

VETERAN: JOHN DWIGHT BURCHAM
INTERVIEW DATE: FEBRUARY 27, 2012
INTERVIEWER: CARTER TARRANCE
COURT REPORTER: MELANIE OLDHAM
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MR. TARRANCE: Good afternoon. Today's date is February 27, 2012, and my name is Carter William Tarrance. I'm conducting an oral history interview in Athens, Texas. And the court reporter is Melanie Oldham. Our veteran this afternoon is John Dwight Burcham. And your date of birth, Mr. Burcham, is?

MR. BURCHAM: September 11, 1923.

MR. TARRANCE: And you served in the United States Air Force or Army Air Corps.

MR. BURCHAM: Army Air Corps, yes.

MR. TARRANCE: And what were your dates of service?

MR. BURCHAM: I believe I went into the service in February of '42 and was discharged honorably in November of '45 after the war was ended. And then I stayed in the reserve for an additional ten years and was called up to go to Korea and took my physical at Brooke Army Medical and passed it; and then the war in Korea was over, so I just decided to get out.

MR. TARRANCE: Okay. We're going to go through some routine biological questions.

MR. BURCHAM: All right.

MR. TARRANCE: And you are John Dwight Burcham. And what is your address, Mr. Burcham?

MR. BURCHAM: 18474 Hickory Circle, Kemp, Texas 75143.

MR. TARRANCE: And where were you born?

MR. BURCHAM: Fort Worth, Texas.

MR. TARRANCE: And what were the names of your parents?

MR. BURCHAM: My father's name was Leroy Peery, P-E-E-R-Y, Burcham. My mother's name Mamie Kelly Burcham. Kelly was her maiden name.

MR. TARRANCE: And did you have any brothers or sisters?

MR. BURCHAM: Had one brother ten years younger.

MR. TARRANCE: And he's ten years younger than you?

MR. BURCHAM: Yes.

MR. TARRANCE: Where did you grow up?

MR. BURCHAM: In Fort Worth.

MR. TARRANCE: And were your parents in the military?

MR. BURCHAM: My father was in World War I.

MR. TARRANCE: And what branch did he serve?

MR. BURCHAM: He was in the -- I believe it was called the Signal Corps then which was sort of the Air Force, as I understand it.

MR. TARRANCE: Was your brother in the military?

MR. BURCHAM: He was retired as Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Force. He flew U-2's. He flew the fastest -- supposedly the fastest jet. He flew nearly everything.

MR. TARRANCE: SR-71?

MR. BURCHAM: SR-71, yes, uh-huh. And he had a liver transplant and he was stationed in Spokane, Washington at the time and had a liver transplant at Mayo Clinic. And that was successful, but he died from the anti-rejection drugs. So he died about ten years ago.

MR. TARRANCE: I see.

When you served, were you drafted or did you enlist?

MR. BURCHAM: I enlisted.

MR. TARRANCE: And where were you living at the time?

MR. BURCHAM: I was living in Austin and attending University of Texas at Austin.

MR. TARRANCE: And why did you join?

MR. BURCHAM: Out of patriotism. I felt it was my duty and so they wrote me and said you're accepted but you can go ahead and finish your college training. And I wrote them back and said no I want to go now, so I did.

MR. TARRANCE: And why did you pick the Air Corps?

MR. BURCHAM: Well, it's funny. I was a sea scout when I was a boy and I was familiar with boats and the sea and sailing and all of those things and I read all the books on the Navy and ships in the Fort Worth Public Library, I think. And when I went to the University of Texas I tried to enroll in the Naval ROTC program there and was not accepted for reasons that I have no idea. So

in the -- after that, the Air Corps came through and they had a recruiting drive and so I took the test and passed and immediately went in.

MR. TARRANCE: And do you recall your first days in the service?

MR. BURCHAM: I do. They were at Sheppard Field in Wichita Falls as a basic Army recruit.

MR. TARRANCE: And anything about your first experiences that struck you or still strikes you today?

MR. BURCHAM: Well, it was quite a shock, some of the things that happened. I don't know why it was so outstanding but -- I hope this is all right -- but I was so astounded when we had to fall out in the street in rain coat and overshoes and have a check to see if we had a venereal disease. Standing out in the street, my gosh.

MR. TARRANCE: That's a good story.

Do you remember anything else about boot camp or training?

MR. BURCHAM: Well, I wasn't there too long. I didn't realize we had to go initially to boot camp and then when I graduated from that I had expected to go to preflight and they were full at the time so we ended up in a college training detachment at the University of Tulsa for a period there. And I was a student officer as a result of my having been in the ROTC in high school. Do

you want me to --

MR. TARRANCE: Sure. And, I mean, anything else. Impressions of boot camp or training that you'd like to share.

MR. BURCHAM: Well, it was just different. I never did have any strong feelings about it. I just wanted to get on -- I wanted to get in an airplane.

MR. TARRANCE: And do you remember -- I guess after boot camp in Tulsa -- did you train in Tulsa to fly?

MR. BURCHAM: No, we did not. We were strictly there at the university and lived at the dorm and it was just a continuation of your college training for a period until they had an opening in preflight.

MR. TARRANCE: Where did you get to preflight?

MR. BURCHAM: San Antonio, Lackland.

MR. TARRANCE: And do you remember about how long you were down there?

MR. BURCHAM: I was there -- I don't remember exactly because one night just before I was ready to leave there I was up watching a dice game in the aisle in the barracks and the Sergeant in charge of our barracks walked in and since I was watching he thought I was guilty of being involved, so I was held over another class.

MR. TARRANCE: Oh, goodness.

MR. BURCHAM: Which was disappointing, but who knows.

MR. TARRANCE: Did you learn to fly at Lackland?

MR. BURCHAM: No, sir. That was strictly ground school. That was pretty intensive. Pretty intensive training.

MR. TARRANCE: About the theory of flight and how you operate --

MR. BURCHAM: Theory of flight, Morse code, enemy aircraft identification, warship identification, manual dexterity. We had to follow a disc around with a stylus to see if we could --

MR. TARRANCE: And navigation?

MR. BURCHAM: And navigation, yes. And aircraft -- the theory of flight and aircraft engine, just the basics really. And it was --

MR. TARRANCE: Weather?

MR. BURCHAM: Weather, yes.

MR. TARRANCE: Clouds?

MR. BURCHAM: Right. Exactly.

MR. TARRANCE: And after that, where did you go then to actually learn to fly?

MR. BURCHAM: I went to Bonham for primary flight.

MR. TARRANCE: Where?

MR. BURCHAM: Bonham, Texas.

MR. TARRANCE: Bonham? Oh, really.

MR. BURCHAM: Yeah. Jones Field.

MR. TARRANCE: My goodness.

MR. BURCHAM: And flew PT-19's there. From there to basic which was in Greenville which was close by and from Greenville to Victoria at Aloe Army Air Corps.

MR. TARRANCE: In Victoria, Texas?

MR. BURCHAM: Victoria, Texas.

MR. TARRANCE: What was the name of the field at Greenville?

MR. BURCHAM: Majors Field.

MR. TARRANCE: My goodness. Sam Rayburn probably got those fields up there.

MR. BURCHAM: I wouldn't be surprised.

MR. TARRANCE: So you went from Lackland to Bonham to Greenville to Victoria.

MR. BURCHAM: Right.

MR. TARRANCE: And what did you do -- I guess the first stage of flying was at Bonham?

MR. BURCHAM: It was. And I had an interesting experience there.

MR. TARRANCE: What did you -- tell me.

MR. BURCHAM: I had soloed and we were flying PT-19's which is a low-range, single-engine, open cockpit -- two cockpits airplane. We were to go on a little three-point cross country one fall morning and it was always a smooth flight. I thought, man, this is wonderful. We were to go

from Bonham to Paris, Paris to Sulfur Springs and Sulfur Springs back to Bonham. I got to Paris, landed. No radio, of course. It was just green light, red light. You are cleared to land or cleared to take off or wait or whatever.

And so I landed and taxied up and turned around and got clearance to take off again and it was just a beautiful day. I had not been off the ground not even two minutes and ground fog just suddenly blotted out everything beneath me, above me, everywhere. And, of course, we hadn't had any instrument training. And I started letting down and I thought, no, you let down you're going to kill yourself.

MR. TARRANCE: You were solo?

MR. BURCHAM: Yes. I didn't have a radio. I couldn't call for help and say which way to go or anything. So I thought, well, if this -- I finally got up above the clouds, thank goodness, before I lost my sense of balance and spun in. And I thought, well, fog. It's caused by moisture and moisture comes from the gulf. So if I take a heading due north, maybe that will help me run out of it.

And I flew and I flew. I thought, golly, I forgot to check my parachute before I got in this morning. And then I thought, well, I'll just fly and when I run out -- if I

run out of gas, I'll just turn it over and unbuckle the seat belt and hope for the best.

When I looked around behind me once and here's a guy on my tail doing the same fix I am. He thinks I know where I'm going.

Well, anyway, I flew and flew and there was nothing but clouds beneath me and beautiful blue sky above. And finally I looked down and there's a little hole in the clouds and you could see dark and so I knew it was the ground. So I turned over and dove down and came out just above the telephone poles.

MR. TARRANCE: Oh, my.

MR. BURCHAM: Over a railroad. So I thought, well, a railroad -- if I can stay above the telephone poles with the cloud cover and everything, a railroad leads to town. And I have no idea where I am. So I came to this town and it was -- as it turned out, it was Antlers, Oklahoma. And so I thought, well, you've got to land somewhere so I looked around for a field outside town. And I flew over a school and the kids were all hanging out the windows looking at this airplane.

So, anyway, I found this field and I thought, well, that looks like maybe it might do. So I came -- buzzed it a couple of times to be sure there weren't any ditches or anything like that and came in and landed. And my tail

man, he came in behind me and landed.

So we -- I called the base and they said just stay where you are and we'll come after you. And then they brought instructors to fly the airplanes out and carried us back to the base by car.

But the people there at Antlers were very accommodating. The ladies -- some of the ladies cooked some biscuits and sausage and things and cookies and brought them out to us. So it was a dangerous experience, but it turned out well.

MR. TARRANCE: That's a great story.

Do you remember any of the names of your instructors?

MR. BURCHAM: Trantina was my basic instructor. I do not remember the names of my -- Trantina was my primary instructor. I do not remember my basic or advanced instructors' names.

MR. TARRANCE: Okay. Let's see. Now I think we're going to switch to the war.

MR. BURCHAM: Okay. I had a little interim here.

MR. TARRANCE: Tell me about that.

MR. BURCHAM: When I graduated -- I had always wanted to fly P-51's. Advanced was single-engine advanced, so I fully expected to go into fighters. And when I got my diploma is the day I found out I was going to instructor school at Randolph. So I was sort of crestfallen because

I didn't ever think about being an instructor. I had a pretty good record of flying in advanced.

So, anyway, I went through instructor school and was assigned back to Majors Field in Greenville as an instructor. I was not happy. Occasionally there would be a notice on the bulletin board to volunteer to go into the fighter program. And I always ached to fly a P-51, and I'd put my name up there as quick as I could.

Then one day I had a student that we were landing. We had been up in training. As we were just about 50 feet above the ground, all of a sudden he reached up and knocked everything off his head and he let go of the controls and I thought what in the -- so I took over quickly because we were just 50 feet above the ground. That's a good way to kill yourself. And I was needless to say quite unhappy about that experience and I really reamed him out and, in fact, I recommended that he not be continued in the program and I never did know what happened to that.

Shortly after that then I was reassigned to transition training and overseas training at Hunter Field in Savannah, Georgia. And that was in B-24's. It was hardly a fighter. I was quite disappointed in that.

MR. TARRANCE: So you were an instructor at Greenville for a while?

MR. BURCHAM: Yes.

MR. TARRANCE: Then you transitioned to B-24's?

MR. BURCHAM: B-24's.

MR. TARRANCE: So you learned to fly them and you would instruct in them?

MR. BURCHAM: No, I didn't instruct.

MR. TARRANCE: You just learned to fly them?

MR. BURCHAM: Just learned to fly them. And we had a lot of ground school there in celestial navigation and more weather.

MR. TARRANCE: Bomb dropping?

MR. BURCHAM: Bomb dropping, yes. Formation flying. Oh, a number of things. And then finally we were assigned to go overseas. We didn't even know where at the time until we got to -- we took a train to New York to the Air Corps field there. I've forgotten the name of it at the moment.

Anyway, we got a brand new B-24 there and from there we went to Portland, Maine and from there to Gander Field in Newfoundland and were to go to the Azores from there but they have only one runway in the Azores so we were delayed there for almost three weeks because they had a strong cross wind which was, I guess, seasonal there.

So finally we were cleared to go one night. We left about midnight on a snowy runway. They were so slick when

we tried to run the engines up to full power for takeoff, the plane started forward. We said what the heck, or something like that, and scattered the flair pots at the end of the runway getting off, but we got off. We had extra gasoline tanks in the bomb bay to make it to the Azores.

We had a new navigator which we -- you know, now it's up to him. We really had some misgivings about that. He was a big mustached Greek fellow named Eleftherios Ballos. He was a little older. He was a married man, had a nice looking boy at home. He was in Miami.

Anyway, we got -- we had no radio contact until we got within a certain distance of the Azores and could tune in a radio station -- radio compass and got in fine and landed. And there's a very long runway there but there's only one runway and it runs between two mountains. It's really a different place. And the Azores are beautiful. And that was quite an experience. It's almost like a tourist. I couldn't get enough of seeing the people and seeing these mountains just go straight down into the sea there. Anyway, we were there overnight.

From there we went to Marrakech.

MR. TARRANCE: Do you remember what time of year this was?

MR. BURCHAM: This was in the fall of the year.

MR. TARRANCE: Fall of '42?

MR. BURCHAM: '44. Spent a long time in college and then in training. Anyway, we were there for two nights and that was quite an interesting --

MR. TARRANCE: Marrakech?

MR. BURCHAM: Marrakech, yes. Of course, when we first hit the African shore, I let down pretty close to the ground because it was so different, the palm trees and the camels and it was just -- the first time I'd been to Africa so we were quite interested in that. And I'll never forget opening the door to get out after we landed at Marrakech and it's just like a blast of hot air just out of a furnace hit you. Oh, it was hot.

So, anyway, we went to the Kazbah the next day and had a nice set of officers barracks there. It was the serenade quarters and all the snake charmers and all of these things. Then we left and we went from there to Tunis and spent the night in Tunis, but we were not allowed to go off the base in Tunis. We could have gone in Marrakech but didn't.

And from Tunis we were to go to Bari, Italy and down on the heel on the Adriatic side and we left in the middle of the afternoon. I don't know why we didn't get off earlier but, anyway, that's when we left. And we got -- we passed Sicily and it was just like a tourist trip. You

just watch out the window and see there's Sicily going by and going by. And then we see the toe of Italy there pretty soon after you leave Sicily. We were to go to Bari, Italy on the Adriatic which is just like -- Italy has that boot heel and everything on -- it's on the Adriatic side just past the boot heel. By this time I completely trusted our navigator and when he told us to turn in, I turned in. Well, instead of being where we should have been and crossed over to the Adriatic, we crossed over and we were on the Mediterranean. And it's getting late afternoon.

MR. TARRANCE: Uh-huh.

MR. BURCHAM: There's no radio aides, no nothing. You've just got to find your way and so -- nothing looked right. We didn't have any maps of this area and so the mountains come right down into the sea on most of that coast, the Mediterranean coast of Italy. I finally just radioed an SOS or had our radio man do that. I got on after he couldn't raise anybody -- I got on the radio and tried mayday but that didn't seem to help. We couldn't get any response at all because there was just radio silence.

So we looked over in what we thought was the direction we had to go which was east -- farther east. It was getting late afternoon and I mean late afternoon and

there were clouds over the tops of the mountains so I knew we couldn't go there because we didn't know how high the mountains were. So we finally decided because it was getting dark and we had to do something and tried to decide whether we should land in the ocean next to the beach -- we found a beach here. And I decided -- B-24 is not made for ditching. So water wasn't really the option. It goes out like a submarine because it has a high wing so -- the fuselage is beneath the wing. So I buzzed the beach we found. It was the only beach on that side of Italy that I ever saw.

MR. TARRANCE: You were running out of gas?

MR. BURCHAM: Running out of gas and running out daylight. And so the navigator, he's so distraught, he said, I'll jump out. I'll jump out. I said you can jump out if you want to. Everybody else is going to stay. So you do what you want but whatever you do, do it now because we're going down. And so I drug the field with the landing lights on. It was that dark. The field -- the beach. And I couldn't see anything. It looked fairly level. So I said boys, we're going in.

And so after buzzing it a couple of times, I came in and touched down. And boy, it was -- I thought, oh, boy, this is nice. I can't believe it's that smooth. And all of a sudden we hit a ditch. The nose wheel went out and

the sparks from the nose gear coming up just filled the cockpit absolutely. It was just like a ton of fire. And then when the nose wheel let go, then the left main gear let go and the left wing went down in the sand and the engine on the side went down in the sand. So all of a sudden we were there. We went up -- the tail went up vertical. I swear it was vertical because in that ditch -- it went up on the nose of the airplane. And I thought we're going to burn. All of a sudden it stopped there and settled back down on the tail.

And I got out of a window I swear wasn't much bigger than that (indicating). I knew I couldn't help the guys in the back so I thought we all need to do the best we could to get away before it exploded. And it was a pretty good drop down there to the sand. But, anyway, I got out. This whole time I was the calmest I think I've ever been. I never got excited. I never got afraid. And I jumped out and ran away where I thought I was far enough from the airplane that I knew it was going to explode and my knees just gave out. All of a sudden, I just, woe. We had the right wing was up in the air as a result of the left wing being in the sand so we got on the radio again, tried to raise somebody, couldn't raise anybody.

MR. TARRANCE: Everybody got out all right?

MR. BURCHAM: Everybody got out. One of the belly --

the belly gunner got hit by a gun and just got a small cut on his forehead, and that's the only person who was injured at all.

So we got out and everybody got out and since the number four engine was up in the air, we got it started. That's when we tried to call on the radio and couldn't raise anybody. So I said, well, somebody has got to go downtown where this town -- we didn't even know where we were. And it was Reggio de Calabria which was an old town on the Mediterranean there just across the straits of Messina from Italy. So I selected a guy name Tex. I've forgotten his name now. He was our top gunner. He was from Nocona, Texas. He and I -- all we had was our 45's. We started in towards town. And what I wanted to do is call the Air Force.

So I ran into -- we ran into a donkey-drawn cart and we talked them into taking us into town and to the Mayor's office. He was very gracious. He called -- got Rome on the phone for me -- Air Corps in Rome -- headquarters in Rome. I told them we were down. Nobody was hurt. The airplane was not flyable out. And so they said, well, we'll send somebody for you as soon as we can. Well, three weeks later -- we lived under the wing of the airplane for three weeks.

MR. TARRANCE: My goodness.

MR. BURCHAM: But the next morning a British Lancaster came over and dropped some supplies for us. Water and some K-rations and some sea soap so we were there, as I say, for three weeks about. And then they finally came and got us. They took the classified items off the airplane and set it afire. They didn't want anything left. As you can see in that picture of me and the crew, it's -- they cut off the number on the photograph of the tail number and everything. They didn't want anything identified.

So they took us back to Bari and from Bari we were assigned to Cerignola. I couldn't think of the name of the town when we were talking the other day. It was between Cerignola and Canosa di Puglia on the Adriatic coast south of Bari.

MR. TARRANCE: Brindisi?

MR. BURCHAM: It was north of Brindisi. It starts with an F.

MR. TARRANCE: Can we take just a short break?

(Recess taken from 3:57 to 4:07.)

MR. TARRANCE: They took you to the base at Canosa.

MR. BURCHAM: They did, uh-huh.

MR. TARRANCE: And that was where you were ordered to go?

MR. BURCHAM: Yes.

MR. TARRANCE: That was your assignment?

MR. BURCHAM: We went to Bari and then from Bari they had an investigation into the crash. There's a picture.

MR. TARRANCE: We'll make this book part of the record.

MR. BURCHAM: You may have that copy if you like.

MR. TARRANCE: What was the result of the investigation?

MR. BURCHAM: Nothing. We never did hear any more of it. I thought maybe there would be some action on it, but it was an accident but -- I'll have to tell you something interesting I thought about the Mayor. I'm just getting too old to think right. The town where we crash landed just across the straits of Messina, Reggio de Calabria.

MR. TARRANCE: Yes.

MR. BURCHAM: The Mayor was very, very accommodating but he had a problem that he didn't have any fuel for his police cars. So although our octane was pretty high, we had plenty of gas. So I traded some of that for protection because the people got to where they could come out and watch us from the time we'd get up in the morning. There was no hiding even when you had things to take care of in the morning. People just -- so I finally got used to it. What are you going to do?

But, anyway, he was very accommodating. So as we got

ready to leave, he insisted that we have some cherry brandy. And I don't think I've ever tasted cherry brandy better than that. So he toasted us. Very cooperative.

So the next morning, the British Lancaster came over and dropped us some supplies and then we were pretty well set. And so for some of the exchange for the gasoline, we got some vino and some cheeses and bread. It helped out with our K-rations.

MR. TARRANCE: I see.

MR. BURCHAM: So, anyway, we got on to our base and got checked in. It was sort of a dismal place. It was a tent for four officers. And it was a muddy floor. So we finally got organized and found out we could have a cement floor poured if we would pay for it. We immediately did so.

Then our heat in our tent was from -- we had a used oxygen tank that was mounted outside on a little box. Ran a copper tubing into the center of the tent and there was a half 50 gallon barrel cut half in two and put sand in that and then put the cut-off piece of artillery shell -- the base of an artillery shell and filled that with sand. And then we had a valve that would drop the gasoline onto the sand in the artillery shell and that was our stove. And it was amazingly comfortable. It was a wonder we didn't have an explosion, but that was the only heat that

we had.

MR. TARRANCE: What was your unit?

MR. BURCHAM: The name of it?

MR. TARRANCE: Yes, sir, the number.

MR. BURCHAM: It was the 465th Bomb Squadron of the 15th Air Force and the 780 -- Bomb Group and the 782nd Bomb Squadron.

MR. TARRANCE: Who was your commanding officer?

MR. BURCHAM: You know I can't tell you. He was a colonel. We seldom saw him. If he went flying with us, I never did -- was aware of it.

MR. TARRANCE: So you made it to your unit?

MR. BURCHAM: Uh-huh.

MR. TARRANCE: And the investigation took place and I assume then you started learning about what you were going to have to do?

MR. BURCHAM: Well, we didn't have much. You saw your name up for a mission and you had to get up before daylight and go to mess hall and get breakfast and they had the officers in one part of the huge barn and the enlisted men in the other part and got different briefings. We had the big map and the people who did the briefing and told us where we were going and the alternate places to drop bombs if there was an alternate and something about the target and that sort of thing. We

were never assigned a specific airplane. It was just whoever -- whatever airplane you got on a specific mission.

MR. TARRANCE: Did you have a crew that stayed with you most of the time?

MR. BURCHAM: Yes. Our crew stayed together. Occasionally I'd fly when another crew member -- another pilot would be unavailable -- ill or whatever. I'd be assigned to another crew.

MR. TARRANCE: Since this is a record, can you tell us your crew members' names? Do you remember them?

MR. BURCHAM: Oh, golly. I hope so.

MR. TARRANCE: It would be -- they would be in your book though, would they not?

MR. TARRANCE: I can't remember honestly if I had the -- if I had the names of those. I don't believe I did.

MR. TARRANCE: How about your copilot?

MR. BURCHAM: His name was "Moon" Volmut. That was his nickname. We just called him "Moon."

MR. TARRANCE: I'm sure the names are in your book. What was your first mission?

MR. BURCHAM: First mission was to Bleckhammer Czechoslovakia. It was an oil refinery. And it was just about the extent of our reigns. I don't know. Somehow Bleckhammer had an ominous sound to it. I bet it means

Black Hammer or something like that. Anyway, that was --

MR. TARRANCE: So you flew across the Adriatic?

MR. BURCHAM: Flew across the Adriatic.

MR. TARRANCE: Were you able to accomplish your mission?

MR. BURCHAM: We were, yes. The flak was pretty heavy. There was some fighters around but amazingly they never did come in on us on that mission. We did some low level bombing on the front lines. The troops were still in the Po Valley. Anti-aircraft guns were shooting down at us because we flew quite low and the troops on the ground put up some artillery that would explode beneath us to show us where their lines were so that we wouldn't drop our bombs on them. We were quite low. In fact, it was -- you know, if you got hit, just say goodnight because you couldn't have enough power to get back up.

MR. TARRANCE: So your first mission was in Yugoslavia or Czechoslovakia?

MR. BURCHAM: Czechoslovakia.

MR. TARRANCE: Czechoslovakia. Then you flew support for -- the Germans were still in Italy at the time. They had not retreated all the way back?

MR. BURCHAM: In the Apennines, yes.

MR. TARRANCE: And can you tell us some of your -- how many missions did you go on?

MR. BURCHAM: Went on 27 missions before the war was over.

MR. TARRANCE: That's a lot of missions.

MR. BURCHAM: Well, it is.

MR. TARRANCE: And can you tell us some of your most eventful thoughts about --

MR. BURCHAM: Well, one of the unusual to me things was we seldom got back with all four engines going. Very rare. We'd have oil leaks or once we had a runaway propeller that we couldn't get it feathered, couldn't get it stopped and it was winding up. It would have pulled out of the wing if it had kept up. But I finally got it -- cut off the gas to it. So we weathered that.

Once we dropped some -- we had a mission to bomb what we call scrag bombing, the little fragmentation bombs. Fighter fields. German airplane fighter fields. Some of those frag bombs got hung up in the bomb bay and didn't drop out and we couldn't get them lose. Our engineer tried the best he could. I went back and looked at them. So we landed at a place on the opposite side of the Adriatic.

It was -- I don't know how the arrangement was, but the U.S. had an emergency airport there on -- it was called VIS, V-I-S, and we landed there. It was really touch and go because the bombs were hanging. As we

touched down if they dropped out, you say goodbye Lucy. Fortunately they didn't let go.

We had to land once again there because of a bad oil leak and we couldn't get back.

Another time -- when we had that runaway prop, we had to use so much gasoline with the engine out there because we couldn't get it feathered, it kept windmilling and slowed us down. So we got nearly back and our engineer said, we're about out of gas. So we landed -- we got permission to land at Foggia, the Tuskegee airmen's base. They flew cover for us all the time. They were in P-51's.

MR. TARRANCE: Was that the black unit?

MR. BURCHAM: That was the black outfit.

MR. TARRANCE: They just made a movie of that.

MR. BURCHAM: I wish I had seen it, but I didn't.

But I can't imagine how they could have been more courteous to us and generous. We -- Moon and I shared a tent with two pilots. I don't know if they just were two to a tent or what. But, anyway, the only white person on their base was the flight surgeon. He seemed unusually glad to see us. There's my guys. We just stayed there overnight. They got us ready to go and refueled.

One odd thing -- it wasn't odd. But as we got to the end of the runway landing, the whole thing cut out. We were out.

MR. TARRANCE: Wow.

MR. BURCHAM: That's how close it was. So the next day, they came and got us. I don't know what happened to the airplane. Somebody came and got it.

MR. TARRANCE: You never lost a crew member?

MR. BURCHAM: Never lost -- yes, we did one but he was on a -- flying with another crew. His name was Walt Osborn. He was our bombardier. He was a little older than we are. He was already a college graduate from Ohio and he had been in the field artillery prior to his going in the Air Corps. And so he would go up into the front lines when we had a few days off and be with the guys on the front lines, which I thought was pretty brave of him.

MR. TARRANCE: Where was the line?

MR. BURCHAM: I can't tell you exactly. It was up -- well, it was in the Apennines.

MR. TARRANCE: And the Apennines run down the spine of Italy, correct?

MR. BURCHAM: Right. It was up in here.

MR. TARRANCE: Northern Italy. North of Rome.

MR. BURCHAM: Right. North of Rome.

MR. TARRANCE: And he was killed?

MR. BURCHAM: And he went out with them and he was shot up. No, I take it back. That didn't happen when he went with the field artillery. He was assigned to fly

with another crew one day and they got shot down and he was all shot up and everything and went home and we found out later after he got home he was confined to a wheelchair and apparently very despondent about the whole thing and he killed himself, which was a shame. He was apparently in pretty bad shape. We never did see him, of course, after that happened.

MR. TARRANCE: Did the crew go out and have any fun when you weren't going on a mission?

MR. BURCHAM: There wasn't anyplace to go. We were just out in the country.

MR. TARRANCE: No Sophie Lorens?

MR. BURCHAM: No. We went on R and R once to Rome and had a few days in Rome. The enlisted men were separated so we didn't know what they were doing. We had our own thing. I remember the last night we were there they had a big dance at the hotel for us. In the meantime we had gone to the Vatican. We had gone to all these different places and were blessed by the Pope. I wasn't a Catholic but the ones on our crew who were were quite impressed by that. They had a lot of sight seeing in Rome. The last night we were there they had the dance. I don't know where they came from but the girls were all over the place in the bar room. You just kind of got acquainted with them.

MR. TARRANCE: Were the Italians friendly with you?

MR. BURCHAM: They were friendly. We went to Bari one time just to eat out and it had a pretty bad reputation of lot of rebellious people, ones who were really with the Germans rather than with the American forces there. That's the one place that we found people were not friendly at all, which was surprising.

One thing we did, these things keep cropping back in my mind. They had a shower for the officers and one for the enlisted men and it had a little drip out of the shower and you go in there with several other guys and trying to get a little soap on you and step out of the way. So we found out if we paid the guys we could have a shower built on our tent and so we had a tufa block shower built and they got P-38 drop tanks and they provided the water and we had a shower put in. And then every time when we'd come back from a mission, we'd get the flight surgeon would bring us a bottle of whiskey and pour us a drink and then give what was left in the bottle -- we had a few people who didn't drink on the crew -- to me. So we had a little stash of whiskey. The guy that bought the water to us for our shower, he wanted a drink. So I kept pouring. I thought he'd say enough. He got a whole water glass. He turned that thing up and drank the whole thing at once. I'm sure he was an alcoholic.

MR. TARRANCE: Well, how long were you at the base?

MR. BURCHAM: We got there in December and were there until the war -- Germany surrendered and then we went to Taranto which was the old Naval base down there inside the instep of Italy and were there for two or three weeks and nothing to do but go swimming every day and that sort of thing because it was spring time or early summer time. And then they gave us an airplane. We looked at it and it was an old tub. It had flak holes patched all over it and just to have something to do I said, let's see if we can't -- because they had patches, metal patches, riveted to the flak holes. I said, let's see how many we have. We painted each one. I was on a step ladder and fell off and cut my ankle. I said, maybe I'll get the purple heart for that. Of course, that was just in fun.

MR. TARRANCE: Did you receive any commendations or medals?

MR. BURCHAM: Air medals is all and we were in several battles which are outlined in the book.

Then we came home the southern route. We went down to Marrakech, flew to Marrakech and then down to Dakar and down to Brazil. And in Brazil we found out there was -- It was at Natal -- we found out there was a C-47 going to Rio. I said I bet we have an oil leak in number three and we went down and signed up to go to Rio. We thought,

well, heck as long as we're this close, let's do it. And the C-40, it was full, we didn't get on. The airplane crashed and killed everybody aboard. We were fortunate in that.

MR. TARRANCE: Did you have superstitions or anybody in your crew have any superstitions about the airplane or the missions?

MR. BURCHAM: None that I know of. As I said, we seldom came back with all four turning. But aside from that and the little bomb thing that hung up, we had to land at VIS one other time, we had an oil leak that was bad that had to be fixed up. So, anyway, we came on up to -- coming home, we came up past the Amazon on up and spent the night in Puerto Rico and then went into Charleston, South Carolina and we were back home.

MR. TARRANCE: And then were you discharged?

MR. BURCHAM: No, we weren't there. We were on leave, on terminal leave. And at that time they told me -- the guy told me -- he said, now, if you decide you want to stay in after you -- before your terminal leave is up, you may just come to the recruiting station and we'll take care of it. Well, I did. I looked around for a job. Oh, I did get married as soon as I got home. Called my wife and told her to come down to Tampa. We were stationed at Tampa -- I was for a while. Thought we were going to,

where was it, Vietnam, I guess -- anyway, or Korea, I don't know. So as soon as the war was over, the whole thing -- Japanese surrendered, I called my fiancée and told her to come down. We got married there in Tampa. We -- all I had to do in Tampa -- it was an ideal honeymoon situation because I had to report to the field once a week -- one day a week and the rest of the time we were free. So Tampa was a fun place to be. A lot of things to see there. We really enjoyed that.

Anyway I got -- came on home. I looked around for a job. I didn't find anything that really got to me. So I went down to the recruiting station and said I've decided I want to stay in. I was told I could do so if I wanted. The guy said, well, you can but he said you'll be a Tech Sergeant. I said I want to fly. Hell, I'm not -- I'm not rank happy but you don't find many Tech Sergeants flying airplanes. I'm not going to take a chance on that.

So I looked around and looked around and finally went to American Airlines and thought I could get a job as a pilot but they had a minimum of 5,000 hours required because they were getting experienced guys -- lots of them after the war. And so they didn't hire me. I thought I've got to get a job out here. I'm married. I've got some responsibilities now. And so I took a job with American Airlines at a very low salary and stayed with

them for 35 years altogether.

But in the meantime I had gotten involved in the military -- got transferred to San Antonio, went to work in Fort Worth. And while I was there, I was working for Air Transport Association in their military bureau because that was when the Korean War was going on and the Vietnam War was going on. And we were -- had charters all over the country picking up service men and taking them to Asia and that sort of thing. That was Korea. I'm getting mixed up here. So I was with the Air Transport Association for a while. And then with the Korean War was over, we disbanded that but I got -- American offered to take me back. They tried to get me to come back.

In the meantime, an outfit called Resort Airlines who I had never heard of, I got to know the people there, they offered me the San Antonio base which was their military charter base. So I took over that operation for them. And then when the Korean war was over, that was disbanded. And what they would do otherwise was they had C-46's and would fly them out of New York and then get everybody drunk by the time they got to the Caribbean and let them stay for a while and then come back. Then in the season they would pull laborers out of Puerto Rico up to the farms in the midwest to help with the crops and that sort of thing.

MR. TARRANCE: Did you get your college degree?

MR. BURCHAM: I never did. And you know it's a shame but I had a child. We had a child, the only child we had. And it never seemed to work out. But I've been to University of Texas, TCU, SMU, University of Tulsa, University of Dallas and took a course at the community college here. But I don't have a degree. If I had known better what to do, I didn't have an instrument rating, but I got a commercial pilots multi-engine transport rating when I got out from the CAA. CAA then, FAA now. Had I taken advantage of the GI bill, I could have gone ahead and gotten my instrument rating and any other ratings I needed and probably could have gone back to work at American as a pilot. And I had one opportunity, but we lived in Dallas at that time and my wife was pregnant and there was somebody murdered that we lived out near the airport near Bachman Lake and there was a couple of murders and a rape out there and my wife was pretty insecure about things. And I thought I can't go traipsing around the country as a pilot and leave her here. That wouldn't be fair. So I didn't. Had one opportunity but it wasn't at the time.

But I've always regretted not getting my degree. I benefitted from the courses I took which I thought were appropriate for what I was doing then. I was in sales and

advertising and public relations. I was in flight dispatch for a while and they had a manning reduction so I went to -- was recalled and went to Dallas in operations there.

MR. TARRANCE: So you've had a career in flight?

MR. BURCHAM: A career in that, yes.

MR. TARRANCE: Aviation industry.

MR. BURCHAM: It's been all in aviation, yes. And then I retired at age 55. They offered me early retirement which I did. I haven't been gainfully employed except in my own little art business. I got to be an artist after I moved to the country club over here and was quite successful in it. The club invited me to hang pictures and price them over the fireplace at the old building before it burned. They'd sell as soon as they'd get up. I was finding out what the price ceiling was and it was up around \$2,000 and they were selling well for the larger pictures.

MR. TARRANCE: What are they, oils?

MR. BURCHAM: Oils, yes. They were all Texas landscapes for the most part, and they are all specific places. It's not an imaginary thing. I didn't have quite the imagination. It all started out when we moved to the lake. We bought a house immediately but we didn't have the furniture. I made some of the furniture. I always

liked to work with my hands. I thought we need some pictures for decoration. So I started painting just for our own decoration in our home and some people said you -- the club manager said, Why don't you hang one of these up here over the fireplace. It took off from there and it did very well.

MR. TARRANCE: Is there anything else you'd like to share about your veteran experience?

MR. BURCHAM: Oh, goodness. I've had so many good experiences. I'm just grateful for all that I have had. I've got so many good friends. I've been active. I go to the Presbyterian church there in Mabank and been active in the church in various ways.

So my wife died in '07 -- 2007 and so we'd been married 62 years and that sort of knocked me out of everything for a little while. I still -- I guess I never will get over that.

It's been I never expected to live to be my age, but I'm grateful for it.

Oh, I did -- I'll have to tell you one thing that was so exciting for me. I was talking -- my wife was in a nursing home and I was talking to a friend I had developed -- his wife's mother was in the same nursing home here at Green Oaks. And he said -- I said some things I still would like -- there are two things I'd like

to do. I'd like to fly a glider and I'd like to sail around the world alone by myself -- alone by myself. And he said maybe we can work out something on the glider. And it turned out he was active. He had a glider and he took me over here to --

MR. TARRANCE: Terrell?

MR. BURCHAM: No. It was east of Terrell near Greenville. There was an auxiliary landing field I remember when I was flying out of Majors Field at Greenville that we would fly over. It's triangular runways we used to practice. And that's where the gliders were. And so I went over there and because I can't bend this leg anymore than that I couldn't get in the glider. It's just they pop the top off and you climb in, and I couldn't climb in. So they got four guys to lift me up and dump me in. Of course there was an instructor behind me but we went up and I kept it up for an hour on a bad day when the updrafts weren't doing that well. Had a toe plane takeoff.

But I was -- I've never been so thrilled in my life as I did that flight in the glider. Had I been able to afford it, I would have bought one and really gotten active in it. Anyway, that was a notable era in my life that I'll always be grateful for.

MR. TARRANCE: Well, we appreciate your service.

MR. BURCHAM: Thank you.

MR. TARRANCE: It sounds to me like you've had a great life.

MR. BURCHAM: I have. I won't deny it.

MR. TARRANCE: Thank you for sharing that with us.

MR. BURCHAM: I appreciate your listening to me, and I hope I didn't last too long and bore you.

MR. TARRANCE: No, you didn't bore us at all.

MR. BURCHAM: I appreciate again your -- both of you. So nice to meet both of you.

MR. TARRANCE: Melanie is a great court reporter and she'll package all this up and send it to the Library of Congress and give you your originals back or whatever we need to do to get it back to you.

MR. BURCHAM: All right.

MR. TARRANCE: So we thank you, Mr. Burcham?

MR. BURCHAM: You are more than welcome. I thank you for the opportunity to share this with you.