

Reginald J. "Reg" Clizbe

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QUESTION: Now just so I get it on tape your true name is?

ANSWER: Reginald J., yes, Clizbe.

QUESTION: Clizbe. Did you grow up in this area.. or?

ANSWER: I was born in Montana.. a ranch, moved to Centralia, Washington, and let's see it must have been 1927, went to school a lot of school there, including two years of college. And then went to West Point and.. got my wings after I graduated in the artillery Corp and changed to the Air Corp of course and just in time to do a little aerial combat in World War II.

QUESTION: So what years did you go to West Point?

ANSWER: 1936-40.

QUESTION: You were in, and I assume being at West Point you had a pretty good idea what America was facing?

ANSWER: Yes we had a very profound professor called Bouchama, who was the first geo politician in the world I think. The State Department wanted to have him go his way, but he was more proud to be an army colonel. But he told us how things were going and lectured us and said war was inevitable and it was the most interesting experience.

QUESTION: How did a young kid from Centralia end up at West Point? How did you decide to do that?

ANSWER: Well, really, it was a quick.. quick do. I was in the second year of college, in Centralia college and I felt the war was coming and that I'd be involved of course and I saw.. or heard something about West Point. You could become a professional and I thought it'd be a good idea to go there and learn how to fight whether I was civilian or military was the thing to do and that's what I did.

QUESTION: What did your dad do?

ANSWER: My dad was a nurseryman.

QUESTION: So are you, are you the first in the military line then?

ANSWER: In the long past my family was quite military but not in recent years except for me and my brother.

QUESTION: So what's, well where were you when Pearl Harbor happened?

ANSWER: Oh God, I'll say I do. I was at Fresno, California, just having.. moved down there from McChord and we were just cadre-d from a different group and we were building ourselves up. I remember I was actually at the front gate at Fresno, California, when we got the news.

QUESTION: How did you get the news?

ANSWER: Radio or?

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QUESTION: I've heard a lot of people describe an immediate change, but a lot of those were civilians talking about every thing that happened. From your point was there immediate change from here were soldiers were drilling and practicing to here we are now in a different mode?

ANSWER: Well, there is that attitude of course, they knew they were at war and the training became more meaningful, they were more diligent in their training and we wanted to get the best outfit we could to go to battle. Yes, there was a change of course.

QUESTION: How old were you?

ANSWER: I was twenty-four.

QUESTION: So compared to a lot of those kids that came in you were ones they called pop, twenty-four years old.

ANSWER: I had a squadron.. I got a squadron as a second lieutenant so I was accelerated of course.

QUESTION: What planes did you fly?

ANSWER: During World War II we started with the A-20 Douglas a light attack bomber, a lot of machine guns on it, quite a capacity for bombs. Designed particularly to fly at low level and do that work. We found ourselves flying at low level and medium altitude both, because we got ourselves a bombing capability and level bombing capability. It was a very exciting airplane and exciting type of war. We went over first.. you want me just to ramble?.

Question: If I have a question I'll jump in.

Answer: In 1942 we had war games in North Carolina. We'd come from McChord to Fresno and Will Rogers Field, Oklahoma. We had field exercises in North Carolina.. with the army of course and from there we picked up our airplanes at St. Louis and took them across the ocean with a lot of fuel in the tanks to fill the bomb bay.

Went from Maine to Newfoundland to Greenland, Iceland, Scotland and down to England. And did a few operations out of England and then one day we were told to.. all be at ready the next morning we're going to have a pretty interesting exercise. And the exercise was to throw things in a box, dress and go down to Lands End for an African invasion and this we did.

Interestingly, I acquired a little Labrador pup that hadn't been weaned yet from a proprietress of a pub that was near our base. I damned near gave the operation away.. because I went that night before things happened said I want my puppy, she said but he isn't weaned, I've got to have my puppy, and I walked out with him. He headed down to Africa in my flying jacket, didn't wet me, didn't bother me at all. He was my great pal during World War II.

Q: He have a name?

ANSWER: Tarfu, and Ernie Pyle loved him. He stayed with us a few days. Has my dog, all about him in, "Brave Men", one of his books.

QUESTION: Where does Tarfu come from, I know Snafu?

ANSWER: Well, situation all fouled up, Tarfu was "things are really screwed up".

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QUESTION: That's the translation right?

ANSWER: Fubar is, "fouled up beyond all recognition".

QUESTION: I was going to say those are the very politically correct translations. So Tarfu flew with you then?

ANSWER: Not on combat missions. He flew from.. when we made a move yeah.

QUESTION: Did he kind of became a mascot?

ANSWER: Oh he knew everybody in the group and he was a favorite dog I think of every country we were in.

QUESTION: Did he come home with you?

ANSWER: I brought him home a few months early.. just for that purpose. Elliott Roosevelt had made a big screw up when he bragged about bringing his dogs flying you know, and I knew it was going to be difficult to get my dog into the country so I made a special stab at it and he was so well disciplined I could go out and feed him and everything at night and put him under the seat and tell him to stay there and he'd stay there and the flight crew didn't know I had a dog aboard. I got to the states and what are the people that put you through the uh.. examine you when you come in?

QUESTION: Customs.

ANSWER: Customs. Got through it and well, I have to make a clean breast of it. I have a dog that has been with me all the war and I'm going to keep him. He said "I didn't hear what you said", he let me walk the dog away. So got him into the country and he died a couple years later.

QUESTION: Was he your.. kinda of your.. well sanity, was he your piece of home or security?

ANSWER: Well.. he was to all of us in the outfit I think. I think most of us liked dogs and Tarfu was so special that.. that everybody had a piece of him.

QUESTION: I never thought of it cause we've only talked to one other person who talked about their pet. But I never thought about.. yours, Tarfu you never probably had to worry about going on a mission and not coming back. So..

ANSWER: Oh there would have been a thousand people that would take him you know.. wanted him. But when I did go on a mission I remember several times.. particularly in the grape orchards in Italy. I'd to take him out of the airplane and sit him under a tree in the shade .. "say stay there Tarf". He wouldn't budge until I got back to the ground. He was almost human.

QUESTION: What were some of your missions and duties of what you were bombing?

ANSWER: Well I had a squadron most of the war, and then had staff duty intermittently in group headquarters. Of course I preferred the squadron work and fighting to anything else. We moved I think I figured.. 31 times during the course of World War II. At the invasion we

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landed at the capital of the country Port Lyautey And we straightened ourselves out at (Kasas?) near Casablanca for a few weeks and went to Tunisia and we're fighting Rommel til he came off the continent. And then went up Italy and into Germany all during the war and I stayed there until after VE Day, Victory in Europe.

The missions were varied. As I said we carried a lot of armament and a lot of machine gun firepower and we were tried to get Rommel and tried to get his tanks. Our machine guns didn't bother his tanks at all. It was a difficult thing to get them because you had to have that bomb right at the tank. So we'd go out in the dessert.. and his tanks would be rolling and we'd try to drop the bomb so they would lodge in the tracks of the tank or under the tank. It had the 5.. the 5 to 7 second delay so we could get out of the road when the bomb went off. The thing was, we flew quite low to do that and often we would come home with bad damage from the tank antennae. Sometimes we had them in our wings sometimes just a big cut in the wing where we'd hit the antennae.

QUESTION: When you're talking low, you mean real low.

ANSWER: Oh you know, in an airplane like that and with the experience and training we had.. we'd fly as low as 5-6 feet. We had to.. we had to raise up to get over the tank actually because we wanted to get that bomb under it. And we attacked enemy troop concentrations that way, It was devastating we'd carry different type of bombs, and we'd fly missions that got up in the alps.. we'd fly at 10 or 12 thousand feet level. And then we did night interdiction.. German's had a free highway at night.. and we had to stop them and we devised all kinds of plans and strategies to catch them at night.. and make the roads unusable for them.

QUESTION: So you actually did night flying then or did you try to destroy the roads during the day?

ANSWER: No the fighters took care of them during the day. They were pretty scarce on the highways during the day. But at night, as soon as it got dark they'd come in massive amounts. They had to get a lot of materials to supply their troops .. and we just try and devise strategies to rob them of the roads.. and get them on the roads.

QUESTION: Case now a days we have all this infrared technology and lasers but you were pretty much...

ANSWER: Well what we did.. just an example.. there is what you call a Link trainer and you pretend to fly an airplane and its an examination tool and has all the attributes of an airplane flying. You're right in a room and you sittin in it. And there are certain ways you can make blind landings that way and so on. Well we used the audio of that machine at one time ..and had the.. calculated what point in space you had to drop a bomb to hit a certain target. And by means of audio from that machine we could fly that leg of a beam and at (inaudible) salvo our bombs or dropped them in a trail. It was quite accurate.. but you don't have radar and so on.. but we got along pretty well without it.

QUESTION: When you were doing the open highway, was that a high elevation bombing or were you back on the low level bombing?

ANSWER: We tried to get as low as we could. We were very skillful at acquiring night vision. Before we'd get in the plane we'd put red goggles on and we'd fly at night with red goggles and then have no light in the cockpit whatsoever and we could see ever so good when we took those goggles off. We had a visual purple in our eyes you know. And we could see

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until a flash of light would burn that off immediately. But we got started on the road maybe anyway at a fairly low level.. and then when you got fires going, you could use those for continuing your attack.

QUESTION: So if you have no lights on in your cockpit, what about your instruments, did you get enough vision that.. or you flew by the seat of your pants?

ANSWER: No the instruments were visual.. or visible. They were a non damaging color. They were infrared lights.

QUESTION: Was a lot of this technology and theories that were developed during World War II so you were..

ANSWER: We were doing it, yeah.

QUESTION: As you faced a new challenge?

ANSWER: Yes, yes.

QUESTION: Do you think that's some of what made America so successful, the creative minds like that?

ANSWER: There is no question about it you'd see it everywhere in the squadron. The armament people would come across ways to load the airplanes faster and better. And the maintenance people would make breakthroughs in repairing hydraulic systems. Intelligence people got very skillful in their analyses.. yes, American ingenuity was very instrumental in our success. Very proud of the people.

QUESTION: is there.. again our political climate has changed so much and with the wars that have happened in between when you went out on a mission do you face a moral dilemma at all or is it just can you separate it and say.. its just enemy or do you use some word or thought to remove people?

ANSWER: I'm glad you brought that up because I like to mention this. For a good part of the war I just had a burning hatred of the enemy, absolutely unreasoning hatred.. and I thought that's the way I had to be to fight well. And I think I was successful taking that war to them. But when Ernie Pyle stayed with me, do you know Ernie Pyle. Oh I was ah.. oh I guess second or third night.. he stayed in my tent because I didn't have any other place for him. And he said "Reg do you mind if I make a very personal observation of you, a criticism actually". I said "no I don't Ernie, I'll accept it certainly". And he said "You're ruining your life, you're corrupting yourself.. and I just hate to see you do it". I said "what do you mean". He said "you hate the enemy so bitterly", he said, "you're getting to be hateful". He said "I understand it". But he said "you notice me in the tent, I pray every morning on my knees and you hear me.. I pray for my wife.. pray for my country.. pray for the servicemen.... then pray for the German families, the Japanese families". He says, "do you know there are mother's and father's in Germany and Japan and Russia and so on.... just like yours". He said "you got to be professional you can't hate. You've got to understand that you've got to do the job, you've got to kill them, and kill them as best you can. But uh.. don't gloat in it and uh.. you might say a prayer for them after you get back".

That answers your question I think. I think he saved my life really... as a human being.. by criticizing me.

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QUESTION: Is that a thing that, then again it sounds like you did because you could have continued to be.. probably carried that on past the war. Did he give you a separation from war world.. to peace world.. so you could separate those two?

ANSWER: Well no but he uh.. it's attitudinal sort of thing. Instead of saying your enemy is a blood thirsty son of a bitch, you see him as a human being you have to kill because.. that's what you're doing.. that's for your country but don't take any gloating attitude out of it... come back and pray for his soul and be thankful you are safe. And its an attitude you carry peace and war. It just changed my life.

QUESTION: Boy, that's cause.. I've heard and read some of Ernie's.. heard of Ernie Pyle and read some of Ernie Pyle's material but for you to have a chance to meet Ernie Pyle who I've heard so many people talk about articles he's written and things that stood out in their mind from the war and to have him personally change your life.

ANSWER: Well that man had a horrible personal family life. You'd just almost cry to know about it. Quickly.. his wife was alcoholic, he got her to stop.. he came over seas.. she started again.. he went back divorced her, he said well that'll do it, it didn't do it.. so he went back and married her again and got her to stop. And it was just a burden on him every minute. And I was sure sorry to see him killed in the Pacific. He was with one of my West Point friends when it happened. A Japanese sniper got him.

QUESTION: Did you have anyone back home.. girlfriend, wife?

ANSWER: No, as a matter of fact, that's kinda one very great incentive for fighting. I knew that if I survived I would want to be a family man, have a wife and children. And I knew if we did win the war I wouldn't have an opportunity to do that the way I'd like to.

QUESTION: What was the best part of being in the service for you, what did you enjoy?

ANSWER: Our people that worked. I could mention a thousand things, about the wonderful people we had working. We had two men in the armament section. After we got through with war in Tunisia, the British of course that had been after Rommel, their army came up. And these two guys just went out and picked a fight with the brawny people from the dessert and beat hell out of them. The commander came to see me and said please keep those men home. And Lewis and Sinclair were their names.

Before I went over seas Sinclair was a staff sergeant and uh he actually drank too much and was..didn't (inaudible). I told him after the first deal I'm going to break you to private if this happens again, just know that. Well 3 or 4 months later he did it and came into me.. and pulled off his chevrons.. said I'll show you I can be as good a private as I was a staff sergeant. The mess sergeant pretty soon was telling how good he peeled the potatoes, washed the dishes and everything, and he worked himself back up. You know people.. are strange.. unusual people like that.

Another master sergeant, old sergeant Reins, headed up maintenance. some young lieutenants.. I guess I was a young lieutenant too, but I thought I was older. But some of them would call him pop like the airmen did. He came to me and said I don't like to be called pop by officers, he said I'm sergeant Reins and you're sir to me and that's the way it should be. Oh I loved it. I ate these lieutenants out. It was a hell of a good list.

QUESTION: What was the hardest part of the service for you?

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ANSWER: I guess once in a while you know you get to working more than you should and you have a.. numbing tiredness you just hardly couldn't work through it but it dropped off and you could go ahead but once in awhile that happened. But I didn't look for bad things you know I.. so I didn't have a.. I don't remember your question precisely.

QUESTION: What was the hardest part?

ANSWER: Oh the incidents that come.. like one of the airplanes couldn't get it's..couldn't get rid of its bombs. They came out over the field and.. I told them to go out and open the bomb bay, jiggle the airplane and so forth. And then I told them to go on up and bail out couldn't get rid of the bomb it was just (inaudible) by one hanger in the bomb bay.. and uh.. they came by and jiggled the last time and the bomb blew up. And it was hard picking up the fingers and toes.. and bones of these people because I wouldn't let the combat troops do it. The non-combat troops cleaned up the remains but uh.. you know they're all my friends, pretty sad to see them go that way.

QUESTION: Then being a squadron leader was it your responsibility to write home to these kids parents?

ANSWER: Oh yeah.

QUESTION: I can't even imagine having to.. what you say or how you begin to write a letter to somebody that...

ANSWER: Well It's awfully hard. One cardinal thing is to be honest and as complete as you can without being unnecessarily cruel. They want to know the details. They want to be told.. you know authoritatively anyway.

QUESTION: Would they write you back sometimes?

ANSWER: Yes, yes.. quite often as a matter of fact.. very nice letters.

QUESTION: I know Hollywood always makes it that they want to know he was a good kid or.. is that the types of things people in reality want to know or is that Hollywood?

ANSWER: No that's true, that's what they want to know. Before you write a letter you uh.. it was my custom to get 2 or 3 of his friends or associ., close associates.. and uh talk to them. incorporate things they observed, experienced with him.. made it more authentic.

QUESTION: So you could give them both the sadness of it, the tragedy, but also here's this living...

ANSWER: Yeah, yeah. One of the things you talked about was American ingenuity. You can't believe how we lived on the dessert in Tunisia for awhile. We had no parts.. no aluminum.. nothing to repair the aircraft, we were getting the hell shot out of us. And the maintenance Sargent found out some of the tin cans were best and put them on the wings. Riveted it instead of aluminum and it worked for awhile and when we finally got the aluminum we put it on. You know those rascals could just do anything.

QUESTION: You know the interesting thing, its good to hear you talk about those people because in Andy Rooney's book he talked about some veterans that haven't talked about World War II for a variety of reasons. Some because it was too hard, but there were some that felt being a maintenance person or supply person they come back and there were all

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these parades for the heroes and they said we weren't on the front we weren't this or that. But you know the way you describe them which is true they were just as important as the person on the front line because without.. all of this all that could have never happened.

ANSWER: That's true. Now a.. the units in the Air Corp, and I assume that's true in the army, navy and marines (inaudible) during the war they got so they were pretty bare bones. If they got a job didn't quite require a man's time and skill, they'd incorporate part of that job with others and get rid of the person. You know because you don't want people working half the time. That is a bad morale factor. You want people working like hell. Working their butts off, and that's.. that's how you have a happy unit in war time.

QUESTION: I can see, I never thought about that, where in two ways that would cause a morale problem. One is people looking and saying well there is so and so they are sitting around and I'm working hard over here and then you're bored if you're working half-time and you get in trouble. The morale must have been, was that a challenge to keep morale up because of our patriotism we knew we were doing?

ANSWER: I don't know. I really didn't have morale problems in my units. I think because we were working hard.. and I was careful to let everybody know what we were doing. If a man were loading machine guns, he wanted to know what happened you know, or man in the mess hall.. so I briefed them very frequently on our operations and I think that helped them.

QUESTION: Now your rank was what again, what was your rank at this time?

ANSWER: Light colonel.

QUESTION: And so you're twenty some year old and you have these "young" kids who are eighteen, nineteen, twenty, underneath you, did they come and console with you, did they try to talk with you personally or did everybody kinda keep it in their own mind. I mean average everyday stuff. Just to say you know I'm lonely out here or homesick. I miss my wife and kids and having a tough time.

ANSWER: No, I didn't get too much of that. Once in awhile they'd come in. We had doctors in our squadrons, flight surgeons that became absolutely wonderful consultants to people who had any physical or mental handicap. Then our chaplain where he was.. Catholic, Protestant or some denomination. It didn't make a bit of difference. They were important to the people.. and uh.. I think they took a lot of flak. I just don't know. It's part of their work anyway.

QUESTION: What did your group talk about if you had down time, if you did have down time, home or, again the movies make it that all that these service people talked about is women but I've found that is really not.

ANSWER: You know I, my memory isn't as sharp as it was fifty years ago but uh.. God I don't remember anybody dwelling on women. I just don't. Sure we'd have a joke about them and this and that but as far as sitting around moaning about women I didn't see it. I guess people weren't working hard enough if they had time to do that.

QUESTION: What about.. once again its tough if you moved to thirty one different spots and were constantly working, but was there some stress relief or fun times that helped your squadron with..?

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ANSWER: Oh yeah uh.. you really had a hard finding it during the Tunisian war. But you had Roman ruins back in the.. back country there. You had Arab sheep herders.. camel herders You could let your men have a little free time and go out and visit something like that. Well worth while and we'd try to get literature about the place we were you know, so people could read about it.

Sometimes they got lectures. Now in Africa it was interesting we were working a lot with the free French, and we got a lot of our bombing information from General De Gaulle. Saw him a couple times there, and Eisenhower came down while we were living in.. actually under ground.. and put his feet up on my field desk and talked awhile. Those were interesting occasions.

QUESTION: Was he from what you saw of him a nice guy?

ANSWER: Who?

QUESTION: Eisenhower?

ANSWER: Oh he was a.. course he was fitting himself to the companies, but he was like an old shoe you know. I kept that desk he put his feet on until.. we had to uh.. fly a (inaudible) change of station from Italy to France and I lost it. I was going to keep that the rest of my life.

QUESTION: So even then..] cause it's interesting there are a lot of things that historically for us, are names that stick out or places but when they're happening aren't necessarily noticed but when Eisenhower came you knew this was Eisenhower.

ANSWER: I'll tell you why.. We were operating not at an airfield. It was about a square mile of bunch grass.. sand.. little.. no big stones. We didn't have such things as a runway. Our aircraft were exposed, we were bombed and strafed every day or two.. and we lived underground. There was an old irrigation system Arabs had there. We plugged that up and lived underground really. So we had some resourcefulness there too. Everybody knew how to make a.. build their own stoves and everything else.

QUESTION: Again resourcefulness happens in many ways. I've heard of bomber pilots flying off to altitudes to make ice cream in a garbage can and I've heard of other ones that would take their beer if they wanted to cool it put their beer in a sock and dip it in airplane fuel and then fly it around and as it sublimed off it would cool beer so everybody was finding ingenious ways to do everything and to fight the war but also

ANSWER: Well, the first time we got beer ration in (Tulet?) it was a big one because we didn't have it for months. I sent an airplane up with all the beer it could hold and brought it down cold. You know it.. sure it was expensive to the country but I'll tell you it sure did the troops good.

QUESTION: The one thing nobody can tell me is what kind of beer they had?

ANSWER: Various types really, yeah.

QUESTION: Because I know cigarettes everybody talks about are Lucky Strikes and Camels.

ANSWER: They had the major brands there.

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QUESTION: Sounds like lot of the guys say we're just glad to finally have a beer who cares what

ANSWER: Do you remember where you were when you heard the peace treaty was being signed?

QUESTION: Yeah. I forget the name of the little village. It was in France.. and we were flying missions in Germany over Berchtesgaden and so on, where Hitler's retreat was and that's where and when we heard it.

ANSWER: Was that, I mean do you feel like we were at war the last minute and we're done with war now or what was the mood there?

QUESTION: We had the Japs to deal with yet you know, the war wasn't finished, it was a big part of it but we didn't feel the war was over, I didn't anyway.

ANSWER: Did you get sent to the South Pacific then or?

QUESTION: No, I was anxious to go there, but I was sent to the Pentagon. I didn't like the Pentagon.

ANSWER: How come?

QUESTION: Oh I just.. It's the capital of the world, Washington, the Pentagon is a big part of it.. but after having been flying and free you know.. it was a very confining thing.

I learned that the a lot of the material people were being sent to Harvard Business school to learn how to handle their supplies and buy equipment and so on and so on. And I had the temerity to write a memorandum to the chief of staff ,saying it appeared he had a wonderful program for officers that were handling materials and I didn't see a commensurate program for officers handling people, which was a much more important commodity. I got out of the Pentagon and sent to Harvard Business School.

QUESTION: Somebody didn't appreciate your letter?

ANSWER: Matter of fact it got to a lot of people, It was released.. they got the word and it started a flow of other than material people.

QUESTION: Do you, this is kind of a two-part question:

Have the history books left something out of the history of World War II and is there a message that needs to be left to future generations that you and I never meet.

ANSWER: I can't answer that question and I'll tell you why. I have never seen a war movie, I've never read a history book of World War II and I'm not going to do it just to ah.. what's the reason? I have no reason to do it and I haven't done it.

QUESTION: Do you think it is important for someone that's wasn't there to read a history book?

ANSWER: I sure do, yes it shouldn't be forgotten and I haven't forgotten it. I haven't chosen to.. to expose myself to.. to the feelings I would have to see a war movie or to read the history. I have deep feelings.

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QUESTION: Patriotic?

ANSWER: I don't know, maybe it's selfish, I just think reading and looking at movies would make me remember moments I don't want to live again about the war cause that's what they are trying to do to the audience is show them what war is like and I don't need that.

QUESTION: You already know. It sounds like something that is best put behind. You did your job; you did your duty.

ANSWER: I feel that way, yeah.

QUESTION: Did you end up in Korea too?

ANSWER: Yes, I went to Korea for two years. Actually I was going to get out of the service and at the same time I was putting in my papers the Chief of Staff called me and said he was aware of what I'd done in World War I to interdict aircraft at night and they had the same problem in Korea and would I go? Of course I went and stayed two years.

QUESTION: What did you do after the war?

ANSWER: Which war?

QUESTION: All of the wars? Did you deal with Viet Nam too or just?

ANSWER: Well, I was Director of Operations in the air force for two years while Viet Nam was on. I went over there several times of course. After I got I got out of the service I worked for the water park company, private utility, electricity and gas about a billion dollar business and enjoyed twelve years with them. I was anxious to kind of apply some of the Harvard teachings and get a taste of civilian life too and of course at that time they made you retire at age 65 so I reached 65 in 1981 so I haven't had a paying job since.