RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS S. TORRESSON, JR.

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SANDRA STEWART HOLYOAK
and
DAVID D'ONOFRIO

WHITING, NEW JERSEY
SEPTEMBER 25, 2002

TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

David D'Onofrio: This begins an interview with Colonel Thomas S. Torresson, Jr. on September 25, 2002, in Whiting, New Jersey with David D'Onofrio and …

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: Sandra Stewart Holyoak. We'd like to thank you again on the record for taking time today to do this interview with us. To begin with, let us start with a little bit about where and when you were born.

Thomas S. Torresson: I was born in North Bergen, New Jersey. Our house was actually one block from the Palisades, when we looked out the window we watched them building the George Washington Bridge.

SH: Really?

TT: Yeah, and you could see Grant's Tomb across the river.

SH: What year was this?

TT: I was born in 1916.

SH: 1916. What is your first memory there?

TT: Oh, our family lived there for many years. My first memory is, I guess I'd say, a St. Bernard dog that the family had which I used to ride around on.

SH: Did you have brothers and sisters?

TT: Yes. I had a brother and three sisters.

SH: Older or younger?

TT: I had two sisters older than I was and one brother and one sister younger and two of the sisters have died. I still have one sister who lives in Florida and a brother who lives in Florida.

SH: Now can you tell me what your father did?

TT: Yes, my father was in the steamship business. He was Marine Superintendent of the New York Cuba Mail Steamship Company, better known as the Ward Line, started there, believe it or not, as a boy of fourteen, because his father, Captain Tobias Torresson, had been lost at sea. In those days they didn't have much compensation or insurance and to help the family out, the president of the then Ward Line gave him a job as a messenger or office boy. He worked his way on up. Spent fifty-two years with the company.

SH: Now all these were in that part of New Jersey?

TT: Oh, no. The home office or the office of the steamship company was in New York on the East River. They covered piers thirteen through fourteen, and fifteen on the East River.

SH: What primarily did they ship? What was their cargo?

TT: Well, they carried both passengers and cargo. They were not like the cruise ships you have today. The passenger and freight liners were the same vessels, a whole group of ships of that nature. They also had a fleet of tankers which were in the Gulf area and a fleet of just plain freight ships called the (*Agwi Sun*, the *Agwi Dale*?) and so on. So he had quite a number of ships to supervise.

SH: As a supervisor for the shipping industry, what were his duties?

TT: Well, actually the duties included the maintenance of all the ships. Keep them supplied and he scheduled paintings and dry docking, and so on, and, of course, the overseeing and hiring of the crews. The sailors were hired through a shipping master, so called, and the officers, particularly the captains were hired by the head of the company.

SH: Was he native born to New Jersey or New York?

TT: Oh, no. My father came from Mandel, Norway. It is kind of an interesting story. His father was a sea captain in Norway, and the economy wasn't too good at that time. We're going back to the 1800s, and around 1894-95, somewhere in there, Captain Tobias came to the United States leaving his family in Norway, his wife and five children, until he got established in the United States, became an American citizen. In those days, under the law, if the father became an American citizen, the rest of the family became American citizens. So after he got established and was working for the Ward Line, he sent for his family and they were brought over and settled in the Borough Hall section of Brooklyn. Now actually at that particular time the oldest daughter was my Aunt Elise, and the youngest was my Aunt Emily, who was just an infant at the time. They had no trouble starting out in the United States because they all spoke English. In Norway it was a requirement that kids took English in school so they had no problem along that line. Things were going pretty well until the father, Captain Tobias, was lost at sea. Now I haven't been able to confirm all this. I'm researching it on the internet right now, but as I heard the family story he was captain of a ship called the *City of Washington*, and their cargo broke loose during a bad storm in the Gulf. He was out directing the men trying to get things under control, and he was washed overboard, and, of course, they couldn't recover him.

SH: Now when you say, Gulf, you mean Gulf of Mexico?

TT: Gulf of Mexico, yes. It's an interesting thing about the *City of Washington*. It was a ship that was next to the *Maine* when the *Maine* was blown up in Havana Harbor, and the delegates from Spain, Cuba and the United States met on the *City of Washington* to try and straighten things out. I have forgotten the name of the captain then, but this was a couple of years, at least three years, after my grandfather had been lost at sea.

SH: So at that point then your father begins working as a messenger boy?

TT: Yes, at age fourteen.

SH: Tell us then please about your mother, where she was from?

TT: My mother was born in New York City, Irish family. Her maiden name was McNamara, and she was the first female employee of the Ward Line. She was a secretary to the president. She really couldn't type. She couldn't take shorthand. The reason they employed females in those days around the docks was because the men used some rather rough language. Now you didn't have travel agents or things of that nature like you have today. If people want to take a trip, they went to the company and bought the ticket. So it's pretty embarrassing if they have a female passenger come in to get a ticket and have all this language going on and so the president came up with the idea of having a pretty young lady sitting outside his office and the men would not use the rough language in her presence. Now, of course, the problem is the women are worse than the men with this rough language, but in those days no man would swear in front of a lady. So that was her first job.

SH: In those days to even have a woman working …

TT: Well, I don't know how much work she actually did. She answered the telephone and scheduled appointments and things like that.

SH: Obviously this is where they met then?

TT: That's where my father met her, yes.

SH: Do you remember the story about how they met?

TT: No, I really don't know anything about that. [laughter] Well she was in the office and my father was in the office, that was how they met, but courtship wise, I can't tell you that, I don't know.

SH: Did your parents talk at all about World War I and what built up to that and any incidences being in the shipping industry?

TT: Well, actually during World War I because the Ward Line, like any other steamship company, was involved in transporting troops and freighting all that stuff to Europe and my father at that time was very involved with controlling the sailing of these ships. Incidentally, he became a Lieutenant Commander in the Naval Reserve and I still have a copy of his commission. My mother's brother, my Uncle Will, was in the army during World War I, and beyond that, at that particular time I was born in '16 and we got into the war in at '17 so I was only a child so I didn't hear much about it. Actually, as we grew up, in the movies, we got to see pictures about World War I and these soldiers all became our heroes, and so on, and there were movies called *The Big Parade*, for example, which was a very fine movie, they were all silent. In New York, I think it was the Rivoli Theater, I'm not sure about that, behind the screen they had things to make sound, like they used a riveting machine, or something against metal to sound like a machine gun and they had big boom things and so on, which were very realistic

SH: Really?

TT: Not really, [laughter] real sound and it wasn't until, oh, around the '29 area, when we started to get sound movies. The first one everybody knows was the *Jazz Singer*, Al Jolson. I don't think anybody …

SH: Did you enjoy going to the movies?

TT: Oh, as kids, yeah, we loved it. In fact, they put a new movie in our town in North Bergen, the Broadway Theater, and for the opening night, I got a job of riding around in a horse and wagon, ringing the bell with a big sign on it advertising the opening, the grand opening of the theater, for which I got two free tickets. That was my pay for ringing the bell all day long, and I took my mother to the movie. [laughter] And that picture was the second sound movie ever made, and nobody remembers it. It was a thing called *Across the Pacific* with Monty Blue. He was the star, yes. So everybody remembers the Al Jolson movie, which incidentally that didn't start out to be a talking movie at all. They only tried to record his voice, his singing voice, and everything went so well that they continued on, that's how it first came out.

SH: Have you continued your interest in movies?

TT: To tell you the truth, I think I've been to two movies in the last ten years. I see the old ones on TV. I'm a John Wayne fan, I guess.

SH: Were any of your family members involved in World War I at all?

TT: My Uncle Bill, my mother's brother, was in World War I and he never got overseas. He got caught down in one of those Southern camps where they had the flu epidemic that killed a lot of soldiers.

SH: What did you do for after school activities? Did you go to regular grade school in North Bergen?

TT: My first two years were at the public school, Robert Fulton School, and after that, the grammar school was Saint Joe's School in West New York and after school, actually like all the kids, we played baseball during the baseball season, football during the football season, and normal things. We played a lot of hand, we used to call it handball, actually, it was a stickball thing with rubber balls and a broomstick, and played that in the street. But that was the normal activity. Kids didn't have a TV to look at, radio was very rudimentary in those days, so actually outdoor activities we were involved in during the winter time, sleigh riding, some ice skating and skiing.

SH: Did any of your activities include the Hudson River which was kind of in your …

TT: Oh, yes. We used to go skinny dipping in the Hudson River. It was sort of a game we guys played to be first in the water in the spring time and it was mighty cold. We swam off the

barges, the old barges up on the beach area there. We never thought about pollution in those days, and it really wasn't anywhere near like it is today.

SH: What about high school? What was your favorite subject?

TT: My favorite subject? I guess, physics.

SH: Really?

TT: Yeah. The teacher we had there was Father Frauhoffer. He was an expert on fires, pyrotechnics, and he also held title in the City of New York Fire Department as a sub chief, because of his expert knowledge in these areas. As a matter-of-fact, we had the big Brooklyn Dock fire, I don't know if you remember that or not, but the whole, on the East River on the Brooklyn side, a whole series of docks were in massive flames. La Guardia, who was then the mayor of New York can be seen in the Pathe News standing next to Father Fraunhoffer who was telling the firemen what they should be doing. It was a very interesting class if the alarm went off, and we had an alarm right in the classroom, Father Fraunhoffer would don his fire hat [laughter] and he had a staff car waiting for him at the exit and off he'd go. But he made physics a very interesting subject. This was Xavier High School, incidentally, in New York City.

SH: Catholic?

TT: Yeah. It was a Jesuit school. It was a military school.

SH: Was it?

TT: Sort of a quasi-military school because we wore uniforms that practically duplicated the New York City Police uniform. We had to wear those three days a week. As a matter-of-fact, I didn't like that because one day some gal thought I was a cop and bawled me out because I couldn't give her the proper directions. [laughter] But actually the military thing in there I disliked heartily, the drilling and so on, and I really wasn't at all happy with the military part of it, not knowing years later I'd spend my life in the military. [laughter]

SH: Oh, the ironies of life, right? Why did your family send you from the public schools in North Bergen to Xavier?

TT: Why? I guess the primary reason my mother had for that was her sister's son had gone to Xavier, and Xavier was a topnotch school. In New York City the two highest rated high schools in the parochial area were Regis and Xavier. Regis was all scholarship. I missed the scholarship at Regis by about one or two points but I got into Xavier, which you had to pay for, and it was just part of the Catholic growing up, to go to the parochial schools.

SH: Was your father gone or was he basically there working a regular nine to five kind of job, or was he on board ship at all?

TT: Oh, no. He traveled extensively. He would have to go to Baltimore on many occasions or down to Texas or Louisiana, and Boston. The headquarters of the top organization was in Boston. So actually he traveled quite a bit.

SH: Did all your siblings go to parochial schools as well?

TT: My brother went to St. Joe's and he went to St. Peter's in Jersey City for high school. Then he went to Mount St. Mary's in Maryland. My sisters, they went to, my oldest sister went to Holy Angels up in Fort Lee and then up to a girl's school called Teveny Hall, up in Highland Mills, New York. A matter-of-fact, we still are very close to nuns at Teveny Hall, and my wife and I visit there at least once a year.

SH: Was your father Catholic?

TT: No, he was a Norwegian Lutheran and that's kind of funny, but in those days if a Catholic girl is marrying a Protestant boy, they weren't even allowed to be married in the church, they had to be married in the rectory. But at the time the guy had to promise that the children would be raised Catholic, and my father, you know, really lived up to that promise even though it cost him money.

SH: As you were going to school with physics being your favorite subject, did you have after school jobs that had something to do with physics?

TT: In high school? No, I really didn't.

SH: Were you involved in athletics?

TT: Well, actually, I played a little football, high school, that was it. See, the travel from my home to New York City was a long commute. You had to take a streetcar, a ferry trip across the river, another streetcar and a subway train, so it was over an hour, an hour and a half travel each way.

SH: Did you think about going to college right out of high school?

TT: Well, actually, no. What happened as you read the story there, we had this summer home in Monroe, and as I grew up, as we got older, I used to do all sorts of jobs, I caddied for a while at the Monroe Country Club, but mostly I worked on farms. I enjoyed that, we thought it was fun to be out there pitching hay in the middle of the hot sun and the pay was great, we worked from six o'clock in the morning to six at night and you got fifty cents a day. You know, you forget about the Depression years.

SH: That's what I'm going to ask you.

TT: When the Depression hit, market crash in '29, the Depression lasted right on through to the start of World War II and during those years, why, it was fifty cents a day with people, grown ups worked for that, and if you're in the military in those days, a private got twenty-one dollars a

month, or say in the Navy, twenty-one dollars a month. So actually, people today, when you think in terms of a kid getting out of college and starting out at fifty thousand dollars a year, why it didn't happen in those days. I remember they were advertising an elevator operator job down in lower Broadway, it was the, I'm trying to remember the name of the oil company, anyhow, New Jersey Oil Company. The elevator job paid twenty-five dollars and required a college graduate and the people applying for that job was two blocks long, waiting to get interviewed. It was that bad. People who one day were bank presidents were out selling apples for a nickel apiece. It was a real sad time for the country. Hopefully, that will never happen again because we have more controls than we had in those days. The stock market was based on margin. Everybody had stocks and they owned stock or they pay ten percent on the stock and the rest was margin. So people thought about the terrific loses, a lot of them didn't lose that much, they didn't have that much to lose.

SH: You were probably just going into high school when the market crashed, is that right?

TT: Oh, actually, it crashed just a year before. It crashed in '29, I started high school in '30.

SH: How did it affect your father and his position in the shipping?

TT: No, we were very fortunate because he, at that particular time, the steamship business was really active in this country. Of course, today we don't have a steamship organization any longer. There's no more American ships sailing the seas. They ruined it and if we have to go to war again and need ships, we don't have them. A number of factors are involved there, but during the Depression years we were well off. My father was making at that time like seven thousand a year. My mother had a full-time maid, live in maid. We had a home in Woodcliff, North Bergen, New Jersey and a summer home in Monroe, New York. So the effect of the Depression, we really didn't have any problem. My father used to, at that particular time, help people out. Now, there was a movement afoot, pushed by the President, to give your neighbor a job. So we always had people working around the house and doing painting and things of that nature. As much as you could do for these people, but it was a sad time, the people would just, they'd do anything to get a job.

SH: I just wondered if he had to make any sort of changes in the way he hired people or anything with them?

TT: I wouldn't say that. Again, you'd have to know the waterfront and this was every steamship company. First of all, on the land side, you had people moving the freight, loading the ship or unloading the ship, and they were hired by what they called the shape-up system. All the guys looking for a job would line up outside the dock, and then the man in charge would come out and say, "You, you, you, you," and they pick up a little disk, numbered disk, which was, they'd carry it in, and there was a chap who counted these people, kept control. Their hours were counted so that when they left for the day, they'd know how many hours they had served. So it was just a matter of selection on the part of the, we called stevedore, who was in charge of the workers. On the sea side of the thing, they would hire sailors through what they call a shipping master. When you talk about sailors you have got to remember you're talking about licensed and unlicensed. You had licensed seamen who were able-bodied seamen, quartermasters, and so on, and then you

had, as members of the crew, you had engineer people, oilers, wipers, and so on and so forth, and they had to be qualified. But then you also had, and the largest group on any ship, even the same thing today, is the stewards department where you have waiters, cooks, bakers, chefs, musicians, all that type of thing. So they were all hired on a piecemeal basis. Once people got on the ships they didn't want to leave because the jobs were hard to find. Today it's entirely different, because we don't have any ships.

SH: How do you think the shipping industry that your father was involved in was able to not be affected by the Depression?

TT: Well, to say they were not affected is not quite correct. They were affected. It was very, highly competitive. They kept the prices for the passengers very low. An example, you could take a seven day all expense cruise to Havana, when I say all expenses, your food on board and whatever, for sixty-five dollars. Now you're talking about food, you're talking about breakfast, lunch, and dinner and snacks, tea in the afternoon, and so on and so forth. So it was a very, very tight thing, the most expensive room on the ships was, as I recall was something like one hundred sixty, one hundred sixty-five a week for the best suite on the ship. This was true of all the other lines, the Grace Lines and all these others that were traveling at the time. For example, you had Monarch of Bermuda, *Queen of Bermuda*, making round trips to Bermuda, in and out on a weekly basis, and their rates were very cheap. So it affected them only in effect that the profit thing was very low, but it kept the ships going. But you also have got to remember in those days the ships also carried freight, not like the ships today. You had all sorts of freight, going to Havana, they'd be carrying automobiles down to Havana, for example. As a matter-of-fact, they carried arms and ammunition, most ships of the day did the same thing, going into Cuba and on the way back they brought fruit back, they brought pineapples, and bananas and coconut and rum, so it was just a regular freight ship, too.

SH: Was your family in favor of Roosevelt, or not? Were they political?

TT: I don't think you could say my family was political, at all. My mother and my father, I guess, were Democrats. One of the good friends of our family was the ward man for the Democratic Club. Johnny Hayes was his name. Johnny Hayes was the first American to ever win the Olympic Marathon. He did this in 1914, I believe it was, and he lived right around the corner from us. So actually, I guess, they voted Democrat for that reason. But I don't think, I ever heard my father discuss any of the political situations.

SH: Did he talk at all about the LendLease arrangement with England to try to get ships …

TT: No, I don't even remember him even discussing that.

SH: Wondered if he was involved in any shipping from the United States?

TT: Oh, yes. He was involved in shipping once we got into the war. But most of the shipping in the LendLease program, as I recall it, and I'm very fuzzy on that, is they carried most of the freight in the British ships, and not those American ships that went to Europe. So I don't

remember, the Ward Line and my father's line, they sailed primarily from New York to Havana, into Vera Cruz, and Tampico, Mexico.

SH: I wondered if they had at any point changed their route?

TT: No. Not that I remember.

SH: The German submarines started coming closer and closer to the US shores, did your father talk about it at all? Did they have any kind of escort or changed their route or …

TT: Well, you're talking in the '39-'40 period, by that time I was already in the Air Corps and not at home.

SH: I know, I'll go back to that.

TT: So, I really don't know what he had to say about the German submarines at that time. I know the Ward Line kept sailing ships to Havana and to Mexico and they didn't lose any ships on that route from any submarine activity.

SH: We need to go back and talk about your graduation from high school, and from there we'll talk. [laughter]

TT: Well, as I say from the, I have to go back a little bit , in January of '34, we'd have the midterm. We were getting ready for the midterm exams, in my senior year, the most important thing was to get through those, then you know you're going graduate and I came down with pneumonia, and in those days pneumonia was practically fatal and I lived through that. My father being with the steamship business and our doctor, Bill Sweeney, was a wonderful man, a very good friend of the family. Knowing my father's position, he suggested that my mother take me on a trip to sea, to Havana to, well, the idea that the sea air would help me recover. This was all arranged and we went on the *Morro Castle* and this is the first time I'd seen that ship, and I really fell in love with it. Since my father was Marine Superintendent of the line, we got plush treatment. As a matter-of-fact, we were in the honeymoon suite, but my mother had the big honeymoon room and I had the little side room. But anyhow, I had practically complete freedom on the ship. I was invited on the bridge, and the engine room, and all over the ship. I met two young fellows who were deck cadets. Now, this was back in the days where even though we did have a maritime academy in New York State, the Federal Maritime Academy hadn't been established yet. Under the Deck Cadet system, a young fellow can sign on, and under the supervision of one of the deck officers, study to become an officer himself. This really was on the job training. They learned to chip paint, paint, clean brass and whatever. They also learned navigation, use of radios, etc, and they studied from books, and so on, to get prepared for the 3rd Mate's examination. In the ship officer category, you had a captain, a chief officer, 2nd Mate 3rd Mate, 4th Mate, and so on. So that was the starting point to get the license. So I thought that would be a wonderful thing to do, so I get back to school after the trip, and I found out that they put me back a semester. I went to the head of the school, the headmaster we called him, his name was Father Andre, and I convinced him that he should let me continue with my class and he agreed. I had to sit in his office, take every examination, one after the other. I'd finish one,

he'd hand me another one, and I had to pass them all, or else I didn't graduate with my class. I think some of the instructors gave me a break, but, anyhow, I made it. So at this particular point in time, why, I thought of deck cadet and I asked my father if I could get a job on the ship as a deck cadet and he said, "Well, no way, because there's fifty on the waiting list ahead of you." So I went back to our summer home in Monroe, and I was pitching hay, whatever. But I used to pick my father up at the Erie Railroad Station when he came up to stay with us at night. This one Friday night I picked him up and as he stepped into the car, he said, "Pack your bags, you leave for Havana in the morning." I was surprised, I said, you know, "I thought you said there was no deck cadet jobs open." He said, "No, you're going as assistant purser." Well, I had no idea what that meant, but it was one of these quirks of fate. The ship was *North Bound*. First of all, I have to tell you the ship had a very tight schedule. It would sail from New York City, pier thirteen or fourteen, at four o'clock in the afternoon, Saturday afternoon, go to Havana, remain a day and a night in Havana and come back and land the following Saturday, at eight o'clock and you could set your watch by it, it was that accurate. Well, on the northbound trip, this is early in July, the chief purser, a fellow named, Don Rowney, got very ill and he had to leave the ship. The first assistant, a chap named, Bob Tolman, radioed, there was no telephone, ship-to-shore, anything like that in those days, radioed the home office, told them the problem. Well, what they would have to do, for the ship to be able to sail the next afternoon, was to move everybody up a step, so the first assistant purser became chief, the second assistant, first, and so on, leaving the third assistant slot open with nobody to fill it. So my father thought it would be a good experience for me, just shove me into the niche, and it was only going to be for one trip. Well, it developed, it went the rest of the summer for various reasons. But at any event, the next morning, it was Saturday morning, I had to go with him by train, the Erie Railroad to New York, stop at the Apple Uniform outfitters and get my uniforms. They're the white uniforms with a choke collar, and ship's epaulets with stripes on, like I was a ship's assistant officer, and the hat read, Purser. Oh, I will tell you, I was really a dude, white shoes, white socks, and so on. Then I had to go and get my picture taken for my seaman's passport. Each seaman had to have an American passport, had to get that done and then go to the, they called it the barge office, where you went and got your seaman's papers. You had to prove your American citizenship, and so on, and so forth. I think my father's secretary had set this thing all up because it worked very smoothly, and I reported on board around eleven o'clock that morning …

SH: That's amazing. [laughter]

TT: And I met the purser, Bob Tolman, a great guy, and my first orders were to report to the chief officer, William Warms, on the bridge. This is a courtesy thing, to report in to him, meet him, and so on, and I'll never forget this meeting. He was a crusty, old bugger, very short spoken. But I was talking to him and I said, "This is a beautiful boat," and he said, "Mister, there's twelve boats swinging in the davits out there, this is a ship, and I never want to hear you call it a boat again." [laughter] I went back to the purser's office and it was getting near lunch time, so we went to lunch. Now in port we ate in the regular passenger dining room, and there the government representatives, who had to visit the ship, the customs people, the immigration people, all ate there and after lunch I was told to go down to the assistant purser's cabin, which was a tiny thing about half the size of this room here, and put my uniform on, report back to the office. Now this is say around one o'clock, and Tolman gave me a little book, with all my duties outlined in a time frame. It was beautifully arranged for each, and he had one for the purser, the

assistant purser, right on down the line, very well organized. Most to my surprise, my first job was to go on the foreign embarkation desk, out on the dock, and greet the foreign-speaking passengers. They were all speaking Spanish. All my knowledge of Spanish was high school Spanish. But, fortunately, the second assistant purser also went out with me was a native speaking Spanish and the forms we filled out had both English and Spanish on it so I got along all right with that. And the next job was to address the gifts, the parcels, that people sent to their friends who were, you know, *bon voyage* type things. It was usually candy, boxes of candy, or flowers, whatever. I had to put the cabin numbers on so the bellboys could deliver them to the various cabins. Much to my surprise, when I call for the bellboys the one that came up first was my cousin, Georgie. (laughter) I never knew he was on the ship. His father was connected with the line also. His father had been the chief engineer of the *Siboney*. So Georgie was there as a bellhop. Because he didn't know I was coming either, for that matter, it was quite a big surprise, and here I am with this ASS'T Purser on my cap. You know what he called me from then on out. (laughter) The job as assistant purser was nothing like you see on the *Love Boat* with the yeoman purser running around in his shorts and chasing the girls. … This was a hard working job. We opened the office at nine every morning; close the office at nine at night, and after closing the office, we'd still work 'til around midnight, I'm talking about every day. The only day we had, or the only night we actually had off was on Wednesday night when, or maybe it's a Tuesday, when they had the Masquerade Ball, and we had to dress up, masquerade costume, and dance with the girls. That was the only time we ever had a break from the routine. The job was not an easy thing. Incidentally the pay not very high either. Third assistant got fifty dollars a month, second assistant got seventy-five, the first assistant got one hundred, the purser got one hundred twenty-five. That was the pay scale and, of course, we ate all our meals in the officers' mess, which is up on A deck, on the starboard side. So, once you get into the thing you just didn't sit down and rest. Now each one of us had a cash drawer which you were responsible for; mine was thirty-five hundred. I had the only key to it, but it was my job to sell the stamps. We used to buy a lot of Cuban stamps. Passengers would want to fill out postcards and mail them with the Cuban stamp soon as they landed, so the postcard would get home before they would, and that was part of my job, to run that cash drawer and the stamps. So it was a busy job. I liked it. The worst part, you know, we didn't have Xerox like you have today, all this Xerox stuff is so nice. We had to reproduce the cargo list, passenger list, the manifest, and all this other stuff, all these papers, they had to be done both in English and in Spanish, and they had to be reproduced in God-knows how many copies. The way you make copies was with a machine called the Hectograph. Now this was a real beast. When you type, oh, incidentally, the typewriters carriage is about so long, I mean, they were big.

SH: About three feet?

TT: Terribly big, and it used to be fun because you couldn't touch type, you had to use very heavy pressure [Colonel Torresson knocks on the table for emphasis] and very often, with the roll of the ship, the carriage would return itself. So you did all this typing, but you had a special ink that if you'd get on your hands, you'd get it on your white uniform. It was terrible stuff, and then you took these pages that had been typed with this awful ink, and put it on this Hectograph machine. Well, the Hectograph was a great, big, gummed surface. This had to be carefully rolled down, the master copy taken off, and then other copies rolled on to get your reproduction. It was a very messy job and we used to do this down in what they called the mail locker, down in

the bowels of the ship. Actually, when I was doing this, I'd take my clothes off. I didn't want to ruin my uniform, you know. That was the most distasteful part of the job I should say.

SH: Your uniform, did it have to be washed every day?

TT: Oh, no, no. What we would do is as soon as we landed in Havana, a Chinese laundryman would come aboard. It was kind of funny to hear someone speaking Spanish in Chinese accent, but he didn't speak English, he did speak some Spanish, and he would take our entire laundry and zip off with it and have it back on board that night. The only time I really had a problem was one day I was in the officers' mess, now again I'm not sure how much you know about ships, but they used to have sideboards that came up around the table so things wouldn't slide off. But this day the water was particularly calm so the sideboards were not up. I was sitting there eating soup, it was noon time, and the quartermaster, for some reason or other, quartered a wave and that ship keeled over. It went over exactly forty-five degrees and all the stuff on the table slid right down and hit me on the uniform. I had mustard and soup and God knows what on my uniform. So I didn't have a clean uniform 'til I got to Havana and we had an old, alpacka, black jacket in the office, I used to have to put that on. It had epaulets on it, that was about all it had. But that was the only problem I really had with the uniforms. I only had two sets of uniforms anyhow.

SH: I was just thinking, alpacka wool, in the …

TT: Well, I had to have some kind of a jacket on the ship.

SH: I was thinking it must have been very hot. How were your dancing skills?

TT: Horrible. No, my sister had taken the job of teaching me to dance. But, as a matter-of-fact, when I went to my high school junior prom the poor girl I invited to that, I kept pushing her backwards around the floor all night. [laughter] I hadn't got to the stage where I could go forward myself. Then I got a little better. But my senior prom I took my sister to that and I learned a little that night and, but that was about it. My skill there was not that great. But, you know, it wasn't so bad because the ship, we didn't have stabilizers in those days like you have today, so the ship rolled and everybody rolled with the ship, so it wasn't too bad. [laughter] You got away with it and, incidentally, at that particular time, we also had a bar account. I had a fourteen dollars a week bar account, which I was supposed to use to buy drinks for the passengers. Well, the gal I was dancing with, her parents, whatever, and all I do is sign for it. Of course, the drinks were like twenty cents, not too much, so I never did use much of the bar account. But that was the only extracurricular duty you had. The other one I had was when as soon as we docked in Havana, I had to go ashore and go to the post office and buy a bunch of Cuban stamps, and I met the gal, one particular gal there I dealt with every trip so it was very easy. Then after that, I had my shore leave. We had an eight hour shore leave and, of course, third assistant purser, you did the night watch.

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

TT: It was the third assistant purser's job. Some very interesting things would happen there and if you want to hear any of those I can tell you.

SH: Sure, please, yes.

TT: There were some incidents on the ship. This particular one I always remembered. There was a pair, mother and father, oh, first of all, I have to go back and tell you that in Havana, they had these tours. A fellow named, I can't remember his name now, it's Hernandez, or Mendez, whatever, ran these tours, daytime tours around Havana and out in the country, in the tobacco farms, whatever, and at night they had a night club tour. You went to about eight different night clubs, and the last of them was the *San Suci*, which was a beautiful casino out in the outskirts of Havana and this mother and father had their young daughter, she was around seventeen, and they went out to the San Suci. Well, that night, when they came back on board they didn't have their daughter with them and I asked about it because we had to check these passengers on and [they] said, "Well, she'll be on shortly." They had met this Cuban, I'd call him a *gigolo*, there who danced with her and she had thrilling romantic night, and all this bologna, and he asked to take her back to the ship, escort her back to the ship, and these parents very foolishly okayed that. Well, about I'd say in a half hour later or so, she did show up with this *gigolo* and he wanted to come aboard with her, and it was after eleven o'clock, and I couldn't permit it and, of course, I had the mate there to back me up. So they'd agreed they would go out on the end of the dock to say goodnight. Well, the mate was kind of suspicious of this, and we had a security guard there, he was a big, heavyset, Cuban guy, so he said to him, "Go out and follow them. See that everything is all right." It was lucky he did because the Cuban tried to rape her. Well, she comes running back. The guard grabbed him and had him in a secure hold. She came running back, running aboard, she was crying, and then the guard brought this guy back. Didn't know what to do with him. Well, if you put him under arrest, the Cuban police could delay the ship, so that wasn't good, so the mate says, "Throw him off the dock." The security guard took him at his word because, climbing from the street way up to the dock was a steel stairway that went up about two and a half flights, it was a long stairway, straight, so he took this Cuban to the top of the stairway, gave him a kick and down he went. What happened to him at the bottom I don't know but he sure wasn't in good shape. After that, the next day, this girl made three or four attempts to come up to the desk and say something to me, but I finally gave her the high sign, you know, "forget it, it's alright." But it's just an example of some of the stupid things some of these people do in a foreign port.

DD: Especially in a place like Havana, which is like Las Vegas.

TT: Well, Havana was wide open. Yes, it was very true. But the *San Suci* was a very, very, exclusive casino and you had to be well-dressed. Well they had to be there, of course, some of the other nightclubs were rather rough. They had a team, supposed to be the rumba king and queen of Havana, anyway, if you made this tour, you'd see the same team at about four of the nightclubs, like, they seem to jump ahead of the tour group. I made that nightclub tour with my mother back in January when I had the pneumonia, so I was familiar with, you know, how it went and part of the tour was the Jai Alai games. You could see yourself a Jai Alai game and it was unique down there where they gambled at the Jai Alai's. They had tennis balls with a slot, a little slit in them, and you put your bet in, threw it down to the bookmaker, or whatever you want

to call him, he'd catch it, write the slip, and just throw it back to you. I won that night. I won about sixty bucks on the Jai Alai games, which I used to treat the ladies, my mother and two of her friends, who I'd taken with us that night to a luncheon, or midnight snack I should say, at the *San Suci*.

SH: When you are taking the passengers down to Cuba were there other scheduled recreation or social activities?

TT: Oh, yes, yes. We had a cruise director on board, his name was Bob Smith and his assistant, Herman Cluthe, and during the day they had, they set up bridge games, they set up contests, courts on the deck, or shuffle board, and whatever, and they had various functions of that type that they were responsible for. See, the cruise director, his job, in addition to entertainment for the passengers, also included setting up the tours. If you wanted to go on a tour and stuff, he handled all that. But not like you have on the *Love Boat* or any of these others. Today, of course, you go on a cruise and you have Broadway Shows and big, elaborate things; it was nothing like that. You have got to remember, back in the '30s now, you're talking sixty-eight years ago, and the cruise concept was just starting up. Most of the ships in those days were actually taking people from A to B. It was transportation, business purposes, or whatever. But the idea of people going on a round trip, on a cruise, such a thing, was kind of new. Now, all the steamship companies like the Grace Line were doing it; Ward Line was doing it, and so on and so forth. We had the cruise to Mexico. For example, you went to Havana, Tampico, Mexico, Vera Cruz, Mexico and back to Havana, back to New York, in a couple of weeks.

SH: Were there orchestras and things like that on board?

TT: An orchestra, yes, small orchestra. [cough] Excuse me. They would play during the dinner hour and play the dance music at night. I would say maybe about five-piece, or six-piece orchestra.

SH: Now, did you have to dress for dinner every night and be part of the social scene during dinner?

TT: Oh, not the assistant pursers, no. We ate in the officers' mess and this was completely separate from where the passengers ate, first class passengers. The purser could eat, would eat, with the passengers, the chief engineer would eat with the passengers, and the Captain would eat with the passengers, or if he was not present the first officer. You know the old story of the Captain's table, "you're invited to eat at the Captain's table," and those are the only ones required. Other then that, the assistant pursers and the other lower ranking people, we ate in the officers' mess.

SH: In your time aboard the ship like this, did you meet any famous people?

TT: Famous people? [laughter] No, I met a fan dancer.

SH: Was she famous?

TT: I'll never forget, her name was Sylvia Sidel and, if you remember, I guess you wouldn't remember, but Sally Rand was a gal who introduced the art of fan dancing at a World's Fair held in Chicago. Well, all the people were copying her and this Sylvia Sidel was on board and I met her at the ship's office and she was gonna perform at the big theater in the center of Havana. So she asked me, if, you know, I'd go see her. I said, "Sure." I went to it. It was kind of funny because the feathers kept falling off her fan. [laughter] It was a riot and she wasn't very good while I was there. You got to remember, when you look at the theater marquee out front, the big words on it was *El Raton Mickey*, Mickey Mouse. The Cuban kids loved Mickey Mouse, so they had the big, Mickey Mouse sign out front. Sylvia Sidel was a little thing on the side. She played second fiddle to Mickey Mouse.

SH: How many, would you call them runs, did you make?

TT: Oh, I don't recall. I made five or six, I think, or something like that. It got to be like a ferry boat. You'd have to wake up in the morning and see the sun to tell whether you're going north or going south.

SH: Really?

TT: When the ship burned I was on my last, I was gonna get off that trip anyhow.

SH: Were you? Because that's just what I was going to ask. Did you have a set time?

TT: Well, as I said before, it was, I was only on the ship because of this open space they had to fill. After that, you would think I was gonna get off and I was told, "No, you have to go another run, because it was the summer time and people were taking their vacations." So at one point in time I was moved up to second assistant, and a chap named Frank Trizinskee came in as third assistant, and then he went on to a different ship, and I dropped back to third, because another guy came on, because they ended up, you know, to shift around. But because of all the changes, I ended up going the whole summer. But, definitely, I was supposed to get off at that trip when the ship burned.

SH: Did you have plans? What you were going to do when that last trip was made?

TT: No. I hadn't even thought about college, or anything else, and, of course, I didn't get a chance to think about it because of the fire. I was on subpoena in New York for over a year. I couldn't leave, to go anywhere. So at that time I didn't have any plans at all.

SH: What did you do for that year while you were under subpoena?

TT: I went to work for the Good All Rubber company on Murray Street in New York. The vice president of the company was a good friend of the family, and they needed a clerk, that's what I actually was, and it was nice for me because I had to report to the Southern District of New York Court, Federal Court there every, what, well, started out everyday, then every, once a week and so on, on a subpoena, where I could be interviewed when they needed me for any interviews. So

it was only a two and a half, two and a half, maybe three block walk from my office, on up there, so it worked out very nicely.

SH: Do you want to go ahead and ask the questions? [Talking to the second interviewer, David D'onofrio]

DD: Sure, if we could just back up, to when you were still on the *Morro Castle*, now you served under the same captain the entire, on every run?

TT: Captain Wilmont, Robert Wilmont. He was a wonderful guy.

DD: How was his service record? I've read that he apparently had a magnificent record, for over twenty years, with the Ward Line.

TT: You mean Wilmont?

DD: Yes.

TT: As far I knew. He was an Englishman to begin with but, in fact, I have some papers of his original applications in there, copies of it. He was a very nice guy, and I had to report to him, too. Now he made an inspection of the ship everyday and when I meant inspection, I meant he went from top to bottom, checked the engine rooms, and everything else. So you'd see him everyday. My close contact with him mostly came about a letter I had to write, or type for him. It was to my father and the discussion was about putting a canal across the Keys, Florida Keys, and the discussion was about the coral reef and all sort of stuff. So I worked very diligently on that letter. When I brought it up to him for his signature, and he read the letter very carefully, and he looked at me and he says, "You've done a very nice job on that letter, but coral only has one R." [laughter] I put down corral. [laughter] I had to go back and type the letter all over again. You know, these were not word processors, these are typewriters. But he was a very nice gentleman. They have a lot of stuff that's been written that he and Warms were enemies, and whatever. A lot of baloney, made up by the writers who I say always speak from the platform of ignorance. They didn't know what they were talking about and they were more interested in jazzing things up than telling the truth. I have books. I can show you the books of that, three books have been written on it, and newspaper articles that were wild. As a matter-of-fact, one of your professors at Rutgers was quoted, maybe he was misquoted, by a guy named Michael Riley in the *Asbury Park Press* and this professor was supposed to be an expert on the *Morro Castle*. Everything was wrong. I wrote a letter to the *Asbury Park Press*, which they didn't print, pointing this out. But a lot of stuff you read really was just imagination on the part of the writer. In there, I have copies of magazines that cover the *Morro Castle* thing. In fact, one of them I wrote to them, pointed out all the errors, they interviewed me and the next magazine came out with my side of the story. I have copies right there.

SH: Great. We'd like to add those to the file.

DD: Now would you say that Captain Wilmont ran a tight ship, kept everything in order?

TT: Well, according to what Jeff Monroe said, it was a tight ship. I would say based on ships I've been on subsequently, it'd be considered a tight ship, but it all depends on what you mean by the word "tight." He did insist that things be done right.

DD: Because you know after the disaster it's usually a habit to try and blame the person with the least defense, i.e. being a deceased captain, and there are always rumors that he didn't run the proper fire drills and things of that type.

TT: Well, here again, it's quite true he did not have boat drills. But in those days they were not a requirement, it was up to the Captain, and the ship was supposed to be a safest ship afloat. The most fireproof vessel afloat. It was like the Titanic, it was supposed to be the safest ship, and unsinkable, and the truth of the matter is boat drills were always an annoyance to the passengers, and I've been on boat drills many trips after that, other ships, both troop transports for the military, I was even on a Polish Liner out of Canada to Rotterdam, and some of the boat drills were absolutely stupid. They didn't teach the people anything, and people didn't show up to them. It's like you see the people on an airliner, the gal stands up and tells you about all the emergency exits, what you have to do, people sit there reading and listening to their tapes, they don't pay attention to it. If anything happens then they get back and swear nobody told them a thing, you know, that type of thing. No, he did have fire drills, but they only concerned the crew, and that was done at night. It was done in conjunction with washing down the decks, you know, get the decks clean. I can't say anything more than that. The idea of not having boat drills was his responsibility.

DD: Let's just go back and could you tell us in your own words what you experienced on the nights of September 7th until the 8th, the night of the fire?

TT: Well, around seven o'clock, I was in the office there, and got a phone call from the bridge area asking that we locate Dr. Van Zile, who is the ship's surgeon, and get him up to the captain's quarters, and Van Zile was eating his dinner. We got him topside, up there, and shortly thereafter, we got a phone call from him saying the captain had died. He was found in his bathroom, head down in the bathtub, which didn't have any water in it. He'd evidently fallen off the john, straight down, and the cause of the death was "heart attack brought on by acute indigestion." So we had a meeting with the cruise director, the purser, the chief steward, and so on, as to whether the passengers should be notified, and it was decided, out of respect for the captain, they should be notified and the last night out party canceled. Well, we had to check back with Captain Warms, who now took over as captain. The first officer, he moved up to captain. With his approval, the cruise director, Bob Smith, went to the main dining room and made the announcement and I think you find that on that tape. After that, Van Zile came down to the ship's office and dictated the cause, all these circumstances around the death, to me, and I had to type out the death certificates. Actually, had to be made in thirteen copies so I had to do them a number of times, and this, plus getting ready all the papers and everything else, ready for the landing in New York. Radio messages going out to the office about the captain's death and whatever, and all these decisions back there having to be made, who's gonna take over as captain, and so on. Well, I have to tell you that at this particular point in time we were going northbound through a very dense fog. Now back in the Thirties there was no such thing as radar. Radar didn't come into being until World War II. So the only protection against fog is you blew

the ship's whistle every so many seconds, this loud woof noise, which set a very dullful mood over things. And between that and getting all the paper work finished up, and everything else, I didn't get into bed until midnight, or maybe close to one. So my roommate, a fellow named Les Arrison, who was a second Assistant, we both slept in a passenger cabin. The quarters that were set for assistant pursers are so small, and they didn't have built-in showers, or anything like that, so very seldom was the ship ever full, so we always picked a cabin with a private toilet and a shower and the one I had was down in D deck aft, as far back as you could go on the ship. A very nice beautiful cabin, but because of the location, it was seldom sold. So we used that most of the summer. It must have been around two, two-thirty, somewhere along that line, there came a pounding on the door. Les got up and answered the door and it was a, I think he was a chief electrician, I can't remember exactly. Anyhow, he was from the engine room, and thinking we were passengers said, "Please get up, get dressed, put on your life jackets and report to your boat station," words along that line. Then he recognized that we were assistant pursers, and said, "Hey, guys, you better get up there on deck and help calm the passengers." Well, this very fact that he thought we were passengers, knocking on the doors and was waking people up, he was going right from room to room, makes a lie, that this baloney that the crew did nothing for the passengers, that was a lot, big blatant lie, by these reporters of the day and I could use some language about those people. But at any rate, we got dressed, fully dressed in our uniforms. I even stopped to comb my hair, believe it or not. I thought that nothing could be serious. I reported to the purser's office, which was my duty station, along with Les Arrison. Tolman was standing in front of the office with Bob Smith, the cruise director, and they were having a discussion. Tolman had left his room without his shoes and he had to borrow a pair of white shoes from Smith. Smith wanted to be sure he's gonna get them back, that's what they were discussing, and I said to Bob, "Well, how bad is it?" He said, "Go look." Now the purser's office was forward, on C Deck, and he said, "Go look," and I went up this forward staircase and, boy, it was just a mass of flames up there. Well, that's where the fire had started up there, in that area. So I came back down, he said, "Now, Tom, you take the port side and Les, you take the starboard side and go room to room be sure everybody's out and get them to the stern." That was orders and that's what we did. In retrospect, it was one mistake made. We didn't have pass keys to the rooms, and if the passengers had left the room and they locked the door behind them, you weren't sure whether there was anybody there or not. So all you do is pound on the door as best you could, and holler. So that's all we could do. We didn't have pass keys. We got a lot of people out, told them, you know, be sure they had their lifejackets, and so on. I remember vividly one woman trying to come back to get her fur coat, which I wouldn't let her do. We moved all the passengers toward the stern. I was on C Deck at the time. We got to C Deck, got them out there, then they moved them up to B Deck, the idea, you have to look at the ship here, [referring to diagram of the *Morro Castle* to interviewers] to see what I'm talking about. You're out here on B Deck, the idea was we could hope to get up here to get to the boats. The trouble is you couldn't. The fire was already up there. So we were all gathered back here on B Deck, and there was a little incident. There was a Father Egan who was on board, just traveling, and I went to him and I said, "Father, don't you think you should give mass absolution, with the Catholics, to have the absolution thing." He said, "I already did." I said, "Father, I wasn't here." [laughing] So he gave me absolution there, which in the Catholic faith is very important. Anyhow, we had them all on B Deck and I was standing on the starboard side, right up here on B Deck and I saw the first lifeboat leave the ship. That's lifeboat number one up here, that boat there, starboard side, number one boat. The boats are numbered one, three, and so on, and the

other side, two, four, six. Number one boat and number two boat were motorized. Now, here was the boat that Chief Abbot left in, and he was accused of cowardice and everything else. I don't believe that's true. I think he went in that boat, at the request of Captain Warms, to see whether or not it would be safe to launch lifeboats in that heavy sea. You have got to remember we had a fifty-two knot northeast gale blowing and the waves were, you know, over the size of this building here. When I saw that boat as it was going toward the stern of the ship and, I was afraid that they'd get swamped and die, as the boat turned it was all over the place, I guess there was not very many people aboard. The idea that Warms had at the time was, hopefully, the lifeboats they could get off, would get to the stern here, and get the people off the stern into the boats. That didn't happen very well, because meanwhile the ship was underway and all things are going wrong. But any event we had the people up on B Deck and the fire kept sweeping toward B Deck and we had to move them down to C Deck. We got them down to C Deck, then we had to move them down to D Deck, the lowest deck back here. The idea for getting there would be to, if lifeboats get there, we could drop them into the lifeboats. Unfortunately, that didn't work out too well, because there wasn't that many; we had lifeboats coming to us from the *Monarch of Bermuda*, the *Luckenbach*, the *City of Savannah*, these other ships that arrived on the scene. The *Monarch of Bermuda* incidentally, they had lifeboats that don't have oars like, the American lifeboats had these great big sweeps, the English boats, the *Monarch*, they had a system of propeller, which were driven by little short arms by the crew, and they were able to maneuver better under the stern. But they got a lot of people, they saved a lot of people, and particularly a lot of people out on the water. But eventually most people had to jump off and there was a mistake there. The lifejackets of the day, Coast Guard approved, whatever, the best you could get, were lots of cork and canvas, and when you jumped into the water from any height, that thing would pop up, and hit you and they tell me a lot of people had their necks broken by this. I think Jeff Monroe mentioned that in this thing, too. Anyhow, time went on and the fire was getting worse. At one point in time I tried to use a fire hose, there was one back here in the stern, and just a trickle of water, I got some water out and then it died out. The reason for that was the people were using fire hoses all over the ship, but when they abandoned them to get away from the fire, those hoses are left open and all of them at one time, the pumps couldn't handle them all. So that part of the firefighting didn't amount to much and, at this particular point in time, somebody, I don't know who it was, you got to remember it was dark and heavy smoke, you could hardly breath. Somebody, seeing my white uniform, said, "Can you take care of this boy?" and gave me a twelve-year-old, about a twelve-year-old kid, who had been up in upper deck. How he got from here down to there, I don't know. But he was badly burned, his back was burned, whatever. I tried to put a lifejacket on him and he wouldn't, it hurt him too much, and there was no question we were gonna have to jump. So I asked him if he could swim, and he said he could swim, so I said, "Okay, Bobby, you jump first, and I'll jump right after you and you get on my back," and that thing, well, I forgot about holding a lifejacket down, and I got whopped on the jaw, too. But luckily, I think I passed out a little bit, I don't know, I couldn't be sure about that, but anyhow, I ended up with him on my back, and that was about it.

DD: So jumping was the only option? Because normally you would board from B Deck, wouldn't you, for the lifeboats?

TT: No. No. The lifeboats were in davits up here on A Deck, and the way the thing was designed; this is B Deck here, with the promenade deck, if everything was going smoothly, these

boats would be lowered down to B Deck, that's where the passengers would get on, the lifeboat. Well, B Deck was where the fire was …

DD: So they couldn't get on.

TT: No, and a lot of people, even on that tape you saw, where Bob McDonald says, "the ship's captain was separated from the ship's officers," that was a mistatement. The ship's officers were all up here, the Captain, the First, Second, Third and Fourth mates were up on here, because that's where their living quarters are, up there, okay? Now, we were down here. So the fire separated the officers, ship's officers, from the passengers. The only passengers who were above this level were the ones in the suites, the expensive suites up here. Those are the ones who got into the lifeboats, some of the ones that got in the lifeboats, except this kid. He came from up there and I don't know how, he got down here, I have no idea. He got down there someway. But the ship's officers were cut off from the passengers completely this way, by the fire, which was swept all the way down here.

SH: How long were you able to stay in communications if you're back here, how were you able to communicate?

TT: No way. That was the problem, there was no communications. You didn't have little hand radios that you have today. We didn't have cell phones or anything like that. The Captain, on the bridge, didn't know what was going on in the stern and we tried to get word to him that we had all these passengers back there and he was steaming into the wind. He was bringing the fire back at us.

SH: At some point should he have stopped?

TT: Well, at some point he realized this, and he tried to put the ship sideways to the wind, so the wind would blow the fire this way, away from the stern. But at that particular point in time he also tried to, I'm only guessing what he tried to do, I wasn't there on the bridge, that he tried to make a run for the beach. Then decided against that because he was afraid if he hit the beach the ship would roll over and kill all these people. His original intent was, as I learned later, was to get into, around Sandy Hook; get behind the shelter of Sandy Hook out of that high wind, and then lower the boats. He couldn't do it. See, people don't realize what this captain was up against. Number one, we had a hurricane coming from the south, up the coast. This is what's causing this big storm. But before that, we had the fog. Now we were driving through the fog, Warms had to be on the bridge. He was up straight for about forty-eight hours. He was dead tired. Now, the Captain dies, he found the captain. He has to take over at a time like this. It's earthshaking. To begin with, he's coming out of the fog. He knows he's got a hurricane. He's gonna have high storm in front of him. Now, he get's out of the fog area, into this increasing storm thing, and, all of a sudden, he gets the report of a fire on board. Now, fire on board is a very common thing. It happens on ships all the time. People throw a cigarette butt into an ashtray, into a wastebasket, or something like that, and you have a little fire. Or, in those days, we used to have the portholes open because there was no air conditioning and people throw a cigarette and maybe it pops into a porthole. I found my bed burning one day because a cigarette had landed right in the middle of it, and it was just a minor thing. You threw a glass of water on

it; forgot it. But those things happen, little fires happen all the time. This particular fire, and whether it was set or not, I don't know, but the night watchman reported the fire to the bridge. They sent Clarence Hackney, who was third officer at the time, down to check it. When Hackney saw the smoke coming out of this writing room locker, he opened it to put a fire extinguisher on it, and the thing went "boom," all over the place. That's when he, there was a telephone there to the bridge, he called the bridge and told them that we had a bad problem, to get the men out, and that took place. But, meanwhile, this thing spread so rapidly, unbelievably fast. At about the time I got up there, that whole area was on fire. From then on out, here's Warms, now, he's had to take over in the middle of a fire. He's at a point where he can't launch the lifeboats. The one thing he's accused of, of not sending an SOS, fast enough. Well, the only word we have on that aspect of it comes from George Alagna, the first assistant radio operator, and George Rogers, who turned out to be a screwball and a murderer. So whether or not Warms had ordered an SOS, and they didn't send it deliberately, we don't know, I don't know. But at any rate, the fire was visible from the shore and it was visible to other ships coming up. Remember, coming in New York Harbor, you narrow down to what they called the Narrows, so they're all coming in the same direction. So the *Monarch of Bermuda* arrived on the scene, and the *City of Savannah*, which is a freight ship, arrived on the scene, the *Luckenbach*, … What were the other ones? The *President Cleveland*; the captain of the *President Cleveland* thought the seas was so rough he wouldn't lower his lifeboats, he was afraid to lose his men. He was later chastised for that. But, at any rate, Warms had an awful bucket of worms in his hands, and now he had a decision where he wasn't sure whether he could lower the lifeboats, or not, because of the lives, the rough sea, and, I assume that at this point, he has to have to take the number one boat off and check it. On that number one boat was … the Coxswain on that boat was Clarence Monroe, Jeff Monroe's father, who he talks about on that tape, and according to him, the motor on that boat kept quitting, dying out. It kept probably getting washed out with the water. The engines on those boats were checked once every week, on every trip they were checked to be sure they operated. But at any rate, they couldn't get to the stern and the other, a couple of other boats left.

SH: How many lifeboats do you remember seeing in the water from the ship and from other ships?

TT: Well, I only saw this one lifeboat, the one boat as it left. Again, after that you were so busy and there's so much smoke you weren't seeing much of anything off the ship. Because when I saw that, the fire was back here on B Deck. Later, I got down to C Deck and we moved the people from C Deck to D Deck. I had to close the door from C Deck to B Deck to stop the fire from going down that way. So I don't remember seeing any other boats until I was picked up by a lifeboat from the *City of Savannah*, many, many hours later. Because when I jumped over, we were washed away, you know, moved away from the ship, so I don't really know how many total lifeboats were in the water. From our ship, I think four or five got launched, one way or the other.

SH: When you're in a situation like this and you're making the decision to move further back and move down, who's making the decisions? Was there a chain of command or just …

TT: No, no. The decision I think was being made by the first, a fellow named Pond, the first assistant steward. He seemed to be the only one who, I was just a kid, you know, I wasn't even eighteen years old and I was just told what to do. I think the decision to move people down came from Andy I'm not positive of that, but the word was out, "move everybody down," and that's what we did. We just said, you know, "go down the next deck," "next deck down." Well, it got to the point where down on D Deck aft, it was just jammed with people. We couldn't get any more, so I had to close the door, leaving me up on C Deck. Meanwhile, people had been jumping off both C Deck and D Deck. Jumping in, you know, at that time. But again, you're not aware of what's going on, even five feet from you, because you're in a heavy smoke and hard to breathe.

SH: What were people doing? Were they screaming, were they calm, were they …

TT: Well, in retrospect, I would say in the situation they were in, they were relatively calm. There was some screaming, but not a heck of a lot. I think that Father Eagen did a lot to calm people. But, I think, in the general situation, it was nothing like depicted in these movies you see, with these people screaming and yelling and all this other stuff, people more or less, I think they were stunned, that was the best word. I know I was. I didn't, I wasn't worried about any particular, things were coming to me slowly, "You got to do this," and, "you got to do this," and, "hey, you're not gonna get into any lifeboats," "now you're gonna have to jump," and, you know, that type of thing. It dawned on you step-by-step. It wasn't a great big all at one type of thing.

SH: Were there any lights?

TT: Well, the lights all went out, eventually, but we were getting close to dawn, too, you know.

SH: So you could see?

TT: Well, yeah, you could see.

SH: That's what I was wondering, could you literally see someone sitting, standing …

TT: Well, it all depended on where you were and what time you're talking about. When we were all on B Deck, yes, I could see everybody, because the smoke, at that particular time, wasn't that heavy, and the fire hadn't gotten that far back yet. What it had done is, it here, cut us off from getting to the boats. We know we couldn't go along B Deck, because that was where the fire started and it was going aft, like this. But up here, we thought we could, aft, but we couldn't do it because, again, you have to walk through live flame. But at that particular time you could see everything.

SH: So at what point do you lose the power for lighting on the ship?

TT: I don't know. I can't guess.

SH: Do you have any guess at how long it took from the time you knew about it until …

TT: I wasn't really paying attention to anything at that time. I mean, at that particular point in time, I was, I guess, it was when we, somewhere at the time that we moved from B Deck down to C Deck, I'm not sure. The power went off at a particular point, when they had to shut everything down and abandon ship type of thing, but I wouldn't really know what time.

SH: You were already off the ship at that point when they said, "Abandon ship"?

TT: Oh, no, no, no. I say abandon ship, there was never any such order given.

SH: You wouldn't have heard the order, because you were here in …

TT: No. There was no order. There was one thing that always bothers me about it, was the fact that and it was true, the lifeboat, a lot of the lifeboats come ashore with mostly crew in them and there's a good reason for that. Let's take the engine room crew for example. Anthony Bujia, who was the first assistant engineer, was in charge of the engine room at the time and his men, they're way down here, okay. … [He] and his men stayed in that engine room, keeping things going and everything under control until they could no longer breathe. It was just impossible to live there and they were ordered out of the engine room and they shut things down. Now to get out of the engine room, they had to come up a steel, there was an elevator up there but they couldn't use the elevator, up the steel staircase. They came up here and they're on A Deck. Now the fire is below them. They're on top. There's no place for them to go except into the lifeboats. They get into the lifeboat, hoping then they could get the lifeboats down past the fire, into the water, and then pick up people here. Well, because of the heavy storm and stuff, they couldn't do this. Those ships were not rowed ashore; they were literally blown ashore, those lifeboats, rather, literally blown ashore. So Tony Bujia, and his black gang, as we call the engine room group, they filled the lifeboats, and, sure, they hit the shore and they were all crew, or maybe two or three passengers, at the most, who had gotten there from these suite rooms. They got ashore and there was no question about it, mostly crew in the boat. But the reason for it was there was nothing else they could do. But the stupid reporters, one of them I could brain him, come up and coined the phrase, "The Ship of Shame." Oh, it sounded great in his story, but these guys weren't abandoning, or anything. They'd done their job right up to almost dying in the smoke and the only place they could do was get into a lifeboat. They couldn't be expect to sit up there and burn to death. That would be foolish. That's part of the reason the crew were in the lifeboat.

SH: From your personal experience, you know, and they give you the young boy, who's been hurt, how long did you, just guess, did you keep trying to hang on and wait for either the fire to go out or somebody to come alongside?

TT: Well, I would say, probably, I was in that particular position no more than an hour, an hour and a half, where it was obvious we had to jump and during that period of time, this kid was turned over to me. I was only with him … maybe twenty to thirty minutes before … we discussed, I'd asked if he could swim and all that sort of business. At that particular point, the fire was coming right at us, so we had to get out of there, and we had to jump from C Deck aft there.

SH: Was it light enough and the storm had abated enough that you could see, literally, which way to go and …

TT: No. You could see, occasionally, you could see a light on the shore, Asbury Park area, or whatever. But once you're in the water, the waves were so high, you didn't know which way. You could still see the ship but we were floating away from the ship because the current and the waves were pushing you towards shore. I had him over my back and around like that, and holding there, he put his hands here, which was terrific on my neck and shoulders, and at this point I had … There's some woman floating along, she was in the lifejacket, it looked like she was on a picnic, didn't seem to be bothering her any, very heavy-set person, and I asked her if she would help me with the boy, because I was getting completely worn out, and she said, "Oh, let him go, save yourself," and that was her answer, so I wasn't too happy with her. I have no idea who she was, where she came from.

SH: Did she make it?

TT: I don't know. I have no idea.

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

DD: This continues an interview with Colonel Thomas S. Torresson, Jr. on September 25th. Tape two, side one.

SH: You were talking about trying to get to the shore and floating in the water with this young man on your back, and the comment of the woman who obviously didn't seem to be under any distress at all. Were there others that you saw in the water that you remember or …

TT: No, I actually didn't. Again, you got to remember these waves are so high it could have been somebody fifty feet away, you wouldn't see them. The first thing I saw, actually, was a lifeboat from the *City of Savannah*, and these people were doing a wonderful job and I still had the young boy with me, except he had died, and I'd had a, we've been talking in the water for quite some time, and praying, and he stopped talking. It didn't dawn on me that he had died for quite a while, until I wasn't hearing anything from him and he wasn't moving or anything, so I got him around front and saw he was dead. There was an oar floating there and I tied his body to an oar with the bottom of his shirt and stuff, and when this lifeboat came along from the *City of Savannah*, they would not take the body aboard, you know, because he was a, they were only taking live people, and I was holding onto this lifeboat and, even at that particular point in time, I didn't even know who was in the lifeboat, or if I knew anybody. Actually, the purser was in that same lifeboat. The assistant purser was picked up by the same lifeboat and the cruise director. But, you know, there were so many people I didn't know it, and the crew from the *City of Savannah* were wonderful. They tried to row, but, again, the number of people on the boat was interfering with the oarsmen, and we were, more or less, drifting helplessly out there until a small cutter, Coast Guard cutter came along, threw us a line, and started to tow us. Well, the first line broke. Came around and got a second line aboard and they started to tow us and their engine quit. So they're floating around there, out there, too, and we're still in a position out there, not

being able to row and not having any, we needed a tow very badly, and a small civilian boat came along, and I'm trying to remember the name, but now it has just slipped my mind, but anyhow, they tossed us a line and they towed us into the Manasquan Inlet, and we actually came ashore at Point Pleasant, on the side of the inlet, and you saw parts of that in the tape, I think. I can't talk too much about the wonderful civilian boats that went out there. The Bogan boat, the *Paramount*, was out there saving people right and left and these other boats were out there, civilian-type boats, who disobeyed the Coast Guard order. The Coast Guard order, had ordered and told, nobody, none of the civilian boats were supposed to go out. They were afraid that, and the commander of the Coast Guard station was afraid that he would have more problems on his hands if the civilian boats got in trouble with the high waves. Again, you got to remember that gale was blowing. So these people disobeyed that order and went out and saved a lot of people. If they hadn't been out there, why you would have tripled the number of people lost.

SH: Was this boy's family also lost?

TT: No, he was just, he was actually just traveling up to go to school. I think a lot of the wealthy Cubans sent their children to New York. Well, he was going to New York Military Academy, I think, as I recall correctly. I wrote a letter to the family and under the circumstances his body was never recovered, which was kind of sad. Actually, they were in Cuba at the time.

SH: I didn't know if they were on board.

TT: No.

SH: When you were brought ashore in this lifeboat, what was the first thing that you did? Your personal story, how did you …

TT: Well, if you look at that tape, it is hard to tell but that lifeboat is being towed, if you look at the towline. First of all, I have to say that the coxswain on that *City of Savannah* lifeboat did a terrific job. He kept that line so straight, if we'd gotten sideways we would have been swamped, he did a beautiful job, very good seaman, and another thing that struck me at the time, since we had women on board, that not one of them used a cuss word. It was kind of funny, but they were all gentlemen in those days. Anyhow, we got into the dock, somebody helped us out, I don't know who it was, and, of course, I'm soaking wet and cold, and I didn't know it at the time, they had all these cameras going. I didn't even notice any cameras present and the only guy I can recall is going up to …, one of the ambulances, and I met my then boss, Bob Tolman, and he was glad to see me. I was glad to see him and somewhere along the line, either before I get in the ambulance or after … I don't remember which, somebody stripped my uniform off and he took a jacket off, his young kid's jacket, and put it on me, because I was chilled and we got in the ambulance and they were taking us to the First Aid Station at Sea Girt. There's a lady, who was laying on the stretcher, I think, and the young kid driving the ambulance was going pretty fast and she said, "For God's sake, make him slow down, he'll kill all of us." But you got to remember, again, these people on shore were doing everything in the world to help us. All the ambulances were coming from all over the place, and firemen, and everybody you could think of, doctors were rolling in, all the help. The Young Ladies' Guild, or some darn thing, had all these young girls down there, helping. Anyhow, we arrived at this first aid station and the first

thing they did was, this gal handed me a glass of brown liquid, said to me, "Drink this." Now the thing was about that much, and, I immediately, I drank it down, because my throat was so raw from the smoke and the fire and then the seawater that I didn't feel it going down; it was straight whiskey. [laughter] I don't know why they did that, but they thought, you know, I was cold, they would warm me up and they sure did. And sitting there with the, they were checking you out, and there was a young girl dying right alongside of me. That was very sad. A lot of the people who died, you got to get back to the hypothermia, people didn't realize, there was no such word in those days, but even though the water, the seawater is relatively warm, even so, you could be in seventy degree water, and still die because you still lose body heat. The longer you're in it the more body heat you lose. Others I think died of pure shock and, or exhaustion, you know, weak heart, or whatever. I think a lot drowned because if they passed out, they fell forward in that life jacket, and would drown. You had to stay conscious or you were dead, that lifejacket you had went right down. But that's why we lost, you know, one hundred and thirty-four people for various reasons. Incidentally, there was very few people, there's only four that I know of, were burned on the ship, burned to death on the ship. Another four, one of them was Harold Furesh, the night watchman; they found his remains in what was left of the main dining room, draped over a hose nozzle. He fought the fire to the very end, wonderful guy. But, anyhow, in the first aid station they took good care of us, and they gave me clothes. It was like a pair of Levi's and this jacket and a workshirt of some sort, but no shoes. I was barefoot. They let me outside, and then when I went out to the, outside the station where I was standing near, in the back there, and my father came along. He had been on vacation up in Monroe, our home in Monroe, and he got a phone call about the fire and he and my mother took off right away to get down to the pier, and his office, and then from there they drove down to Asbury Park. So he walked up to me and shook my hand and says, "Son, did you do your duty?" I said, "Yes, sir." He says, "Fine, I'll see you later," and he took off. He was a Norwegian, you know, they don't show emotion.

SH: How about your mom?

TT: Well, I didn't see my mom at that point. The next thing, I was grabbed around the back of the neck by this guy hugging me, and I turned around, it was Jim MacDonald, who was a family friend. He and his wife … used to rent a summer place at Avon each summer, like they had an apartment there, and his son, Jimmy, had practically lived with us as we were growing up. As kids, I was sort of his baby sitter; we didn't use the term in those days. But at any rate, Big Jim as we called Mr. MacDonald, why, he got me in the car and drove me to the Essex and Sussex Hotel, where my mother was waiting on the porch, you know, she was quite emotional and they took me and insisted I have dinner, sitting in this beautiful dining room with all these clothes and bare feet and I really wasn't interested in eating. I was so tired and exhausted. We got to the MacDonald apartment, now, my mother insists I have to have a bath; hell, I'd been in the water twelve hours, and I didn't know I needed a bath, but [laughter] …

SH: You don't want to see anymore water. [laughter]

TT: Anyhow, that was the way that worked.

SH: So did you finally get to go to sleep, or did you have to start talking to authorities right away, or what?

TT: No, no. Oh, that's one thing I missed here, and this was the biggest mistake that was made about in the whole affair. The vice president, the executive vice president of the Ward Line, so called, which was, the real name was New York-Cuba Mail, Henry Caboud, put out an order for the crew not to talk to reporters. Now this included, actually people don't obey an order like that, with the ship's officers, some of the crew, were loyal to the company, others they couldn't give a darn. But not to talk to reporters? You don't talk to reporters, they're gonna get the story one way or the other, and the passengers could do all the talking that they wanted. So, actually, I was given the order, "don't talk to reporters."

SH: Now when did you get that order? I mean, how did that come to you, from your father, or …

TT: No, no. It was passed to me, actually from some of the other guys. I think it was Tony Buhia, who passed the word.

SH: Oh, when you were all at the aid station?

TT: At … Sea Girt aid station, that we're not to talk to reporters. Well, anyhow, my mother believed this so much because she had been working for the Line, too. At one time, that even when I was home in Woodcliff, the reporters, the local papers and stuff, and the *Jersey Journal*, *Hudson Dispatch*, and so on, they came up to the house and my mother wouldn't let them in. Meanwhile, I was, she would tell them I was, you know, under doctor's care, or something. I was in the library, in a room talking to my buddies all about that, you know, telling them all about the stuff. The only person who was allowed in to see me was the local pastor, Father Keys. But beyond that, it was a big mistake, because if they had told a straight story, at that particular time, it wouldn't have turned out to be the way it did. If you don't give a story to any reporter, they're gonna make one up, one way or the other. Because, again, the only big communication system in those days was the newspaper. The scoop was the big thing.

SH: When were you allowed to finally go to your bed and try to rest? Were you able to rest?

TT: Oh, yeah, in MacDonald's, in the apartment there, I fell, I hit the sack and I was out like a light. The next morning we drove back to our home in Woodcliff and since I had been, my right side of my face was burned, and my eye, right eye had gotten a little scorching. I had to wear a patch and, you know, stuff like that, nothing serious, and a, three, about two or three days later, I was back down at the Shore, helping my father with all the details.

SH: Did you ever talk to reporters?

TT: No, not even down there. I did have an experience with the reporters. There was a man named Hoover, not J. Edgar Hoover, I forgotten the name, was the big investigator for the government, and he was on scene, and we were all staying at the Berkley Carteret Hotel, which, of course, is still there; they're trying to get it going again, but in those days it was a brand-new,

beautiful hotel. My father and my mother and I were living there, or staying there and the reporters would try and get into the room, but we wouldn't, you know, wouldn't talk to them. But meanwhile, I was in an elevator going down with Mr. Hoover and three or four of his entourage. They were going to inspect a lifeboat which they had behind the firehouse in Seagirt, check it for seaworthiness, kind of foolish in a way because the ship was brand new; it was only four years old, but anyhow, I followed the group there, and they were standing around the lifeboat and he had a ballpeen hammer and he was checking the watertight tanks, you know, popping them, pop, pop, pop. He turned around, he said, "Gentlemen, this," a bunch of reporters all around, "this lifeboat is 100% seaworthy." With this a reporter hands him a twelve pound sledge and said, "Mr. Hoover, give it a bang with this." Because they all wanted to have a hole in that watertight tank so they can write it up, that the lifeboat was not seaworthy. Hoover said, "Gentlemen, I said it once but I'll say it again. This lifeboat is 100% seaworthy." But that was the kind of reporters you had in those days. Anything for a sensation. Anything for a scoop. So that never got into the paper.

SH: What about the storm that was coming up as you were going through this? Did it affect the investigation? Did the hurricane actually come up the coast?

TT: Actually, the hurricane, as far as I recall, you know, was well behind us. But, you know, in a hurricane it circulates counterclockwise. Now as the storm comes up, the center of the hurricane may be here, you got the winds stretching out all, then that's where the northeast wind was coming from. That put the hurricane off our coast, in other words, east of the coast, and that's where that fifty-two knot gale was coming from. Now that hurricane, and I don't recall this exactly, but I understand it went right on off to the northeast. It didn't actually hit the coast, but the winds did, and same thing is happening right down, right now in the Louisiana area; the hurricane hasn't hit the landfall yet but the winds are knocking the heck out of things.

SH: I just wondered if it affected their ability to investigate or salvage …

TT: Oh, no, no, because what happened when they tried to tow the ship, the Coast Guard cutter, *Tampa*, had it under tow and the line broke and the ship came ashore at Asbury Park. I have pictures of all that stuff in the folder over here and, incidentally, that was the other big problem they had was when the ship beached at Asbury Park. It was around Labor Day and the summer was over; people had gone home. This was a bonanza for the people on the boardwalk and the storekeepers, and so on, because it brought thousands of people down again and when these thousands of people came they blocked the roads, interfered with official vehicles, and every other darn thing because they were all rubber-necking and I run into people, even today, who say, "Oh, well, yeah, my father took me to see that ship. I was seven years old," you know, that type of thing. But everybody came floating down; it was the biggest thing that had happened to Asbury Park since Year One and it still, for many years after that, the *Asbury Park Press* continued to run stories about it, which for the most part were full of bunk and baloney. When I went into the Air Corps, I'd forgotten all about this thing; I hadn't even thought about it. When I got back here to this location, I would see these stories and look how wrong they were, so then I started to write letters to the *Asbury Park Press* correcting them, and of course the *Observer*. And from this, there's a Doctor Judge in Spring Lake, who his father had brought him to see the wreck when he was seven years old. He had an artifact, a canvas bag that used to be used for

hard tack in the lifeboats, and he was very proud of this. But he started to read my letter and, all of the sudden, one day I got a phone call from him and he wanted to meet with me and he told me he had a tape that he had gotten from the historical society there in Sea Girt, or somewhere in that area, and I went over and he showed me the tape and then I showed up on it. I didn't know it. I had no idea that any tapes were even made that day. But there was a clear-cut picture of me in the lifeboat, you could center it and that type of thing, because I was standing up on starboard side, holding the a woman under my arm here, see, trying to hold her in the boat. But, at any rate, we got to be very close on this, and I checked in at first. You know, these other tapes start to pop up, and what had happened is in '34 the home movie camera is a brand new thing, just had come out, Kodak, and these people had the cameras taking these tapes. Now, they're pure amateur but they had pictures of the lifeboats hitting the beach, and there's one shot of an eight engine aircraft, I think it was a Dornier, flying over the beach, unbelievable. But I never knew this existed. So from this, in the meanwhile, these authors, who were trying to write this book, the latest book, got my name and they contacted me and I started to work, ten years ago, helping them with their book; trying to get some factual stuff into it. But even today facts get twisted, even eyewitnesses. For example; you may be a passenger and you see a crew member running and to you, he may be running in panic, when, actually, he's carrying a message, you know, you never know. And so even people's stories, even though they could be eyewitnesses, are twisted. We've had a number of reunions, the *Morro Castle* Survivors, sparked by this Captain Jeff Monroe, who was at that time the commandant of cadets at the New York Maritime Academy. He now is the Port Director in Portland, Maine, and a great guy. He set up these reunions. One couple, two sisters, came to a reunion and they were great gals on the ship. I remember them on the ship. They had a room number three thirteen, something like that, one of the inside rooms, and they made a lifelong habit of talking about this in groups, ladies groups and stuff like that, but again, what they had to say, even though from their standpoint was actually factual, it was expanded in their interpretation to where it was exactly right, and the reason for it was because, and incidentally, they were beautiful ladies even; both of them are dead now, I think, but they came to reunions. They thought that the crew did nothing for them. Well, actually, what actually happened, the last night out, they stayed up and, the thrill of thrills, they danced with the cruise director, Bob Smith, and they thought this was wonderful and they decided not to go to bed that they're gonna stay dressed and, so on, when they land in New York, they'd be ready to go. Well, one of the sisters thought she smelled smoke. So she called the telephone operator. If you had a phone in the room you had to pick it up, there was a central telephone exchange with an operator and he had these plug-in things. He said to her, "Yes there's a fire on board and you should get dressed," and blah, blah, blah, "get on deck." Well they were already dressed so they grabbed their lifejackets and they went up from D Deck where they were, D Deck forward on the starboard side, up to C Deck and they didn't see anybody. But the pursers, we were all sound asleep, and nobody knew it. So they went to go to B Deck and they saw the fire and they knew that was no good, so they very smartly walked to the stern. But at that point they hadn't seen any crew members. We were asleep. But to their minds, the crew didn't do anything. Well, not to them, because they were, we weren't there to do it. But anyhow, they were very nice ladies and so they come to the reunions, and so on, but their story put a bad taint on things, not because they wanted to, but because their particular point of place in time varied. People don't understand that you may be seeing somebody fire a shot here, and you're over here and you don't see him firing a shot, but you hear it, you think you hear a shot, and it's an explosion of something else, you know, it gets mixed up.

SH: Did the crew ever get together, I mean obviously you had to give depositions or testimony because you were subpoenaed. At any point have you, the survivors, the crew members, tried to write your story or …

TT: Not to my knowledge, no. No, actually, what happened is the hearings, and the trial and stuff went on about a year. I was subpoenaed and I had to, oh, I, I think I was interviewed three times and the interviews were conducted by these young lawyers, who were anxious to make a name for themselves, anything they could find and any little bit would be great, and my testimony involved mostly around what I knew about the captain's death, and so on and so forth, and it was at one point in time where I was describing using this firehose and interrogator said, "Well there's no firehose station there, you're lying," and I said, "Well, how do you know it was not there?" And he said, "I'm looking at the chart." I said, "You got the wrong chart." I said, "Now let's get the right chart." Got it out and I said, "There's the station." No apology, no. I said to him, "You know, you better be careful, you're telling people they're lying. If you ever get the truth out of things you better do it right." But they were young guys, too, you know, and one of them, as a matter-of-fact, was dating my sister. [laughing]

SH: Well, that would be my other question. Did anyone, because you were the son of someone who had a high position within this company, did anybody ever cast aspersions on your ability to testify?

TT: No. I was interviewed just like any other crewmember. No, they didn't ask me any questions that would in anyway involve my father, no.

SH: How long did this, I guess now you'd use the term litigation, go on? I mean, for your father, how long did …

TT: Well, the first hearings and stuff lasted about a year and the only, the big problem with it was that the people who were the judges, and all these other people involved, were not seamen. Now if this had happened in an English ship, it would have been tried in an Admiralty Court with seamen who knew what was going on. You have a judge with the most knowledge of the sea is riding on a ferryboat. I mean, these people didn't know what they were talking about. You mention portside, they don't know what portside even meant. You talk about stern, they didn't know. The trouble was that our American courts are not set up to investigate properly something that happens like this. The truth of the matter is that ship was inspected fully by the steamboat inspection service, a government agency, just the trip before, fully inspected, they were doing nothing wrong. The big problem if you look at it realistically and you say you want to put blame on something, it's hard to do that. The real truth of the matter is the fire spread rapidly, in my opinion, because we had so many vents designed to bring fresh air into this passenger area. Because the ship was designed to ply the southern waters and the Caribbean area where it was warm and you wanted to keep fresh cool air. So you had these scoops, you can see them up here, bringing air down through these sheet metal vents into all areas of the ship. Now, the fire got in there; they acted as actually flues and that's what brought the fire around. Whether the fire actually started in the writing room locker as most people believe, may or may not be true. One theory was it started in number Two hold, up forward, where we were carrying

wet hides and they thought it was spontaneous combustion, which would again carry that stuff through. So there's so many theories that you really can't determine, as I say again, the truth about the *Morro Castle* is nobody knows the truth.

SH: All the court proceedings were in New York?

TT: Yeah, the district in New York. I have some of the paper work from that and some of the FBI records, which incidentally are also full of mistakes. All the stuff I got from them, the MacDonald Rasmussen office who did a terrific research job. At one point in time they had to go to court over at Trenton to get some of the stuff released and I went over to be a witness in their behalf, even though I do not concur in their findings. I was only there, hopefully, to put some truth into the situation. Also at one point in time I got a captain, Ernie Landstrom, who was later captain of the *Oriente*. The *Oriente* is the twin ship of the *Morro Castle*. So he was a real expert on the ship, much more than I was. I mean, of course, my knowledge was very rudimentary. So I got Ernie with this, Ernie was living right out here at Crestwood Village, and I had him help out. He subsequently has died, but he had a different theory entirely. He thought the fire started here in number two hold, and he makes a good case for that. You can talk to anybody … who's been there, and they'll all have a different story.

SH: What eventually happened to the part that beached? Was it scrapped for scrap iron or …

TT: Oh, well, what I, it was finally towed off it. The thing that happened was, immediately after it was on the beach at Asbury Park, the company made arrangements to get it towed off. The Asbury Park Chamber of Commerce and the mayor and stuff got an injunction against this mandating that they'd have to leave the ship there because it was bringing so much money into the town and, you see, this is what happens. So now the ship is there and, meanwhile, sand is building up around it and about three months, is number two hold was, as I told you was full of hides, wet hides. They were rotting and the stench would knock you over. Now, "get rid of it." This becomes a real engineering problem now because the ship is stuck in the sand and everything. They finally get it towed off. It's towed from Asbury Park up to Graveson Bay, which is outside the southern area of Brooklyn, New York and it's anchored there; I'd say two or three months while they were trying to figure out if they could sell it. You see there was nothing wrong with the hull. Actually, the ship could have been rebuilt, put in service, but nobody bought it and finally from Graveson Bay was towed down to Baltimore and scrapped and probably the Japs were shooting some of that metal at us in World War II. Incidentally, the sister ship, the *Oriente*, stayed in service; the war came along and it became a troop transport serving all through World War II as a troop transport and on up to about 1950.

SH: I remember reading it had a unique design.

TT: Well, one of the designs was a bulbous bow. What it is, is you normally, you have a bow going through the water like, I think you have a flat plate area here pushing against it. This bow, bulbous bow, brought the wake back this way. The wake was breaking in around here, and we used the flat plate area, in fact that gave it more speed and our navy is doing, is following the same concept now. No, I think when Ferris designed this ship the basic error was the vents. But there was no air conditioning in those days so, he was doing what was then state of the art. The

poor guy, I think it broke him that he always blamed himself in the aftermath. Well, everything on the ship was state of the art at the time. The art has changed so much. The problem here, the fire burning rapidly, is a lot of decorations. The walls were lacquered and you had draperies and all these things that added to the fire. But actually if you look at the thing, the location of the fire made use of the lifeboats difficult, if not impossible. The same thing had happened on the ship today. They moved the lifeboats, incidentally, from the upper decks down to around this level. If you look at the modern cruise ships, they were down, but suppose the fire starts on that deck? Can't get to the lifeboats there. Lifeboats really, the only time they were ever used properly and did really any good was on the *Titanic*. The only trouble there was they didn't have enough of them. They only had enough lifeboats to, [hold] about half the people. That's why so many people were lost then.

[Tape Paused]

SH: How long this affected your family and you personally, being such a young kid and having experienced something as traumatic as this?

TT: Well, I don't think it affected me particularly. My mother was afraid I'd have some kind of an emotional thing but I didn't really. I went, as I say, I went to work in the rubber company, which was headed up by a family friend, MacDonald, and I was up to the, I was subpoenaed for a year. Interviewed only three times and they were very easy to do. I liked going to subpoena because I think they paid you a dollar and a half a day, and all you did was go up and get your cards clicked, you know, and the job I had, in working, I was only getting paid fifteen dollars a week, so a dollar and a half a day was good, about that, post time and I'd never really, I'd had to go to court. They had some of the hearings on the radio. Again, radio was very rudimentary in those days and my father really wasn't involved so much with the court thing either. They set it on Captain Warms and Chief Engineer Abbott and their actions and, really, the guy who got really kicked around was Henry Cabau, the vice president of the company, and as a result of the first court thing, Captain Warms lost his license and was convicted, and all this other stuff, and the same with the Chief Abbott, whatever. But then when they had the appeal the following year they got a little sense into the thing and realized that the first court thing was stupid. So on appeal, Captain Warms and, they were all exonerated. Again, it goes back to the very poor court system we had and the fact that people who were hearing the testimony had no idea what was, they were talking about. Anyhow, Warms went on, incidentally, in World War II to serve as a full Captain in the Navy and Abbott, who was supposed to be the coward, served on board as chief engineer of troop ships all during in World War II. You know no cowards were going to sea in those days and every other member of the officer bunch, they served during, in World War II. They were all reserve officers. So a aftermath, I, as far as my father was concerned, I don't think he ever got over it. He went on, the line went on, but during World War II, of course, they were, he was very busy, … sailing other ships, and so on and so forth, and following that the American merchant marine went downhill. A number of reasons: one of the reasons the unions. The unions took over the National Maritime Union, headed up by a bunch of thugs and they were putting the prices out of sight. The company and the people couldn't pay the cost that they'd had to be charging for passage. Airlines were starting to form up and people are starting to fly. Again, it had something to do with it, and third: the foreign competition. Where foreign ships could, had cheap crews, and they could make money where the Americans couldn't. The

combination of those three factors ruined the American Merchant marine. Now, today, if you have freight to be shipped, it's shipped on ships that are registered in Panama, or registered somewhere else, not in the United States. We don't have an American merchant marine anymore. That's what happened. It happened the same way after World War I. You know, they scrapped everything after World War I. When World War II came along we would have been really up the creek if it hadn't been for Henry Kaiser who built all the Liberty ships, and really carried the cargoes to Europe and then to the Far East.

SH: After 1935 then, what did you do after the year of testimony?

TT: I went off to college.

SH: Where did you go?

TT: Notre Dame, and after that, I got into, to fly and we had, at that time, a flying cadet program. Again, they were just realizing in this country that here was Hitler with a tremendous air force, here was Japanese with a big air force, big military build-up, and Hitler was going wild in Europe and we finally came to the conclusion that we have to build up our own Army Air Corps. In those days … all they had for training bases was Randolph Field in Texas, in San Antonio area, and Kelly Field, totally inadequate for training enough pilots. So somebody came up with the smart idea of increasing the size of the Air Corps, get the primary training at civilian primary schools. Actually there was flying, aviation schools conducted by private enterprise. They had the Spartan School of Aviation and Parks Air College people, and people like that, so they contracted for this. So what I, I applied for the then flying cadet program. There's a difference between the flying cadet program and the aviation cadet. It was just a matter of the requirements you had to have before going in.

SH: Do you know what the difference was?

TT: Oh, generally speaking, education and physical stuff.

SH: Now were you doing this when you were still in college in Notre Dame or …

TT: No.

SH: You graduated in '39?

TT: No, I didn't graduate. I left Notre Dame and … applied for the, because I wanted to fly them rather than to build them, and I really had the aviation bug. I'd flown a little bit out of Teterboro. You know the Teterboro airfield up here? I had maybe eight hours flying time in the ships you never heard of, the Waco taper wing, and the Argo, and the Cub on floats, and whatever. So I applied for the flying cadet program and you had to go through the, you had to have, you know, physical and mental qualifications and academic stuff, and I eventually got in and …

SH: What year was this?

TT: 1940, and I went to Parks Air College out in East St. Louis, Illinois for primary and I have pictures of that right in there, in the folder. Primary phase in those days was kind of peculiar. The instructors were civilian instructors who, they had barnstorm pilots, crop dusters, and, gosh, knows what, and this was a tremendous, wonderful job for them. But if more than two of their students washed out the basic phase, they'd lost their jobs. So they were very tough. They washed students out right and left and they didn't want to lose their, these then good paying jobs. So, my class, starting class, was decimated until maybe about a third of us graduated. I've forgotten the exact number. In fact, one of my roommates was washed out the last day and he would have made a terrific pilot. But, anyhow in the primary school the only uniforms they gave us was a mechanic's coveralls, had little brass buckle here we got to keep polished, and the floppy mechanic's hat. Since it was wintertime, we're talking February of '40, in East St. Louis, it was cold so we had these big, heavy, flying suits, fur lined pants and jacket and boots. The trouble with those was I was so big when I got those on I couldn't fit in the cockpit. So I had to dispense with a lot of it and put on double underwear, or whatever I could put underneath. But primary; there was three phases, primary, basic and advanced. So, you took primary and there was nine of these civilian schools at the time. There was one at Lincoln, Nebraska, which didn't work out too well because of the bad weather there all the time. But the Park School was very well run. The civilian students used to give us a hard time as we would march back and forth from our so-called barracks, it was a nice building really, to the dining hall, which was shared with the civilian kids and the classrooms. We had to march in formation. Then they'd give us the, you know, horse laugh, but we gave them a horse laugh because we had PT-13s, beautiful airplanes, compared to the Kinner Sports that they had to fly, which were flying tin cans. But, at any rate, the primary was wonderful. My instructor was one of the greatest guys in the world. In the Air Corps there was always a saying, "You never forget your primary instructor, the guy who soloed you," and he, I'd never forget anyhow, he was terrific.

SH: What was his name?

TT: Howard Trunell?

SH: The flying cadets corps there at Parks, were they from all over the country?

TT: Mostly from the East, because the people, there were three schools scattered all over the country, and they sent you to the closest school. Now, when I was taking my tests at Mitchell Field, the initial test, physical exams, and stuff, I met a fellow named Ackerly, from Middletown, New York, and we kind of buddied up, and Bob Ackerly just died last year as a matter-of-fact, he and a couple of guys from Jersey. In my hometown nobody had even heard of the cadet program. But I had been a member of this flying club at Teterboro and, to say, we were just a pick up bunch. I was their hero, I was the first one to even get into such a thing, and it took about a year of going through the exams and all that sort of stuff before you got in. Then after the flying training, the primary training, you went to basic training at Randolph, and following the basic training at Randolph, then you went to advanced training at Kelly, or Brooks. Now the Army way was the last end of the alphabet went to Brooks and, being a Torresson, I was the end of the alphabet. We used to call it the Polish Air Force, at Brooks Field, advance training.

SH: Brooks field is in?

TT: The San Antonio area, too. Kelly Field, Brooks Field, Duncan Field and Randolph Field were all in the San Antonio Area. Randolph was a beautiful base, permanent base, very unique. The water tower, we used to call it the Taj Mahal, looked like a monument type of thing, but it was actually a water tower and they had …

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

TT: … When you graduated you were 2nd Lieutenant, Air Corps Reserve, and you had wings. You're actually only probably spending maybe a year on active duty and then brought back to civilian life. Because of this, the Army Air Corps was built up of about ninety-nine percent reserve officers, very few regulars. Now the regular officers were either West Point graduates, or people who obtained a regular commission, very highly selective type of thing, they get a regular commission. This is why General Arnold, who was then the Chief of the Air Corps, and General Marshall, who was the Chief of Staff of the Army, wanted to get more West Pointers into the then Army Air Corps and wanted the West Pointers trained as pilots while they were going through West Point. Now when I graduated from, as a Second Lieutenant …

SH: This is nineteen …

TT: 1940. October 4, 1940 a group of us were picked up and sent to the 22nd Observation Squadron, right at Brooks Field, and there we trained to become combat observers. Now the observer's wings were a little circular thing, not regular wings. We used to call it the "Flying Toilet Seat." We took this course for about three months, where we became qualified, and we were flying at that time O-47s and O-46s. O-46 was a high wing monoplane. O-47 was a beautiful mid-wing aircraft. I guess it came out in around 1936, or something like that, had good speed and altitude and we learned to be aerial photographers. We mapped half the state of Texas. We either flew at 20,000 feet, or we flew at practically sea level, to take side shots and the rule was when you're holding that camera, if you dropped it, you'd never come back yourself, that type of thing. But we were trained so that we could train army officers, National Guard people, reserve guys, whatever, to be combat observers to serve in World War II. When we finished the combat observer course, I took a very short flying instructor training, which lasted about a week, and now I'm a qualified flying instructor and now we move over to the new section and the students started to come in and here we're gonna teach advanced flying training to cadets, and we're gonna teach observers, to be combat observers at the same time. Well, they posted the listing and we're supposed to see our students and I didn't have any students. So I went to the squadron commander and said, "Look, Bill, I don't have any students." He said, "No, you're the flight commander." First thing you know, I'm the boss of seventeen instructors and I have never been an instructor myself. That type of thing was happening. Remember when we were expanding, and I'm gonna give you the copy of that thing, you can really see what expansion was. Well, we trained students, and we also trained observers, and then they gave us a horrible airplane called the O-47 I think it was, no, O-52. This airplane had been designed by a committee of Army, Navy, and Marine Corps guys who couldn't agree on what they wanted. This was supposed to be an observation aircraft, and there was only seventy-five of them built, and we were stuck with these things. Well, if you were an instructor you had to be in the rear

seat. The pilot was up here, you couldn't get out, except out the sides. You didn't have a back for the, you had a canvas back … for your back seat, and you also had a third cockpit where there was supposed to be a machine gun, which you would man otherwise, but a stupid thing. But anyhow we flew the cadets, trained the cadets 'til they, somebody discovered it was illegal. These cadets really weren't legally supposed to carry passengers. So then they gave us brand new graduates to fly the observers around. Meanwhile back at the ranch, we were all trying to get to combat jobs and we touch on that problem in that little book I'm gonna give you. Now everybody volunteered to be assigned to combat.

SH: Now World War II has started now?

TT: Well, no, it hadn't started yet. But everybody was on the volunteers, we were building up the ideal thing. Everybody wanted to be a fighter pilot. Meanwhile, while we're there, we used to have to, were assigned to ferry trips and these are great because you got fifteen dollars a day extra money. When a 2nd Lieutenant was making a hundred and a quarter a month, this is good money, you know. We got fifteen dollars a day so we loved these ferry trips and I was on this ferry trip to Downy, California. We were picking up PT-13s to bring it to Enid, Oklahoma where they were starting a new flying school, so you're starting from scratch. It was just Kelly and Brooks and Randolph; build, build, build, build, build. We only had, roughly, two thousand pilots in '39, and now it went up to forty-four thousand, you know, it's just out of sight. But anyhow at this particular point in time, you were allowed to, as we were waiting to get to combat, we're on these ferry trips. We had ferried to Enid, Oklahoma, over the Adirondacks, over the Rockies into Enid, Oklahoma, and when I landed there, we kind of landed in a gaggle, and again, it was just nothing but an open field. Pulled into the line, as the crew chief climbed up on the wing and said,"Sir, they bombed Pearl Harbor," it didn't strike me. "Where was Pearl Harbor?" You know, it didn't hit me right away and up until this time we used to travel in civilian clothes because the civilians were very, they disliked the military. As a matter-of-fact, when we had maneuvers in Louisiana, the diners would have signs, "coffee five cents, for soldiers, ten cents," type of thing. Yeah, they didn't like the military. "For guy's sakes, don't let your daughter go with a sailor," you know, that type of thing, so we traveled in civilian clothes all the time. Well, after we finished delivering the aircraft, we got on a train to go back to San Antonio; somebody got the word that we were Army Air Corps pilots. Well, boy, their attitude had changed overnight. We were gonna save their necks now. The women were hugging us and kissing us; guys were bringing bottles out of their bags, "Have a drink," you know, all that sort of stuff. We were heroes to them. Well, the day before that we were bums, that type of thing. That was the American attitude toward the military and it really changed, too, when their sons were being drafted. You know, the military changed, but, at any rate …

SH: I wanted to ask, some of the pilots that you were training with from 1939, '40, before December '41, did any of them go to join the Canadians or the RAF or …

TT: Well, we had a lot of people who did not qualify who went. In fact, I knew one of them named Curtin, who did not qualify for our Air Corps. He joined the RCAF, Royal Canadian Air Force. Others, who actually were accepted by our Air Corps, went into Flying Tigers with General Chenault. One of them named Ed Rector I knew him for years. He's still around somewhere. Tex Hill just died, but they became the Flying Tigers helping China against the

Japanese. Others, who didn't qualify for our air, joined the RAF; we had the Eagle Squadron over there. In fact, my own flying instructor, Howard Trunell, who was too old for our cadet program, wanted to get into the action, too. He joined the Eagle Squadron but he was lost at sea when his ship was sunk by a submarine and I didn't know that until, I used to keep in touch, when I got a letter from his wife about it. But actually, people were actually trying to get into the act. But what they had to do, they had strict requirements, and then they had to reduce the requirements to get more and more people in. Where we went through it, at the time, when they washed you out for the smallest reason it ended up to the point where it was hard to wash somebody out. The reason: 'cause we thought we're losing people overseas, the 8th Air Force was losing them. In fact, the planning for the 8th Air Force was based on a hundred percent attrition. There was daylight bombing without escort, and they shot down an awful lot of bombers. Getting back to this Stewart Field time …

SH: Please back up to Enid and go forward from there. You had talked about being in Enid, and delivering the plane, and finding out about Pearl Harbor and …

TT: Oh, yeah, well, after we got back from, I told you about the train thing. We were back to the base. Of course, we had to continue the training program we were on, but we were all, everybody was on the request list to get to combat. They were starting to train B-17 pilots at Orlando and Sebring, Florida, and everybody was on the volunteer list. You didn't dare not be on it, really. So everybody was on the volunteer list. So the decision was they'd let you go out by class. In other words, if you were graduated in Class 40A, you'd be the first to go, 40B the next, but I was 40F. So when my time was coming up, I was awaiting my orders, and my wife was all set, my wife was gonna go home to her family. Her family lived in Hoboken where her father was a school principal, she was going there, and we were having a baby, by the way, at that time, and I got a call from my squadron commander, it was Bill Holmes, saying, "Your orders are in," and I was expecting to go to Sebring. I said, "Great, when do I leave for Sebring?" He said, "You don't, you're going to Stewart Field." Well, I never heard of Stewart Field, and I said, "Stewart Field, where is that?" And he says, "Up at the United States Military Academy." I said, "You mean, I'm going to West Point?' That was a surprise and, whatever, big surprise. At that particular time we were having a baby; my wife went through a miscarriage and it was very rough. But anyhow when I arrived at Stewart Field, this was in July of '42. What had happened is the Stewart family had donated this property, including an airbase, or an airport, to the government, and Marshall and Arnold had carried through on the desire to get a school going, and it was unprecedented that they got the money. It was the only wartime built base in the country that was faced with red brick, beautiful base. But we started training cadets on the twenty-three foot, twenty-three hundred foot runway, with one old steel hangar and I arrived and I was the first squadron commander. So I went from flight commander at Brooks, to squadron commander, and I was promoted to Captain. So I'm now a captain, a squadron commander, and we started to get the cadets, and the cadets were driven up by bus from West Point. Half would go, come up in the morning, the other half in the afternoon, and then you go back … to the academics. It worked in this way and they reduced the class time, the academic time, from four years to three years. So the first class we actually trained had been the Class of '44, ended up the Class of '43. I was with the first class that went through the whole program there. We had, starting out it was basic, we were training in basic, now we're gonna have to get ready for advanced. So they brought AT-6s in for the advanced training and, now, we also had

to train them in twin-engine. So I had to take a contingent down to one of the Southern bases, get checked out in twin-engine aircraft, which happened to be the AT-10, come back up and check out all the instructors on the AT-10. … Then we had the only school in the country that was teaching basic and advanced, and advanced single and twin engine, all at the same time, and anytime we didn't have West Point cadets in, we filled in with aviation cadets. So we flew seven days a week and worked about twenty-four hours around the clock. During this particular period, I was a squadron commander, and I was promoted to major. The day I was eligible, I made major. Again everything was building, and since we were under West Point, West Point at that time was considered a major command, they had direct access to the Pentagon building. There was no intermediate commands. Anytime the Superintendent of the Military Academy signed to something, it was like a major commander, and I ended up as his pilot so I went from the squadron commander to the group commander. Now I had the command of the twin-engine group, replacing one of the regulars who was being let out to go to combat. What they were doing, they let the regular officers get out, to go to combat, the reserve officers were held. We ended up with, I was a group commander and the director of flying, at the time, was a fellow named Tom Whitehouse, and now he had under him the single engine group and a twin-engine group. The director of training above him was a fellow, Ben Webster. Whitehouse and Webster were both West Pointers. He had the ground school, and the others, and the director of training, that was the top job; next job up would be the base commander. The first commander was a man named Weickert, P.D. Weickert. P.D., was a name being given to him at West Point, Pennsylvania Dutch, and he was replaced by a chap named George Schlater, who was known as Slats, another West Pointer. But anyhow, that's where we went, and, meanwhile, they were building the flight line, the maintenance hangars, and all that sort of stuff. At one point in time, in order to fly the students, we had the runway over here, we had no connecting taxi way between the flight line and the runway, no taxi strips. We used to have to take the airplanes off in the morning and this, incidentally, … went like this, this and this, and like that, took off and we'd meet the students on the other side of the field, do the flying thing, and at the end of the day, fly back and land that way. It was crazy, but we did it.

SH: Just for the record it looks almost like a hockey stick.

TT: Well, actually, it's this way here and there.

SH: A series of angles.

TT: And you got to remember, this is in the middle of winter up there. We had snow and ice and God knows what. General, pardon me, P.D. Weickert, who became later a general, he for some reason or other, had to construct a twenty-five hundred foot square concrete ramp in the middle of the field, thinking we'd all fly off of that. It was impossible. It's covered with snow most of the time and farther than that, there was a little spring under there that seeped up from the concrete and there used to be ice out there all the time. So we really never used that twenty-five hundred foot thing. We had a beautiful base, as I say, for wartime construction it is terrific. I moved up from group commander to now director of flying, because Tommy Whitehouse was able to go overseas, and he promised me when he got established over there he'd send for me, and all this. Anyhow, and to tell you about the officers' club there, they built the officers' club and the way this was manned was unbelievable. The first club officer was a fellow named Fox.

He was a reserve captain, but he was also an agent of some type on Broadway, in show business. He went down to New York, and he'd go to these people, "You're gonna be drafted, come up and enlist at West Point. You'll stay here for the rest of the war." … At the officers' club, we had the second chef from the Waldorf Astoria, he was our chef. The wine steward, no, the wine steward from the Astoria became the club steward. We had an orchestra made up of people from. [Gene] Krupa the drummer, we had some of his people. We had all the major bands. We had people out of a band, it was The Million Dollar Band, and the band leader, I'd forgotten his name now, but our feature singer was Don Cornell. He's still singing; he was at Atlantic City about two years ago. Well, he was our featured singer. The opening night, the grand opening of the officers' club, the headliner was Al Jolson. Our physician, the base doctor, was married to another movie star; I'd forgotten her name now. She was a well-known star in those days. The orchestra, we were visited by Nat Brusiloff, the society orchestra leader used to come up to entertain, and he had a singer, I've forgotten her name, but he wrote, I have the music yet, from, one was called *Wings of West Point*, a beautiful song, and the other was *Temple Hill*. You remember *Temple Hill*, at Newburgh, was where Washington had his headquarters, and the building is still there, of course, and there was a big gathering of troops there, and that area was called Temple Hill, so he wrote this other song. Well, at opening night, my wife got to go to this, I was O.D. then, officer of the day, and was out plowing in the mud. All this was going on, I'm out there, you know, security stuff. But anyhow, we had an unbelievable officers' club set up, and, as I say, all these entertainers come up from New York, and all these headliners, who enlisted there because they were not, don't have to us overseas. Don Cornell used to have his nice convertible so that when he finished Saturday night, he'd be down to New York, see his friends, all this other stuff. Oh, it's unusual.

SH: Sounds like a country club more than an officers' club.

TT: Well, it was in a way. But you got to remember, at this time, there was nothing else, no other relaxation for us. The only time we got time off was when the weather was impossible; you couldn't fly. There was one point in time, what I would do is make the decision we can't fly because we were fogged in and the weather is not gonna improve, and let my men off, so they'd go shopping. Like civilians, we were stuck with the gasoline rationing, your wife couldn't go charging all over shopping, things like this, and to find a place to live up there was, there was no housing for us. My wife and I, when we first got up there, we lived in a hotel, and this hotel has been subsequently torn down, and the next step we had, we lived in a rented room in a doctor's, third floor, house. We finally got to find an apartment, which wouldn't be ready, Perots, we stayed, at the Perots funeral home for about a week, and my wife said to me, one of the things she said, "What's all this, I hear this elevators all hours?." I said, "It's just bringing the bodies up and down." My wife, "That's enough." But said the truth of the matter is, … it was hard for everybody to find a place to live. We finally found this little apartment and it was on the third floor, with a roof like this. I couldn't stand up in the bathtub. I had to slide into it. Then we went out to Orange Lake, and we lived on this lake. In the wintertime, the snow was so deep you had to go out on skis. It was a pain in the neck, it wasn't any country club.

SH: No, I should have not …

TT: The first day I reported to Stewart Field, I reported to a tent, after I checked in at West Point and I had no idea what to do at West Point. I checked in with the adjutant, got my orders and all that sort of stuff. They sent me over to the officers' mess for lunch, and I didn't know the protocol. You had to report to the President of the Mess, go through all this malarkey. You had to have permission to sit down, and to leave, and all this. Air Corps guys weren't used to that. So when we got to Stewart Field, why, things were a little different.

SH: Now you're working with West Point men, commanders, but you are coming out of like the cowboy flying corps, was this part …

TT: Are you talking about the cadets now? The cadets were very simple. We were their instructors.

SH: No, no. I meant you're having to work with …

TT: You're talking of permanent party personnel. Well, all our top bosses, initially, were all West Pointers. Colonel Wiekert was the commanding officer, and Benny Webster, and so on, they were all West Pointers. There were no problems there actually. The West Pointers were happy to have us, and they played up to us so that we could fly them places. In fact, my wife had our first baby there at West Point. She was given the Superintendent's special room in the hospital. She was given all sorts of nice treatment and General Wilby, the Superintendent, was great, and my wife used to go to West Point and visit headquarters, and, actually, I always flew the general around. It's just part of the thing. Up there we had, in addition to the regular aircraft, we also had seaplanes, and the General had an OA-14, an OA-9 rather, and an OA-14 at West Point, and a seaplane ramp there, and that's where I became water qualified. One of the few air corps officers also with water qualification and I used to fly him in the OA-9 and, or the C-45, take him down to White Sulfur Springs, he and his wife, and things like that. So …

SH: So was that the biggest brass that you flew around or flew with?

TT: Well, I never could consider them brass. I flew Maxwell Taylor, who was then, later the Superintendent of the Military Academy, and I flew President Roosevelt's daughter, Anna Roosevelt. When the president died, you know West Point is close to Hyde Park, we had all the big wheels landing at Stewart Field, and, in fact, at one point in time, I had to entertain the Secretary of War and his wife. My wife and I had to have them out to dinner and stuff at the club. President Truman visited there and came see a football game. I was on the security detail for that. De Gaulle from France was there, and we had a lot of bigwigs coming in, because of West Point, but it was sort of a routine type of thing. As we went through the first class, and we got the twin engine group going, I moved up to group commander there, and then Whitehouse left, I moved up to Director of Flying, and while I was down at the twin-engine group, I had been promoted to major and I always remember the class there were … giving a class in navigation and these kids were, it's hard, you had to get their attention because they were studying academics at the Point at the same time, and we were talking about a night cross country over to the, you know, the Adirondack Mountains, and stuff; it was rough terrain. And sometimes you'd begin lecturing and they'd be down studying the next day's assignment at the Military Academy, so you had to keep their attention, and this particular day, why, one of my instructors came in, a

fellow named Sol Blair, and he has a piece of paper in his hand. He said, "Sir, I have to make an announcement." I said, "Sol, right in the middle of my class?" He said, "Sir, this is important." I said, "Go ahead." So it was the orders making me a major. Well, I was completely surprised, because I had only become eligible for major the day before, one year in grade was our requirement, and the class broke out cheering, and they already knew about it, and they had, they gave me the gold leaves, they pinned them on. It's a nice relationship. As a matter-of-fact the head of that class, the leading cadet of that class, he and I were friends for years. Later on, we were in the Pentagon together, and whatever, for many years.

SH: That's what I was going to ask, did you stay in contact any of them?

TT: Oh, with some of them, yes. The Class of '43 was my favorite class. Actually, I remember them better. Well, I had some problems with '44 and '45; by that time I had left, went on overseas. But the whole experiment was, in a way, unique; the only time it ever happened. Years later, I was asked to go down and advise Annapolis whether they should do it or not, and I talked them out of it. It detracts from the academic program to begin with, and, secondly, the weather. We flew in such horrible weather up there. For example, at one point, we never lost, we never failed to graduate a class on time, but one year, in order to do it, we had to take the instructors and fly up to Rome Air Force Base and operate out of there for two weeks and the people at the West Point were madder then heck at us, because the Commandant of Cadets was insisting I fly them all back, and we had zero weather at Stewart, I couldn't land, and they were very, he was a very uncooperative, whatever.

SH: … We can talk about this later, but you were there when the Air Corps became the Air Force.

TT: No, the Air Corps, we didn't become a separate air force 'til 1948.

SH: But you were still in the Air Force?

TT: Oh, I was still there. No, I was out in Hawaii at the time when that happened.

SH: … I don't want to jump ahead to there. I want to talk about how the war progressed for you. Where did you go?

TT: Well, I was stuck at Stewart Field. What happened is, again, everybody was on the volunteer list. In fact, there was only two people at Stewart Field who were not on the volunteer list. One was, he was a Quaker, and he was willing to do any job there is, but he couldn't kill people, his religion, and the other, his uncle was one of the German Nazi, what the heck is his name now, Stryker. His uncle was Jules Stryker, the Nazi butcher, and they weren't about to send him overseas because, you know, of what would happen. But beyond that, everybody was on the volunteer list and, as I say, we were putting all the regulars out first, and some of them are starting to come back. So I was on, at that particular time, Whitehouse lived up to his commitment. He made it. We could, if we were asked for by name from an overseas command, then we can get out. That was the rule. Well, the only time I ever took off was to take my wife to New York. Because her family lived in Hoboken, we dropped the kids there, and Irene and I

went to New York. I got to, I think it was the Astor Hotel, or something, and I called home to check on how the kids were. My mother-in-law says, "There's an emergency call, Stewart Field, for you, you have to call them right away, you call the commanding officer," who at that time was Schlatter. So I called up there and Bill Keifer, who was the director of training at the time, answered the phone. I said, "Bill, I understand my orders are in." He says, "Yeah," he says, "they've asked for you at the 15th Air Force." That was flying P-38s in Italy, that's where Whitehouse was. Well, the group commander there had been a, I knew him all the way back at Brooks Field, he'd been my section chief at Brooks Field, his name was Danny Campbell. So I said, "Oh, great. When do I go?" And Kiefer said, "You don't go." I said, "What do you mean, you don't go? I don't go." He said, "Well, my orders came in today, too. I'm going, you're staying." I said, "What do you mean I'm staying." He said, "You're taking over as Director of Training." Well, up to that time, you'd had to be a West Pointer to be the Director of Training and I wasn't a West Pointer, but the Superintendent, since I was his pilot, insisted I take the job. So I was stuck as Director of Training then.

DD: Was there any resentment to the fact that you weren't a West Pointer?

TT: No. As a matter-of-fact, the people, all the people I worked for who were all West Pointers, at later times, always asked for me, too, for they're, wherever they were commanding, including Weikert, he was in the 7th Air Force, and so on. But the, no, there was never resentment. Actually, the only time we ever ran into any problems was, you might run into one or two obnoxious types that you run into anywhere, but I would say, generally speaking, we were good friends, most of them.

SH: Now that you have to stay as Director of Training, then did you get to finish your weekend in New York?

TT: Oh, well, that weekend in New York was shot by that time, because I had a, we finished, I think, we went out to dinner. I don't know what we did, but then went down and grabbed the kids and went back to Newburgh. Well, I forgot to mention one of the things, going back to West Point, the Superintendent, as I say he was treated as a major commander, like the Commander of SAC, or whatever. We had a personnel officer named Dave McKinley, and we used to have a promotion board every month and you sit down and people were recommended for promotion. Now, I was on this board. This one particular time I was off on a trip somewhere, I'd forgotten where it was, well, McKinley had made a bet with the commanding officer that he could get me promoted within twenty-four hours, and he set the whole thing up. They had the promotion board, the commanding officer signed the recommendation. It was hand carried by messenger to the Superintendent's office. He approved it. It was hand carried back; put on an airplane, and flown directly to Washington; delivered to the Pentagon building; one day, right. The next day I'm in my office and the phone rings and I pick it up and said, "Major Torresson," McKinley says, "No, you mean Colonel Torresson." I said, "No, it's Major Torresson." He said "Tom, you're Colonel Torresson as of today." I said, "What are you talking about, Dave?" He says, he told me the story. He won the bet. But it wasn't fair to my contemporaries because I was promoted way ahead of them. At that time, you know, they had to go through all the stuff. But that's the way they were able to work things, and after that, I became Director of Training and gradually things started to, to fuel up, and, then I moved up to

Executive Officer, right under the commander there, and at one particular point in time, I was the commanding officer of the base, because the guy who was normally the commanding officer, Joe Kelly, he went to the Air War College. Well, in those days, in order to be the base commander you have to be a rated pilot, and I was the highest ranking rated pilot, so I became the acting commander, and still act fully as Director of Training. So I used to go over every night and sign all the paper work. Chuck Moody, who was the exec officer, did all the work, the real work. But I had to be, I was commander for about six months or so. In those days, you did the job they gave you, and a, even going back to Brooks Field, at one point in time there I was communications officer. I was flight commander and they called me one day. I had to see the Director of Training, his name was Larry Greenbank, and I reported to him. He said, "You are now communications officer." "What, me? How come?" He said, "Well, you had the code, the highest code speed in the squadron." Well, the reason I had the highest code speed, we used to take Morse code, and we had a little pool and we throw a quarter in, whoever got the highest code speed for the day won the pool. I was only getting the pool money. So I got to twenty-five words a minute. That's all I knew about radio. Then I had to start the next day and start teaching a class on radio and we had Hammarlund SuperPro receivers and Collins Transmitters and they also had to build a radio station and they gave me forty men, and they were mostly Mexican, and I had to line them all up and I said, "Anybody know anything about radio?" Two hands went up. I said, "What do you know about it?" He said, "I'm a ham operator, sir." "What are you?" "Ham operator sir." I said, "How old are you?" He said, "I'm twenty-one." "How old are you?" "Nineteen." "You're a sergeant, you're a corporal." That's the way we started. We built a radio shack there. We had the Hammarlund SuperPro receivers, and the transmitters had to have a remote station, away from the sending station. So we had the remote station, a building up here, and the radio shack down here, about three or four blocks away. We had no cables to connect them. That bunch of guys went over on the trash thing and found a sixteen pair cable, and repaired it. We ended up with fourteen pairs and they connected up, and, years later, that same cable was still doing the job. We got everything going, and they hired all these civilian radio operators to replace the military guys, and I was replaced by a reserve major, who had twenty-two years at the Bell Telephone Laboratories. But all the job was done by the time he got there. Then I went back to the flight line.

SH: Did he approve of what you'd done?

TT: Oh, yeah. He just sat down and we had a base commander there, Stanton T. Smith, who, I would first say he was a major, as a base commander. Then he went to lieutenant colonel and finally colonel, very quickly, a great guy. But he had a few funny habits. One of the things was we had these, called squawk boxes, intercoms. In his office he could press buttons and listen to what was going on in these various places that had this, and I had one in my radio shack, and something was going wrong and I'd let out a few blasphemies over the thing. He goes, "Torresson, cut out that swearing down there." [laughing] That kind of stuff. I really got a laugh. But, later on, going back to that same period, as I say, we were all 2nd Lieutenants, and promotions opened up, and, all of a sudden, the list came out, the 1st lieutenant, I wasn't on the list of 1st lieutenants. Now, I'm a flight commander, over seventeen instructors, most of whom are now 1st lieutenants and I'm still a 2nd Lieutenant. Well, I'd no sooner absorbed this when, one of my classmates, Freddie Engleman, who passed away, he's a nice guy, but he was very military, and I walked on the base that morning and walking down to the office, I passed Freddie

and said, "Hi, Freddie," and he stopped me. He says, "Don't you salute your superior officers?" And he points to, he's a 1st Lieutenant. I couldn't believe it, but I gave the salute, fine. So anyway, I get into the office and was wondering, "What happened to me, why didn't I get promoted?" The commanding officer came over, which was very unusual, and he said, "Tom," he said, "a mistake was made, your name was, because of the T at the end of the list, when they turned the page they forgot to put it in." He said, "Oh, I've already gotten back to Washington," so on and so forth, "It'll be in a day or two, you'll have the same date of rank," which was very important. Well, about three days later I get a call from the base adjuntant, named Perkins, and he said, "Colonel Smith wants to see you right away." "What have I done now?" type of thing. When you get called to the Colonel's office you know it was a problem. Well, I went over there. I walked in, here's my wife sitting there, and a photographer, and the colonel, with my 1st Lieutenant bars, he pins them on himself. He was nice enough to send for my wife in a staff car, bring her out there, so I have pictures of all this.

SH: Wonderful. I can't wait to see some.

TT: He was a real, well, I don't have them with me here, of course, I don't have all that stuff. … He was a great guy and years later, believe it or not, he replaced me at Wheeler Field.

SH: Really?

TT: Yeah, really is a funny thing, but it's a long story. But we did so many things, we had to during this buildup. People were promoted very rapidly because what happened when you graduated a class, you had to take part of that class and make them instructors so you could, you know, usually the ratio was one student, one instructor to five students. At one point in time, there was one instructor to ten students, and it was, what they tried to do was take the people who had the capability, the flying grades and the aptitude, to be instructors, and put them into instructor jobs, because that meant you'd get five more pilots out of it, and you need them to build up real fast, and they were building these schools. So, I was not the only one getting promoted rapidly, everybody was getting promoted, rapidly if you did the job.

SH: Do you think you were effectively able to train the pilots with more students, I mean, going from five to ten?

TT: We won the war.

SH: Enough said.

TT: We lost a lot of pilots in the training program. We lost a lot of pilots there learning to fly and, incidentally, during this period of time, we were training Chinese.

SH: Really?

TT: In fact, one of the guys who was killed was flying a Chinese student. Chinese were supposed to know, to speak English when they came over, but they weren't speaking very good English. The stuff, like instrument flying, was very rudimentary. We were taught the old needle

ball and air speed. Actually, there was an altitude indicator in the aircraft and we were told to leave that alone, you know, keep it locked, it's no good. Beautiful instrument, we didn't know enough to use it. We used to have no problems with carburetor ice down in Texas, yet in Newburgh, New York, carburetor ice was a problem, but nobody knew about carburetor ice. There was a carburetor heater in the airplane; nobody ever used it. The first instructor pilot at Stewart Field was killed. The first main road going in there was named after him. But the point was we came from southern flying into a northern flying thing, which was very difficult. We had to learn and we had to learn about winter flying. We had to learn about wing icing, and things like that never happened down South, and potentially, you have to learn about, really about the weather. Because we ran night cross-country flights we sent aircraft up with supervisors and put in all these turning points, to count our planes going by to be sure that they, you know, weren't lost somewhere, and we lost a lot of people in the mountains up there. It was a very bad thing to do, really.

SH: Would not the training situation in Newburgh be comparable, more comparable to what they were going to experience in Europe, at least the northern …

TT: You really can't compare. The type of aircraft we were flying were training aircraft. After they left Stewart Field, then they had to go to training on whatever aircraft they're gonna fly, flying B-17s, B-24s, P-40s, P-51s, and so on. This is specialization type of thing. And we had certain problems up there were unique; for example, we had Hyde Park, the President's home right across the river from us, right about Poughkeepsie. That was a sacrosanct area. You could not fly in that area. If you flew in that area it was an automatic court-martial. Well, sometimes these students, you know, they get lost, so I was always getting calls from the supervisor over there, the security people. … It was a funny story. We had, I had one cadet, his name was Robert Olds.. Robbie turned out to be one of our best fighter pilots, but, he was a big guy, and he wanted to be in single engine, but he because of his size and everything else, he ended up in twin-engine. His father was a general who had been killed down in one of the training programs down South, and Robbie was a natural pilot. He was great. So when the twin engine AT-10, had two cadets in it. You were soloed when you, it was just two cadets with you. You had to, normally, you had one cadet and the instructor. But when you're ready to let the cadet go, and he had put another one with him, who was also checked out, so you'd have …

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

DD: This continues an interview with Colonel Thomas S. Torresson, Jr. on Sept. 25, 2002. Tape three, side one.

SH: Okay, please.

TT: Well, if I had a difficult student, maybe he was a little rusty on his landing, or he was a little, a few of the maneuvers we had to do were single engines whatever, I would just ask Robbie to ride the right seat. He was just as good as having an instructor in there. He gave the student a little confidence, so he helped me, you know, graduate these people. Anyhow, when graduation came along for Class of '43, we had a massive fly up thing and a lot of the last flights, they were all up, and I got a call from Hyde Park from the security officer over there, that a

bunch of my aircraft had flown under the Poughkeepsie Bridge, which would have put them in the Hyde Park area, too, and, you know, I said, "Well, give me the spot numbers on it and I'll take care of it." Well, actually he couldn't do that. Well, I knew darn well Robbie had something to do with this thing, because he was all this other stuff. Meanwhile the orders were coming out, for who was going to single engine and twin-engine, and I was given two single engine assignments that I could give to two of my cadets. So after this report from Hyde Park, I gathered the whole group together, and I was reading the riot act to them, and mentioned that it was an automatic court-martial and all that sort of stuff. After I finished, I started out of the room and I said, "Cadet Olds, report to me in my office right now." So I had him at my desk, and I knew Robbie was aching to be a fighter pilot, he stood in front of me and I said, "Olds, I don't know what the heck that I'm gonna do with you. You've been one problem after the other. I guess the only thing I can do is send you to single engine." Well, he went right through the roof. He really was happy as could be. Anyhow, after graduation, I got a phone call from him and he said, "Sir, this is Olds, can you meet me up at the officers' club, I'd like to buy you a drink." Because I never asked him the question, "Did you lead that formation under the bridge?" That would have been bad nature. So Robbie and I met years later, and he did some things for me and I did some things for him.

SH: Did he confess to going under the bridge? I guess I shouldn't ask that after all these years. That's a great story. What did you, being in the position you were in, you had to be very aware of how the war was progressing, in Europe, and in the Pacific?

TT: Well, not only that, we had a Saturday morning briefing. Everybody on the base was given an up-to-date briefing on the situation, you know, throughout, and it was just a normal training program that everybody had to undertake. It was sort of like most of those physical training program, we ought to be active in physical training. This is sort of on the side. But, everybody was kind aware of what was going on, particularly during the 8th Air Force bombing of Germany, because we had friends involved, and, I guess, our primary job at the time was training cadets. Beyond that, as we were letting people go out, and there was always a turnover of personnel, you had the people coming in. We had some returning pilots to make instructors out of.

SH: Were there people coming back from …

TT: Yeah, there was some rotation. The trouble with the, it was never formalized. In fact, in that little book that I'm gonna lend to you, I want it back, it'll explain the situation. The instructors were unhappy that they weren't getting a chance to get overseas and it sounds silly, because you got to remember we were all very young at that time, and it was, we were glamorous and it was a, to be an Air Corps pilot, or a navy pilot for that matter, was sort of glamorous. We were up in the skies, and it was more, well, it was unusual compared to what today is, flying is nothing, but in those days it was more of an adventure type of thing. So everybody wanted to get in on the act, and, really, in this respect, why you can say that everybody was a volunteer except the two I mentioned before. So a …

SH: Did the people who came back who had been in combat, did they make good instructors? Were they happy to be doing that or …

TT: Not really.

SH: Had they done their twenty-five missions or thirty missions?

TT: Yeah, but we didn't get too many of that type at Stewart Field. One of the guys that came back to Stewart Field was (Brick Holstrom?), who had been on the Tokyo raid with Doolittle, and (Brick?) fitted in very well. There was another chap, I'd forgotten his name now, who, he had done his stint and he just didn't fit the pattern to be an instructor. He wasn't good at all. Some were good and some aren't, just like anything else. Some of them were inclined to say, "Well, the instructor job, forget it," you know, "I don't want that." They resented being put in the instructor job. I can't say, really, that it was bad or good. The real problem was there was no steady rotation. In other words, … even the other bases, at Stewart Field, of course, we were kept because the regulars were getting out ahead. The idea was get the regulars the experience in a wartime situation and they're West Point graduates. At other bases, like me, some of them were kept as instructors, and flight commanders, and squadron commanders, and group commanders, and so on up the line. Many of my friends, never got overseas until after the war.

SH: With such a build up you needed someone with experience in organization. Were you still at Stewart when the war ended?

TT: To all intents and purposes, yeah. I think, yeah, I got over to, yeah the war was over, surely the war was over, come to think of it, and I was assigned from there. Actually, I was offered a regular commission, which in itself was, a lot of people were seeking regular commissions and my commanding officer at the time, Benny Webster, insisted I apply for it. I really didn't want to stay in the military. At the time I was in contact with some friends, we had set up a flying service; we called it Suburban Air Service, flying seaplanes. We ended up with five seaplane bases. I was the director of training for this, but I was still in uniform.

SH: Now where did your Suburban Air Service fly?

TT: We had a base in Newburgh. We had a base in, at Long Island, we had one in Florida, another one somewhere else in New York, I'd forgotten all the locations. We had mostly ex-navy pilots, and the president of the thing was a navigator, and they got going and I was still in service. We all put money into it. I lost my money, because later on the thing fell apart. It looked like a good deal, the government was paying the money for training the people coming back. So the government was paying for flying training. The trouble is that, you'd fly the student today, you wouldn't get for paid it 'til six months later. You know, that type of thing, and buying gasoline and paying all these bills, why, we ran out of money. But I still was in uniform. I didn't get too involved with it. I did, at one time we had a Cub that I recovered, hired a guy at Stewart Field and recovered the thing, and had a beautiful twenty-one coats of finish on it, whatever, and they came and picked it up at Newburgh, flew it down to, what was it now, Rockaway Beach. We had this thing at Rockaway Beach, and they crashed it the next day. They offered me a regular commission and an assignment to Hawaii at the same time, and I couldn't turn that down. So, I was sent to Hickam Field initially, in the director of operations office. I was there about two days and I looked at my desk and I had a bunch of orders sending me to

Wheeler Field, as executive officer, to the 7th Fighter Wing. So, I stayed there and part of the time there, I reorganized the wing. We had a lot of changes that had to be made; that's when Stanton T. Smith replaced me. He came out there to be in some kind of a job and they sent him up there to be the deputy wing commander, and then from there, I was sent to the Air Command and Staff College at Air University, and from there to the Pentagon building where I was assigned to Director of Personnel and three years there. You can only spend a maximum of three years, no officer can stay more than three years in Washington without Presidential approval. Because the civilians could homestead there, the military had to move out. Then I went to Headquarters Air Training Command at Scott out in Illinois, as the Director of Student Personnel, and then from there to Air War College in Montgomery, Alabama, Maxwell Air Force Base, and then from there to Germany, to Wiesbaden, as director of Operation of 710th Wing, and from there to Hahn Air Base as the base commander, NATO base, and we had on the base, both fighter aircraft and attack missiles.

SH: Really?

TT: And this was what Colonel Andy is interested in. He was a missile type. We had the Mace missile, and the Matador, most useless things in the world. [laughter]

SH: What year was this in?

TT: Now by that time it was '57. I graduated in the Class of '57 in the Air University, and then came back there in '60, Deputy Wing Commander at Craig Air Force Base in Alabama, and then up to Homestead Air Force Base as head of the recruiting group up there, and then I had to move my headquarters from Homestead to McGuire, and then from McGuire to Wright Paterson Air Force Base where I retired in 1969.

SH: When the Korean conflict broke out, where were you? You would have been in Hawaii then, right?

TT: No, Korea, I was in the Pentagon. Actually, what happened, in Hawaii, it was just poor timing. We had P-47s, we used to call Jugs, at Wheeler Field. The wing had been the 7th Fighter Wing, was renamed the 81st Fighter Wing, and they decided to move the whole wing back to the States, and turned all our aircraft over to the Hawaiian National Guard. So we had to ship the whole wing, bag and baggage, back. So we had three transport ships set up, and one of the chaps, fellow named Cranford, he was left there to be sure that household goods and everything else were packaged properly. I was in charge of the second transport load coming back and we were all supposed to go to Columbus, Ohio. Now you had to remember, back in those days, President Truman wanted to integrate the armed forces, which was a good thing. But somebody, nimble brain, decided that the 81st Fighter Wing should move to Columbus, Ohio, where they already had a all black wing. So now we're gonna integrate on a one-to-one basis and ninety percent of our people are southern boys, and you can imagine what we're having. So, luckily, we got that changed. But meanwhile back at the ranch, I'm in charge of all these troops coming back, the radio messages, they changed. Well, a lot of people had already made arrangements for housing in the Columbus, Ohio area and so on, but now we're gonna go to Michigan, Detroit, Michigan. Well, we arrived in California, San Francisco, and I have to stay

there with a couple of guys with me, and change everybody's orders, because the Detroit thing went out of the window, and we ended up going, sending everybody to Moses Lake, Washington. I had sold my car, in Hawaii. I only had a little business coupe there anyhow. This friend of mine Mac McCarter had shipped his automobile back, so he was waiting with us for his car to arrive and it was on one of the Navy barge types of thing, whatever it was, and that sunk. So he lost his car. I had to, I was picking up a car at Detroit, so I had railroad train tickets from Frisco to Detroit to pick up this car, and they mixed up my accommodations on the train. I ended up with this one bedroom, with my wife, two kids, eleven pieces of baggage, including golf clubs, my wife's sewing machine. So we're all jammed in this one little bedroom thing, and I had to sleep, there was a little sort of settee, about yo long, I had to put my feet on top of the toilet, is where I slept that night. We picked the car up in Detroit, at Ford, actually, and from there we went over the Peace Bridge to Canada, and traveled through Ontario, and back down over Niagara Falls area, and came back down to Hoboken where my wife's family were and I ended up with a case of viral pneumonia there. And I spent my month's leave in bed. I had to go to from there to Air Command School.

SH: At this point I'm going to ask you to tell us anything that you feel is important and reserve the right to come back and interview you, again.

TT: Important in relation to what?

SH: What you would like to talk about. Things that we maybe forgot to ask you about. You were there in the military during Vietnam and different things like that. So if there's any point of your career you'd like to talk about, please do. I don't want you to feel that we want you to sit here for the next four hours and talk to us. We will gladly return.

TT: [laughter] No, I think the most important thing in my mind is that we need to learn from the lessons of World War II, to a certain extent, but, for example, we started this combat observer training. We were training them in World War I tactics. In other words, the observer sat there in the back of the airplane, keying the Morse code messages to the ground, adjusting artillery for example. Well, if you tried that in World War II, you would have lasted about fifteen seconds. I mean, there's no way in the world you can do that. The other thing we had them doing was drop messages and pick up messages. You wrote a message and dropped it over the side. It was a little weighted bag with a tail on it, and when the guy wrote you an answer, they had these poles here and here and you swoop down, and with a weighted thing, you snatched that thing and pulled it back into the airplane. In World War II, never. And the third thing, you had the ground communication. It was by a biscuit gun, we called it, it was a light, flashed light. You sent Morse code with this light. The airplane's bouncing around and you're trying to send Morse code, impossible. So it's silly, right? Well, if you're gonna train for a coming conflict, you got to look ahead to what's probably gonna happen, not behind. We started World War II looking behind. This business of training observers, this business of the maintenance training was stupid. It was the old system of putting a class in, starting that class, and if anybody missed, failed that one subject, kick him out, you know, that type of thing. You got to realize that tech times have changed. Now, requirements for a pilot today are vastly different than it was in those days. As a matter-of-fact, if I would climb into an F-15 today I would be completely lost. I mean, I wouldn't know what the heck it was all about. The instrumentation is all changed, everything is

changed, and it's getting worse. We're bringing out the F-22 now. This is a brand new, state-of-the-art type of aircraft. The training for these things is gonna be a lot more intense than we had to take. But I don't think we'll ever fight a war like that again. I think the next war can be fought with what you have on hand, when the war starts. General LeMay, who was the commander of SAC, made that statement very clear; that if you're gonna start a war, it's gonna be a war where you fight it with what you got on hand. You can't go back to the, that's why we're having an enlarged military today. That's why we built up the Navy. That's why we have more modern equipment. But it's not really as modern as it should be to overcome what they've got. But then the other type of war, right now, I think we've so far dispensed with the idea of a atomic war with Russia, because the Russian situation has changed. Now you got a bunch of small countries. What you got now is a bunch of little hot spots, Afghanistan, places like that. You can't go in and fight that war with massive ground troops. You're fighting little pockets. The air war there now is selected targets, and they're doing pretty good with that. The nature of war has changed. If we have to go and fight a war, like Hussein is, says you bring it to the streets. Our troops have to be trained to fight in the streets, instead of over battlefield type of thing. But the real reason that you learned from World War II, and we learned in Korea, and Vietnam, is you got to learn to train the people to fight the type of terrain you're gonna be in and the situation you're facing. World War II we didn't do that, and so, well, we learned as we went along. We did a remarkable job. We produced so many people and we won the war and all this sort of stuff but, it's an awful cost.

SH: Did not a lot of things change from '44 to '45 when you got the fighter coverage for the bombers?

TT: Oh, yes. You mean the attrition rate, yes. Yeah, the initial attrition of the 8th Air Force was tremendous, and somebody quoted, it was more or less greater then the Marines were getting in Iwo Jima and places like that. But whether it did a lot of good or not, I don't know. Some people say, "Well, it made the Germans, it increased their morale, at least the military portion of it." Whether that's true or not, I don't know. The British were smart. They did their bombing at night, and the Germans didn't have much of a night flying capability. So it was much better too on the British. On the other hand, the British fighters, Spitfires and so on, they did a tremendous job, fighting a German air force which far outnumbered them. But, again, you got to remember that Hitler was allowed to build up. We knew he was building up. You know, Lindberg went over and told us this. In fact, Lindberg was castigated for telling us how good the Germans were gonna be and our country ignored this. They started from scratch in World War I and they had to start from scratch in World War II.

SH: We thank you very much for taking time to talk with us about a wonderful career and an exciting life, I think this will be something that we will look forward to editing and getting back to you.

TT: Well, actually, I don't know how exciting it was. It was, as I say, I would have maybe liked it the other way, but you did what you're told.

SH: Well, thank heavens, you were there to train the men. We interviewed a lot of the pilots, so I'm sure, not from West Point I have to say that, but I think training, pilot training is extremely important. Thank you very much.

TT: You're welcome.

----------END OF INTERVIEW ----------

Edited by Nicholas D. Molnar 2/16/04
Edited by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 5/5/04
Edited by Nicholas D. Molnar 7/22/04
Reviewed by Thomas S. Torresson Jr. 12/1/04