six and getting off at six, and then we worked two weeks on...getting...starting at six in the morning, and working till six. But on the nightshift, we went for lunch, what we call lunch, at twelve o'clock. So, I was the one and we had what we called a cleet (sp?) track; now, I...I'm not sure that that's the name of it or not, it was...looks like a half tank, it had tracks on it like a tank, but it was a big ole...and we used them to pull the planes around along with the tugs, but I was...had my driver's license to drive that because I worked in one of the hangars, and so we would all gather and they would just get on top and around, any place they could hang onto that cleet track and we'd go down for dinner at twelve o'clock. And so, that's the way uh, that's the way we worked. So, I was...I was the hydraulic man. We had a crew there, a Chief, the one...of the hangar...Hangar Chief, he was over all of us, but we had electricians, we had body men also, you know, had engine repair, and we done it all at this one hangar. Now, this wasn't the main hangar because the main hangar had civilians working in it. If we couldn't catch up or had more than we could do or didn't know what to do, then we sent it down to the main hangar, and they done...they done the rest of the work. So, our...our duty was to keep them rolling. So, I...they authorized me to...since I was on the hydraulic...and we changed a lot of brakes, the brakes were...consisted of two different metal discs that opposed one another, and the fact that they wouldn't get hot, the wouldn't stick together, and so that was...that...and they were...they'd burn them out pretty fast. So, we had to...we had to change those brakes, and when we'd change the brakes, we usually had to bleed the lines. Now, this was part of the deal that we went through, we had to bleed the hydraulic line to get the air out

of the...the...oh, away from the brakes so that they'd work. So then, I was authorized to taxi the planes, me and another guy would get in there and I had a guy named Lindbergh (sp?) was my...he was really my helper, and he was from Duluth, Minnesota, claimed he was (unintelligible) kin to Charles Lindbergh. Now, whether...whether he was or not, I don't know. But anyway, so I would taxi them out and go on the...on the taxi strip, go up to the end and we'd get up to about fifty or sixty miles an hour and I'd hit the brakes and they were supposed to stop in a straight line and stop real good after we worked on them. So, this particular time, I'll tell about this, time that I...I got in trouble, and I did get into trouble several times, but we had worked the brakes over, and Lindbergh had...working on one side and...and me on the other side, and we got them set up. So, I asked him, I said, "Lindbergh, you ready?" "Oh yeah, I'm ready." So, I presumed that he'd bled his line like I did, so we...I took it out, and got it up at the end of the runway and got on the service road, started back (pause) this was at night about ten o'clock at night, I think, somewhere along there, and we come, revved it up and we got out fifty miles an hour, I hit the brakes, his side did not hold, mine did, so we whirled the plane, tore these front strut along with the tire, just rolled the tire off the front strut and we bent the strut. So, there we were. So, I knew I was in trouble. That wasn't supposed to happen. So, finally we got the plane back in the hangar. So, I talked to the night man, the hangar chief, and I told him, I said, "Now, we got problems," and he said, "Yeah, I see that." Says, "Yeah, y'all messed up the...front struts." Says, "I think we got...we got some replacements in there," we...they was always tearing one up, landing and taking off. So, he said, "I'll tell you what, I'll put some crew over there and they'll help you and we'll just go ahead and fix that thing tonight, and then I'll...I'll turn in a report that the probably damaged and they never looked at them anyway, we'd just junk them." Said, "The...the old struts was damaged in flight." Well, that's partly true; it damaged while it was running as long as we was stopping, so we got away...I got away with that one. But anyway, they...this particular plane had a little hydraulic pump, and I never will forget those little pumps, and they supplied the pressure

for the hydraulic. Now, everything was run by hydraulics on the one...on the...on the B-26 (unintelligible), and so it was critical. But when something went wrong with the pump, we...we didn't (unintelligible) fix the pump, we just removed and replaced it. When we replaced it, we had a heck of a time getting the pump to...it...it just wouldn't pick up the fluid; we could...we tried priming and it was...and the position of the little pump was on the back of the engine, so it was hard to get to, and we could not make it pick up the fluid. So, we worked for hours trying to get that thing to put the pressure. So, I decided, and I told Lindbergh, I says, "Now, what we'll do, we'll drain the uh, air pressure tank," and we had a portable one, you know, had a Briggs and Stratton engine on it and pump...and you can pump it up to a hundred pounds I guess or more, but anyway, "we'll bring that down and we'll...we'll plug up the vents on the hydraulic tank, and we'll put some pressure on there. When we start the engines and it'll...the little pump will pick it up. It'll force it in...the hydraulic fluid into the pump and it'll pick it up, and the pressure run out." He said, "That sounds like it's a good deal!" So, here I get up in the plane, I start both engines, and so, I'm revving them up, and he's out there with the tank, and we stopped the vents up, and he puts the pressure on it. The only trouble (throat clearing) I'll tell you about it later, and so I signal...tell him to tell me when the...when...and I'm looking at the gauges whether...the pressure doesn't come up, so he...signaled me to cut the engine off. So, I do, and I got...get out, and guess what? All the hydraulic fluid is running out the bomb bay doors. What had happened, we blowed a hole as about as big as your fist in that hydraulic tank, and it sets up in the bomb bay, way up in one corner, and made out...almost like tin foil; it's real soft metal, the hydraulic tank is not very heavy, so we have blowed that dude all to pieces! So, here I am, so naturally I get called in. So, he's a Captain I think or a Major, I'm not sure, don't remember his rank. So, he calls me in, and he's in charge of the...kind of the Commander, and he says, "Alright," says, "tell me...tell me what happened. You...you've messed up." So, I told him what we were doing and the idea was, but I told him, I said, "Now, I've got it figured out now, I think, I'm...we put too much

pressure on it. I think Lindbergh said he put fifty pounds. Well, that's about forty pounds too much; I'm thinking five to ten pounds of pressure is all we need to put on that (unintelligible) tank, and I believe it'll work." He said, "Okay," says, "I'm going to let you off this time; no...no problem." Says, "You go back out and...and when you put that...get that tank in, you try that," said, "put just a little bit of pressure in it." So, we did, and sure enough, it worked good. So, that was passed as an ordinance, and we...sent it on down to the main hangar 'cause they were having the same trouble as the...getting the pumps to pick up the fluid. So, that way, I got out of that one. And I got out of the other one, so I...I was in the clear. So, guess what? I made stripe, went to Corporal. Boy, I'm telling you what! I was proud, two stripes! Yeah, I was a Corporal, hadn't been in all that too long, and yeah, I was already a Corporal. So, but that really pleased me, so we...we were...we were trying to do our best. And so, another time that I...I fowled up, I got away with it, was the fact...in the meantime, we could...by getting on what they called flying status, and we could fly as a engineer, a flight engineer, that's what they called us. We would go up on test flights or we could go up when there was training. And so, they used one of us, and we could get our...so many hours a month in and we'd get flying pay. So, I joined up for that and got it, and so, anyway, this test pilot and we had a plane, it was a...a number thirteen, Black Cat, that's what they had on the side of it, and all of the pilots said the plane wouldn't hardly get off the ground, it just stayed (unintelligible) whole runway, so they was quite afraid of it. So, they sent a test pilot from (unintelligible) Martin factory in Baltimore, Maryland come down and tested it. So, he didn't find anything wrong with it; he could fly it off in half the runway, but they couldn't. So, but anyway, I went up with him, and we...when we brought the plane in, we had some pins and locks that we put on the struts to keep the...accidentally it'd hit the...while it's landing...sitting on the ground, if you hit the retraction on the strut...you had...oh, switch inside of the cockpit, if you had troubles, it would collapse, so we put locks on them in case somebody punched the wrong button, it wouldn't go down. So, stupid me, when we went up, I was supposed to take those locks off, and then we

had...chucks that we put under the wheels also, so I got them out and got in the plane with the test pilot, and he had a co-pilot, me, and so, we got up and he pushed a button to retract the landing gear, and they wouldn't come up. So, there we were flying and the indicate...indicator said it was still down that they didn't come up, so he didn't know whether they were malfunctioned, and he asked me, says, "I want to ask you a personal question, and this...may be life and death," said, "did you take those locks off of the strut or do we have a problem?" And I said, "Sir," I said, "I'm sorry," but I says, "we have that problem, but I didn't take them off. So, you can land, the struts are not going to collapse." He said, "Are you sure now?" He said, "All indications is they're not locked, they're not up and they're not down." And I said, "It's my life as well as yours; I did not take them off." He said, "Well, if you're right, when we land, it won't be nothing, I'll just tell them I brought it in...in the...kind of malfunction, you know, on the instrument," and said, "then you can take them off." So, you know, they didn't move; they didn't try to get...they just...they just showed them a instrument panel that they...it wasn't...they didn't come down. So, sure enough, I was right, I hadn't taken them off. So, we landed, and so, I didn't get in trouble over that. But it is very possible that I could have got in...in pretty good amount of trouble on that. So anyway, I'll back off on working on them for a while and get on what we were doing.

When we got off, we either went to town, that was a (unintelligible) place going into town, drank a little beer or just browse around, and there really nothing to do. But they had a...one thing, they...on Saturday nights they had a...they had one dance hall that I remember, one, I remember this, one drug store that I used to go in and talk to the waitresses that was...behind the counter, but they didn't seem to like the airmen, but we decided, me and Walt Raven (sp?) and Johnson, I think it was, maybe Snellinberger (sp?) decided that we'd go to the country dance and...and the dance hall was situated above the...might have mentioned it, above the bus station. So that...on Saturday night, we decided to go down there. Well, we went by the saloon first, or the tavern, and Walt Raven had more than

anybody else, he...he was the kind of guy and he was kind of comical, but he...sometimes he drank a little bit too much, but any time we got to the bus station to go to the...to the dance, he was feeling good. So, it was upstairs, we walked upstairs and it was a big room, big dance hall, and it had chairs around the outside wall, and the ladies, uh, it was a country dance. The ladies sat around there and even some kids was there. And so, they had a band that was playing, and everybody was enjoying their selves, so we walked in and Walt Raven...I looked around and he was over there, and he was sitting in one of the lady's...elderly woman's lap! With his arms around her neck. Well, naturally somebody called, and here come the MPs. He came over, and about the time the MPs got there, and it didn't take them long 'cause they was all over town. So, they come upstairs and so they...they got us all, they turned us in, they got us all...taking us back out to the base, put us through the front gate, told us not to come back. So, that was our Saturday night dance. So, I asked Walt Raven later, I said, "Why did you do that?" And he just grinned, said, "She reminded me so much of my mom, and I just had to hug her." So, it was comical the way he said it.

So, another time about Walt Raven I'll tell this. We...I think we went to a rodeo. I...I believe that's the time, we went to...they had a rodeo, so we went to it, and Walt Raven had...had managed to get a little more to drink again than he needed, so...and there was a sign up there...there was a café down the road there a little bit, and they had a special on their steaks. I...I don't remember whether it was T-bone or...what kind of steaks they were; I don't remember that, but anyway it says, "Steak, good steak for lunch," and it was cheap. So, we decided we'd go down and have a steak 'cause we didn't get too many steaks in the Army. So, we go in down there and it's a nice café and a lot of people in it, so we ordered lunches with steak, and they brought them out, *beautiful* steaks with all the trimming. And they put us in a half-moon booth and there was four of us, and so, we started to eat our steaks. Well, they were a little bit tough, I'll have to admit that. They were...mine was pretty tough, but I...I managed to saw

off a piece of it and eat it. But Walt Raven asked the waitress for another knife, so she bought...she brought him another knife. And he...he said, "No, I want a butcher knife." So, she went back to the kitchen to get a butcher knife. Well, Walt Raven takes his steak out, moved his plate around, moved all of our plates to one side, put the steak on the table, got up in the booth, and put one foot on the steak and started to cutting it with a butcher knife. And, guess what? The owner called the MPs, so here they came. And so, naturally, we were...we were causing trouble, and I...I can understand. And...and that's not the way to do things, but they got...here they came in, said, "Okay guys, comes with us." So, I started out the front door and the manager hollered and said, "Hey soldier, you owe for your steak." Well, guess what? We all had to pay for our steaks even though I'd just taken two bites. I said, "Well, I didn't eat it!" And he said, "You owe for it anyway," so we had to eat it. So, they carried us back, front gate, put us back and told us not to come back." So, again, I asked Walt Raven, I says, "Why in the world did you do that?" Said, "We didn't even get to eat steaks." Said, "Every time we go out with you, you...you mess up. We're going to quit taking you if that's the way you're going to act." So anyway, Walt Raven, and he had this buddy that...little bit heavy on drinking, too. He was a little older than Walt Raven, and he got...his buddy would get mean when he got drunk. I think he might have had a little Indian in him, I don't know what was wrong with him, but he...he'd get mean. So, one day he came in drunk, and Walt Raven said something to him about it, and I mean he coldcocked, and that's what I call it, he hit Walt Raven, sounded like he almost broke his neck, and he knocked him out cold! I mean, one lick and he was out cold! And so, they...they and...and Walt Raven never did...until he came to, he didn't even know what hit him. Anyway, Walt Raven came to; he didn't say a word to his buddy, he just kind of shook his head and went about his way. And about two weeks later, his buddy was going to take a shower, and we had always had put a towel around us and go down to the shower. So, Walt Raven was standing on a...they had a...walkway going between the barracks and the shower. He just standing aside and his buddy started by, and his buddy didn't act like he ever

remembered hitting Walt Raven, but anyway, Walt Raven just walked up and he hit that guy and he al...I thought he'd broke his neck. He (unintelligible) that older guy and of course, he knocked the daylight out of him. I mean, he floored him! So, the fellow fell out on the sidewalk, his towel came off, there he is out cold laying on a sidewalk naked as a Jaybird. And it was comical. So Walt Raven got it back on him. Later his buddy asked him, said, "What'd you do that for?" And Walt Raven said, "Hey, I just...I told you...I really don't know whether I told you or not, but you knew after you hit me, I was going to hit you." The guy didn't even remember hitting Walt Raven he was so drunk. So, that's...that's typical...some of the typical things that happens in...with the Army guys. And so anyway, we had this...and he was an Indian, he had...he told me that he had been run off from, uh, been barred from coming on the reservation because he stole horses. Now, I don't know whether that's true or not, but anyway, he was from Montana, and he was supposed to have been on an Indian reservation, but he was in the Army, and he was mean as the dickens. But he picked on this one guy, he was...he was just a real nice guy, but this Indian came in drunk and picked on him, and he wouldn't...he wouldn't pick on nobody else, just that one guy. So, I told him...told him one time, I said, "You don't need to pick on that guy," said, "he ain't going to fight you." Says, "He's not that mean, but why don't you pick on me?" "Oh," he says, "I like you, I'm not going to pick on you." So anyway, he came in drunk one night, so he...he was on the top bunk, so the way those bunks are made, they were stacked, one and two. So, you could take the top one off and just use the bottom; it just slipped on. So, when he came in drunk, we just...uh, there was four of us got him, and he was up there snoring and come in...and...and threatened to whip this guy and it was late at night, so we just politely took him out, put him under the shower and turned the cold water on him. And you know, he never did come in drunk anymore. If he got drunk, he didn't come in the barracks anymore. So, that...that kind of...that settled the Indian part of it. And so, there were things like that...they just...they just happened.

And so, anyway, as time moved on, uh, you know, the war...war was going okay, so I...I'll bring this in before I start on some of the other (unintelligible) issues we got into. But they came out, volunteered anybody that wanted to be a...aerial gunner. So, I still kind of wanted to be in flight, you know, I was take...I was putting in so many hours a month, but I wanted to be...maybe combat missions, and so forth. I had that in mind, so I volunteered to go down and join the...uh, aerial gunner. And so, you had to pass the test, and okay, so I went down, but I was a half inch too tall, and I kind of thanked the Lord later that I was too tall because I don't think that I would have liked that. And I think he kept me out of it, so I didn't get an aerial gunner. So, went back to my hydraulic business, and in the meantime, I think I got a furlough and I came back to San Angelo, and there was some problems that happened at home, and I'll...I'll just briefly go through them. John had run off, him and somebody had went to...he'd quit his job; he was, I think, he was working for...uh, telegraphs or something or...company riding his bicycle delivering...there was messages. Anyway, he just left his bicycle down on whoever and they taught him how to (unintelligible) or somebody (unintelligible), but anyway, him and the guy decided to go to California. They got out, about half way out there, somewhere in Arizona and got in a fight, and so John...had...had to send him some money to come back on. And then Grady had fell in the river on a fishing trip and almost drowned, I think, that when they got him out, I think Daddy said he turned him upside down and he had about four gallons of water in him, but anyway, that was...that was what was going on. They had moved...was moving and building houses there in...house there in...in town, they had moved from Veribest in the meantime. And I had lost my...one of my girlfriends, but I had another one that she was worse than...I won't go into detail in that. She proposed to me the first night I went out with her I think...wanted to get married, and so forth. So, I...I don't think...I don't think I (unintelligible) around her, but that's what I...when I come back to. So, that was my first furlough from Dodge City, Kansas. And so, when I went back, I made Sergeant, and brother, I was proud of that

Sergeant! I thought man, I'm...I'm getting up in class here. So, that's the way it was...that's the way things were going.

I remember this and I'll tell it. Now, my oldest sister, Edith, and her sister in law, Lera (sp?), and they had...went up to Wisconsin 'cause their husbands was going overseas; they were in the artillery, W.C. and Smiles was their name, and anyway, so they came back through Dodge City and...and called me. And I went out and visited them. Dud was...uh, Dud is...was a small kid, and I remember the other lady was pregnant with her first child I think, so I enjoyed visiting them, and we had a good visit.

Then the old routine went back, two weeks on, two weeks off. But we, I'll bring this in, we got to the point where we had a friend of ours that had a car and he told us to, when we washed parts, to put the gasoline...we usually poured it out, to put it in...leave it out behind the hangar and he would get it, strain it, and use it in his car. You remember that gasoline was rationed, and so you had to have some stamps to get gasoline. And so, he...he had a...I never will forget, he had a '41 Ford convertible, so we decided that Dodge City was too small for us, we decided we'd start going to Wichita, Kansas. So, low and behold, there was a lot of girls in Wichita, Kansas! There was no Army camp very close, there was two airplane...aircraft manufacturing companies around, and they had the midnight shifts. And so, if we went over to Wichita, Kansas, then the...the MPs didn't...didn't watch too good in...in Wichita because there wasn't no air bases there, so we could get away with not coming in at twelve o'clock or whenever we were supposed to, so we would go over there. And there was a dance hall called Shadowland, and it opened about ten, and about twelve is when the ladies get off from their midnight shift. They would come by dressed in their work clothes ready to dance. So, there we were. So, we had...we was high on the...we was in hog heaven I guess you'd call it. So, that's what we was going back and forth with this guy, and we furnished him gas, so we'd ride over there and so forth. And things went pretty well. But this one time I remember, and we didn't go with this guy with the car, and I don't remember his name, but

man, I'm...I'm thinking it was Lindbergh or it wasn't ole Walt Raven, so it...we went over there and we decided we'd go, nobody else wanted to go, we usually went in fours, and so we went over there and rented us a five-dollar motel and went to the Shadowland. Came in about two o'clock the next morning. And I'd just about laid down and someone kicked the door in on...on the motel, and when I woke, I was looking into a...here was a...probably the largest revolver that I ever seen, looked like the barrel was big as a bucket. And said, "Don't move, we'll shoot!" And the other guy had a shotgun. So, I didn't move. The guy, my buddy, he started to jump up and I kind of held him down and I told him, "Don't...don't do that!" Says, "They'll shoot us!" So, meantime, I finally asked them, I said, "What in the world do you guys want? We don't have no money; we're broke." And he said, "Nah, I wasn't after your money, but we were looking," and they apologized then, "we were looking for two escaped German war prisoners." And the motel owner had called and said he had two guys that fit the description, so they came to arrest us. Well, that scared the daylights out of me, and...and we couldn't even...the door, they kicked the door off the hinges! So, we had to prop it up and needless to say, we left the next morning, and I...I didn't much want to go back to Wichita, Kansas anymore! That kind of broke our Shadowland visits, and it was rough. It was probably best to get out of that 'cause we...we was getting kind of rough. And really don't go that way; we drank too much. And I, even me, I...I wasn't too heavy on drinking, but I got to where I'd...I was hitting the bottle a little bit heavy, and so, it...it was a good thing that we might of decided to quit going over there.

But then we went back...I went back to my routine, and I'll fill this in...we...me and a guy by the...this Snellinberger had...at Christmas time, he had got a, I believe, it was a pint or a half a pink of whiskey, I forget now, it wasn't very big, but anyway, for Christmas. Somebody had sent it because remember Kansas was dry on whiskey, but he got it through the mail for Christmas. So, and I...in a little small town from Wichita Falls, not Wichita Falls, but Dodge City, there was a place called Meade, Kansas, and on Saturday night we

understood they had an old country dance, and for miles around, they'd come to the country dance and we decided that we'd go down there. So, we...we applied for a three-day pass and we were going to go down there on the weekend and come back on our pass, so that was our plan. We got our pass and there was a blizzard come in, I mean, it was...the wind was blowing about forty miles an hour, it was snowing, it was sleet, it was cold, and probably down to twenty degrees or something and felt colder than that. And so, Snellinberger, I'm...I'm...I think it was Snellinberger, he told me, he says, "I...I don't think we ought to go." And I said, "Well, I've got my pass, and I'm determined to go to Meade, Kansas to the dance." And he said, "I'm going to go! You can go with me or not," and he said, "You mean, you're going to go out there and stand in this blizzard and hitchhike?!" And I said, "Yeah," and I was just stupid enough to do it! So, he said, "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. I won't go with you," but says, "I...you want to take this whiskey with you," and this half pint I think it was or a pint, and said, "it's going to get cold," said, "you might need a little snort." Well, I...I had to agree with him, I said, "Okay, that...that sounds like a...sounds like a good deal, I'll try it." So, I get out there and it's snowing, it's cold, and of course, I started getting cold, so I take a little snort, and I stand out there a while, and all of a sudden, here comes an ole...and I never will forget this, it was a Model-A Coup, and it was two women in it, and they were probably, I thought they were old. You know how that is, I was, you know, I was nineteen I think, and I...I thought well they was old; they was about thirty. And so anyway, they stopped and says, "We're going about twenty miles down the road," says they were going to a...I'm not sure that they came from or going to a church meeting, but they...that's where they were going. And on their car and if you...oldtimers can still remember, they...they put out a gas heater on some of those old cars, and they called it a Southwind gas heater, and brother, when it worked, it would get warm inside! It worked off of the gasoline from the...like the car was running on, I...I think that's the way it worked. But anyway, so they put me in the center, and I was cold. I'd had a couple of snorts and probably smelled like a brewery. And so I...it's in the center, and they start

preaching to me. Well, bless your heart, I never...I wasn't a church member and never went to church, they wouldn't go...raised up to go to church, and I did not know what they were talking about, but they started preaching to me. So, they preached me a while and they were moving pretty slow because of the...the roads really was slick, and so by the time they got almost to where they were going to let me out at, I'd about got tired of their preaching, so I pulled the bottle of whiskey out and I offered them a drink. Well, that didn't set well at all, and I'm sorry that I did that...I was stupid enough to do that. I should have listened to them, but stupid me, I didn't. So anyway, they let me out, and I caught another ride down to Meade, Kansas. So, here I am on Saturday evening about half drunk in Meade, Kansas going to a dance and it's still a blizzard. So, I get there, and I...first thing I do, I get me a...a...there's a rooming house down there and it said, "Overnight rooms," I think, for a dollar or something; they were pretty cheap, you know, so I...get me a room, pay, and it's still pretty early in the evening and it's still snowing and sleeting and cold. And so, I decided well, I'll see what's in town. Well, Meade, Kansas is not very big, and I found out where the dance hall was at, and there was a domino pool hall down the street from the rooming house where I had made arrangements to stay all night. And so, I went down there and I thought, well, I'll go down there and see what's going on, and I thought about stopping at a little café and getting a cup of coffee, but I didn't, I went on down to the pool hall and went in there and went in there. And there was a guy in there and he was standing around not doing anything, and he asked me, he said, "Do you ply pool?" I said, "Nah, I'm not a pool player, I've never played too much pool, but I know what you're talking about." He said, "Well, I tell you what, I'll buy you...I'll buy the beer and (unintelligible) (recording interrupted momentarily) says, "If you'll play with me, I'll buy you the beer." So, free beer sounded good to me, so I joined him, we played a game. Of course, he beat me, beat me terrible, but I, anyway, I was playing, I was his partner. So, he bought me a beer. "Want to play another one?" And I said, "Yeah, I'll play another one." And by this time it was probably, oh, around six to six, thirty, somewhere along there in the evening.

I'm thinking that the dance started at...maybe eight or nine o'clock; I'm not...I'm not too sure about that because I...I don't have the right time....it just...about it. So, we have...we was playing another game and I drank another beer and so I decided, well, I might better go and have a bite to eat, but I thought well, I'm not that hungry, I might just wait till after the dance and find a restaurant or something, but it's still snowing, it's still a blizzard, the wind is howling and everything. And so, I...anyway, I asked the pool hall man, and I says, "Do you think the people will...I've come down here for this Saturday night dance; you think they'll have the dance?" He says, "Oh yeah," said, "there ain't nothing stops that...that Saturday night dance." Says, "They all...they'll come in, don't make any difference if it's raining, freezing, ice," says, "that...that is part of this country down here, that Saturday night dance." Says, "They'll be here." So, I said, "Okay!" So, I wandered around and...and sit there a while and talks to this guy and he'd kind of get boring, but I'm...I'm kind of feeling my, uh, I'd mixed that beer along with, you know, a few shots of whiskey that I had, so that...that wasn't a good idea. And I hadn't eaten anything, and so I thought well, I'll tell you what I'll do, I think I'll go down and...at the...my room and just kind of relax, maybe clean up a little bit for the dance, and so, that's where I...I walked down through the blizzard. Get outside and you get a little cold. I didn't take another snocker...shot though, but I walked down, went into the room and piddled around a while. And there wasn't too much (recording interrupted momentarily). This is cassette two, tape three, on Vernon Oates' story, number two, on his experience in the Army Air Corps.

So, here I was in Meade, Kansas, going to a Saturday night dance with this blizzard going, cold, and since I'd went back to the...where my room was, it was real warm in there, I'll have to say that, and so, after cleaning up a little bit, I'd decided, well, it'll...it's still a little bit early to go to the dance, so I'll just...I laid back on the bed of this bed and rest. Well, after getting warmed up, the few drinks that I had along with the beer that I had drank, hadn't eaten, so I was beginning to feel like I was about half drunk. So, I went back and laid back on

the...on the bed to relax, just laid back on it, and closed my eyes a while. And I opened my eyes and I closed them and I'd...getting...feeling kind of crazy like, so I opened my eyes and looked up, and all of a sudden, the ceiling was moving (unintelligible), and *boom!* the whole ceiling fell in! And Sunday morning, about eight o'clock, I woke up and I was still sprawled on the...on the bed, had laid there all night, passed out, and didn't get to go to the dance. And it's a wonder I hadn't froze to death, but it was still warm; I...I hadn't got cold, and I still...still laying in the same position. So, that was my Saturday night dance in Meade, Kansas. (recording stopped momentarily.)

It was Sunday morning in Meade, Kansas, and brother did I have a headache! My head was pounding and that's the first time that I really came to realize that I had got on a drunk and had passed out and that's one and the only time that I ever drank too much. But here I was, supposedly going to a dance, got on a big booze, got drunk, passed out, and woke up with, oh!, I had a headache. So, I...i found a little café, I had a couple of cups of black coffee, ate a breakfast, and I decided I'd better get back to Dodge City, Kansas, get out of Meade! I didn't...didn't even think about ever coming back. I still had a little whiskey left in the bottle, I mean, I hadn't drank that much, but it...(unintelligible) so, I got out on a road, the...the blizzard had let up some, it was cold, it hadn't...hadn't really snowed that much but the wind had blowed what little snow it had, and it was banked up along the road, but I got out and hitchhiked back to Dodge City. I didn't have...I remember I didn't have no trouble catching a ride, I caught a couple of them, and...and got back to Dodge City. So, I reported back into Snellinberger; he was all smiles when I came back to the barracks, and he said, "Oh," says, "you're back!" And I said, "Yeah, I made it." And he said, "Well, how did you enjoy the dance?" And I said, "Oh, it was wonderful, it was wonderful! And my head was pounding, and my mouth was dry and I handed him the bottle and I said, "Now, next time I'm wanting to go to a dance, don't give me your bottle of whiskey." He grinned kind of, and said, "Well, you didn't drink too much," says, "what happened?" Says, "You don't

look like you're too happy." So I...I told him about my Saturday night dance in Meade, Kansas. Well, we both had a good laugh, and every time I tried to laugh, my head just cracked open, you know? So, there I learned something. I learned that from...I made up my mind that I'd never, never drink that much to get that drunk again in my life. So, I really...I...I kept that vow, I never did. So, that was my Saturday night dance in Meade, Kansas.

So, the routine started back again, and I'll...I'll fill in on a couple of stories I think that might be interesting. We had a...a plane that had landed in Sherman/Dennison, a small airstrip there, and it had to land. It some engine problems or...I'm not sure what happened, but there's a small airstrip. So, they had...in...in landing they had damaged one of the struts, so they sent me and two more mechanics, Lindburgh and another mechanic that worked in the...in the other ship, they sent him along. So, they sent us from the plane down to...to repair and...and sent us down with another strut; we were to take the old one, the one that was beyond repair, and replace. So, we went down there and we stayed till we finished the job. And so, after we finished it. The Pilot, well, the Pilots on the B-26s were...were a little bit concerned because the airstrip was not as long a takeoff, and in fact, it was...it was pretty short, a little bit too short for B-26 bomber, uh, that's what they said. So, of course, we got...we were pretty well worried about it. Anyway, we got everything ready, so we were...we were the ones that were taking off and going back to Dodge City. And I'm not sure that this plane that was in Sherman/Dennison even belong...it didn't belong to our squadron, it was another squadron, but they used us to go down and repair it. And so, we'd taken off, and I still remember this. I was standing and looking out the side, and this Pilot he lowered the boom, he opened that plane up, wide open, and sure enough, it...the runway was a little bit short, but I can still remember that...it looked like when we passed over the top of the...and there was some mesquite trees, and...and I can still see those mesquite trees, and it looked like...it was probably just the backwash of the plane passing, but I thought we parted those mesquite trees. But I think it was just the wind when

we passed over them. But uh, to make a long story short, we started back to Dodge City. Well, we ran into some...I...I'm wanting to say we were kind of east of Oklahoma City, going in at a...at an angle like that, and it...we had got a report, or the Pilot had that there was some bad weather. There was a storm, and you know, that Oklahoma is pretty well known for some violent windstorms, tornadoes, bad weather. But this one had come up, so he...it was a dry...uh, our Pilot got the weather alert that it was best that maybe we turn back, and not try to come on to Dodge City. Well, he talk...he said, "Well," says, "I think I can miss it," so he disregarded the bulletin or whatever you call it, the warning, and so, he decided he would just kind of skirt it. So, he started to skirt it, and low and behold, all of a sudden, we were in the midst of the cotton-pickin' storm! Or I though we was in the midst; the lightning was flashing and cutting right across the plane, and it was bucking and pitching in the wind and so forth, and all of a sudden, we got in a downdraft! We were flying about...I would say about seven thousand foot, maybe eight, somewhere along in there. I...I've forgot...I...I didn't remember looking at the...at the altitude, but there we were – in the middle of this storm, and we was in this downdraft! So, it...we dropped, and I can remember this, I looked over and the Navigator was sitting in one seat and I...I had just got up from the...the seat over...over on the other side, and I was...had been sitting in it, and the rest of the guys was squatting around, I think one of them was in the tail. But anyway, uh, we...I...all of a sudden that thing dropped straight down. It was still going forward, I guess, at the regular speed, but the...the wind turned...had it going down, and we fell from, I'm wanting to say the seven or eight thousand feet down to a thousand foot, and we'd all given...given up all hope that we was going to get out of that. My head was against the top of the plane, my feet was dangling down, and we were falling so fast that there was no way I could get...I could get off of the ceiling. And the guy, the Navigator, was holding on. The only thing that kept him from coming up where I was at, was he was holding onto the seat, and it was bolted down. And so, that...when we came out of it, it...all of a sudden, turned, seemed to turn us lose and we were going forward, and we at...right at

the edge of the storm. So, that made a believer out of the Pilot, so he circled around and went back to Oklahoma City and landed at Tinker Air Force Base. And so, that's where we wound up. And I can remember one of the guys that went down with us. When we landed and parked the plane, and they told us they'd put us up for the night, and we could go down to the mess hall and so forth; it was about time...that was about the time for chow time anyway. And this one guy, when we got out, he got down on the...the ground and kissed the pavement! That's how happy he was to be on the ground again. And it was a scary thing, so needless to say, the next morning we continued on our...on our flight and went back to Dodge City. Then that was...I thank the good Lord just watched over us.

Then another time I was getting my flying time in, and I can still remember this, and they had these...I mentioned one time, I thought we was training a French Pilot. Anyway, this particular flight that I was on was supposed to be...they put a...kind of a canopy over the...the cockpit in what they called blind flying. So, they had...that's what we were doing, and this French Pilot was taking instruction from...from the instructor, and so then after they did that, then they, uh, what...what he was teaching him and was showing him was to...you could feather one prop, fly on one engine, but actually, the B-26 was hard to control at that, and it wouldn't, really wouldn't stay up; it just wouldn't...wouldn't pull the plane, and so it would start gradually losing altitude in spite of it having one engine wide open. But anyway, that's the way they did it, they'd feather one prop, fly on one engine, then they would kick that engine back in and feather the other one. And he was showing him how to do it in case they had to...like one of the plane engine might be on fire, and they could struggle and maybe get back down somewhere where they could land; this was the general idea. And he was telling this, so that's what they were doing. And so, he was instructing this French Pilot, so the French Pilot had feather the right prop, and he was to turn it back on and feather the other one, but...in place of turning the right one back on, he started to feather the left one. Well brother, that plane started to

drop like a rock, I mean, it just come to a sudden, almost stop. Well, I can remember the Pilot just almost...he backhanded that French Pilot, knocked him out of the way, and kicked...kicked the left engine back in, it caught and started...about half that, and then he kicked the other one in from feather into full throttle. But we had dropped, and he told...told the Navigator, I remember this, he told him, says, "I...that's the fastest time that I think that this plane ever seen." Says, "I...they...it was way," says, "maybe a hundred miles faster than it's supposed to be flown." Says, "A B-26 is not supposed to go that fast, but that dude was moving on, wasn't it?" He said, "Yep," and said, "we...we come just about," he said, "I would say less than five minutes on this severe (unintelligible)." So, that was...that was scary. And I've thought, well, another time, seemed like the Lord taken care of this ole man!

And so then, low and behold, one day I was...was trying to get my flight time in so I could get the flying pay, still working at the hangar and everything seemed to go...be going pretty...pretty good out at the hangar, and we were on...on a dayshift, so they let us fly and get our time in. And so, we were supposed...I was supposed to go up on this plane. Well, I...I sometimes even in the Army I had some stomach problems; I had...I had a little problem with my stomach all of my life, seemed like, so I was feeling woozy and I decided I'd better not go 'cause if I did, I'd probably get sick. So, a buddy of mine, he lacked a couple of hours, and he said, "Well I'll...I'll just go, I'll just go." He said, "I'll...I'll just substitute," said...so he went out there and put his, and they put his name down and taken mine off. So, I laid down and went to sleep. And I woke up, uh, he had just...he had just...uh, the plane it...it just come back, and the guy from the orderly room had come down and was looking for me because they told me, said to contact Sergeant Oates. So, they came down and said, and it kind of woke me up, I got up and I said, "What's wrong? What's wrong?" They said, "Well," says, "you're...we got a call from the hospital down there, and says your buddy had taken your place is...is in the hospital," said, "he got a broken leg." And I says, "What?! What happened, what in the world happened," and they

said, "Well, they all had to bail out of the plane. The...one of the engines went haywire, and they couldn't keep it going and the Pilot couldn't control it right, so they decided they'd better bail out. And so, your buddy, when he hit the ground, he broke his leg." So, that was another time, seemed like, the good Lord was taking care of me. He kept off of that plane. I might have forgot to pull the ripcord, I don't know. But I went down and talked to the guy, and he said, "Oh, don't even...don't even come down here and talk to me; I'm mad at you." Said, "You're," said, "that should have been you." Said, "Here, I'm out of commission, and I broke my leg." And so that's the way...that's the way the ball rolls sometimes. And then I got a furlough, and my furlough, and this was strange, my furlough was to start on...on Monday, and this was Friday, and we always...when we went somewhere, and this was typical of...of the...the way we done things. If we had a furlough coming, and it was legal, that we could see if we could get a hop going down to where we was going. And so, of course, I was...had my mind on Goodfellow Field in San Angelo, and this plane, I got a report, that this plane had came in from Del Rio, and they had the same type planes, the B-26, light bombers, we were training in...in Del Rio at the airfield in Del Rio, Texas. And so, they had came up to pick up some parts, and we were kind of...we had more parts, I guess, than we needed. We...we'd had a pretty good supply of...of parts, and they needed some...I don't know what all they needed, but they came up there and was to load up with the parts they needed and go back to Del Rio. So here, that was right down my alley, so I went to the orderly room and talked to the First Sergeant there and told him, I says, "I think I can get a flight to Del Rio, and my furlough starts; would it be possible for me to pick my furlough up on...today? It don't start till Monday, but if I can get a...if I can get a hop, can I do that?" And he says, "Well, let me think about it," say, "I think maybe that we can arrange it." And so, he said, "Come back in about an hour, and I'll have it ready." And said, "Make sure now, go down and see if you can get on that plane." So, I went there and checked with the Pilot, he said, "Okay," said, "we're going to leave about five o'clock." And this was Friday evening. It's five o'clock and says, "We'll have

everything ready, we got,” and he told me that...what all they was going to have to pick up and load. And said, “We’re going to have...we’re going to have a pretty good load,” but says, “I...I think we...we can carry you.” So, I went, got my furlough and like the Sergeant said I could pick it up. So, I picked it up and it started on Monday, this was Friday, I got all my...my things together and got ready, and I went back to the...to the barracks and was kind of relaxing. At about three o’clock I had this call from the orderly room to come up to go out on the line and to the hangar, and so, of course, I...I thought well, that...maybe they’re going to start going back and my hop is going to be early. So, I went out to the hangar and the Pilot said, “Well now, I’m sorry,” but says, “we,”...they had contacted him to put on uh, quite a bit more equipment that they needed, and they had called in and said pick up a couple of more struts or something. And I don’t know what it was; it was...more weight, and he said, “I’m sorry, but we are already over our limit,” and said, “I’m going to have to take you off the flight.” And said...and he apologized and he was nice about it, and so I said, “Well, I...I can’t help that.” But I thought, well, now there’s no use in me going back to the orderly room and telling the Sergeant that I can’t get the flight. So I’m ready to go to San Angelo, and I got my furlough and got everything packed and ready, so I went down...I knew the...the transports that brought the gasoline in came in from Borger, Texas...kind of panhandle, close to Amarillo. But they...they transported from there and they brought it in this truck, truckloads of...of airplane fuel and oil and so forth. And they came up and unloaded it and drove back. So, I went down and checked at the motor pool there where they came in, and sure enough, there was a...a truck they was unloading and he was going to turn around and go back to Borger that evening that night. And so, I had told him what the story was, and he said, “Well, you can ride; I’m...I’m by myself.” Said, “You can ride with me back down there if you want to.” Says, “Your...your...it’ll be...we’ll get there in the middle of the night, maybe it might be late by the time we get there,” and said, “do you want to do that?” And I said, “Well it’s...okay!” And the...temperature, and it was...it was nice that day, and they had no problem with the weather and so

forth. So anyway, I went down and waited for him to get his...all the gas off the truck and so forth, and then it was getting pretty close to five o'clock. Well, this plane was to take off at that time, so I...I knew that our...most of...airplanes and the trainer had come...already come in; they'd come in before five o'clock usually unless they'd gone night flying, they'd started back later. But anyway, they...low and behold, this plane was to take off and the airstrip was about a half a mile from where I was waiting at this distributing plant there where they...they put the...put the diesel, I mean, not the diesel but the airplane fuel out, and so I heard the plane and it taxied up and got on a runway and heard it taking off, and it got about two hundred, I'm saying two hundred foot in the air and one of the engines cut out and *bang!* Here it came down! And it didn't...it kind of flattened out when it hit; he...it just hit the ground and bounced, and it looked like it might have broke in two. Now, I was close enough to where I could see it. The...the airstrip, the runway, went pretty close to this...about like I say, about a half a mile and I swear that I could hear those guys. The plane just a moment later it caught on fire, and it was...looked like it was half in two and...and of course, part of it was already scattered. But I...I swear that I could hear those guys getting...trying to get out of that plane, and screaming with the flames going. And here I was, I thought, well now, that was the plane that I was supposed to be on. And there, again, I think God might have had a hand in it. I didn't...I didn't...I wasn't a church goer. At that time, I stayed...positive that I was not saved. Anyway, I caught the transport, and I...when I got to Borger, Texas, it was getting kind of late, so I went down...they had a bus station down there and I think it stayed...I don't know whether it stayed all night...open all night, but anyway, it was open. So, I went down there and I went in to get a cup of coffee and he told me...he let me off where the bus station was at, and I thought well, I...maybe I need to try to...I had the money, I could of caught a bus and go on into Amarillo and from Amarillo, I could hitchhike on down to Lubbock and so forth on to San Angelo, so that's what I had in mind. So, I went to the bus station and while I was sitting in there, the proprietor or the man with the tickets, and I had enquired and he says, "Now," he says, "the curfew,

you know, you're...you're...it's past curfew." And said, "We're going to close in a little while, but this (unintelligible) curfew," says, "we've got a couple of...a guy...MPs, yeah, I think, I think that's what they called you," and that's what he said. Said, "That's what we call them; they...they come around through town checking," and said, "ah, they'll probably pick you up and since you're furloughed on (unintelligible)," and this is what he was telling me, and this was already Saturday morning 'cause we'd travelled most...most half of the night to get back to Borger, Texas. And so, I thought well, I better get out of here, so I...I slipped out the front door, looked around, and I did see a...like a jeep coming up the...the road, and I...I'd swear that's what it was, so I circled around behind the bus station, walked down through the residential with all the dogs barking and so forth, and I wound up in the football stadium. That's what that's what I finally found – a football stadium. Well, I think I seen this, maybe this jeep was wandering around looking for me, maybe...maybe he told them that I was...I was in town. But anyway, I laid down across two seats in the football stadium and went to sleep, woke up the next morning and two, and I got out on the highway and I thought well, I don't know if they were looking for me now, but it...I was okay then, so I got out on a highway...I didn't go back to the bus station, I hitchhiked and wound up...I finally got to San Angelo. I'll say that I didn't have...run into no more problems. I...I did hitchhike and got into San Angelo and had my furlough and looked up, of course, I looked up my favorite girlfriend, and I...I swear, I don't think I done very much while I was in...in town. And probably just chased around, but I did run into the Line Sergeant at Goodfellow Field; I passed him on the street down on Chadman (sp?) Street, I remember this. And I still don't remember his name. So anyway, I walk up and I asked him I said, "Do you remember me?" Of course, I had...I was a Sergeant, and he said, "Yeah, I remember you!" Said, "You're the one that gave me so much trouble, and you was always in...in trouble out at Goodfellow." And I said, "Well, see?" I said, "You told me I never would amount to something...anything, and here I am I've got...I...I'm a Sergeant!" And he said, "I can't believe it, I can't believe!" He said, "I never thought...in fact, I didn't

think they'd keep you in the service very long; they'd kick your rear out as...as much as you messed up!" I said "Nah, not so. I'm...I'm a Sergeant," and I told him where I was stationed and he says, "Well, I just don't believe it," and I said, "Well, I still," and I told him this point blank, I said, "I...I still don't like you." (Recording stopped momentarily) As far as I know, not much happened on...during this furlough while I was in San Angelo, and the days passed by and the first thing you know, it's time for me to go back to Dodge City. Well, I was kind of anxious to get back to Dodge City because I had heard rumors that there was going to be some changes and...and what I'd heard was kind of favorable towards me, so I...I looked forward to going back. But I'll tell this, anyway, when it was time to go back, I got out on the Big Springs [s/b Big Spring] highway and hitchhiked back. And if I'm not mistaken, at that particular time when we went on furlough we had to carry our gas mask. I...I'm wanting to say that that was the time; now I could be wrong. Well, one time I came in, I had my gas mask because they was afraid Hitler...now, Hitler was...he wasn't doing too good over there; they were bombing the heck out of him, and they were...they were getting some...get to him in some Tudor...conditions over there, and he was...he was, I guess, scared that he was losing, so they thought maybe he might start using gas. So the...anywhere we went, we...we were supposed to take our gas masks, so I think that's the time. But anyway, I got out on the highway in Big Spring and a car arrived and I still remember this. This first ride, the guy was going to some ranch up past Sterling City, I...I'm thinking, so he let me out up there. And it...it was kind of a warm day. I...I remember I think it was pretty...pretty warm day. Anyway, he set me out there and if you've ever been between Sterling City and...and (pause) Big Spring, it's not very much up there. There's one of those stinkingest oil fields that ever was, and it was there at that time, it smelled worse than it does not I think. But anyway, I stood out there; I got hot. And there was an old windmill, I can still see it and it was about a hundred yards off the highway, and...and it...it was squeaking, you know how it does, and the wind was blowing some and it was squeaking and I...and I...I could just taste that water 'cause I didn't...didn't carry

no water with me and when I was hitchhiking. But anyhow, I stood out there, I...I thought for two hours, but it probably wasn't that long. And here come a guy pulling a...a stock trailer. He had a pickup and pulling a stock trailer, so...and he had...I'm wanting to say a bull; I never really looked...looked to...at whatever he had in the stock trailer. Oh, it was very good 'cause I wasn't interested in that, all I was interested in was catching a ride. So, he pulled up...pulled up, asked me, says, "Where are you going, soldier?" And I said, "Well, I'm going to Dodge City, Kansas." And he says, "Well, you're in luck," says, "I'm going to Amarillo." Says, "I'm taking this bull up there; I've got a ranch up there out of," I think he said about twenty or thirty miles out of Amarillo. And I said, "Well, that is good," says, "that'll get me a long way!" So, he says, "Yeah, but," says, "there's one condition." He said, "I'm...I'm tired and I would like to catch a little nap. Can you drive?" And I said, "Well, sure I can drive!" He said, "Well, I'll...I'll, one condition; I'll pick you up if you'll...I'll drive...I'll go ahead," he said, "and drive to Big Spring. And then from Big Spring to Lubbock, you think you can make it alright?" And I said, "Well, sure, I can do...I can do that while you're sleeping." So, he said, "Okay," said, "I'll take you." So, we stopped in Big Spring and he bought me a...a drink. And I'm...I'm thinking that we might of got a sandwich, I don't remember this for sure, but he was a nice guy. He talked most of the way...to where he picked me up there out of Sterling City to Big Spring, and he told me about his ranch. He...and I believe him 'cause he had a nice...nice stock trail and I...I'm wanting to say that probably a new Chevrolet pickup or....but anyway, so he told me about his ranch and then...it was a huge ranch sounded like. And of course, I was interested because I...I'd always had dreams that I...one of these days I might be a cowboy; yeah, yeah, a cowboy! I couldn't even ride a horse.

FINAL copy

CD – #OH04551 – Mr. Oates

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