

Transcription: Joe Thigpen

Today's date is June 26th, 2008. My name is James Crabtree, and today we'll be interviewing Dr. Thigpen. This interview is taking place in person here in Horseshoe Bay, right?

Joe Thigpen: Horseshoe Bay.

Horseshoe Bay, Texas, at his home, and this interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. So we've gotten that recorded, and then from there, we'll go ahead and start our interview with you, sir. And I guess the first thing is uh, maybe tell us a little bit about your background, where you're from, and that sort of stuff.

Joe Thigpen: Well, I was born in Bay Springs, Mississippi, which is a small town, just north of Laurel, Mississippi, a town of 1,200 people in 1920. And I stayed, finished high school there in 1935, entered and finished Mississippi College in Clinton, Mississippi in 1940. After I finished college in 1940, of course the war started in 1941, and I joined the Air Force in January of 1942, went to primary flight school in uh, well indoctrination school at Santa Ana, California. Then I went to Luke uh, Bakersfield, California, and finished my basic training after doing a primary training in San Diego. So I finished that in 1942, and then from there, I went to, after I finished there, I went to the Panama Canal with a photo recon outfit and stayed there until I was transferred back to the States, and I went over to Guam and stayed in Guam a couple of years, and then I was discharged in, maybe it was 1948.

Yes sir. Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor was bombed?

Joe Thigpen: In 19-, let's see -

It would have been December 7th of '41.

Joe Thigpen: '41. Well let's see, I guess in 1941, I was, I was probably in the Panama, probably in the Panama Canal in 1941.

Yes sir. Do you remember hearing about the bombing or what your thoughts or emotions were?

Joe Thigpen: Well, of course I was pretty well disturbed about the whole thing. Anyway, I was far away from any action, so being in Panama Canal.

What was it that made you want to become a pilot? Did you know when you entered the service?

Joe Thigpen: Well, all my friends were just joining the Army or getting drafted into the Army. I decided I didn't want to be in, a foot soldier, so I decided to try flight school.

Did you have any fear or trepidation about becoming a pilot?

Joe Thigpen: No, none at all.

Can you maybe briefly describe what your training was like in flight school or what you had to go through?

Joe Thigpen: Well, yeah. It was actually flight training uh, was not bad. Of course, you know it had the three uh, levels, primary, basic, and advanced. I went for primary in San Diego. Then I transferred to Bakersfield, California for basic, and I finished up my flight training at Luke Field and then I finished. And from there, then I went to, they sent me down to Panama, and I was in the Panama Canal with this photo recon outfit for, I was there for it was about 18 months, and then they transferred me back to the States.

I got you sir, I'll just plug in this. I noticed the battery was getting low, so we're good. At that time, were you married or engaged when you entered the - ?

Joe Thigpen: No, no. I got married in, they transferred me from the Panama Canal, they transferred us, my squadron back, I was in P-39's then, flying P-39's, and sent us back and we ferried the airplanes back from Panama to Tyler, Texas, Pound C in Tyler. And we were there for oh, three or four months, and I got married. I got married in Tyler, and after then, after that, we were transferred to, from Tyler we were transferred to California and we stayed in California for oh, six or eight weeks. Then they transferred us to Hickham Field in Hawaii, and so we went by boat to Hickham, and then that's when we got our P-38's. So from Hickham Field, then we were transferred to Guam. So we ferried the P-38's from Hickham Field to Johnson Island, from Johnson Island to Idawikok, from Idawikok we went to Guam and then we stayed in Guam until the war was over.

During the war, did you have the ability to have much contact with your wife or your family back home?

Joe Thigpen: Well no, not, see, we got married in Tyler, and then a couple of months later I was transferred out of Tyler, and that's when we went to Oahu, to Hawaii.

During your time in the war, I guess the one thing we try to do with these interviews is try to really capture, because everybody, the history books, they've already written the stories of the generals and the battles and that sort of thing, but we try to capture for the current generation, especially those who haven't served, kind of what your emotions were, or your feelings, or what it was like with your comrades. Maybe just tell us a little bit about some of the things that were the most memorable to you during your time in the war.

Joe Thigpen: Well, of course it was all new, all new to me. You know, just even moving to Hawaii, being stationed in Hawaii for a couple of months and then we had to ferry it, the P-38's from Hawaii to Johnson Island and then to Idawikok and then on in to uh, Guam where we were stationed for the last six months or so during the war.

Were you in the same squadron for the duration?

Joe Thigpen: Yes sir.

I guess you'd gotten to, with the guys that were in the squadron, had most of them gone through the same training? Did you go through training with most of them, or were you a new guy when you got there?

Joe Thigpen: Well yeah, no, no, I was in the same, see, I was in the same group the whole way through. They just changed our designation from, from a photo recon outfit to, I mean from just

maybe what I would call a support group to a photo recon outfit, and what we did was we made photos of 32,000 feet from the, whoever told us to get the pictures.

Talk a little bit about that. What was a typical mission like for you with photo recon?

Joe Thigpen: Well, you know, just a matter of getting in that airplane and flying up to 32,000 feet and getting photos that they needed and getting it back so they could use 'em for whatever purpose.

I imagine your missions were usually kept pretty quiet about where you were flying?

Joe Thigpen: Yes, oh yeah.

And when?

Joe Thigpen: Yes.

And were the cameras, were you, were you taking, did they train you on how to take the photographs themselves?

Joe Thigpen: It was automatic. All you had to do was punch a button -

Oh really -

Joe Thigpen: And the photos would run.

Yeah. Do you remember any of the places that you flew over on those recon missions?

Joe Thigpen: No, not really. It was just out in the Pacific, smaller islands down there.

When you would fly like that, would it be just solo, or did you have other -

Joe Thigpen: No, it'd be solos.

Solo flights. And that plane I believe is just a one-person plane, right?

Joe Thigpen: Yes sir.

And did you do the recon missions most of the war you think?

Joe Thigpen: No, no. Of course, I would do it in just routine flying during the war. I would call 'em mercy missions, like in when we were stationed in uh, Panama, we might fly to South America to take somebody or pick somebody up from that was ill and bring them back to the main Hickham base, not Hickham, but Panama Canal, transfer people.

What did you think of the P-38?

Joe Thigpen: Well, I liked it. Of course I flew everything from B-18's, O-47's, to P-39's, to P-38's and A-20's, B-18's, A-20's, flew just everything they had.

Did you have a preference as to what plane you thought was the best?

Joe Thigpen: Well, I liked the P-38 the best because it cruised about 250 and the others, some of the others I flew cruised some of them cruised at 80, would cruise at 105 and that kind of thing, so I liked it, I liked the P-38 the best.

Have you had a chance – I know they have the Commemorative Air Force now that flies some of those old planes, have you had a chance to see one recently or go up in one again?

Joe Thigpen: No, I haven't flown. When I retired from the Air Force, I did a little private. Well, a good bit of private flying back in Haskell. I had a little, couple of, you know, private planes that I used – Comanche and well, most of my time, flight time with a Comanche 258, I retired.

You mentioned you were in Guam a lot, or based in Guam a lot during the war, what were some of the more I guess hair-raising type missions you might have been on?

Joe Thigpen: Well, we were just taking, we were just taking on photo recon missions. They'd just tell us if they had something they wanted to take pictures of, they just assigned it to us and we'd just go up to 30,000 feet and take what they wanted.

Did you ever encounter Japanese planes at all during those flights?

Joe Thigpen: No.

How do you think you were able to avoid those? Just because your altitude?

Joe Thigpen: Well no, well actually the altitude, but I just uh, never did, never was in any contact.

And then where were you when Japan finally surrendered? Do you remember where you were that day?

Joe Thigpen: Yeah, we were on a mission from, we left Guam and we were on, going up to Okinawa, and the weather was bad and they uh, canceled the mission. They turned us around and we went back to Guam, and uh, the war was over.

Did they tell you when you landed?

Joe Thigpen: Well, I knew about it over the radio, radio communication.

Describe for us kind of what the emotions and feelings were?

Joe Thigpen: Relief, relief.

Yeah.

Joe Thigpen: I was just glad for it to be over.

Before they surrendered, they had had the dropping of the two atomic bombs. Do you remember where you were when that happened?

Joe Thigpen: I think I was, I'm pretty sure we were on the way up there to Okinawa.

What was your thoughts about that? I mean did you think that was gonna end it pretty soon?

Joe Thigpen: Yeah, I thought it was, I thought that was all of it really.

What's your take on a lot of the, kind of the revisionist historians now that try to look at the atomic bombs through today and not in the sense of the perspective of the service men that were there? Kind of like what was your feeling and your comrades' feelings about the atomic bombs?

Joe Thigpen: Well of course, I wasn't, I never was associated with the bomb, but of course obviously I was glad that it was over, that we wouldn't have to do that.

It seems to be kind of a consistent thing. I've found from talking to veterans is that they all kind of feel the same way you do. Well so the war ends and you said you stayed in until 1948?

Joe Thigpen: Yes.

OK. What were you doing after the war? I guess you were there when the Air Force was actually created when it went from the Army Air Corps to the Air Force?

Joe Thigpen: Oh yeah, I went through that. Well, you know, I stayed in until I was discharged, say in 19-, I guess it was 1948, and I came back and went to medical school, I started medical school and went to the University of Mississippi for the first two years and then I transferred to Houston to Baylor, and finished med school in Baylor in 1950, and then from there after I finished med school, I did a year's internship in Houston and then I moved to Haskell in 1951 and stayed there until I retired.

Yes sir. What was it that inspired you to go into medicine?

Joe Thigpen: My father was a doctor.

And then how did you come to move to Haskell?

Joe Thigpen: Well, I married this woman from, that lived in Haskell, and she wouldn't go to Mississippi, so I had a choice. I could either go to Haskell and keep her or get rid of her and go back to Mississippi and find somebody that liked red mud rather than sandstorms.

You mentioned you got married in Tyler, Texas?

Joe Thigpen: Yes.

How did you meet your wife?

Joe Thigpen: Well, I was in the Air Force. See, they transferred us. We ferried our P-39's from down in the Panama Canal back up through South America and Mexico City and we flew

into San Antonio, and then from San Antonio, they sent us up to Pounds Field in Tyler, and were there just piddling around until they decided what they wanted us to do.

Was she in Tyler? Is that where you met her?

Joe Thigpen: Yeah, I met her in Tyler.

And do you remember how you all met?

Joe Thigpen: Yeah, I met her in a swimming pool. We had access to the country club, the pilots did, and so I was out there swimming one day and she was swimming at the same time. I met her there. We got married I guess three or four months later.

That's great and then after you got married, how long was it before you had to leave to go overseas?

Joe Thigpen: Oh, probably I'd say six months.

OK, so you had a little time together before you had to go.

Joe Thigpen: Yeah, we were, I was stationed in of course Muskogi, and then we were there together for six or eight weeks, and then we were just moving to Seattle and then rode a ship over to Hawaii. And then from Hawaii, we had to ferry the P-38's from Hawaii to Johnson Island to Idawikok, and then to Guam.

Did your wife go with you to Hawaii or did she stay?

Joe Thigpen: Oh no, she stayed in Haskell.

Oh, so she went back to Haskell while you were there.

Joe Thigpen: Yes.

And then during that time, was she able to write you a lot, were you able to write letters very much?

Joe Thigpen: Oh yeah. I didn't have, write very much, but she wrote, she wrote pretty frequently.

That's great. When the war ended, how long was it before you were able to get back home to see your wife and family?

Joe Thigpen: It wasn't very long because she was pregnant and was living in Haskell, so as soon as they, we had came back on a troop ship from, to Los Angeles, and then from Los Angeles we rode a troop train back to uh, Camp Shelby, Mississippi and I was discharged in Camp Shelby.

OK, and then at that point did your wife meet you there, or did you have to get on a train.

Joe Thigpen: Yeah, she was, she was in the hospital having our first child.

Wow.

Joe Thigpen: So I went back to my home town. We was discharged in Hattiesburg, so I went back to Bay Springs and when I was in Bay Springs, they called me and told me that she was in the hospital in Haskell having a child, in delivery, so I just had to get in the car and drive to Haskell, Texas and I got there the next day.

That's great. That's a good story. With the P-38's then, then you said you took the troop transport back across the Pacific. Did they just leave your planes there, or how did that come about?

Joe Thigpen: They lined those airplanes up at the air base in Guam and they put big dozers and pushed those P-38's out into, in the channel.

Oh, that's a shame.

Joe Thigpen: And just destroyed 'em.

Yeah.

Joe Thigpen: By pushing 'em out, I don't know how deep the water was.

The few that are left today that they still fly, but I guess that makes sense there were so many of them.

Joe Thigpen: I guess they decided it was easier to get rid of 'em that way than to try to ferry 'em back.

Yeah, that makes sense. What about during your time in the service? What about some of your, can we talk about some of your friends or some of the guys that were in your squadron with you – any anecdotes or stories you want us to know about?

Joe Thigpen: Well, you know, not really because after we got back to in Panama, then they started dividing or changing their place that they were stationed, so the turnover was pretty, pretty much. And most of us, I didn't know anything but that, ___ the master.

What were your living conditions like in Guam? Your food and where you slept?

Joe Thigpen: Well, I tell you what, I may have a copy of a -

I see you got some pictures over there.

Joe Thigpen: Yeah, this my, of course I had a real good friend who was a pilot and uh, that I roomed with in Guam, and uh, we were living in a tent, and so we, I didn't, it rained like the dickens, and every time it rained, water would just run everywhere, so we decided we'd just steal enough lumber to build us a shack, so we did. We stole enough from the supply group there, built us just a little shack and fixed it so it wouldn't rain in it, and we had pretty good quarters.

That's great. What about the food? What type of food did you eat?

Joe Thigpen: Oh, awful, awful. Regular Army food.

Were they C-rations or I mean did they -?

Joe Thigpen: No, no, they, we had a cook, and uh, we, the stuff that we had was all right, but it just wasn't like living at the Hilton or somewhere.

When you were at Guam, did you guys ever have any air raids, Japanese bombings?

Joe Thigpen: No, no.

I'm trying to make sure I capture everything because I want to make sure we get all this. When you were in Guam and you had a lot of those missions, how often would you usually fly a mission? Was it every day you'd be flying?

Joe Thigpen: Oh, we'd fly every, oh every couple of three, two or three days we'd have a mission.

And where you were at your air field was it pretty much just P-38's that were flying out of there?

Joe Thigpen: Yes, P-38's flew there, but uh -

You didn't have any bomber crews or other crews?

Joe Thigpen: No, there was more Navy, a lot of Navy personnel than airplanes there.

What about the runway that you used? Was that one that was -

Joe Thigpen: No, that had a good runway.

Was that one that was constructed by the CB's or was it one that -

Joe Thigpen: Yes, no it was constructed by the CB's right out in the jungle.

Yeah. Have you ever been back to Guam all these years?

Joe Thigpen: No.

Have you ever had a desire to go back?

Joe Thigpen: No. No, I don't care. There really wasn't much to do. I mean just out in the jungle and it was about 8, 10 miles to town, and I only went in to the town one time I think. Just wasn't anything.

So what would the guys do to pass the time then if they weren't on mission?

Joe Thigpen: Play poker.

Poker. Did you play much?

Joe Thigpen: Every day, every time they had a game I played. They were pretty chumpy.

How'd you do?

Joe Thigpen: I did well. I came out way ahead of the game.

That's great. That's a story that might be apocryphal as President Nixon was a major in the Navy and was stationed at some island in the Pacific and in his autobiography he wrote he played a lot of poker, and supposedly earned enough when he came back to finance his first run for Congress in 1946. I don't know if that's true or not, but -

Joe Thigpen: Well, I didn't do that well. I did well enough. I could send, I sent money home.

That's great, that's good. I see sir you've got a bunch of photos and documents over here. Are there any that you want to tell us about?

Joe Thigpen: Oh, those are just some. This is a B-18. It was a great, big old monstrous deal, airplane that we used in Panama to uh, ferry people and also used it for night tracking missions.

Wow, that is a big plane.

Joe Thigpen: For the artillery.

Now tell me a little bit about, are you in one of these photos?

Joe Thigpen: Yeah, this, this is, I'm right here, this is, that's on a trip that I made with my commanding officer when we went up to one of the islands just north of let's see, just north of Cuba on a trip.

Would all of these been part of the crew that would have flown with you?

Joe Thigpen: That was the crew. Of course, the reason I went was that our commanding officer was a very poor pilot and he needed somebody -

How did he get to be your CEO if he wasn't a good pilot?

Joe Thigpen: Just rank. He was a colonel ____, he got to -

That's funny. Now I guess this is a - tell us a little bit about this.

Joe Thigpen: Well that's just a P-38 that uh, and the information that went with it.

It's a pretty unique plane I guess for people that aren't familiar with WWII aviation, just the design alone is, is unique. Did that cause, was that different to try to fly, did you have to learn all over how to fly a plane like this?

Joe Thigpen: No.

Versus another one?

Joe Thigpen: Well, the only thing this one being a twin engine, most of everything I've, well not most everything, but I flew a lot of single engine aircraft, and of course the twin engine and was having that boom in there made it uh, different.

Did you have external fuel pods that you would take with you on some of these flights and jettison?

Joe Thigpen: Yeah.

I was doing some reading about the P-38's and some of those missions and I guess before you would, before you'd jettison those, you'd have to switch over your fuel, right?

Joe Thigpen: Yeah.

Did you ever have a situation where you didn't do that in time?

Joe Thigpen: No, not really.

One of the things that I had read about was a P-38, a couple of P-38's over Europe were flying and the pilot had forgotten to switch over and he jettisoned his fuel tank, and then a few minutes later his engines quit and then he realized what he had done wrong and had to restart 'em.

Joe Thigpen: Yeah, I never did, I was fortunate to never do that.

That's good. This looks like a really neat plane. And what are some of these other things over here?

Joe Thigpen: Yeah, this is just a bunch of stuff that I never did go ahead and catalog.

That's great that you still have all this though.

Another person in room: Looks like orders, discharge papers.

Wow, that's great.

Joe Thigpen: That's just a bunch of -

41st Photo Reconnaissance Squad. So you were with them from, it says from '42 to '45.

Joe Thigpen: Yes, that's right.

And you got out on Christmas Day? Wow. That's great. Wow, these are really neat. I really appreciate you letting us see all this. Luke Field I guess is what later became Luke Air Force Base there in the Phoenix area.

Joe Thigpen: That's right.

Or is that Tucson?

Joe Thigpen: No, it's Phoenix.

Phoenix, yeah. That's great.

Joe Thigpen: Actually I might – many years ago. I've got a, I've got one from the P-38 – I thought I had it. Yeah that, that's my first solo I think right there. No, that's my, that's my -

Oh, that's his, I didn't realize that.

Another person in room: That's your flight during Guam.

This is really something that you have all these photos. Tell us what C-flight meant?

Joe Thigpen: Well that was just, we had A, B, C – A, B, C, and D, and I was, I was the commander of that flight. My airplane and my crew, all my crew.

So you had a big crew to keep up, a plane up. Now where are you in this photograph? Need some light? These are really great photos.

Another person in room: Especially the ___ guy with all that C-flight in there because that's from Guam. I've been there yet ___, but I'm going back. It's hot, sticky, wet.

Joe Thigpen: This is me right there.

Now tell me a little bit about the name on the plane. That says Ms. - is that Diana on the nose? Did you name your plane or did your crew name it?

Joe Thigpen: It's not Diana. That's Ol' Miss. That was of course Mississippi. I went to school at Old Miss. In fact, went to med school at -

That's great. So September 1945.

Another person in room: Here's almost all your orders.

Joe Thigpen: Yeah, I was lookin' for the one where uh -

You've got a lot of pictures, paperwork, SRB's. That's great that you kept all that. There are so many folks that – my wife's grandfather was in the Marines in WWII, and he only has a couple of papers and didn't really keep a lot.

Joe Thigpen: Well, I'll turned all this over to my, my wife takes care of it all.

Oh, that's good.

Joe Thigpen: I thought I had this picture of that uh, place that my friend and my Captain Young and I where we built that -

That shack?

Joe Thigpen: That shack.

Another person in room: It might be in that pile of pictures that we had a second ago. Where is that?

Joe Thigpen: No, that's -

He's got a whole bunch of photos over there.

Another person in room: That your shack?

Joe Thigpen: Yeah, that's the one we built.

Oh wow, there you go.

Joe Thigpen: And we built it up on these stilts, but the unique thing about it was how we slanted the, this, so when it rained, it hit on -

You built this whole thing?

Joe Thigpen: Yeah, yeah.

That's a pretty good job.

Joe Thigpen: We stole all that stuff and picked it up after dark to build it.

Any of the other guys get jealous that you a good -

Joe Thigpen: Oh yeah, they'd all come over there when it rained so they wouldn't get wet.

Ya'll there at Hickham?

Joe Thigpen: Oh yeah, yeah that's when I finished flight school.

Oh wow, yeah, you can see the palm tree behind ya'll there. Oh wow. That is great.

Joe Thigpen: And this is a trip is we flew, I flew a colonel up to this uh, island just out of uh, Jamaica for overnight. Yeah, that's my airplane and this is my crew chief right here.

Another person in room: So these were one-man planes?

Joe Thigpen: Mm-hmm, yeah.

Those are great photographs. What is this one of right there?

Joe Thigpen: Oh that's, that's just a squadron.

Oh, OK -

Joe Thigpen: Uh, inspection.

Oh yeah.

Another person in room: You were still in Guam you'd try to play golf where you'd hit that ball and the monkeys would come grab -

Joe Thigpen: I didn't play golf.

Another person in room: You just ___ off wherever you want to.

Joe Thigpen: When I was in Guam, yeah.

Well these are great pictures, sir. Thanks for showing those to us. And one thing we can do, too, sir if you ever wanted to make copies of these, we can take copies and put 'em on our web site so that when uh, when people go on there and they listen to an interview, we also have, we get a transcript of it so people can read the transcript and we also put the pictures on there, so if there's ever any of these photos you want us to put on there, just make a copy or you, if you trust us, you could send in an original, but maybe just make a copy and we can get it back to you, but we can scan it in and put it on there so it's nice. People can look at that and kind of adds to the archives.

Another person in room: Especially when you're talking about your shack.

Joe Thigpen: Yeah -

Use a picture to describe, a picture is worth a thousand words.

Another person in room: The planes and the other things, but when something special, this is home.

So how long did you live in that shack for do you think? A couple of years?

Joe Thigpen: Oh no, no, I'm thinkin', I was in Guam about four months. We as soon as we, we built it pretty soon after we got there. And we lived in it about three months I think.

Well, so we've kind of talked about your time in the war. Now you mentioned that you got home, and your wife had had your first child – we can sit back down if you're more comfortable. You went back to Haskell, right?

Joe Thigpen: Yeah, right. Well no, I went, after, well after I got home, I went, moved back to Haskell and I worked on a seismograph crew. Then I decided that wasn't doing very much, so I decided I'd go back to, go to med school, and then I was started back, I started to med school in 1948, and went to Old Miss for the first two years and finished up at Baylor, and after that, did an internship at Herman Hospital in Houston, and uh, was there for a year, and then I moved to uh, out and joined this group in Haskell and stayed there from uh, until I retired in 1995.

So you were there, you were the, Jim was kind of telling me you were the town doctor during that time.

Joe Thigpen: Well, I was one of the town doctors. I was there from, after I finished my internship in 1951, I went to Haskell and then say I retired in 19-, 1998 or so.

Another person in room: I think the biggest compliment probably can be given to Dr. Joe there is that in Haskell County, Rick Perry is not known as the governor, he's known as Dr. Joe's son-in-law. This carries a little bit more weight in some places -

That's great. Did you ever, now for folks listening, one of your son-in-law's is the governor of Texas – did he ever – he was a pilot himself and I saw in one of the pilot manuals here it looked like he did some flying with you?

Joe Thigpen: Well, we did some flying after uh, he got, he was not in the Air Force. He got out of the Air Force. He moved back to Haskell and he used the airplane to get around his area for political purposes.

Yeah, sure.

Joe Thigpen: Where I was, all mine was just pleasure after I retired.

Sure. Did he ever talk to you much about his time flying in the Air Force compared to your - ?

Joe Thigpen: No, he was, of course he was in a bomber outfit out of Abilene and uh, we didn't have much in common.

But it's still the same Air Force -

Joe Thigpen: Oh yeah.

Because I know with uh, my wife's grandfather was in the Marine Corps and I was a Marine and Jim was a Marine, it's just kind of like we always still talk about the Marine Corps and that bomb that you have even generations apart. Well -

Another person in room: Well, you could tell James a thing or two about raising daughters. He has a baby daughter that's fixing to be 1 year old.

Joe Thigpen: Is that right?

Another person in room: And he raised three good ones. I didn't know Peggy as much as I knew the other two. Nita's still keepin' the state of Texas straightened out through Rick. And then uh -

Joe Thigpen: Peggy's still keepin' the vets straightened out through Dr. Tom.

Another person in room: Which was Emily doin'?

Joe Thigpen: She's a pharmacist and uh, lives in uh, San Antonio.

Another person in room: Lives in San Antonio – Shirts area or – at uh -

Joe Thigpen: No, Alamo Heights.

Another person in room: Alamo Heights, OK, yeah, she was the younger one and uh, she was the one that we probably knew more than, than the other two. She came out to Lake Stanford and would play around behind the ski boats with us a little bit and that was always fun. Then you would stitch us up whenever we would do something crazy.

Joe Thigpen: Yeah, you get back to Haskell much?

Another person in room: Holidays, Mother's Days, and Pansy's uh, birthday. You know, she had a four-way bypass here uh, back during the latter fall, but I still believe, you know, she's got that Moore blood in her and her mother turned 100, so she's gonna do the same. And Theo, I don't know whether you ever got to know Theo.

Joe Thigpen: Theo Free?

Another person in room: Theo Moore, her brother. Well he was gone from Haskell by the time, he was the guy that was a glider pilot and did the uh, was part of the early Army Air Corps and then trained glider pilots in uh, but he and Woodrow Frazier and uh, one of the Everett's and that bunch, they get together about once a year because they all left Haskell and went into WWII together and those five came home and they get together and talk about it every once in a while.

Joe Thigpen: Well, is your father uh -

Another person in room: My father was James.

Joe Thigpen: Yeah I know that, is he still living?

Another person in room: No, uh, Doc Joe, he contracted uh, pancreatic cancer back in '80, and uh, I was in Japan and they let me come home and do recruiting duty in Houston while he was down in the hospital there, and he, he left us in November of '80, and I went back to Haskell bound and determined I was gonna go to law school, got a job assistant coaching and teaching special ed for Miss Cox, Wallace Cox's wife?

Joe Thigpen: Yeah?

Another person in room: And I haven't been to law school yet. I decided I had to teach and it was what it was gonna be all about. And you were still around then, uh, because I got there in '80, and uh, the clinic was changing hands a little, you know, a little between you and Dr. Frank and uh, and Crew, but you know, it was always nice to know that we had folks like Dr. Joe. It's not like it is today. If you had something wrong with you, you walk in there and they were gonna see you and they'd fix it. Whatever it was, they were gonna fix it.

Joe Thigpen: Try anyway.

Another person in room: Or come to your house if you needed that, and uh, but you knew that uh, their kids and you had grown up together and had an opportunity to be a cubmaster for his grandson, Hank, and when Hank was, Hank had during that period when he decided he wasn't gonna be Joe, he was gonna be Hank.

Joe Thigpen: Yeah, when he got that thing, he took that name, he never changed.

Another person in room: He never changed. He decided I'm not gonna be Joe, I'm not gonna be Little Joe, I'm not gonna be three, I'm gonna be Hank, and he kept his name which I think is pretty much a Thigpen trait from what I hear.

Joe Thigpen: We're kind of hard-headed.

Another person in room: Once ya'll decide something, that's the way it's gonna be. But I don't think Haskell County and then in particular even the state of Texas would be what it is now unless you and Peggy had, or you and sister hadn't decided to live in Haskell, Texas. But now I understand it was her idea.

Joe Thigpen: Yeah it was, I tell you what, I either had to go back there and stay with her or I could've gone anywhere else I wanted to.

Another person in room: Now what was sister's maiden name?

Joe Thigpen: She was Dennis Ratliff's daughter.

Another person in room: That's another one of those classical names -

What's the last name?

Another person in room: Ratliff -

Ratliff, OK, in Haskell County.

Another person in room: That says a lot right there.

Another person in room: Counties and judges and magistrate judges -

Another person in room: Well, we were a good group back then.

Joe Thigpen: Yeah, we were.

Another person in room: We've done all right. We've launched some people out. We've done all right in the world.

Another person in room: James, can I ask a question?

Yeah, absolutely. Dr. Joe, when you were in Guam, that was kind of a jungle - ?

Joe Thigpen: Oh yes.

Another person in room: A lot of rain, so you'd take off and it'd be 75, 80, 85 degrees and you'd climb to 32,000 feet and what was the temperature and how long were you at that altitude?

That's a good question.

Joe Thigpen: Oh, I could stay up there for an hour or so, and you know, we had about four hours of fuel on board.

Another person in room: But you'd leave and it'd be hot, and it'd be cold at 32,000 wouldn't it?

Joe Thigpen: Oh yeah.

Another person in room: So you leave with a coat in the floor and put that on as you're climbing out and P-38's weren't notorious for having good heaters, were they?

Joe Thigpen: Well, I never did get real, that wasn't uncomfortable for me.

Another person in room: OK.

Joe Thigpen: If it was, I don't remember it, which is possible.

Well sir, I really appreciate you taking the time to talk to us today.

Joe Thigpen: Well I'm sorry I haven't been much help.

Oh no, and see that's the thing I want to let you know because we get veterans that say the same thing and that's not true. Every, every story that we record adds to the overall knowledge that future generations have, and in fact, that's the one, kind of the last question I want to ask you because you know, this is something that's gonna go in our archives and we've got stuff like I said in our archives that go back to Davy Crockett, Stephen F. Austin, so you know, future generations will hear this. What's one thing that you would want them to know about your service in the war or any of that sort of thing?

Joe Thigpen: Well, of course you know, I never, I always wanted to be more, in more contact, uh, and more, more active participant in uh, duties of the war, but I was of course had no control over where I was and what I did, so all I could do was do the best I had, do the best I could with the opportunities that I had in the Air Force.

Well I know we're, you know, we're all grateful that you did do what you did, and I think uh, I think everyone in Texas feels that way. I know Commissioner Patterson and the Land Office and Veterans Land Board, we all appreciate your service and your generation's service, and so this is something that we'll save this and you know, maybe 100 years from now, 200 years from now, someone -

Joe Thigpen: I'll come back and read it.

Yeah, somebody will be listening to it and there's another story that adds to the overall picture, the password quilt.

Joe Thigpen: Well, I appreciate ya'll coming over, and uh, sorry we had so much trouble getting this lined up.

Oh no, Jim was great helping us set all this up and I'll go ahead and shut this off. We can keep talking though.

[End of recording]