

Transcription: Bruce Batchelor

Today is Thursday, August 20th, 2009. My name is James Crabtree, and I'll be interviewing Mr. Bruce Batchelor by telephone. I'm at the General Land Office headquarters, Stephen F. Austin Building, in Austin, Texas, and Mr. Batchelor is at his home. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board, Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you for letting us interview you today. It's an honor for us. Usually the first question we always start with is to ask you to tell us a little bit about where you were born, a little bit about your boyhood, your family and that sort of thing, your life before you went in the military.

Bruce Batchelor: OK, yeah, this is Bruce Batchelor, Bruce B. Batchelor. The "B" stands for Bingham. My great grandmother Bingham's family founded Binghamton, New York. I'm a P.E., a C.S.P. and a C.I.H. It's a professional engineer, certified safety professional, and a board certified industrial hygienist, retired of course. I'm 88 years old. I'll be 89 in a couple of weeks. I should say I'm 89 years old. OK, so much, yeah. I was born 9/12/20, Springfield, Massachusetts, and we moved to Texas. I'm not a native Texan, but we moved to Texas in 1923 and '24 to Fort Worth, and then that was a real hot, the hottest on record I think was 1923, and my mother couldn't stand Texas heat so they moved back to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and we lived there until 1935. Then we moved to Columbus, Ohio, where I went to high school, and then of course World War II came along.

And sir, did you have any brothers or sisters?

Bruce Batchelor: Yeah, I had an older brother, Kenyon, who was four years older than me, and then I had a younger brother, Richard, that was 15 years younger than us. Ken was supervisor of the cold roll mill Allegheny & Ludlum Steelworks in Leechburg, Pennsylvania, until his retirement. He stayed there, he worked there through the war. The Navy wouldn't let him enlist and made him stay in his job and produce stainless steel for the Navy.

Yeah, that was definitely important.

Bruce Batchelor: My younger brother, I was a pilot during the war and he was crazy to be a pilot, so after the war he joined the aviation cadets and became a helicopter and multi engine pilot and he went to work for TWA, and he retired I think it's only a couple of years ago. He was a TWA pilot. Anyway, I had an older brother and a younger brother.

You said sir you were living was it in Columbus, Ohio?

Bruce Batchelor: Yeah, we moved there in 1935 and my folks, of course I left during the war, but I enlisted, OK, here, I enlisted in the Air Corps Aviation Cadets in May 1942, and I was inducted at Fort Hays, Columbus, Ohio, February of '43. They had a long backlog and they said we won't call you. You go back home and we'll call you when we're ready, and I was home for one year. They didn't call me until February of '43. I graduated in Class 43K Aviation Cadets, Turner Field, Albany, Georgia, twin engine pilot, to Dodge City, Kansas for a specialized twin engine, Martin B-26, B-25, P-38, C-46 and so on, and my MOS, I completed Dodge City, my MOS was 1082, specialized twin engine, and that was on the Martin B-26 Marauder.

Sir, to go back a second, do you remember where you were when you learned that Pearl Harbor had been bombed?

Bruce Batchelor: Oh, I was in Columbus. I graduated from high school in '39, and I was working, I went to work at Curtis Wright. They built a plant there, the first hell divers were built in Fort Worth. In fact, the first plane we built was an SO-3C1 Seagull. It was a Navy observation plane. I had a HAM radio license. I was WAQCS, and my buddies were a couple of older buddies, were made supervisor of radio and electrical, and of course I was the first one they hired. My clock number at Curtis Wright was 1018. 10 was final assembly, and I was the 18th one in final assembly. Anyway, I graduated and went to Dodge City for a B-26 transition, graduating class 442B April '44. I was first pilot on a B-26, and they sent us to Barksdale replacement training unit to go overseas. Well, we were there for about two weeks and they called a bunch of us aside, about 50 of us, and they said we got a secret mission you guys have been selected for, and they put us on a train and we went to Kansas City and I don't know where, but anyway next thing you knew we were in Canada, and we ended up in Syracuse, New York, came back down. We had been reassigned to activate the second combat cargo group in Syracuse, New York, and I was assigned 5th Squadron, 1st Pilot with a brand new C-47. Boy it smelled like, if you've ever been in a new airplane, it has a fragrance like a new car. You'll never forget it. It was brand new. It even had the cigarette lighter in the dashboard. It still had the cigarette lighter in the dashboard, brand new. Anyway, we flew those nonstop until I guess it was about August. Then they sent a bunch of us TDY to Polk Field, North Carolina. The 101st Airborne Paratroopers were getting their first drop, and we dropped them, there was about five or six airplanes went down there, and we dropped 3,500 paratroopers of the 101st Airborne, including their two-star general Davis, in a 48-hour around the clock exercise. Oh, it was something. Anyway we got that done and they went overseas, and we did nothing until finally one day they said OK, all you new guys, pack it up, you're being shipped out, and of course they never told you where. We got on a train and went to California, and we boarded the General Mitchell troop ship, and nobody knew but we finally learned later that we were headed to Australia. From there we went up to Bombay, and from Bombay we got shipped by cattle train across to Calcutta, and then we got shipped into China. We were reassigned to the 14th Air Force troop carrier squadron, 69th Chinese American composite wing, at Chengkung, China. We finally got into China and went to the flight line, and this Captain showed men on our plane, and we showed him our orders, and he said the 27-troop carrier squadron is over there somewhere. He was pointing to the flight line. So we took off and about two hours later, we found the 27 troop carrier, and man, they were so glad to see us because when we showed up, there was about 20 of us, when we showed up, that meant a lot of them got to go home. They treated us like kings. They rolled out the canned bacon and fried eggs and everything. We did resupply. Well, people don't realize it, but the first B-29's to bomb Tokyo came from Chegntu, China. We didn't have the islands conquered in those days and we weren't sure we were going to have island bases, and the only way we knew back then to get the B-29's across to Tokyo was from China. That's why we were in there, and of course Claire Chennault was the general put in charge, and he had field teams out that radioed in all kinds of information. We resupplied those teams. We took 'em out and dropped 'em, we picked 'em up and brought 'em back and we resupplied them with food and all the necessities they needed and that was our job was to resupply the intelligence teams that Chennault had out in the field, all over China. A lot of them were behind the Japanese line.

Tell us what that was like flying those missions and flying behind Japanese lines and that sort of thing.

Bruce Batchelor: Well, this was 1945, and the Japanese were pretty well subdued. They didn't bother us, I found out later that the Japs wanted to go home worse than we did. Like for

example, I was flying down over Changshaw one time. I was out on a trip, I was flying over Changshaw and I was out with another plane, there were two of us and he was way ahead of me, and I was flying down south and I was all alone, and I said now what would I do if I met a Japanese airplane out here? And I looked around and there was an overcast up there, a couple of thousand feet above me, and I flew up into that overcast and I went through it. It was about 50 feet thick, maybe 100. When I came out it was sunny bright on top, but I could go down into the overcast and I couldn't see the ground, and I figured that would be safer flying just under that overcast, and if I did see a Japanese plane I could pull up into it and it would be harder for him to find me. Anyway, I was flying under this overcast and it wasn't 10 minutes later, off to my left I saw a plane way down at treetop level, a single engine plane, and it was painted snow white, and I said uh-oh, we don't have, none of our airplanes are painted so white. Japs were all painted, so almost all of them are painted, and I looked and I could see the red balls on the wings. Oh God. I immediately pulled up into that overcast, and flying along and I got on the radio immediately and I called Smart Guy, Smart Guy, fighter control, enemy aircraft sighted and told 'em where I was over the river south of Changshaw. Well, I learned later that the fighter control had two P-51 pilots and two P-38 pilots that were on duty that morning, and they said when that radio, when my radio broke in, he said they were all playing cards. They said that card table flipped up into the air and all four of them hit their planes, and cranked up and came out to where I was. The first one out there was a P-51 pilot. I talked to him later. He said he cranked up his airplane, slammed on full take-off power and took off, and he said he left on full take-off power all the way and he was in sight of me in about 7 minutes, and he said his air speed was reading 465 on full power. Those guys, they wanted a Japanese kill worse than anything, and anyway, he came on the radio, but in the meantime, when I was up in the overcast, I said well I better, I'm so curious, I didn't hear anything or see anything, I said I'm gonna drop down and take a look around, which was a big mistake. I dropped out of the overcast and I was looking around and dead in front of me, below me, was a Japanese, it was the third generation Hawanishi-Hine – I forget now -

Kawasaki?

Bruce Batchelor: No, it was the third generation, it was one of those huge single engine planes that they made to reach the B-29's. Kawanishi. Anyway, I think it was a Kawanishi Hine, and I was right on his back, and the pilot had a brand new, it looked like a shiny brown leather, he was a little bit overdressed with a white scarf and helmet and all, and he turned his head and looked at me and grinned, and I could see his gold teeth shining in the sun. I immediately pulled back up into the overcast, and I thought I've got about 4 or 5 minutes to live, and nothing happened. Then all of a sudden I'm talking to this P-51 pilot on the radio and I told him, I said I was just under the overcast and I was almost on this guy's back, and I pulled up in. He said well I've been above the overcast and below it and he said I haven't seen anything. They looked around and looked around, and so they didn't find him. I don't know where he went, and he must've been a high ranking, the uniform and the gold teeth told me he must've been a samurai of high rank that was out there playing with that airplane because there was no gun, obviously it didn't have any guns on it or he would've shot me down I would think. But he might've come over from Japan just to look around and fly back again, you know. But anyway they didn't find him, and I went on and completed my [mission], and this one P-38 pilot, he said I'm gonna stay with you, I'm gonna follow you through your mission and be sure that he doesn't come back, and the other three guys went back home. We completed the mission and came back, but come to find out, the next day I learned one of the P-51 pilots was gonna outsmart this Jap. He said he beat it. He must've come from Changshaw, so he went back and there's kind of a mountain ravine right around there and he went back in that mountain ravine and he did figure 8's and he waited, and

he was in sight of the landing pattern for the field. He said he was back there doing figure 8's, and sure enough he said here comes a big white Kawanishi Hine, and he went through the traffic pattern and he went around to land, and he said when I saw him on his final approach, he said I broke out of my figure 8, put on full power, and got in behind him just about when his wheels were going to touch the runway. He was about 10 feet off the runway and he said I opened all six .50 cal machine guns and he exploded right there over the runway. In other words, he waited for that Jap to come in and land, which he did eventually, and blasted him. Anyway, that was the story.

That's amazing.

Bruce Batchelor: And I know it's true. So much for that. That was as close as I ever got. I always, thinking now, I survived the war, I never scratched the paint on a military plane, and I never killed anybody. I never killed anybody, not me or any of my friends or any Japanese or anybody. None. I actually saved people. I counted up one time, it was over 40 people I can count that I actually saved their life, and I can't brag of any machine gun wars or shooting, I'm not a C-47 ace, but at least I saved people. I didn't kill anybody but I saved a bunch from death. So that's my claim to fame for World War II I guess. Anyway, we were at Chikiyang flying an OSS trooper team. We didn't know it. You weren't even allowed to say OSS out loud, but we didn't know it but we were flying teams of Americans and American officers, and one of the missions I went into, they said they wanted to take this guy, and it was a paratrooper, he was a medic, he was a sergeant medic and they wanted me to take him to this station, it was an L-5 base, and drop him because there was a man there, an officer that had appendicitis and they said he only had a few more hours or days to live. So I said sure. I took him out and the sergeant jumped. He parachuted down and he talked to me on the radio and he said oh man, he said this guy, he's gray death right now. He said if you don't get into a hospital, he said he's only got three or four hours to live. I said oh boy. It was just a grass L-5 strip and I'm flying a C-47. I said well I'm gonna try to, let me take some measurements and look around here. I said I'm gonna try to come in and get him. He said OK. So I came in the best I could. Of course I had an empty airplane, an empty C-47 on a hot summer day and it'll float like mad, and it doesn't have any spoilers to pull like a CG-4 glider. You pull spoilers on a glider and it'll just fall out of the air like a rock, and that's it, you're down. But the 47 floats forever on a hot summer day in an empty plane. Anyway, I put down full flaps and I came in as best I could and it was too short. We went down and I jammed on the brakes. I locked the wheels. I said well maybe I can blow out the tires and that'll stop us. But we were on grass and the tires didn't blow out and we went right up to the edge of the field and stopped, and I looked out my window and I was looking down on the tops of green banana trees, and I said oh my, it's about a 50-100 foot drop right off the end of that runway. I said my God, and we got out of that airplane and my landing gear was two feet back from the edge of that going over. We lacked two feet of going over that damn runway down into the banana trees. But we were OK, but we couldn't, there was only four of us and there was about three of them on the ground, and we couldn't pull, there was no way we could roll it. An empty C-47 still weighs about 29,000 pounds, almost 15 tons, and five men can't move it. This one young fellow, he was about 20 years old and he was wearing a white shirt and khaki pants, and this was out in the middle of the jungle, and you wouldn't normally see a Chinese man wearing a white shirt. He came up and he introduced himself, he spoke English, and he said I'm so and so, he said I'm the mayor of this area. I said great. He said I think I can help you. He talked to about a 10-year-old boy there with him and he talked to him in Chinese and the boy took off up a pathway off of the runway there that I didn't even see. He took off on the run, and he said it'll be about 10 or 15 minutes, we'll just wait. I said OK. And it was a first lieutenant that had the appendicitis and boy, he looked like he was already dead. I

says oh boy. To make a long story a little shorter, we heard this sing-song chant and out of that pathway the boy went up, here comes about 50 Chinese and they had a big 3-inch hozer rope over their shoulder. He had gone down to the nearest dock and got these canal boat boys and their big rope, and we put a loop around the tail wheel of that C-47 and those 30 or 40 Chinese with that rope over their shoulder, and they called out signals and they pulled and stretched the rope, and then they rolled that airplane back about 30 or 40 feet where I could turn it around and take off.

Wow.

Bruce Batchelor: Yeah. And they were all done and they untied the rope and boy, they were back up, went back up that path singing the chant, you know. I said oh my God, and I told them, you sure saved the day for us, and I had a Schaeffer pen and pencil set that my mother had given me. It was gold leaf, it was that real nice brown and gold Schaeffer pen and pencil in my shirt pocket, and I noticed this guy looking at it and boy, and he couldn't keep his eyes off of it. I said well, how can I reward? I had about \$30 American and probably a couple hundred Yen in my pocket. I gave him all my money. I said we want to reward you and I gave him the money I had. But he was still looking at that, and it finally dawned on me, he wanted that pen and pencil set. I gave it to him because that was a set in the shirt pocket, that means in China that you can read and write. That's a big sign of an educated person. Anyway, and man he was so happy. I said I'll give you my wristwatch, but it's an American issue and Chinese are not allowed to have American issue stuff. But he wanted the pen and pencil set because that wasn't military issue. Anyway he was real happy and everybody was happy. We loaded the guy on the plane and I flew, I took off and made a direct return to Kunming, and I didn't call in on the radio and ask permission. I just took off for Kunming because I said I've got a casualty onboard and if anybody gives me any trouble I'll just shoot two double red flares and they'll have to clear me into any field. So on the way back I called home base and told them what we were doing and said I was bringing this guy back and he only had a few hours to live. I called Kunming and told them we had a first lieutenant almost dead with appendicitis and to meet me with an ambulance, and oh boy, they cleared me right in, pulled off the runway and parked and this ambulance drove up and they had that guy out of my plane before I could shut off the left engine. They took him off to the hospital. I didn't hear anything about it. Everybody was happy when I went back to Chityang. In fact they loaded me up with some gasoline and some other things to go back to Chityang, and about a month later, I was back at Chengkung in the barracks in Basha one day, and this first lieutenant, and boy he was in a shiny, bright uniform and he looked like brand new, just come out of the store. Anyway, he said, and he was looking for Bruce Batchelor, and I said yeah, I'm Bruce Batchelor. He said do you remember me? I said no, I can't say I remember you. He said I'm the guy that had appendicitis. He said you saved my life. I said well, I did what I thought I had to do and I'm glad you're recovered. You look OK. And we talked a little, and I never did write down his name. I guess the excitement at the time, can't tell you who he was. But anyway he came back and thanked me for flying him back to Kunming and that made my day.

That's a great story. Let me ask you a little bit. What was your crew like? Were you with them through most of the war?

Bruce Batchelor: Oh, we traded airplanes. We had about 7 or 8 airplanes and we rotated them around. I never did learn the radio operators. There was one radio operator we had that would later in our old China hands group, I remember him, but the crew chiefs and radio operators and most of the time I flew with Don Armstrong was my copilot, and we'd switch off and he'd fly

and then I'd be copilot. But I remember, I've got a list of the 27 troop carrier people, and two or three of them, or several of them we've met in reunions and all that, but anyway, yeah, well now, see we were at Chityang when they dropped the atom bomb.

Yes sir, tell us a little bit about that, how they told you and what your thoughts were and that sort of thing.

Bruce Batchelor: Well, we didn't know a thing about it. We were at Chikiyang and I'll tell you what actually happened. We were at Chikiyang which was the furthest, the most easterly – wait a minute, I'm getting my east and west wrong – we were the closest to the Japanese lines of any of the bases. We went down there with a couple of airplanes and we flew out of Chikiyang because it would save gasoline coming all the way back from Chengkung which was oh God, a whole afternoon flight, about 500-600 miles away. It would save gasoline to just stay there which we did in a tent. One night, I guess it was late afternoon, and they said all pilots go to your planes and wait for a signal to evacuate. They said the Japanese are about 15 miles up the road and they're coming this way, and we've got to evacuate immediately. They said take only GI's in uniform and no foot lockers and no barracks bags. Take only personnel in uniform, no Chinese and no foot lockers and no barracks bags, and load the plane and take off when you're told. Stay in the airplane ready to crank the engines and take off. OK, we did that and we stayed there and it went and came and got night time, and midnight, and it was, oh, it came morning and it hit. It was daylight. I don't remember what time. It was about 7 or 8 o'clock. It was just daylight and we heard the news that they said the evacuation is off. They said the Japanese stopped and dug in last night. I said oh, that's great. And then about 30 minutes later, they said, they told us that we had dropped the atom bomb, and I got to thinking -

Did you know what that meant when they said that?

Bruce Batchelor: Well, I didn't know what the atom bomb was, but they said it had destroyed the whole city of Hiroshima, and anyway, I got to thinking, they were advancing, they were gonna take Chikiyang, and suddenly they stopped and dug in, and then the next morning they dropped the atom bomb, and they knew, I still think the Japs knew something we didn't, see what I'm saying? Because the Japs had been in Shanghai and in China on the coast for 10 years, and the Japs had perfect intelligence of everything that went on. They knew when we went to the bathroom. I mean their intelligence was way better than ours because they'd been there that long, and the Chinese would get paid for telling about the Americans, you know. Anyway, I turned on my radio right away, my plane radio. We had a HAM and I knew how to work all the radios, and I turned on my receiver and I was listening around, and sure enough, I got a broadcast from Japan. The lady spoke perfect English. I don't know if she was Japanese or American, and she was giving this interview. She was interviewing a lady that survived the bomb, and she was telling the story about it and she was actually on the air, and it was first-hand over the radio information that I was getting. It was fascinating. In fact, most, I don't even think it's supposed to be told now, but that's a story in itself. After the surrender, we were authorized to go into Shanghai and pick up American prisoners, that had been prisoners during the war, and I was one of the first ones into Shanghai Kangwan Air Base, because we were right there. We were closest, and it didn't take us long to fly into Shanghai. I went in and I was looking at the runways, and when I landed at Kangwan, the runway next to mine, the one I landed on had big old bomb creators all over it still, and mine had been cleaned and swept clean, you know. Anyway, we went in there and taxied around, and here comes a brand new, Dodge gas truck, painted kind of African brown, that white tan the Japanese used, but it said Dodge right on the front and it was brand new, shiny Dodge gas truck, and this Japanese lieutenant jumped off and

he came over and he spoke better English than I did. Come to find out, he said that they wanted to gas the plane? We said no, we're not supposed to take any gas. It may be a sabotage. He said OK, no problem. He said I went to school in LA. He went to college in LA and he was telling all about it, and he said some of these poor guys have been here 10 years. He said man, and he's the one that said we're waiting to get home. We want to go home worse than you guys do. We had a good little visit there, and they were carrying arms and sidearms. They had their rifles and he had his sidearms. I said how come you're still carrying guns? I said the war is supposed to be over. He said oh yeah, but he says you know, these Chinks will steal anything. He was telling me all about it. He was carrying his sidearms for protection against the Chinese. Anyway we loaded up. We got some guys and we flew back. But it was interesting. That was my last doing in China. Then we came back and got ready to go home which took about three months if I remember.

During this time, sir, were you married or did you have a girlfriend back in the States that you were corresponding with?

Bruce Batchelor: Yeah, I wasn't married, no. I was only 23 or 24, I was 24 years old I guess, and I met this nice lady in Texas. In fact I'm married to her right now. She's sitting in the other room. We've been married for 62 or 63 years, and we married after I came home in '46. I finally got back to the States in '46 about April, and we got married that fall, and we've been living together. We've got one daughter and she's in Austin here. She's the director of the Office of Disciplinary Appeals for the Texas Supreme Court. She's an attorney and her husband is also an attorney, and he had his own law firm for several years. After we retired, we hung around Mobile for a few years and then decided we better move to Austin to be close to Chris and her family.

Now you said you had met your wife before you went overseas in World War II?

Bruce Batchelor: Yeah, I met her back when I graduated from B-26 flying school in Dodge City, back about April of '44. I was sent down to San Antonio and I got on the train, and when the train came through Temple, Texas, there was a whole bunch of little kids and people on there, and there was myself and another officer, and we got on the train when it started, so we had two facing seats, so we kind of blocked them to keep the little kids out of them, you know what I mean? And we were sitting there and it came through Temple, Texas, and these two girls got on, and I said wow, how about that! And they came down looking for a place to sit, and of course the seats were all taken, and when we saw these girls coming, we pulled our feet off of the chair and offered them to sit, and they said OK, fine. So these two nice looking ladies sat down and they were going to San Antonio also, so we rode all the way down to San Antonio and got acquainted with these two girls, and the one that I chose, her name was Wanda Lee Dunlap. She was the one I married in '46. We corresponded all during the war of course.

That's great. How often were you able to get letters when you were in China?

Bruce Batchelor: Oh it was very good, see, because they flew in and out of the hub. They flew in and out every day, and almost every mail, mail was pretty fast. It would take about two weeks I guess, and when the weather was bad, there would be two or three days when there wouldn't be any mail at all, but then you would get two or three letters the next time they would come in. The mail was quite good in and out of China at that time. So I didn't have any trouble. In fact, I've still got her letters in a big bundle in a box here.

That's great. Did she know when you were coming home? Was she able to meet you when you got back?

Bruce Batchelor: Yeah, I only had 65 points after the war, and a lot of guys had been there two or three years. They had over 100 points and of course they got priority going home. My priorities, it took me after the war, well the war ended in August 6th or 7th or 8th whenever I think it was, after the second atom bomb they ended the war. The Japanese gave up, and that was the last of August, or mid-August. I didn't get home until April, so that's how long I had to wait. I finally got home, but it was a long wait.

What were your missions like in between the end of the war and before you got to go home? What type of assignments were you carrying out during that time?

Bruce Batchelor: Well, we were closing up, they started closing up bases and we were moving, we flew GI's back to Chang Kung, guys that had a lot of points, you know. I flew several plane loads of guys up to Ceyon or up to Chengtu, or various other places, and pick up GI's that had been there two or three years and they were priority going home. We'd fly 'em back to Kunming and then they would put them on a C-54 and take 'em back into India. So after the war, most all I did was pick up GI's, and boy they had duffle bags and foot lockers. I overloaded a plane one time and didn't know it. Boy, I had a heck of a time. I was up at Luling I think it was, it was a B-29 base. It was a 14,000-foot runway. It was wide enough for three B-29's to take off in formation, and that was the same way up at Chengtu. Their runway was about 12 or 14,000 feet long, and they would take three B-29's in formation, a lead man and a man on each wing, and take them off and head straight for Japan to save fuel. So I could almost land my C-47 crossways on a runway up there. But anyway, that's the way it was. Then finally when it came our turn to go home, we flew into Kunming, and the warlords, the Communist warlords had already moved in, and they said OK, take you, take your bag. They let us take a duffle bag and carry bag over your shoulder, and leave the airplane, which we did, and they made sure that we took nothing of value. They just put us on – I came back in a C-54, and we were glad to leave because the Chinese nationalists were already being run out of that area, you see what I mean? We got back and everything was in good order as far as we were concerned. We didn't have any problem. We stayed in India, we stayed in Calcutta waiting on a tip. Oh, that was another one. They finally put us aboard it was a Marine Panther. It was an older ship and it was war weary. It was headed up the river and it couldn't turn at the dock. They had to leave the dock after we loaded it up. They had to leave the dock and back down the river to a turning basin, and then go in that turning basin and turn around and then head down the river bow first, you know. Well we were in that, they got it backed down. The current of the river backed it down and they kept it, and we went into the turning basin, and while we were in there, coming out, the Fisk Victory, a regular victory ship, the Fisk Victory came by bow first, and got in front of us, went down ahead of us. And they were laughing. We could holler to them and we were close enough to holler across, and they said sorry boys, we had to leave you here, but we're gonna go out the river first. So anyway, the Fisk Victory went out ahead of us, and we learned later I guess it was the next morning, we went out the river and into the Bay of Bengal there, and we heard that the Fisk Victory had struck a floating Japanese mine and went down in about 10 minutes and there was only about half of the people on board survived. So the Fisk Victory passing us in the, if we hadn't had to turn around, we would've probably hit that mine instead of the Fisk Victory.

Yeah, that's fate there.

Bruce Batchelor: Yeah, we said oh boy. Anyway, the old Marine Panther got us back to Seattle, and it was pretty wild. We hit a storm and the ship was rolling like it was going to turn over, and I talked to one of the petty officers and I asked him, I said what's this ship ballasted for? He said it's ballasted for 30 degree rolls. And I said well what are we rolling? He said well so far we've only rolled up to 29 degrees. And I said wow, this thing could still turn over. He said you notice I'm not in my bunk. He said I'm staying topside on the fan tail where I can survive if I have to. I said well I'm staying right here with you. So we spent that night on the fan tail with all our life preservers and water and food and everything we had over our shoulder. In case the ship turned over, we could maybe survive it. But anyway we got back to Seattle, and that was it. I tell you, it's a God wonder why I'm still here I tell people. I used to think I was, oh yeah, I was a second lieutenant during the whole war, and finally old Major Cooney whom my wife knew back in San Antonio, Major Cooney made me a first lieutenant before we went to Shanghai, just before the bomb was dropped. Otherwise I would've spent the whole war as a second lieutenant. I used to say I can sum up my World War II experience by being in the wrong place at the wrong time repeatedly. But then in these last few years where I'm going on to 89 years old and all of my war buddies are almost all gone or never came back from China, a lot of them never came back. I said I'm going to have to change my tune. I obviously must've been in the right place at the right time repeatedly because I'm still here and they are not. So anyway, God almighty, that's the way it was.

Yes sir. Well we really appreciate you taking the time to share your stories with us. Our whole goal is to save these memories for posterity so that future generations can hear them, historians, school children, that sort of thing.

Bruce Batchelor: OK, real quick, I'll read the last of this after the war here. OK, Batchelor, discharged April 1946 with the Air Medal one oak leaf cluster and the Distinguished Flying Cross, who later received the Liberation of China Medal No. 17638 from Nationalist China Government on Formosa. September '46, Batchelor married Wanda Lee Dunlap, San Antonio, one daughter, Christine McKeeman, attorney, Austin, Texas, two grandsons, one granddaughter, actually graduated University of Texas on the GI Bill and employed by Convair General Dynamic Fort Worth as senior flight test engineer on the B-36, B-58, F-111 and F-16, was active in military reunions and was past president of his 27th Troop Carrier Foundation. Batchelor is still active in HAM radio, that's a W5 Ally, Air Force Flyers Net Old China Hand's Net of which he was charter founding member in their first net control station. Two of the prominent active stations were W6EZV, General Curtis LeMay, and KU7G, Senator Barry Goldwater. Barry was an ATC captain and flew the C-54, the largest then four-engine transport C-54 over the hump in and out of China. Batchelor was registered professional engineer SF1168 California certified safety professional 4456, industrial hygienist E923, was qualified by OSHA to testify as expert witness on critical court cases when requested or required. Retired in 1982 in Mobile, Alabama, later relocated to current address in Mountain City, Texas, to be near our only daughter. OK, well that's it. That's pretty much the run down. I'll make a selection of copies. I've got a couple, I said I saved about 40 people, one of which was Lord Louis Mountbatten, and I'll send you that. That story's been published by American Heritage, a Forbes publication.

Yes sir, that's a great magazine. I've heard that. We would love to get a copy of that, sir, and we can put that on the web site along with your interview.

Bruce Batchelor: I will, and also I would, one day when we were coming back from a mission, it was the middle of the night, and the homing station in Kunming went off the air, the homing beam went off the air, and I was pretty far out but I was on the beam and I had my settings and

all, and I continued on my compass setting, and I finally sighted Kunming and got home, but we had two more airplanes were out and they were behind me. I knew they wouldn't have any homing beacon, so I took, and I said well I'm going to turn on my radio and make a homing beacon here, and I checked to see, I called operations and said I need a radio operator, and they said the radio operator is off in Khan Ming studying this new Laran, and they don't have any radio operator. I said OK, so Armstrong and I took off and he flew and I set up the radio on I think the homing beacon was on 700 KC. It was in the broadcast band at that time of 700, and everybody used their direction finders to use on it. Anyway, I circled Chengkung, and I transmitted, I set up my transmitter on AM 100 watts and I let out all my trailing antenna and I loaded it up on 700, and I called, I said all stations receiving this signal, the homing beacon in Kunming is off the air, and home on my signal. I'm circling Chengkung, and the weather was broken and cloudy, but I said the field lights are on and easily visible. Just home on my beacon. I repeated that three or four times in about a half an hour, and then we came in and landed, and I shut everything off and didn't hear anything about it. Well next day, I learned that both of our planes came in, no problems. So I said well that was good, but I didn't hear anything about whether they heard my signal or not. Nobody said a word. And I knew a guy up in Kunming who was in radio repair, and old guy that I went to school with, and I was up there one time and he told me, he said hey, that night you called on the beacon frequency, two C-109 Panthers came in, and he said they told me if they hadn't heard my signal, they would've missed it and had to bail out. I think they had about 10 men on each crew. They had gunners and everything on those tanker planes. Anyway, I saved two C-109 tankers and the two airplanes in our squadron, and later, about one of our first reunions, there was a guy, he said, you know, we hadn't met for a long time, what was his name – Ed Coke? Anyway, he got up and said I'm looking for the man who put out that radio signal when the Khan Ming beacon went off the air. And I said well I'm the guy, and I shook his hand. I remembered him but I said I'm the guy. He said I wanted to thank you. He said if you hadn't have put out that signal, he said we would've never made it and had to bail out and probably at least one or two of us would've never made it. I said well good, I'm glad to hear it. Anyway, he and I are good friends. He's still got an email address and we contact every once in a while, so he can verify that that was true. I said well how about the second plane? He said the second plane was Colonel Rasmussen, our CO, our commanding officer was in the second plane. He got in, too, obviously on my radio beam, but I never heard a word. He never said a word to me or nothing. The reason he said, one of the guys was joking one day, he said after we had done that, he said I heard Batchelor was supposed to get the Silver Star for putting out the radio beacon, and they were all laughing, oh sure, sure. Well it never happened, and I say maybe that's why our CO never put it in or never did anything. Anyway, that was the way it went. But I did save four airplanes that I know of, and there probably were others that I don't know of. But I say, that was one of the incidents of being able to use it. The radio operators were all set up at Kunming for Laran training and for some reason they let the beam go off the air.

Yeah, that's a pretty big mistake.

Bruce Batchelor: It was one of those things where you just had to play the cards you were dealt, do the best you could with the equipment you had. That's all there was to it. Next day was just like any other day.

Yes sir. That's right. It's been an honor for me to do this interview and I want to tell you that Commissioner Patterson, he's the commissioner of the General Land Office and everybody that works here at this agency appreciates your service, especially during time of war, and that's what this program is all about, is honoring veterans' service so it's an honor for us and we

really truly appreciate what you've done for our country, and like I mentioned before we started the interview, we'll make copies of this and as soon as we've got the copies made I'll get those in the mail to you and then you've got my phone number. So please give me a call if you need anything.

Bruce Batchelor: OK – give me your phone number again.

Yes sir, it's 512-463-1970.

Bruce Batchelor: James Crabtree. What address should I use?

It's my name, James Crabtree, and the program is Voices of Veterans at 1700 N. Congress Ave., Austin, TX 78701.

Bruce Batchelor: OK. I got it now, no problem.

All right sir, I'll let you go, but again, I really do appreciate you letting us interview you and if you know of any other veterans that would want to be interviewed that live here in Texas please have them contact me as well.

Bruce Batchelor: OK, I don't really. As I say, most of my old buddies are gone. I'm almost a sole survivor. Well I appreciate it. Like I told you earlier, I could blab on until 6 o'clock, but it's best off if I scan some of this stuff and send it to you.

That would be great, yes sir. Sounds great. Thank you again.

Bruce Batchelor: OK James, thanks for calling.

[End of recording]