

Transcription: Oliver Hill

My name is Tom Single and I am with the General Land Office. Today is Thursday, February 28th, the year 2008. It is approximately 9:10 a.m. I am interviewing Mr. Wendol Hill by telephone interview. I am located at the General Land Office and he is at his home. The interview is in support of the Veterans, excuse, the Voice of Veterans Program of the state of Texas Veterans Land Board. The purpose is to create a permanent record of the military service experiences of veterans. Mr. Hill, as you know, I am about to interview you regarding your military experiences. The interview is by telephone and I will be using a tape recorder to record this interview. The interview will be transcribed and made into a permanent record at the Veterans Land Board in Austin, Texas. Does the Veterans Land Board have your permission and consent to conduct this interview and make it a part of the permanent records of the Veterans Land Board?

Oliver Hill: Yes.

OK. The purpose of the interview is to record your recollections of your military experience. We will follow somewhat a question and answer format, but please feel free to expand on your answers and add anything that you think may be helpful in refreshing your recollections so that future generations will have the opportunity to know what it was like for you during your military life and how those experiences shaped your life since then. We understand that some of your experiences may be difficult to discuss and if so, you are free to limit the interview to the extent that you are comfortable in relating the experiences.

Oliver Hill: Great.

OK?

Oliver Hill: OK.

OK. So first let's start off with the easy part. Could you give me your name and your present address?

Oliver Hill: My present address – of course it's Oliver W. Hill, and I'm at 3617 Nichols Road in Willow Park, Texas, which is located between Fort Worth and Weatherford.

OK, would you permit, repeat your full name again please?

Oliver Hill: Full name?

Yes.

Oliver Hill: Oliver, O-L-I-V-E-R, Wendol is spelled W-E-N-D-O-L -

D-O-L, OK.

Oliver Hill: Yeah, there's a jillion ways that people spell Wendol.

And we have it wrong on your sheet.

Oliver Hill: Well, one thing I'll clear for you. This Wendol was a Norwegian name and it was originally spelled with a "V" and if you understand how they do things, they would spell that V-E-N-D-O-L and pronounce it as a "W," so uh, I've had some problems with that all through my life trying to keep it spelled correctly.

OK. And Mr. Hill, how old are you?

Oliver Hill: I'm 84 years old as of February 8th this year.

OK. You just had a birthday then.

Oliver Hill: Yeah.

Could you tell me a little bit about your, your family background, parents, where you were from?

Oliver Hill: Well, my parents, my parents were tenant farmers beginning of course in Hamilton County, which was further down into central Texas, and I was born at, in Hamilton County which was just across the line from the Bosque County town of Cranfills Gap.

I'm sorry, would you repeat that town again?

Oliver Hill: The name of the little town that I was born in Cranfills Gap, which is actually a part of, in the edge of Bosque County, but I was born over into the, in the edge of Hamilton County.

OK, could you spell the first part of the city again? The town that you were born in?

Oliver Hill: Cranfills, C-R-A-N-F-I-L-L-S.

Cranfills Gap.

Oliver Hill: Yeah, and if you, this is simply a little, well, it's a little village. It was a town.

Is it still there?

Oliver Hill: Oh yeah. it's still there. But uh, of course that was in 1924. So uh, we moved, my parents as I said were tenant farmers. We moved, my father and mother moved to the farm that was occupied by his father, my grandfather Hill, on what was known as the Gleason Ranch, up north of Cranfills Gap, still in Hamilton County, and we lived there until I came out of about the 7th or 8th Grade in school. That was where we were located. So I had a very special upbringing in the country.

I guess.

Oliver Hill: So I was, I was one of the, I was one of the finally what the family grew to a number of seven, of course me being the oldest.

Seven children?

Oliver Hill: Yeah, there were seven of us in the final count, and the youngest was 16 years younger than I am, so during that period, there were me and six other children.

OK, and how many were males and how many were females?

Oliver Hill: I had two sisters.

Two sisters and four brothers.

Oliver Hill: Yeah, that's right.

OK. Did any of your family members, other family members spend time in the military during the war?

Oliver Hill: Well, I had two brothers, a brother just younger than I spent some, spent some time in the Navy and he also had a naval reserve time and he spent some time during the war in Korea. So this WWII was his primary service, and he had some extra service during the Korean conflict.

Which area did he serve in during WWII?

Oliver Hill: He was serving in the Pacific.

In the Pacific?

Oliver Hill: Yeah.

Was he aboard a ship, or - ?

Oliver Hill: He was naval, uh, well, U.S.S. Isely, which was an escort, naval escort vessel. And then I had a younger brother that also served aboard ship during the, in the Navy in the Pacific, but that was, he served his time more in occupational time after war time, war time had actually passed. But uh, I served in the European theater. I was in the 15th Air Force.

Right, we'll get to that. Don't go too fast.

Oliver Hill: OK.

We're still on your growing up.

Oliver Hill: We went to school at the first little school was of course at Mt. Pleasant which was my very first school was a one-room school on the side of a mountain between Fairy and Cranfills Gap in Hamilton County, that was known as Mt. Pleasant, and as far as I know, the old building is still there.

OK, and you went there up to what grade?

Oliver Hill: That was, I just went up into about 3rd or 4th Grade and then went over to Fairy, which is another little town over in between Hico and Hamilton, and it still exists I understand. I haven't been there in years, but Fairy was named after a very small woman and her name was

Fairy, and uh, they changed, they changed the name from an original name is, it was named some name with a Gap on it, but they changed the name of the little town to Fairy, and that's what it has remained to be. And that's where I went to school until I was in the 7th Grade.

OK, and after the 7th Grade?

Oliver Hill: We moved up to a place called Hewitt, which is south of Waco, about three, four, five, six miles I guess south of Waco. I don't know exactly. But it's part of Waco now, and if you're familiar with that area at all, you just don't know when you get there anymore. You just drive through it. But anyway, we moved to a farm that was just south of Hewitt and that's where we went to school until I got into the 7th Grade, or in the 8th Grade, and when I finished that, we moved to a place over in, that was still in McLennan County – no, that was in Falls County near Bruceville and uh, there was a consolidated school, Grosville and Eddie and some other schools had consolidated and they called it Bruceville Eddie, and I think they even call the town Bruceville Eddie now. But anyway, that was where I finished high school. And that was in 1941.

So you graduated high school in 1941.

Oliver Hill: Yeah. And of course the war was at hand, or it was pending so shortly because it was in December of '41 of course when things began to happen for us.

Yes, we'll get to that.

Oliver Hill: But nevertheless, that's where I, that's where I wound up with my, the end of my schooling.

Now you said your family were tenant farmers?

Oliver Hill: Yes.

Were they tenant farmers all the time that you were young until you left for the service?

Oliver Hill: That's true, but my father left the farm in 19-, well he left the farm in 1941 or '42, when the war got going, and he took a job and uh, he came to Fort Worth and uh, took a job at what was Consolidated Aircraft, and he worked there all during the war and until he retired. So eventually after my service time, I came there and spent 42 years working at that plant.

Is that right? Was it still consolidated?

Oliver Hill: It was started out as Consolidated and it was Consolidated, but then it's now Lockheed.

Oh, OK, it's a Lockheed plant, OK.

Oliver Hill: Yeah, that's what it is.

All right, at that Consolidated at that time, that's, Consolidated built the B-24.

Oliver Hill: They sure did.

And did they build them there?

Oliver Hill: Oh yeah. they built C-87's, which was a transport version of the B-24. Also the bomber aircraft which was built there and uh, several different versions of it. Of course they improved the bomber as time went by.

So as you were flying the B-24 in combat, your father was building them.

Oliver Hill: Well yeah, that's really true. And I was a flight engineer. I went in -

Well wait, we'll get there in a second. You're getting ahead. OK, I'm still interested, could you tell me relative your family, I take it prior to the war, as tenant farmers your family would not be considered well to do.

Oliver Hill: No, no, no, we were, we just made a living as the old saying goes, and uh, we survived and uh, as far as I knew, I didn't know I was poor, but that's the way people would look at us today. They were, we were very low income as far as income compared to a lot of workers' incomes.

And as a child, besides going to school, what were your responsibilities?

Oliver Hill: Well, just maintaining the chores of the farm, and I went to school and worked with my father and I grew up working with my father in care of the farming operation.

What kind of farming did you do?

Oliver Hill: Well, we did just general surface crops – corn and the grains, and we had dairy cattle and we milked cows and took care of that part of the program which meant milking the dairy cows and separating the milk from, I mean the cream from the milk and if you ever went through one of those operations, you knew there were things involved there with a cream separator and you take care of getting the cream to the market and the milk to the market.

So as a youngster, you were kept pretty busy I see.

Oliver Hill: Oh yeah, we worked. I was used to hard work.

There wasn't a lot of time to watch TV, or there wasn't a TV.

Oliver Hill: Well, didn't have a TV. We had a good radio. I even listened to Ma Perkins.

Did you really? Ma and Pa Perkins. I remember them.

Oliver Hill: Yeah, if you remember those old radio programs, that's the kind of entertainment we had.

OK, you said you graduated in 1941 from high school. Was that, when in 1941, would that have been like in May?

Oliver Hill: Well it was in uh, I guess May I guess.

And what were your plans after high school?

Oliver Hill: Well, I had, I had really planned to go to Indiemda school, but uh, of course I felt like I needed to have an opportunity to put up a little cash and have something to kind of start with, and I took a job in Dallas and lived with my dad's cousin in Dallas, and I worked for Butler Brothers, which was a wholesale place and I don't know if you know about them or not, but anyway -

What did you do?

Oliver Hill: I was more or less an errand boy.

OK, and how long did you do that?

Oliver Hill: Oh, about six, seven months.

So that got you towards the end of the year.

Oliver Hill: That got me toward the end of the year and the war started.

Where were you on December 7th?

Oliver Hill: I was in Dallas on that Sunday when that happened and we heard the news on the radio, and heard what had happened, and uh, of course I was at the age where I could see my education being interrupted, which it was, and uh, I became an enthusiastic kid like most young guys were, and my mother and father had like I say, he had moved to, well actually my mother's folks came from around Decatur, so they moved up in that town and he took the job in Fort Worth at Consolidated. That's where they were at the time the war was going on. And that's where I wound up going to before I went into the service.

So you worked for Consolidated beforehand?

Oliver Hill: No, I didn't work there. I never did work there until I came back, until I came back from the service.

Well, when did you join the service?

Oliver Hill: In 194-, oh goodness alive now, I'm trying to think, it had to be '42. It must have been September.

OK, I hate to say this, but did you join or were you drafted?

Oliver Hill: No, I joined.

You joined.

Oliver Hill: I volunteered. I wanted, I wanted to go in and be a, I wanted to learn to fly.

What made a farm boy want to be a flyer?

Oliver Hill: Well, I'd always, I'd always built model airplanes.

You did?

Oliver Hill: Yeah, I had built model airplanes from the time I could put a little kit together and played with 'em and did those things that kids do.

I did the same thing.

Oliver Hill: Oh really?

Lots of 'em, oh yeah. Years later though.

Oliver Hill: My early on experience was simply model building and that's where my interest came alive.

OK. Were you ever in an airplane before you joined the service?

Oliver Hill: Oh no, I just was around 'em and I went to every opportunity, took advantage of every opportunity to go see the little air shows that would come around like those at Waco and wherever, and but I never did have the opportunity to do any flying. But uh -

I want to take you back to December 7th for just a moment and try to get your recollections of how you felt. How did that, what was transpiring?

Oliver Hill: Well, at that time, I was, I was in, I was in the car with my father's cousin. We were, we had been into a program at the church, at one of the churches that they went to, and we were on our way back over to their home, and this bulletin came on over the radio. Bombers had hit Pearl Harbor, and they just, it was like they are today. They didn't have enough information to tell you what happened really. Somebody saw some smoke.

Did you know where Pearl Harbor was at the time?

Oliver Hill: Oh well yeah, I wasn't that far out. I had, I was, in fact geography was one of my favorite subjects, and I had been pretty well versed on that part, that part of it and knew about how the world was laid out.

Was the Pearl Harbor bombing surprising to you?

Oliver Hill: Oh yes, I had no idea such a thing was about to happen and uh, of course I hadn't been versed on it. We hadn't, it hadn't been uh, as far as I know, no one had prophesied that it would be coming along, but uh, of course history has indicated that people had some knowledge of it, but apparently they didn't get the word out. I think that's where the problems came in, but it was a surprise to a lot of people like that, like myself.

So it surprised you.

Oliver Hill: Well, sure. But the thing of it is, it also instilled in me the desire to become a part of the Air Force. It was, we didn't have any Army or we didn't have the U.S. Air Force then.

We was all U.S. Army Air Corps, and uh, so I had to, had to go into the Army and I wanted to go in and be a cadet.

OK, so tell me about your enlistment.

Oliver Hill: Well, I went up to Decatur where my folks lived, and I stayed there for uh, like I say, for the time I finished school and finished my little tour of there with Butler Brothers in Dallas, and I stayed there and worked just around and doing odd things around and picked up a few extra dollars, but I made up my mind that I was gonna enlist and become a cadet. That's what all the kids my age were beginning to do that, especially the ones that had already finished high school. So I went to Dallas and enlisted and I took off over Mineral Wells and that's where I, that's where my first introduction into the military came about.

Mineral Wells?

Oliver Hill: Yeah, that was Camp Walters. That was a long time ago.

OK. Was that in September of '42?

Oliver Hill: Yeah.

OK, so -

Oliver Hill: That had to be, no, that had to be October.

October of '42.

Oliver Hill: Yeah, it had to be October.

By that time, since December 7th to October '42, there had been some substantial actions occurring.

Oliver Hill: Oh yeah.

How were you feeling about getting in as you got closer and closer, knowing that the war was getting bigger and bigger?

Oliver Hill: I was anxious to get into it. I felt like I needed to do my part and that's just the way it developed. That's why young and foolish kids get into wars.

So you had no reservations or concerns or great fears.

Oliver Hill: Well no, not really. I was looking forward to it, about taking my part.

OK, so you went to Mineral Wells.

Oliver Hill: I went to Mineral Wells, and of course I was, I was uh, separated and wound up at uh, what was it Fort Worth, I meant Waco Army Air Field No. 1, which was uh, had a little air base out on the north side of Waco. You may know where that all is, I mean it may even still be a little airport there.

I know there is one up there, yeah.

Oliver Hill: But anyway, they had BT-13's, which was basic trainers, and that's where I went out and uh, I sent, was assigned and I took the tests and took to ____ and the flight crews to be a pilot, and I wound up, I failed a depth perception test which put me out of competition. I didn't get to be a pilot. So instead of being a pilot, they let me become a part of a bomber crew, which was I turned out to be a flight engineer.

So your idea of going in was to be an air cadet, to be a pilot. Depth perception knocked you out.

Oliver Hill: That's exactly what happened. I just had to, I was just kind of pushed aside. I don't know whether they, I think they, they have eliminated a whole lot of that problem. I might have made it if I was gonna do it later on, but anyway as it turned out at that particular time, they would not allow it. So I went to be a part of a flight crew.

How disappointing was that to you at the time?

Oliver Hill: Well, I was, I didn't set down and cry about it, but I was definitely felt like that it wasn't exactly what I wanted to do, but then after I got into the program, I realized that well, this was a good way to go anyway. I had a full crew to work with and be a part of, which I finally was able to do. I trained with the crew.

Where did you get your training at?

Oliver Hill: Well, various places. I went to uh, Buloxi, Mississippi was one of the, the uh, primary places for the basic training that we, where the engine mechanics and flight crew training where you begin to understand how the airplane worked and what you did with an airplane.

What were they training you for? A specific job?

Oliver Hill: Well, as it turned out, the flight engineer on a B-24 manned an upper turret gun which was a turret that sat between, you sat between two 50-caliber machine guns, and that was up on the flight deck. Of course you did your flight engineer's chores. Of course they wouldn't take place only on take-off or landings and in-flight checks anytime the trip was, you were in transit somewhere.

What was the basic responsibilities of the flight engineer?

Oliver Hill: Well, we had a, we maintained the fuel levels on the airplane with transfer of fuel from one tank to another. Of course those old airplanes had fuel tanks all over 'em, and you kept 'em balanced for to keep your wings loaded in the proper perspective, and you just transferred 'em with internal pumps, and kept the load level and kept it from being out of balance, you know, with the fuel. That was one of the main projects, and of course uh, in the actual flight program, if you were gonna land, you'd get, stand between the pilot and the copilot and you'd call out the air space for a landing or for your take-off, and just part of the flight program.

OK. Was the flight engineer considered the highest of the enlisted crew?

Oliver Hill: As it is now, well yeah, we were, we always, I had, I had a rank finally when I was, got my full training, was fully uh, qualified, I had what we called a technical sergeant, and as of today, the ones that are flight engineers are mostly all second lieutenants. So in other words, they were given an officer's rating in the Air Force Air Command and the air, and the Army Air Corps of course I was, we still had the -

You remained enlisted.

Oliver Hill: We were just as one of the, one of the uh, enlisted men.

How long did your training take before you became qualified to do that job?

Oliver Hill: Well, I'd have to figure that up. It must've been six or seven months from the time I started to before I was, well, you might say OK, let's see, in say December '42 back to uh, '43. I went into '43 and then when I got in, actually got into the crew that went into training, that was in the last part of '43 and in the early part of '44.

OK, so -

Oliver Hill: It took nearly a year all the way around.

Yeah, so your training basically began for yourself and then ultimately when you were trained to do your job, you were then assigned to a crew on a particular airplane.

Oliver Hill: Yeah. We went, when we, when they got us to a point where we could be assigned as an engineer to a crew, we were given a position in a formed, in a newly formed crew and we did that at uh, Salt Lake City. That was in, oh sometime in late '44, late '43 or early '44. I would have to look that up. I don't remember exactly.

OK so just briefly if you could, could you list the, in terms of your training before you went overseas, what bases were you stationed at?

Oliver Hill: Well, I was at uh, like I said, Buloxi, Mississippi was that basic training, and then I went to uh, they began to bring in the arms training, well from, I'll have to back up a little bit. From Buloxi, when they sorted us out and ___ of making a line of flight-line mechanics out of some of us and some of us were separated and made flight engineers. That's where I went. I went to the flight engineers and that, and they sent me to uh, San Diego, California, where which was a fac-, what they called a factory school. I got direct training on the B-24 airplane itself, and learned functioning of the airplane and what a flight engineer would do, you know. In other words, I learned to be a flight engineer in San Diego. And that brought me more familiarity with the actual hands on experience in taking care of what airplane had to be, how an airplane had to be cared for to keep it flying. So that's what that training amounted to, and that was San Diego. And then they had, I had to go to what they call small arms training, which was I guess strictly an artillery base, and it was up in Kurds, Utah, and I learned to use weapons, handheld weapons as well as the machine guns that we used in the airplane. So that's why this all extended into a whole year before it was all over.

Yes.

Oliver Hill: So that was Kurds, Utah, and then I went to what they called gunnery school. From Kurds, I went down to Laredo, Texas, which was an aerial gunner school and I flew missions out of that little air base in airplanes that had turrets and some beside an open cockpit that you used a handheld gun, and uh, that's where my wife and I married was in Laredo. And in the meantime, well I -

While you were going to gunnery school?

Oliver Hill: While I was, as I finished my gunnery school, when I finished my gunnery school, my wife had, she came down from Decatur, and I had met her during the time I was with my folks in Decatur, and she and I married. Of course in the meantime, we'd stacked up letters every day. We wrote letters back and forth, kept in touch and uh, when the time came for me to finish at gunnery school, we decided to go to get married. She had decided to go into the Navy. Now this is another story, but she, you know, the Navy had programs for young women to become Navy nurses, and uh, I had asked her to be my wife, but I hadn't really planned on getting married until I got back out of the service, and uh, and I realized hey, if that gal goes off over there to that, takes off into the Navy, I'm liable to lose track of her.

Some sailor's gonna grab her.

Oliver Hill: And things began to be kind of serious for me when I had talked about that with her mother, and uh, that's the main reason her mama agreed so easily for her to become my wife, and uh, so well they sent her, let her come on down to, she was very young. We were both very young.

You were what, maybe 19?

Oliver Hill: I was 19. I wasn't 20.

OK.

Oliver Hill: Yeah, I wasn't quite 20, and she was 17.

She was 17?

Oliver Hill: I think that's right.

OK.

Oliver Hill: She came on down and we married, and uh -

In Laredo?

Oliver Hill: In Laredo, and she went back home and of course stayed there during the war, during the time I was gone, went off. There was another little intercept.

She didn't join the Navy?

Oliver Hill: No, she didn't. When I married, they wouldn't take a married girl.

Oh, OK.

Oliver Hill: So that's why her mama was so interested and so eager to say well, she'd rather be married to me than to go off in the Navy. That's kind of the way I felt about it, too.

Yeah, OK.

Oliver Hill: But anyway, those are the things that you had to do a lot of growing up in a hurry back in those years. But anyway, she and I married and went, we went, I went from gunnery school back to Salt Lake City, and that's where I was assigned to a crew that was 10 of us on an airplane made up a crew.

And that was a B-24 that you were assigned to?

Oliver Hill: That was a B-24 that I was assigned to, and a crew that I made a flight engineer and we had all the various gunners and the officers made up the pilot and the copilot, and we had a navigator and a bombardier, and uh, all together there was 10 of us. So we flew, we trained together from that point on. We were in New Mexico when we finally got our first uh, airplane together. I mean we were assigned an airplane and then because they decided they'd put our crew on what they called a replacement training crew. In other words if a crew got shot down overseas, they'd just send another crew over to replace 'em, and that's where we were fitted into. They gave us an airplane and we went to Charleston, South Carolina, and that's where we did our flight training as a crew. We did our bombing runs, ____, bombing runs and you know, the training programs that they had lined up to train a crew to be a bomber crew.

So very quickly you went from a kind of central Texas farm boy who hadn't been anywhere to someone traveling all over the United States.

Oliver Hill: I was the greenest guy you about ever saw. And I don't know what haven't come out of it a whole lot yet, but I did get to go some places I never would have been and do some things I never would have done.

Let's talk about your first experiences in flight. You wanted to be the flyer and what have you, never had flown before, how did it feel to finally to get into the air?

Oliver Hill: Well, it was a thrill first thing. Of course I had, I had flight, I'd dreamed of flying all my life you know, it finally had become a kind of obsession for me, but then when I got into the military and began to be a part of especially begin to fly in the training crews, well, I realized hey, flying was pretty good even though I didn't get to do it all. It wasn't bad just to ride.

Do you remember your first flight?

Oliver Hill: Well, I'd have to think a minute. I don't remember just when that was. First flight was out in New Mexico, one morning real early. Yeah, I remember it. I remember we got on that B-24 and I'd never been on that big air, never been up on, up in the air with a big old, big airplane like that.

They make a lot of noise too, don't they?

Oliver Hill: Well, really that's why -

They shudder an awful lot, don't they?

Oliver Hill: That's why I'm wearing my hearing aids today.

I'll bet.

Oliver Hill: Yeah, that's right. But no, yeah it was noisy and you just, you didn't think about that. You just – of course we had those ear uh, the helmets with the ear receivers on 'em and you put them over your ears and that shut out a lot of the noise, but it didn't stop it all by any means. But uh, just like I say, you just had to, you just got used to it and didn't worry about it. You got to where you talked over the interphone and that's where you, that's about the only way you could make people understand you. They would feed the conversations right into that ear piece, you could understand 'em. You could speak back and forth on the interphone just as you and I are talking.

Were you ever concerned while you were training that the plane you were on might have some troubles and go down?

Oliver Hill: Oh well, you always wondered about it as you hoped it made it, that's about the only way you could look at it because you got on, you know, and you was gonna just go with it.

Did the thrill overcome the fear?

Oliver Hill: Well yeah, you got to, I got to where I wasn't afraid to get into it. I never did think about it. You just found your spot and went to work. But uh, flying became as natural as getting up and getting in your car.

At that period of time when you were in training which was '43 and the early part of '44, the Army Air Force, especially in Europe, was suffering some very, very, very heavy losses.

Oliver Hill: Well yeah, that was, it was pretty harsh times. I mean they had, they had the Germans had the stronger force as a, we hadn't had an opportunity to take us, so much of it away from 'em.

That's right. But there was, there was the 25-mission rule about completing 25 missions and then you could come home, but not many crews were making that 25.

Oliver Hill: Well that's, that, when I, of course 15th Air Force, they had difficulty of the missions were when they – I actually, I flew what amounted instead of 25, they used sorties and I've had, you were supposed to equal 50 missions, which was -

Yes, they extended that later.

Oliver Hill: Some of the missions that you flew had democratics because of the, of the where they were, what you were about to run into.

But before you were there, you were still in the United States training, but the Air Corps was suffering tremendous losses over the skies of Europe and, and the Mediterranean as well, and North Africa. As you were training, were you getting a feeling of this, that this was happening?

Oliver Hill: Well, we were watching it of course, and we were understanding that the problems were gonna exist and of course we had to make sure we, we learned where we were gonna be situated in the airplane to make an exit if we needed to during flight and keep our parachutes ___ or handy where you could put 'em on or get 'em on real quick, but uh, and some of the different types of parachutes, some of 'em you actually wore, and uh, just kind of set in a position with the parachute on. Others you had to actually fasten the parachute to your, uh, you had a strap vest that you put on, or kept on all the time. You wore it and you'd just plug your parachute in and if you needed to go, you could jump out with it. But uh, you had all kind of routines that you had to practice doing in being able to get yourself into a position to where you could, felt secure in getting in and out.

While you were in training, did you witness any crashes or accidents?

Oliver Hill: Well yeah, every once in a while there'd be somebody that couldn't make a take-off, and somebody would bounce and pull the gear out too quick, and the first thing you know the prop would hit the ground and there went an airplane. You'd have a bad wreck and maybe kill two or three or more. So yeah, you had to deal with that. That was just something you learned to deal with.

Did you ever see those yourself? Did you ever observe any of those crashes?

Oliver Hill: I've observed 'em but I thank God I never did have to have one. It was always I have felt like I had the best pilot ___ I didn't, so I never did have a situation that we couldn't walk away from. Any landing that you could walk away from, it was good. First time we ever had any kind of an incident, we were, we had, we were on our way overseas and we took a brand new airplane, got in a thunderstorm down in Balayem in South America, and it blew us over into uh, oh, buddy's side of the strip and of course we caved the nose gear in on the airplane, tore it up, and uh, wound up with all of us getting out. Nobody got hurt, and uh -

This is on your flight overseas?

Oliver Hill: That was on our flight overseas.

When did that occur? When did you leave the states - ?

Oliver Hill: Well, that was in, it had to be in February '44.

Did you know when you left where you were going?

Oliver Hill: Well no. We knew we were gonna go to the 15th Air Force and the headquarters of the 15th Air Force was in Mary, Italy, and that meant we went across South America and then we flew across to Africa and around the, the upper end of Africa and then across to Italy and that's where we wound, we wound up getting over there. But after we tore our airplane up, we, my crew was, we just had to more or less hitch a ride on what they called ATC, which was Air Transport Command. We had, it was a, we just fitted in with the different airplanes that were headed in the right direction and we finally got to Mary as a crew. And they just made a replacement crew out of us and sent us to the 450th Bomb Group over in the 15th Air Force.

So you left that new airplane behind in South America?

Oliver Hill: Well yeah, it was, the nose was stuck in the mud and the wheel, I mean it was caved in and, the nose gear was knocked out from under and I don't know what they did with the airplane. I don't think, surely they didn't junk it, but then it could've been fixed. I imagine they did.

Were you disappointed that you weren't taking that plane with you?

Oliver Hill: Well sure, we were all heart sick on losing our own airplane. So we just had to fly whatever was available. We were sent to as a replacement crew and when a crew would either finish their missions or they'd be transferred or some of 'em would be lost, we would replace those people and that's where we fitted in. When my crew all finally got to the air base there at the 450th Bomb Group, we were oh, had a little time, about 45 miles north of what they call a town called Toronto in southern Italy which was down in the boot.

OK, Toronto?

Oliver Hill: Well, we were at Banderia. Toronto was a coastal town. We were back in at Banderia which was our location of our base and we, that's where the air base was located, all the equipment and everything. We flew off that air base. Anyway, my crew was, my pilot was a guy named Haupt.

What was the name?

Oliver Hill: Haupt, H-A-U-P-T.

Haupt, OK.

Oliver Hill: And he, and for some reason, they picked him up and my pilot and my copilot and uh, some of the other crew and they sent them to England and left me and the rest of the enlisted men down there. They worked down to that, off of that air base, 450th Group, but we were just assigned, I was assigned immediately from my old crew the one I trained with, to a crew that the flight engineer had just completed his missions and uh, was assigned as a member of that crew, and that's where I began flying the combat missions.

So you didn't get to fly in combat with the crew that you trained with.

Oliver Hill: Not my regular crew, no, not in actual combat except there was a couple of the boys that stayed down on the base with me and I remember one or two missions we went and uh, my assistant engineer was on a crew, a different crew than I was on, and he was shot down and Les spent about, I guess, I don't know whether he spent a year to two years in prison in a prisoner of war camp. And then I had another fellow that his name was Andy Johnson. He was a boy from Montana. He was also down there with me, and he happened to be on a different airplane and they, he was, his airplane was shot down. Of course he lost his life. As far as I know, that's the only one of our, of my old original crew that actually lost his life. The rest, we had a couple of 'em that were, were uh, injured and of course Ingle was put, put in that prison camp, so uh, generally speaking, I think we came out pretty good out of that final, out of that total crew. There were just two of 'em that were actually shot down and getting lost.

Does that include the pilot and uh -

Oliver Hill: Yeah, the pilot, pilot and the copilot, they, they went to England I say, and believe it or not, it hadn't been but a couple of months since I had a letter from old Crayton__. He lives out in California somewhere. I had a letter from him. He and his family live out there.

You mean just a couple of months ago?

Oliver Hill: Yeah, it hadn't been long ago.

So all that time and you still communicate.

Oliver Hill: We still keep, kind of keep up with you, with it.

So out of your original crew of 10 that went to, to Italy, 8 of you survived.

Oliver Hill: Yeah.

Well, 9 of you survived. One was -

Oliver Hill: Well all, we 8 of us survived really because one had, one had been, you know, in a prison camp, but he, he survived. Of course he passed away later on, but then after he got back to the States. He's lived in Ohio, he and his wife lived in, oh, I've forgotten, a little town in – it's in Ohio. My wife and I went to Houston with him one time back several years ago.

So what was life like at the base in Toronto?

Oliver Hill: Well, people were, naturally it was a barracks and we kept all our letters and everything and we'd share letters from home and different ones and ___ have things that we'd pine, we'd hear from home. That tells you it was just kind of a family thing almost.

So you lived in barracks?

Oliver Hill: Yeah.

You weren't stuck in tents.

Oliver Hill: Well, very seldom. We'd hit a place once in a while that uh, fact of the matter is, that base that we, we wound up with over in Italy had a, when I first went there, they were in tents, and then we were moved into some barracks that they had available. But anyway, we wound up where we stayed as comfortably as you could with that kind of a situation.

Was the food good?

Oliver Hill: Oh, I can't, couldn't complain about the food. You usually had plenty of good food and of course, I wasn't a, I wasn't a drinking man, but every mission that you went on, when you got back, why they'd give you a shot of whiskey that I always just poured mine in the bottle and saved it, and then I'd take mine, whiskey I'd save up, I'd get some and give nearly a bottle of whiskey, I'd go around and somebody would want to buy it. I'd be making myself a dollar or two along there. Crazy things like that.

How many planes were at your base?

Oliver Hill: Oh goodness, it was a group and of course they, that 15th Air Force, it had, it was divided up into wings, and uh, we were in what they called the 47th wing, and it had, I think it had four groups, had what they called 450th and 447th, and I can't remember the numbers of the others. There was about four different ones and all B-24's, but it was uh, well we had each, each group would have a, they'd fly three squadrons, and you'd fly usually 24 airplanes out of a group would fly, so that's how you kind of counted 'em up. That'd be three, three groups of 8 in each, out of each group, so you'd kind of figure it up over the total.

So your base at least in terms of B-24's had maybe 25, 30 airplanes.

Oliver Hill: Oh yeah, that would be at least that many because you had to have some spares.

Did they have any other planes at your base?

Oliver Hill: No, they, all they had, people would come in in different airplanes. There would be transport airplanes and of course once in a while, you'd get a B-17 you had to make a trip in, but uh -

But you didn't have any of the fighter aircraft stationed at your base?

Oliver Hill: Beg your pardon?

You didn't have any fighter aircraft at your base.

Oliver Hill: Not stationed at our air base, no. We didn't have a, they had fighter groups, when we had, we'd fly a mission, the fighters would be based at a location that would be closer to a target than we were.

Because you were down at the southern end of Italy. You had a long place to fly.

Oliver Hill: Yeah, and uh, fighter planes, they'd just come in and meet us over the target area, and first thing you know we'd look up and there would be those beautiful fighter planes, and when we got, we had the first experiences with what they called the Tuskega fighters, the B-51's that this, the black flyers, they finally let some of them make pilots, and uh, that was kind of late in the early part of '44, and they began to come over in brand new B-51's and every one of us got a chance to see some of those guys work, and they were good. I mean we watched 'em. We were so proud to see them come in. But uh, of course fighter planes were, they were definitely appreciated because they kept situations kind of balanced, especially after they become more prominent and were able to kind of, we kind of pushed out the enemy aircraft to a point where we didn't have near as many fighters to worry about when our bunch finally got there enough numbers to really do us some good.

So tell me in terms of recollection back then when, excuse me, you know, WWII was at least for the Army it was still segregated, and whites and blacks were kept apart, but relative to the Tuskega air group who flew fighter planes in support of the bombers, how did you, how did you bomber pilots feel about them? How did it feel to know that those were the people who -?

Oliver Hill: Well they, as far as I know, there wasn't any, any big problem. They welcomed 'em in. Of course they were, they were fighters that came in to help defend the bombers, and any help was appreciated. And when they began to show up and we knew who they were, and it was, they were appreciated. I remember a few of 'em made a pass to come in and uh, let us have a look at 'em and get a recognition of the airplane so we'd know what we'd watch and know, you know, knew who they were.

They had big red tails, didn't they?

Oliver Hill: Well, they had different markings on 'em. Most of those guys had a, yeah, they had a red tail on the B-51's, and uh, but most of those airplanes didn't have any paint on 'em except just whatever markings they put on 'em. Of course they had their ___ stars, but uh, in the beginning, of course we had, we had different, there were different type of fighter planes. We didn't see too many different kinds. B-51's mostly and uh, those P-39's where we didn't see too many of those. And they had some uh, see there was another big, heavy airplane that always -

P-38?

Oliver Hill: Well, yeah, we saw a lot of P-38's. That was a twin tail airplane built by Lockheed. And uh, they called it Lightning, and I noticed they're building a new landing, they're building a new, called a Lightning II. I don't know whether I've ever seen one of 'em or not. Anyway, it had a long way to go if it makes it, if it's ever appreciated like the old Lightning was.

I'll bet. Tell me, do you recall your first combat mission?

Oliver Hill: Well, let me think a minute. Yeah, I guess I do. We went out that morning and when as it turned out, instead of flying into a, in the upper turret, on my first mission, I flew back into waste, had an opened window with a 50-caliber machine gun pointing out of it, and of course we were back there in that heavy flight suit and muddled up to try to stay warm, and looking out across the country and the first indication that we were in combat was when we saw, began to see anti-aircraft explosions on the what we call flack.

Do you recall where you mission was to?

Oliver Hill: No, but it was somewhere near, we were headed for the Ploesti oil fields which were down in Romania.

That was your first mission?

Oliver Hill: Yeah. It was a, we didn't go all the way to that particular oil field. We went to another town and I'd have to look it up. Let me see, I think I got a list of that I have. Called Breshof in Romania, yeah, and an ___ town, don't ask me where it was over there, but I, I've got a list there that's got all those missions on it, and that Breshof was on, it was on the way down to Ploesti. Ploesti, that's the way you pronounce that. That's P-L-O-E-S-T-I.

The famous oil refineries -

Oliver Hill: But they had oil refineries and in fact they had so much oil around there that that's really what it was all noted for. That's where they got most of their oil.

And that's where uh, there were some rather historical missions flown.

Oliver Hill: Well, brought the whole 98th Bomb Group which was stationed in Africa at the time, made the first mission in the Ploesti oil fields and it was a low level attack and they lost nearly all of their airplanes. They scattered 'em all over the country, and it was a very foolish way to do it and that's when they began to learn to do their high altitude bombing and they, they used this dorm bomb sight, we had finally had a dormed, what they called a dormed sight, and it was a _____ one that they came up with and they were able to uh, line up a whole flight of airplanes and then gather 'em together as close as they could, what I mean in a group, and then all drop at the same time, and then they could almost count on destroying a target. The railroad _____ yards where there was big railroad, trains come in, you know, with their cars loaded up, they could just then destroy the tracks and the trains.

Did most of the air crews who came after like you, and even those who participated in those original raids, consider that those raids were kind of wrongly done or foolishly done?

Oliver Hill: The realized that there were better ways of doing it because especially after so many of 'em were, well the fact is that when the airplanes were just scattered all over the country and they didn't, uh, they weren't able to plan a return, they couldn't figure out how they was gonna get, of course they, they were all, those places were highly defended, and those guys meant business and it was hard to, hard to make a pass over at a lower altitude. You didn't have much chance.

How did you feel on your first combat flight?

Oliver Hill: Well, I was just like any dumb kid. I was naturally I learned to pray when I was going out on one of those missions. I think that's what has kept me closer to my church than anything else, simple fact that I think if it hadn't been for the hand of God, a lot of times we might not have made it back. But uh, I do know that uh, yeah, you were anxious and you had the same fear you would looking into a situation where you knew the bottom could fall out any time. You look into a target area and see flack coming up even with where you're gonna be going through with a flight of airplanes, and you see just what looked like a cloud made up of exploding shells. There's stuff flying around all over up there.

Tell us what it felt like. Did it have sound? Could you hear them exploding?

Oliver Hill: Well no, the airplane made so much noise, of course they get close enough, they get close enough to you, you could hear 'em go off and then just it exploded just the shell exploded like a big boom.

And it would throw shrapnel all through the air.

Oliver Hill: You'd get, heard shrapnel peel through, in fact I've, we had, we had a, we used foil, you know, just sheets of foil threw out the window, guys throw it out the window to make, confuse the radar. I mean when it fell, it would fall through the air and the targets, I mean the gun's radar, they what they call home in on those old airplanes, well they'd hit that, some of that foil and stuff that was flying through the air and they'd just get it, disrupt their signal and cause 'em to miss their target.

Then ended up firing at the foil instead of the airplanes.

Oliver Hill: That way you, sometimes it helped you get missed. So there was a lot of that thrown out and people that worked back in the back of the airplane that did most of that kind of stuff, but it happened the day that I was back there one day, that a piece of shrapnel came through the bottom of the airplane and hit that, hit one of those, it was just a cardboard box that was sitting there with those packages of foil in it, and that box, that hole come right in the bottom of that box, that piece of shrapnel come through the bottom of that box and went right out the top of the airplane. So you had things like that happen, you could call a near miss, and that's when you'd thank the Lord real quick.

I imagine. Were you ever on a crew or on a flight where any of the crew men were wounded by flack or by enemy fighters?

Oliver Hill: Oh, we had a couple of guys that would take a little hit. You had your clothes on, this old heavy leather jackets, flight jackets and all, sometimes that flack would come through and uh, it'd make a hole in that and maybe you'd wind up with a piece of that flack in there somewhere maybe you'd get a little blue spot or sometimes you'd get a little cut, but uh, I've seen several just little skin blazes, but then usually if it hits you, it did more than that, so if you got, if it come through hard enough to really do you any damage, you never hardly even cared about a little skin blaze. But uh, I was fortunate on our airplane, of course I, we lost, there was this guy I mentioned a while ago named Johnson I happened to be watching when his airplane was hit. Of course he went down and uh, the airplane went down and I don't, I don't remember anybody getting out of that airplane, so we saw some people that were lost, and it became, you had to make a, be able to accept that. That was just part of it.

That must have been an experience that most of us can't comprehend.

Oliver Hill: Well, you really, not now, you, I can understand why young people need to do that, and the people that, we have lived long enough to have had the life's experiences and appreciate things, I'd have a harder time doing what I did then. I don't know whether I could or not. But uh -

So you think that we can be thankful that America had a lot of young people at that time who were foolish enough to go into that danger -

Oliver Hill: Not only foolish enough, but being in a position to fill a position that they needed to take in order to fight that war. You couldn't expect an old coot like me to get over there and do what those guys did. I guess why young people have to fight the war, and that's why I see so many of these young guys that go over into Iraq into situations they get in over there. A lot of 'em are so young that uh, they haven't had, haven't lived life long enough to where the experience is gonna do the damage that it would to a guy that had lived a long life.

Tell me where were some of the missions that you flew? The combat missions, where did you fly to?

Oliver Hill: Well, like I say, we flew out of over from north of Toronto into center part of the boot, and I got a list here says Sofia, it's over in Bulgaria.

Sofia, Bulgaria.

Oliver Hill: And uh we had a lot of targets in northern Italy. There was a Treviso was in northern Italy, and Vienna in Austria, and there was Schwechat. Schwechat was an Austria target that was uh, not far from Munich, that was one of the hardest targets that we had to make.

What was the name of that?

Oliver Hill: S-C-H-W-E-C-H-A-T. Schwechat.

OK.

Oliver Hill: And that was in Austria.

In Austria.

Oliver Hill: There was a lot of, I had about five different missions to Ploesti, five or six, and -

So there were the famous early missions, but what you're saying is there were a lot of missions after that as well.

Oliver Hill: Oh well, there were missions all over. Now we went, I went to Nice, France. We had a submarine pens, you know, they had, the Germans had those old submarine pens all around the coast and we had to find out where they were and we had to come and get those, we'd drop those real heavy uh, armor piercing bombs in those things, and I don't think we ever did really do 'em much damage, but uh, I don't know how many times we made missions like that. My very last mission was to Munich, Austria. That was a, that was on uh, 7-19-1944, July, July 19th.

And that was your last mission?

Oliver Hill: Yeah, that was in Munich, and that was what they called a double mission. In other words you got double credit and it was equal to two of the regular missions.

Why would that be equal to two? What was the basis for - ?

Oliver Hill: Because of defenses.

OK, the tougher the target, the more credit you'd get.

Oliver Hill: That's the way it was.

Well tell me, most of us have never thought about or experienced flying in an airplane that's loaded with uh, high explosive bombs hanging from racks right where you are. Were you ever scared, were you ever concerned that uh -

Oliver Hill: Yeah, I've had to, the one scared out of me, I had, we had a bomb hang in the bomb rack, and it had been, it orbbed, it was a 500-lb. bomb and didn't drop out, and it hung up in the bomb rack.

Was that a common experience?

Oliver Hill: It happened lots of times and most of time I never did know of an airplane actually being lost because of it, but you wouldn't know about it anyway, probably you wouldn't know what caused the problem. But uh, on this particular one that I'm thinking about, this bomb and the bombs had all dropped except this bomb, and I don't know how they ever got off the bombs, there were some from above it had gone on out, and then this bomb was left hanging in that rack, and uh, it took three of us guys. We went down there and got on that bomb rack and we were able to pry that thing, we finally just disconnected the rack and all and we got, got, it had a little shackle rack about as long as the bomb that went from one end to the other, and one end of it was still hooked.

So here you are, how high in the air were you? 20,000 feet maybe?

Oliver Hill: Well yeah, somewhere in there.

And the bomb bay doors are open.

Oliver Hill: Keep the bomb bay doors open, but we had -

And you're walking on a -

Oliver Hill: We had a, a catwalk that went from one end of the bomb bay from the front to the back, and you could get in and out from the front to the back on that catwalk.

So you're standing on a catwalk, holding on -

Oliver Hill: Well, we had to get on the catwalk, but you had to have oxygen bottles in your hands to try to keep something to breathe -

Because you were up so high.

Oliver Hill: Yeah, well yeah, you had to be on oxygen, and uh, try to get that rack loose.

And what was the temperature like?

Oliver Hill: Oh, Lord, I don't know. It must've been 20 below or something like that.

OK.

Oliver Hill: But it was cold.

I can well imagine and the wind blowing through.

Oliver Hill: Well, the wind wasn't blowing as bad as you'd think with the, you know, with the bomb bay open like it was. Of course the wind was going under you. But uh, we finally managed to get that thing pried loose and got that rack out and when it fell out, we prayed it wouldn't hit something and go off before it got out.

Now tell me you weren't a little bit scared at that time.

Oliver Hill: Well we were, we were about three or four of us we was plum scared to death.

I would imagine.

Oliver Hill: But all we could do was try to get it out of there, because we sure didn't want to try to land that airplane with that hanging down there.

Did you ever have any crew members that were so afraid that they just couldn't function?

Oliver Hill: No, I don't think so.

So you never experienced somebody who kind of lost it?

Oliver Hill: I don't think so. No, I don't remember that, don't remember anybody ever doing that. I remember a guy getting, ear getting plugged. That was when we were in training.

He got a what?

Oliver Hill: He got his, he got an ear – I don't know, he had a cold or something I guess, anyway that coming down from altitude and his ear drum popped. I think it might have broke his ear drum. But then that was pretty common happened to do, people getting hurt where ears getting hurt. And it was kind of nice to get away from a target area and head back where you could feel like well, you might be able to relax a little.

A lot of people don't realize that for especially for bomber crews, that you spent a lot of boring time if you will, flying long distances, and then a few minutes of wild and crazy excitement and chaos, to be followed by another period of boredom going back to the base.

Oliver Hill: You had that. Of course you just had to be ready for the target area so you could be managing defenses that your airplane had, and uh, of course make preparation to drop the bombs that you've taken over there.

How long were most of your flights?

Oliver Hill: We've had 7 to 8 hours.

OK, so 7 to 8 hours to get there to unload and then come back.

Oliver Hill: Yeah, most be probably what an average was. I think uh, on this uh, for 37 sorties, they gave me a credit for 266 hours.

OK, that's a lot of flying time.

Oliver Hill: That's combat time. That's the actual hours that was considered combat time. Of course all you have the flying time didn't get in on that.

Now on most of the flights, what would be considered at least relative to uh, concerns about flack or enemy fighters, what part of that flight, how long of that flight would be where you would have to be concerned about that?

Oliver Hill: Well, a special target area, it depends on how you had a what they called an initial point. That way when you had to make a run on a target, you had to get in a position where you could line your airplanes up, you know, you had a group of airplanes flying together remember, and uh, you had to have enough distance to get them all aligned and these uh, target areas no matter where they were, they usually had their defenses set up for where you went in, that's where they were gonna be, and that was the hard part because you could get out, you could see that stuff coming up, and your fighter planes would be unless you were right over the target, most of the times, the fighter planes didn't get right over the target because they can get right in the middle of that stuff, too. But coming in to that, these fighter planes, that's what did give you problems, and you just had to learn to watch for where they were and try to keep 'em off of you. And you had your guns were loaded with what they had a belt of tracer bullets in there that you fire those tracer bullets and they, they could see them. I mean they'd streak out and have a streak of bullets going out, and that'd give 'em a warning. If they see you got one coming right at 'em, they gonna turn, and they wasn't as dumb as a lot of people wanted 'em to be. But they'd start in after that airplane and you'd fire those tracers and it turned him off, and that's why you had to keep something going before they'd be tryin' and not let 'em come in on you without you knowin' about it.

So I assume you had encounters and ones you had to shoot at -

Oliver Hill: Oh yeah.

At German planes?

Oliver Hill: That's right, and we had a lot of training in being able to see 'em, being able to, how to locate 'em, you know, and it uh, usually worked out. But -

And I assume you've had experiences of them shooting at you.

Oliver Hill: Oh yeah, hoping they'd miss.

Did you ever see the tracers actually coming at you?

Oliver Hill: Yeah. Well they, I never did uh, I never did have a great deal of experience like because that happened so fast, you just uh, you don't know until, if you don't, if it hits you, you just wouldn't have seen it anyway. But they had different types of airplanes that they used to launch those different, they had a bigger what they call a ME-210 was one of the typical ones. They would set off out far enough where you couldn't reach it with a regular shooting gun. They could lob a cannon shell off of that bigger airplane -

Before you were even -

Oliver Hill: And fire into the group and you was kind of at their mercy and just hope a fighter plane would come along and move 'em before they'd hit somebody, and most of the time they did.

I understand they used to even sit off and had some of the planes shooting rockets into your formations.

Oliver Hill: Yeah, that's what was on these, these when I say cannon, it would be usually a rocket of some kind, but uh, some of those airplanes, they use a pretty good sized shell. I don't know, the 88's was typical I guess of the largest ones, and they had some smaller, a lot of 20 millimeter stuff.

Did you ever run into the ME-262 which was the German jet fighter?

Oliver Hill: No, I never did see one. I heard about 'em and they were just beginning to use some of them I think. But uh, well they usually used what they called an ME-109 and uh, ME-210 and, and the FOK Wolf 1-Daddy and that was some of their typical -

Yeah, the piston engines. Did the awareness that the Germans had jet propulsion planes begin to cause -

Oliver Hill: Well, we never really give it a whole lot of thought because they never did come in on us and have to give us any, but we did know they existed and we were glad that we had gotten rid of most of the opposition before they got enough of 'em to do us any real bad damage. They never did really have enough of 'em to give anybody any big problem. But they would have sure tore things up, they would have been in and out so fast. But uh, but I never did see one.

What was the, if you recall, the normal flight component that you would fly in? Like how many planes all together on a mission?

Oliver Hill: Well, like I said, we had, they'd usually fly, it was four groups, three or four groups and there would be 8, I mean squadrons, and there'd be like 24 in a squadron, and you just, and if you got two or three groups like the 450th and 447th and the 98th happened to be going into the same target area, there'd be an air full, the air would be full of airplanes. I mean the sky -

There'd be 100's of them.

Oliver Hill: Oh yeah, indeed.

That must have been -

Oliver Hill: That's what ruined the big cities in Germany. Of course we didn't have, we had 'em going over all over the Balkans down there, like in Ploesti and some of those other cities, but not like coming out of England into the Berlin area and some of those big cities where it just literally riddled those big towns. And those big bomb groups like that going in like that, it would just flatten those whole towns.

Yes, they had as many as 1,000 planes in one place.

Oliver Hill: I'll bet there were times when there were that many of 'em over.

That must have filled you with some sense of awe to be in the air and see the air field with so many planes at a given time.

Oliver Hill: Well, you had to, it made you feel better that there was a whole lot of 'em there.

Right, the more the merrier, right?

Oliver Hill: You wasn't there by yourself.

Could you recall any, what experiences, combat experiences that really stick out in your mind to this day that you were engaged in?

Oliver Hill: Well, I could just remember having to, having some controlled services damaged pretty seriously and we'd have to kind of drop back and kind of, or maybe we'd lose an engine and we'd have, have to come back in maybe lower or get into a group and try to stay with 'em as best we can, but then where we had to go, like having to go back, if we got back to where we could get into our base or to another base, we'd just be, we'd feel like we were lucky just to be able to find a place to get on the ground. And that was the main thing we tried to make sure of we could find a place to get back to, and the situations on the airplane got to where it was hard to fly or we're losing altitude, why we'd throw stuff out to keep from having so much weight aboard. I've seen what they call flack vests and some other pieces of equipment we could really get rid of to lighten the airplane and make it stay in the air better.

And you had to fly over some hills and mountains to get back to your base.

Oliver Hill: Well yeah, but most of the time, we'd come around. We had a lot of that. We were close to the Alps, and some of those mountains that we came out of going up, going from, through Bulgaria and back down through there, they had some pretty high mountains, but nothing like the Alps, but you certainly wanted to stay high enough. It wouldn't have been a very good place to set one down on the ground with those, like some of the mountains we got out in our west.

Are there any other experiences that you had in combat that you would like to share?

Oliver Hill: Well, the only thing, I can remember some when we were coming back into the bases, naturally we would find out we'd have a flat tire on the airplane or we'd have a problem, could be have a control service damaged, like I say, we'd have to kind of, at least we didn't have a problem getting on the ground and it took a real good pile-up to take care of some of those such questions that uh, I remember a piece of flack I've got it, I've got a piece of flack in there in my, one of my boxes that came out of our, one of our landing gear wheels, tires, that uh, we landed with that flat tire was down, and we hit, we finally hit the runway or got on the runway, and uh, it was we had lost an engine and we come in to skid to the side with that tire dragging, and finally the pilot had to let it go off on the ground, I mean on the, you know, the soil and uh, I believe it probably took a lot of the danger of finally breaking that wheel off completely, but it, that was one of the narrowest, and we kind of hit, docked that one gear down on the ground and we just kind of stepped out on the ground when we got ready to get out of the airplane, but and no fire. We were lucky enough to all get out of it without any big problem.

I assume you saw a number of airplanes that were damaged in combat come back and crash trying to land.

Oliver Hill: Oh yeah, that wasn't unusual at all and I saw guys come back and bail out over the runway, what I mean is they knew they couldn't get that airplane on the ground without tearing it up and I've seen crews bail out all except the pilot, and maybe the pilot. They might have just turned the airplane loose and headed it out where they could get it out, you know, out of the way

from hurting anybody, and so they'd just leave it. But sometimes just had to do that. If you could be lucky enough to get one back, you'd be all right.

So I assume then that every time that you came back from a combat mission even when you were down safe, you were in a position to observe the other planes coming back and seeing the devastation and seeing -

Oliver Hill: Oh yeah, because coming out of a combat area where you'd been dealing with anti-aircraft fire and fighter planes, there was always somebody that had lost parts of their airplane or been damaged a lot more than others, so yeah, it was, it wasn't unusual at all to see airplanes having big problems. But it's just something like I said a while ago, you had to, while you was young and foolish, you didn't really worry about that much I guess.

You never thought it would happen to you.

Oliver Hill: Well, I guess that's one way of looking at it, and it didn't thank goodness.

I think that's a young man's strength is that he always believes it won't happen to him.

Oliver Hill: I think that's the way it works.

So the war in the middle of '45 was coming to an end and you were still flying combat missions and did you ever have the sense or feel that you didn't want to be the last plane to go down at the end of the war?

Oliver Hill: Well no, I can't say that I ever really looked at it in exactly that way. When you got into a mission, it was each mission was individual, and of course your goal was to get there and back every time you left the ground.

So towards the end of the war you felt the same way as you did -

Oliver Hill: I couldn't see any difference. And of course I was back in the States really before the war ended to a point where I could really see an end to the war like that because of course I, they did the, the invasion in, on June 6th over there, come into France, you know, from when they invaded from England. We made missions the day before. Let me see what I got. I got one here. We were flying in northern Italy and taking care of some targets that were, that would have given the Germans aid that defended any area up in there, when that invasion took place. So of course we weren't aware of the fact that this invasion was about to take place, but we did know that it was imminent, but we didn't know anything about when or anything. So but we were fortunate enough to maybe help 'em a little bit on that.

Do you remember when your last combat flight was?

Oliver Hill: Well, it was on July the 19th, 1944. That was when I went to Munich and that's why when I realized that was my last combat mission and found out where it was going, I wondered why in the world I drew that devil mission. Of course that was a regular hard target there in Munich, and I thought well, that's one way to get a finish, but I made it through. As far as I remember, it was fairly easy. We didn't have enough opposition to give us any big problems.

So you then had after that mission the opportunity to leave Europe.

Oliver Hill: Yeah. I came on back home. The fact of the matter is, I went, I came back, after I finished my mission, I stayed over there for probably a week or two before I went to Naples and uh, I boarded a transport coming home.

A transport ship or plane?

Oliver Hill: Yeah, transport ship. They brought us back on a ship.

So you spent well let's say close to the last year of the war in the United States.

Oliver Hill: I did.

And where did they have you then?

Oliver Hill: I come back and went to, I was stationed over here, I went, let's see, when I first came back, I came into somewhere up in New Jersey. I don't even remember what the name of the place was, and they, what they called a separation center, and I finally got back to, to uh, oh I guess I went to Salt Lake City, and didn't come to Fort Worth because they sent me to Carswell which was Army air base then, and was it used to be Carswell Air Force Base and now they got a naval base out of it. But and that was, that was where stayed the last months, about 7 months, and I, my wife was pregnant when I left, and when I came back home, the baby had just been born and we stayed in Fort Worth until, well, when I was discharged in 1945, and that's when I went to work over at Consolidated. At that time it was, yeah, it was still Consolidated, and now Lockheed. But my dad asked me if I wanted to go to work over it and I said well yeah, I guess so, but I went over there and worked for 42 years.

When you went there, when was that? It was after the war though.

Oliver Hill: Well, the war was over by the time I got there.

OK, so you didn't end up flying in B-24's and then going back and building because they stopped production right at the end.

Oliver Hill: No, the time I, at the time I went to central dynamic, we went to Consolidated, they had started building that old B-36 which was the biggest, that old big six-engine deal.

Monster.

Oliver Hill: It was a huge air – I never saw anything like it in my life, but uh, they had built when I went to Cars-, went to the Fort Worth Army air field, right after I got out of the B-24 group and came back to the States, they were trying to, they were building what they called B-32's, you know, they had B-29's. And the B-32's were being built by Consolidated and they had one group in the Philippines and they were getting ready to send another group over and I was being prepared to go over with the, a new group with the B-32's to the Philippines, which I would have done if that war had lasted in the Pacific, which thank goodness it didn't.

How did you feel about that?

Oliver Hill: I was very pleased how it all turned out because I didn't have to go.

When you came back to the United States from your tour in Europe, I assume that you were thinking that um, the war was over for you.

Oliver Hill: Well no, I wasn't because they sent me right straight to the back out to San Diego to learn to fly the B-32, and I was already set up to take a crew of it, make a crew, same position on the B-32, only I found out if I had stayed with the B-32 if they had continued with it and I had stayed in and I would have been commissioned instead of being a -

By then they were making the -

Oliver Hill: They were making the flight engineers -

Commissioned officers. OK.

Oliver Hill: And then you could have gone from there on up, but I didn't have that opportunity.

You missed it.

Oliver Hill: But I wasn't unhappy about that, I was just glad to get out. Because after we'd gone through all the rest of it I was ready to leave anyway.

Do you remember where you were when you heard that Germany had fallen?

Oliver Hill: Yeah, I was sittin' on a, I was sittin' on a ___ out there on the flat line waitin' for my crew to get to the air plant so we could make a flight on that B-32. And they come along, I was sitting right in front of the control tower and some guy run out and told me, told us that that part of it was over.

How about when the Japanese surrendered?

Oliver Hill: Well I don't remember just exactly where I was when that was happening, but something very similar because we were getting ready like I say, we were getting ready to make our move and they all of a sudden everything just shut down. It wasn't long until I went to San Antonio and got my discharge.

So at the time Japan surrendered, you were in preparation to head out to the Philippines.

Oliver Hill: That's right. I would've been over there -

To be flying bombers over Japan.

Oliver Hill: Wouldn't have been long because they, the B-32 was ready to go. They were, they were gonna line up beside what they had the B-29 doing, and of course the last mission, I understand the last combat mission that was made was made by the B-32 group that was over in the Philippines.

Is that right?

Oliver Hill: So even though I never did get over there to help do that, which didn't make me too unhappy.

I would imagine that you were elated as everybody else in the world was at that time.

Oliver Hill: That's right.

Do you recall where you were when you mustered out? Was that San Antonio?

Oliver Hill: Yeah, went to San Antone, and when I got out, why they gave me a bus ticket to get back to Fort Worth and I didn't even use it. I got on the highway and caught me a ride. That's when I was hitch-hikin'.

That's when it was safe.

Oliver Hill: Well yeah, you could get a, I got a ride right on up here. The fact of the matter is, I rode to Burleson or somewhere with some guy, and uh, it wasn't but just a minute. I kind of got a, seemed to me like I went to Decatur when I got, when I left Burleson and went on the next trip, the next ride and I went into Fort Worth and went on up to Decatur. My father-in-law met me in Decatur. And I mean in Fort Worth and I went to Decatur. So it was just pretty simple getting home.

I guess. Well, it was certainly a pleasure to talk to you and follow your experiences in the Army Air Corps. I just would like to have a couple of follow-up questions if I could with you.

Oliver Hill: OK.

One of 'em would be as you look back now, how do you think your military service affected your life?

Oliver Hill: Well, it prepared me for a career that I never would have had otherwise. I'd have probably been, I really hadn't planned to be, I planned, the war came along and of course that interrupted my, my plans to attend A&M, so I never did get to go to college. I did manage to get a, I went to trade school over here in Fort Worth before I went, or while I was going to work, while I was working over at General Dynamics, which helped me to maintain a position at a, I wound up in out there. I stayed, of course working out there out at Consolidated, it wound up you was in such a big place and such a variety of ways to go that uh, you could have two or three careers in that place if you wanted 'em, but as it turned out, I wound up doing some things I never would have done simply because of my military experiences.

Do you think of the war years often?

Oliver Hill: Not anymore than I have to. I just kind of put them aside. And I had to dig up a whole lot of this information realizing that we were gonna make this, have this little session. I had a folder that had some old stuff in it and I went in and dug around and found some stuff that kind of brought back some memories and I was able to give you some time, real dates, you know, and work out some things on that basis, but uh, it's been put behind me to a point where I just never had any reason to talk about it. I'd rather talk about a lot of other things because some of those things you don't like to talk, think about a whole lot anyway.

What are the greatest memories that you have of your military service?

Oliver Hill: Well, the fact that I have met some of the people that I never would have known and of course, the experiences of the war itself, thank goodness you don't have to do that anymore, but the simple fact that like I say, I met people and I just had a letter from the one of, woman, I was in the gunnery school with down in Laredo, with a guy named B.F. Clark. He and his, he and his wife were, he was my best man and his wife wrote me a letter just past, last week, that B.F. had fallen and had an infection set in. I guess he took pneumonia, but he broke a hip and passed away, so that was my best man and he had, he was an older guy than I was because I wasn't, I don't know, I wasn't 20 at that time, and I think he was about 87, so uh, they had, they had, his wife had been real close to my wife. She was a teacher in grade school, you know.

Is your wife still with you?

Oliver Hill: No, I lost my wife last June.

Oh, I'm sorry.

Oliver Hill: And she was, she was 80 years old. We would have been married 64 years in September if she had lived to September.

At least you had a long, long life together.

Oliver Hill: We did, we did. I couldn't really grieve and wish her back in a situation that she was in because her health had gotten bad and she was suffering from diabetes, and some of the things it can do to you are not good, so uh, we had _____. We went a lot of places, did a lot of things. I did a lot of work overseas during the time I was working for General Dynamics and Consolidated and on the old F-16 airplane that we built out here. My wife and I went and had to spend quite a long time in Holland and Belgium.

Wow, wonderful.

Oliver Hill: So we had several trips to Paris and we played around over there a little bit.

Good.

Oliver Hill: So uh, I felt like it was all good. We got to go a lot of trips after we got out of the, out after I retired. We've been to a couple of trips to Alaska. I kept a trailer. I pulled a trailer behind a suburban.

Good for you.

Oliver Hill: At Hood. We wound up going up there a couple of times and made two trips that lasted over two months apiece, so uh, we enjoyed being together and doing things together, so we did have a good life. And like I say, you're gonna grieve, but then you can't wish her back to be in the situation she was in.

Yes sir.

Oliver Hill: So uh, just celebrate the fact that we had what we had. I think that's the best way that we could handle that.

Absolutely. Well Mr. Hill, I got one final question for you. I'd just like to know if there's anything else that you would like to add so that future generations will have a fuller understanding of what your generation went through during the second World War.

Oliver Hill: Well, one of the things that I would like for people to know that when I went in to do my military service, I volunteered, and I wasn't volunteering because I was afraid I'd get drafted. I went in because I'd have more of a choice to go into a place that I might have a choice to get into and that I went in because I felt like I needed to go in. I felt like I owed that to my country and I still feel that way and I can thank the Lord I was able to do that, and when I see some of these people that appear to just kind of step aside and don't take any pride in getting into the defense situation that I don't know, kind of makes me wonder about some of the people that we have in our society. I wonder if they'd be willing to do what we did during WWII.

That's a very powerful question.

Oliver Hill: We have I think we kept our country from being changed completely by going in and taking over during WWII and getting rid of the factor that was causing all our problems, and I think about what Hitler was really trying to do and I think about how many of the people bent toward him and what would have happened if we had lost that war.

It would have been a sorry world.

Oliver Hill: I think we might have been.

Yes sir.

Oliver Hill: So I'm glad it happened in a way. I was glad I was able to be there.

OK, that's great. That's great. OK, we certainly appreciate the time you've given us to listen to your story. It's an excellent one. I'm sure many people in years to come will enjoy listening to it and experiencing those things with you to the extent that we can, and um, again, both for myself and Joan who's been sitting here listening through the whole thing, we again appreciate your time and supporting our program, and I'm going to stop the recording now, but before we hang up, there's a couple of things I just want to finish up with you. OK?

Oliver Hill: OK.

OK, thanks.

[End of recording]