

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN TALBOT SMITH

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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An interview with Mr. Talbot Smith conducted by Kurt Piehler on July 8, 1998, in New Brunswick, New Jersey. The interview begins already in progress. ...

TS: You got to know him then you ...

KP: Despite the fact that Dominic was cheating, you still managed to beat him in cards.

TS: ... I wasn't the one who was beating him but everybody else was ..., but it illustrates the types that you can get in with and boy, when you see some of those outfits, that outfit that I was in, all from, Chicago down to Calumet City, Chicago Heights. It was that the Army could put together anything that would be useful out of a mob, or put them on a gun like we were on. There was ... some technical work to be done there and ... Most became ammunition handlers or truck drivers or, digging the gun pit or whatever it might have been.

KP: So, you were a product of that. You were just part of the battery. You had a college degree, which was very rare in that day.

TS: Oh, yes. It sure was ...

KP: You had been a manager. Someone like Mosquito, who now you were buddied with, a few months ago you would have ordered him around in the factory, nicely, probably, but still giving orders nonetheless. How did it feel to be in this position?

TS: Well, this isn't something you want to do all your life. You know, you were glad there was a finite end to this, [laughter] one way or another. ... You were kept busy, but when you had time on your hands, there wasn't much of a challenge there to ... go anywhere with these guys or do much in any depth, but, within our little sphere, why we did things ... People down South were quite nice. One thing that they did was on Thanksgiving Day, a church requested ... that they send five or six GIs over for Thanksgiving dinner, and ... four or five of us went over to this house down in Waycross, Georgia, which was a new experience in itself. You drove up this little modest home and it was in, let's say a lot of almond trees or pecan trees, and the front yard is all just weeds and the driveway is all sand. People were just as nice as they could be. They were just great.

KP: They served you a Thanksgiving meal.

TS: Yeah, which was a treat, ... a real treat, too. ... We got the flavor of living in the South a little bit. ... You had to look at it in many ways ...

KP: You were in Savannah, Georgia, where you are now retired to. Do you have any other memories of when you first arrived in Georgia?

TS: ... I can remember getting passes to go into Savannah. They'd load you into a six-by-six, [or] whatever they were called, and you'd go in town, and it was a tremendous service town. It was a port, first of all, so you had a big navy contingent. They had a big air force contingent at

Hunter Field, a big coast guard group, a lot of marines coming over from ... Paris Island, S.C. I was born in 1918. My parents built a home. [They] did it the hard way. [They] got a lot that was an old orchard. My father went out there and chopped stumps out of the ground and cleared up the land. His father ... gave him two thousand dollars and away they went, and they raised a family right there at that spot on 33 South Valley Avenue, in Vineland, New Jersey. My father went from a bank to a glass factory ...where he became the general manager, and held that job, oh, for many, many, years, all through the Depression ... I can always remember the magic number, he made eighty dollars a week, ... week in, week out, Depression or no Depression.

KP: So, your father was fairly fortunate.

TS: Oh, yeah.

KP: He had pretty steady work. It sounds like he didn't even take a pay cut during the Depression which was very uncommon.

TS: No, he didn't. Exactly. We had people all around us that were into the tank, you know, they were really hurting ... but we were shielded to that extent. ... I had two other brothers, and one's sixteen months younger, sixteen or eighteen. I lose track. Eighteen, I guess, and another [that's] ten years younger, and we all went through the Vineland school system. In my own thoughts, I think we got a pretty good education. I always thought that we got a very good education in the Vineland School System, but it was a very, very different system then you read about today. It was much more disciplined from the top, no fooling around, and if you didn't like memorizing multiplication tables, and division tables, and spelling, day in and day out, and writing and diagraming sentences, you were in the wrong place. [laughter]

KP: It still is to a large extent even today, but was Vineland even more of a large agricultural community back then?

TS: Oh, yeah.

KP: You mentioned that there were some factories, but your house was built on a part of an old orchard.

TS: The town of Vineland was started by a man by the name of John Landis, who I believe was an Italian who came over from Italy and laid out the town of Vineland. He seemed to have some inside information that it was a good place to raise grapes and that's why they called it Vineland, and the original town was a mile square. Square with the world, north, south, east and west. Streets numbered East Avenue, Eighth Street, Seventh, Sixth Boulevard, Fourth, Third, Second, West, [it was] that type of a town, and then the streets in the other direction were named after trees ... He promoted people coming in there and buying land, or getting it however they got it, and raising grapes, but of course, the soil was good and it branched off into a lot of other truck garden type vegetables: corn, peas and beets, all that stuff, and somewhere along the line, it also became a great place to raise chickens, and the chicken farming industry became big ... when I was a kid. ... I don't recall just what caused it to fall by the wayside, other than the competition

from people who were getting into it, more mechanized, better sources of food, more space, what have you, but it died and it's dead as it can be right now. That's chicken farming country ... It was agriculture then and then there was the glass business, and ... the glass business thrived there because they were seven or eight miles, or ten miles from some good sources of very fine sand ..., one of the main ingredients, and ... that brought about a lot of industry. Some companies [were] larger than others, but many of the smaller ones came along, and some of them are there even to this day. The Kimble Glass Company, which bought up Durand Glass Company, (where my father worked), have been sold to Owens Illinois who, in turn, sold them all off to the Japanese, I haven't the slightest idea who owns them now, but they're still there ...

KP: Did your father stay with Durand Glass until his retirement?

TS: No, he stayed with it until ... Mr. Durand, (who my father worked for directly), died ... He died in an automobile accident coming home from a party in Philadelphia, and the company was put up for sale. ... They were right next door to Kimble and Kimble bought them. Durand Glass Company was an art glass producer, and Kimble were a scientific glass manufacturer, and ultimately, got rid of all the art glass business. But my father worked with them until he retired. He was just a hometown boy, that's what he did.

KP: Growing up what type of activities were you involved in both in school and out of school?

TS: Oh, it was a great life for a kid growing up in many respects. There were things about it that we didn't like, but ...

KP: What was it that you did or didn't like?

TS: [laughter] Well, in retrospect, ... it was a good place to grow up because it was sort of a Huckleberry Finn type of thing in many respects, particularly in the warm weather, and even in the winters. We had good schooling. ... Our parents were attentive. They kept us in line, ... religion was quite important when we were young. We spent a lot of time in Sunday school and church.

KP: In the Episcopal Church?

TS: Yeah, ... of course, school was important. Then, you'd get home from school you know it was always, a sand lot football game or sand lot baseball, or bike riding, or lots of places to roam for a kid. You couldn't get into much trouble. ... You could go in town, you know, and your parents didn't have to worry about you going down on the main street. My mother would send me to the bank, with a bank deposit, and let me do it. I'd walk or run or ride a bike to the bank, (or just other stuff that we did). Along in there somewhere. My entrepreneur grandfather, gave up on farming and bought ... a lake and a thousand acres of woodland about seven miles away or something like that, over in Salem County. We lived in Cumberland County, and they had a house there and a little country store, the property that they bought had an old sawmill on it, and it had dams and a fleet of rowboats, and this was heaven for kids.

KP: Yeah, it sounds like it must have been great as a kid.

TS: Oh, yeah, and ... my father and his brothers each, had a cottage on the lake, and we spent all the time that we could there swimming and boating or just ramming around in the woods. ... One of the treats was that every year at Christmastime, why, we had a place to go with Dad who would take us out and we'd get our own Christmas tree in the woods, and so that was another treat that you could always remember. As I say, you could lead the Huckleberry Finn type life there with boats, and woods and fishing and all that stuff.

KP: You had also mentioned that some of the aspects, that you appreciate now, you disliked then. What were they?

TS: Well, there was always a limit, on the goodies in life. We had some friends who had plenty of money and they were always off, it seemed to me, having more fun than we were. You know, with cars, or boats, etc., most of the time. In my free time, seems to me I was delivering papers from the day one, and I worked on farms doing, (as a twelve year old). I'd go out and pick cherries from dawn 'til dusk and weed onion patches and, make a magnificent sum of two dollars a day or something like that. It wasn't that we ever got bitter about that. We were probably a little envious of some of the kids that we thought were having more fun than we were.

KP: It sounds as if your parents were trying to teach you some lessons because despite that you probably didn't need money as much as some other families, you had to earn an allowance.

TS: Exactly. Yeah, it's true, and I remember that we had a mortgage on the house where we were born and raised, and we had it for as long as I can remember, just paid the interest on it every year.

KP: Were you ever a Boy Scout growing up?

TS: Oh, yeah. That was part of it. Yeah, got to be a, let's see. I got second, first and five merit badges. What would that be, Star?

KP: Star. Right.

TS: That's as far as I got. We had church activities. We had a church baseball team. We had a church basketball team and I played on both of those. My brother did, too, and it was almost continuous that we had something going.

KP: Do you remember going to the movies at all?

TS: A little bit, they were very inexpensive, and you could go for what, a nickel, or a dime or fifteen cents? Not a lot, but you know, often. We were never deprived of anything like that.

KP: Did you ever take family vacations growing up?

TS: They varied. ... I can remember one family vacation. My father had bought this used car. It was, I think, a 1926 Buick, probably the biggest Buick that was ever built, and he was very proud of it and he wanted to take a vacation, and we took off ... I can remember going to Long Island, Center Moriches. There was a family out there that my parents knew, and we drove out there, and we drove over to the North Shore and took the ferry boat across to Connecticut, and I think that we got out to level country, and my father realized that this car was burning more gas than they were making in the United States about that time, but we did that. [laughter] We did, (my father and another man, and four of us kids, my brother and I and two other fellows), we all went to New Hampshire. One of the men had a pickup truck and he loaded it up with us, and we went up to the White Mountains in New Hampshire for as long as we wanted, I guess it was almost a week. I remember climbing Mt. Washington on foot ... We'd go to the seashore occasionally, Ocean City, New Jersey, for a week, and ... those were about the high points. We never got very far from home. We stayed pretty close. Boy Scout trips up to the Delaware Water Gap maybe, and that sort of thing.

KP: Did you go to the Jersey Shore a lot growing up?

TS: Well, it wasn't as much as we would have liked. There were other kids who were going oftener than we were, but we did get to Ocean City, and Avalon, and you know, down [towards] that southern part of the state.

KP: What about Atlantic City and Philadelphia?

TS: ... Atlantic City, we would get there on special occasions, and I can't remember when that would have started. There was, of course, the Steel Pier, (a big attraction at that time), and I suppose in high school we were becoming attracted to girls on the big bands of the time, but we never did much of that. We got to the Steel Pier and saw the entertainment. The diving horses and et al. One of the attractions at Ocean City, again, was some high school girlfriends that we had, and they had the money, and we could get down there. Why, we could enjoy life quite a bit, and in Ocean City they had ... a beautiful hotel, the Flanders, and they had a beautiful swimming pool, and that was a treat to get to that particular locale. Never enough, you could never get sated on that at our age, I remember that. [laughter] Philadelphia, not an awful lot. I can remember my mother and my aunt taking my brother and me to Philadelphia to have good pictures taken, for instance, when we were small, and I can remember my mother insisting that we go to Philadelphia and shop for some good clothes. I can remember that. I don't know what got her on that kick, but I guess she wanted her kids to get started and she didn't want them to look like farmers any longer. They were going to get dressed up or something like that ... I can't remember the names of the stores now, but there was Chestnut Street. Chestnut Street was a favorite shopping place for us, for her to take us, or go to Philadelphia at Christmastime. Strawbridge and Clothier had the beautiful Christmas decorations, and we'd go up there and do a little shopping. So, yeah, we'd get there, but it wasn't too often.

KP: So, a lot of your life really did center in Vineland.

TS: Yes, oh, very much so.

KP: Do you remember any activity of the Klu Klux Klan? You might have been about seven or eight, but do you have any recollections at all of that situation?

TS: I heard the name but it was never ...

KP: Did you ever see a march?

TS: I've subsequently learned that it was quite a hotbed of the Klu Klux Klan.

KP: Yet, you never witnessed any of their activity?

TS: No, there weren't very many blacks in our town, and ... in looking back, I would say that they were in one area of the town and there weren't many of them around town. For instance, we had a black garbage man, he'd probably be working in the State Department today. He was a real, it seemed like an intellectual guy.

KP: Oh. What about the garbage man?

TS: Yeah, Zacharia was his name, and he was the kindest old gentlemen and well spoken, driving this old horse and wagon hauling garbage, and I can remember him so well. We had colored women who would come to the house once a week or twice a month, something like that, and do some cleaning. There was the Petway family who made a name for themselves by getting into a lot of trouble, I remember that. I never knew any of the others. The reason why I knew the Petways was a couple of the Petway kids were in school, in grade school and high school. I was never aware of any lynch type activity or unfair activity. I'm sure there was plenty of it there, but we were pretty well shielded from that.

KP: Did Vineland have a very large Italian community?

TS: Oh, yeah.

KP: How did the Italian community relate to the other communities?

TS: ... John K. Landis, who founded the place, brought all the Italians in he could. He had to sell land and raise grapes, and they were there early. They started it ... I think there was a little animosity, but I never knew it to get out of hand because ... They were, well, they did a lot in the town. ... I knew Phil Lirio and his family. He was one of the mayors in town and a nicer person you couldn't find. Nick Caterina had a hardware store, great people ... When I've been back to high school reunions, some of those kids are still around. Some are dying off pretty fast, too, but, we've had a chance to, visit.

KP: Have you been back to Vineland often?

TS: I have two brothers that are living there now.

KP: Do you still have a sense of how the community's doing?

TS: Yes. They keep me posted on who just died out of my class or things like that. Some of the highlights, but there's a lot of water gone under the dam. Well, when I went away to Rutgers, that was, in essence, I was divorced mainly from Vineland.

KP: Your parents were both Republicans in the 1930s which was a particularly democratic time. What did they think of Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal?

TS: Oh, I used to hear them jabbering about it. Of course, it never meant much to me at twelve years old. I'd listen to it and hear about it, and I can remember very well listening to Father Coughlin. The reason that I remember it is my grandfather, at the lake, on a winter afternoon. We'd be all cooped up in his house with oil burners going, and the coal stove in the kitchen trying to keep warm, and he had, a new Atwater Kent Radio with three condensers and all that stuff, and we'd listen to Father Coughlin rant and rave but, you know, I didn't have any sense of what this was all about.

KP: Was your grandfather a regular listener?

TS: Oh, yeah. I never heard him say anything. ... If I overheard him, I didn't know, whether he was ticked off at Franklin D. or not.

KP: In high school what activities were you active in? Did you play on any sports teams?

TS: Not a great deal. Mostly schoolwork and I was small, ... only weighed probably 110 –15 pounds when I graduated from high school, [or] something like that, and we had a bunch of biggies who played football and sports ...

KP: I would imagine a farming community, with a large number of farmers, produced some pretty rugged young boys.

TS: Yes, they did. Well, one of my classmates, you may run across his name somewhere, Doug Hochkiss.

KP: I have run across the name.

TS: He was from Vineland and he played varsity football for three years and freshman football for fourth year, and he was a big, tall raw-boned guy. He was a good athlete, and another guy that came along from Vineland, or was there before me, was Tony Ferrera. I don't know whether you've run across his name or not. He played four years of football, and another, after me, was a fellow by the name of Ferd Ratti, who was in the ceramics department. So, we had some representation from the south ... I didn't do much in sports in college. I was working harder in school than I ever worked in my life. School in Vineland had come relatively easy. I had good teachers ...

KP: It sounds like you did fairly well in Vineland.

TS: I'd have a hard time proving it, I think I was eleventh in a class of 147 or something like that.

KP: Which is a pretty good record.

TS: ... When I got to college, a little different story. The chemistry department had me going back to Vineland after six weeks. You know, [it] looked like I wasn't going to make it. You know they took a different attitude about it. As in Vineland, my aunt, I had an aunt that taught school and you know, as a family, we were known in a small town so, whether, I don't remember getting any special treatment but ... Anyway, but getting into college, well, in high school, I think that some of those teachers decided that I needed a little broadening and slapped me into a job like editor of the class yearbook, and I don't even remember doing anything about it, and I don't remember doing much of anything outside ...

KP: Outside of school.

TS: Yeah.

KP: Did you go to school dances?

TS: Yeah, [we] went to school dances.

KP: Did your high school have any fraternity?

TS: No. If they did, they kept it a secret from me. [laughter]

KP: Did your father serve in World War I?

TS: No.

KP: You had two uncles that did?

TS: I had one on my mother's side, and one on my father's side.

KP: What did they tell you? Did they ever talk about their experiences?

TS: A little bit, yes. I was always very interested in it. The uncle, my father's ... youngest brother, he was in the engineers, and he would tell stories about himself, humorous stories, and not much about the military part of it. ... One story that I always remembered was that he worked in the machine shop at the glass plant. He was a good machinist, and he told a story about how when he felt bad, over in the trenches or wherever he was, he carried a bottle of castor oil with him and he'd open it and take the cap off and drink it out of the bottle [laughter] and he did that

one day in the machine shop, [laughter] next to his buddy and the guy was about to throw up, you know, he'd never seen anybody do that. My other uncle was a sergeant in charge of a mortar unit, and he didn't talk much about it. He was a likeable Irishman and he'd talk and tell you some funny stories, but nothing of ...

KP: What it was like to be in combat?

TS: No, never.

KP: You listed as your mother's occupation that she was a secretary in a law office. Did she work while you were growing up?

TS: No. Once she started a family, why, she didn't work any longer.

KP: Was she active in any organizations?

TS: She was in some of the women's organizations, which I don't remember any of them. A couple of them were oriented towards the church, and some women's social things, but I don't remember anything other than that (Red Cross in World War II).

KP: What led you to choosing Rutgers or had you considered other schools?

TS: Oh, yeah, I thought of it quite a bit. I was determined that I was going to go to West Point, and I got the opportunity. I got something. I guess it was an appointment. I had to take the exams, the entrance exams for West Point, and I came in as a second alternate I think, and nothing ever came of that, but again, I was still only about 115 pounds and had enough of a school record maybe, but no other backup to induce them to find a way to get me into West Point. I mean, they could find plenty of left guards and that type, that would go well on the football team ...

KP: What lead you to go to West Point or think of going to West Point? Were you interested in becoming or having a military career?

TS: Well, I thought I was. ... How much do you know at those ages? ... I watch my grandson now and I can picture myself, when I was his age. Going through this being a fireman or a whatever might come into your head at any one time.

KP: How long did you have this interest in West Point?

TS: Quite a while because ... I took some extra tutoring one day a week, just in math, because I figured it would help me pass the exams. ... You know, Tex Coulter never could add and subtract but he went to West Point for four years and played a heck of a good football game, you know. [laughter] ... I knew there wasn't any money around. We didn't have any money for going to college, and you didn't have to pay to go to West Point. That was one of the big items.

KP: That's why West Point was so appealing.

TS: Yeah. Right.

KP: Had you read about the history or the traditions of West Point?

TS: Probably. I'd seen a couple of movies with ..., "The Long Gray Line" or Dick Powell or Ruby Keeler or something like, that would have been a big influence.

KP: Were there other schools besides West Point?

TS: Princeton, and I had nothing to offer them. I wasn't that great a scholar. I needed a job, and I wasn't going to be on their basketball team for sure. ... [I] got nowhere there. They were very forthright and up front.

KP: They sound like they basically told you that in so many words.

TS: Yeah, sure, in cultured language, but [laughter] Then, how did I get started on Rutgers? There was a fellow from Vineland who ... had been in the administration. I can't remember his name. Well-thought-of at Rutgers ...

KP: Stan March?

TS: No. It was in his era. I got to know Stan but I can't remember this fellow's name. Some McMahon.

KP: Oh, yes. Ernest.

TS: Ernie McMahon, yeah. I had met him once but it didn't mean anything, but he ... got quite a bit of publicity in the local news, and I'm trying to think how I got started. I can remember some of the details. [I] probably got a catalog and made some approach, and found out that scholarships were available and somewhere along there, a fellow who used to be very sweet on my Momma, Jim Hanford, he graduated from Rutgers. His son is probably the one you've heard more about, young Jim.

KP: Oh, yeah. We've interviewed his son. He lives on the shore.

TS: ... He used to be from Maplewood.

KP: Okay.

TS: His father was a South Jersey product and a Vineland boy, and he had his eye on my mother, but she looked at him as sort of a clod. He was a farm boy with straw in his hair or something. ... Anyway, he found out that ... I had an application in for Rutgers or was getting a scholarship, and he called up and came to the house and visited us. And to show you how innocent you could

be, he wanted me to join Kappa Sigma. I didn't know what a fraternity was but I said, "Sure," and I did. I pledged.

KP: If this fraternity had not dropped into your lap, you probably would not have joined.

TS: Yeah, exactly. That's what happened though, and somewhere along the line I got into the scholarship business and somebody told me that if I were to apply to somebody at the county seat, that I could get a two hundred scholarship for tuition, and I found out that somebody already had it. But he was only using eighty dollars, and I could get the rest. I didn't give you that in the notes?

KP: You did say you recieved a scholarship, that you had a two hundred dollar a year scholarship.

TS: Yeah. This fellow's name was Mixner and he was from Millville. I always remembered that, and he dropped out after the first term, so they just kept supplying me with a scholarship for the whole four years.

KP: Did you take the state scholarship exam?

TS: No.

KP: It was a different scholarship then.

TS: It was just one available in each county of the state at that ...

KP: That was definitely a state scholarship.

TS: I guess. I didn't ...

KP: But you didn't take any exam for it?

TS: No, I just asked for it and they gave it to me, which made the difference between victory and defeat, I can tell you that. [laughter]

KP: So, if you hadn't gotten that scholarship it would have been very difficult for you.

TS: I would have had to work a lot more in school to make up for it, to get money.

KP: Am I correct in thinking you got into a fraternity easily?

TS: Yeah.

KP: Were you surprised by the fraternity lifestyle, particularly the initiation process and Hell Week?

TS: Oh, yeah. That was quite a surprise, but, you know, we sort of took it all in stride somehow or another. After all, ... I was living rather inexpensively at the fraternity house. I had a job waiting on tables in the fraternity.

KP: You were waiting on the fraternity?

TS: ... It was rough. I mean, the Kappa Sigs were a rough bunch of guys in those days. We had that house right on the corner of College and Hamilton was it? It's now a parking lot. ... we had a bunch of football players and that was their game, and they were rough. They didn't much care about the academics or being gentlemen, or being much of anything, but having a good time. [laughter] ... We had a bunch of us that were initiated that year, and a couple of years after that, we took them from the bottom to the top academically, which put a nice little (patina?) on the [laughter] Kappa Sig House because they became well regarded.

KP: Were the Kappa Sigs hard drinkers according to the standards of the day?

TS: Oh, yeah. It was brutal, some of the stuff that went on.

KP: So, the reputation they had was deserved?

TS: Yes, indeed.

KP: Were there political games played by the fraternities with Dean Metzger because drinking was not allowed?

TS: That's right, and he was on top of it as best as he could. He knew it would happen and that it would ... just be that you would have to ride herd on it, and yeah, he had me over in the office on one occasion asking me questions about what happened on a prom weekend, and I told him the truth. There was quite a bit going on, and he said, "Well, I know all that." He says, "I want to congratulate you for telling the truth, otherwise, you were going to get one of those social probations." [laughter]

KP: So, the dean was ...

TS: Just wild ass kids, I guess, is about what ...

KP: Was it just drinking or had it been something more risqué?

TS: Well, probably a little more risqué. ... I was president of the house at the time, and as far as I knew, nothing had gotten really out of hand, but it was enough that, of course, he had his agents around, going around on those weekends and he had all the details he needed. It always reminded me. It was a lesson well learned, and he brought it home real well, and I told the truth and I've always remembered that.

KP: The lesson was to tell the truth even if it is not the comfortable path.

TS: It's like what Linda Tripp is doing right now. [laughter] Maybe.

KP: Why did you end up in ceramics? It seems interesting because I think only one other school, at that time, offered a ceramics degree.

TS: There were more than that, but Alfred was one.

KP: Alfred was one.

TS: University of Virginia ... I don't remember actually.

KP: There were very few and Rutgers was one of the first.

TS: Well, I was working in the glass factory and I worked a year between getting out of high school and going to college ... The finances were such in those days, I was living at home. My mother took everything that I made and put it in the bank for me. ... Spending money was parceled out. I was making, I started out at twelve dollars and a half a week and worked up to fifteen dollars somewhere along that line ... The father and son Kimble, (Evan Kimble was the father and Herman was his son), and they heard that I was going to Rutgers. Herman asked, "What are you going to study?" ... I said, "Well, I'm going to take chemistry," and he said, "Why don't you consider ceramics?" He said, "We can buy chemists by the dozens, but we can't find ceramic engineers." Which, showing you how innocent I was, I said, "Well, fine. Suits me." ... I'm glad I did. ... It turned out to be a pretty good break for me. [It] worked out all right.

KP: Mike Hill had told me that compared to many other people during the Depression in 1940, ceramic engineers had a selection of jobs to choose from.

TS: ... I'll tell you a little different angle on that, too. There were ten of us, nine men and one woman. And my roommate, his father was the vice president of the American Olean Tile outside of Philadelphia, a big company, a very prosperous company, and he got a job immediately at his father's company at thirty-five dollars a week. All the rest of us got twenty-five dollars a week [laughter] wherever we went. I happened to go to the glass plant and went out to Chicago. ... Whoever else went into ceramics ... I don't remember talking to Mike Hill about that or ... Otto Stack or Jimmy Miller, or any of the rest of them, but that's what I remember. That Bob, my roommate, he got ...

KP: Thirty-five dollars. Was there a little family nepotism?

TS: Yeah, yes.

KP: One of the things Mike Hill emphasized was how rigorous the program was. He said the ceramics courses were not that difficult, but the chemistry and other classes were.

TS: Physics, right.

KP: He also said it was rigorous in that there weren't very many free electives.

TS: That's right.

KP: He said that the curriculum was locked in before you got to choose any classes, for the most part.

TS: That's right, it's correct, and I might have been the only one who kicked over the traces in my junior year. Dr. Brown, the head of the department, was telling me I was going to take a course in electronics or something like that. I said, "That isn't what I want to do." I said, "This is an elective, it's mine. I'm going to take American Literature with Dr. Twiss or Professor Twiss." ... They didn't like that, and I don't think he ever got over it, and I think I probably missed some favors along the line, possibly, for other considerations.

KP: Why was this?

TS: That was the one thing I kicked over the traces on, was that I wanted to take that elective.

KP: So, despite that this was one of your only free electives, he still tried to determine it for you?

TS: That's exactly right.

KP: Incidentally, that was a point that Mike Hill had made, as well. He said he wasn't disappointed with the degree, but he was disappointed that he never got to take any history, art, or literature classes.

TS: Once you got past the freshman year, it was all hard-nosed science, and I agree with him wholeheartedly. It was rough. I remember in my sophomore year, we went from no afternoons off to work labs five afternoons a week and you know, going to five or five-thirty in the afternoon, and I think you miss something ...

-----END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE-----

TS: They were good. Now, it's tough to be ... flashy when you're teaching some of that stuff, like crystallography, or something like that.

KP: Humanities may have it easier, but a bad teacher can make the most interesting subjects boring.

TS: ... We've had plenty of those ... but the fact ... [is], you know, we all worked hard. Bob Braid and I roomed together for three of the four years, and, you know, we'd get into that room at night, and we'd go to work, and you might be at that desk until two or three o'clock in the morning and have an eight o'clock coming up to go to the next day, and I remember that as being

very difficult. ... I was ready to quit in my sophomore year and my mother said, “You’re not going to quit.” [laughter] ...

KP: You had said that you had difficulty in chemistry even in your first semester.

TS: Oh, yeah. ... I was just taking the easy ride, you know, that I had gotten use to in high school, just working enough, but they wanted a little more, and they knew how to get it. [laughter]

KP: You had mentioned that your favorite professor was Dr. Grant of the mathematics department. What stands out about what you remember about him?

TS: He was a short, unimpressive looking guy. He dressed rather conservatively and walked erect, and carried one book, and was always very precise, and he knew his stuff, and again, you can’t make much out of calculus, other than what’s on the page, I mean, but ... he didn’t rush through it. He was very precise and ... one of the best things that he ever did for me was to tell one of my classmates that I was mentally lazy. He didn’t tell me himself. I learned two things already at Rutgers. [laughter] ... He was very friendly, but he wasn’t overly. He wasn’t leaning backwards for anybody. He just did a good job ... There were others that were interesting in different ways, but I always thought that I got as much from his course as I did from any single course ... at college. Now, I ... couldn’t do a calculus problem today if I tried. [laughter]

KP: Bill Bauer remembers very fondly one professor.

TS: Larry Kane?

KP: Was he from England?

TS: Larry Kane?

KP: He apparently didn’t even have a degree.

TS: No, he didn’t.

KP: He was something of a character. Even by today’s standards he would probably be something of a character, but by the standards of the ‘40s he was a standout.

TS: He was Peck’s Bad Boy in the ceramics department. [laughter] ... [He] got snookered (too much booze), frequently and showed it when he came in to school. Yeah, he gave a good course. It didn’t happen to be something that I was particularly interested in. It was glazes for pottery or tile, and that sort of stuff, and I was going into the glass business. ... Of all the records that I have left of Rutgers, my class notes from Larry Kane are one set that I have saved, and a geology book from a very poor geology department. [laughter]

KP: Why was it that you saved the notes from his class?

TS: He had the technical knowledge to put together these great formulas, or he collected them from somewhere ... He backed them up with technical knowledge and they were very usable. ... If you went into a pottery plant, you'd have a real basis for a lot of information that you might need. ... It might not be that you could use it right away, but it would be a starting point for developing something ... I liked the guy too, and I can remember him. [laughter]

KP: What were some of the unpleasant experiences you had with professors? You don't have to name names if you don't want to.

TS: We had a Professor Miller in the physics department, and I had an awful time with that course, just terrible, and he was no help at all. ... I think he wanted to be a nice guy, but he was just all thumbs and the typical "absent minded professor", maybe, or something like that.

KP: Ralph Schmidt told a story of the physics professor who liked "The Grapes of Wrath" so much that if you wanted a break from chemistry that day, you just mentioned the movie and he would just go off on a tangent. [laughter] Was that the same professor?

TS: No. No. We had some gems, though. Crystallography was one of the toughest courses I had to take. It was taught by a graduate student in the Rutgers ceramics department, Kenny Green, a real nice guy, but no pizzazz. He couldn't ... gel it for me. I don't know if ... he had anybody else with my problems or not.

KP: Considering that you had a difficult major, how tough was it to be a member, and eventually the president of a fraternity with a lot of rough edges?

TS: Yeah. Well, ... I lived in the fraternity house in my freshman year, and the freshman year was the easiest of all of them, and I was able to handle it all right, I guess. ... Bob Braid and I, at the end of our freshman year, I've forgotten where he was living, but we got together and decided, I had ... gotten him to join Kappa Sigma fraternity, which he did. ... Bob ... he was an Upson scholar at the time, [a] football player, and a great golfer. So, we decided, there was a rooming house behind the Kappa Sig house, on the street behind it. I can't remember the name of that street now, but we decided to set up housekeeping over there for our sophomore year, and the fraternity people were very upset. ... I must have had a premonition that it was going to be a rough year and I couldn't hack this fraternity life. ... We went over there for a year, and ... I think that's when we spent the most hours of all on this heavy-duty school business that we got into. I can remember setting up and doing engineering drawing up there in this room. ... That's when I started smoking. I remember that. ... The work load was heavy and I felt that we should get out of the fraternity and get down to business for that year. So, we did, and whether it made that much difference or not, I don't really know.

KP: Did you move back to the fraternity house?

TS: Yeah, ... we went back to the fraternity house for two years, but those roughnecks were all gone, too. ... Bender, and a guy by the name of McGee, and my old roommate, Chet Westcott. I think they're all dead now. They died mostly of old football injuries if I'm not far off. [laughter]

KP: You played freshman baseball. Did you decide to give that up because of the workload?

TS: That and the talent that was out there, that was coming on in our sophomore year, ... I was just not in that league. Art Matsu was the freshman coach, a real nice guy. ... We had some talent on that freshman baseball team, but the next year I think the only one that stuck with it was Lenny Cook, who became a four-year athlete. He was a good catcher. Shorty Shank ... became a varsity shortstop. I think those were the only two on our freshman squad that survived. The rest of us just didn't have that much going for us. ... We had some good athletes at Rutgers. [We were] never good enough to win a championship or anything ... [laughter]

KP: Did you ever have time for any fun? Did you go to any dances?

TS: Yeah, not a lot, but ... we had some fun. I can't remember which dances I might have gone to now, but ... the Military Ball, the Soph Hop. I'd make one a year, maybe something like that.

KP: Did you date women from NJC?

TS: I used to date a girl from NJC but ... not really dating. I mean, we'd get together and play tennis, friends of Otto Stack ... In fact, the girl that he married was one that I dated from NJC at the time. Duffy, Jane Duffy. How we got together with those two girls I haven't the slightest idea, but ... the other one, in the tennis doubles, was a girl who married Art Perry. He was a football player and went into the Air Force in 1939. [He] was a big man on campus. Anyway, those were the two girls I played tennis with. We'd go over to the New Jersey College every once in a while for some social activity, but not much for me. There were other guys who really went at it hot and heavy, and ... several married girls from NJC, the girls that they went with.

KP: A number of people that we have interviewed said there was a great deal of interaction between Rutgers and NJC.

TS: Yeah, there sure was.

KP: Had you mentioned that there was one woman in the ceramics program?

TS: Yeah, ...

KP: What was your relationship with her?

TS: ... I felt sorry for her because she only came over for that one class in our freshman year, and then went back to NJC for the rest of her courses, and that class met three times a week maybe, at eight o'clock or something like that, and I sort of lost all track of her after the freshman year. I don't think she ever did anything in ceramics ... I know one woman who did ... and I know her

today. ... I went to work for her husband later on ... Ceramics, in that day, was completely different than it was after World War II. There's a big, big gap in there. ... The courses that we took, you could compare them to taking courses in reading recipes out of a cookbook ... as compared to what they did during the war and developed during the war, which they put into the curriculum after the war.

KP: So, the war made decisive changes in ceramics?

TS: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. We had one guy in ceramics. He was [in] the class of '39. Glenn Howatt ... He was a boxer and a big taciturn guy. He picked up on some of the science that he was exposed to in the years '35 to '39, and I don't know how he got going on it, but he made these ceramic parts, which were picked up by the Signal Corps. They were very good insulators and held up well under a lot of conditions. ... He rode out the war building a plant, and making a fortune and turning out these talc things that ... My memory is getting so bad that I can't remember the terminology (steatite) ... Anyway, that was the first that I saw of any change coming along, and ... I could sense the change, and for a variety of reasons, I decided to go back to Rutgers and do graduate work in ceramics, and I didn't stay with it, I only went half a year, ... one semester.

KP: So, you went back under the GI Bill?

TS: Yeah.

KP: Was that all graduate work?

TS: Yeah, I only did it one semester.

KP: Only for one semester?

TS: Yeah, I was too old. I'd done too many other things by that point. ... I went back with Bill Bauer.

KP: Okay.

TS: Yeah, that's where he and I got to know each other quite well, and he stuck with it. He got his doctorate and got all kinds of honors.

KP: Was the GI Bill campus very different from Rutgers before that?

TS: Oh, yeah.

KP: What differences did you notice in one semester?

TS: They were just beginning to ... there was no signs of that great outburst yet.

KP: Do you remember what semester you went back?

TS: I went back in ... let's see, I got out in September '45. I went back in January '46 and stayed until May or June of '46, and I don't remember any of that great burst of growth. For instance, whether they even had the Livingston campus yet, or not, I don't know. I don't remember it as any part of my experience. I was aware of the guys around me that were doing the graduate work, Larry ... Again I'm up against a blank wall with names. Larry ... He also got his doctorate at the same time Bill Bauer did.

KP: One person that comes to mind who was not in ceramics, but was in the sciences was Sam Blum.

TS: Sam who?

KP: Sam Blum was back at Rutgers for graduate work. I think he was in chemistry.

TS: Oh. Larry ... I can't remember his name, and he was ... the biggest jerk as an undergraduate, and the Navy did wonders for him, and he got down to business, and did very well, and got his doctorate in ceramics. Bill Bauer, Jay Comofofo.

KP: Oh, yes.

TS: You know Jay?

KP: We interviewed Jay. We interviewed Jean, his wife.

TS: Oh, I'll be darned. Well, Jay was in that graduate class at the same time that I was, and he went on and got his doctorate, and it seems to me there were five of us, and I can't remember the other one, and ... by that time, I was, let's see in '45, I was twenty-seven years old, and I'd done a lot, and I was getting ready to really settle down and do something I liked.

I didn't like my first job out of Rutgers. It was an awful job, as I remember it, and I used Rutgers as a way to let the Kimble Glass Company people down a little gently, because my brothers and the family were all working at Kimble Glass, and they had given me that job out in Chicago in 1940, and so, I just didn't want to just turn my back on them, so I went to graduate school ...
[laughter]

KP: What did you think of mandatory chapel at Rutgers?

TS: ... I was *comme ci, comme ça* about it. It was always inconvenient, but we did hear some good stuff. They had Sunday chapel. They would have some outstanding speakers. I can't remember them now, but the inconvenience of it was the toughest part of it, but it had a purpose, and ... I'd been trained in religion at home and untrained, incidentally, when I took a course in contemporary civilization under Dr. Burns, in my freshman year. He talked me out of all of that. ... I don't know whether anybody ever mentioned his name to you or not?

KP: Oh, no. Professor Burns has come up. It seems like he made quite an impression on you.

TS: He did, he did. He was a real Prussian type, very precise and very head-on, and when he spoke, you'd better get it all down. ... It was a good course, but, you know, I was at that age, where I was easily influenced, very easily influenced, and I listened to him, and he was so logical that there was no ... sense spending a lot of time being in church, that was the impression that I [had].

KP: It seems interesting that his message would be so bold. I have been told Dean Metzger was, if nothing else, a stern Calvinist minister.

TS: Oh, yeah. Right.

KP: It really sounds as if Burns was unfazed by this.

TS: He really knew how to ... get you out of all this foolishness that you're wasting your time on and get down to something important. [laughter] I don't know what that was ... I can always remember ... our star football player was Bill Tranavitch. He was in our Class of '36, and he was in my contemporary civilization class. He wasn't really going to be going to Oxford, or anything like that, and we had this twenty question quiz, plus for correct, minus for incorrect, or something like that, and old Bill came out with a fabulous mark of eighty-six, and I think, on the basis of that, Dr. Burns decided that we'd all cheated and he gave the test over again. [laughter] ... He was a very forceful guy.

KP: Did you apply to stay in advanced ROTC?

TS: I didn't apply.

KP: Why was that?

TS: No, I didn't want it.

KP: Was it because you had wanted to go to West Point?

TS: That's right.

KP: What changed in those few years?

TS: Well, I got a taste of the military, and I said, "I don't like this". [laughter]

KP: After the mandatory ROTC, you were not too enthusiastic to stay?

TS: No. I thought it was ... map reading and ... the very lack of depth of military science, I think, ... it's challenging in the bulk, but not really understanding much. ... I don't believe I ever went

through learning how to aim an Army rifle or not ... You'd think if you did it once, that would be enough, but in the Army you never stop, ... and many, many drills like that just would irk you. You could find better things to do with all that time. [laughter]

KP: It sounds like you don't regret the fact that you didn't go to West Point in '38.

TS: No. Many times I was so glad that things had turned out the way they did.

KP: If you had gone to West Point and stuck it out you would have gone right into the war.

TS: I would have been in Corregidor or some nice place like that. ... In retrospect, things just sort of fell into place for me, and I was balked from doing what I thought was the most important thing I would ever do, you know, and in retrospect everything worked pretty good. [laughter]

KP: I had been told that there was a rivalry of classes that carried some animosity. Was there hazing of the freshmen by the sophomore class?

TS: Yeah, a little bit. I mean, they'd come up to you [and ask you], "Where's your freshman hat?" or something like that.

KP: Did it go beyond that?

TS: I never had any problem with it that I can remember. Most of the hazing that I ran into was right in the fraternity house, and I guess these guys looked at you with disdain, you know, to some degree. Art Perry, the guy whose name I was trying to think of, a big man on campus, whose girlfriend I played tennis with, you know, those guys wouldn't pay attention to you. Why should they? You were a new boy, or new kid, and these guys were men by the time we got there.

KP: My students and I have all gone back and read the *Targum* from the '30s and '40s, and it was a rather insular world, at least from that perspective. Very rarely the outside world would penetrate onto the pages of the *Targum*.

TS: Right.

KP: How much were you aware of what was going on in the world outside Rutgers?

TS: I don't know at what point I became aware of some of the things that were going on. ... I can remember, in retrospect, going back even before college, my grandfather was a great proponent of England, and everything they did being great, and my father was to a certain degree, and I think maybe ... as a kid I got sick of that. ... When the war started and Adolph started marching all over the countryside and beating the hell out of England, I thought, "Well, this guy Hitler has got something. He's organized. He's pulling his country out of the doldrums. He's whacking the British pretty good" and I didn't care one way or the other. ... Now I look at that

and think, “Boy, no wonder these young people look so stupid.” Here I was, the whole country was working towards getting behind saving the English-speaking people.

KP: It sounds as if you wanted to be rebellious against your father and grandfather.

TS: Yeah, let them [England] get whacked. They think they’re so good, and, you know, I think of that now, and I blush. What a horrible thing. Of course, you don’t know what to expect from kids. I see my own children and grandchildren doing things now that just, I’m aghast ...

KP: It also sounds like you have acquired an understanding that kids do stupid things.

TS: Oh, yeah. It’s going on all the time. Just so they don’t get too close to Washington ...
[laughter]

KP: We looked at a student poll from the *Targum* from ‘36, during the election, and most students were for Alf Landon, and most in ’40 were for Wilkie.

TS: Sure.

KP: Is that reading correct?

TS: Well, I felt that way myself coming from the background that I did. Yes. We heard ... as little as a young person like me would get involved in any of that, we heard anti-FDR, packing the Supreme Court. You know, all these programs were just so earth-shaking. I never dwelled on it, you know I was more interested in ... who knows what, but I would go along and say that that was probably very true. We had some guys in our class, I can’t remember the fellow’s name now, but he went on to go to Washington and was an assistant to the great senator from New Jersey, who graduated from Rutgers.

KP: Clifford Case?

TS: Yeah. He was a close assistant to Clifford Case, and Clifford Case was a moderate republican and this fellow who went from Rutgers with him, I always classified him as a socialist, ... but he stayed in Washington, and I don’t know whether he’s still alive or not, but Sam Zagoria, Z-A-G-O-R-I-A.

KP: I think I’ve heard the name.

TS: I think ... that’s the guy. He was a little wild, I thought, but he stayed in Washington, and became part of the war production board, or got into these bureaucratic jobs. He would be pretty much the wildest thing that we would have seen on campus.

KP: Do you remember any socialist or communist meetings?

TS: Yeah. We knew that there were a few there who were, you know, on that kick, but they were so outnumbered ... [that] they just didn't make that big a dent.

KP: Do you remember the Veterans of Future Wars?

TS: No. No.

KP: You don't remember that.

TS: No.

KP: There were a few peace rallies in the late '30s at Rutgers. Do you remember any of that?

TS: Don't remember those, no. [They] didn't hit me.

KP: What about the 1940 peacetime draft? Do you remember registering for that or do you remember how close were you to getting drafted early in the peacetime draft?

TS: I was registered, and I registered in Chicago Heights after I went to work, and I still have my registration card from the Chicago Heights Draft Board. ... My number was drawn about, let's see, about March, February or March of 1942, and the company got me one six month deferment. I was a bachelor and, you know, new kid on the block, and I had ... no tickets to keep me out of the draft. So, I don't remember being involved with it at all in Rutgers in the spring of 1940. I don't think anything had happened at that point.

KP: So, you weren't drafted until 1942?

TS: Right. Yeah, but ... I didn't pay attention to that sort of stuff, you know.

KP: Well, it sounds like you weren't called up, so it obviously, you didn't dwell on it. You mentioned that you got a job with Kimble Glass, partly because of the family connection, and you moved out to Chicago.

TS: Right. Yeah.

KP: You weren't crazy for the job.

TS: No.

KP: What were you doing? What was your first job like?

TS: Well, I was given the job as a ceramic engineer. I was told that was what I was. That was my degree, but I didn't have a great engineering in glass technology, and I had worked in the glass factory in Vineland, but, office boy for a year, a lab assistant in the summertime, no hands-on responsibilities as far as manufacturing and all. So, when I went out to Chicago Heights, they

had taken an experienced ceramic engineer from there and brought him back to Vineland, and I took his place, but they left a team of experienced people out there, none of whom had any college training at all, or real technical training. It was all hands-on, how to make this factory run. And it was ... some experience, I'll tell you. A twenty-three year old kid as the main source of technical knowledge, let's say, but these other people, the manager, and the foreman in the department where I was, and the machine foreman, and this man in charge of maintenance, a great team. They could keep that baby going ... I was thrown into that, and it was hard work. ... This plant ran fourteen days in a row, and then you took a weekend off, by state law, and ... you closed the plant down. Well, everybody else went home, but you had a lot of maintenance work to do in those two days. ... It was nonstop, hard labor, for twenty-five bucks a week, you know whatever I was making, and so, it was all right. The novelty of it was pretty good for most of the first year. It sure wore off in a hurry. ... It was dirty, ... and I wasn't gaining anything technically. The manuals were there on how to run this place and you ran it by the manual, and you'd get into a little trouble, and hopefully you could get some help to get out of it, ... but by the time two years had gone by, I was, you know, drafted. The draft looked pretty good to me. I was single. I didn't have any romantic entanglements, and I met some fine people in the Midwest. I think that was one of the best things that I learned, was Midwesterners versus Easterners. They're very warm and brought you right in the factory family, and their social life and everything.

KP: So, it sounds like you liked living in the Chicago area in a lot of ways.

TS: That part of it, I did.

KP: You enjoyed the warmth of the people.

TS: Yeah, that I liked. I was impressed by those people, and Chicago Heights is the last place in the world you'd ever want to live. It's the poorest city in the United States according to what I've read in "Life" magazine, and it was well on its way then, how many years ago.

KP: Even then, it was a rough place.

TS: Pretty bad. They had crime. The place was run by organized crime. Everything was run by organized crime. I used to like to play the horses a little bit, and I'd go to the bookies, and one day, they said, "We're going to be raided. ... We're going to be closed for about an hour and a half, but we'll open up down on Hallstead Street." Getting back the fund. [laughter] That's how I got my driver's license, you know, I gave the guy, he said, "You didn't do too well on the written exam." He says, "We're having a dance Saturday night for our agents, and if you'd like to buy a couple of tickets, why we'd love to have you come." Five bucks for two tickets to a dance which I wasn't going to go to, and I passed. [laughter] On, and on, and on, like that in that area, it was terrible.

KP: Your reflection is interesting because some people were trying to argue that there was less crime.

TS: Not out there. [laughter]

KP: Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

TS: Yeah. I sure do. I was rooming with a doctor and his wife, and I had been at the plant. It was a Sunday morning, and I had been at the plant, and I came home. I was dirty and grimy, and before I did anything, ... I decided to have a snooze on the bed, and the doctor came upstairs and woke me up and said, "The Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor," and I remember that distinctly.

KP: Did you know where Pearl Harbor was?

TS: Yeah, ...

KP: What was your reaction? Did you think you would be going in soon?

TS: It didn't strike me that anything would be happening real quick. It just, ... [I] didn't give it much thought.

KP: Did you think you would enlist?

TS: No, I never did. No. I was willing to play it out. As I say, this is one of those things, when you look, in retrospect, suppose I'd enlisted? We wouldn't be talking today, probably.

KP: It's entirely possible.

TS: These things happened to me so regularly, you know. Who wants to be? ... There's that damn seagull with the broken wing. I'll be damned. I don't know what to do about him. See him sitting out there? Right out, look through the screen door here.

KP: Oh, yeah.

TS: No, ... that was just one of those things that just fits this pattern right along, one thing after another.

KP: You were just waiting for your number to be called, as they say

TS: I wasn't even worried about it. It didn't even cross my mind ... until it happened, I guess.

KP: How did you feel about the company getting you a deferment?

TS: Oh, I thought that was fine. That was okay with me.

KP: What would have happened if the company had been able to get you a deferment? Do you think you would have just sat out the war?

TS: I don't think I could have handled that. I don't think I could handle that problem there much longer.

KP: So, while you were willing to wait it out, you didn't want to stay the rest of the war

TS: No, that was a dead end spot to be in, as far as I was concerned.

KP: ... You were drafted in late 1942. Where did you report?

TS: [I] went into Chicago, the City of Chicago, to some armory, or something, and took a physical exam with, I don't know how many thousands of others, and then, shortly thereafter, I got notice on September 4th, let's say, that I'd be called to Camp Grant on the 22nd, or something like that, and so, I made arrangements and got myself together, and came home. [I] visited my folks and family, and went back to Chicago, and went into Camp Grant.

KP: How long were you at Camp Grant?

TS: About three days. Very little.

KP: Where were you sent next?

TS: By train ... to Camp Stewart in Georgia.

KP: You were originally assigned to antiaircraft.

TS: Yeah.

KP: Did you do basic training for antiaircraft or did you do basic infantry?

TS: No, ... they were so much in need of people, of warm bodies overseas, that we took it all at once, mixed it all in together. We ... worked a lot, right in the battery area, where I was assigned, to a gun battery.

KP: So, you were immediately assigned to a gun battery after Camp Grant? You didn't do sixteen weeks or fourteen weeks at basic first?

TS: Right in.

KP: You were learning on the job.

TS: That's right. Exactly, and we didn't even have the guns to train on. So, ... we had uniforms, and we had a small area in the battery area where we had our barracks, and we did a lot of close order drill in there, and learning the fundamentals of saluting, and an awful lot of running, physical exams. Again, that boring stuff of how to fire a rifle. You're in the playroom, you know, and trying to look through a peep site over and over ... I don't remember the timing, but it was a

big base, and ... a lot of it was swamps and woods, and we ran all the time, and again, it was quite a new experience for me, running through those woods in there. You'd find a wild cow looking at you, you know, or wild pigs. They just took the farms, the animals and everything, and made an army camp out of it. I was just back there a couple of weeks ago. I took my grandson down. Two-hundred and eighty-thousand acres of land is what that is composed of now, and it's huge. It was big then, but then, you know, it took them a long time to get us rifles. The Garand Rifle, which was new, and it took them a long time to get the guns that we were going to fire, the .40mm guns.

KP: You were with this unit until December of what year?

TS: '42.

KP: What do you remember of your comrades and sergeant, and do any memories stick out?

TS: ... We had a Captain, a Captain Denlinger?

KP: Was it Captain Denlinger?

TS: Denlinger, yeah. He was sort of an egotistical, pompous guy, but it was something you needed. You needed somebody with some, a little class, which he had.

KP: Was he a West Pointer?

TS: No, I think.

KP: Was he a regular?

TS: No, he was, I think he might have been a lawyer, or something and volunteered early. One of those types.

KP: It sounds as if he was serious and passionate about his position.

TS: Yeah, oh, yeah. He was very serious and ... they kidded those guys a lot, but I give them a lot of credit. Those fellows that stepped in took the responsibility. I thought highly of them, and you may have had some discomfort, but ... they were true patriots, I think. ... One of the other officers, one of my platoon officers, was a real nice guy that just graduated from Princeton, and I can't remember his name to save me.

KP: It sounds like there is a lot that you remember about him.

TS: Yeah, and ... we had a captain and four lieutenants, and they were all real good. ... They weren't tough like the regular army was, but I'm sure they would toughen up as they went along. Then, we had a master sergeant that was regular army. He ran the place. His name was Williamson. He was from Texas, and he was big and tough, and he knew how to handle two

hundred men, and he had a cadre ... of regular army types. For instance, our ... gunnery sergeant, at our particular gun crew, in our barracks, Sergeant Bryan, it's something like you'd read out of *From Here to Eternity*, you know. You'd get paid on pay day and go, man, go, and then, drink hair tonic for the rest of the month. You know, [laughter] one of those kinds of people, but they ... had to whip us into some kind of shape, which they did.

KP: What parts of the country were the people in your battery from?

TS: Mostly from that area, out there.

KP: Mostly from the Chicago area.

TS: Yeah, very, very tough crew. When you'd get into something like that, see, I had plenty of education and responsible experiences, and some of these people were, oh, man, the bottom of the barrel, and often, I thought, "Boy, if this country is depending on these people, we are in worse shape than I thought we were." [laughter] ... One of the guys ... had married a "madame" from a whorehouse in Calumet City. He was a pimp himself, and he was about the lowest that I ever ran into.

KP: How did you learn that he had been a pimp, and were both he and his wife involved in prostitution?

TS: Yeah. There was another kid in the company, and all I remember, his name was, they called him "Mosquito". I can't remember his name. He was a little, short fellow, and he had worked in the glass factory where I worked. He was one of the boys running stuff from the blowers to the lehrs, and we played poker at night, ... occasionally. ... Dominic was the one that I was describing as the pimp, and Mosquito was off to the side. The reason Mosquito trusted me is ... he'd give me his mail. He had a girlfriend, and he couldn't read, and he'd give me his mail and I'd read it to him, and you know, ... I was his confidant.

KP: You probably would not have been close friends in civilian life. You may have been nice to each other in the factory, but you wouldn't have had the friendship that you developed in the service.

TS: Oh, yeah. Very close, you had to be close in the Army. As you get into a unit, you'd find that out, but he said to me, "Dominic is cheating in that card game you're playing in." You know, it was five-card draw, or something like that ...

KP: Just to go back, even though Dominick was cheating, you were still beating him in cards. He was still losing.

TS: ... I wasn't the one who was beating him but everybody else was, you know, so, but it illustrates the types that you can get in with. ... Boy when you see some of those outfits, that outfit that I was in, all from Chicago down to Calumet City, Chicago Heights. It was that the Army could put together anything that would be useful out of a mob, or put them on a gun crew.

-----END OF TAPE SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE-----

TS: Well, we'd get an occasional weekend off, and that was about the only place that I would go. It was to Savannah, and it was just overwhelmed. It was a fairly small city at that point. Today, it's only 151,000, and it could have probably been half of that in 1942. ... The experience was that you got off the truck and you were immersed in a sea of servicemen, which is exactly what you didn't need after the training periods you'd been through ... You went to the USO, and then another hot spot was the DeSoto Hotel. It was the DeSoto at that time. It has since become the DeSoto Hilton. It was an old brick building, maybe three stories. A big, circular bar is all I remember, where you'd pack in and try to get a drink, and it was just impossible. You couldn't get a place to stay. We slept, sometimes on the floor in the lobby, in the hotel, or on folding chairs in the USO, and, generally speaking, you at least got off the Army base. You could walk around. I'm sure all the families had their daughters hidden, because it was, a lot going on there. ... I can remember one time specifically, I was walking from the USO down towards the port area, and there ... weren't very many people out, and I can remember two Marines had come over from their place over there in South Carolina. I can't remember the name of that base now, but they decided to pick a fight with me. Just out of thin air, just like that.

KP: Just because you were walking along?

TS: Just because I was a soldier and they were in the Marines, and the Marines are, you know, they feed them raw meat all the time and that's the way they act. [laughter] So, we didn't go through that drill. I talked them out of it, I guess, and I can't remember much that was outstanding, other than just the fact that you could get into town and walk around, and see something that was a little different.

KP: You give the impression that your initial unit was a hard drinking lot from the wrong end of town. What about when they hit town? How many would you say went to houses of prostitution?

TS: No, I never got that. One time, there was a soldier in our outfit. He wasn't worth much, ... and he got into some kind of deep trouble. ... I know that they lined us up the first thing Monday morning, and Sergeant Williamson was going to find out who did this. ... I always was thinking of that one guy. If somebody screwed up and nobody owned up to it, they punished the whole battery or the whole unit, and so I had no idea who did it, but no, I was ... never aware of that. The few times that I had gotten away, some of us got together and went over to Georgia Tech for a football game and slept in our pup tents right on the ground in the stadium. ... I met one of the kids in another outfit, and he was a real nice guy, and you knew, he wasn't going to be tearing up Atlanta. He was going to the football game and whatever the boss said, he'd do that, too. ... The guys that I went to dinner with at that Southern home, some of the language got away from us during dinner. I remember that, but that was accidental ...

KP: How would you describe the unit when you left it? Did the officers in the cadre work as much as was necessary by the time you left?

TS: Well, I don't think we were ever tested enough, really, as compared to what you would be tested today. For instance, in firing the guns that we were trained to fire, we didn't have enough of that out on the range to really know. I can't say that we were great, about the only thing I could say was that these guys now knew the basic things that an Army did. One was march, one was run, and one was to do guard duty, and another was KP. ... You wore your uniform a certain way, and the officers could move these people around in some organized fashion.

KP: Was it tough in the beginning?

TS: Well, I think it must have been for that Regiment to go over and, you know, Rommel was running all over North Africa at the time ... I've seen a couple of them since, many years later, and they look the same today as they did then, and we didn't get a chance to talk much, but at least they survived ...

KP: Where did that unit go?

TS: To North Africa.

KP: They did go to North Africa.

TS: Oh, yeah, they went to North Africa.

KP: When did the unit depart for North Africa?

TS: I don't know. I left to go in the Air Force about three or four days before Christmas. I was on a train going out to Texas and never had any way of finding out.

KP: How much experience did you end up having with the antiaircraft weapons?

TS: It seems to me, in retrospect, it was very little ... The way we would do it, we'd be on a long hike, and we'd get out to the range, and set up at night for camp, and the next morning they'd have us out. We'd have the guns, we'd have to dig a pit, put the gun in, and all that sort of stuff, and then they would fly in a 20 with a target towed behind it, and I can't even remember how many shots we got to fire at it, on that one time. I can't even remember it coming back a second time. So, I'm very hazy on that particular part of it, but the stuff that went on, I know you were supposed to be aiming at the sleeve that they were dragging, and there were guys that were hitting the airplane ...

KP: You do remember that? [laughter]

TS: I do remember that. I didn't see it, but I heard about it. That, you know, some party, some officer, or some gun aimer, or something. ... I'm glad I didn't go to North Africa, I can tell you that.

KP: How did you end up going to the Air Force? What happened that they moved you from this anti-aircraft unit?

TS: Well, one of the many things that they did while we were in training was to go through and give the usual examinations to the personnel, written exams. ... They were looking ... to cull out some people and send them to anti-aircraft officers' school up at Camp Davis in North Carolina. ... So we went through that, and I had good marks a lot of technical training and experience. My marks were good, and they called me over to regimental headquarters and asked me to sign up for anti-aircraft officers' school, and I told them I was really interested in pilot training. And they said, "Well, that's got a higher priority so we'll take care of you," and nothing happened. You know, this was then, in October, and not being very worldly, even then, why, I sat around patiently and waited, and I thought, "They'll tell me sooner or later," and they could have just as soon ship me to Africa and brought me back. I didn't have the balls to just go up to regimental headquarters ... and say, "What's happened to my application?" ... It did come through, and they pulled me out, and four or five other guys from Camp Stewart, with we went on a train out to Kelly Field, Texas.

KP: You saw a great deal of the country. They had you going from Chicago, where you initially reported to Georgia, and now to San Antonio, Texas, to the classification center.

TS: Yeah. Yeah.

KP: Did you make the initial test, that pre-flight?

TS: Yeah, right. I was qualified for pilot training and navigator training, but not bombardier. So, ... I thought, "Well, I'm on my way." [laughter]

KP: How did the selection process go?

TS: I thought it was well done. The first thing they did was to go through the physical part of it again, I mean, over and over again. They do the same things, and they picked up one thing on me, I had a heart murmur, and they didn't know whether to let me go through this pilot training. ... They made me go through the test again and they decided that, "You're okay," whether that's a wartime thing that they let you go through, or what. [laughter]

KP: It sounds like if the country was in peacetime, there is a good chance you wouldn't have made it through.

TS: It's possible, yes, and because later on, after I got out of the service, an insurance company picked it up, and they tried to charge me a premium ... that was eleven years older than I was. [laughter] ... Anyway, [I] got through that, and then the other tests. I don't remember much about them, but again, a lot of it was coordination and adaptability to different things, and I was quite impressed. I thought it was pretty good, pretty fair, and again, we sat around in the classification center for six weeks, and those were terrible days. We planted grass all over Kelly

Field, during January. This stuff that you buy in clumps, zoysia grass, I think it's called. I planted grass until I was blue in the face. We played a lot of poker ...

KP: They were just trying to keep you busy.

TS: ... We only had to go ... practically, a block away to get into pre-flight. That got a little rough. They got down to business there. A lot of cadet training, really, you were a dog, and they treated you like you were, and they tried to keep you out of step all the time, to see how much they could knock you off your feet, but ultimately, you know, when you got overseas into the real business, you found out that all this stuff really meant something.

KP: So, it was not the most enjoyable experience.

TS: Oh, yeah, annoying as hell. It was terrible. [laughter]

KP: I have been told that the Air Force is considered one of the more informal branches.

TS: Yeah, once you got overseas.

KP: That pre-flight, in fact, was much like officer's training.

TS: Just like West Point, only condensed time.

KP: So, it was close to West Point, only shortened.

TS: Condensed time period, yeah.

KP: Are there any other memories you have of pre-flight?

TS: ... I can remember again that, most of the academic stuff, was pretty easy for me. Again, they're trying to keep you off balance all the time. They're throwing stuff at you. You've got to move quick, and you've got to be able to pass inspection at any minute, and all that stuff. ... I've talked to my wife about this. I was very conscientious. If they said you had to do something, you know, I was always trying to do it, and I think it finally did me in, in pilot training. Now we can get around to that. ... To be a fighter pilot, you know, "To hell with the rules." "These guys don't know what they're talking about. I'll show them how to fly this airplane," ... You know, that kind of stuff, and I was never one to do that, but anyway, back to the pre-flight. I did well, again, on grades, and total performance. I was supposed to be there nine weeks, so, at the end of four and a half weeks they said, "We don't think that you ought stay here any longer. We're going to push you up with another class that's going out ahead of you. You're going right into flying school".

KP: So, basically, this was primary flight school. Where was this?

TS: Corsicana.

KP: In Corsicana, Texas.

TS: Yeah, right. So, we went up there and we got into flying right away. No, fooling around.

KP: Had you been on an airplane before?

TS: Oh, I'd flown commercially ...

KP: So, you had flown commercially before?

TS: As a passenger, yeah.

KP: Between which points did you fly?

TS: Chicago and Philadelphia.

KP: Was it for work?

TS: Well, coming home for vacations. Yeah. DC-3s.

KP: It seems that was very rare. Not many had flown before that.

TS: You're right. It was an adventure, and it was a house party, and it was a mark of distinction, you know. I'd go downtown in the Chicago Loop and walk into TWA's beautiful office, down there at State and Madison someplace, and I'd feel like a million bucks going in there and buying an airplane ticket. ... You know, I was going to be in this unique group of only twenty-one or twenty-two passengers on this beautiful airplane. I'm telling you, it was living. I loved it.
[laughter]

KP: So, you had actually had this experience of being on a plane. [laughter]

TS: ... Yeah.

KP: What was it like to actually fly a plane, to be on it?

TS: ... That was really new. You were out of this world. I was doing something I thought I'd never have the guts to do, or that I would have the talent to do.

KP: Was it a childhood dream of yours to become a pilot?

TS: Off and on, but not intense. ... My uncle took me up in an airplane back in the 1920s. It was an old World War I biplane, and a local guy in my hometown had a flying field and he took passengers up. We went up for fifteen minutes, you know, I was quite impressed, but I wasn't just dying to go do this for the rest of my life. ... Three or four commercial flights and that one

flight was the only flying I'd ever done. Anyway, ... getting to Corsicana was, that was a real new life. I had a guy by, I'm always trying to remember his name. He was one tough cookie. He was a civilian flight instructor, and he had five students, and our last names all began with S, as they do in the Army, and he used to give me hell. He'd really go after me. ... He and Professor Grant, I think, spotted something they both agreed on [laughter] even though they're two thousand miles apart. He was convinced that I wanted to fly, but I didn't think intensely enough about, you know, flying. The heck with looking at the altimeter. He'd whack that stick back and forth between my knees, and we had a communications tube, he was in the front cockpit and I was in the back, and it was just a tube, and ... he'd give me hell and he'd hit me with that stick, ... but he did solo me in about five hours, and he kept after me, [he] stayed with me. I'd make the usual mistakes and he'd keep after me, and I had a high regard for him. I was afraid of him, for sure, ... but we had to have, I think, three check rides before we could get our certification, and on every check ride I had to take over again. For three of them, I had to take six ... One of the things that was wrong, I was interested in doing well academically. We were getting academics along with the flying, and I got involved with Morse Code. They gave us courses in Morse Code. Well, I bet you there isn't a fighter pilot that ever went in World War II that could remember the first letter A in Morse Code, but I had to get myself involved in stuff like that, or weather sciences or, you know, stuff that I shouldn't have been trying to encumber myself, and, I think that eventually became my undoing as far as flying.

KP: I've gotten the sense that a lot of pilots just want to fly, they didn't want to do anything like Morse Code.

TS: ... All that stuff.

KP: You enjoyed classroom instruction, though. Am I right?

TS: Well, ... any challenge like that, I'd always picked up and done it whether it was in grade school or college, I just did it, and I couldn't break the habit. [laughter]

KP: You made it through your basic flight. How many didn't make it to pre-flight school primary and then basic flight?

TS: I probably heard some numbers at times, but the only one I can really remember was the five students I was with in primary, and I cannot remember whether it was just two of us, or three of us that made it.

KP: So, failing out was a real possibility.

TS: Well, it could happen.

KP: It could happen.

TS: Oh, yeah, it did a lot.

KP: Yes.

TS: ... They brought a whole bunch of West Point cadets down, and this would have been in March or April of '43. They brought them down and put them in the primary flying school there, and they had a rough time. They had just as a rough a time as anybody, and we all got the same treatment, and again, boy, you'd worry and wonder what the heck they were trying to do, but when you got into the position where you had to fly under the circumstances, all of a sudden it all fell into place. [It was] just amazing. They knew what they were doing. [laughter]

KP: You went from pre-flight to basic flight?

TS: Pre-flight primary and then basic.

KP: This was in Greenville, Texas, and it would not be as successful.

TS: No, that was a total loss.

KP: What happened?

TS: ... We were in ground school, more code, more weather, and more miscellaneous, and a tougher flying job, and I couldn't loosen up ... that I wasn't able to do the flying job loosely enough, and it was partly the instructor. He had probably just gotten his wings and had been home on leave, and now he came back to teach somebody like me, and he was in worse shape than I was. He didn't want to let me have the airplane, and I don't blame him, [laughter] but ... it was just one of those things and he recommended that I not go any further, and some major took me up for a check ride and he agreed. He said, "Can't let you go." Again, a stroke of luck. I didn't kill myself or anybody else. [laughter]

KP: It sounds as if, in retrospect, you think they made the right decision.

TS: That's the way I feel. Right.

KP: What about a long range bomber, a B-17 bomber, do you think you would have been a better pilot if you were using one of those planes?

TS: It's hard to say.

KP: Those fly differently.

TS: Straight ahead.

KP: That is right. You could get in trouble if you deviated from the straight ahead courses.

TS: That's right, but that's oversimplification of it, because you've got four engines, now, to run and four propellers ...

KP: I have been told it is very complicated.

TS: It was, it was, very complex, and it took some teamwork to do it properly. ... Then, when you got into real trouble, like you lose a pilot or a co-pilot, or you've got a fire in the bomb bay, or, you know, any number of things always happening, it took somebody sitting up there, cool, calm and collected, and again, the guys on the team and the crew getting together and solving these problems ...

KP: In many ways you were an accidental pilot. You didn't aspire to be a pilot in the war. I get the impression you drifted to it, very happily, because you had flown. Airplane travel was much more glamorous back then. I still remember that in the '60s, people still wore ties and jackets to get aboard. Now if you go to an airport, you wear whatever.

TS: They look like this.

KP: People that I have interviewed always seem to remember crashes. Did you have any sense of how dangerous it could be? When did you have some sense how dangerous aviation was?

TS: Yeah, oh, yeah. Well, they drill safety into you all the time, and it was never anything that I lost any sleep about in training. Even when I was at Corsicana, I knew I could fly the airplane. I might not be able to do a perfect Immelman or a perfect loop, but I know I could fly it, and I didn't worry about the crash. Basic training, that was a little different, when I only had the five or six hours, but then we went to the B-17s, after they pulled us together as a crew, and our crew was good, our pilot was excellent, they were all conscientious. ... The flying that we did, maybe occasionally, you would say, "What the hell am I doing here?," ... Not very often. They didn't do crazy things. If my pilot ever got lost, I never knew it. If we were dangerously low on fuel, it hadn't gotten back to me until one time, in combat. Then, we got a lot of it, you know, daily almost, en-route overseas, we flew from Kearny, Nebraska, Manchester, New Hampshire, no problem, to Goose Bay, no problem, to Bluie West One, a little tough in there. Landing on that damn fool airbase, that was very dangerous ... From there, we went to Iceland, and we got into some hellacious problems coming into Iceland. The weather was terrible. A lot of airplanes flying around in the air trying to get down on the ground, and I know we came in, we had to come in low and break through the clouds. We were out over the water coming in, supposedly lined up on a runway. Instead of a runway, there was a cliff in front of us. We pulled up and now they weren't over the runway, so they had to go back up in the air and do this whole thing all over again. [laughter] ... The second time around, the same thing, we had to pull up. This time we pulled up over a barracks with a bunch of GIs sitting on top of it, and they all dove and got the hell out of there, but ... we were pretty lined up. We did land the second shot. ... That was sort of an introduction to the European Theater. From then on, depending on where you went, why, it could get ... pretty rough, and then ... you got all tense and you had a hard time with your nervous system.

KP: Did you ever see any planes crash?

TS: No, never did.

KP: Not in training, either?

TS: No, never. [I] heard about one that disappeared from Rapid City. [I] didn't know the crew well. It didn't mean much to me. We used to strafe down in Yuma, Arizona, and never even gave it a thought. You know, you're down fifty feet off the ground, strafing desert targets. [I] never even thought about it.

KP: After you didn't make it through basic flight training and they told you that you would not make it, then what? What did they tell you? What did you think was going to happen to you, or what did they tell you was going to happen to you?

TS: They told me I was qualified to go back to navigation school if I wanted to, and become an officer, or, other than that, I'd go back into the enlisted pool at Wichita Falls, Texas, and I said, "I'm not interested in navigation. I'll go back into the pool," and it was then, I don't know whether I took some more tests or not, but I got sent to radio school, which suited me fine.

KP: It seems you enjoyed the books and the scholarly aspects of the experience. Navigation seems to be the ultimate book.

TS: It is.

KP: Your job, even on the plane, is mostly thinking and calculation.

TS: Yeah.

KP: Why did you have no interest in navigation school?

TS: ... I think it was probably one of the toughest jobs on the airplane, a lot of responsibility, and it didn't look like much fun to me at this point. [laughter] ... Subsequently, you know, I've heard enough navigation stories to last me the rest of my life, and those navigators did a lot of sweating, ... and some of them lived, and some of them didn't.

KP: It seems that, in sharp contrast to back then, it is very hard to get lost when aviating now.

TS: Yeah.

KP: Now we have sophisticated tracking and electronics.

TS: Correct.

KP: It was, however, very easy to get lost in that day.

TS: Oh, it was terrible, the losses that they took from just people getting lost. Horrible, just unbelievable. ... It was just one of those things that I said, "I'm going to do something, but it's not going to be navigation school," and they were glad to help me along. [laughter]

KP: When they said you were going back in the enlisted ranks, it would be back to the Air Force, correct?

TS: Oh, yeah. Air Force.

KP: You didn't go back to ground forces.

TS: Yes, and I didn't know it at the time, but ... I was going to be on an aircrew. I wasn't going to be a grease monkey on the ground. The organizations said, I was in the pipeline to just fly.

KP: You were going to be on a plane somehow.

TS: Yeah. That's right, a gunner, or a mechanic on the air, or a radio operator, or a togglier.

KP: They would send you to radio school in Sioux Falls.

TS: Yeah.

KP: How long did that last?

TS: Five months. It was a good time of the year. It was a nice place to be, and boring as hell, but [laughter] that's how they trained you, you know. They'd bore you over and over, day in and day out. ... It gets drilled at you ...

KP: I've also read that radio school was very technical.

TS: It was and it wasn't. The code part of it, I think most anybody could master it, sending and receiving. There were a lot of guys ... that were beyond me. They could send code like crazy and receive it, but I could hit ... what they wanted, and the rest of it was, you know, it could be technical, but it never hit me as anything that I was going to really master, or ... I really didn't do much with it, to tell you the truth ... They showed you how to make radio circuits, and they had wires with snaps on each end. Snap, they called it Snap Lead OCS, and ... somehow or another, they were teaching you how to make these circuits so that they would work, and all I ever learned was on and off, and how to send and receive code. ... We had a little bit of first echelon maintenance, which was nothing. They didn't expect you to do anything, but if they had people who developed talents in those lines, or showed talents, they moved them on into more advanced work ... so that they could get the best. But they weren't there driving you to do this. They needed plenty of people, like me, who were just slogging along, sort of.

KP: After those five months in December of '43, which in some ways was great timing because the climate's getting cold in South Dakota, they sent you to Yuma, Arizona.

TS: The sun.

KP: In some ways, your training matched the weather.

TS: It did.

KP: At this point, it did very well.

TS: Beautifully, beautifully. It was great.

KP: What do you remember of aerial gunnery school?

TS: It was again, a lot of new experiences. We had all kinds of firing exercises. ... We had to learn deflection shooting, and they had these rigs down there where they ... drove you on the back of a truck. You were in the back of a pickup truck, and they had a track, and at various points, they'd shoot these skeet targets out, and you had to learn to shoot ... , you were going at it, and the target was going away, or different speeds, and it was kind of interesting. We did aerial strafing with B-17s. We did high altitude gunnery in B-17s. You know, experiences that you'd never have, kind of interesting for a guy like me who wasn't going to be an officer. [laughter]

KP: You could have been an officer as a navigator. How did you feel that you weren't going to be an officer now?

TS: Didn't bother me a bit. ... It would have been nice, but it didn't worry me. You know, hell, my ceramic engineering guys, five of them, out of ten, went on to be officers, my ex-roommate included. And it never bothered me. I used to listen to the nice stories about the officer's club at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, or something. [laughter]

KP: Yeah, I've heard a lot of those stories. Mike Hill has talked about the officers' club.

TS: Yeah, he went down there with a bunch of guys.

KP: It was with a bunch of ceramists that ended up in Aberdeen.

TS: Yeah.

KP: You saw a lot of the country in a relatively brief period of time. What was Texas like, and then South Dakota and Arizona?

TS: Texas-I didn't like. My flight instructor in Corsicana called it a big plot of ground surrounded by civilization, and he hated it. Corsicana was all right because it was a small town, and we had a select group there that was training, and you weren't overwhelmed, and the people were nice. Greenville, I wasn't there long enough to really get a reading on it. It didn't impress me much. Wichita Falls was terrible. ... I was out there in Wichita Falls in the summertime for

about six or eight weeks, and ... it was a big training base for Air Force personnel starting from basic training, and they tried to fold us back into that, and a bunch of us just never bothered. We just didn't bother to show up.

KP: Are you saying that they wanted you to start with basic training again?

TS: That would have been a third time, and all of us had had enough, and so we just goofed off and disappeared and every case, we'd go ask them if they needed help with the mess hall, and we'd open the doors for them and let the troops in, or something easy like that.

KP: You give the impression that in these reclassification centers, you were floating around and no one was really in charge of you. On another base, you couldn't get away with that.

TS: You wouldn't get away with it. That's right. They had so many people there, they didn't know how to handle them, and few, very few officers. I've forgotten how many thousands of troops were there, but let's say between fifty and eighty thousand, if you can imagine it. And these big parade grounds. ... It's as if you made a parade ground out of Rutgers University on red shale and had fifty or eighty thousand men marching around in August heat. It was terrible. ... The worst part of it was, sometime during that time while we were there, they decided to bring in a lot of Mexicans who were illiterate. And they mixed them into the barracks with the rest of us, and they were pigs. They were uncivilized. They were dirty. ... It was a nice place to get out of. I've forgotten how many weeks I spent there, but it seems it was six or eight weeks. It was terrible. I didn't like that. Arizona, ... there was a special situation being in Yuma, Christmas to February. Rapid City was a beautiful service town. We got there in late March, early April, and had good duty there, a lot of flying ...

KP: You had said that Sioux Falls was pleasantly boring.

TS: Sioux Falls was where I went to radio school. ... I never even bothered going into town, it was such a boring place. I don't know, I can't remember. We were very busy in the school, and I can't remember the time off schedule, but it wasn't much.

KP: You would meet your crew after a leave. Did you go home for your ten days?

TS: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Sure did. That was a long trip. That was by rail from Yuma, to Chicago, to Philadelphia, to South Jersey, and they were using all kinds of equipment that shouldn't have even been on the railroad tracks. It was so terrible, dirty and unsafe, unsafe at any speed, as they would say, but yeah, I got home. It was February, and all my friends were in the service. I saw my parents and grandparents.

KP: Everyone else was away.

TS: They were gone, yeah, my brother ... was on his way overseas at that point.

KP: After your leave, you went to Salt Lake City to meet the crew. Was the crew that you trained with the same crew that you went into combat with?

TS: Yeah, right.

KP: Could you talk about each crew member?

TS: Yeah.

KP: The first is the pilot.

TS: Powders.

KP: Powders, Viridin Powders. Where was his background and where did he come from?

TS: They called him “the cowboy”, and I’ve always assumed that he was a cowboy. And I think probably, he was at an early stage, but he didn’t pick that up again after he got out of the service. He went into other things, but they called him the cowboy.

KP: What did he do after the service?

TS: Eventually, besides from having a pretty good size family, he stayed in the Reserve and flew B-29s, and got called back in Korea. ... At this point, he had three daughters I think, and ... subsequently, he and his wife spent an awful lot of time and money putting together a string of convenience stores. ... He was also on the board of directors of an oil distribution company down there in Oklahoma. I don’t know that he ever got intensely wealthy, but he did all right, and a real nice guy. You’d watch him walk and you’d swear that he couldn’t fly an airplane, that he was just unbelievable, what looked like an uncoordinated walk, ... he could fly, he was very good.

KP: I am sure that you had a heightened sense of what was good flying since you had flown before and had been certified to fly.

TS: I think a little bit more.

KP: What was he like as a commander?

TS: He was not very forceful. He was a little like me, I think a little lacadaisical about that. He didn’t want to be overwhelming to anybody, and when we first got overseas, I ... became a little bit aware of it. Never dangerously, that I was aware of, but anyway, ... he had that type of temperament. It was difficult for him. He couldn’t discipline anybody, I don’t think. ... It took a tougher man than him to lay down the law, [laughter] but we, by that time were all trained, you know, and it’s automatic. We didn’t get chummy with the officers. We knew they couldn’t get chummy with us.

KP: So, you weren't at all chummy with your officers.

TS: To some degree we were, but we never went on leave together, ... we never went drinking in a pub together. ... We did when we were at our work, you know, we could call him "Skipper", or call the co-pilot, "Dick". I mean, they weren't that bad ...

KP: Some people have described crews that would go on leave together. They really were not supposed to, but one story I heard had the enlisted men staying in the officers' barracks and they would sleep in the same bunks.

TS: Yeah.

KP: They would have never done that in the Navy.

TS: No.

KP: Particularly on a big ship, that would never happen.

TS: No.

KP: What about Dick Blair? Richard Blair? You said you would often call him "Dick" (co-pilot).

TS: Yeah, a real nice guy. ... He and I had sort of parallel careers after we got out of the service. He was in the raw materials business, and I was in the raw material business, and both selling. He was a little bit excitable. Maybe ... not as level headed as Powders, and invariably you'd find that the Army had picked them about right.

KP: They were well matched.

TS: Yeah, and technically very good. ... He worked well with the pilot. The crew all liked him, and ... he got excited one day, and I never knew this until long afterwards, but we were flying over a target called Hamm in Germany, we had a Colonel Travis leading us, and I've gotten to know Travis over the years since. ... He and his brother were going to win the war single handedly for the whole damn Air Force, and he took us over Hamm, Germany this day. We didn't get a clear target, and he said, "We're going to go around again," and we're getting the crap shot out of us. ... The second time around we were getting it hot and heavy, and we all had our bomb bay doors open. The co-pilot, Blair, now, he was getting a little antsy, and we were leading the last six B-17s in the lead squadron. Blair hit the salvo switch and five planes behind us dropped their bombs ... with us, at the same time. Travis would have none of it. They go around a third time, and we're going to go with them. We've got to protect ourselves against fighters, and that sort of stuff. So, we went around a third time, and they dropped, and we went home, and we made it. Now, we had a lot of damage. Travis' plane, got shot up. His bombardier was badly injured, and anyway, we got home, and into peacetime. ... I decided to put

together some notes on some of the things that we had done, and ... I described this particular experience.

-----END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO-----

TS: Chris McCue Bombardier in Phoenix, said, "I've got to straighten you out on something." He said, ... "I didn't salvo those bombs. Blair got excited and he dropped them." [laughter] ...

KP: [laughter] This is something you only learned years after the war.

TS: Yeah, this was, ... thirty years later. [laughter]

KP: What about your navigator, Jerry?

TS: Sorrentino.

KP: Sorrentino.

TS: He was a real nice Italian guy from Newburgh, New York, and very conscientious. He was a little more formal than the two pilots and the bombardier, but ... he worked hard at navigating, and I know, coming from Manchester, New Hampshire, over to Goose Bay, or maybe from Goose Bay over to Greenland, we were getting navigation signals few and far between, and ... he was sweating a lot, trying to make sure we got to where we were supposed to go. [laughter]

KP: There is a lot of ocean, and the water's very cold.

TS: Oh, boy. When you get out there, we were warned of false signals from the Germans, false navigation signals ... Have you heard about those six or seven planes that landed up in the ice cap in Greenland. They got down on the ice cap, all right, but they followed a German submarine that was signaling, and they did what the German submarine told them to do, and they ran out of fuel and got lost and all landed up there. Three B-17s, I think, and three P-38s. ... Sorrentino was a very conscientious navigator, and I don't think he ever got as rattled or as hyped up as Blair did. ... I think that he was just a hard working guy ... We made a career, between the bombardier and me, of trying to find him after the war, and nothing.

KP: Really? You have never been able to locate him?

TS: Until about last fall, sometime, I got an idea. I went to the public library and told them my plight, that this guy Jerry Sorrentino was born and raised in Newburgh, New York. Is he back there? ... The librarian dug out every Sorrentino in Connecticut, New York State, eastern New York State, and Brooklyn. She found three Jerry Sorrentinos in Brooklyn, and I wrote to all three of them. Two of them answered and said they weren't him, and the third one was returned and said, "deceased," and so ... none of us ever had a word from him.

KP: You are not even sure that that's the Jerry Sorrentino either.

TS: No, because there were a lot of other J. Sorrentinos.

KP: ... You may actually want to try the Internet.

TS: That's a possibility.

KP: That is one likely place.

TS: Yeah.

KP: What about Christopher McCue, the bombardier?

TS: The bombardier. He was a little short guy ...

KP: Where was he from?

TS: ... I think he was from Pittsburgh, and he got into the service early and had planned to make a career out of it, and did. He never got beyond just being a bombardier on a crew. ... While we were overseas they started pulling bombardiers off of airplanes and putting an enlisted man up in the nose. The Air Force made a toggler out of him, which made the bombardier unnecessary. He wasn't in line for any promotions or any big career. ... Mac did a good job for us, and ... he flew most of the missions that I was on. We had a toggler once in Mac's place. Mac got out of combat a little bit after I did I think, because of that thing at Hamm that I was telling you about. They tacked an extra mission on him. They got the wrong guy. It was the co-pilot. [laughter]

KP: So, the bombardier had to do an extra mission.

TS: One, but he didn't care. ... He was planning to be in the Air Force, ... and all the experience he would have would be good on his record ...

KP: He planned on staying in the Air Force.

TS: Yeah. Yeah.

KP: He was a career serviceman.

TS: That's right, and ... he was a little bit of a loner. I don't know how much even he stuck with the other officers when they went somewhere. The pilot and co-pilot seemed to do a lot together, and the other two guys were on their own, but real pleasant, ... nothing horsey about him at all. He just did his job. He was there everyday, and he did, ultimately, stay in the service, but again, ... He became a captain, but then they started retrenching, and they gave him an opportunity to take a staff sergeant's rating, and stay in or leave, and he stayed in as a staff sergeant and got twenty years ...

KP: He stayed in.

TS: Yeah.

KP: You were staff sergeant. You were the radio operator and gunner. What was next for you?

TS: I became a tech sergeant. I don't know whether I was on that particular mission.

KP: I'm just reading the first mission.

TS: Yeah, okay.

KP: The other staff sergeant was Leonard ...

TS: Dernalowicz, engineer and top turret gunner.

KP: Thank you. Where was he and what was his background?

TS: He was from Massachusetts. No, Connecticut. Connecticut, and ... we shortened his name to Murphy. ... That's all he was, called ... he had worked in the aircraft industry around Hartford, and New Haven, and had gone to engineering school for working in aircraft plants.

KP: In many ways, he was a very skilled individual.

TS: Oh, Oh, yeah, you could really count on him. We did. He was good, and ... I don't know how to describe him other than [that] he did his job real well. ... I never went on leave with any of the guys on my crew ...

KP: You didn't.

TS: No.

KP: Didn't you get along very well as a crew?

TS: Oh, yeah, [we] worked as a crew.

KP: Once the day was over, however, a lot of you went your separate ways.

TS: Sure. Oh, yeah. [We] didn't band together ... You get enough of that after a while.
[laughter]

KP: Gordon Dukes was the ball turret operator, which I've often viewed as probably the least envious job.

TS: I agree, ... just terrible. Just getting in the damn thing when you're sitting on the ground was scary enough, and ... how he or any of them stood up to that [is] beyond me. ... You had a front row seat in hell, as far as I was concerned. [laughter] ... He did his job, and I don't know how he got in the Air Force, because he was a married man and had a family. He was probably in his thirties, and what he was doing in flying in combat is beyond me.

KP: Was he the only married member of the crew?

TS: No, the pilot and co-pilot were both married.

KP: They were married as well.

TS: Yeah.

KP: Was he the only one with children?

TS: No, the pilot had a couple of children. I don't think the co-pilot did ...

KP: There was also Carl Schoonhoven, [a] waist gunner.

TS: Schoonhoven, yeah. He was a bachelor, a big, rough neck, German guy.

KP: Where was he from?

TS: Illinois. Not far from Camp Grant. Freeport, Illinois, and relatively uneducated, but a good man on a crew. He ... fit in real well.

KP: Finally, there was your tail-gunner Donald Cox?

TS: He was a sad story. He was a young kid and just out of high school, and had never been anywhere ...

KP: Where had he been?

TS: Chicago.

KP: Chicago.

TS: Yeah, and he just couldn't take it, about three missions and he cashed in his chips. He said he wasn't going to fly anymore. ... So we got a replacement.

KP: He just refused to fly.

TS: Yeah. Oh, he wasn't the only one. There were others, but they got pretty rough treatment.

KP: So, what, for example, happened to Cox?

TS: Well, he got in the chain gang on the base, you know, all the dirty jobs that they could find they got ... Then, the Battle of the Bulge came along, and they took all those guys and gave them ten days of close order drill, and gave them a rifle and put them over in the front lines, and Cox survived. We send Christmas cards to each other.

KP: So, you're still in touch with him, and, in many ways, he wasn't shunned by the crew.

TS: He wasn't shunned by me, the other guys, whatever their feelings were, we never talked about it.

KP: Right.

TS: I felt sorry for him, ... he couldn't adjust ...

KP: He was not alone though.

TS: Oh, no, no. It was a big problem in the Air Force. They had all kinds of problems with that, crews over in Germany getting in a little trouble, ... go on up to Sweden with the airplane, the crew and everything, or go to the Alps, down into Switzerland. They made life miserable for them though. They didn't get away with it. They had to pay some price to do that.

KP: How widely, at the time, was that consciously said, that anyone could go to Sweden if it gets really rough?

TS: Yeah, it was a joke in some instances, but I'm sure it happened.

KP: Did you know of any crews in your base that actually went through with it?

TS: No.

KP: You did know that it happened, right?

TS: Sure, I have a friend that stayed in the service as a full timer. His crew ... went to Sweden in a B-24. He said they got shot up and they couldn't make it. He stayed in the service and became a colonel. He's retired from the Air Force, but there was a lot of sifting and checking done.

KP: To make sure that didn't happen.

TS: Yeah, correct.

KP: What about aborting missions and that process? Sometimes you have no choice but to abort missions, but it can be a gray area.

TS: Correct.

KP: Now, if you aborted a mission, it didn't count. You still had to do it, but regardless, did you ever get the sense that some pilots aborted missions?

TS: Not really. We had one abort ourselves on about our fourth mission going to Maastricht in Belgium, or Holland. ... We had an old plane that just wouldn't take it, using full military power and the whole outfit's going on ahead of you, and you can't keep up, and then you've got an engine running away, and you've got real problems. So, we just turned tail and went back. We even dropped out bombs in the Zuider Zee that day, and they hoped you'd bring them back, but, you know, with an airplane that can barely fly, you don't want to be fooling around with that sort of thing.

KP: So, they preferred that you bring the bombs back?

TS: Yes.

KP: Were you thinking about that, or did you prefer not to bring them back?

TS: Not that day. There was no way that we could have done it safely. ... We had an engine wind-milling, and there's always a danger that's going to just catch on fire and you're gone, and what do you do with the bombs if you're back over England? So, we took the opportunity of getting rid of them in the Zuider Zee, and somehow or another, kept that engine under control long enough so that we could get back. That was the only true abort that I was ever involved in. ... One mission you'll see there, we were reported. I think it was about December the 27th, or somewhere along in there. We were reported as missing in action. It was the day after, the first mission after Christmas, and what happened was that we had one of those air planes ... and, an engine, gave up and we were wind-milling a propeller, and we couldn't keep up, and we were just dropping, and dropping, back. Well, they reported us as missing in action, which we weren't, but that's the report that came through. I never knew it until I got this data base.

KP: Was this report ever sent to you or to anyone, to your parents?

TS: No.

KP: Fortunately there was no SNAFU.

TS: No, there was nothing automatic about that.

KP: Out of all the missions that you did, what is the mission that stands out the most to you, for whatever reason?

TS: The one that I think was probably the most was the one the day before Christmas, in December 24, '44, when we went to do ... tactical bombing to help the troops that were in the Bulge. ... They put up the biggest air armada that's ever been put up, a couple thousand bombers

and all the fighters they could get up, and I think our bombing was good, and it was a very exciting and hairy kind of a day. Getting back to England was the biggest problem. We had taken all of our equipment on board with us in the airplane ... so we could stay over in France that night. But they decided to bring us all back and it was hectic. It was very dangerous and I'm glad I never had to do it again. [laughter]

KP: What made it so dangerous?

TS: ... It got to be dark, and flying bombers, you didn't have any lights on anywhere, and you didn't have enough lights on the airplane. You have a bunch of kids flying these monsters around, and you're criss-crossing at night, and you can see a red light here, and you can see a green light there ... We had the base that we landed on in Mendlesham. We had the RAF landing there with heavy bombers and fighters. We had our group landing there. We had the home group. I've forgotten how many planes they put on the ground there that night, but it was just a humongous number, and we landed in the dark. The runway was lit enough so you could see it, but it was icy. Just totally un-habit forming.

KP: It sounds like the most frightening part of the mission was coming home, even more than the actual time over the target.

TS: Yeah, ... it was fairly quiet that day. [laughter]

KP: You would enter the air war with fighter support.

TS: Yeah.

KP: The fighters could take you all the way to the target, or close to the target.

TS: Correct. Right.

KP: The losses were not as great.

TS: They were frightening.

KP: There was still flack.

TS: Yeah.

KP: Despite that the number of German fighters were diminishing.

TS: Yeah, but then, you see, you had all the problems back in England that mostly never got reported very much. You had airplanes crashing on take off, or having malfunctions getting off the ground and into the air where they belonged, or midair collisions. You had a lot of that, which was ... sometimes more hectic than the combat part of it itself ...

KP: In the United States, you had never really witnessed an accident yourself, but it sounds like you got your real baptism in the Greenland and Iceland trek, and then there were a lot of airplanes in England and not a lot of space for them.

TS: That's right. Particularly on taking off and coming back, ... it was dense. You know, another airfield, ... we could look from our airfield and see over to the 303rd bomb group, or some British airfield off on the horizon. There you could see them landing and taking off, and that's pretty close. You can't imagine having Kennedy and LaGuardia ten miles apart.
[laughter]

KP: There is always this discussion about how crowded the air space was. A student of mine flew me to an interview in a single engine plane, and it was striking to be actually up there and be able to observe the planes and how crowded the air space was. The navigation systems are better today, though.

TS: Oh, yeah.

KP: The aircraft control will tell you if you are in the wrong place.

TS: Oh, they're right on you.

KP: Whereas, in your day, there was no such thing.

TS: Nothing, and bad weather thrown in. [laughter]

KP: What was the most frightening mission in terms of the actual either flack or fighter cover from the enemy?

TS: One of the worst was ... Mannheim Ludwigshafen. We took a direct hit with an .88, between the number two engine and the fuselage, and it didn't explode. It went right on through the leading edge of the wing, and it probably exploded above us. ... There was enough concussion to knock the bombardier around, but ... we were in tough shape, [and] bad weather, again. ... We couldn't get rid of our bombs. They wouldn't unload. ... The eighty-eight had cut a fuel line from our number two engine, and the damn thing was pouring fuel in on our bomb load, which consisted of iron bombs and incendiaries ... The ball turret gunner was getting soaked with high octane gasoline down in the ball turret, and we were in real trouble, and the pilot pulled out of line and headed west, and we're getting rid of bombs one at a time as we're going back across Germany, kicking them out of the bomb bay ... We got back. We had a bad engine, again. One of them was windmilling, and we came back across the Channel, and it was touch and go because we were running out of fuel. There was a big airbase at the mouth of the Thames called Manston, and it's black top from horizon to horizon, and no lines, just land or take off. ... We came in there and they tell me, I didn't see this, I could feel it ... Powders was getting that airplane down quick, as fast as he could, and he got it down so quick that he bounced once, and there was an old British bomber sitting over here somewhere, an old Sterling bomber. He bounded it high enough to go over the tail of that Sterling, and he got it back on the ground. ... I

don't know whether I mentioned it anywhere in there, but whoever takes charge of this sort of stuff told us we had forty gallons of fuel left.

KP: That is not very much.

TS: Nothing, it's nothing, and that was probably one of the ... worst days.

KP: Was anyone ever injured on any of your missions?

TS: No, none. Other than that day, the bombardier had some concussion or something, it knocked him over flat, and he bumped his elbow, or something. ... Nobody got cut, or bled, or nobody got the Purple Heart.

KP: How many losses did you have of planes in your squadron?

TS: I really don't know. I can't say. I think the group as a whole, the four squadrons lost something, say, between 150 and 200 in a period of May '43, to April '45.

KP: People in the air war talk in a very fatalistic sense. They expected to get shot down or killed.

TS: Yeah, Oh, yeah. Right, right.

KP: You know that you can really get killed or be taken prisoner. When you got to the air war, what was your sense?

TS: You just felt ... as though you will never make it, but there were no numbers that I can remember. No. When you were flying twenty-five missions, ... if their losses were five percent of the force per day, you weren't going to make it, but I never saw any numbers like that.

KP: By the time you got to the air war, it was not as bad.

TS: No. We saw German fighters. They never attacked us, they flew under us, and passed our nose, or other things. We either had protection or they wanted to get somebody else, for which I was forever grateful. ... Again, one of those signposts along the way was that my mother was really running this war, it wasn't anybody else. [laughter]

KP: As a gunner, did you ever fire at them?

TS: [I] never fired a gun in anger.

KP: Really?

TS: Never. We used to warm them up. We went across the Channel and that was it, which again, pleased me [to] no end.

KP: Did you ever encounter any German jets?

TS: We saw them in the distance.

KP: Was that as close as you got?

TS: That was as close ... and somebody would say, "There goes one of those jets," but we ... were just very fortunate. Now, when I finished in January '45, I went on a one-week leave, and [on] a mission during that week, Germans jets hit our group and got four planes, but that was after I was on the ground on a permanent basis. So, they were there, but never touched us.

KP: Do you recall any losses of planes that stick out?

TS: The first one I saw go down was probably out on my second mission. I happened to be standing up, looking out the dome window as we were on the bomb run, and Lieutenant Miller, (his crew was in our barracks), took a hit. I saw them peel off and I thought, "Well, I never saw any chutes, I never saw anything." I could hardly watch it, because I knew all the guys. ... Eventually, two of them came back. One was a prisoner of war, the tail gunner. The bombardier hit close enough to friendly lines, and he was back in the group within a week, or ten days.

KP: So, one was captured and one made it back to the lines, and the rest were killed.

TS: Yeah, eight out of the ten were killed, and ... two of them were good friends of mine.

KP: That must have been very sobering.

TS: Oh, it was. Well, that's the day you realize the first mission had been such an easy thing, in broad daylight.

KP: You had a milk run during the first mission.

TS: Yeah. ... Now you knew that ... you were into the real business of going to war.

KP: The planes you were on flew a number of diverse missions. You had hit coastal guns on your first mission on France. You hit marshalling yards a number of times in Germany, but you also hit a synthetic oil plant, a steel plant. You would fly missions to Cologne, and Magdeburg. Was the Schweinfurt plant on your list?

TS: Yeah, once. Easiest mission we had, probably.

KP: Really? The Schweinfurt, a few years earlier, was one of the most dreaded.

TS: It was terrible. Terrible. We went over in solid cloud cover. I don't even think they fired any anti-aircraft at us. They didn't want us to know where the city was ... [laughter] We went after synthetic oil, marshalling yards, it seems to me, day in, day out.

KP: That seems to be the predominant target.

TS: Those were the real strategic targets.

KP: Did you only fly one tactical mission? Was that in December?

TS: ... The first one was probably the one we aborted. ... It was supposed to be a bridge in Maastricht and then the ... next tactical target was the day before Christmas ...

KP: That was in the Battle of the Bulge.

TS: ... Then, two days after Christmas, we hit an airfield, and we hit some crossroads around there. About four tactical missions altogether, something like that.

KP: You said the Battle of the Bulge was probably the most frightening and the most memorable mission.

TS: Memorable, yeah.

KP: You also said the people who could not take air combat had been given what?

TS: Dirty duty.

KP: Dirty duty, but also "make work" duty. They were not court-martialed. They weren't sent away.

TS: Well, it varied. I think it varied from base to base, and the severity of the case, and the rank of whoever might quit. It could have been a West Pointer who was quitting ...

KP: He would get the work.

TS: He'd get the work, somehow or another, another guy I heard about was a captain, and they grounded him and put him in charge of the mess hall. ... Quite a step down for a hotshot pilot, ... but ... you didn't hear much about that. They didn't want this to spread.

KP: Had you seen these people who had been crew members digging ditches?

TS: ... You didn't even see them.

KP: Really?

TS: Yeah. Most of the stuff that I've been able to tell you other than the tail gunner, is stuff that I've dug out from ... the reports that I got out of the group mission folders.

KP: Weren't they from the National Archives?

TS: Yeah.

KP: This is surprising to you, at some levels.

TS: Oh, yeah.

KP: At the time, you didn't know.

TS: We knew something was going on but we didn't know what, no details.

KP: You didn't know the details. Did you ever say to yourself, "I'm crazy to get in this plane again. Why don't I just stay on the ground?"

TS: Yeah.

KP: What did you think would happen to you if you didn't?

TS: Well, there was an old saying, or a regular saying, "You don't have to do anything you don't want to do in the Army, but they can make you wish you damn well had," and that was enough for me. [laughter]

KP: [laughter] Did you fear court-martial, or humiliation?

TS: Well, there were a lot of thoughts, but there were a lot of guys that were going to go ahead and do the duty. ... If you slacked off, that meant that somebody else had to take your place, and you know, there were ... too many good guys doing these jobs, starting right with the top leadership in the group and at headquarters. All the way through, ... that's one thing I learned over a period of time, that we had a lot of good people, and they weren't perfect, but they were really going all out to do things right. ... Time after time, I refer back again to how I felt when I was in college. I thought it was good that the British were getting whacked a little bit. ... Then, in the training phases of when we were in the service, it was a pain in the neck in the training commands, and you wondered, "What in the hell are we doing here trying to win a war like this?" You got overseas, and every once in a while, you'd see something that would really make a patriot out of you. I can remember one mission, I think it was to Merseburg, a famous synthetic oil plant. I think they were sending the whole 8th Air Force that day, and we went in early. We didn't realize it at the time, but we were going in ... I think we went in with a head wind and came home with a tail wind. And we made the turn and we're coming back, and we had a course parallel to where we had flown in. You'd look off to the north, and there was this column, group, after group, in formation, just like a military parade going in there and going to get that

darn refinery that day. ... It was done with, as far as I could tell, with ... great precision and you really felt proud that you were part of ... something that looked as good as this did.

KP: Did you get the sense that the Air Force was a glamorous service?

TS: Well, you got a lot of breaks that you wouldn't get otherwise, and a lot of it was in the newspapers, an awful lot of newspaper stuff. ... We never saw any of the great entertainers coming around to entertain us, but they were around entertaining at the bases and getting a lot of ... ink. ... Today ... I can go out there with my grandson and look up there at airplanes just like he does. [laughter]

KP: You mentioned that you were very impressed with the group leadership and headquarters leadership. What impressed you so much? Are there any specific instances which particularly stand out?

TS: ... We had a group commander in England. His name was Maurice Preston. He was a colonel, West Point grad. Had been an all-American football player. He was a big guy about six-foot three, and he'd flown all the tough missions. He didn't sit home, and ... he put together a group here in the states and brought them overseas. ... He brought them all together, and he brought schoolteachers, and librarians, and all these people doing this great job, and ... the records speak for themselves. He put one of the best groups together. ... There were other groups getting ... more ink even today, but he had like the fewest aborts, the greatest number of tons on target. The largest number of missions for the days that they were there ...

KP: How much of this did you realize after the war, while going through the records?

TS: More and more. ... We realized that he was good.

KP: At the time.

TS: At the time.

KP: It sounds like he gave you a lot of confidence.

TS: ... I never met him. I saw him once, and you know, there was just an aura about the guy, and he went on to become a four star Air Force general, and somebody else recognized he was pretty good. ... He was tough. ... He led on one of the Schweinfurt missions. One of his deputies led on another one. ... He was just terrific.

KP: What about life on base? What was that like?

TS: I've had conversations with people about this and it was ... pretty mundane as far as I was concerned, I think that it probably happened to a lot of other crews. I talked to a lieutenant that I knew had been over there with our group, and I ran into him at a reunion one time, talking about experiences. ... He said, "You know, if you want my description, I went around with blinders on

all the time,” and I said, “By golly, I think that’s true.” ... You had these concerns, that you were going to get killed, or captured, or injured, or whatever, and you didn’t think you were long for this world. ... When you got back and [went] through your routine, you got to your mess hall, went to the club and had a beer, maybe, and then went home, and went to bed. At, least I was like that and ... I knew a lot of the guys in the barracks were, internalized.

KP: It sounds like you were very contemplative a lot of the times.

TS: Yes.

KP: In the best sense of the term.

TS: Yeah.

KP: I’ve gotten the impression that a lot of guys have confessed or said that they went out in crowds in town.

TS: [They] wanted to be among them.

KP: They went to town and looked for the opportunity to go on leave.

TS: I went on leave, but I quit going to London because it was under attack, and I’d stay in Bedford, fourteen miles away, and I had a favorite pub there. I knew the people that owned it. Some of my gunner friends, we’d meet there, and we’d have a few beers, and that would be about it. ... Nothing very exciting. Occasionally, I’d go visit some relatives I had over there ... Originally, I thought I’d like to learn a lot more about English history, but I soon got that out of my system. I didn’t bother with that, ... but, you know, we’d go drink beer, and really quite modestly. I would send a lot of money home anyway, you know. I could see me blowing it like crazy, and I’d send it home, and my mother put it in the bank for me, and when I got home, why, I had a few bucks.

KP: You got flight pay.

TS: Oh, yeah.

KP: You were getting a bit more than the average.

TS: Oh, yeah.

KP: You were a sergeant so you were getting paid for that as well.

TS: We did well for the times. I’ve forgotten what it was, two hundred and ten dollars a month, or two hundred and forty. It was a magnificent sum at the time.

KP: What about the English?

TS: [I] pooh, poohed them.

KP: Was this partly a reaction to your parents and grandparents?

TS: Right.

KP: You had a few Anglophile sentiments, but now, you have a favorite pub there?

TS: Yeah, and ... my father had relatives over there, and I visited them a couple of times, and thoroughly enjoyed them. They were real delightful people. They understated everything, you know. They weren't suffering, you know, but ... they were having an awful time. ... [I] met a few people in the little town of Kimbolton, right off the base, and you know, I was sort of overwhelmed with some of the stuff that I learned about the English. They were real fine people, and worked hard. They were just good fighters, and they kept up the good fight all that time.

KP: Someone I interviewed, in the Class of '42, Lyman Avery, talked about how he married an Englishwoman. He said rationing here was nothing compared to England.

TS: Oh, that's right.

KP: I think it was Mike Hill that told me, if you're invited to dinner, or lunch, or tea in England, you should bring some butter because they will feed you their months' ration. You had to take few scoops of butter, and that is it for the month.

TS: Yeah, right. I found that out the hard way the first time I went to see my relatives. I didn't take anything, and we had high tea. That was it. That was dinner. All the bread and butter you could eat, or bread at least, and a lot of tea. ... Somebody put me wise, you know, you get ration tickets and take it to them. Take them the oranges that you got, or stuff like that, and you're a hero, and I did the second time, but the first time they thought, "Boy, I hope he never comes back." [laughter]

KP: Did you date anyone overseas?

TS: No. No. No. ... It's just the dating business was worth your life from the people that I would meet ... They were factory girls that, whether you were black or white didn't make a hell of a lot of difference to many of them. It was a real problem for the troops in some instances.

KP: Did you ever go to church there? You mentioned that Professor Burns started shaking you up about religion, but how did you feel about religion now that death was a real possibility?

TS: Yeah, I was getting back much closer to it, and believing in it. ... We had a minister available before every mission. You could go Catholic, or Protestant, or Jewish, and I went very regularly, and I also went to one church service in the cathedral in Bedford. Jimmy Doolittle gave the Thanksgiving Day sermon. I remember that. ... I became a believer. ... I'm not intense

about it these days, but I'm still much of a believer, really. It's a philosophy that, if nothing more, ... gives you something to think about. Something out there is bigger than all of us, you know.

KP: What did you and your crew think of the ground crew that serviced your plane? What was that relationship like?

TS: Well, you can see from the number of planes we flew that we'd meet many. It was one crew one day, and some other crew the next day. ... We weren't wedded to one airplane and one crew, and we had a very high regard for them. The problems we had with the airplanes were engine problems, and there was probably not much that the crew could do about them, because we were wearing out engines, and then they'd send them back to be rebuilt. They'd put the rebuilt engines back on the airplanes, and they weren't worth a hoot. They wouldn't last very long, but we got to like those guys on the ground very much. ... We'd sit in the tent with them before dawn and have a cup of coffee, and maybe not say anything ... I'd gotten paid, let's say, and I'd give this guy my billfold. I didn't even know his name, and I had all my worldly possessions ... the few that I had, my driver's license or my identification card, and I'd hand them over to that guy. "See you later."

KP: You wouldn't take them with you on the mission.

TS: No.

KP: What good would it do if you didn't come back?

TS: That's right, and ... they didn't need any information. They didn't want you to give any information to the enemy. You had name, rank, and serial number was the rule, and you had it on your dog tags, and they didn't want you to have a lot of other stuff. So, if I had money, or identification cards, or St. Christopher's medal, why wear that? [laughter]

KP: Were there any superstitions that you or the other crewmembers had? Do you remember any superstitions?

TS: There probably were, but I don't think I paid much attention to them. Somebody would wear a pair of socks, the same ones all the time, or something like that. ... I never did that, and I don't know that anybody on the crew did.

KP: I did notice that you flew on different planes with different names.

TS: Yeah, right.

KP: Not all the aircraft were named, but you had certain planes that were. One was the "Hundred Million Dollar Baby", and the "Birmingham Jewel".

TS: Yeah, I didn't even remember that (Hundred Million Dollar Baby). That one I remember (Birmingham Jewel).

KP: Where did the names come from?

TS: The original crews that flew them and took the liberty to name them, and got some permission to name one. We never cared ...

KP: I noticed that most of them didn't have consistent names.

TS: Yeah.

KP: You also had different crews. You flew as a crew together, except that Robert Goodrich would replace whom?

TS: Cox. Yeah.

KP: What was he like?

TS: He was a wild kid, and his father was a general in the Air Force. Father was in c.o. of the material command for the 8th Air Force, and Bob used to tell us that his father was a general, and we said, "Baloney." You know, we never believed him. ... He was being threatened with court-martial, or getting broken all the time. ... He would go off by himself, or maybe one of the other gunners, and they'd get drunk and in trouble down in London, or something, but he was adequate. That's about all.

KP: Was his father really a general?

TS: Yeah, ...

KP: He really was a general.

TS: I didn't find it out, for a fact, until the last three or four years.

KP: At the time, you didn't believe him.

TS: None of us believed it.

KP: Towards the end of your time in England, you flew with different crews.

TS: My pilot and co-pilot finished up on the 27th of December, and so, I went with Matisse, or a few other guys. I can't remember their names.

-----END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE TWO-----

TS: We knew enough that the pilots had had a few missions under their belts, so we didn't feel ... too antsy. It would have been nice if we could have all stayed together, but it wouldn't do you any good to get upset because you were going whether you liked it or not. So, there was some cause for concern. One of those guys, I think it might have been Matisse. I can't remember for sure ... We were coming home and got back over England, and he decided to leave the group and get down under the clouds and come home on his own. I don't know why he decided that. ... He decided he was lost, and the navigator was trying to help him, and I asked him if he wanted me to help him, and, "Yeah, sure." I could get a radio fix. ... The navigator and I both decided about the same time where we were, but we were about 180 degrees apart, and it turned out that we were just down too low, and my radio wasn't any good for navigating at three thousand feet or below, and we got home all right, but it was just upsetting. ... Why he left the group, I had no idea.

KP: This is on your last mission.

TS: One of my last missions, yeah.

KP: It seems like something you were told not to do unless you had to.

TS: ... If you had an emergency, that's one thing, but ... I couldn't tell that we had any emergency.

KP: How formal was your base? You had a West Pointer as your Group leader.

TS: Yeah.

KP: How formal was it in terms of military dress, or in terms of saluting?

TS: It varied. ... I was going to the mess hall one day, or I was coming back from the mess hall, and a captain was on the other side of the street, going in the other direction, and I didn't salute, and he hollered at me and wanted to know why I didn't salute, and I just said, "Well, you know, all I see is officers from here to there and, ... how many times should you salute?" I said, "I don't mean any disrespect." I just tried to use a little reasoning. He didn't say anything, he let me go. ... By this time, everybody's been in the service long enough, and they're all sick and tired of being there, and ... I think you've got to step out of line pretty bad ... before you get raked about anything, or really raked.

KP: How was the food on the base?

TS: It was just, generally, pretty mundane. ... They'd try to do something real nice for you every once in a while. I've told this story many times. I've forgotten what the mission was, but it was a long day. It was going to be a long mission, and ... they were cooking steaks at five o'clock in the morning to feed us when we got back, and putting them in steam tables, which guaranteed that they were going to be pretty doggone tough. [laughter] ... Another time, towards the end of the activities in Europe, ... I was through flying, but I was on the ground in a teaching capacity,

and ... they brought in a bunch of cold storage eggs from Denmark. ... As soon as they started breaking the shells, you knew they'd been in Denmark in a silo, or deep freeze, or somewhere for six or seven years. The gases that just came off of those eggs was terrible. ... I presumed somebody had it in their heart that they ought to do some good to somebody and give them these eggs, but [laughter] they weren't worth anything. So, you know, you've got a lot of stuff that was the same. You've got the carrot salad with the raisins in it. You've got the standard SOS meal ...

KP: What was the standard SOS meal?

TS: It was called "shit on a shingle," [laughter] and so, you know. You were looking forward to the day when you wouldn't have to be bothered with it anymore.

KP: What about showers?

TS: In England that was a problem. ... We were on a base that had been built by the RAF for the RAF, and they weren't great on ... creature comforts. I don't remember that we ever had hot water, ever, and a sink would be something like an autopsy table, you know, made out of soapstone and about that deep.

KP: This sounds pretty spartan, even by military standards.

TS: To me, that's the way I remember it, yes, and hot water ... was a real problem, a real treat if you ever got any.

KP: You finished your last mission and you did not get rotated back to the States. You said you stayed on the civilian base.

TS: I asked to stay there as a communications instructor. ... I knew the major that was running it and he said, "Yeah, we could use an extra man." So, I got it, and that was the first time I had any teaching experience, kind of an interesting thing to jump into. [laughter]

KP: Did you like it?

TS: Yeah, I did. ... It was like anything else. If you do it often enough, ... you begin to know the subject and you begin to feel comfortable, and that sort of thing. So, I kind of got to enjoy it.

KP: What was it like to be part of the ground crew and not having to do missions?

TS: ... It was an entirely different world. The guys I was in with ... had been there for a long time and ... they felt pleased that one of the combat people had joined them in a voluntary manner. So, they were very friendly. Again, ... if I had leave, I didn't go anywhere with them. ... I was usually pretty much of a loner on ... that score. ... They had a different viewpoint completely. ... Many of them would have liked to have the goodies that we got, but ... none of

them were running out to the flight line, getting on a plane, going into combat anywhere.
[laughter]

KP: Aside from the flight pay, what were some of the other benefits you got?

TS: Very, very few. You know, once you got back on the ground, you weren't out on the flight line at all, why, you didn't get any of the perks at all. Not that there were very many, but ... I could get into town oftener if I wanted to.

KP: You had more freedom because you were not on duty.

TS: Yeah, I didn't have any officer telling me what to do all the time. I had a buck sergeant who was ... a teacher, and he and I made up our own schedule. He'd been there for two or three years, and he said, "This is what we're going to do today." ... I'm sure some major, or captain, or lieutenant had done some of that background, but I worked through him, the buck sergeant who had all the experience. ... It was a good, easy life.

KP: The ground crew was there for the duration. The flight crew knew that the statistics were against them. If they reached twenty-five missions, they knew they were done for.

TS: Yeah.

KP: The ground crew was there the entire time.

TS: Day in and day out.

KP: Do you think there was any tension between the ground crews and the airmen?

TS: I think there could have been, but ... it wasn't anything that I was ever aware of, unless the ground crew were saying, you know, "We'll fix him." ... I never saw any of it.

KP: Were you ever envious of the ground crew?

TS: Only on take-off days, that was all. [laughter]

KP: You said you were something of a loner. Did you do much reading when you were overseas?

TS: Not an awful lot, no. ... I had friends on other bases, and ... we'd get together. You know, I had a brother over there, and we got together a couple of times. A couple of guys on the base were ... in high school with me, ... but we never did a lot, not much. The greatest sport for all the GIs was to go in town and drink beer. ... That seems to be the mass sport.

KP: It was the bandwagon to climb on.

TS: Yeah, the masses.

KP: You would eventually be rotated back to the states. The war was almost over by then.

TS: Yeah.

KP: You returned by boat this time.

TS: Yeah.

KP: What was that experience like?

TS: It was awful. It was terrible. It was a Liberty Ship.

KP: It was the Charlie Victory ship, the *Francis L. Lee*.

TS: Yeah, I didn't learn the name of that until last September. [laughter]

KP: How long did the voyage take?

TS: Twelve days ... from Scotland to Boston. The *Queen Mary*, or *Queen Elizabeth*, was loading up the same time we were. They left four days later and got to New York four days before we got to Boston. ... We had hoped to get on that big boat and get a fast trip home, but it wasn't to be.

KP: What else made it such a terrible voyage?

TS: Well, the sleeping quarters, it was a light boat. It was only four hundred and fifty feet long, or something like that, and ... no weight in it, so it sat up in the water, and they had five tons of sand bags around the propeller trying to keep that in the water. ... Then, you slept in the holds and the bunks were seven high.

KP: They were tight.

TS: Yeah, and they were very close together. It was claustrophobic.

KP: How crowded was the boat?

TS: We had about five hundred twenty-five troops on there, I guess. Something like that. Somewhere in that range.

KP: So, it was a fairly full.

TS: They took up all the beds. That's for sure.

KP: You didn't have a half-empty ship. What would you describe the scene as?

TS: A full compliment of people with a lot of space in it. In other words, the hold, they had dining tables bolted to the floor in the hold, and there was space back and forth in there ...

KP: The entire hold was not used.

TS: It was about three sides, I think. ... It was not very pleasant, and then we had one storm that lasted for about thirty-six hours with an empty ship. Boy, that baby rolled and rolled, and everybody got sick, and it was a real mess, but, you know, we were going home, so we put up with anything. Salt water showers. ... In the storm, ... everything in the heads got dumped on the floor. Then, the salt water came over, and you got more water in on the heads, and ... it was really something.

KP: It sounds very unpleasant.

TS: Yeah, not fun at all.

KP: You did make it to Boston. Did you have any sort of a "welcome home"?

TS: ... It was a real nice attempt, and it was nicely done. We came into ... what they call, "the roads," (I guess), to the port. Boston's got a pretty long approach, a lot of little islands. Sometime, during the night, while we were asleep, we came to some point in there and anchored. When you woke up, it was dead silence. I remember getting up, and about that time, there was some noise outside, and they had a boatload of WACs that came alongside with a big army band, ... some sort of Tommy Dorsey-type band, or whatever. I can't remember, but it was, a nice touch. A lot of waving back and forth, and hollering, and music, and shortly we were on our way, and tying up to the dock. ... That was our welcome.

KP: From Boston, where did you go?

TS: [Fort] Miles Standish right outside of Boston, ... that was just to get us off the boat and organized, and separated out, to where we were going to go from there. That was called Miles Standish, and it was probably something like Camp Kilmer. From there, we took the train. I was on the train that went to Fort Dix, and I got to Fort Dix and went through the usual army routine. They don't know what the hell they're going to do with you. ... I forgot what hour of the morning it was. Some major was giving us a bunch of infantry stuff that the Air Force is not used to. He got a royal welcome, I can tell you that. ... They got us sorted out, and ... I got some new uniforms and clean clothes and a train ticket, or bus ride to Trenton, and train tickets to Vineland, and ... I've forgotten how many days I had.

KP: Thirty days.

TS: Thirty days, I guess, yeah.

KP: After your leave, which you spent in Vineland, you went to Greenville, North Carolina, and I have a good friend who works in the University there.

TS: Oh, is that right?

KP: Where did you do your R&R and why?

TS: That's where we did it. There was a golf course there, and there are people today that can remember that that was there, and I haven't the slightest idea where we were other than on a golf course at Greenville.

KP: Did you play golf?

TS: I did at the time, but I didn't have any clubs and didn't have any desire to play there. ... They made it nice for you. It was German POWs doing all the work, and the meals were great. You got up and had breakfast at eight o'clock. You looked at the bulletin board to see if your name was up for anything. If it wasn't, you didn't have to be anywhere near there until eight o'clock the next morning, and you checked the bulletin board again.

KP: What kind of things would be on the bulletin board?

TS: ... What they were going to do with you next, and mostly it was rest and recuperation is all it was.

KP: Was there any sort of counseling?

TS: They were trying to get you to reenlist, and they were trying to get you to buy your GI Insurance and War Bonds.

KP: Did you buy your GI Insurance?

TS: I sure did. I still have it.

KP: Did you buy any War Bonds?

TS: I did, under pressure, while I was overseas.

KP: Had you given any thought of reenlisting?

TS: Oh, yeah. A lot of thought. That was never going to happen. [laughter]

KP: You had enough.

TS: I'd had ... enough of the service, yeah.

KP: Were you counting the calendar days?

TS: Yeah.

KP: During this R&R, the days were numbered.

TS: Yeah.

KP: Did they give you a set date, or was it very vague?

TS: It was all vague. I don't know how many people they were dishing out to various parts of the country or what the priorities were. People were there before us, and all that ...

KP: You were on leave when you learned the war was over.

TS: Oh, yeah. I was home in Vineland, New Jersey, sitting on the front porch.

KP: Do you remember anything about the VJ Day celebrations in Vineland?

TS: No. ... None of my friends were home. ... My relationships with everything were now five years stale, and I just was happy to be out of it and know that the war was over, and I just stayed there until I went to Greenville.

KP: When did you learn that you could leave Greenville and that you had been given a terminal date?

TS: ... I was out of the service almost three years to the day that I went in, and it was like the 22nd of September. Let's say, that I got out at Dix, so I was en-route from Greenville to Dix, say at least the sixteenth or seventeenth of September, and out. A very strange feeling to be ... on your own again. A very strange feeling after three years ...

KP: The Air Force determined where you were going to be.

TS: Yeah, everything. Every move you made was preordained ...

KP: You would not enter school until January.

TS: Yeah.

KP: What did you do in those few months after you got out?

TS: I got in my parents' way. ... I really ought to get a job. ... I went up to Rutgers, and the head of the ceramics department was just back from the Navy. He had a lot of people looking for veterans coming out and wanted ceramic engineers. So he showed me these forms, and while he's doing this, the phone rang. ... It was a graduate student, who had been ... one of my

instructors in my undergraduate days, who was looking for somebody to, work and go to school part-time. That's exactly what I wanted to do. So, the director handed me the phone and I talked to him, and I got a job.

KP: Where were you working?

TS: In Trenton, New Jersey, starting in early December of '45, and ... it worked out well, ... one of the best things that I ever did.

KP: It sounds like you stayed with the company.

TS: I did, [for] twenty-three years.

KP: That is a long tenure.

TS: Yeah.

KP: What company was it?

TS: It was United Clay Mines Corporation, which you would never have heard of, probably.

KP: No.

TS: It was a small company, raw materials, and ... as employees, we were able to buy the company in 1952, and we kept it until 1965 and sold it.

KP: You eventually sold the company and profited.

TS: Oh, yeah. I hate to tell you how much. You'd turn me in to the IRS and my wife would know how much we made. [laughter]

KP: I don't need to know. [laughter] Did you work for the company that bought you out?

TS: For three years, yes, and it was all I could handle of those guys. We didn't like each other.

KP: What company did you then work with?

TS: After that it was International Talc. ... They had an office in New York City, and they had a plant up in New York State, up near Plattsburgh. I worked for them from '68 to '74, and they were in deep trouble and had to sell out, and I lost my job. I wasn't taken over by the other company. ... From there, it was another company owned by a friend of mine. It's still smaller. (Making kilns) and that didn't work real well. ... You should never go to work for a friend or a relative. That lasted about fourteen months, and I got out of that. By this time, I guess the kids were on their way pretty well. ... Our son was probably married along in there somewhere, I went with another company, and he was in worse financial shape than anything I'd ever seen, and

that didn't last very long. After that, I guess, just Barbara and I were home, and I thought that I really ought to have something to do, so I got a real estate license. That was all right for a little while, but then we got a pamphlet in the mail about this place in Georgia, and to cut the story to its bone, why, we went to Savannah and bought a lot. Two years later, we were living down there.

KP: When did you move to Georgia?

TS: We moved into our new house in February of '83, and it was the best thing we ever did.

KP: You have been very active in the 8th Air Force Museum. In fact, you've done a remarkable amount of research on your experiences with your squadron.

TS: Oh, yeah.

KP: Have you been active in anything else?

TS: Just ... socializing. I was a very active tennis player, but I ruined my knees, and I had to quit tennis in 1987.

KP: It sounds like you had a fun time. [laughter]

TS: Oh, yeah. It was great. It was a real good life, but ... I keep busy. Now I have the fitness center I can go to. Again, it's a social thing, meet a lot of people. We do a lot of things together.

KP: Did you stay in touch with people from your squadron after you got out?

TS: Yes.

KP: How long did you stay in touch with people and how did that go?

TS: I've forgotten how it started, but it started with Christmas cards, obviously.

KP: So, you would initially send Christmas cards to each other.

TS: Yeah, and then I went to a reunion the 379th had in Williamsburg. That was in 1982, I think. Wasn't it Bobbie, do you remember?

Mrs. Smith: Yes.

TS: I met a lot of guys, and talked a lot. I got the bug. I was now definitely retired, and I just thought, "... I did all these things but I didn't know why or exactly where," so I decided to go back and dig into it, which I've done.

KP: You have done a wonderful job. You have done what historians love. You have the actual hard and cold facts.

TS: Well, the recollection goes back to the fact that I got the facts, and it brought out a lot of other details, and then the experience that I've had at the 8th Air Force Museum, as a docent, in the combat film, and working with people coming in, I've gotten to be a little verbose about the whole thing.

KP: I hope there's some oral history project going on at the 8th Air Force Museum. I hope someone is taking your stories.

TS: They've just done a very little bit. They've tried to figure out the major targets in Germany, and they've decided on Berlin, St. Nazaire. Merseburg and Schweinfurt. I don't know whether Schweinfurt was the fourth one or not. ... They wanted me in on the Merseburg because I'd been there, five times, I think, but then they decided that ... they'd bitten off too much, so they crossed Merseburg off. [laughter]

KP: You never joined any veterans organizations until recently. What did you join?

TS: 8th Air Force

KP: Historical Society and the Bomb Group Veterans. You never joined the American Legion or the Veterans Committee.

TS: Oh, no.

KP: It sounds like you didn't have much interest.

TS: I got talked into going to the VFW early on, when we were first married. ... A retired colonel lived near us, and he overwhelmed me. Then, I joined the VFW, and they turned around and supported Harry Truman for president, and they were using my money, and I said, "Well, that's it. I'm not going to have any more of that," and I've never been back to any of them.

KP: Did you ever encounter any black soldiers or airmen in England?

TS: No, they were there and en mass ...

KP: You never encountered any?

TS: They were on our base, I guess, but I never saw them. They were out in the bomb dump, somewhere ...

KP: Did you encounter any women on the base, or WACs?

TS: No, not until I married Barbara. She was a WAC. [laughter]

Mrs. Smith: ... You didn't know me then.

TS: No.

KP: Were you a WAC in World War II?

Mrs. Smith: Yes.

KP: Which specialty?

Mrs. Smith: I was in the weather service in the southwest, and we were with the Air Force ... The WACs, at that time, WAAC, but changed to WAC.

KP: They were flying the planes.

Mrs. Smith: No. They were WASPs.

KP: Did you encounter any WASPs when you were there?

TS: No, the only women that we encountered on the base or in duty were the Red Cross gals that were serving booze, and coffee, and donuts. We didn't have any WACs. ... It was very limited.

Mrs. Smith: Well the only weather WACs who went overseas went to Paris to ...

TS: Yeah, SHAEF [Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force] Headquarters, SHAEF Headquarters, probably.

Mrs. Smith: ... You had to have points like you did to get out, and I didn't have enough points.

KP: How did you and your wife meet?

TS: ... I'll tell it to you briefly. My brother went to the University of Alabama. Barbara's father was ... teaching ROTC there. Her sister was in my brother's class, and they knew each other, and married eventually, when the war was over, Barbara came to visit her sister and my brother, who lived in the same town I was in, and that's how we met.

KP: It was your brother going to the University of Alabama.

TS: Yeah.

KP: Why did your brother go to University of Alabama?

TS: Good football team.

KP: Oh.

TS: That was it. That was it.

KP: Did he play football?

TS: No.

KP: He just wanted to go

TS: He just liked good football teams.

Mrs. Smith: University of Alabama was known as the playground of the South. [laughter]

KP: Neither of your children served in the military.

TS: No, my son was getting ripe for Vietnam, but the numbers just never worked out and the thing was over before he ever got called. My daughter ... is four or five years younger than he is, so. No.

KP: Is there anything I forgot to ask, particularly about your Air Force career? If there's something that you're waiting to tell me, please do.

TS: I'd rather send you some copies of stuff when I get back.

KP: Please do. Anything that you have written, please send us ...

TS: ... I'm just looking through it today, and there's some stuff. ... I'll make copies of that I think you would find interesting. That sort of stuff. These are official orders that you might ...

KP: Those are exactly the kind of things that we would love to have.

TS: Stralsund was the longest mission that we went on. Cologne-that was in our backyard ... This (Hamm) is where the co-pilot dropped the bombs too soon. Stuff like that, you know. Gelsenkirchen, we commuted to, Merseburg, and other synthetic oil plants. I'll just send you some copies of those.

KP: That would be great if you're willing to do that.

TS: Yeah, just the highlights. ... It'll give you a little [bit] to hang your hat on.

KP: Have you learned more as your research has progressed?

TS: Yeah.

KP: You know people who couldn't take it. That was something that was hushed up. They didn't broadcast what they were doing.

TS: No.

KP: What surprised you in terms of looking at some of the documents in the National Archives, and other sources, and talking to people? What has really surprised you the most of what you've learned looking back on it?

TS: Well, the stuff that's recorded, I can pick out errors in it today, a lot of errors.

KP: What type of errors?

TS: ... I was just looking at one today, showed a whole flight formation, showed the wrong leader, leading the whole thing.

KP: Well, that's one of the most basic things.

TS: Yeah. ... I know who led it and his name isn't on the flight manifest. ... Some of the things ... that I experienced were some horrible mix-ups. When you get that much of an organization in the air, and all the variables, you've got some terrible mix-ups ...

KP: You mentioned that there were a lot of midair collisions.

TS: Yeah. That and you know, I can remember this Colonel Travis that I've mentioned in my own records many times. He was leading us one day, and we were going to this target and getting close, and all of a sudden, coming from the right hand side, there's a whole group, or wing of B-24s, and we were all inter-meshed going at right angles to each other. Well, he couldn't ... regroup the whole thing and they met. I counted planes dropping bombs on just targets of opportunity. You know, they'd pick out something that looks like a town and drop their bombs, because they're no longer a cohesive group, and you'd never see anything like that in the news. That would be deadly to let the American public know that, something like that was going on. [laughter]

KP: That might have bad consequences.

TS: You could destroy a lot of airplanes, and you know, you've got a lot of hardware over there for nothing. You've got all that effort going on. So, you know, you'd run across things like this.

KP: That didn't make it to the paperwork.

TS: No.

KP: Not the two wings intercepted.

TS: You'd die. It was told entirely differently.

KP: People have eluded some of these topics. There are skeptics of oral history, but I tend not to believe everything on paper.

TS: Right.

KP: You cannot believe everything everyone tells you.

TS: Yeah.

KP: At the same time, don't believe everything people have said about paperwork. Sometimes, there's very little relation.

TS: Yeah, exactly. Well, I've noticed that in tracking this stuff down, and I know this guy that's compiled my own records out of the database. ... He's stumbled across some of those things and you know, they've got me credited for thirty-nine missions. Well, they counted aborts and stand-downs, and recalls, and everything.

KP: Only thirty-nine.

TS: ... I didn't have that many. I had thirty-five. ... It's all grist for the mill, and there's an awful lot of information that we, our group, happened to be one that saved their records and kept pretty good ones. So, it's been a lot of fun.

KP: Thank you very much. I really appreciate how you make things very easy for me.

TS: Yeah. I'm glad to contribute a little bit to it, and I'll look forward to getting your stuff when you send me a copy.

KP: I'd love to give you a copy of the tapes, but the actual transcript will take some time. So, don't be surprised if it's a year or two when you get the transcript.

TS: Yeah, okay.

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Reviewed by Randy Mitchell September 18, 2000

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak September 24, 2000

Reviewed by John Talbot Smith November, 2000