

Transcription: Forrest Thompson

Today is Thursday, March 10th, 2011. My name is James Crabtree and this morning I'll be interviewing Mr. Forrest Thompson. This interview is being conducted over the phone. I am at the General Land Office Building in Austin, Texas, and Mr. Thompson is at his home in Corpus Christi, Texas. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us today. It is always an honor. The first question I want to ask you sir, is just to tell us a little bit about your boyhood and your background before you went in the service.

Forrest Thompson: All right. I was born in Lincoln, Nebraska, and started to school in a little one room country school house in Shickley, Nebraska. And after one year, my father moved to Colorado. They had free high school there and they were charging tuition for high school in Nebraska, and he wanted us to get an education and so that's the primary reason we went to Colorado.

Was your father a farmer?

Forrest Thompson: Yes he was.

And, so tell us then, what was life like in Colorado, I guess this would have been in the 1930s during the Depression?

Forrest Thompson: Yes. We moved there in 1927 and he started farming, or just he worked for a while and then he started farming and we got on a ranch. So the first 20 years up until about 1933, I rode as a cowboy on the ranch.

What part of Colorado was that in?

Forrest Thompson: It was 25 miles east of Sterling which is about 150 miles northeast of Denver, up on the south, beginning of the Republican River, of South Platte River.

Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Forrest Thompson: Yes I had 2 brothers and 1 sister. One brother older who was also a pilot in WWII and I had a brother who was captured at Corregidor at the Pearl Harbor and he made the Bataan death march, and then the information I have so far, he was on one of the Hell ships and went to Manchuria, was selected as one of the 1,500 to work in the industrial area of the Japanese in Manchuria. Now in October of 1942, we heard over KOA Denver that he had escaped. That was the information come through the Red Cross and we never heard again another word of it. Now, records that I have now, he died 3 days later after the ship landed in Manchuria. Now, if he was captured, they either shot him or he was sick and died.

So, to back up a little bit, sir, I know you mentioned you had 2 brothers that served in the military, I guess they had all gone in before the war had started – is that right?

Forrest Thompson: Well, my older brother joined in 1939 and I joined in July of 1940.

Then, your brother that was on Corregidor, when did he join?

Forrest Thompson: When, Pearl Harbor, he was at Corregidor Island and he was coming home in 2 weeks.

So, he had already been in the service as well.

Forrest Thompson: He joined the service in 1940 also.

What was it sir that motivated you to join the military?

Forrest Thompson: I had just gotten out of a business college, and I think it was about the time that Hitler had invaded Poland about that time, and it looked like war was coming. And I thought it would be, just getting out of school, that I would get in and get me a fine job rather than wait for the war to start. I didn't like being in that business. So I joined the Army at Ft. Logan and my induction was a walk from the recruiting office as Secretary to the Commanding Officer.

How did your folks feel about you signing up?

Forrest Thompson: They had no objections. There were no jobs available in those days, and it was hard to find work, and so that was more the thing to do.

So tell us then what your first thoughts were when you got to Basic Training.

Forrest Thompson: Well, basic training I was sitting at a desk, the next day I was sitting at the desk of the Commanding Officer as his Secretary.

So, were you not put in a boot camp environment then?

Forrest Thompson: Oh no, absolutely not. I walked from the recruiting office to the seat of the Secretary of the Commanding Officer.

What was their basis for doing that ... was it because you had been in college?

Forrest Thompson: Yes. I could take shorthand and I could type 107 words per minute. And I would type a letter while he talked to me.

Did they put you through any sort of training though, in terms of firing a weapon or how to march?

Forrest Thompson: No. No. Absolutely not.

Wow. Did you feel lucky in that sense?

Forrest Thompson: Well, I felt quite honored. We had brand new clothing, brand new shoes, and, we had a nice barracks and it was just perfect living, and I could go home every weekend. I was off Wednesday afternoon and I was off on Saturday afternoon. And I was home every weekend.

That's great. Tell us what things were like ... now this was the Army Air Corps, is that right?

Forrest Thompson: No, this was the old US Army.

Oh the regular army ... okay. I had misunderstood. I thought ... tell us then, this was the regular Army ... tell us what things were like then in 1940 before Pearl Harbor.

Forrest Thompson: Well everything was on an honorable basis ... it was absolutely great. The Adjutant General came through, once a year, and took any complaints from the soldiers and you got special care and it was just a great place to be and they were very fine people ... very fine individuals, and it was just a wonderful place.

What was the commanding officer like?

Forrest Thompson: Well he had been sent out from Washington for his health, his name was Major Mayor, and he had been in the Philippines with General McArthur and Eisenhower, and he knew all the top brass, and he got me an appointment to West Point. And, as an enlisted man I had to go through Fort Sam Houston at preparatory school for one year. And by that time I was 3 months too old to enter West Point and so I didn't get to go.

That's too bad. So then, were you there ... where were you, then, when Pearl Harbor was bombed? Do you remember that day?

Forrest Thompson: Yes, I was in the Finance Department, I had transferred to the Finance Department and finished a correspondence course with Fort Ben Harrison, Indiana, and at the time of Pearl Harbor I believe I was the Chief of Sections of the Finance Department of Fort Logan ... I was over the enlisted section, in officer section and the transportation section of the finance. And we paid in cash.

How did you learn about the bombing? Did you hear it over the radio?

Forrest Thompson: No, my brother, who was a soldier at Kelly Field, Texas, and I, was sitting in the Denver Theater when the lights came on and they said: "All soldiers, return to your home base." And the lights went off in the Denver Theater and we went home and then I went out to Fort Logan and my brother started back for Kelly Field.

When they told everyone, when they told the soldiers to return to your post, did you know what had happened, or what was going on?

Forrest Thompson: No. We didn't have any idea.

So when was it that you finally learned what had occurred?

Forrest Thompson: Well, it was coming over the radio very shortly afterward, and I don't remember the exact words, but it was shortly after that we heard that the Japanese had attacked Hawaii.

And you said, at that time you had a brother that was at Corregidor.

Forrest Thompson: Yeah, he was at Corregidor. He had one week ... he was coming home the next week.

Wow. But you didn't hear from him at that point, right?

Forrest Thompson: No, no. He was in a hospital up at Baggio, I think Baggio was the name of it, and he was in the hospital ... and it took him 30 days from Baggio Hospital to get back through the Philippines to Corregidor Island through night, and traveling at night, and he got back to Corregidor. Now I was told by a man, a returned prisoner from Pennsylvania, that he refused to surrender when Wainwright surrendered, he refused to surrender, and went out and fought the Japanese until he was unconscious.

How did your parents deal with the news of your brother?

Forrest Thompson: Well, of course they took it very hard. My brother went in when he was underage, he had to get a signature from my father, so my father felt responsible, and all they did for my mother was bring a flag to her door and said "we're sorry."

And how much was the age difference between you and your brother?

Forrest Thompson: Well, he was about 2 years younger than I was.

Two years younger. And you had a brother that was a couple of years older that was a pilot?

Forrest Thompson: A couple years older, and he was in the communications at Kelly Field and he gradually became a pilot, and when Eisenhower was president he flew Mrs. Eisenhower ... he was a transport pilot, he flew the DC-4's

That's really neat. So he had the chance to fly the First Lady? That's great. So to back up then When Pearl Harbor is bombed and the United States went to war, what were your thoughts? Where did you think you were going to go next?

Forrest Thompson: Well, we had no idea. We were called in by the Commanding Officer and told us we had to turn in all of our civilian clothing and from now on we would be a number ... and that was it. And that was the way it started. I stayed on the job there for some time before I studied 2 years to be a (warrant) officer. And in the old outfit, until somebody died you didn't get a rating. So, when they come up for the examination, they wouldn't let me take the examination because I wasn't a Sergeant, I was still a Private First Class, and so they wouldn't let me take the exam so I said "the heck with you, I'm going to join the Air Force" ... so I joined the Air Force and came to Texas to learn to fly.

Was it very hard to make that transfer ... to get out of the Army and go into the Army Air Corps?

Forrest Thompson: No, I signed up on about the 10th of January and by the 30th of January I was in the Cadet Center at San Antonio.

So, they definitely needed people?

Forrest Thompson: They were We had 5,000 trained cadets getting ready for combat in, that was in December of 1942.

Was that your first time coming to Texas?

Forrest Thompson: Yes.

Tell us what your memories are of that.

Forrest Thompson: Well, we went through flight training, pre-flight school and that's where I had most of my basic training that I had never gotten before at the Cadet Center ... and then I was transferred to Bonham Air Field at Bonham, Texas at Jones Civilian School and got my primary flight training, and if I remember right I was the first one to solo in the class, and then from there we went to Perrin Field over at north of Dallas and took basic training. And when I finished basic training I went to Victoria at ALOE Field and I was a little bit upset about my brother being killed over there in the prison camp, I heard that in May, and so I wanted the squadron to go to the South Pacific ... and I was selected to give the graduation ride to the commanding officer and I took up a formation and flew around, and when I got down the commanding officer said, "Brief me on that flight" ... well I thought I did pretty good but I gave him a briefing on how I could do better on safety and so forth ... and by noon I was assigned to go to the Instructor's School at Randolph Field as an advanced flying school instructor.

Wow. So you definitely excelled with the flying.

Forrest Thompson: Yes, I was a top student.

Was it something that kind of came naturally to you?

Forrest Thompson: Well, we had been riding on the ranch as a cowboy until I was almost 19 years old ... I was to the outdoors, and driving tractors - the caterpillars, and big machines out in the field ... and I was quite an outdoorsman, and it all came natural to me and I rode a motorcycle before so it was all natural and so it was nice to have wings rather than fly with my motorcycle!

Sure. Did many of the cadets in your program wash out?

Forrest Thompson: Yes. I think, if I remember right, I think there was a third of them washed out. And then, a lot of them were getting through because there was war and they needed everybody, but then I went to Randolph and then to Moore Field at the Advanced Flying School Instructor in December Well, I went there in November of 1942. And then 1943 I started instructing in Advanced Flying School at Moore Field, Texas, at McAllen, Texas.

So at that point, you were training cadets that were coming through the system?

Forrest Thompson: Yeah, we were getting ready for D-Day.

So, what was the biggest challenge you had as an instructor, in teaching those cadets?

Forrest Thompson: Well, I don't know about the challenge ... you did your job and had to graduate them and make 'em fly right ... Now, I had one thing I was very proud of, I never had a student, EVER, damage a military aircraft.

Wow ... that is quite an accomplishment.

Forrest Thompson: And of course, I was meaner than MacArthur or Patton, I was worse than Patton ... but I didn't tell them they had to pass the test. I told them that if they didn't do what I said they'd get killed!

So you were there at Randolph, doing the training, how long did you spend there?

Forrest Thompson: Well, I was there for about 10 days and they were overloaded so they just sent me straight to the flying school as an instructor.

And how long did you spend as an instructor?

Forrest Thompson: Well, I was an instructor there for about one year ... well, I went there in December of 1942 and then I got I used to fly weekends. We were flying P-40's, the old Flying Tiger plane, and on weekends, I didn't know anybody down in McAllen so on weekends I'd fly the P-40 up. I thought well, if I am going to combat I better get some time and get to where I'm good to fly because those guys, German Messerschmitt's, could outfly us. So I would spend weekend after weekend flying the P-40. And I got to be fairly good at it until I got more hours in the P-40 than the people coming back from combat. Then there was a special assignment, I got a secret, special assignment to go to gunnery school with my P-40. And then, after I took some training at Selma, Alabama, I went back and started flying at well, we took our training in gunnery. To go to combat in those days, all you had to hit was 2 bullets out of a hundred. And we had special training, and they had learned the secret of flying and that was that we were hitting 45 bullets out of a hundred from the air into the target. So I got a very special gunnery rating. And then I came back and was assigned to Harlingen Air Base. And that's in Harlingen, Texas. And then, I went down there and we had a special assignment. They were training the students wrong, they were going up at 7:00 o'clock in the morning and coming in in parallel formation and closing real slow and run off their 50 feet of film and then everybody would go home at 11:00 o'clock and nobody was getting the training for a 400-mile an hour Messerschmitt coming in and shootin' at them. So they were, we lost squadron after ... they would go up there and the Germans would fly around and the men would burn up their ammunition, or burn up their barrels, and then the Germans would just sit back and then, shooting at a plane in the air is like shooting a spit flying sparrow with a 22. You might hit it, but very seldom. So anyway, we had a very serious gunnery problem in the Air Force. And we lost squadron after squadron, people that were holding their ammunition like you did in the Revolution "Hold your fire, until you see the whites of their eyes." If you look at a plane, and shoot at it, and it's too far away, bullets are not going to go off that far. So we had special training, and I went down to Harlingen Air Base – the sub-base was at Port Isabel, right on the coast, and not one fighter had a gun sight. Now, I worked there, flew around for about 2 weeks and watched what they were doing, and I was there on a secret mission. They told us that we had to bust up ... they had tried to change the training mission, had to try to change the training procedure and they were unable to do it and we went in on special assignment ... that we would probably be court marshalled if we weren't careful, and they said, just ride it out and we'll change the court marshal when it gets to Washington. Now... I secretly put a gun sight in a P-39 and put a gun camera in the wing, and went up there one day, and I come down, we trained for 3 weeks, I come down at that bomber at about 300 miles an hour and just missed the tail. Well we trained for 3 weeks, it wasn't nothing unusual ... we came in like a Messerschmitt would go to bring 'em down. And that Captain screamed at me, that Captain screamed at me – he said "Don't you ever make a pass like that at me again." I went up there and I made 5 passes and he was screaming all the time and then I heard the commanding officer, the group commander, ordered me to land at the main base at Harlingen immediately. I went in there and landed, and I

was met with 4 colonels. I was still a second lieutenant, I was met with the commanding officer of the group, the commanding officer of the air base, the director of training and the director of flying, and they met me at the plane and they said, "Who in the hell do you think you are?" And I said I was flying a mission. And they said, "We heard that – and we got a safety record here and we don't want anything like that anymore here." I told them, I said, "You see that gun sight in that fighter? Do you see that hole in the wing - there's a camera in there and I took a picture of every pass I made, and I want that developed." And then they looked at one another, we went to the training at one o'clock and they looked at that film and it was precisely like the book called for. And right then, I was raised my rank to 1st Lieutenant and took over the coordination of all gunnery at the Harlingen Air Base as the 1st Lieutenant. And then I set up the gunnery training, and this was towards the end of the war so, of course, it didn't take long for the missiles to put this out of date like WWI stuff. Anyway, it was interesting of how I maneuvered to change the training ... and we were sending boys to the front lines in bombers without any training at all. And it was very serious at that time.

How long did you spend, all told, at Harlingen?

Forrest Thompson: Well, I was there until '45. I got out in January of '46. They closed the air base, the war was over, and I got out of the service ... because I had just gotten married and our orders were to go overseas without your family if you hadn't been overseas. Well they were bringing the boys home after the war and they were sending the ones that hadn't been there. But to go 3 years without my family did not suit me, so I got out of the service.

So you ended up spending several years then in Harlingen.

Forrest Thompson: Well, then, with the help of my mother-in-law and father-in-law in McAllen, I bought a little acreage and had a little farm up there, so I got out and moved on that little farm.

What was Harlingen like during the War?

Forrest Thompson: Well, it was a very nice town. I flew off the sub-base at Port Isabel and so it was just a nice little country town.

Did you ever regret not getting to go to the South Pacific, I know you mentioned that early on, that was one of your goals?

Forrest Thompson: Well, of course, I was mad at the Japanese because they killed my brother and I wanted to go down there with a squadron and wipe them out, of course I'd have got wiped out too, but anyway ... the war was over and so then I started a little family there on Sugar Road at McAllen, Texas.

And your wife was from McAllen?

Forrest Thompson: Yes, her father owned a store in McAllen and that's where I met her.

While you were stationed down there? That's great! What did she think of you being in the service?

Forrest Thompson: Well, young girls were looking for soldiers in those days, and so we moved out on Sugar Road and started our family.

That's great. How about your older brother, sir, the one that was also a pilot as well, is that right?

Forrest Thompson: Yes, he went through as a flying sergeant, and then they ____ him later, he retired as a Lieutenant Colonel.

And he was in the Army Air Corps as well?

Forrest Thompson: Yes, he flew DC-4's from Prescow, Maine, to Europe.

Did you guys talk much about flying ... was that something you enjoyed discussing?

Forrest Thompson: Well, yes, we saw each other one or two weeks a years at that time ... he was up in Prescow, Maine and here I was in Texas, and he had quite an adventure flying all over the country. He used to fly to Sweden to carry on prisoners and exchange prisoners ... he was just a transport pilot. There was one thing that was quite interesting to me, he was a flying sergeant and one day there was a general that got on board, in Prescow, Maine, and ordered him after they were in the air – the general came up to him, and he was just a sergeant, he said “You're flying the wrong heading I want you turned to a certain heading.” And my brother, as a sergeant, told that general “You sit in this chair, I am in command of this plane, or I will have you court marshalled.” And he said that if I had followed that general's orders I would not be here today.

Because he wanted to fly at the wrong heading?

Forrest Thompson: The general did, he didn't know anything about flying! And he flew and then he retired as a Lieutenant Colonel. And then he went to fly with Air America over And was chief pilot for Chiang Kai-Shek. He had quite a career in flying.

Wow. So he had quite a career then ...that's great. So the service took you to Harlingen for training, and then you got married, and you stayed there and then did you remain there, pretty much for the rest of your life?

Forrest Thompson: Well, I stayed in McAllen for about 20 years and became a I went to college – and oh I was called back in the Korean War. We were, at that time – about 1950 around there – we were afraid Russia was going to get into the Spain and take Gibraltar. So we were going to make an invasion of Spain by going into Barcelona, and the Spanish was going to shoot over our heads for 3 days and make it a legal war, and a legal surrender diplomatically, and we were going to take Spain. And, General Sherman, who was the general in charge of the secret operation, died of a heart attack, or at least that is what I heard, and he never revealed – nobody ever knew who he was contacting, so the mission fell through and there was no invasion. And then, I was transferred I had my license to practice accounting in Texas by then. I had picked up my accounting career from my business college and I had a license to practice accounting in Texas. So, when the general saw my credentials, he ordered me to the Auditor General Department ... he said, “We've got all the parts we need ... send him to the Auditor General Department,” and I never left my desk at Kelly Field.

And how long did you spend at Kelly Field?

Forrest Thompson: Well I spent the 2 years ... we were drafted in and we spent the 2 years at Kelly Field during the Korean service.

Were you able to bring your family with you?

Forrest Thompson: Oh yes. My family moved up to San Antonio and we lived there for 2 years.

At that point, I guess, the Air Force was transitioning to jets?

Forrest Thompson: Yeah, they were going into jets, I had a little experience on that. After I finished my 2 years in the Auditor General Department there at Kelly Field, I went back home to McAllen, Texas, and they had opened up more field as advanced flying school instructor, teaching in T-34's and T-28's. And they were paying, I think, around \$600.00 a month, and after I got my degree, the best offer I had was \$200.00 a month. So, I went back to flying. So I taught flying for 5 more years at Moore Field. After I taught 5 more years in T-34's and T-28's.

What did you think of those aircraft ... was there one that you like better than the other?

Forrest Thompson: Well, they were faster and they were jet trainers, more or less, and they were very good planes. The T-28 was a more advanced plane of course and I had five dead-stick forced landings – the engine quit.

Tell us about those a little bit.

Forrest Thompson: Well, I will tell you one that was quite frightening I always made the runway, or someplace to land. I never damaged - you can look in the record of the Air Force, I never damaged a military air craft, I always had a place to land someplace. Now, one day, I took off with a student at 9 o'clock in the morning and had enough gasoline to fly until noon. And he went around the field a couple of times and on take-off, I pulled up the gear with full flaps just after take-off and the engine quit. Well, I hit the stick real hard and went into a dive toward the runway, it pulled out just above the runway and I held it off the runway and put the gear down, and the gear clicked in place just as I hit the ground, and I rolled back and changed at that time I had changed my gasoline tank I had run out of gasoline in one of my tanks. That was because the selector valve was worn and if the student puts the selector valve in the middle position, when you did that it pumped the gas overboard. They had been trying to get that corrected and the structure in the back seat had no gauges for gasoline. I could not tell how much gasoline was in the plane. Now, by noon that day, all T-34's in the United States were grounded, and that was corrected. So that was one experience of a forced landing I made, and most people, when they have full flaps going up and the engine quits, they'd burn up, they'd just crash right straight down. But I hit the stick so fast, I pulled out on the runway and held her off until the gear got down. So, that was one of them. Then the other one, I had – in a T-28, I had the impeller shaft break over Freer, Texas. I was going from San Antonio to McAllen and all I know is, I didn't have any power and I was at about 7,000 feet. Now, the regulations say that you will land, when you have an emergency you will land at the nearest air base. The nearest air base was Laredo. There were hills and rocks all the way to Laredo. The other air base was a Navy base at Kingsville. But if that engine quit, I didn't know what was wrong, all I knew is it had no power. And if I come over the city and that engine quit, I'd go down and kill a whole

bunch of people. And it was level land, it was level all the way to McAllen, 150 miles. So I chose to go to McAllen which was breaking all regulations ... the regulations say you land at the nearest air base. But I could slide in anywhere on that level land, so I flew to McAllen and if anything had happened of course I could have been court marshalled by not flying the regulations. Then I made it to McAllen, I got there at 3,000 feet and made landing on the base.

Did you ever find out what was wrong with the engine?

Forrest Thompson: Yeah, the impeller shaft to the supercharger broke. It just snapped in two. And then one time I had the engine quit on me and it went – I was over hilly country by Roma, Texas down there, and when the engine quit, and the engine just started up again about 50 feet from the ground and I pulled out. I would have burned up if I had hit the ground. But that was some of my, and I never damaged an airplane. One time I did a 270-degree left turn on take-off, I had student ran the engine too high before I could catch it, and I made a 270-degree turn to the left and came back and landed on the north runway – a deadstick – with no damage. So that was my deadstick landings.

When situations like that arise, what went through your thoughts?

Forrest Thompson: No, it's just like putting on your brakes when you see a car in front of you. You don't think It's what you've been trained to do and you just automatically do it, just like putting on a brake.

With the pilots that you trained, what did you see as being the biggest difficulty for them in terms of getting through their training ... was there any particular aspect of flying?

Forrest Thompson: No, all the students had degrees and they were very brilliant young men. But the boys who came from farming country and had learned how to run machinery were better pilots than those that rode street cars. And I had very good students, they were all graduate students, everybody was smart, and I only had one student that I know of that was ever killed, and he was killed in England. He came down through the fog and he hit something and I never found the detail of what he hit. Whether he hit a mountain or another plane, I don't know. But that's the only thing, that's hearsay.

Then after you got out, were you involved with any Veteran's groups and things of that sort?

Forrest Thompson: Well, I was in the Reserve of course for several years. Now, one day I was sitting at my desk – see I got my CPA certificate – and I was sitting at my desk as the general manager of a corporation. And I got a telegram one day from President Truman. And, he told me, in the telegram it said: “Get your affairs in order. Be in combat in 48 hours.” That was with Russia, and it was the Trieste Incident and Russia backed down on the second day and so they cancelled my orders. I had a high gunnery rating. And that ended that.

So, now you're in Corpus Christi. How did you get to Corpus Christi?

Forrest Thompson: Well, when I got my CPA certificate, I was working for a CPA firm when I got my certificate, and he raised my pay \$25.00 a month. A CPA firm in Corpus offered to double my salary if I would come to Corpus Christi. So I doubled my salary and I went to \$1,000.00 a month and then I came to Corpus Christi. I worked for them for 5 years and then I

had my own CPA firm up until I retired and turned my accounts over to my son who is now a CPA and has one of the big firms in town. And that's the end of it.

I know earlier in the interview we were talking about your brother that was at Corregidor, it sounds like you've done a lot of research trying to track down exactly what happened to him. Tell us about that process.

Forrest Thompson: Well I had contacts with several people who were prisoners of war from Japan that came back and contacted me, because they memorized each other's serial numbers and names. That one from Pennsylvania, the one that told me he fought the Japanese single handed until he was unconscious. He would not surrender with Wainwright. And the rest of them were just people who had called me – prisoners of war that when they came back, that lived through it – then they would contact me. I don't know why I didn't, at that time I didn't keep the documents or anything, I just remembered it.

Did you ever learn about that – you mentioned that KOA radio report saying that he had escaped – did you ever learn what the origin of that was?

Forrest Thompson: Never could find out any information on that, never could. That was in October of '42 ... I think it was, no ... I get my dates mixed up. It was in '42, October of '42 I think. Now Pearl Harbor was in '41 wasn't it?

That's right, December 7, 1941.

Forrest Thompson: And he was captured in May of '42, and then we got that telegram in October.

And did they recover his remains?

Forrest Thompson: Well, we had got a letter one time – my Dad was very upset over it because he felt responsible – so they sent us a letter that they had his ashes, and that they would send them back. And to me, sending back ashes was a bunch of baloney. The cost, and how do I know they were his ashes, so that didn't make any difference to me. He has a grave in Hawaii, with his name onto it in the veterans grave over there

Yeah, at the Pacific cemetery, the punch bowl? Yes sir, I've been there.

Forrest Thompson: So that's where he's got a tombstone, now whether those ashes were his Ashes are ashes as far as I'm concerned.

Well sir, I'll tell you, I really appreciate the time you've taken today to share with us some of your memories of your time in the service.

Forrest Thompson: Ya know, I've past my 91st birthday, and I had my own airplane after, also when I was a CPA, I had my own airplane and I could practice before the tax course but I couldn't practice for the judicial department and I had a very successful tax practice and had very close friends in the Internal Revenue Service. A lot of stories of all the years, and then about several years ago, 5 years ago I had a stroke and it affected my leg and my right arm but it all came back. I'm in fine shape now. And the doctor told me – I had a test the other day – and the

doctor gave me an examination and he says “I don’t even want to see you until next June.” And I only take 2 pills a day.

That’s good. That’s a good thing to be able to say. So you kept flying then, after your time in the service?

Forrest Thompson: Yeah, I flew my own plane for almost I guess 15 years. I flew to Los Angeles, I flew to Colorado several times. See I can take off from here and be in an office in McAllen in one hour. I’d fly to Dallas and Houston, Austin – I flew to Austin all the time. I did the auditing for a contractor in Austin. And so, I’ve had a wonderful career, I’m very proud of everything I’ve done. I’ve got one son in Houston who’s a petroleum engineer and he’s a multi-millionaire by now. I got another one who is a CPA here in town – he’s got a big firm here in town, one that I turned over my accounts and he bought in and he headed that. And the other boy, my oldest son went to Vietnam and he was in the Tete Offensive. And he got three degrees when he got back, but his temperament was such that he was not able to hold a job.

What branch of service was he in?

Forrest Thompson: He was in the Air Force, and he was just the ground forces, he was in the electronic end of it. He’s retired, he lives in Harlingen now, he don’t do anything. And my wife – I’m in this nursing home – I got an apartment on one side, my wife is on the other side for nursing care, and we’ve been married 67 years.

Wow. Congratulations! That’s outstanding. It’s great to hear that you guys are still able to be together like that.

Forrest Thompson: And last year, I got a round trip paid ticket to Ft. Collins, Colorado, to play my accordion at a wedding. And, it’s on the Internet.

Really? How did all that come about?

Forrest Thompson: Well, she is the granddaughter of the old ranch lady I used to work for out in Colorado – the new Calamity Jane. And I played my accordion. The last time I played my accordion, it was about 600 people and nearly all of them were standing before I finished.

I’ll have to check that out. Where did you learn to play the accordion?

Forrest Thompson: When I was on the ranch in Colorado growing up. Everyone had little bands out there, like Lawrence Welk, and we had a little band and I played this diatonic accordion. I’m playing it this weekend also.

Oh that’s great, yes sir, that’s really something. Well sir, as I mentioned before we started the interview, we have archives here at the Land Office that go back to the Spanish Land Grants and David Crocket’s widow’s land grant, and Stephen F. Austin’s original Register and things of that sort. Our goal is to put all of these interviews into those archives so that hundreds of years from now, hopefully, people can listen to these interviews and learn just a little bit about what it means or meant to be in the military. And with that in mind, is there anything you’d want to say to anybody listening to this interview a hundred or two hundred years from now?

Forrest Thompson: Well, no, except be sure ... I got a book the other day, Psalms 91, sent to me by the President General – see I'm a member of the Sons of the American Revolution. And you've heard of the Daughters of the Revolution, well I'm the Sons of the American Revolution, and my son in Houston is on the state board. And I got a book signed by him, to me, and so the main thing I am a radical on Christianity. I'm very discouraged because the schools have left Christian teaching out of schools and they are bringing up barbarians as far as I'm concerned. And television is nothing but killing and shooting and fighting one another, and they are not following the Christian ways. Now to me, the Lord is the Lord. And love is love. I've got wonderful children, I'm proud of them, and so right now I'm trying to get some Veteran benefits so that I live the next couple years of my life I guess in this home.

Well it sounds like you have had a blessed life sir and we really appreciate you taking the time today just to share a little bit of that life with us.

Forrest Thompson: I appreciate the opportunity to tell somebody about this, and right now I have some nurse come in here in my apartment ... and what's your name?

My name is James Crabtree and we will be sending you soon, copies of this on CD's, as well as a nice letter and certificate from Commissioner Patterson and I will follow up with a phone call and all.

Forrest Thompson: Well I appreciate it very much and I'm glad I got to talk to somebody about this.

Yes Sir. We'll talk to you again soon and have a good day.

[End of Interview]