

**Veteran:** ANDREWS, John  
**Service Branch:** ARMY AIR CORPS  
**Interviewer:** Coy, Larisa L.  
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Terry Moore  
**Highlights of Service:** World War II & Postwar; B-29 Command Pilot and Flight Instructor; Stateside Service

Interviewer: Are you aware that our conversation will be recorded, and that the tape and transcription will be placed in the Lee College Library? Do I have your permission to do that?

Veteran: Yes.

Interviewer: What is your name and age?

Veteran: My name is John H. Andrews, and I'm 81 years old.

Interviewer: What military branch were you affiliated with and when?

Veteran: I volunteered for the Army Air Corps in January of 1942.

Interviewer: How old were you?

Veteran: I must have been about 18, I guess. I wasn't old enough to be drafted, so I volunteered.

Interviewer: What made you want to become involved in the military?

Veteran: The attack at Pearl Harbor made me want to do something about it.

Interviewer: Where were you when that happened?

Veteran: I was in college.

Interviewer: What college did you go to?

Veteran: I went to lots of colleges, but the one I was in at that time was Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond, Louisiana.

Interviewer: Did you participate in any war, and which one?

Veteran: I was in World War II, and I was in military active duty from January of 1942 until June of 1950.

Interviewer: Where were you stationed?

Veteran: Lots of different stations. I went into training with a small group from Chicago, Louisiana, and Texas. They sent me to Wichita Falls, Sheppard Field, to do basic training. From there I was sent to Vanderbilt, and the reason was they had more applicants for becoming pilots than they had places to train them. They sent us up to Vanderbilt to wait until a slot opened. From there I went to Maxwell Field in Alabama for pre-flight, and to Jackson, Mississippi, for primary flight training. Then I went to Walnut Ridge, Arkansas, for basic flight training and to Blytheville, Arkansas, for advanced flight training. I stayed there as a flight instructor for the better part of a year, and then I was sent to Columbus, Ohio, to Laughlin Air Force Base to fly B-17s. From there I was sent to Maxwell Field again to train in B-29s, and I became a command pilot in B-29s. That's the plane that won the war, as far as the Japanese are concerned.

Interviewer: What was combat like?

Veteran: I had my crew, and I was on the way to the South Pacific when the war ended, so I didn't actually fly combat.

Interviewer: So you just received training for flying?

Veteran: I trained and I taught. They would not let the B-29 pilots out of the military at the end of the war, because they figured there might be another problem some place, and we would be the number one people to take part in it. So they sent me to meteorology school and were looking for pilots that had training in physics and math, which is what I had my degree in. They sent me to Chanute Field, which is right out of Champagne, Illinois. When I finished training there, the military was looking for pilots again who would go to college and get additional training. In

fact, they told me what to study, and they sent me to Ohio State for eight quarters, or two years in physics. I got a graduate degree in physics, and from there I was a staff officer for a general who was in charge of research and development in the Air Force for all electronic and geophysical research. I took part in trying to find if Russia had the atom bomb, which was a top secret thing, and I also took place in the development of the land navigation system for the military, and the development of the solar observatory. From Wright Patterson Field I was transferred to Boston to the Air Force Cambridge Research Laboratory. I went to college at Harvard and took all of my prelims, because I hadn't had anything but physics and math, because that's the only thing I thought was worth studying at the time. I had to go back and take organic chemistry, biology, and zoology, and all the other chemistry courses that I hadn't had. From there I went into medical school.

Interviewer: You went into medical school while you were in the military?

Veteran: No, I went to medical school after I got out.

Interviewer: How did you feel when you were training people to go into combat?

Veteran: I thought it was absolutely terrible that we had dropped the atom bomb in Japan and burned the country down. We burned at least half of Tokyo down, and Yokohama, and all these other large cities, and we killed more people with Napalm than we killed with the atom bomb, by far. People were making a lot of their instruments of war in little cottage industries in homes.

Interviewer: Did you receive any medals? If so, what kind?

Veteran: Yes, the Good Conduct, and all of that routine, but no Purple Heart or any of those medals.

Interviewer: What was the atmosphere like in the United States after the war?

Veteran: I don't really know, because I was kept in the military. They wanted me very much to stay in the military, so I don't know what the atmosphere was like after the war. I got out of the military in June, and in August I was in medical school,

so there was not much time. They also had a book that we had to read most of before we started medical school, so I can't answer that question.

Interviewer: Did the war change your perspective of the United States in international affairs?

Veteran: Yes, it certainly did change my thoughts. I became aware that this was not just one country—it was global. For example, when I first went into the military, they changed my way of thinking, too. Like I told you, I went in with a group from Chicago and the New Orleans and Texas areas. Students from A&M that were in our group told us that we could go home, because they would take care of this problem. I thought, “these guys are nuts,” but that’s the way they felt. Their thoughts were a lot more optimistic than the rest of us.

Interviewer: When you were in the military, did you write any letters home, and if so, what would you say about the war?

Veteran: I wrote letters home all the time, and they were more about my training than anything else. I had three roommates, and inside of about ten days the three of them were dead from flying, and that was quite a shock to me, but you just get over it.

Interviewer: Did you have any close friends or family members that joined the military as you did?

Veteran: Yes, I did. I just got through reading a book, Flyboys, which is about the first President Bush when he got shot down, and he was flying off of aircraft carriers in the South Pacific. I had one of my buddies that lived two blocks away from me that was mentioned in the book many, many times. He was a pilot, also.

Interviewer: Did the military tell you what type of conditions you were going to face in the war?

Veteran: Not really. We were kind of sheltered, and they kept a lot of stuff from us, just like the Japanese were cannibals. They were eating the pilots that got shot down. They kept that a secret for twenty or thirty years, and the military knew about it, but they didn't tell anybody. I think under the circumstances if I had been shot

down or something over Japan, that I would probably have wanted a pistol, not for the Japanese but for myself.

Interviewer: What was your individual task or mission during the war?

Veteran: My tasks were training other people to be pilots and learning to fly the most expensive, biggest, and best airplanes in the world at that time. They were very complicated.

Interviewer: What was an average day when you were training?

Veteran: It wasn't a forty hour week, and it wasn't an eight hour day. We would fly days and nights, and sometimes fly thirteen or fourteen hour training missions, so it certainly wasn't like most civilians think of their normal day.

Interviewer: How old were the pilots that you were training?

Veteran: Most of the pilots were young. I'd say most of them were anywhere from 19 or 20 on up to about 24 or 25 or so. The ones that were older were usually the higher ranking officers. In other words, they had more flying time and more experience than the younger pilots had.

Interviewer: Were they enthusiastic about the war, or were they kind of scared?

Veteran: At that age, and that's the reason that that age group fights wars, you'll do most anything they tell you to do. You're not afraid of anything. That's human nature, and that's the reason they had young people in combat and flying. They were jobs that were dangerous. In fact, we got extra pay for flying. They paid us half again as much as they paid other soldiers. Like I said, I lost three roommates in a very short time, so there certainly were a lot of accidents even in the states before they went overseas.

Interviewer: How did your family react about you entering the war?

Veteran: Mother was a very strong person, but she was visibly upset when she heard that I had volunteered. She never said she was sorry I did it, but I know that she felt that way.

Interviewer: Where did you go to volunteer?

Veteran: At the university. They had people who came by, and they gave us these written examinations if we wanted to be a pilot. That was the most popular place to go. In the school I went to, everybody wanted to be a pilot. They took maybe two or three out of every hundred that applied for it. After they gave you the exam, then you had to take the physical, and you had to really have nothing wrong with you. You couldn't be near-sighted or have anything wrong with you to keep you from flying. There was a small percentage of us that got in, and of those of us that got in, about fifty percent were flunked out. It was a very competitive thing.

Interviewer: So a lot of people were volunteering to join the military after Pearl Harbor?

Veteran: Yes, a lot of us did. I took the test to be a Navy pilot and an Air Force pilot, and I passed them both. There were a few that got in in both places, but not many.

Interviewer: What did the area look like where you were stationed?

Veteran: We had very primitive quarters, and they weren't really cool or warm either. It was better than being out without anything over your head, but it certainly wasn't anything elaborate. They had what they called bachelor officer's quarters for the officers that weren't married. We even had German prisoners of war that came to clean the place. They had freedom, and certainly that wasn't what our prisoners of war experienced in their country. Our quarters may have been primitive but our airplanes were great, and that was the reason we were there.

Interviewer: Did you have any contact with civilians in other countries, and how were you received by them?

Veteran: I have a son now that works in Tokyo, and I told him, "Whatever you do don't tell anybody in Tokyo that your dad flew B-29s. I was in a museum in Tokyo, and they were talking about the B-29s and showed movies of them and all that, and I didn't dare say a word that I flew those things, because they're the ones that literally just killed many, many, many people. In fact, my professor at Harvard in organic chemistry was one of the ones that developed Napalm. Most of their city was wood, so when the Napalm bomb detonated, it almost burned down the

whole city. I've had contacts in Germany and in Japan, but I'm very careful who I talk to in Japan about what I did.

Interviewer: What was more difficult—physical fighting or emotional effects of the war?

Veteran: It was all very demanding. Certainly, I had no mental problems, so I took the word of one of my early instructors when he said, "If you fly in formation and there is one hole in the fence, there better be three holes in the fence." In other words, we don't pay any attention except to the guy that's beating us. And that was true. They just did a very good job of teaching us to be soldiers. Most of us had no experience at all except for the ones at A&M.

Interviewer: How do you feel about the war today?

Veteran: I think war in general is just terrible. They're barbaric, and I'm certainly anti-war and believe that even though I served a long time in the military, I think we should try everything possible to settle our problems without having to go to war.

Interviewer: Do you think the military is honored as it should be by the American people?

Veteran: They did a whole lot for me. I had the G.I. Bill of Rights, and it paid my tuition and all my books all through medical school. It bought my microscope that I had to use all the time, and so without that I probably would not have been able to go to medical school, so I feel like they certainly paid me back for my time, and it was an experience well beyond my chronological age. There's some things about it that were very interesting. I thought when I got into the thing about Russia having the atom bomb, I felt like this country's putting a lot of faith in me to find out whether they did or not, because every time the Americans and Russians would get together in a meeting, they would fight each other and say each other had the atom bomb. It turned out that Russia didn't have it until 1949, and with the program I was involved in trying to find out, we were able to discover they had it by a B-29 that was flying "weather reconnaissance." That's what it was listed as, and it ran into a lot of radio activity and with Geiger counters they could tell they had exploded an atom bomb. They found out because they had spies that told them how to build one, but it took them four years to build one even though they had all the information they needed to build one.

Interviewer: Looking back, do you feel the role you played in the military was one that you would not give up?

Veteran: Certainly, I'd want to help and defend my country, and my family. I have no doubt that Hitler would have ruled the world if he could have done it. He came close, and Japan came close to getting us, also, so yes, I certainly would. I think our country is great, and that we were able to be a Sleeping Giant and suddenly wake up and flex our muscles and be able to win the war. At first we certainly weren't prepared—not by a long shot.

Interviewer: Do you have any additional comments that you would like to add about being a veteran?

Veteran: Not really. {END OF SIDE A}

{SIDE B BEGINS WITH VETERAN SPEAKING}

Interviewer: Were you an eye doctor?

Veteran: Yes.

Interviewer: And where were you born?

Veteran: Kentwood, Louisiana. The only other person I know that was born there was Brittney Spears.

Interviewer: What year were you born?

Veteran: 1922.

Interviewer: How long did you have to train before you got your wings?

Veteran: The training period was two months of pre-flight, two months of primary, two months of basic, and two months of advanced flight school, so the better part of a year. At least fifty percent of my class washed out. Everybody didn't get through it. The military had training, and if you weren't able to absorb that training in that short a time, they would get rid of you.



Interviewer: Would they still allow them to be in the military, or were they put in the Army?

Veteran: Most of them went back to the Army or went into the Air Force with a job that didn't involve flying. Some were aerial gunners; the ones that shoot the machine guns onboard. It was very competitive, and I'm very proud of it.

{TAPE STOPPED—END OF INTERVIEW}