

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

The Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With
Charles H. Tucker
LaCanada, CA
April 18, 2017
12th Bomb Group
729th Bomb Squadron
10th Air Force

My name is Richard Misenhimer: Today is April 18, 2017. I am interviewing Mr. Charles H. Tucker by telephone. His phone number is 818-790-3919. His cell number is 818-802-1505. His address is 4533 Boelieu, LaCanada, CA, 91011. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Nimitz Education and Research Center for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Tucker:

Well, you know I really don't think people need to be thanked but if you want to thank me, OK, because, you know, we all just did what we needed to do.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's right but it was a difficult task and you need to be thanked for that task. Now, the first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the museum to make sure this is OK with you. So let me read this to you. (agreement read) Is that OK with you?

Mr. Tucker:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Tucker:

Yes, I have a son. His name is Frank Tucker. He lives in Orange, California. That's about 50-60 miles from me. His phone number is 714-240-3157.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you have an address for him?

Mr. Tucker:

Yes. I don't remember...

Mr. Misenhimer:

The phone number is most important thing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What is your birth date?

Mr. Tucker:

March 11, 1924.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you born?

Mr. Tucker:

In Birmingham, Alabama.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What were your mother's and father's first names?

Mr. Tucker:

My mother's name was Mary Louise and my father's name was Charlie. That was his legal name.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Tucker:

Yes. They were all half-brothers and sisters. I had two half-brothers and four half-sisters.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were any of your brothers in World War II?

Mr. Tucker:

Yes. My brother's name was Ira. He was in the Seabees in the Pacific and he helped build several of the airstrips in the Pacific.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Is he still living?

Mr. Tucker:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

If he were, I'd like to interview him.

Mr. Tucker:

He's not. He's been passed away quite a few years.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Tucker:

Well, you know, we were poor but everybody else was poor. I lived in Birmingham of course and on our block I would say we were a little bit poorer than the other people on the block but it didn't make much of a difference.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your father's occupation?

Mr. Tucker:

He was a mold-maker. He worked for a company that made the cotton gin machinery and he made molds for some of the parts.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was he able to keep working during the Depression?

Mr. Tucker:

For the most part, yes. He worked part-time for a while and he was actually unemployed for a short time but we were lucky, most of the time he worked.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you live in town or in the country?

Mr. Tucker:

We lived in the city and just outside the city for a while in a small town just outside the city.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have a garden?

Mr. Tucker:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How about a milk cow, anything like that?

Mr. Tucker:

No but we had a big garden.

Mr. Misenhimer:

No chickens.

Mr. Tucker:

Yes, we had some chickens.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you did have some food then?

Mr. Tucker:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Tucker:

I went to high school in Birmingham. Its name is Woodlawn High School and incidentally they recently made a movie about my high school.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh? What is that movie?

Mr. Tucker:

Well, it's a movie about when the southeast states were integrated, how that affected that particular high school's football program.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's the name of that movie?

Mr. Tucker:

It's called Woodlawn.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What year did you graduate from high school?

Mr. Tucker:

1942.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on December 7, 1941 Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Tucker:

Oh, yes, I remember exactly what I was doing. I was laying on the couch listening to some music on the radio and it was interrupted by an announcer, you know, who announced that Japan had just attacked Pearl Harbor. I was 17 years old then but I knew that I would be affected.

Mr. Misenhimer:

All right. Then what happened?

Mr. Tucker:

Well, I went ahead and finished high school. I graduated the following June from high school and then I went to college one semester. That summer after I graduated I worked on a construction job building a munitions plant and then that fall I started to college at Auburn University. I went there until sometime in 1943 when I got the call to go into the service.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were drafted, were you?

Mr. Tucker:

No, I actually volunteered for what was called the Army Air Corps then.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK. Go ahead. What happened?

Mr. Tucker:

At that time you know the Air Force, what we call the Air Force today, was not a separate branch of service. It was part of the Army. It was called the U.S. Army Air Corps and then later the U.S. Army Air Force. I went in 1943. I had basic training at Miami Beach, Florida and then I went to Aircraft Armament School in Buckley Field, Colorado. Then I went to aerial gunnery school in Ft. Myers, Florida.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What kind of school was that?

Mr. Tucker:

Aerial gunnery school. Then I went to B-25 crew training at Columbia, South Carolina. I was the tail gunner on the crew.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Actually, what date did you go in in 1943? Do you have the date or the month?

Mr. Tucker:

Let's see. About the middle of the year.

Mr. Misenhimer:

June or some such?

Mr. Tucker:

Yeah, something like that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have a choice of the Air Corps or did they just put you in there?

Mr. Tucker:

No, I had an understanding with the recruitment office that they would put me in the Air Corps.

That's why I volunteered, I wanted to get the Air Corps.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Why did you choose the Air Corps?

Mr. Tucker:

I just didn't want to be in the infantry.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's understandable. Tell me about your basic training. What all happened there?

Mr. Tucker:

Well, I went to Miami Beach, Florida. It was quite interesting in a way. We were actually housed in a hotel. We had about seven or eight guys per room in a hotel and we drilled on the street part of the time and in a golf course there in Miami. We would sing as we marched and some of the hotel patrons objected to that and the Mayor of Miami Beach told them to shut up and be thankful.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What all did you do in basic training?

Mr. Tucker:

Well, mainly you learned close order drill. You practiced close order drill and you spent time on the rifle range learning how to shoot a rifle.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What kind of rifle did you use?

Mr. Tucker:

Well, it was an old rifle. It was a Springfield. I think the original design was 1903 or something

like that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Right. Was it a bolt action?

Mr. Tucker:

Yes. But it was repeating. You fired one round at a time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes. You had to work the bolt to get the second round in.

Mr. Tucker:

But it was accurate. It would pretty well hit what you were aiming at but...

Mr. Misenhimer:

A lot of the snipers used that, the Springfield '03, because of its accuracy.

Mr. Tucker:

Is that right? I didn't know that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes. They weren't trying to shoot real fast. They were just shooting accurately.

Mr. Tucker:

Yeah. Didn't know they even used them during the war.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah. In fact the Marines used them on Guadalcanal.

Mr. Tucker:

I'll be doggoned.

Mr. Misenhimer:

They didn't get the M-1 until later.

Mr. Tucker:

I see.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were your drill instructors pretty tough on you in basic?

Mr. Tucker:

Oh, yes. We had an Italian guy from New York and mainly it was a group of southerners in my platoon so he got his full vengeance.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything particular from basic training that stands out?

Mr. Tucker:

No, I think I mentioned the main things that stand out, about the hotel patrons objecting to our singing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then when you finished basic training, where was it you said you went?

Mr. Tucker:

I went to the Aircraft Armament School at Buckley Field in Colorado, just outside Denver.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you travel out there?

Mr. Tucker:

We went by troop train.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that trip?

Mr. Tucker:

It was interesting. You know we had one car that was a restaurant. It had a lunch line there. I think it took us two days. Two days to get there. We went out of Florida via New Orleans to Denver. One interesting thing was...no, that was later. It took us about two days to get to Denver.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Had you been that far from home before?

Mr. Tucker:

Oh, no. Furthest I'd been from home was going to college which was about a hundred miles from home.

Mr. Misenhimer:

People didn't travel a lot in those days.

Mr. Tucker:

No, no they didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What all happened in that school?

Mr. Tucker:

Well, we studied and learned the armament, the machine guns and the bombs and how to attach the bombs to the airplane and how to arm the bombs. That's what we studied.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About how long was that school?

Mr. Tucker:

It was about a little over four months.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Four months, OK. Then what happened?

Mr. Tucker:

Then I went to aerial gunnery school in Ft. Myers, Florida. Studied aerial gunnery there. You had some, you practiced both with some electronics like present-day games where the planes would attack you and you would shoot at them and they would check if you were aiming at the right place. Then we did skeet shooting from the back of a truck with a shotgun as the truck drove around a circular path and there were places along the path where they would launch the

Mr. Misenhimer:

Clay pigeons?

Mr. Tucker:

Yes, clay pigeons and we would fire at them with a shotgun from the back of the moving truck. The idea was to get you used to knowing how to aim when you were moving.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Tucker:

We did a lot of that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's some other things that happened there?

Mr. Tucker:

Well, we had a couple of very hard rains. It was hot and muggy there and we had a couple of very hard rains there where it rained so hard we just sat around for three or four days, watching it

rain. They told us to just stay in the barracks. We didn't do any training. All told we probably lost a week and a half that way.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you actually train with machine guns there also?

Mr. Tucker:

Oh, yes, we trained with machine guns. One of the training missions we flew was in a B-17. A B-17 has a side gun on each side and we would go up and fly over the Gulf at a fairly low altitude and we would fire into the water. They wanted us to get the feeling of what kind of pattern the bullets made when you fired when you were moving. They had a whole system for it. If you get attacked by a fighter, most of the time to hit you, he has to follow what's called a pursuit curve. He had to aim ahead of you and he has to keep changing where he aims. Then if he does that, he has a predictable path so then all the aerial gunners would aim toward, if he flew that curve, then they knew exactly where to aim to hit him. We had an electronic sight on the gun and you had a system of you would lead him by so much if he was in let's say seventy degrees or thirty degrees it would diminish and finally he was coming straight at you. You just aimed right at him.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you also have them pulling the cloth sleeves to shoot at?

Mr. Tucker:

We didn't do that. I know some gunnery schools they had done that but I don't know what the reason was, if they discontinued it or if the rain put us behind the eight-ball or what but we didn't do that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything else you recall from that gunnery school?

Mr. Tucker:

No, it was so humid there, how uncomfortable we all were. You'd put on a fresh uniform and go outside and walk a couple blocks, you'd be wringing wet.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened after that?

Mr. Tucker:

Then we got split up, you know. We didn't all go to the same place. I got assigned to go to B-25 crew training at Columbia, South Carolina.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about that training.

Mr. Tucker:

Well, we crewed up. The B-25 had two pilots, one navigator/bombardier, one engineer/gunner, one radio/gunner and one tail gunner. So I crewed up and we trained for about five months. The pilots were involved in formation flying. I don't think they had ever had formation flying before. We flew some low-level training missions but we never fired our guns. There was a lake near Columbia that we would fly over, simulating a low-level attack and then we did drop some practice bombs.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did the B-25 have a turret on top of the plane or not?

Mr. Tucker:

Yes, it had a turret and I had...the tail gun position had a turret which would not swivel

completely. It would just swivel about 40 degrees to each side and about 60 degrees up and down. My position, I had a seat like a bicycle seat but my knees were also on the floor of the plane. I had a protective steel plate in front of me but I had two openings that I could put my hands through and grasp the handles of the gun turret and fire the gun.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How many guns did you have?

Mr. Tucker:

Two. 50 caliber machine guns. Aiming the guns manually but it was a hydraulic powered system which moved the guns with the controls hydraulically.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did your plane have a belly turret?

Mr. Tucker:

No. I don't think the B-25s ever had a belly turret. The early B-25s did not have a tail gun position. The B-25s that flew the Tokyo raid. They put a fake gun in the tail but they didn't actually have a real gun there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What else happened in that training?

Mr. Tucker:

It was a much better time. It was a little over five months and we got off every weekend and it was lots more freedom than we had in basic training and gunnery school. Columbia was a town that was pretty friendly towards soldiers. So it was good weekends there. Columbia was a real friendly town even though they had a lot of servicemen there on the weekends. They had Fort Jackson. That was an Army, I think it was basic training, a lot of military establishments around

there. On weekends the whole town would be filled with soldiers on leave but still they were friendly.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Tucker:

Well, in December of 1944 we finished our crew training and we got the orders to fly overseas. So we went up to New York and sat there for a few days and then we left sometime in December on a U.S. Army/Air Force transport command C-54, Douglass C-54. That's the same plane that was later called commercially a DC-4. We flew out of LaGuardia Field up to Newfoundland and then to the Azores and then to Casablanca, French Morocco. Then we flew to Tripoli, Libya. From there we got off the plane and that was in the middle of the night and we just laid around in the terminal there about six hours. Then we got another plane that was a Curtiss C-46, a twin-engine transport type plane and it flew us almost from Tripoli to Cairo to Abadan, Iran on into Karachi. This was before India became separated into India and Pakistan. At that time it was a British Crown Colony, the whole thing was called India. So we flew into Karachi for processing there. We stayed there a pretty long time. I was surprised how long we stayed there. We were unable to leave the base or anything but we had three meals a day and the weather was pretty good. Then we got our assignments. Then we flew by air transport C-47s. Those were C-47 transports. This is what they used, twin-engined transports. We flew from Karachi to Delhi to Agra. We overnighted. Agra is where the Taj Mahal is. So we all got to go out and see the Taj Mahal and then the next day we flew on to Calcutta where we refueled. Then we flew, kept on to Dacca into the base called Feny. I've seen it spelled Seni and also Scenni. I'm not sure what is the correct spelling but it was a B-25 base and we joined the 12th Bombardment Group there of

the 10th Air Force, the 12th Bomb Group. The unit I joined had had a lot of past. It had been activated in early 1942 and been shipped overseas and had participated in the battle of El Alamein in Egypt. It had been all through the North Africa campaign, through Sicily and then to Italy. Then it was reassigned to the China/Burma/India Theater. So all the original ground crews was still with it but almost all the air crews had already fulfilled their number of mission requirement and had gone home. There was all replacement crews for the most part.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Tucker:

OK. So then we were assigned to the 12th Bomb Group, they took my pilots away. Took both my pilots and reassigned them to the combat cargo command where there was a shortage of pilots. So I didn't have a crew to fly with so I didn't fly much at first and then I started flying as replacement for some crews that maybe had a tail gunner that got sick or I'd fly with some administrative pilot that didn't have a regular crew. Then I did that for a while and then I got assigned to a regular crew and flew most of the rest of the time with a regular crew.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What bomb squadron was that?

Mr. Tucker:

The 12th Bomb Group had four squadrons, the 728th, the 729th, the 730th and the 434th bomb squad. They had four bomb squadrons and I was in the 729th. We were assigned missions of supporting the British 14th Army in its campaign to recapture Burma from the Japanese so most of the missions we flew were over Burma. When I first joined it, we flew one or two missions to

the southwestern part of China but no more after that. All the rest of the missions were over Burma.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your target on these missions?

Mr. Tucker:

Mostly the infrastructure in Burma. We bombed a lot of railroad yards, bridges, supply dumps, things like that but also we bombed a few fortified positions and a few other targets. One of the other targets I remember, most of the missions I flew we did formation bombing from seven or eight thousand feet. You know when you drop your bombs from that high, you don't get the full impact of how much damage they're causing. I'd look down and see a puff of smoke and dust rising up and if it was a bridge of course you could tell it was collapsed or not but most of the time, you know, you didn't know how much damage you had done. But one day we got this order to carry out kind of a special mission. We were trying to work closely with the British Army and they had discovered that a Burmese village had been taken over by the Japanese and they had driven all the Burmese out so we were given the mission to bomb the village. So it was too far from our base for us to fly to it with a full bomb load and get back so the British 14th Army had just captured an airfield in Burma at a place called Meiktila and it was decided that we would stage out of that airport for the mission and we had to fly our own transport for fuel and for the bombs so it took us a little while to get everything assembled over there. I flew in with the crew and we spent the night there before the mission. It was only like four or five days after this airfield had been taken from the Japanese and there were dead Japanese soldiers all over the place. It was just absolutely littered with them. I thought about taking a souvenir but we were informed that some of the bodies might be booby-trapped. I didn't try to take any souvenirs from

a body and they had not yet begun to smell. You know they smell when they're dead, you know, four or five days and they hadn't started to smell yet. So the next day we took off on this mission to bomb this village that the Japanese had taken over and the higher you are, the further away you can be heard. We wanted to surprise them so we flew this mission at low level, 500 feet. We came in and in one pass wiped out the village. It was totally different from any of the other missions that I had flown because you could see now the full effect that your bombs were doing. We were dropping explosive incendiary bombs and you looked around and you could see buildings exploding with fire and as we approached we saw a few Japanese troops running for foxholes but we dropped our bombs and the shockwaves from the bombs shook the planes violently. It was different from any of the other missions I had flown. Nevertheless we didn't lose any planes and we went back to this temporary field and we had stored some fuel there and we refueled and flew back to our base. It was a very successful mission but the model wasn't followed much after that because we had discovered it was too difficult for us to supply ourselves out of another field instead of flying from our home field where we had all our supplies stored.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About how many planes went on that mission?

Mr. Tucker:

Twelve.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Twelve planes, OK. Then what happened?

Mr. Tucker:

I continued to fly missions mostly conventional type. We did fly a few strafing missions where

we attacked fortified positions. Some models of the B-25 had a solid nose. That is, instead of having a navigator/bombardier in the nose they had a solid nose with machine guns, eight machine guns there and four on the sides of the planes so that was one heck of a lot of firepower. We attacked some fortified positions where the British troops were coaching us from the ground by radio and tell us how we did but most of the time we were flying, doing formation bombing from our base.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did any of the planes from your squadron have those machine guns?

Mr. Tucker:

Oh, yes, every squadron had some planes with the solid nose like that. Incidentally, in our group the B-25 model that had solid noses for machine guns was called the H model. Our unit received the last H model made by North American Aviation from the plant at Englewood, California. When we got it, it was covered with messages and greetings from the workers who made it. So it was a very unusual appearance. After the war, sometime after the war, I had a painting made of this particular mission and the painter explained to me that he couldn't show the whole squadron of twelve planes and go into detail on the planes because he would have to paint it from the vantage of being away from the planes. So instead I had the painting made with just four planes, one plane from each squadron, and one of the planes was this plane with all the greetings and signatures on it. The crew had named the plane "Bones". So the campaign we were involved in was very successful. Turned out to be very successful and they really made revolutionary use of air power. They did things by air that had never been done before. They flew in a complete army, supplied it by air, and when the time came, evacuated it by air. In late May 1945 the campaign ended with the capture of Rangoon, the main city of Burma where the remaining Japanese troops

that were in Thailand. They had a victory parade in Rangoon. One plane from each of our four squadrons participated in the flyover of the parade grounds and I was lucky enough to be on the plane from our squadron that participated in the victory parade. We flew over the parade ground as our part of the parade. I did get into Rangoon and saw the pagoda, really outstanding, saw the Sawe Eagon pagoda, the gold-plated pagoda that has a big sapphire gem and we could see it from the air, miles away you could see it. It was a very good thing that I got to see that. So after that campaign ended, our unit started changing over to a new type of plane. It was called the Douglass A-26 and we first trained at our regular base. Then later we moved further back into India to an airfield called Madeaiganji and started training there. We were still in the training process when the atomic bomb was dropped and the war ended. It was odd but one of the most frightening times I had during the whole war was the day the war ended. We assumed it was ended when they dropped the atomic bomb although they hadn't actually signed the peace treaty yet. We decided to celebrate. We had a little club there and I was raised in Alabama as a Baptist, you know, and alcohol was a bad thing and I'd never had a drink of hard liquor in my life. But I decided that if anything justified having a drink it was the end of the war. So I went to this little club and got a drink. It was Coke and English gin. So I started to sip on it and I started to drink and started to feel it and went outside and started throwing up and about this time all the guys started firing off their guns and celebrating the end of the war. So I was stumbling back to my bunk and I could hear these bullets hit the trees and the edges of the buildings and that was the most frightened I'd ever been in the whole war. I made it back to my bunk OK and luckily nobody was killed or injured with all that firing guns, you know. Everybody had a pistol, a .45 pistol so everybody was just shooting up in the air. They were drunk when they were doing it, so we were lucky nobody got hurt.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Right. OK, go ahead.

Mr. Tucker:

The way I heard about the bomb being dropped, was that me and a friend of mine decided to go into the village and shop. He wanted to buy something I guess. I don't remember what. Along the route from our base into the village, the Royal Air Force had a communications tent. He knew somebody there so we went into the town and found what he wanted to buy. As we came back and headed toward the base, passed by this communications tent, all of the RAF people cheered us. "Way to go, Yanks! Go, Yanks!" You know. We thought, "Gee, that's fine but it's a little unusual." You know, for them to do that. Then when we got to the base, we understood why. That atomic bomb had been dropped. So we all thought the war was going to be over. We didn't doubt it. They had a point system for returning you to the States. I had quite a few points, so I went down to Calcutta and got on a ship October 1, 1945 and headed for New York. My ship got to Columbo, Ceylon and then we went through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal and then through the Mediterranean, through the Straits of Gibraltar of course. We could see Gibraltar. When we hit the Atlantic it was far different from those other seas. It was rough and everybody, everybody got sick. Even the crew got sick it was so rough. But we got into New York on October 31 and we were there for two or three days. I went into town one night and then they gave me 45 days' leave to home. I'd never had a leave since I'd gone in. So I went back home and celebrated with everybody and then on December 22, 1945 I reported to San Antonio and got my discharge. So I got on a train, went to Birmingham. Only about one-third of the passengers had a seat but nobody complained. So we made it to Birmingham and I had the best

Christmas I had ever had because I thought, "I've got a lot to be thankful for. The war's over. I'm out of the Army. It's Christmas and I'm home." That was the perfect Christmas.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Perfect timing.

Mr. Tucker:

Yeah. You want to hear more?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Go ahead.

Mr. Tucker:

Well, after the war I went to college on the G.I. Bill and you know, you got \$75 a month to live on and it was just barely enough. So one day I was talking with a buddy of mine and in 1947 the Air Force had been created as a separate service. He told me they were starting an ROTC program and you got paid if you took it. If you're a veteran they waived the first two years because you just took the advanced ROTC and got paid. I says, "Where do I sign up?" You know. So I entered into the ROTC program and I was in the first U.S. Air Force ROTC class to be commissioned. Got that in July 1948 and I graduated from college in August. When I signed up for the ROTC, you know, I thought at that time the U.S. had a monopoly on the atomic bomb I thought, why risk it. For me at least in the ROTC I'd be safe. Worst thing in the world.

Nobody's going to mess with us. But in June 1950 the Korean War started. In 1949 the Russians had exploded their atomic bomb so their ally, North Korea, immediately made plans to attack South Korea and our stupid Secretary of State at that time a man named Dean Acheson had proclaimed that Korea was outside the U.S. sphere of influence or concern. That we had no interest in Korea and then that further encouraged the North Koreans to attack so they attacked in

June of 1950. So about that time I was doing pretty well. I was the district field manager for a coffee company in Macon, Georgia but having taken the money in ROTC, I knew that I was going to get called up and I was still young enough to get in on flight training. So I went to the Air Force recruiting office and told them I wanted to sign up for flight training. They were very, very happy to accommodate me because they had a quota and they were having a hard time filling the quota so I took the physical test and they told me, they said, "Well, I'm sorry but you didn't pass the physical. Your depth perception is not good enough for pilot training but we will give you a waiver if you want to volunteer for navigator training." So I said, "OK." So I went into the Air Force in February of 1951 and became a navigator. Then I went to B-26 crew training at Langley Field in Virginia. Now the so-called B-26 was the same plane that had been called the A-26 that we had trained on briefly at the end of World War II. When the Air Force became a separate service, they changed the designations of all the planes and the P-51 which was a fighter was changed to an F-51 and this A-26 supposedly an attack plane was changed to a B-26, a bomber. So I went through the combat crew flight training and went over to Korea where I was assigned to the 452nd Bomb Group whose mission was night intruding. We patrolled the supply routes of North Korea running down to the front. We patrolled them at night and the fighters patrolled them in the daytime. So we were hunting for trucks and trains at night. So I flew 55 of those missions and I came back home and got assigned to the military air transport service ferrying squadron and for a couple of years I navigated all over the world where we were delivering planes the U.S. was either giving or selling to other nations for replacement planes for Air Force units. Then at the end of 1954 I got out for the second time and I got in the airline business but I did stay in the Air Force Reserve and eventually I retired from it. I did have one little incident. I was in a Reserve troop carrier unit and got called in to active duty during the

Cuban Missile Crisis. We had trained in dropping parachutists and their equipment so we cranked up our planes in Indiana at the time and we flew down to Florida and got in position to participate in the invasion if it had occurred but luckily it didn't and in about a month we got released back to civilian life. So I eventually retired from the Air Force Reserve. So I guess that's it as far as my military service goes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What date did you retire then?

Mr. Tucker:

Lieutenant Colonel.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What date?

Mr. Tucker:

July 1984.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK, good. Now, I've got some questions for you. During World War II over there, how many missions did you fly then?

Mr. Tucker:

17. The campaign we were involved in ended, like I said, at the end of May 1945. We just sat around for the rest of the war. We didn't fly any missions for the rest of the war.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was the morale in your outfit during World War II?

Mr. Tucker:

Very good. We had a corps of guys with a lot of experience that had served in North Africa, Sicily and Italy and they knew what to do.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. Tucker:

Oh, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you think of her?

Mr. Tucker:

Well, I didn't pay much attention to her but I liked the music.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, I've heard that she played good music.

Mr. Tucker:

Yeah, she did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever cross the equator?

Mr. Tucker:

Let's see. I think so. Colombo, Ceylon, that's the furthest south I went.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you crossed the equator, did you have any kind of a ceremony or anything?

Mr. Tucker:

No, it wasn't. I'm not sure if we crossed it or not. It may not have been quite to the equator. I got a globe right here. Let me look. Just a minute. We were probably five to ten degrees north of the

equator. I see where Ceylon is. I don't think when we rounded the tip of India there that we would have to have gone further south so I'm pretty sure we did not.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your worst day during World War II?

Mr. Tucker:

Oh, I was just disappointed when they broke up our crew in India and I didn't get to fly with the guys that I'd trained with.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How about the most fearing time, when you were the most scared? When was that?

Mr. Tucker:

That's what I described to you: when the war ended. The guys were firing off, they were drunk and firing off their pistols.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That was the worst day.

Mr. Tucker:

I was more scared then than I had been on any mission. We did get hit, slightly, on one mission but it did not affect the performance of the plane.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever lose any planes close to you?

Mr. Tucker:

We lost two planes two months before I joined the unit and thereafter we lost only one. It was not due to any action. It was an accident.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You mentioned you went from the B-25 to the A-26. How much difference was there in those two planes?

Mr. Tucker:

Well, the A-26 was very much faster. It was more maneuverable. It was a much better plane. It had a bigger bomb load. For its time it was a very good plane. It had a very long life. It was used as late as the Vietnam War.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did the A-26 differ from the B-26?

Mr. Tucker:

Well, on the B-26 you could not go through the bomb bay. There was no way to go from the forward compartment to the rear compartment where the gunner sat. The gunner sat by himself in the rear. He had two remote controlled turrets, one upper and one lower and there was no way to go between the two. The B-25 you could crawl over the bomb bay and go back and forth between the pilot position and the rear of the plane where the radio gunner and the tail gunner were. Of course the B-26 or A-26 was considerably faster than the B-25.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Right. The B-26 they considered to be the Widowmaker because they had so many accidents with it.

Mr. Tucker:

I never heard that before.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You haven't? OK. They had a training base there near Tampa, Florida and they had a motto, "A plane a day in Tampa Bay."

Mr. Tucker:

That's a different B-26.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, B-26.

Mr. Tucker:

World War II B-26...

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's what I'm talking about.

Mr. Tucker:

The Marauder...

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, the B-26.

Mr. Tucker:

It was not the same B-26 that they called the B-26 during the Korean War.

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, no, I'm talking about World War II.

Mr. Tucker:

World War II?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah.

Mr. Tucker:

No, I never flew in that plane.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah.

Mr. Tucker:

Yeah, you're right. The World War II B-26 until they learned how to fly it, was a dangerous plane. But the A-26, later renamed the B-26, was a different plane even though it had the same designation at a later time. It was a good plane all around.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Right. Now April 12, 1945 President Roosevelt died. Did you all hear about that?

Mr. Tucker:

We heard about it. Not right away but we heard about it probably three or four days later.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What reaction did people have when they heard that?

Mr. Tucker:

Well, I think we all felt sad. You know, because we'd all grown up in the Depression and he was a big hero during the Depression.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, yeah. Now on May 8, 1945 Germany surrendered. Did you have any kind of celebration then?

Mr. Tucker:

No, we didn't and I was telling you about the victory in Burma. It got very little notice in the international press because it was coinciding with the immediate aftermath of the war in Europe

and that was dominating the news and it was little noticed. It was a remarkable campaign that the British did out there, to recapture Burma.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Right. Now, when you got out, did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Tucker:

No. I thought when I went to college you know. I'd say probably sixty percent of the students were former G.I.'s. I never noticed anybody. We were too darned grateful to be back.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah. Did you use your G.I. Bill for anything other than college?

Mr. Tucker:

No. Didn't know you could use it for anything else.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Could buy a house with it and that sort of thing.

Mr. Tucker:

Oh, yes. I think I did. Bought my first house in California I think with a G.I. loan.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you had any reunions of your outfit?

Mr. Tucker:

Oh, yes. Both, the World War II and the Korean War. We had reunions. I went to the World War II reunions until 2012. That was our last one. The last few the numbers had dwindled so much that we had a joint meeting with the Vietnam Era unit. We would coat-tail on their arrangements and we would have our own meeting and all of that but at our last meeting there were only four of us, actual members. Lots of the family members came. I think we had 30 some in attendance

but only four of them were actual veterans. But we had had as many as a thousand attend our reunions. They were very well attended for several years.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Tucker:

I got the Asia/Pacific Campaign Medal with battle star. I did not get the Air Medal because you had to have a minimum of 25 missions to get the Air Medal. I got the American Service Ribbon and the Victory Medal.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Got a Good Conduct, did you?

Mr. Tucker:

Oh, yes, I got that too. I never really considered that worth getting really. What do you do to get the Good Conduct Medal, you just don't mess up. I didn't think that was anything to brag about.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How many battle stars did you get?

Mr. Tucker:

One. Central Burma. The Battle Star was awarded for the Central Burma Campaign.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Tucker:

Well, let's see. I was struck by the difference you know by the way we were treated by the public than what occurred by the way the Vietnam veterans were treated by the public. You know, in

World War II you could be walking up the street and people would come up and invite you home for dinner. I heard that some of the Vietnam veterans got spit on when they came back.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, yeah, that's right.

Mr. Tucker:

My God, what is going on here? The contrast just struck you right in the face. An interesting thing was when I went back in in 1951, the Armed Forces had been desegregated so we had one black guy in my navigation class.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Tucker:

No. I gave away the one I really wanted to bring back. I told you about going into this air field where they had just been captured from the Japanese and I picked up some of the wreckage around there. I saw this head of Buddha that had been blown off a statue. I thought, "Boy, that would make a good souvenir." So I brought that back to my base with me but my houseboy, of course he wasn't a boy, he was a man, was so taken with it. He was a Buddhist and he asked me to give it to him so I did. The other thing was I came back with some photographs that I later lost. It was probably because I lived in what was called a Bashe, that was a hut with about six or seven guys living in it, and the squadron photographer lived in my Bashe and his job was to take bomb burst photographs of every mission and so he saved for me and got for me, photographs of each of the 17 missions I'd flown. Then somehow when I got back home they became lost. And I had a few other photographs but I did recoup some by going to reunions. I met guys there that had some pictures. You weren't supposed to have a camera but I met one guy who did have one

and had taken some pictures and he had them developed after he got back to the States and at one of these reunions I got copies of his photographs so I do have some copies of photographs. All of our nose-art on the planes I have quite a few photographs of those and the living arrangements we had there with the Bashe, it was kind of a concrete structure with a thatched roof. But then I have photographs of a couple of friends of mine and I have a photograph of this plane that I was telling you about that had all these signatures and greetings on.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What nose-art did you have on your plane?

Mr. Tucker:

You didn't necessarily fly in the same plane every time. You just flew the plane that they assigned to you for that mission.

Mr. Misenhimer:

During World War II, did you ever see any U.S.O. shows anywhere?

Mr. Tucker:

Yes. We had one that came to our base. It was an actress named Jinx Falkenburg. She was a beautiful woman and it wasn't much of a show, though. She just kind of visited. She was pretty much monopolized by the officers.

Mr. Misenhimer:

During World War II, did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Tucker:

Yes, in Calcutta they had a very good facility. When we went on leave we would stay there in Calcutta. Calcutta you may imagine was a city with atrocious sanitary conditions and there was two places considered safe to eat, besides the Red Cross, two hotels. No other places were

considered safe to eat in. Well, I'll take that back. There was one Chinese restaurant that was owned by a Chinaman. I had one leave in Calcutta where I stayed in the Red Cross so they did a nice job there. There wasn't very many of them but they had one in Calcutta.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's all the questions I have unless you've thought of anything else.

Mr. Tucker:

No, as I've told you, I had a painting made of that one mission I mentioned to you and I've thought about maybe donating it to the museum maybe in my will and I want to make sure that if I did, they would display it. I've been to the museum but I didn't think they didn't give hardly attention to the CBI. It was all the Pacific island campaigns that they mainly had exhibits on and that's not unusual though. We think that part of the war was not well recognized. We had no Army there. Our mission was to keep China in the war and we had a lot of supply and transportation and Air Force unit and Engineering units but we had no Army there. We did have a task force for a time but that's the only reason that I can think of to explain the very little press coverage of that area during the war. I sure enjoyed the interview Richard.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I want to thank you for your time today and I want to thank you for your service to our country.

Mr. Tucker:

Well, I thank you for yours.

Mr. Misenhimer:

We'll keep in contact and like I say, when I get this transcribed, I'll get back with you and we'll go from there.

Mr. Tucker:

OK.

Mr. Misenhimer:

All right.

End of Interview

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