Interviewer: This is Filiberto Hinojosa, and I am interviewing Mr. Elsie McCagg. Are you aware that this conversation is going to recorded and put in the Lee College library?

Veteran: Yes, I am.

Interviewer: Can you start by telling us what war you were in?

Veteran: I was in the service during World War II from November 6, 1943, to sometime in March 1945.

Interviewer: Were you drafted or did you join?

Veteran: I joined. When I graduated from high school in 1939, I went to fill out an application for the U.S. Marines, and then they called me, and I went into Houston and they gave me an examination. Because I was practically blind in one eye, they wouldn’t take me, and so I tried the Army, and the Army wouldn’t take me either. After the war started, they called me up for the draft, and I went to Houston, and they examined me again and turned me down for the draft. Later on in 1942, they weren’t so strict about it, and I went out to Ellington Field, and I enlisted in the Air Force. Me and a friend of mine both went up there, and they told us when to show up on November 5th. We went in there on the 5th, and we through all the rigmarole—the examination and everything—and then they told us that they couldn’t send us that day and we would have to come back the next day. So we had to catch a ride home, got home about midnight, and then had to be back up there the next morning in Houston. When we got there, they took us
and sent us to San Antone. I went through my basic training there, and then they shipped me to Lincoln, Nebraska, and I stayed there from January 12th to July 12th. Then I went to California, and I stayed out there in California for most of the war. After the war with Germany was over, they decided to ship us overseas, and so I went to New York and stayed up there awhile. Then I got on a ship and went to India, and stayed there for awhile, and then went to China. I spent one night in Cun-ming(?), China, and then flew from there to Shanghai. I stayed there in Shanghai for the rest of the time, and then they put us on a ship and sent us back to Seattle, Washington. I took a train from there to San Antone, and I got mustered out in San Antone, and then I got on the train and came home. The war with Japan was over before I went over. It was over in August, and I didn’t even get on the boat until sometime the middle of September. It took us about twenty-six days to go overseas. It only took about fifteen days coming back.

Interviewer: Were you married?
Veteran: Yeah, I was married before I left. My daughter was born in January while I was over there, and I didn’t come home until March.

Interviewer: What role did you play in the war?
Veteran: I was an aircraft mechanic. Started out as a mechanic on P-38s, and when they shipped me overseas, where we went there weren’t any P-38s so they put us on B-51s. We didn’t have much to do—hardly anything while I was overseas, because most of the pilots were not eager to fly anymore. They flew just enough to keep up their flight pay because, you know, you get paid more if you’re a flying pilot than if you’re on the ground all the time. They flew only about four or six hours a month, and we just messed around. Went to town anytime we wanted to, and Shanghai was a pretty good town. You could go over there and get a pretty good meal pretty cheap. Everything was cheap over there at that time. Of course, Chinese money wasn’t worth anything. Fifteen hundred Chinese yen was a dollar.

Interviewer: Did you have any other family in the war—brothers or sisters?
Veteran: Yeah, I had an older brother. He was drafted, and they took him in the very first draft. He went overseas and made the landing in North Africa, and then from there he went to Sicily, and from Sicily went into Italy. He was killed over there in Italy during the war, and he’s buried over there. I went over there in February and visited his grave. They’ve got a beautiful cemetery over there. He’s buried in Naterno(?), Italy. My younger brother, he went in the service, too, but it was after World War II was over. He was in the Korean War, and stayed over there a couple of years during the war.

Interviewer: What was the toughest part about being in the military?
Veteran: Well, I didn’t have any problems with it myself. We always had plenty to eat, plenty of clothes, a good place to sleep. Not like it was in the infantry or something like that, where you’re out roaming all over the countryside day and night.

Interviewer: Did you write letters and receive letters?
Veteran: Oh, yeah. I wrote my wife all the time, and she wrote to me. A friend of mine and I were in the Army together, and we’re still friends. We still see each other once in awhile. He got a letter from his wife telling him that my daughter was born. He actually knew about it before I did. I got a letter from my wife later, but you know that mail wasn’t too good sometimes.

Interviewer: Where was your hometown?
Veteran: I graduated from high school at Barbers Hill, but then before the war started we had moved to Dangman(?), and that’s where I was when I enlisted. I was in Dangman, and that’s over in Brazoria County.

Interviewer: What did you think when they dropped the atomic bomb over in Japan?
Veteran: Well, I figured it wouldn’t be long until the war was over, and I was right about that. I couldn’t see how anybody could keep on fighting with something like that.

Interviewer: How were things when you returned back home?
Veteran: I had difficulty getting a job. There wasn’t much going on, and I was called up at Humble Oil. I could have gone to work for them, but the thing about not being able to see very good out of one eye stopped me from being able to go to work for them. Finally, I decided I’d take advantage of the G.I. Bill and go to school, so I went to school and graduated from college, and started teaching school. I taught school for thirty-three years.

Interviewer: What did you teach?
Veteran: I taught industrial arts, which was woodworking, metal working, welding, and drafting courses.

Interviewer: You taught at college?
Veteran: I taught at Lee College for a couple of years, and most of the time I taught in high schools. Started out teaching in Seguin, and from there I went to Barbers Hill and taught there for twelve years, and then I came out and taught at Robert E. Lee High School for a couple of years, and then I went back over to Lee College, and I was superintendent of maintenance at Lee College for about twelve years. While I was teaching at Robert E. Lee High School, I taught at San Jacinto College, too, as a part-time teacher. I’d go over there and teach a couple of courses three nights a week.

Interviewer: What do you think of the way things are now in the United States?
Veteran: Well, seems to be going pretty good. The economy’s not too good, and I don’t think much of the fact that they’re trying to have all these tax cuts. We need to get the taxes while they can. That’s why we’re in such bad shape now.

Interviewer: What do you think about the war that’s going on?
Veteran: I wasn’t much in favor of it starting, but after it started, we might as well get after it. I think they’re doing a good job so far, and it looks like everything will work out.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you’d like to say about your experience there?
Veteran: No, that’s about it.
Interviewer:   Alright. Thank you for your time, and for letting me do this interview with you.
Veteran:       You’re welcome.

{TAPE STOPPED—END OF INTERVIEW}