

Janis Kozlowski: Did you enlist in the Army Air Force or were you drafted?

John Pletcher: Well, no, I wasn't drafted, I always wanted to fly and I knew I never could of gathered up enough money to take flying lessons and pay for them so I figured the best way is to get the military to train me. I investigated getting into the Army Air Corp and I found out that you're supposed to have two years of college. Well I had had one year of college at the University of Colorado at Boulder, Colorado. While I was there I learned that they had a written test you could take in lieu of the two years of college so I applied for that and went down to Lowry Field at Denver, Colorado and took the written examination.

The written examination to exempt you from the two years of college was nine - two hour examinations -- two hour examinations, written examinations on nine separate subjects including: mathematics, geography, physics, and several other subjects. So I took that in January of 1939 and then when the college quarter was over, before the quarter was over, I got a letter back from the War Department saying that I had passed and was on the waiting list. But I was my category, having passed the test, was low man on the totem pole. Four years of college, two years of college and enlisted personnel with prior service and then the people who had passed the exam was tail end.

Well, in the meantime, college semester was over and summer vacation so I went back down to my hometown of Yuma where I was from, and worked down there for awhile but didn't do any more, any flying. And in the meantime in the fall, I got a letter from the War Department saying that I could expect to be called in the next few weeks that I was on the eligible list. And they didn't say to go ahead and re-enroll for this fall semester - the fall semester would have started in September – and I got this letter saying I could expect to be called in the next few weeks, so I did not enroll for the fall semester, I held off. And then I got a second letter saying “report to,” [pause] I forget the name of the army post at Denver, report there for enlistment as an aviation cadet and so I reported there and got orders to enlist as an aviation cadet. I'd already taken the full physical examination and I had passed the written examination so I was on the eligible list and now they were calling me to go ahead and enlist as an aviation cadet, which I did.

We actually were, what you might call enlisted status, although aviation cadet was a, sort of a separate category and our pay was \$75 a month, believe or not, even at that time. I think the GIs were getting \$30 as a beginning enlisted man. So, I went ahead and enlisted and became an aviation cadet. They gave us an additional physical examination upon being sworn in. They gave me orders to go to primary flying school at Glendale, California so I ended up at Glendale California at a primary pilot training school and we had the PT-13As, which was the Stearman, single engine bi-plane trainer. Later, - they had 100s of them eventually – later they put a different engine in them and called them a PT-17. But it was the same basic airplane, and the airplane was built by Stearman, which was owned by Boeing, and the airplanes we had were brand new airplanes. They'd just been flown out from the factory, so I got my primary training – 65 hours – at this primary school then was sent to basic training at Randolph Field [in Texas] for the basic flight training.

At Randolph Field we flew single engine, low wing trainers, BT they called them, for bomber, bom ... eh, basic trainer, BT, and they were BT-9. And BT-14 was an updated version of BT-9 -

it was a refined version of the BT-9, they also had that. Then Consolidated Vultee made a similar trainer that they called the BT-13, we called it the Vultee “vibrator” because it shook and rattled. I flew that some at basic and I finished Randolph Field in about, well I guess it must have been about late June, and was assigned to Kelly Field for the advanced training.

At Kelly Field we flew the T-6, although, they called it the AT-6 at that time. An earlier model of the AT-6 was called the BC-1. The BC stood for basic combat and that meant basic combat airplane, model 1 - the BC-1. The refined, updated version of that, became the T-6 which was a favorite airplane for people, that could afford it, to buy after World War II. A lot of them were sold to private pilots after World War II.

I finished my training at Kelly Field and graduated on the 26th of July 1940 as a second Lieutenant in the US Army Air Corp. My initial base that I was assigned to as a second Lieutenant – went on active duty on the 27th of July 1940 – and I was assigned to the 17th Bomb Group at McCord Field at Tacoma, Washington. I and nine other classmates of mine – 10 of us – all ten were assigned to the 17th Bomb Group at McCord Field and I was assigned first to the 34th squadron which was a medium bombardment outfit. They were equipped with B-18s. Well, the B, the 73rd Squadron was a part of that group, and it had been designated as a squadron to be assigned to Elmendorf Field in Alaska. It was to be taken out of the 17th Group and shipped to Alaska which it was.