

Joseph D. Hutchison: Anyway, the next stop was, Alamogordo. And we showed up there and the first thing they said was, “We’re sorry to do this, but in a month, ten of you guys are going to be dead.” – And that was a nice way to greet us.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah.

Joseph D. Hutchison: We found out, though, that that was pretty much true; they exceeded the amount ... there were planes crashing all over the place. They didn’t have enough instructor pilots. We didn’t get a copilot, until there at Alamogordo. Up until then, well, he had been flying with an instructor pilot, or with another guy learning how - two of them.

Anyway, we picked up our copilot at Alamogordo, and the pilot let him take off on his first ride. [Chuckle] And he’d naturally thought we were the best crew in the world ... [he] showed up, you know, bright and shining, right out of flight school. And anyway, he took off and he reached down to pull up the landing gear, but he grabbed the wrong handle - grabbed the flaps. And we ... slide off; were just barely off the ground. And so, we fell kind of to our left and hit real hard on the left wheel. Well, that was one time when the pilot did the right thing - he slapped the guy’s hand away and pushed the flaps back down and pulled the throttle wide open. And we staggered into the air; we came around, made a circle around the field, and came down. And everybody was shaken pretty good.

This was the first time, and only time, I saw my tail gunner scared. He and I both got out of the plane, walked over to the wheel that had hit the ground, and he was shaking. And he lit up a cigarette, [Chuckle] and as he struck the match on the tire, the tire exploded. [Laugh] And both of us took off running across the airport. There were many plane mishaps at that field.

We then went to Clovis, New Mexico for our third phase. And he ran into - the pilot, ran into problems everywhere he went.

At Alamogordo, we had one pass while we were there - where we could, they would run the truck down to El Paso. And we had special passes, because it was so long down there. And we only had the one pass. We could stay out after curfew. And there was a lot of ill feeling between the troops that were stationed at El Paso and us, because we were supposedly favorites. But, when we climbed on the truck to go down there, there was another crew on the truck first. And we were at the back of the truck, and my pilot came walking up - the last man. And he said, “Hello,” or something like that to this other pilot. And the other pilot turned around and chewed him out. And he looked at us and he said, “If you guys know what’s good for you, you’ll get off of that crew, because I’m telling my crew right now,” he says, “If you’re in formation with us on the way over, then [to] shoot you down.” That’s apparently how bad his officers felt with him.

So ... learning from that and having run-ins with him myself, I decided, “Well, I’m going to try to get off of this crew.” So, I made up ... a roster [Chuckle] and a program. And I cut magazine articles out, you know, where they were saying, at the time, “They were having trouble getting gunners,” because ... things were getting kind of rough. And I went in and made my pitch to get off. And the major listened to me. And after I was through, he says, “Well, we know all about your pilot and your crew.” He said, “And if I let you off, who’s going to replace you? Everybody

knows about it.” He says, “You’re just stuck with it.” Everybody else on the crew had, at one time or another, tried to get off of it too; with no success.