

Fort Hunt Oral History  
P.O. Box 1142  
Interview with Edmund N. Carpenter II  
by Brandon Bies  
Wilmington, Delaware  
May 5, 2008

INTERVIEWER: Okay, we should be going right now. So I'm going to go ahead and get started. Today is May 5th, 2008. This is an oral history interview for the Fort Hunt [00:20] Oral History Project. This is Brandon Bies, historian with the National Park Service, and we are here at the home of Mr. Edmund N. Carpenter II, a veteran of P.O. Box 1142 and the Air Ground Aid Section. And so with that we're going to go ahead and get started. And, Mr. Carpenter, if you wouldn't mind giving us the critical information first of when and where you were born?

EDMUND CARPENTER: I was born actually in Philadelphia, largely because people in Wilmington thought all doctors [01:00] lived in Philadelphia back at that time on January 27th, 1921.

INT: And growing up did you live mostly in Philadelphia or did you live in Delaware growing up?

EC: Always in Wilmington, Delaware.

INT: Okay, all right. And do you have any siblings growing up?

EC: Yes. I had two brothers, both older, none of them alive today.

INT: Okay. And growing up, as you were a child going through school -- I'm talking middle school, junior high school, high school -- did you have any foreign language experience or any training in foreign languages?

EC: Well, when I was a very small child, I did participate with a group of other little children in some elementary [02:00] French classes, which were largely "how old are you, have you eaten lunch," that sort of thing. But that was all. But then I did study French in

boarding school and later in college.

INT: And as you were growing up, did you travel a great deal?

EC: I didn't travel a great deal as a child. I have traveled a great deal since then, really starting right after World War II [02:53].

INT: But up until -- prior to World War II have you ever been to China [03:00] or --

EC: No.

INT: Okay.

EC: I had not. And I was trying to think when I first went to Europe, which would have been after I was in college.

INT: Okay. And after graduating from high school, you went to college in that area?

EC: I did. I went to college, and when war broke out I initially enlisted -- I tried to enlist in our Air Force. I had a pilot's license. But because of my eye problems, I was turned down. So I then enlisted in the Canadian Air Force, and six weeks after I'd done that a new arrangement, a treaty arrangement [04:00] with Canada was developed. As a result of which we were all transferred back. So I couldn't get in a number of the programs here because of not having 20/20 vision, and in the end I enlisted in the Army just as a buck private.

INT: Oh, really?

EC: Yeah. And at that time there was a program called the Enlisted Reserve [04:31], and you could enlist, and they would call you up for active duty when there was room because obviously all of the facilities for training soldiers were overcrowded. And so they permitted people like me to finish college if we accelerated. So I accelerated, and I [05:00] actually graduated from Princeton in 1943 in January.

INT: In January 1943?

EC: Yes. So six months early.

INT: Got you. Okay. I'm just going to pause this for one quick second. Sorry about that little break there. And so you had actually been trying to, if I understand correctly, tried to enlist or to become a military pilot prior to finishing college?

EC: Yes.

INT: Okay. Okay.

EC: But that was wholly unsuccessful.

INT: Right. And so in -- let's see. So you mentioned 1943 you graduated from college and then at that point you enlisted as a regular enlisted man?

EC: No, I actually enlisted in 1942.

INT: Oh, really? Okay [06:00].

EC: In a program called the Enlisted Reserve [06:04].

INT: Right.

EC: And they attempted to permit you to finish college on condition that you must accelerate, you must try to graduate earlier than you otherwise would have, which is what I and a number of others did. And so I actually graduated in January. To accelerate you had to go throughout the summer, and you had to take certain other steps in order to expedite your graduation. And then immediately after graduation, almost immediately I was called to active duty and went to Camp Upton [06:50] on Long Island.

INT: Okay.

EC: "Yip Yip Yaphank," you remember the song from "This is the Army." Camp Upton [07:00] was an induction center. And I was sent from there directly to Camp [Fort] Hood

[07:07], Texas near Waco, Texas. And at that time there was a branch of the Army called the Tank Destroyers [07:18], which no longer exists. It was a theory that turned out to be wrong. And the theory was that you fight tanks not with other tanks, but with a thin-skinned track vehicle, which was supposedly much faster than the tanks and carried a very big gun, a big three-inch gun. That was thought to be the wave of the future, but actually it turned out to be a catastrophe [08:00]. When the Americans landed in North Africa, there was a major engagement involving tank destroyers [08:13] at -- I think it was Kasserine Pass [08:14]. And it was a total disaster. The German tanks first involved were so heavily armored that our 37-millimeters just bounced off them. We had 37-millimeters at that time and also some 75s. And eventually the tank destroyers [08:43] were just divided up among the infantry and the artillery. But anyway, that was where I was. And then, as I mentioned to you before, I had become sort of [09:00] -- I should say I went to OCS [09:03] there at Camp Hood [09:07] at actually the insistence of the commanding officers group. They were trying to get more officers, and while a number of us had been holding off on that, hoping to be shipped overseas as enlisted men, and we thought this would defer our being sent overseas. Nevertheless, they told us we were going to OCS [09:42]. And then after that I went to North Camp Hood [09:49], which is an adjacent camp, where we were training replacements. And I became sort of a machine gun instructor [10:00] for the entire area, and I thought I was going to be stuck there forever, and then the secret order came down calling on anybody who had lived in France [10:16] or on the coast and spoke French to volunteer for a, quote, special assignment, end quotes. Obviously it was to be in connection with the invasion, and I volunteered for that. And within a very short time, I think about two weeks, I was transferred to 1142

[10:42] and found I was going to China [10:46]. I don't know whether if someone pushed the wrong button or whether their requirements changed as a result of that very short lapse of time, but in any event as soon as I arrived [11:00] at 1142 [11:02] I was directed to begin a rather extensive reading program involving China [11:11] and we got training in escape and evasion.

INT: And so up until this point, had you received any training, specifically in military intelligence?

EC: No, not other than what you learn in basic training.

INT: Sure.

EC: I actually was assigned after -- initially I had the tank destroyer [11:42] insignia and then transferred to cavalry, and then eventually -- actually I suppose wore that emblem for the rest of the war.

INT: Okay. In fact, I think some of the documents [12:00] that I brought have you listed as being with the cavalry even when you were over in the China-Burma-India Theater [12:08].

EC: Yeah. Well, nobody disclosed the fact you were involved with Intelligence, and we didn't even discuss it with our shipmates. And it was from then on an extremely secretive organization.

INT: And so you arrived at 1142 [12:30], do you remember anything specifically about your first impressions of arriving at this place? Did you -- you said you mentioned that you drove up from Camp Hood [12:43]?

EC: I did.

INT: And did you drive directly to 1142 [12:48]? I realize this is 60, 65 years ago and you

may not recall.

EC: I think I did because I think I had a car there at 1142 [12:58], but I do remember the difficulty [13:00], perhaps because the car was in the garage or something, the difficulty of getting to 1142 in a taxi because the taxi was not permitted to approach it. So we were basically let off on the side of the road and we had to walk in from there. But I think I did have a car.

INT: Okay. And so when you arrived at 1142 [13:29] were you at that point briefed what -- rather than what you assumed, that you were going to be taking part somehow in the Normandy invasions. Were you briefed immediately that this was about training for the China-Burma-India Theater [13:46]?

EC: Yes, and I started right out at the beginning preparing for China [13:54], and there was no more talk of going to Europe. And we [14:00] were given a number of books about China, not military books, but books giving the history of China [14:10] some description of the situation in China and things of that kind, and just told to read these books. And then in addition, we had some briefing on escape and evasion, particularly on the materials available. And further we had debriefing of aviators largely who had escaped or evaded capture in Europe. I don't remember anybody from China [14:50] at that time, although the program had already started in China.

INT: You were being trained there, and I think [15:00] we mentioned over lunch, you remember there being at least a few other people going through the same training at the same time?

EC: Yes.

INT: Okay. Do you have any recollection about how many people were being trained in your -

- if you'd call it class per se, whatever your training class was?

EC: I would say five or six, a very small number. I remember, as I said, Harry Whallon [15:26]. We also had another Army officer whose name I don't remember. And one or two others. We had exciting stories from Europe from persons who had been shot down and had somehow succeeded in either being picked up by the Maquis [15:54], the French Underground [15:57], or by some other organization, and escaping [16:00] from Europe or staying there. As it turned out later on, many had just stayed until the invasion.

INT: And so these folks who were doing these briefings, we spoke a little bit over lunch about some of these, these were American soldiers who actually been shot down and who had successfully either evaded capture, or do you recall any of them actually escaped out of prison camps?

EC: I don't recall any that escaped from prison camps, but there were a number who had been shot down either just on the border of France [16:43] or in France, and they were able to establish contact with some underground organization and get back. And what they did was tell us about their adventures with the hope that we could use that [17:00] in training aviators as to what to do if they were shot down, and all of us were trained to do that kind of briefing, which is what I principally did in China [17:16], briefing various squadrons on what to do in the event they found themselves on the ground in enemy territory and how to get back, and what to do if they were in fact captured, how to try to escape and take advantage of materials that we would try to smuggle into them to assist them in that.

INT: And these gentlemen who were -- these Americans who had escaped who were helping to lecture or whatnot at 1142 [18:00], were they permanently assigned to 1142, or where they there for one day, gave a lecture about their escape, and then they went somewhere

else?

EC: The latter. They were just passing through and were brought there so that their experiences could be recorded.

INT: Got you.

EC: And so that we could learn as much as possible from their experiences and use that in briefing air groups.

INT: Okay. Do you remember, listening in on these exploits of these gentlemen, who, again, was it just your group of soldiers that was being trained to go to the China-Burma-India Theater [18:47] or were there others from 1142 [18:50] who would come into these lectures as well?

EC: I think it was all officers who were going to [19:00] the Pacific or to China-Burma-India [19:05].

INT: Okay. And so in addition to these briefings that you were receiving, you mentioned also, I think, that you were familiarized with the escape devices that were being developed?

EC: Yes. We learned a lot about buttons that in fact could be used as compasses, about devices that would identify you readily. Later we all had flags inside our flight jackets, an American flag and a Chinese flag with several different languages describing the fact that "I am [20:00] an American and I seek your help" or something of that kind. And we learned about other secret devices, which we would try to smuggle into the prisoner of war camps [20:16].

INT: Do any of those stand out? Do you remember any of those in particular?

EC: I do remember the buttons that served as compasses. I don't recall the others at the moment, but I know there were quite a number of them, and we used them from time to



time in our briefings just to demonstrate what might become available to them if they were prisoners of war.

INT: Okay. A couple of the items, I don't know any of these will ring a bell or not, some of the items that we know about were radios that were hidden inside [21:00] of maybe a cribbage board or radio parts inside of a baseball, tobacco pipes that you could unscrew and there would be a little canister inside. Even something like a deck of playing cards that if you steamed the individual cards apart there would be little pieces of an escape map hidden in between. These are all examples that we've been learning about.

EC: Yes, well, there were things like that, but I don't remember the exact specific items.

INT: Sure, sure. Did you learn anything about code or coded messages or anything like that?

EC: I don't recall any training in that, no.

INT: Okay. So, again, to summarize, your time at 1142 [21:49] was primarily spent attending some of these briefings from people who had escaped, learning about some of the escape devices, and then the rest of it [22:00] was mostly reading books about --

EC: Which were assigned to us.

INT: Okay.

EC: I remember particularly Emily Hahn's book on "China to Me" and other little histories of China. The whole idea was to give us a background in China [22:21] itself so we would know what we were about to encounter.

INT: Were you tested? Were you even quizzed or graded on these items like any other school?

EC: Not to my knowledge.

INT: Okay.

EC: Whether somebody was writing down evaluations, I suppose so, but I don't remember

any formal tests.

INT: Do you remember about how many instructors there were or officers who were supervising your program?

EC: Well, there was a commanding officer, and a sort of deputy [23:00] commanding officer, whose name I think was [John] Wolfe [23:04], and I don't remember any others.

INT: Okay.

EC: And as I say, much of what we did, we did by ourselves.

INT: Sure.

EC: We were just waiting for orders to go on to China [23:22].

INT: And while you were there at 1142 [23:30], did you live on the post in housing?

EC: Yes. We did live right there in a bachelor officers quarter.

INT: Okay.

EC: Don't remember much about it. It was the kind of living I had had at Camp Hood [23:51] too, so there wasn't nothing unusual, nothing striking about it.

INT: So just a couple of other officers, younger officers like yourself [24:00] who all lived kind of --

EC: Barracks.

INT: Okay.

EC: But nice from the standpoint of the army, nice bachelor officer quarters.

INT: Okay. When you were at 1142 [24:22], obviously from our previous conversations, you know now that there was a lot going on there other than just training for the Air Ground Aid section [24:35]. Did you know at the time, did you know, for example, there were German prisoners being held there?

EC: I did, but we were very compartmentalized, and there was really was no effort on my part or anybody else's part as far as I know to explore what was going on in the other part of the camp, but I did [25:00] understand that very important German prisoners were there and were being interrogated. If there were any Japanese prisoners I didn't know it. And the facility where they were kept and the officers and men that were involved in that were completely separate from where we were, and we, to my recollection, never encountered them at all. You might encounter them when you were out exercising in the afternoon and running around and when the flag was lowered and everybody stood at attention, but I never really met any of those men, and I think we were kept segregated.

INT: Okay. And, so you recall this as being an even completely separate part of the camp?

EC: Yes.

INT: And it wasn't where you were receiving [26:00] your trainings or anything like that?

EC: No. We were a little encampment within the camp, and they were much a bigger operation across this central field.

INT: Oh, okay.

EC: And I never went there. And I think everybody was being as secretive about what we were doing or what they were doing as they possibly could.

INT: We don't have to do it this moment, but do you think if I pulled out a map of the layout of the post you might remember generally about where on the post you were stationed?

EC: I might, yeah.

INT: Okay. In a little while we'll take a break and do that. I have some maps here to show.

EC: Okay.

INT: Because that would be very interesting. We obviously have a fairly good idea where the

prisoners were being kept because [27:00] the maps actually show the large prisoner compounds, but what we don't know is where the Air Ground Aid Section [27:07] was being trained. So even if you could help us narrow down the general vicinity of the camp where that was going on that would be very helpful for us.

EC: I might remember that. I have a picture in my mind of it, but it may be inaccurate.

INT: Fantastic. Okay, well, super. We'll get -- I don't necessarily don't want to bias you, but we'll give it a shot. That would be great. So the entire time you were there, realizing this was compartmentalized, do you remember ever actually see any German prisoners?

EC: No.

INT: You knew they were there, but you never saw them?

EC: I knew it was none of our business, and what we were doing was none of their business. I think the army on these secret assignments [28:00] always tried to keep what your knowledge was to the minimum and only just what you needed to know, and we didn't need to know any of that.

INT: Let's see. You mentioned before that you lived on post. When you ate on post, did you eat in the general mess hall?

EC: Yes, yes. We had a very small mess hall; there just weren't that many of us.

INT: Okay. Do you remember the secrecy of the place? Do you remember if the whole place was guarded by MPs or surrounded by fence lines? Would you characterize it as a very, very secure installation or kind of typical of any military base?

EC: Well, I think all military bases were pretty secure at that time, and [29:00] the only thing that was unique about this was that we just used a number to identify it instead of calling it Fort Hunt [29:13] and that we were never permitted to bring anybody in there, and that

when we went in ourselves, as I've already mentioned, we couldn't drive down into it. We had to get off on the highway and walk down.

INT: Okay. When you parked, when you had your own vehicle -- you said you seemed to remember having a car there -- could that be parked on post?

EC: Well, I think it was, but it may have been that I kept it in Washington. I'm not clear on that.

INT: Sure, yeah, sure.

EC: I know I had a car somewhere in the vicinity.

INT: And in all of your briefings that were going on did you ever [30:00] go up to the Pentagon [30:01]?

EC: Yes. I visited there. I should say I was recalled in the Korean War [30:15].

INT: Okay.

EC: And at that time I was on the general staff in the Pentagon [30:20]. So I'm not sure I'm not confusing the two experiences, but I believe we did go to the Pentagon really just to be shown around.

INT: Sure. Okay. But most of your time was there at 1142 [30:38]?

EC: Yes, it was.

INT: Okay, all right. Do you remember anything else distinctive about the post? Again, you realize my job here is to just try to eke out as many little details as you may recall. You mentioned, I think in passing a few minutes ago, that one of the times you would see everyone was when you'd go out and they'd raise or lower [31:00] the flag or something like that. So it was a military post in the general sense that there were -- the flag was being raised every day and you'd have formations and whatnot?

EC: Well, we didn't have formations.

INT: Okay.

EC: And my recollection of the flag raising was that the flag pole actually was in the middle of this rather large circular area, which was the area where I used to jog around, the center track, about every day, and frequently it would be about the time the flag was lowered.

INT: When you were stationed there had you -- did you take advantage of being close to Washington D.C.? Ever take trips, I guess, into the city?

EC: Yes.

INT: Okay.

EC: But these [32:00] were just personal visits for fun in the evening, or, well, it would be largely on the weekends.

INT: Okay.

EC: We were free to go, and my home wasn't that far from Washington, although travel in wartime was difficult. So I didn't do a lot of traveling, but I'm sure I visited here in Wilmington.

[End of Tape 1A]

[Beginning of tape 1B]

INT: To pick back up, again jumping ahead, when you were stationed over in the Pacific Theater [00:11], do you remember if you or others ever corresponded back to 1142 [00:19] to let them know what was going on or suggestions for other training, or did your communication with 1142 halt completely after you left?

EC: It halted completely after I left. And I went to China-Burma-India [00:38] not the Pacific

--

INT: Not the Pacific, I shouldn't have -- I'm sorry. Sure --

EC: Although I did, as I mentioned to you earlier, after [Douglas] MacArthur [00:48] had returned to the Philippines [00:49]. I did go there for a one-month visit.

INT: Do you feel that there's anything else that you [01:00] might recall about 1142 [01:03] that we haven't already talked about?

EC: No. It was a relatively informal atmosphere, particularly compared to Camp Hood [01:16]. And we, as I suggested, were pretty much on our own in doing our studies, although we came together for these briefings of persons who had evaded capture or for training on some of the materials that were available that you described that was hoped we could smuggle into prisoner of war camps [01:48].

INT: Overall, do you remember much about the size of the post? Obviously you passed through a handful of military posts during the war [02:00] and after the war. Did this seem like a relatively small post or a large one or an in between?

EC: Very small. Certainly very small compared to Camp Hood [02:14]. I think at Camp Hood we had around 200,000 troops, and there was also North Camp Hood [02:23], which was a more advanced training post, and that was a large facility. And this was tiny compared to that. And those were really the only two that I had extensive experience with at that time.

INT: Okay. When you were there do you remember any big wigs per se who came in, any high-ranking officers or even generals who maybe were touring the facility or briefed on your program [03:00]?

EC: No.

INT: Okay.

EC: I don't remember anybody coming through or inspecting it. I'm sure they were there, but I didn't contact them myself.

INT: Okay. Another off-the-wall question, when you were at 1142 [03:18], any contact whatsoever with groups such as the OSS [03:23]?

EC: No.

INT: Okay.

EC: We had no contact with them.

INT: Did you later have contact with the OSS in the CBI Theater [03:32]?

EC: They came to China [03:34] very late in the war as I remember and I did have contact when they came, and actually had an old friend from college who was among that group, but it seems to me that they arrived about two months before the war ended. And our contact with them at that time [04:00], at least on my level, was largely just social. We were not working with them, but I did end up in an OSS [04:13] group just at the end of the war, supposedly as an authority on behind the lines operations at prisoner of war camps [04:24]. Apart from that I didn't work with them at all.

INT: Okay. When you were here in the States being trained, were you even aware of the OSS [04:39]?

EC: I doubt it, but I'm not sure. The only reason I would have known of it is that I had friends that were in the OSS [04:56], but actually [05:00] around March of 1945 when I went on the first flight from China [05:10] to the Philippines [05:11], which was over Japanese controlled coastal areas, on that trip was General [William] Donovan [05:22], who was the head of the OSS [05:23].



INT: Oh, really?

EC: Yes. And I met him because I was asked to brief this group on escape and evasion before we took off because we were going over Japanese controlled both land and water, and so I had a chance to really just say hello to him and then we took off and went straight to one of the seven islands. I think Mindanao [05:53].

INT: So he was actually on your flight?

EC: He was.

INT: Oh, really? Wow.

EC: And I don't know why. Maybe [06:00] he was checking in with his Chinese operations.

INT: And I guess at this time operations in the Pacific -- excuse me, in the European Theater [06:10] would starting to be wrapping up? This was coming up on March or April of '45.

EC: Yes. Well, the war in Europe ended, what, in May of '45, and I know that already we were focusing on the possibility of invading Japan [06:31].

INT: Sure. I guess, just trying to think of a last few questions on 1142 [06:39]. The folks who were -- your officers who were training you, you remember there being one or two officers who trained your group. Did any of them eventually come out to the China-Burma-India Theater [06:57]?

EC: No.

INT: Okay. So your only experience [07:00] with them was at 1142 [07:02]?

EC: Exactly. Yes.

INT: Okay. Did you get the impression that they had previously been in the China-Burma-India Theater [07:10]?

EC: No.

INT: Okay.

EC: No. I don't think they had been, and I'm not sure they weren't veterans of World War I.

INT: Oh, really?

EC: They were older and higher-ranking officers, but not regular army, I don't think.

INT: Okay. Okay. That's probably all I'll cover on 1142 [07:40] unless something comes back to you that you remember. And, again, certainly I hope you don't mind me asking all these nitpicky questions. I realize -- I can't imagine if somebody came through 65 years from now and asked me to describe every bit of this room or something like that [08:00]. So thank you for bearing with me, but if you do think of anything else on 1142 [08:05] feel free to interject. But I'd like to spend the rest of the time having you explain a little bit about the Air Ground Aid Section [08:14] and what your roles were and some of your more memorable experiences so that we can better understand that. Even though that didn't happen at 1142 [08:25], it seems like a number of folks were trained there for this program that we really don't know all that much about. So you were at 1142 I think we figured out for about two or three months or so, and you were then transferred from there to the west coast?

EC: I was actually under orders to get to China [08:50], and in order to do that I went to Los Angeles and to its port Wilmington, California [09:00], and I was the commanding officer on a small freighter that actually was carrying a lot of freight but had maybe 24 troops onboard. And I was also the cargo officer, which means you signed for all the cargo and were supposedly responsible for it. And we left from Wilmington, California, and we were basically at sea for about 60 days because we not only had the Japanese then controlled a lot of the Pacific, we not only had to go south of Australia, but we also had

to zigzag, which was at that time the way of avoiding torpedoes. I think it's since been discredited. But in any [10:00] event we went very slowly and with very few alarms because we were entirely alone. We weren't in a convoy, and we had one stop at Fremantle, which is a tiny town in the extreme south of Australia, and could go from there up to Perth, which was nearby. But apart from that we were on this boat all that time, an opportunity for a lot of quiet reading.

INT: So do you have any recollection of what type of cargo the ship was carrying?

EC: It was some sort of war materiel to be unloaded at Calcutta [10:52] because we ended up in Calcutta, one of the worst places I've ever been. And [11:00] I remember it was -- a lot of this war materiel was piling up there on the docks in Calcutta [11:08] because they couldn't move it out as fast as we could unload it. And I was stationed there just north of Calcutta at a former British camp, Camp Kanchrapara [11:21], and basically what I was doing was just waiting for transportation over the hump into China [11:29].

INT: And so, again, just a little bit more about this trip. There were, you said, about 26 or so men on this ship, actual troops. How many of those were going to be part of the Air Ground Aid Section [11:47]?

EC: None of them.

INT: None? Just yourself?

EC: Just myself.

INT: Okay.

EC: There were three other officers. I think -- I don't know this, but I think probably all of us were in [12:00] some branch of intelligence because nobody disclosed what they were doing or where they were from. But it was a friendly group. We were on one of the

standard boats. What did they call it?

INT: A liberty ship?

EC: Yeah, I guess it was a liberty ship. It wasn't a huge ship, but used principally for transporting materiel, in this case war materiel.

INT: And you said before the ship was completely alone? It was not in a convoy or --

EC: No, we were not in a convoy. And I don't know how many ships were traveling that way, but I think many of them.

INT: Okay. I would just think that would be relatively terrifying to be just on one boat all by itself [13:00] traveling across the Pacific Ocean. It seems like a little -- it certainly would have left an impression upon me knowing that there were maybe Japanese submarines around or something like that.

EC: They were around. I know we had some alarms, but not many. And it was waiting to get to Fremantle. So had a brief chance to enjoy that.

INT: And so the other handful of men who were with you at 1142 [13:36], Harry Whallon [13:37] was one of them you mentioned, they all went over separately from you?

EC: They did.

INT: Okay.

EC: They did. Whallon [13:46], I remember, was also a troop commander and also a cargo officer, and they did stop in Fremantle [14:00] but not at the same time we did. I didn't see them again until we got to China [14:06].

INT: Okay. So you arrived in Calcutta [14:11] and you essentially had to wait for transportation, or was that -- I guess the only -- I mean, you essentially had to be flown in over the hump, right?

EC: Yes.

INT: Okay.

EC: We go up to Assam [14:26] from Calcutta [14:28]. And as I say, I wasn't actually in Calcutta itself, although I visited there frequently, but I was in a camp called Kanchrapara [14:38], which is just north of Calcutta [14:41], and it was a taste of what it must have been like to be there in the time of the colonies, outdoor showers, rather primitive camp facilities [15:00]. But not burdensome.

INT: And was that location -- once you got over the hump did you continue to have to advance? Was there a central headquarters area for the AGAS [15:21]?

EC: Well, actually we flew from that field up in north India [15:29], and incidentally I had to go up there by train.

INT: Oh, really?

EC: And it was at a time when we were having a very bad time in Burma [15:44]. I remember I had an officer assigned to the same room I had on the train, who had been over there for Merrill's Marauders [15:57], which were a very distinguished group [16:00], and he described a horrifying situation he had had where he had actually, while in the United States, volunteered for jungle training and jungle warfare. He was immediately ordered to some west coast fort. He assumed that they were going out to some South Pacific island to train, but in fact with a mixture of other army personnel, many of whom were not combat at all, just supply clerks and that sort of thing who had volunteered for this jungle training. Off they went and landed in Bombay, and when they got off the ship in Bombay, they were divided up into companies. And arbitrarily if you were [17:00] a captain you were the company commander, and if you were a lieutenant

you were a platoon commander, although none of them were infantry, actually. Marched them out to the airport, and they landed right in front of [unintelligible], which at that time was a tremendous battle, and he found himself in the first week trying to teach these supply clerks et cetera how to fire an M1 rifle. And by the end of the first week every officer in his company had either been killed or wounded, and he was the company commander. That sort of thing happens in wartime, and it happened to him. But then when we took off from India [17:48], we went directly to Kunming [17:50], and from Kunming, I went directly to AGAS [17:56].

INT: Okay.

EC: To answer your question.

INT: So AGAS [18:00] headquarters was in Kunming [18:04]?

EC: Right on the edge of the airfield, yes.

INT: All right. And throughout this conversation you may have to assist me because my understanding of Chinese geography is fairly limited, so you may have to help clarify some things, but that's --

EC: Well, Kunming [18:18] is about 60 miles from the Burmese border.

INT: Okay.

EC: So you're in the extreme western part of China [18:26]. At that time the Japanese occupied all the rest of China including the entire coast. And we were still blowing up bases and retreating in China [18:46] when the war ended. So we had no ground troops there. We did have the sort of Chinese combat command officers who were training [19:00] the Chinese in artillery fire, but that was about the extent of it. So we were dependent entirely on the Chinese army for protection. And our little unit was attached to

the 14th Air Force [19:17] under General [Claire Lee] Chennault [19:19].

INT: Okay. And so was the theory then that the airmen -- let me back up. Was your mission going to primarily be to brief Chennault's [19:34] airmen from the 14th Air Force [19:35] or was it also going to be to actually conduct rescues of when these airmen were shot down?

EC: AGAS [19:45] did both. I principally did briefing some missions, but my principal responsibility was to see that every squadron [20:00] was briefed.

INT: Okay. Was most of the 14th Air Force [20:05] based out of Kunming [20:07]?

EC: Yes.

INT: Okay.

EC: That was their headquarters. They had other fields, but Kunming was their big operation, and that's where General Chennault [20:18] was.

INT: Okay. I'm just curious, did you ever meet General Chennault?

EC: No.

INT: Okay.

EC: I never did meet him.

INT: Okay. Do you remember what sorts of missions the 14th Air Force [20:31] was flying?

Did this consist of both fighter and bombers as well?

EC: Yes.

INT: Okay.

EC: Both. And in the end they had the big B-29s.

INT: The B-29s.

EC: They had -- before the twin engine bombers, the B-25s and B-26s, and lots of fighter

aircraft [21:00]. Still some left over from the Flying Tigers [21:03]. Really Chennault [21:08] and the Flying Tigers had evolved into the 14th Air Force [21:12].

INT: Do you, just out of curiosity, remember where most of the targets were that the 14th Air Force was flying against? Were they all within China [21:23]? Were they mostly in eastern China?

EC: They were all within China until the B-29s came, and then I think they were bombing Japan [21:32].

INT: Okay.

EC: Yeah.

INT: Okay.

EC: Which is a long hike from there.

INT: And so what sort of information -- we covered this a little bit earlier, but what would you brief these flyers from the 14th Air Force [21:49] in? Would it be the escape and evasion techniques or would it also be information about the latest news on where Japanese troop movements [22:00] were taking the Japanese and what area might be friendly and not friendly?

EC: I'm sure they were briefed on these later items but not by me. I briefed them exclusively on escape and evasion. And the briefings were, at least my briefings were calculated not only to show them the various techniques that were successful in evading and to tell them anecdotes of people, and also to bring along with me when I could, which was frequently, an aviator who had successfully evaded. And in addition to that, I made an effort to build the morale of the squadrons so they [23:00] would not feel all was lost if they were shot down and had to parachute in or crash land, that they would still be determined to try to



get back and that their chances of getting back were very good. And that they were very good particularly in China [23:23] because large areas behind the lines were in fact controlled by the communists [23:30]. The Japanese didn't have enough troops to cover all of China [23:34] obviously, especially with their other commitments. And so the Japanese were concentrated along the coastal areas, and when you got inland, in areas that these pilots would be flying over, you could generally find your way, if you had time enough [24:00], to some communist [24:02] held area. And if they could get to the communist held area, we could get them back.

INT: So I guess my next question would be, could you describe the relationship between the communists [24:18] and the U.S. forces in the area?

EC: Well, we had a friendly relationship. And actually we had an officer, Lieutenant Bob Clark [24:36] [phonetic], who was also [unintelligible] in China [24:38], who spoke fluent Chinese, stationed in Xian [24:42], which was just across the river, really, from communist [24:50] headquarters. And we worked as closely with the communists as we could, and they [25:00] worked closely with us because at that time, of course, we were both on the same side.

INT: Right.

EC: And they were extremely helpful not only there, but we also had jurisdiction over Indochina [25:13], now Vietnam, and there we had a, believe it or not, commercial group called GBT [25:26], [Laurence] Gordon, [Harry] Bernard, and [Frank] Tan, who had been, I think, with Texaco before the war, and who set themselves up as a commercial intelligence group, selling intelligence to the Army, and could move easily from China [25:50] into Indochina [25:51] and back. Tan [25:54] was a Chinese-American, who

actually [26:00] was about four feet tall, tiny little guy. And he was extremely successful in getting pilots that had been downed in Indochina [26:13] back to safety. Really had some remarkable achievements. I remember there was a pilot named Hessler [26:25] [phonetic], who had been incredibly injured. He was flying a B-25 as I remember, or anyway it was one of the bombers that had an escape hatch over the pilot. And he remembered being hit bombing close to Hanoi [26:54], and he opened the escape hatch, and that's the last thing he remembered [27:00]. Apparently the plane dropped. He went through this escape hatch, banged his head very severely, and he fell from the flying plane into a rice paddy and sank into the mud, and the Vietnamese there dug him out still alive, and they put him in a French hospital. Well, at that time, Indochina [27:38] was occupied by the Japanese but actually administered by the French Foreign Legion [27:46]. Of course, France [27:48] had been conquered by Germany [27:50], so the French were, in a sense, aligned with the Japanese and the Germans.

INT: So this would be [28:00] the Vichy French?

EC: Well, it was the French Foreign Legion [28:07]. And the French Foreign Legion regarded itself as on the Japanese side in this sense that if you were a pilot and you were shot down over Indochina [28:20], if you were captured by the Japanese you became a prisoner of war. If you were captured by the French Foreign Legion [28:29] you became a prisoner of war, and some of those prisoners of war we did get back. But, well, I suspect if you were in the custody of the French Foreign Legion [28:48] you were treated somewhat better but not a lot. And in the case of this Hessler [28:57], he was put in a hospital [29:00], and the sisters that ran the hospital protected him from the French Foreign Legion [29:07]. They didn't disclose that they had an American there. And

when he was well enough, Frankie Tan [29:13] went down and brought him back across the border to Kunming [29:18], and he was one of the pilots that went around with me to describe how it's possible even under the worse circumstances, and his experience was one of the worst, to get back, and it was extremely helpful to have a pilot – here's exhibit A to show that even though you have bad luck, here's how you can survive and evade capture.

INT: Wow. Did you ever meet an American airmen who had been shot down and escaped and came back and said they had been briefed by you originally? Did you [30:00] ever have anyone return and say, "I used what you taught me and I successfully evaded capture?"

EC: I wish I could say yes, but I don't recall any such instance, no. I think in general if they came back after we debriefed them and perhaps used them on one of these briefing tours, they were transferred somewhere else so they wouldn't be shot down in the same place and have a second experience.

INT: Got you. Well, we've gone through an hour, believe it or not, and this tape's about to run out. So I'm going to go ahead and shut both of these off, and we can take a couple minute break if you'd like.

EC: Sure. Okay.

[End of Tape IB]

[Beginning of Tape 2A]

INT: Okay, I think we're ready to go. Here we go. This is an interview for the Fort Hunt Oral History Project for the National Park Service. This is the second in a series of interviews with Mr. Edmund N. Carpenter II here at his home in Wilmington, Delaware. This is Brandon Bies, a historian for the National Park Service. Today is May 5th, 2008. And

with that, Mr. Carpenter, we'll pick back up catching on some more details about your experiences in the China-Burma-India Theater [00:45]. And we've been talking a little bit about the briefings and what sort of information were in the briefings, and just curious, a few more questions on those. Do you recall how frequently would you [01:00] give these briefings? Would you give several in one day, or would you just give a briefing a day? About how often did these occur?

EC: Except the time spent in transportation to remote fields, I was briefing all the time. And I would give one or two a day when I was at a field, and also when I was in Kunming [01:34]. So there were a number of them, and I made reports on each of them, but I suppose those reports were all destroyed because at the end of the war, as I recall, we shredded all of our papers and threw them into the lake there in Kunming [01:58].

INT: Really?

EC: Yes [02:00], absolutely everything was destroyed.

INT: Wow.

EC: And the secrecy continued until I think when George Bush Sr. [02:13] was president. He declassified everything up to a certain point.

INT: Okay.

EC: So the secrecy was in my view quite excessive and resulted in the army losing a lot of records that would have been helpful in the Korean War [02:34] or even in the Vietnam War [02:37].

INT: If I can interrupt real quick. Your microphone has fallen off your tie.

EC: Oh.

INT: Okay, go right back ahead. You were talking about the classification of these all the way

through Korea and Vietnam conflicts.

EC: And as a result, as I think I mentioned to you, we did have [03:00] a session organized down in Virginia, perhaps seven or eight years ago, when we were asked to come back and describe how we did what we did. And I think all of that was videotaped at the time. I have no idea where it is now.

INT: Okay. If we were able to get a copy of that, would you be interested?

EC: Yeah.

INT: I think because we do have some contacts, and we may be familiar with what you're speaking about. We've seen interviews with other people in the MIS-X program [03:45], but none of them were in Air Ground Aid Section [03:50]. They were all working in the European Theater [03:52] of operations, but I'll see what we can look into and we'll get back to you on that.

EC: All right [04:00].

INT: And so I'm just curious of the whole secrecy since we're on that subject. Did you stay relatively mum to your family about what you did during World War II [04:13]?

EC: Yes, apart from saying I was in China [04:17] with AGAS [04:19], and we were responsible for personnel trapped behind the enemy lines, small detachments cut off and prisoners of war, and in China [04:31] principally downed aviators.

INT: And let's see. I guess getting back to the China-Burma-India Theater [04:43], your primary role was to give these briefings on a fairly regular basis. Did you primarily stay at the airbases in Kunming [04:57] or did you take trucks out [05:00] and full flights out to these other more remote airbases?

EC: I went to the other more remote areas.

INT: Okay.

EC: I was in Kunming [05:09] really coming back and perhaps briefing somebody right there, and then I was off again to another field.

INT: Okay. But your regular -- your normal quarters were in Kunming [05:24]?

EC: They were. They were. And from time to time I got involved in operations for one reason or another. I don't clearly understand now why I was, but I do recall going down way south of Kunming [05:46] to Nanning [05:47] and living there. A British major and I had rented one of these boats [06:00] in the river that was usually engaged as a house of prostitution, and we rented it from the prostitutes and moved them off because we could keep our papers there safely secured because we were offshore. And I can't recall exactly what we were doing there except trying to arrange the return of some aviator or other, and then we got driven out by the Japanese and had to retreat all the way to Kunming [06:42] again. But I can describe another episode I was in if that fits in with your --

INT: That would be great. I'm not sure if it's -- at some point I'd love to hear your account of how you were awarded [07:00] the Bronze Star [07:01] if you wouldn't mind, but feel free to discuss whatever you were about to right now.

EC: Well, let me turn to that.

INT: Sure.

EC: As I mentioned earlier, Indochina [07:13] was occupied by the Japanese, but they didn't want to get involved in the administration. They left that up to the French Foreign Legion [07:26], and the French Foreign Legion had been stuck there really since the beginning of the war. So they were cut off from supplies, they were cut off from pretty much control from France [07:43] itself. And of course France was then being occupied

by, administered by, the Germans. And what happened was this. The war [08:00] proceeded to the point where the invasion had taken place, and then gradually France [08:07] was being reoccupied by the Allies and the Germans were being driven out, and that left the situation in Indochina [08:17] rather ambiguous. And there was an occasion about the 9th of March, 1945 when the Japanese invited the officers of the Foreign Legion [08:36], particularly those in Hanoi [08:40], around Hanoi, to a meeting to discuss the situation, and when they arrived they were all murdered, and the Japanese then attacked the barracks. And the French Foreign Legion [08:55] was doing what they could to fight off. They didn't have their top officers [09:00] because they'd been murdered, but they were retreating westward toward Dien Bien Phu [09:07], which was their big headquarters at that time. And in the midst of this turmoil in Indochina [09:15], which of course we were interested in because there were Americans that had been prisoners of the French Foreign Legion [09:27]. In the midst of this, I think the last French Foreign Legion aircraft flew out and flew to a little town on the border there called Mengzi [09:44]. Mengzi was a Chinese philosopher like Confucius and this town was named after him. And he was seeking help from us for the French Foreign Legion [10:00]. And the plane he came in was a plane which I understood had been used in the Algerian War in 1922. It looked like a SPAD (10:19) from World War I. And this poor guy had this last airplane. He was brought up to Kunming [10:28], and after General Chennault's [10:31] people interviewed him, we interviewed him to find out where certain Americans that we knew had been in their custody had gone. There were seven navy pilots that were shot down in January of 1945 in a raid on Saigon [10:51], but they had eventually been moved up to a prison camp which was either -- and they were

captured by [11:00] the French Foreign Legion [11:01]. And they were moved up to Haiphong [11:05] or Hanoi [11:05]. So some prison camp in there. And then of course the entire French Foreign Legion [11:17] was being overrun by the Japanese, and they were retreating. And so they gave us an opportunity to interview this pilot who had escaped. And he said yes, he knew of them and that they were retreating with the French Foreign Legion [11:36] towards Dien Bien Phu [11:38]. We gave him a Mae West [11:44]. You know the Mae West?

INT: Sure.

EC: And asked him to contact us. He was then going to fly back to Dien Bien Phu [11:52]. And we asked him to contact us as soon as he got back with any information he had about these pilots [12:00] who were our responsibility. And he took off, and I remember I went down to Mengzi [12:11], and I sat up all night with my sergeant cranking our Mae West [12:19] to try to get news. And what I didn't know was that he had evidently -- there are little hills there. They look like upside down ice cream cones on the border, and he crashed into one of those and was killed. So we didn't hear from him. At that time there was a very distinguished pilot who was the A-3 of the 14th Air Force [12:48], the Operation Chief named Colonel [Nathan] Ranck [12:53]. And Colonel Ranck volunteered [13:00] to go down with me to Dien Bien Phu [13:04] if he could find it. And I said if he could find it, the maps were so inadequate that if you had a river, it was just a squiggly line. It didn't really mean the river turned there. That's just how they were indicating a river. And finding Dien Bien Phu [13:22] was going to be a real task. He had a very good copilot with him, a major, and I don't remember his name. But in any event we got an unarmed DC-3 and Colonel Ranck [13:39], his copilot, my sergeant,



and I, and I think that was all. We set out to try to find Dien Bien Phu [13:58]. And he [14:00] found it. And we didn't know whether it was held by the Japanese or the French. So I suggested we fly low over the headquarters there and see if there was a French flag flying or a Japanese flag. And we flew low and there was no flag. So there was a very, very small airfield there, and we landed in that, and there was a wounded French Foreign Legion [14:35] soldier on the edge of it. And then in my inadequate French I asked him about these Navy flyers, and he had no idea whatsoever, but he said that the main body of the French Foreign Legion [14:53] was moving in. And so I elected to stay [15:00] and Colonel Ranck [15:03] took off and left. And we had a code that we were going to use to communicate when I finally found the flyers. Well, I did find the flyers. I found six of the seven. The seventh had been -- I think he broke his leg riding a horse and he hadn't made it back. And I had thought he was later tortured and killed, but now I think maybe he survived. There's quite a Navy write-up of this entire thing, by the way.

INT: Really?

EC: Yeah, starting with the experience -- and I have a copy. But starting with the experience of these men in Saigon [15:54] and how they got captured and how they were mistreated and eventually moved up [16:00] north close to Hanoi [16:03]. Haiphong [16:04] was the port there.

INT: Okay.

EC: And in any event, I walked to the headquarters there. They were very accommodating, gave me a place to spend the night, and then -- by the way, everything was chaos as you might imagine because first of all the Japanese were hotly pursuing the Foreign Legion [16:38], and secondly you would find people, find soldiers who'd been shot through the

chest. The hospital was about the size of this room. So they were out on the street, walking around three days after they've been shot, and there was no facility there [17:00], and it was obvious the whole place was going to be overrun by the Japanese. The general in charge of the entire French Foreign Legion [17:08] also retreated there, and I met him. I think his name was Alexander [Marcel Alessandri], and had a brief conversation with him in my embarrassingly poor French. But any event, I got these six settled down with me and then tried to communicate with the 14th Air Force [17:32], first in code and then as a couple of days ran by in frantic English, and no response and no airplane. And this part you definitely will not believe. At that time there was a Postal Telegraph [17:53] office there in Dien Bien Phu [17:56]. Postal Telegraph was a competitor of Western Union [18:00], no longer in existence I don't believe. I went to the Telegraph [18:05] office, and could you believe that from Japanese occupied territory to the part where we were occupying around Kunming [18:16] there was still telegraph communication? But there was. Which was typical of what was going on when they were saying trains would come to the front lines and just change crews then keep going. But in any event, I telegraphed first in code and then later in clear text saying desperately "come, everything's all taken care of. We're ready to go." What had happened was there was an overcast, and with the overcast they couldn't find Dien Bien Phu [18:55] again. But eventually -- I think I was there [19:00] about six or seven days -- eventually it cleared up and in he came and you asked about OSS [19:13]. I recall seeing getting off the airplane this nattily-attired officer, and he was in dark glasses and he had a hunting knife, and I said, "That's got to be OSS [19:28]." And I said, "Get back on that airplane because this town is going to be taken in no time at all and nobody's going to escape." But he stayed,

and I put my Navy pilots on the airplane and out we went. And that field was so short that as we took off, when they retracted the landing gear, we retracted the bushes at the end [20:00] of the field into the [unintelligible]. So when we landed in Kunming [20:04] all these bushes fell out. But we got back, and both Ranck [20:16] and his copilot, I believe, received a Distinguished Flying Crosses. I mean, a top decoration, which he richly deserved. I'm sure he's no longer with us, but he was a fabulous pilot and could do that. So that was the kind of thing that we were engaged in to get flyers back. And as I say, in some Navy publication was this complete story, and then there was an author down in Georgia. I'm not sure [21:00] he isn't in the Park Service --

INT: Oh, really?

EC: -- who contacted me, and he wanted a description of what I knew of this for a book he was writing. And I really kept up with him from time to time because he promised he could find the citation of mine, but he never was able to do it, for my Bronze Star [21:24]. But in any event, that was the story of that.

INT: And so who wrote the citation again for the Bronze Star [21:37]?

EC: It was a Major Ross Taylor [21:40].

INT: Okay.

EC: And Major Taylor [21:44] was an author, and so he really did a wonderful job on this. And I believe he was involved at that time, as I say in this river [22:00] series, which was a series of books giving the history of the large rivers in this country, and he did, I think, the Red River. So he had one of the most romantic one of all of them.

INT: And so something like you just described, your primary role was as a briefer, you did, from time to time, go out on missions?

EC: Yes.

INT: Rescue missions?

EC: Yes. When they came up, and when Colonel [Al R.] Wichtrich [22:39] told me to do it. And in fact, I think I got one of my worst diseases. I had malaria and maybe dysentery, and the worst one was yellow jaundice, which is now called hepatitis. So that when we went [23:00] to Beijing [23:03] for that rescue, I had yellow jaundice and didn't know it, but it got very severe while I was actually in the custody of the Japanese. And I had a bad time with that back in the hospital in Kunming [23:24] when I finally got evacuated with the Doolittle Flyers. [23:28]

INT: Right.

EC: I came back early with them.

INT: Would you mind talking about that? We spoke a little about it over lunch, but not while we were recording here. Would you mind telling that incident?

EC: Well, what happened there was this. I had actually been at another base in China [23:50] when the atom bomb was dropped and then the second bomb, and then the Japanese surrendered [24:00]. And what we thought and what our intelligence thought was that when the Japanese surrendered, all of their armies surrendered. But in fact, unbeknownst to us, their very successful army in China [24:23], the Kwantung Army [24:24], did not surrender, and I think they were places on the islands where they didn't surrender. But in any event, a month or two before this, after MacArthur [24:41] had returned to the Philippines [24:42], the Japanese issued an order that if there were American soldiers in their custody as prisoners of war and their camp was about to be overrun they should dispose of them. I remember [25:00] in the Philippines [25:02] there was a group of

prisoners of war who were told to get down the slit trenches because a bombing raid was about to occur. As soon as they got down, they were doused with gasoline and set on fire. And that was going on in a number of places regrettably. So at the end of the war, or after we thought the war was over, an effort was made to get to the prison camps as soon as possible. And here's where I actually was with an OSS [25:40] team. There were six or seven of these teams that went out to the all of the known or suspected locations of prisoner of war camps [25:51] in China [25:52], and -- I'm trying to think if we sent any [26:00] to Indochina [26:01]. I'm not sure. But in any event, the first I heard of this was when I got back to Kunming [26:11], I got orders with six others who were members of AGAS [26:17] to report to the commanding officer. And when we arrived, he said, "You officers have just volunteered for another mission." This is the typical army hand-picked volunteers. And we were supposed to be army liaison and the experts on behind the lines and prisoner of war camps [26:43] to go with OSS [26:47] teams that were going to go Mukden [26:52], Kweilin [26:56], I think, Beijing [26:59], and [27:00] I've forgotten where the other was. And our assignment was Beijing, and we were told we could not land there. They would not permit us to land. So we were to parachute in. And I think we staged in Xian [27:23], and as soon as we were all assembled, off we went. I have the citation for that, by the way upstairs, which names all of the people. There were seven of us, and as far as I know only one other is still alive. He's a Nisei [27:50], who lives in Hawaii.

INT: Oh, really?

EC: And I'm in touch with him.

INT: Oh, fantastic.

EC: And he was OSS [27:58], not AGAS [28:00]. But in any event, we took off in a B-24, which was not equipped for parachute jumping, so we were to jump through the camera hatch. And I can remember, I think I told you, this friend of mine who is one your list, George Watson [28:23] was a paratrooper, and so he said just keep your feet together, keep your head down, and it's like rolling off a log. And we had a long flight. And I didn't know it, but at that time I was quite sick with yellow jaundice. So I slept through most of it. But when we got over Beijing [28:51], we all sat around the camera hatch, which was opened then, with our feet dangling in the wind. And there was [29:00] a jump master there, and "number one jump, number two jump," and so on. And they dropped me, at the time I thought intentionally, right on the concrete runway. And despite your parachute it's like a big jump. It's like jumping from the ceiling or higher. And as soon -- well, actually they fired on us while we were still in the air and again on the ground. As I say, they thought the war was still going on. And we were immediately captured, and I can remember a truck came out with Japanese in it with fixed bayonets. And we were all herded into the truck. As we headed back to the base there [30:00], the commanding officer of the OSS [30:06], who had been in China [30:07] about three weeks I think, fell back against one of these bayonets. And it didn't draw blood but there was a little scratch. We had a doctor with us, who by the way is still alive. I saw him at one of the Doolittle [30:27] Reunion. And he immediately turned to the doctor and said, "I want you to certify this for a Purple Heart." And far as I know he got a Purple Heart, but in any event, we were taken in, in front of the commanding officer there, who was sitting in a raised location with this huge Samurai sword. And he asked us what we were doing there, and we explained that we were trying to make contact [31:00] with the

prisoners and arrange for their immediate evacuation and get whatever medical help was necessary there. And he just said, "This was very foolish, we should never have done that," and we were now in Japanese custody. However, they put us out in the Hotel des Wagon-Lits [31:21] which you won't remember this, but Thomas Cook and Sons used to be a great travel agent in this country and they owned the railway cars, the sleepers, the wagon-lits. And so we were kept in very comfortable surroundings. And then discovered that the Doolittle Flyers [31:47] were there. And when the first plane was allowed to land, I went back with [inaudible], now diagnosed by a doctor as having [32:00] yellow jaundice, and I went back with it and went straight to the hospital.

INT: So this was literally within days of the war ending?

EC: Yes.

INT: Wow.

EC: I would say three or four days. They got these missions out I think all over the Pacific and partly because of the threat that the Japanese had made but partly also just to get the prisoners back as quickly as possible --

[End of tape 2A]

[Beginning of Tape 2B]

EC: I was going on to another meeting, but I've cancelled that because I really didn't feel up to it.

INT: Okay. Well, we can call it quits whenever you'd like.

EC: No, no. I'll give it a shot.

INT: This is going great. So essentially this mission, this jump mission was to have an immediate American presence on the ground to ensure nothing catastrophic happened to

any American prisoners of war?

EC: And to bring in help as soon as we found out what the situation was and how much help was needed. The idea was to get medical attention as quickly as possible. So that our seven-man group consisting of a commanding officer, me as the sort of the expert [01:00], the supposed expert on prisoner of war camps [01:03], a doctor, a Nisei [01:07], who actually translated went before the commanding officer, a radio operator, and two others. I've forgotten what their specific assignments were, but the Nisei [01:28] is the one I'm still in touch with in Hawaii. He's not well, but he is a survivor so far.

INT: And you were given you said the Soldier's Medal [01:47] for this?

EC: Yes. It was the Soldier's Medal [01:56]. This actually outranks the Bronze Star [02:00], but it's given for heroism in a situation other than wartime because they thought the Japanese having surrendered it wasn't in wartime, but it was wartime as far as we were concerned.

INT: Sure. You were shot at out there. So I'm just very curious, when you jumped out of the B-24 was this a static line or was this a pull the ripcord?

EC: No, a static line.

INT: A static line.

EC: Yeah, because I didn't know a damn thing about what I was doing. And I did remember to keep my feet together. The boots we wore at that time were sort of paratrooper boots anyway. So I was dressed for it. But I didn't keep my head down, and I can remember the cord coming up and snapping the back of my neck.

INT: That's amazing. That's an amazing story [03:00].

EC: My one and only parachute jump.



INT: Oh, really? No interest in doing it again?

EC: None.

INT: You don't want to be like George Bush Sr. [03:12]?

EC: No, no interest.

INT: So, again, to summarize, it sounds like mostly your responsibility was briefings with the occasional rescue mission or informational mission like the trip to Dien Bien Phu [03:32] and this trip. And this was to Beijing [03:35], correct?

EC: This was to Beijing, yes.

INT: Right. One quick question regarding the end of the war. The only other person we've interviewed who was a veteran, specifically AGAS [03:48], was this gentleman named Oliver Aymar [03:50], who was there just at the very end of the war. He went on one rescue mission, but he said that at the end of the war -- when the war was actually over -- he spent [04:00] a lot of time with AGAS [04:03] going around and ascertaining the locations of human remains of American airmen who had either been killed in plane crashes or maybe from mass graves from the Japanese. Does that ring a bell to you?

EC: What happened was this. After the war ended and after we got back from these various missions that I described like mine to Beijing [04:36]. And this Watson [04:38] actually went to Mukden [04:42] and I think they were abused there. But when we all got back, we decided to move our headquarters from Kunming [04:56] to Shanghai [04:58], and when we got to Shanghai [05:00], our principal assignment now that the war was definitely over, but our assignment was war crimes. So we were supposedly investigating war crimes. Now, it is true at that time I was asked if I would go to Formosa to look for crashed airplanes and identify bodies, and I somehow got out of that

assignment for various and sundry reasons, one of which was I very much wanted to stay at Shanghai [05:40] and finish up there. But Shanghai was an entirely different climate, you might suppose, than Kunming [05:49], nice restaurants, and everybody was very welcoming to the soldiers. So I was there for three months [06:00], and some of that group were sent here and there to try to identify missing aircraft and identify bodies. I didn't think I would be very good at that. So I'm not surprised. You would be interested to know, though, that there was a comic strip that ran during the war called "Terry and the Pirates," and it was about this character Terry and his contact with a female pirate. Well, it was based on actual fact. There was a female pirate who more or less controlled the canals south of Shanghai [06:49] down to -- I think there's a town called Huangpu down there. And some members of our crew wanted to join with her [07:00] because this was a very lucrative occupation. How far they got I don't know, but she actually existed, and she was still very active at the time we were there, and helpful to us in recovering pilots. [Barclay Preston] Schoyer [07:24] was I believe in contact with her. -- This is our dog, Vedora [unintelligible].

INT: She was investigating a little bit --

EC: Investigating everything. She won't be any trouble.

INT: I love dogs. It's no problem. In wrapping, we've got 20 or so minutes of tape of left. If we have more to talk about we can, but one thing, if you can just help me understand the general size [08:00] of AGAS [08:03] in the China-Burma-India Theater [08:05]. About how many men were attached to this? Obviously it was a relatively small operation.

EC: It was a very small operation. We were army attached to the air force, and its size varied enormously over the time I was there from a very small operation, which I would

describe as maybe 15, and probably got up to 50 or 60 by the end. I don't know whether Colonel Wichtrich [08:43] in his book describes that, but you know it started out with one person, just Schoyer [08:51]. And then they sent Wichtrich [08:53] over, and when I arrived there, there were very, very few [09:00]. I would guess maybe 15 counting the enlisted men. One of the operations they had there was an attempt to get the Chinese commanders to assist us in the areas where they had jurisdiction when we thought a pilot was down in their area. And to do that we had a storeroom about half the size of this room, I guess, with all kinds of trinkets which you could give them to persuade them to help, like a carbine, a small rifle, a pistol. But one of the most valuable gifts was a Parker 51 pen. If you've never seen them, but they were quite popular [10:00] during the war and sort of a prestige angle. And so we had a number of those, and to get a Chinese commander to move his company three miles to the west we had to give him a gift, and that's kind of the gift we would give him.

INT: And so in that example of getting him to move his company, would that be to help to look for an allied airman or something like that?

EC: Yes, only for that; just for that.

INT: Okay. And in fact in the interviews with Mr. Aymar [10:36] that we conducted, he remembered going out in these missions with a large number of Chinese -- native Chinese there with them helping to carry the supplies, but that they were also with them carried bundles of money that would be used to basically pay off either informants or people along the way [11:00], to pay for expenses, gifts and things like what you're describing.

EC: Yeah, I'm sure they did that.

INT: So, I presume there was a good bit of cooperation between the actual AGAS [11:13] field agents and the local Chinese, who lived in those areas--

EC: Lots, lots. And if you can get Schoyer's [11:21] book, which, by the way, is a very good read, *The Indefinite River*. You'll see, as I say, he married this Chinese girl who had worked with him out there. My recollection is that he had a behind-the-lines location not far from Shanghai [11:51]. And it's just incredible to think that you could have done that because you'd be so conspicuous not being Chinese and not being Japanese [12:00], but he did it and so did others. And I remember while I was there one of the officers, I think his name was [Henry] Whittlesey [12:15], was actually captured by the Japanese.

INT: Really?

EC: Yeah, and then the -- it was probably the communists [12:25] forces moved in to attack this unit, and so they killed Whittlesey [12:34] because they couldn't keep him any longer.

INT: I think it might have been mentioned in Wichtrich's [12:42] book, but something along the lines of an AGAS [12:46] officer being killed or being captured and then released and killed, and there was a firefight that ensued or something like that. I seem to remember it.

EC: Yeah. I actually [13:00] haven't read that for a long time, so I don't know if that's in there, but I do remember this guy because everybody was very upset about it at that time actually.

INT: Sure.

EC: He'd been very valuable.

INT: Did you keep up with Wichtrich [13:17] after the war?

EC: I did talk to him on the telephone and corresponded with him, not much, but somewhat, and we always planned to get together, but he was not in good health. And he told me that he would try to come, but he was on oxygen, and it was very inconvenient for him to travel, and I wish I'd gone out to see him, but I was also trying to earn a living at that time. And so I regret that I did not keep up more [14:00] with the men I had known in these various units, but I was not able to do it.

INT: I believe that book was published just after he passed away I think. I believe he wrote it, but I think it was published very shortly after he died.

EC: Yeah.

INT: But that's very interesting. I'll have to look up some of these other -- you mention the book by Bernie Hill and then this one by Schoyer [14:31]. I'll have to look into those.

EC: Yeah. Whether they're in print or not, I don't know.

INT: Okay.

EC: And I just am unable to find it. I looked in this house.

INT: That's no problem. We'll give it a shot, and I'll leave you a couple of my cards in case you do happen upon them or anything like that. I guess just in wrapping up AGAS [14:57], you [15:00] -- let's see. We were talking a little bit about the use of the Chinese. At your headquarters where you were in Kunming [15:09], were there any Chinese-Americans, any Chinese-American soldiers that were there with you as translators or anything?

EC: Yes. Principally we had Frankie Tan [15:23], who was probably mentioned in this book.

He was a member of this GBT [15:31] group, and he would be there from time to time.

CARROLL CARPENTER: Are you doing all right?

EC: I'm doing just fine, thank you.

INT: You can sit.

CC: I promised our daughter that I would go for a walk, and I'm about half an hour late.

EC: Go.

CC: Okay.

INT: We've got about 10 or 15 minutes left on this tape and then we'll call it quits.

CC: Okay. I have my cellphone.

EC: Okay, bye. We also had [16:00] a Chinese who was with us all the time, and I don't think he was in the army, but he did translation and he did various and sundry other things. But Frankie Tan [16:17], who I did see after the war. I mean, if Frankie Tan were sitting in your chair, his feet would not touch the ground. He was just a little bit above a dwarf, but a very engaging guy who spoke English with a Boston accent. He would have been raised in Back Bay or somewhere in Boston. He had a very Boston accent. In addition to other things, he used to bring me back rum from Indochina [16:54]. Indochina had a fabulous rum, and he would bring it back [17:00] in those five-gallon cans that you strap on the back of a jeep.

INT: Oh, sure, jerry cans.

EC: So how clean that can was, I don't know, but the rum was delicious, and it was a favorite of mine. But he was a wonderful guy, and I didn't know Bernard [17:24] but I did know Gordon [17:25], who I think was American but he may have been English.

INT: Oh, okay.

EC: They all lived for quite a while in Indochina [17:38] with one of the big oil companies, and they just set up this organization as a way to make money when the war broke out,

and they were very helpful. I remember Frankie Tan [17:54] also brought back an aviator who had flown into the ground. This is [18:00] a fighter pilot, crashed right into the ground. He had a severe head injury, and as a result some brain difficulties, which I'm sure were permanent, but, there again, they were able to put him in one of the church hospitals and the nurses protected him from the French Foreign Legion [18:30], and eventually they brought him back. I'm not sure whether he came back with me when I was living on that pleasure boat or whether he came back with Frankie Tan [18:51]. But in any event, he was saved. He did not go briefing with me because he really had difficulty [19:00] speaking as a result of his injury.

INT: Wow.

EC: And how he – you could do that and survive because the rice paddies were so soft and if you didn't get buried in the mud you might survive like Hessler [19:21] did. Hessler's experience was unique. I mean, our people on the ground said they could see him sort of emerge through the emergency exit on the bomber, and he was in one of those B-26s, which was fitted with a French .75.

INT: An antitank gun.

EC: Yeah. And I can remember he said every time they fired the plane came to a stop [20:00] because of the kick.

INT: Right.

EC: But I don't know how many planes were actually fitted that way, but they used it for strafing runs.

INT: Wow. In the briefings that you did, obviously some of it you would bring along a downed airmen who would assist in the odds as an example, but would you conduct the

briefings typically by yourself?

EC: Yes.

INT: Because I noticed on these lists there were a couple of other people, I think Whallon [20:35] may have been one of those who was listed primarily as a briefer for AGAS [20:40], but you wouldn't brief as a team? It would just be you as an individual?

EC: No.

INT: Okay.

EC: I was alone most of the time except when I had an aviator to take around with me as an exhibit. And the airmen [21:00] were very interested in this as you might suppose.

INT: And, again, to summarize, we talked a little bit about it, but a typical briefing, would this be to a group of airmen? This wouldn't be one on one, maybe a whole squadron --

EC: Squadron, yes.

INT: Okay. And you would be telling them information about basically how to -- basically to not give up hope essentially if they've been shot down?

EC: Yes. I think the briefings had a dual purpose. One, to give them technical information over what you could do, the kind of people you could contact, how to use your jacket with the flag, and if you're captured, name, rank, and serial number is all you're supposed to give. And then tips [22:00] on how you can try to escape and that it's your obligation as a soldier, as a U.S. airman to try to escape, and never give up hope. Principally, the idea that you hide your parachute, get away from the area as quickly as you can. And here we had maps of the communist [22:32] areas, and here's where you want to fly if you can still fly this far depending on the condition of your aircraft, and here's where you want to get to, and then we'll pick you up. It was to show them, which I think otherwise



they wouldn't have known, but all is not lost if you're in enemy territory. You can still get back [23:00]. And a lot of them did, which was real satisfying.

INT: In the end, were you ultimately briefing B-29 crews?

EC: We did begin briefing B-29 groups, sure. Not so much about what to do in the homeland because we didn't know then. What we know now is that all pilots and other airmen who bombed the homeland were treated as war criminals. There's a very good book by Jim Lehrer -- do you know who I'm talking about? Called "A Special Prisoner," which is quite factual and has this theme, this airman who was shot down over Japan, B-29, and was treated [24:00] as I've described, as a common criminal and tortured, particularly by this one Japanese, and he survives. And my understanding is of the airmen who bombed Japan [24:18], the homeland, and who were captured alive, became prisoners of war, only five percent of them lived through the experience thereafter, and some of those statistics are in that book. But in any event, he comes back and over the course of years following the war he becomes a minister and he becomes a bishop, very prominent, and he's walking through JFK Airport to go somewhere and he sees the Japanese who had tortured him. And he tries [25:00] to get on the same airplane, but he doesn't succeed. But he gets on the next airplane because he found out where he was going, which I think was to San Diego or somewhere on the west coast. And he encounters this guy out there. And you have this interesting dichotomy between his obligations as a minister, turn the other cheek and forgive, and that, but on the one hand this intense hatred for the man. So I won't tell you the rest of it. It's a very short book.

[inaudible commentary]

INT: Well, we've just got a few minutes left to wrap up. Is there anything that you feel that we

left out either about 1142 [25:55] or about AGAS [25:57] that's critical [26:00]?

EC: Nothing I can think of at the moment. If I think of something, I'll get in touch with you.

But I think I've told you pretty much what we did. I'm sorry that I really didn't have more of an experience at 1142 [26:23].

INT: That's okay. I mean, the information you gave us, for example, what was really enlightening to me was the information about the downed airmen, principally from the European Theater [26:36], who were coming through 1142 [26:38] to brief you about their experiences.

EC: Yes. Well, I vividly remember the one that was the tail gunner. I don't know whether you want me to --

INT: Yeah, would you mind -- because we have a few minutes. If you wouldn't mind telling that on camera that would be just great.

EC: Well, one of the airmen [27:00] who briefed us at 1142 [27:03] had been a tail gunner in a B-17, and they were over Germany [27:10] or France [27:11], and were attacked by the German fighter squadrons. And all he remembers, he was of course confined in this little compartment where the tailgun is. All he remembers was hearing this tremendous explosion and then all went quiet, and he found himself rotating so severely that the centrifugal force pinned him against the edge or against the wall of his compartment, and he wanted to get up and jump, but he couldn't do it. Although he was a very powerful young man, he was just absolutely [28:00] forced against the wall by the forces. And then 10 or 15 minutes went by, I don't know how high they were, and all of a sudden he heard this swoosh. And then the force was released, and he got up and immediately opened the compartment door or whatever there was there to try to get out, and found

nothing was there. He was on the ground, and what had happened was that this thing after rotating, the whole tail section, which is separated at the time the aircraft exploded from the rest of the aircraft, and had come all the way down, and he landed in some pine bushes or pine trees, and had a soft landing. And he was uninjured. Of course [29:00], what we wanted to talk to him about was how he got back from there. But the fascinating part of the story to me was that he was able to survive this explosion, which evidently killed all the rest of the crew, and had this bizarre experience of rotating down safely to the earth.

INT: That's unbelievable.

EC: That was unbelievable.

INT: And so you remember, though, a handful of these soldiers coming through 1142 [29:36]?

EC: Yes.

INT: And they were all airmen presumably?

EC: They were all airmen that I recall. I don't recall any others. The airmen had these experiences, more likely than say an infantryman, who was on a battlefield where you couldn't escape [30:00]. Actually, my partner, one of my partners in the practice of law was shot down over Yugoslavia. And his big problem in getting back was that he was picked up by one group who were fighting another group of Yugoslavians. You may remember there were the Chetniks, on one hand, and then there was Mihailovic group which were the partisans. And instead of fighting the Germans they were fighting each other vigorously for control of Yugoslavia. Tito actually succeeded.

INT: And so we literally have about one minute to go. When the war ended you were still stationed for some time with AGAS [30:51], but you eventually -- what was it, 1946 by

the time you got back?

EC: No, I got back just before Christmas in '45 [31:00]. We finally got transportation back. We had enough points to go back the day the war ended, but we were ordered to stay on for investigation of war crimes, and so we did stay on. But as I say, we had moved our headquarters from Kunming [31:21] to Shanghai [31:23].

INT: Right.

EC: And so we were right there. Actually, in the French Quarter, in a very nice chateau. So it couldn't have been more comfortable. And five years ago I went with one of my daughters to go back and try to find this chateau. And as you will discover if you go to Shanghai [31:46], all street names have been changed. They're no longer the French. We were on Route Pichon [31:52] but there's no longer a Route Pichon. It's some Chinese name. But she got a book that translated them back [32:00], and so we did find what had been Route Pichon [32:06], all old auto repair shops and motorcycle dealerships and so forth, not at all like this spacious lawn and beautiful chateau that I remember.

INT: And finally, you were called back up during Korea [32:24]?

EC: I was.

INT: Did that have anything to do with what you had done during World War II [32:29]?

EC: Supposedly.

[end of transcript]

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